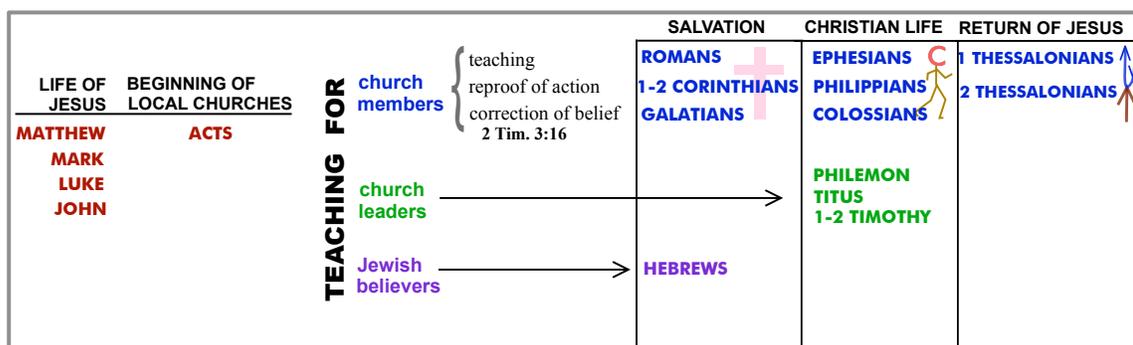


Lesson #18 - Hebrews 2019

Before starting this lesson, **read the book of Hebrews**. If your time is limited, read **chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13**.

Thruout these lessons, we have seen the logic and order of the New Testament. It begins with the Life of Jesus in the 4 gospels. The book of Acts explains how local churches began. The rest of the New Testament is teaching.



First of all, there is teaching for **church members**, over the topics of **SALVATION**, the **CHRISTIAN LIFE** and the **RETURN OF JESUS**. These include the books of **ROMANS** thru **2 THESSALONIANS**. These are all churches started by Paul.

Then there is teaching for **church leaders**: 2 letters to **TIMOTHY**, 1 to **TITUS** and 1 to **PHILEMON**. These 3 leaders had believed in Jesus thru the ministry of Paul.

All the books written to church members and church leaders are written by Paul and connected with Paul.

Last of all, there is teaching for Hebrew or **Jewish believers**. They are part of the Church, the Body of Christ. They are members of local churches or synagogues, but not in the areas or places where Paul worked. Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles. Some of these Jewish congregations have Paul's letters, but have questions and situations that he did not mention.

So the Holy Spirit guides Jewish leaders to write a series of 9 books for them. They are written over a period of 50 years, from the mid-40s to the mid-90s AD. Like the other New Testament books, they are not in chronological order. They are arranged by the same topics as Paul's books - **SALVATION**, the **CHRISTIAN LIFE** and the **RETURN OF JESUS**.

This lesson is about the book of **HEBREWS**.

In the past, my only reference material for teaching this book came from Gentile scholars in the West. But since then, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum has put out the commentary, *The Messianic Jewish Epistles*. He is a Jewish believer, a brilliant scholar with expertise in first-century Judaism. I am indebted to him for helping me see this book from the Jewish perspective, in its problems and answers. So this lesson is a combination of my own studies and the insight gained from Dr. Fruchtenbaum.

The author of Hebrews is unknown, but he is obviously Jewish. He is in Italy, is well-known to the readers and expects to see them in the near future. Many have suggested that Paul was the author. However, chapter 2:3 shows it could not be Paul. The author says,

How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It (the salvation message) was declared at first by the Lord, and it was confirmed or made sure to us by those who heard.

According to this verse, both the author and readers learned about salvation from the apostles - those who heard it from Jesus. But Paul insisted he did not get his message from the apostles; he got it directly from the Lord. So Paul could not be the author. Gal. 1:12; 1 Cor. 9:1

This means the author is unknown. It means God wants the focus on the message rather than the messenger. So rather than speculating on who the author *might* be, we need to focus on the book itself.

The author is writing from Rome c. 68 AD, after both Paul and Peter had been killed. He is writing to 2nd generation Jewish believers in Judea. As long-time believers they should be some of the teachers in their local churches. But, altho they had been spiritually mature in the past, they now are immature.



