

# Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 28, Hebrews

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in New Testament History and Literature, lecture 28 on the book of Hebrews.

All right, it's time to begin.

Just a couple of words of announcement. One of them is my sympathies to all the Red Sox fans. I have to confess, I'm a St. Louis Cardinal fan and they're doing no better, so I understand.

Second, there is an extra credit review session tonight in this room at 8 o'clock, so show up and bring questions, be prepared to talk about anything related to the exam. And again, that's for extra credit. Just once again to remind you that you get the amount of extra credit for how many ever sessions.

There will be four of them, so if you show up to just one, you'll get credit for that. If you show up to four, obviously that will affect your final grade for the good even more, so the more the better. But tonight at 8 o'clock, we'll, in this room, extra credit review session.

The grade for the previous exam, you should have that by Friday, I'm hoping, yes. They're all graded, they just need to be calculated. I usually look through them first before I have my TA put them up on Blackboard, so they have gone to her and they should be up on Blackboard hopefully by Friday.

Yep, good. All right, and I also emailed, hopefully, you got an email with the study guide attached. As I said, I'm trying to put one on Blackboard.

For some reason, my computer has not let me on Blackboard all day. I'm not sure why, but as soon as I get on, I'll put it on Blackboard as well. But you should have an attachment on an email I just sent out this morning on a study guide.

So, if you're coming to the review session tonight, you might want to download that or make a copy of that to have with you.

All right, let's open with prayer. And then we started looking on Monday at the book of Hebrews, and we'll try to finish that up today.

And as I said, Friday is exam number three which does not cover anything in Hebrews. It goes through Titus as the last of Paul's letters that we considered. And so, Ephesians through Titus, with Philemon thrown in there with Colossians.

All right, let's open with prayer. Father, we are grateful for the gift of your revelation to us in the form of your son Jesus Christ. But as we've said before, the scriptures testify to and witness to Christ and what he has done for us and what it means to follow him in obedience and to live life as God's people in this world. So, we ask for your guidance as we consider part of that revelation in the form of the book of Hebrews, give us wisdom and insight, and help us to grasp the significance of that book, not only in terms of how the first readers would have received it and understood it, but how you want us to respond to it as your people today. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.

All right, well, we started looking at the book of Hebrews, and I suggested to you that Hebrews was basically written to try to persuade Jewish Christian readers, who the author perhaps suspects have not yet fully embraced Christ and this new covenant salvation and faith, but now for a while have attempted to turn around and go back to their ancestral religion, to Judaism, and in doing so turn their backs on Jesus Christ and this new covenant salvation that Jesus offers.

What the author tries to do then is, throughout the book, compare Jesus Christ to various institutions and persons in the old covenant scriptures, in the Old Testament, the author wants to demonstrate that Jesus is superior because he brings fulfillment, he brings to a climax God's revelation that originally was revealed through the old covenant scriptures, but by showing Jesus Christ is superior, God's superior means of revelation, the author is trying to get his readers to, again to use the phrase that I've used so often, is to get them to see they have everything to lose if they go back and they have everything to gain if they press on and embrace Christ in faith, no matter what the cost. So again, when you read through Hebrews, the author alternates exposition and exhortation to demonstrate to his readers that Jesus Christ is superior to Moses, he's superior to the Old Testament law, he's superior to the Old Testament tabernacle and temple, he's superior to the old covenant, to the sacrificial system, by demonstrating Jesus is superior because he fulfills them, then he, the author is hoping then to convince his readers that why would they want to go back to something that has now been fulfilled in a greater way in the person of Jesus Christ. So, they have everything to lose if they turn their backs on that, and they have everything to gain though if they press forward and embrace Christ.

I said it's perhaps as if the readers are kind of teeter-tottering between embracing Jesus Christ and faith in the gospel but going back to their former religious system in Judaism. Perhaps part of the difficulty was most likely the lines between Christianity and Judaism may have been somewhat blurred at this time, so that again, the author suspects that these readers may not have completely made the transition to

complete faith in Jesus Christ and the gospel, and now they're in danger for various reasons of going back. And so, the author, we saw that the author even argues from the Old Testament itself, that the Old Testament pointed to the temporary nature of the Old Covenant.

