

# The Book of Hebrews: Five Warnings For Christians

## A Brief Overview

The authorship of the Book of Hebrews is unknown, but we do know he demonstrates a deep knowledge of the Old Testament as he draws from it often. This book was written to *believers*, meaning the author is addressing saved individuals in the church (which is the body of Christ). We know this to be so as evidenced by the author including himself in the warnings and using terms fitting the saved, such as "holy brethren" (Christians) who are "partakers of the heavenly calling."

Historically, the author's contextual audience were Christians who were *Jewish*, as they would have had a keen understanding of his use of so many Old Testament passages. And in particular, those he directed his letter to were currently facing persecution.

But the Book of Hebrews is just as important and applicable today as it was 2,000 years ago when it was written. This book, like every book in the Bible, contains *God's words* speaking to *God's people*. Church, we need to have eyes to see and ears to hear what God is saying.

It is important to point out before skimming through this book that Scripture presents salvation as having three main aspects: justification (past), sanctification (present), and glorification (future). The Book of Hebrews primarily focuses on the current and future aspects related to rewards, rewards concerning positions of authority within Christ's kingdom that are given when He returns.

The five warnings in Hebrews are written in order to caution Christians against the loss of privilege and rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ due to *unfaithfulness and disobedience*.

### **Differing views concerning the warnings**

The Calvinistic view interprets the warnings as addressed to "spurious" believers, meaning Christians who aren't really Christians. Calvinists believe that only true Christians persevere throughout their life, thus proving that they were initially saved to begin with. (Conversely, if someone claims to be "saved" but doesn't persevere throughout their life, then they weren't really saved at all.)

The Arminian view sees the warnings as addressed to *believers* (those that have been "saved"), who are in danger of *losing their initial salvation* through sinful behavior. Arminians believe that a person is initially saved by grace through faith, but that initial salvation can be forfeited, lost, or given back.

Both of these views see salvation in too narrow a way, not understanding the 3 aspects: initial salvation, ongoing salvation, and future salvation. If one only sees salvation in a single manner

as pertaining to a deliverance from an eternity in hell, then the previous viewpoints are basically the only approach.

The correct view, however, sometimes known as “The Partaker” view, is a more mediating approach to the five warnings. This view understands the warnings as addressed to genuine believers (saved individuals, *Christians*, individual members of the body of Christ) who risk losing rewards or privileges, *not their initial salvation*, if they live unfaithful lives of disobedience.

## Hebrews Chapter One

Hebrews chapter 1 serves as a crucial introduction, emphasizing the superiority of Christ's revelation and the superiority and Deity of Jesus Christ Himself; this chapter focuses on heirship and inheritance, setting the stage for the warnings. Verse 14 is of great importance, as it identifies individuals who "shall be heirs of salvation" (co-heirs with Christ), referring to the future aspect of salvation (the “salvation of the soul”) for Christians, which is directly related to Christ's coming kingdom. In order to receive this salvation, faith and works (works done in faith in obedience to the Lord) are required in the life of the Christian.

The first chapter of Hebrews highlights specifically the coming millennial kingdom of Christ, supported by seven Old Testament quotations; Christ's future reign is the total fulfillment of God's purpose.

## Why the Warnings?

The author of Hebrews includes these five warnings to alert readers (which includes all members of the body of Christ, then and now) of impending danger from apostasy, and to highlight the importance of persevering in the faith in order to be recipients of God's promises. The warnings address the potential loss of rewards for Christians at the Judgment Seat of Christ, emphasizing the importance of striving for the promises God has given—*specifically* to rule and reign with Christ in His coming kingdom.

## The First Warning: Hebrews 2:1-4

The first warning urges readers to not neglect the "so great salvation," which is the privilege of ruling with Christ in the millennial kingdom, also known as “the salvation of the soul” (Matt. 16:24-27, 1 Pet. 1:3-12, Rev. 3:21). Neglecting this salvation (**not giving up your life/soul now in order to receive life/soul then**) will result in not escaping God's just recompense when the Lord Jesus acts as Judge at the Judgment Seat of Christ, where He doles out rewards (and lack thereof) to Christians according to their works.