BACKGROUND

To get the context, we need the background of the Gospels. When Jesus began His ministry, He told the Jews He was their promised Messiah. A group of 70 Jewish leaders at the Jerusalem Temple were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the Jewish nation. They were called the Sanhedrin. When anyone claimed to be Messiah, the Sanhedrin were to investigate him and then tell the Jewish nation - *Yes, He is our Messiah - believe in Him or no He is not our Messiah - do not believe in Him.*

The Sanhedrin investigated Jesus for a year and a half - they saw miracles, which by their teaching, only the Messiah could do. They listened to what He said. But when they realized Jesus would not accept their man-made rules - the Mishnah - they rejected Him. They told the Jewish nation, *He is not our Messiah - do not believe in Him.*

This was a decision by the spiritual leaders of the **nation** - therefore it was a **national** sin. Jesus said the consequence would be a **national** judgment. At a later time, the Romans would come, kill the Jews, destroy the Temple and take the nation off the map.

30 AD – The Sanhedrin made their national decision to reject Jesus as their Messiah.

31 AD – The Sanhedrin planned and watched the crucifixion of Jesus.

Over the next weeks, with the resurrection and Ascension and Jesus gone, the Sanhedrin assumed people would forget about Jesus. But instead, on the day of Pentecost, the Church, the Body of Christ was formed. As a result of Peter's sermon in Jerusalem, thousands believed.

31-33 AD

The development and growth of the Church brought intense persecution from the Sanhedrin, especially in Jerusalem. As a result, the believers in the Jerusalem church left town and set up Jewish communities thruout the province of Judea. Because they were Jews, they always went to Jerusalem to celebrate Jewish holy days, but then returned to their communities.

34-49 AD

Later, when there was less persecution, some moved back to Jerusalem, but most stayed in their new locations and worshipped together in homes.

50-63 AD Life was relatively peaceful

Jewish believers in Judea were encouraged because now there were 2nd generation believers.

The message of Jesus was spreading.

But when the Sanhedrin see this, they become determined to stop the growth with renewed persecution.

They tell the Jewish believers that if they do not return to *Judaism*, their homes and income will be confiscated, they will be put in prison and some will be killed.

The term **Judaism** is basic to this book so we need to understand what the term means.

Judaism of the Old Testament...

...was the form of worship and life that God gave to the Jews. It was from God. It meant coming to God in God's way and obeying His law.

Judaism of the Sanhedrin/Temple...

...developed after the resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. It taught that animal sacrifices were needed to be right with God and that Jesus was **not** the Messiah.

Some of the Jewish believers in Judea are spiritually mature and strong in their faith. They refuse the demands of the Sanhedrin, no matter what. But so many of the 2nd generation Jewish believers are spiritually immature. Their only focus is to escape the persecution. In their immaturity, they are **considering** what they think is a perfect plan.

THE PLAN OF JEWISH BELIEVERS TO ESCAPE PERSECUTION

They will temporarily give up their salvation of faith in Jesus, and go back to dependence on temple sacrifices during the time of persecution. After the Sanhedrin stop the persecution and leave them alone, they plan to put their faith in Jesus all over again - to get a **new** salvation that can erase their sin of turning away.



This is why the author is writing about **SALVATION**. The topic is the same as Romans - yet the 2 books are very different. **ROMANS** is a detailed explanation of salvation written to Jewish and Gentile believers who are established in the faith. The book is a guide for them to use in their role as teachers and leaders.

HEBREWS is an explanation and a warning about salvation written to immature Jewish believers.

In simple English the author tells them...

Giving up your salvation to escape persecution and receiving another salvation later on, is not an option. You have only 2 choices...

- 1.** *If you go back to Sanhedrin Judaism, you will lose your **physical** life.*
- 2.** *If you make a complete break with Sanhedrin Judaism and mature spiritually, you will have strength to endure the persecution.*

*But the plan **you** are considering is **not** possible.*

THIS IS A TEACHING BOOK

STYLE - Jewish

Everything is either a **comparison** or **contrast** with Old Testament Jewish history.

The author uses Jewish **history** and then based on that history he gives a **warning**.

He teaches more history and then another warning.

Five times he warns about the same issue - returning to animal sacrifices to be right with God.

There is a **PATTERN** in this history-warning style. Four of the 5 times, he makes the point,

As it happened to the Jews that came out of Egypt, so this could happen to you Jews in the 1st century AD.

PURPOSE...

To logically prove that going back to any kind of Judaism is giving up the greater for the lesser

Old Testament Judaism focused on angels, Moses and animal sacrifices. Step by step the author shows that Jesus is greater than angels, greater than Moses and greater than everything involved with the animal sacrifices. Therefore,...

Why give up Jesus who is greater and go back to that which is lesser?

Why go back to things that served as pictures, when you have Jesus who is the complete fulfillment?

OLD TESTAMENT PICTURES in Hebrews

The Jews coming out of Egypt was an historical event.

When it is mentioned in the New Testament, it is often a picture of salvation - they were God's people saved thru Jesus, the Passover lamb.