It pointed to a greater fulfillment that was to come, and now the author is convinced that fulfillment has taken place in the person of Jesus Christ, and the readers ignore that at their own peril. Now, the next section I want to look at as a demonstration of what the author is doing is Hebrews chapters 3 and 4. In Hebrews chapters 3 and 4, the author, again, in trying to convince his readers not to return to Judaism, and in doing so, turning their backs on Jesus Christ and the gospel, in trying to convince them, the author sets up a comparison or analogy between the Israelites, but during a specific period of time. He doesn't give you a survey or a sweep of all of the Old Testament history, but he focuses on.

Interestingly, the author of Hebrews focuses on one aspect of Israel's history, and that is the wilderness generation, the generation who left Egypt and came up to the land of Canaan, the land that God promised to bring them. But if you remember the story of how they sent in 12 spies, and Joshua and Caleb were the only ones that came back encouraging the people to go in and take the land as God promised, but the people failed to believe, and they disobeyed God and refused to go into the land, and because of that, God judged them. They basically wandered in the wilderness for 40 years to kill that generation off, until a new generation then goes in under Joshua.

But that period between the leaving of Egypt in the Exodus, and going up to the promised land, where despite the report and positive encouragement of Joshua and Caleb, the Israelites refused to go in, that period of time is the period that the author of Hebrews focuses on. And he uses that as a model, or as an analogy, that runs something like this. He compares the old covenant people of God in the wilderness, those again who made the trek through the wilderness, up out of Egypt, up to the promised land, and for whom the tabernacle accompanied them along the way.

Remember, the Tabernacle is kind of a portable temple. The tabernacle is where God met with his people, and they could tear it down when they needed to move, and then set it back up, and that's where God dwelled with his people. Later, that would be replaced by a more permanent structure, the temple.

But the author again, the author compares his new covenant people that belong to this church that he's addressing, perhaps a church in Rome. He compares them, and again, made mainly of Jews at this point, to the Old Testament people of God who left Egypt, and made the trek through the wilderness, up to the promised land, yet they rebelled, and they refused to go in. And what the author does then is say, he compares it in terms of the promise of rest.

He says, the old covenant people of God, the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness, that was, that stood as a promise that they could have obtained, yet they failed to obtain that rest, that is the wilderness generation. They failed to obtain that rest. They were denied that rest because of their disobedience and rebellion because they refused to act on God's promises, and enter the land, and experience the rest in the land that God had promised them.

And now, he says, the readers of Hebrews, again, back to the first century, now the author says, you readers, you are in danger of committing the same mistake. That is, you too have a promise of rest right in front of you, and you are, you are in danger of committing the same mistake, but don't commit the same error as your ancestors did, who also came right up to, within reaching distance of that rest, yet they failed to believe, they failed to embrace it in faith, they failed to obey God's promise, and, and forfeited the rest, and instead were punished, and, and under God's judgment. And now he says, you New Testament readers, you also are now faced with the promise of rest.

The promise of entering that rest now confronts you, so don't blow it like your ancestors back in the wilderness did. So, do you, do you see the connection, the analogy? He's, he's, again, basically drawing a correspondence between the Old Testament people of God, and now his readers, who are also Jewish, but now are, have, have, again, in some way, responded to the gospel, have come within the orbit of the church as God's people. But again, the author suspects that they are in danger of doing the same thing the Old Testament people did, that is coming right up, and to the point where they are with, again, almost within touching distance of the promise, about ready to embrace it by faith.

They stand on the brink of seeing the promise fulfilled of God's rest. Yet, again, the Old Testament people of God refuse to obey. They refuse to enter that rest.

They refuse to act and respond in belief. And now the author doesn't want history to repeat itself in a way, by having his readers commit the same mistake, and not enter the rest that is now available to them. You can see what is, so, so the, what, what is going on is that the, the physical rest that Israel in the Old Testament was to experience by entering the land was, in a sense, a type or an anticipation of a greater rest that now is available through Jesus Christ.

So, what the author is telling his readers of Hebrews is that the rest that you are about to enter is not entering a certain land, but now it's what the land symbolized and what was, what it pointed to for, in the Old Testament, that is the, the rest and the salvation now that Jesus Christ brings is now available to the readers of Hebrews. And again, he, he wants them, the message is, as the New Covenant people, the author's trying to get his readers to, he's trying to say, don't blow it. Don't commit

the same mistake that your Old Covenant ancestors did back in the wilderness, who refused to believe and obey.