Again, this is not about losing one's initial salvation relative to eternal security. This is about receiving—or not receiving—the reward of the inheritance during the coming 1,000-year Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

### **The Second Warning: Hebrews 3:7-4:13**

The second warning uses the first generation of Israel out of Egypt as an example of losing one's inheritance due to unbelief and disobedience, *despite being a redeemed people*. Christians are warned not to have, as they did, "an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

The author points out that the first generation did not enter God's "rest" and continues on to say that there *is still yet a Sabbath Rest that exists for the people of God*. This seventh day Rest is the coming kingdom of Christ, the seventh 1,000-year "day," based on the unchangeable pattern set in Genesis 1:2-2:3 concerning God's process of restoration; God rested on the seventh day then, and will still yet Rest on the Seventh Day to come.

Christians must labor and strive to enter that coming Rest by living a life of faithful obedience to the Lord, lest one falls after the example of unbelief, as the first generation did.

### **The Third Warning: Hebrews 6:1-8**

The third warning emphasizes the seriousness of falling away from the Lord, describing Christians who have "been enlightened" and have "tasted the heavenly gift" and "the powers of the age to come" **falling away in such a way** as it is impossible to renew them again to the Lord's repentance. God's views this "falling away" *as serious as crucifying the Son of God again*.

The warning also draws a parallel to that first generation of Israel's failure to enter the Promised Land, as they too "tasted" the good fruit of the land AND the powers of God, but refused to believe that God would do as He said He would do. God rejected them and they did not receive their inheritance in the land; therefore, if we follow their example we too will be rejected by God and not receive our inheritance in the heavenly land.

The strong language of Hebrews 6:8 that refers to being "burned" symbolizes the Judgment Seat of Christ, where works are tested by fire, and unfaithful Christians who have works of wood, hay and straw (not gold, silver, precious stones) suffer loss, yet are still saved through the fire (1 Cor. 3:11-15, 2 Cor. 5:10-11).

### **The Fourth Warning: Hebrews 10:26-39**

The fourth warning intensifies with mentions of the *willful sin*, resulting in a fiery judgment, and sorer punishment...of which there is no sacrifice in order to receive God's mercy. Again, this is all addressed to the body of Christ, the author of Hebrews included. Willful sin is defined as turning away from *epignosis*, which is having a full, mature knowledge of the gospel of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ (having been revealed by the Spirit of God). This warning clearly explains that the "willful sin" is a **deliberate forsaking** of God's promises regarding our inheritance.

The fiery judgment resulting from this deliberate forsaking includes “falling into the hands of the living God,” which is a loss of the reward of the inheritance of ruling in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Elsewhere in Scripture we can see this loss described as “wailing and gnashing of teeth” and “the outer darkness,” being separated from the glory of the Lord during the Kingdom Age (Matt. 22:2-14, Rom. 8:14-19, 2 Tim. 4:11-13).

### **The Fifth Warning: Hebrews 12:14-29**

The fifth and final warning references back to Esau and Jacob, wherein Esau is called a “fornicator” and “profane” because he sold his birthright for one morsel of food. Afterward, Esau wanted the blessing of his inheritance from his father, but did not receive it though he sought it diligently with tears. This is to remind us of that example, that if we Christians treat our birthright – our inheritance – as something of no value like Esau did, trading it for present fleshly desires, then our Father in heaven will likewise NOT grant us our inheritance, though we would ask for it with tears.

This warning also commands us Christians to listen and not refuse God's offer of this regal blessing, drawing a contrast with the nation of Israel who refused to listen to God's voice when He spoke time and time again. It is very clearly stated that since *they did not escape the judgment of God due to their refusal to listen*, neither shall we escape the judgment of God if we refuse to listen.

The author of Hebrews states the importance of reverence and godly fear, reminding Christians of God's holy character and the need for judgment. The warning ends with mention of the coming *unshakable* kingdom, where perseverance ensures rewards in the millennial kingdom.

### **Comfort amongst the Warnings**

Despite the severity of this book, the warnings aim to incentivize faithfulness, encouraging readers/us to “go on,” “hold fast,” and “run with patience.” The author of Hebrews reminds us of “the many clouds of witnesses” who persevered before us, all of them looking to that coming promise of the heavenly city. These faithful Old Testament saints endured far worse things yet considered it joy for the rewards they knew were out ahead for them. The author encourages us to persevere for the very same reasons... a heavenly reward of our inheritance if we would just faithfully obey and endure. We are urged to seek things above where Christ is seated, and told to assemble together with like-minded believers in order to exhort one another, stir up one another to love and good works, so much more as we see this Day approaching.