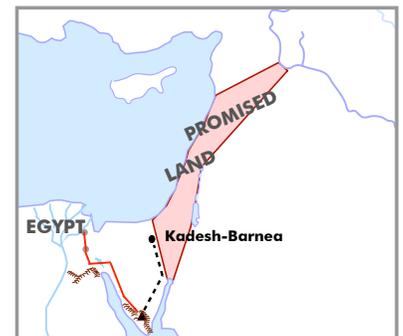
The Jews entering the Promised Land, was an historical event, in the Old Testament

Based on many hymns and poems, we usually think the Promised Land is a picture of heaven. But that is not true. When the Jews entered the Promised Land they had to fight the enemy. That is not a picture of heaven. When it is mentioned in the New Testament, it is often a picture of spiritual maturity.

God did not take the Jews out of Egypt just to get them out.

He took them out to lead them into the Promised Land.

God does not give us salvation just for the sake of it. He gives us salvation to lead us into maturity.



OUTLINE

Teaching and 1 st Warning - Careless about Obedience	1 - 2
Teaching and 2 nd Warning - Doubt about His Protection	3 - 4
Teaching and 3 rd Warning - Insensitive to right and wrong	5 - 6
Teaching and 4 th Warning - Willful rejection of God's Warnings	7-10
Teaching and 5 th Warning - Refusal to obey what God says	11 -13

TEACHING WITH FIRST WARNING 1 - 2

In the past, God spoke to the Jews thru prophets. They were only given parts of God's message – bits and pieces. Now in the 1st century AD, God has spoken to Jewish believers thru Jesus. He has given God's complete message.

Therefore, Jesus is greater than the prophets.

He is greater because He is Creator.

He is greater because He is deity.

He is the exact image of God the Father. All the attributes of the Father are true of Jesus.

God the Father is eternal, has all power, all knowledge and is everywhere.

This is also true of Jesus and to the same degree. Jesus is deity as well as perfect humanity.

He is greater than the prophets because He is Savior.

He provided purification (payment for our sin) *and then sat down at the right hand of God the Father.* 1:3

Jesus made payment for sin.

Sitting down means His payment for sin was *finished/complete - nothing more to pay.*

At the right hand of the Father means His payment was *accepted.*

Jesus is greater than the Old Testament **prophets**.

Jesus is greater than **angels**.

In Jewish history, their first prophet was Moses. The Jews believed and the New Testament confirms that...

...Some of the Old Testament law was given to Moses directly from God Himself

...God gave other parts of the law to Moses thru angels. Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:3

This is why the rest of chapter one is about angels.

Remember the **PATTERN** - *As it happened to them, it will happen to you.*

PATTERN

Jews who came out of Egypt received God's law given to Moses thru **angels**.

When God's people did not obey, there were consequences...

sometimes loss of blessing - sometimes loss of physical life.

WARNING

Jesus is greater than **angels** who gave God's law. If Old Testament Jews were punished for not obeying...

How can New Testament Jews escape punishment if they disobey what **Jesus** has said?

If they neglect and become careless in their obedience,

they will lose their spiritual blessings and eventually will lose their **physical** life.

This first warning is not about losing salvation, but about losing **physical** life.

For since the message - God's law - declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution or punishment, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? 2:2-3

This is the **FIRST** teaching and warning.

TEACHING WITH SECOND WARNING 3 - 4

Jesus is greater than **Moses**.

In Jewish history, God took the Jews out of Egypt and gave them His law. He was then ready to take them into the Promised Land. But the people and 10 of their scouts rebelled. They did not believe God could protect them.

PATTERN - *As it happened to them, it will happen to you.*

They were still God's people, but in consequence of their unbelief, they died in the wilderness, never experiencing the **blessings** God had for them.

WARNING

These first-century Jewish believers do not believe God will protect them in the persecution. It is why they are considering going back into Sanhedrin Judaism. But if they do, they will physically die in 70 AD when God's judgment comes on the Sanhedrin. They will never enjoy God's blessings that come with spiritual maturity.

Again, this warning is not about losing salvation, but about losing **spiritual blessings**. If their unbelief continues, they will lose their **physical** life. However they will still have eternal life because they had accepted the payment of Jesus.

The author writes...

Take care, brothers - notice he is writing to believers only. The word "brothers" includes "male and female." *lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*

The unbelieving heart is unbelief in God's protection in persecution.

Exhort - encourage one another - especially those who are weak and immature in their faith *every day, as long as it is called "today"* - meaning as long as you have the opportunity - *that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* *Deceitfulness of sin* is rationalizing.

In their case, thinking they can temporarily give up their salvation to escape persecution.