And therefore, they did not enter the rest. Now, the readers of Hebrews also have the promise of a rest, that is rest in Jesus Christ. But they're in danger of committing the same mistake if they do not respond in faith and embrace Jesus Christ.

And instead, if they go back to the old, their old ancestral religion. But, but, but do you see the, the, the rest that the author, and notice when you read chapters three and four, how many times the word rest is used? For, again, for the Old Testament people of God in Israel, the rest was physically resting in the land, settling in the land, and, and rest from the enemies, and enjoying God's blessings. But, the author of Hebrews is saying that was only a type of, or an anticipation of, and pointed to a greater rest that now comes through Jesus Christ.

And the rest that now is available to the Hebrew Christians, the readers of Hebrews, the rest that is available to them is resting in Christ, trusting in Christ for salvation, and the blessings of salvation that he provides. But they are in danger of missing that and ignoring that if they act like their ancestors and refuse to respond in faith and obedience to the promise of God. Now, chapters three and four, this has all kinds of implications that I don't want to go into right now.

But, for example, the issue of the Sabbath, are, are, are Christians supposed to observe a single day as a Sabbath? In the Old Testament and throughout Judaism, they observed the seventh day as the Sabbath day based on creation that they set aside. Interestingly, then somewhere along the lines, Christians, and the church, begin to meet on Sunday, and some have wondered if it was, is that kind of the new Christian Sabbath. Should Christians observe a day of rest or a Sabbath today? In my opinion, again, I'd be glad to talk about this later. In my opinion, the answer to that is no.

I think the New Testament, and a book like Hebrews chapters three and four is clear, that day of rest that the Israelites observed, that one day out of the week, has now been fulfilled ultimately in the rest that we experience in Jesus Christ. So, we fulfill the Sabbath by trusting in Christ, by resting in Christ, and by trusting in him for our salvation, according to chapters three and four. So, in a sense, as someone once told me, every day is a Sabbath for Christians when we trust in Christ, and as the author of Hebrews says, when we cease from our own works, and we trust in Christ, we fulfill, we embrace this rest, we fulfill the true intention of the Sabbath rest that God provided for his people.

And what that anticipated has now been fulfilled in the salvation that Jesus Christ provides. I think the reason the church meets on Sunday for worship is because that's the day Jesus was raised from the dead, and that's the day we celebrate Jesus'

resurrection and all that means. Although, as, as some of you may know, as, as churches begin to grow and get larger, a lot of larger churches also have worship services on Saturday now, which is completely fine.

But again, it seems to me Christians are not called upon to celebrate a single day as kind of a new Sabbath. We're called upon to rest and trust in Christ for our salvation as the fulfillment of the Sabbath. All right, but the main thing is everyone sees that the correlation or connection, what the author is doing, he's, he's trying to compare, he's using the Old Testament, just that, that segment of Old Testament Israel life.

When they left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, wandered through the wilderness up to the land of Canaan, yet they refused to go in. The author uses that as a model or example now for his, his readers or kind of as a type of, of his readers and trying to get them, don't commit the same mistake. In the age of fulfillment of Christ, you too have the promise of rest, but don't blow it like your ancestors did and refuse to believe and enter that rest.

And as I said, later on, later on in Hebrews, the author will compare Jesus to the sacrificial system. And intriguingly, his main model for that is not primarily the temple, but it's the Tabernacle. As I hinted at last class period, some, some would suggest, well, Hebrews, that means the book of Hebrews must have been written after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

70 AD is a crucial date, in early Christianity. That's when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and recaptured again. But most likely the temple very well may have been standing at this time.

The reason the author uses the Tabernacle as his model when, when he wants to compare Christ to the sacrificial system and the priesthood, he relies on the description of the Tabernacle, not so much the temple. The reason he does that is, I don't think because it's necessarily because the temple was destroyed, but again because he is, he's focusing in on the wilderness generation as his primary model. And so, the wilderness generation did not worship in the temple.

They carried a tabernacle that they set up, on several occasions. So, I think that's why the author appeals to the Tabernacle because he's, he's not, he's not referring to the whole Old Testament and the total life of Judaism. He's focusing in on that one, that one segment of Old Testament Israel life.

That is the wilderness generation who left Egypt and made their trek to the promised land. During that time, they set up and took down and worshiped God through the Tabernacle. And so that's why the author appeals to the tabernacle because he's focusing in on the wilderness generation as a kind of a model for the warning that

he's giving to his readers not to do the same thing they did and miss this promised rest.

Now, chapters three and four also raise another issue, and that is chapters three and four contains actually the second of about almost half a dozen warning passages. If you remember, the quiz you took most recently, I guess on Monday, the quiz was over Hebrews, one of the questions related to what was one of the characteristic features of Hebrews, and that is the stern warnings. Dotted throughout the landscape of Hebrews are these rather stern or rather pointed warnings to the readers.

And again, that makes sense if the readers are just about to turn their back on Jesus Christ and go the other direction and go back to the old covenant, their ancestral religion, these warning passages are meant, in a sense, to shock the readers, to wake them up and get them to see the danger of what they're doing or what they're about to do. And so, you have a number of these rather strict or stern warning passages that are, again, meant to warn the readers of what it is they're about to do if they refuse to embrace Jesus Christ and the gospel, and if for whatever reason they want to go back and instead return to their ancestral religion. One of the most famous of those warning passages, I think we already read this, but I'll read it again, is found in chapter 6. And starting in verse 4, the author says, I'll read through verse 8. So this is Hebrews 6, 4 through 8. This is one of those warning passages or one of them, remember, Hebrews flip-flops between exposition and exhortation.

The exhortations usually contain or consist of one of these rather stern warnings. And listen to this one. For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, they've tasted the heavenly gift, they've shared the Holy Spirit, they've tasted the goodness of God's word and the powers of the age to come, and then they have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God, and they are holding Him up to public shame or contempt.

Ground that drinks up the rain, falling on it repeatedly, and then produces crops useful to those for whom it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if that land produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless, and it is on the verge of being cursed, in the end, it will be burned. So that's his message to the readers who are contemplating turning from the gospel and going back to Judaism.

Now, what is going on in this text? There have been a number of ways, and again, this is only one of the several warning passages, but it's fairly well known. Who are these people that the reader says they've been enlightened, they've tasted the heavenly gift, they have shared in the goodness of God's word, they've received the Holy Spirit, and now they have fallen away, and in the end, they expose, in doing so, they expose Jesus Christ to public contempt, and in the end, they are in danger of being burned. I mean, who is this that the author is describing? Throughout the

history of Christianity, there have been a number of ways of describing these warning passages, or these rather strict warnings.

Again, here is another one. This one actually is even a little more severe than the one I just read, as he says, verse 26. Again, he's addressing the same readers, but now here's how he addresses them.

Here's how he warns them. For if we willfully persist in sin, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but only a fearful prospect of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the enemies. Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy, on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved for those who refuse the Son of God, who profane the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outrage the Spirit of grace? For we know the one who says, Vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.

That's how the author addresses his readers. So, who are these people who have been enlightened, they have received the knowledge of the truth, but now they are in danger of falling away or rejecting the Son of God. Who is he describing? Again, historically there have been a number of ways to describe these warnings. Some have suggested, that I know the order in this slide is not quite the order in your notes, but I'm not sure why I did that, but anyway, you'll kind of have to skip around in your notes.

The first view is that some have suggested that these warnings are only hypothetical. That is, they really could not happen, but it's just rhetorically kind of the author's way of waking up the readers. It's as if he's saying that this really couldn't happen, but if it could, if you could really fall away, and if you could refuse the Son of God, this is what would happen.

But it really can't, so you have no option but to press on and respond in obedience to Jesus Christ. So, some would say, we don't need to worry about these warnings too much because they're only hypothetical scenarios that really won't happen. Another possible view is that this is describing genuine Christians who actually forfeit and lose their salvation.

That is, at one point, they have responded in faith to Jesus Christ, and they are what we would say today are true Christians, yet by turning away from Jesus Christ and refusing to believe in Him any longer, they actually lose or forfeit that salvation. It ceases to become a reality. They cease to be God's people any longer.



That salvation that they once experienced and possessed, they have now forfeited and given up because they have now sinned and turned their back on Jesus Christ. This is often known as the Arminian view. Arminian view is named because of its association with, historically, an individual named Jacob Arminius, who was known for emphasizing the need for obedience and human responsibility, and if that doesn't take place, one can lose one's salvation.