For we have become sharers in Christ - the Greek here means, *we have become and still are believers.*

But how can **others** be sure of our faith - (that we are believers in Jesus)?

if indeed we continue to hold fast that original confidence firm till the end. 3:12-14

The author is saying that those who continue in their faith in spite of persecution prove they **are** genuine believers. Does that mean those who become weak in faith do not have salvation, or they have lost their salvation? No. It simply means, others now, cannot be sure that weak members have salvation. There is no *outward* evidence their faith is genuine. (Peter/Judas) This is why mature believers should exhort and encourage weak believers to continue in the faith.

To make sure his readers and we have the right picture, the author goes back to the Old Testament picture...

Who were those who rebelled?

It was **God's** people who refused the Promised Land because of the **physical** dangers. The consequence was they **physically** died in the wilderness. They never experienced God's rest that the Promised Land offered them - a picture of spiritual maturity. The author is emphasizing, this is not a warning about unbelief of salvation. It is a warning about **unbelief of God's protection in persecution.**

TEACHING WITH THIRD WARNING 5 - 6

In chapter 5, the author refers to Jewish history about the Old Testament high priest. He compares him with Jesus and shows that Jesus is greater. But these New Testament Jewish readers have not developed their faith. This teaching is way over their heads.

So the author stops to deal with their immaturity, their desire to avoid more persecution, and the action they are considering.

WARNING

They had full knowledge in the past. They had been spiritually mature in the past but did not use it. As a result, they went back into immaturity. They lost their sensitivity about right and wrong.

The author wants to help them, but God will not give the opportunity if they do not want to spiritually grow.

It is why the author says, *if God permits.*

In their immaturity they think they cannot possibly handle more persecution from the Sanhedrin.

They have no sensitivity about what is right and what is wrong.

So they think they can temporarily give up salvation thru Jesus and be right with God thru Judaism with animal sacrifices. When persecution ends, they can repent, asking for new salvation thru Jesus - a different salvation that will forgive this sin of turning away.

Knowing their thinking, the author now explains why this is not possible.

He starts out by describing their condition. They had been enlightened and received genuine salvation in the past. They had tasted - enjoyed - their relationship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit was and is within them and had given them spiritual gifts. They had experienced specific answers from God as well as the power of God in their lives.

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once and for all been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come... (the power of God in their lives like the power that there will be in the future kingdom).
6:4-5

This is obviously a description of true believers.

The author is now going to explain that as believers, they cannot temporarily give up their salvation and think that later they can get a new salvation to forgive them. If it takes a new salvation to forgive, Jesus would have to return and make a new payment. That would bring shame to the name of Jesus, implying that His first payment was not adequate. So if *that* is how they think they will be forgiven, they will never experience forgiveness because there can *never* be a different or new salvation..

It is impossible for true believers, having fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, (to get a new salvation), since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding Him up to contempt. 6:6

In reality, they only have 2 choices.

Return to Judaism - If they do, they will not lose their salvation but they will lose their physical life. (70 AD)

Or they can make a complete break from Judaism and use the opportunity to spiritually mature.

PATTERN AND WARNING

The author uses picture language to make his point. *As it happens with land, it will happen to you.*

Land receives rain as a blessing from God. Some land responds with fruitfulness.

Other land only has thorns and thistles. The lives of Jewish believers are like land.

They have received salvation blessings from God. If they grow and mature in their faith, their lives will have the fruit of the Spirit, they will produce good works and will receive rewards.

If they choose to go back to Judaism, there will be discipline and physical death. (70 AD)

In addition, at the Reviewing Stand of Jesus they will have no rewards.

It is important to also notice how the author ends this part of the warning.

Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things--things that belong to or accompany salvation, (meaning spiritual maturity). 6:9

The author is convinced that after his readers hear this warning, they will choose to develop their faith.

TEACHING WITH FOURTH WARNING

7 – 10

Jesus is greater than everything connected with the Jerusalem Temple and its worship.

In the Old Testament, for **God's** people, animal sacrifices could only forgive sins of **ignorance**.

When God's people were guilty of willful sin, the consequence was physical death.

In his teaching, the author tells these 1st century Jewish believers ...

... To enjoy the privilege of entering directly into God's presence

In the days of the Old Testament, only the high priest could do that, and only once a year.

Now, because of Jesus, they can enter directly into God's presence thru prayer at any time.

... To show love and support for each other

... To keep meeting with other mature believers for encouragement, strength and teaching

Some Jewish believers have stopped meeting with others to avoid persecution. But it is mature believers who will give them encouragement and spiritual insight as things get worse.

With this teaching and Old Testament history about willful sin, the author gives the...