So, this is sometimes, therefore, called the Arminian view. But again, they would say, these two passages I just read describe people who were at one time genuinely Christians, God's people, yet now they have ceased to be so. That salvation has now, they have forfeited that and lost that because of their refusal to obey.

The opposite view is known as Calvinism, which is a view often associated with or goes back to some of the thinking of John Calvin, who emphasized God's sovereignty, God's grace, and God's ability to keep us and God's ability to, that is, salvation from beginning to end is primarily a work of God, so how could that be frustrated? How could that be thwarted? And so, they would say, the people that the author is addressing, although they may have appeared to be saved, they actually weren't. The fact that they would turn their backs on Jesus Christ shows that they really weren't saved in the first place. So however much they may have appeared to be God's people and to have experienced salvation in a relationship with Jesus Christ, the fact that they're willing to reject the Son of God or fall away, as these warnings say, proves that they weren't really genuinely saved or God's people in the first place.

That's another option. Again, usually, these two are the two major views throughout the history of the church and they're kind of, often have been at odds with each other. A fourth possibility is that the author, some have suggested, that while the author's really not talking about salvation, he's talking about rewards.

So, these people, these people that fall away or are in danger of being burned, to use the metaphor, or those that reject Christ and are in danger of being, falling into the hands of an angry God, these are people, this is describing not losing your salvation. It's simply describing losing rewards. So, these are Christians, it's just they won't have as many rewards or as many blessings as those who do obey.

And there's different ways of conceiving that. Some would say they won't have as many blessings now in the present, some would say no in the future, they'll still be in heaven, to use the common terminology, but they won't have as many rewards as those who have responded to faith in Jesus Christ. So those are the four primary options.

I've run across a handful of others that are not quite as common as these. Again, the last one, I think the first and the last one are probably the most problematic in my view. That is, the first one is difficult because I find it very hard to think that an

author writing a word of exhortation in addressing an issue like this would simply be giving some hypothetical scenario that really couldn't happen.

However we take these warnings, it seems to me that the author's warning them of something that can actually happen, not something that is hypothetical. The bottom one, to me, there are other kinds of problems with that view, but I think the language is just a little bit too pointed and severe to be reduced to just losing reward. When he talks about falling away and in the end, being burned, and crucifying the Son of God, rejecting the Son of God, falling into the hands of a just God, and falling under judgment, that does not seem to be the language of, oh, you're just losing reward.

That seems to be eternal punishment and judgment. So, I think I'm not convinced that the last one fits really well either. So, in a sense, we could say, well, which of these two should we understand? Before I look at that, let me just raise a couple of questions and then I want to go back to chapter six, the first one I read, and just give you an example of how I read it and how I understand it.

First of all, one of the questions is, what sin are the readers in danger of committing? In other words, what can we be certain about these warning passages? First of all, what sin are they in danger of committing? In my opinion, because there have been a number of suggestions throughout church history, some have wondered, well, does the sin of having an abortion qualify or does committing suicide qualify? Does failing to take communion or participate in the sacraments, failing to be baptized, does that qualify as committing the sin? Is that the sin that the author's talking about? It seems to me when you put it in the context that the sin that the author's talking about is simply an outright refusal to respond in obedience and faith in Jesus Christ. It's a willful and conscious turning away from Jesus Christ. Remember what the author said in the last one I read if we go on willfully sinning, so this is something that the readers would consciously do.

That is, they would consciously and willfully turn their backs on Jesus Christ and refuse to respond in faith and obedience. So that's the first thing. This is not some unconscious or accidental thing, and it's not to be identified with any one specific sin.

The author is primarily addressing those who, as he said, have been enlightened and who have come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, yet now they willfully are turning away and turning their backs on that and outright rejecting that. That's the error that Jesus has in mind. So, when someone asks me, I wonder, have I committed this? I simply ask them, did you do this? Are you willfully rejecting and turning your backs on Jesus Christ walking away and wanting nothing to do with him? That's the only scenario that the author of Hebrews is addressing.

The second question I've listed in your syllabus is, who are the readers? Again, I think, and this is where I kind of start to how I understand these warning passages. Again, I think that these readers, at least most of them, the author suspects, have not yet fully embraced Jesus Christ. That is, in this transition from the old covenant to the new covenant, he suspects some of them are, as I said, they're kind of teeter-tottering.

They have not yet fully embraced Jesus Christ in faith. And now they're still at the point where they're willing to turn back and return to their ancestral religion and reject what they have come to know and experience in the gospel and even being part of the church. They've come within the orbit, within the sphere of the church and the gospel, and they've experienced so much, yet now they are willing to turn their backs and go back to their ancestral religion.

So, these people, I would say, have not yet quite fully responded in faith to Jesus Christ and have not yet quite embraced the gospel. And the author, in a sense, wants to give them a nudge to push them to that last step to embrace Jesus Christ in this new covenant of salvation in faith. But instead, they're in danger of acting like their Old Testament ancestors who also were on the verge of entering the promised land, yet they refuse because of unbelief because of rebellion, and hard-heartedness, they refuse to enter that rest.

In fact, I think the author of Hebrews says as much. In chapter 4 and verse 2, this is one of the key verses for me for understanding who the readers are their spiritual status, and how they relate to the Old Testament. The author, this is in chapters 3 and 4, part of that text we were just looking at, where the author clearly compares his readers to the Old Testament people who wandered in the wilderness.

He says, therefore, while the promise of entering God's rest is still open, and he's telling his readers that promised rest, which is now trusting and resting in Christ for salvation, that promised rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should be seen to have failed to reach it. For indeed, the good news of the gospel came to us just as to them. The theme is the Old Testament people who went through the wilderness, and came up to the promised land but refused to go in.

He says, for indeed, the good news came to us just as it did to them. That is, they had the good news, the gospel, of entering this rest, the promise that God had provided. Yet the message they heard did not benefit them because they did not combine that message with faith.

For we who believe enter that rest just as God has said. So, notice that phrase, the Old Testament people of God apparently did not truly believe. That is, they did not combine the message they heard, this good news, this gospel, of the rest, and the promise that God had made.

They did not embrace that and combine it with faith. And now I think the author suspects that his readers are in the same boat. They too have had the gospel preached, yet they have not yet solidified that relationship through faith.

They have not yet fully responded and embraced the good news of that gospel in faith. And that is what the reader is trying to get them to do. And again, he does it over and over by showing that in every way, Jesus Christ is superior to all the Old Testament persons, institutions, events, sacrifices, the tabernacle, etc.

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all that. So why would they want to go back to that? When the reality to which it pointed, Jesus Christ and the salvation and the rest that he brings, is now available. Why would they want to, how could they miss that? Why would they want to turn their backs on that? So, I take it that these readers are, again, Jews who have, again, responded in some way to the gospel, have come within the orbit of the church, and experienced all these things, yet, at the same time, the author still suspects that they have not yet fully embraced it in faith.

And they're in danger of going back. So, what is it that they are in danger of losing? Again, I think they're in danger of missing out on the gospel. It's not just losing reward, but they are in danger of completely missing out on this gospel, the salvation, the new covenant salvation that Jesus now provides and offers to his readers.

Now, to give you an example of one of the warnings, let's go back to Hebrews chapter 4, and especially chapters 4 through 6. Hebrews 4, 4 through 6, which is the third warning, the main warning. There's one in chapter 2, and then one in chapters 3 and 4. Then the third one comes here in chapter 6. Then there are actually two more warning passages in Hebrews. But this one is the most common one and well-known.

For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, they've tasted the heavenly gift, they've shared in the Holy Spirit, they've tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then they have fallen away. Since on their own, they are crucifying again the Son of God and holding Him up to contempt. Ground that drinks in rain that falls on it and produce a crop that's useful to those that cultivate it receives a blessing.

But ground that receives rain but produces thorns and thistles is worthless, it's in danger of being cursed, and in the end, it will be destroyed and burnt. Now, what's going on in this text? What I want to focus on is how we understand those descriptions. They've been enlightened, they've tasted the heavenly gift, they've experienced the powers of the age to come, they've tasted of the Holy Spirit and of the good word, yet they fall away. Those are the phrases I want to focus on.