WARNING

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins... 10:26-27

After hearing the warnings in this letter, if they return to Judaism and renounce their belief in Jesus, there is no sacrifice - no forgiveness - no escaping the consequence because it is willful. They will have God's judgment, which will be physical death.

PATTERN - *As it happened to them, it will happen to you.* 10:28

In the days of Moses, God's people lost their physical life for willful sin.

First century Jewish believers will lose their physical lives for willful sin by returning and continuing in Judaism.

How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? 10:29

The author is talking about a genuine believer. Even tho he has denounced Jesus, he is still sanctified - he still has salvation because he accepted the payment of Jesus. The severe punishment is physical death in God's judgment in 70 AD and loss of rewards at the Reviewing Stand of Jesus.

TEACHING WITH FIFTH WARNING

11 - 12

Avoiding persecution is the major issue for these immature believers.

So the author reviews Jewish history to remind them of their Old Testament heroes of faith.

Some were rescued from persecution but others were killed for their faith.

The readers should also remember what Jesus suffered and how He was persecuted.

The author goes on to explain that God uses persecution as discipline to help them mature in their faith. Of course it is not pleasant. But spiritual maturity will give them...

...Spiritual discernment

...Faith to endure continued persecution

...Eagerness for the joys of eternity.

PATTERN - *as it happened to them - Jews in the Old Testament, it will happen to you.*

The Jews in the days of Moses knew what God wanted at Mt. Sinai, but they refused to listen. The result was physical death for many.

WARNING

The author says to the Jewish believers who want to return to Judaism with animal sacrifices...

Do not refuse what God has said. 12:25

He has made it clear, animal sacrifices no longer forgive sin. It is now thru Jesus, the greater and complete sacrifice. God the Father is speaking to them in grace at the present time. But if they refuse to listen, He will speak in judgment, bringing physical death in 70 AD.

The author ends his letter with final instructions. If they obey, it will lead to spiritual maturity.

These warnings were given in 68 AD. In less that 2 years God's judgment came.

When Titus, the Roman general started to surround Jerusalem with his armies in 70 AD, Jewish believers thruout Judea recognized the danger. They left town immediately. According to history, all the believers escaped and settled east of the Sea of Galilee.

Any Jewish believers that returned to Judaism at the Temple were caught off guard. They would have been part of the one million Jews killed by Romans. They did not lose their salvation, but they suffered the consequence of physical death.



LESSONS FOR US

This book was written specifically to Jewish believers of the 1st century. Because they were also part of the Church, the Body of Christ, the book has lessons for us as well.

It answers our questions about true believers who wander from the faith.

According to this book, for those who genuinely accept the payment of Jesus and then wander away, deny Jesus or rebel, there will be consequences in this life and loss of rewards in eternity. But there will be no loss of salvation because they were declared holy when they accepted the payment of Jesus. This is God's point of view.

From the human viewpoint, when a believer falls away, there is no more outward evidence that they are a genuine believer. It means we can no longer be *sure* if their original decision was genuine. Maybe it was - maybe it was not. But we can be sure God knows those who are His, even in their failures.

It teaches us the importance of spiritual growth.

It is so easy to get caught up in life and think as long as we have salvation, that's all that matters. Very seldom do we hear about the dangers of spiritual immaturity. This book says, **without growth...**

- We will become careless in our obedience.
- We will have doubts that God is adequate for our difficult situations.
- We will lack sensitivity to what is right and what is wrong from God's point of view.
- We will knowingly reject God's warnings.
- We will refuse to obey what God has said if we want to do something else.

These are the dangers of immaturity in the lives of believers. This is not salvation as God intends it to be.

It teaches us how to spiritually grow.

- Have mutual support and love with mature believers.
- Obey God's rules and stay within His boundaries.
- Meet together to study God's Word in depth.
When we only study the milk of the Word we are barely surviving spiritually.
We need the meat - the deeper truths of Scripture - to grow.
- Listen to the warnings of God's mature leaders.
Warnings from spiritually immature leaders can be dangerous. We need to listen to those that are mature.
- Have a thankful heart.
- Ask God for and then accept His grace and mercy.

This is living the salvation life as God wants it to be.

ENDNOTES The 9 books written to Jewish believers

Hebrews - written to Jews in Judea c. 68 AD

James - written to synagogue Jews in Babylon, Elam and nearby areas c. 45 AD

1-2 Peter - written to Jews in northern Turkey c. 66 AD

1, 2, 3 John - written to Jews in Asia Minor c. 90 AD

Jude - written to Jews in Israel, in the 70s after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple

Revelation - written to Jews in Asia Minor c. 95 AD