So, again, in the order they occur, they've been enlightened, they've tasted the heavenly gift, they've shared in the Holy Spirit, they've tasted the goodness of God's word, tasted the powers of the coming age, and then they fall away. Why do you think the author describes his readers like this? Again, I think he's referring to his readers, those in the first century, perhaps in Rome, the Jews, and Jewish Christians who would have responded to or to whom he was writing. Why does he describe them this way? Or another way of saying it is what do these phrases recall in your mind? Maybe just a couple.

I think the easiest one is the second one. What does this sound like? Who else tasted the heavenly gift? We'll limit it in the Bible somewhere. The Israelites, when did they do that? In the Exodus, and what was the heavenly gift? The manna from heaven.

Over and over, the manna from heaven is described as a gift from heaven, a gift that comes down from heaven, something that God gives them. It was a sign of his sustenance and his blessing. Let's go back to the first one.

What about being enlightened? Now that you're kind of focused on a little more, what about this phrase being enlightened? Think of the same scenario. And by the way, before we answer that, which generation of Israelites experienced the manna falling from heaven? Those that wandered in the wilderness from the Exodus. So the author is still using the wilderness generation, even though he doesn't say so specifically.

They're the ones who tasted the heavenly gift, the manna. What about being enlightened? Think of the same generation, the same story. What does that perhaps reflect? How did the Israelites know when they needed to pack up this tabernacle and head out? God gave them the law, which tasted the goodness of God's word.

We've taken care of that one. So, tasting the goodness of God's word would correspond to Israel receiving the law. What else? What about this? Yeah, the pillar of fire that provided light to the Israelites.

Good. What about sharing in the Holy Spirit? I mean, certainly, they didn't do that. The Holy Spirit is something that we have today as the church, but certainly, the Israelites didn't have the Holy Spirit, did they? Or did they? When you go back and read the story of the Israelites' trek to the wilderness, there's a reference to them receiving the Holy Spirit.

There's a reference to Isaiah chapter 63 that refers to the Israelites receiving the Holy Spirit. So, the Israelites as well, in the wilderness generation, would have witnessed the working of the Holy Spirit. What about the powers of the coming age? It's not so much the coming age, but the reference to powers.

What might that recall in Israel's experience? What powers or wonders, or another way to translate this would be miracles. What would you guess? What in the wilderness would have constituted the miracles or powers they would have experienced? All right. Like the supernatural healing that took place when they were bitten by snakes.

What about the Exodus parting of the Red Sea? The provision of man. Just a number of things that, interestingly, a couple of the Psalms that refer to what God did for Israel refer to them as powers or miracles. Several of the events.

You're right. It probably doesn't refer to any one thing, but all the ways that God miraculously acted on behalf of his people and provided for them. And then the falling away probably corresponds to what? Again, thinking of the wilderness generation and the story that I've summarized several times, what would the falling away correspond to in the wilderness generation's history? Remember, God leads them through the wilderness where they experience all these things.

They're led by the pillar of fire to lighten their way. God provides manna as a heavenly gift. He gives them the Holy Spirit as well.

They taste of God's word, his good word, which is the law. They experience the powers and the miracles that God does. And what does the falling away correspond to? Right.

Exactly right. They fail to go into the land. So, what is going on here? I think the author has intentionally chosen these words to demonstrate that in the same way that Israel experienced all these things just by virtue of being part of God's people, yet they still failed to believe and go into the land.

In the same way, the author of Hebrews has experienced all these things just by virtue of being part of the church. They've experienced all these things, yet they too are in danger of failing to embrace that in faith. They are too in danger of falling away.

So even though the writer doesn't say it, I'm convinced that he's still comparing his readers back to the wilderness generation. And he uses language that would, for his Jewish Christian readers, would have reminded them of their ancestors. Again, as if to say, don't do the same thing they did.

They experienced all these things too, yet they rejected it. They failed to believe. They fell away and didn't go into the land.

Don't you do the same thing? You have also experienced all these things, yet don't reject God's promises. Don't refuse to respond in faith and miss that rest, miss that salvation by acting like your ancestors did.

Right? Any questions? Again, I think all the other, interestingly, all the other warning passages I think should be understood in a similar way. Interestingly as well, all the other warning passages actually use the Old Testament Israel as an example. Again, as if he's telling his readers over and over, don't let, in a sense we might say, don't let history repeat itself.

Don't respond in the same way that Israel did in the Old Testament, who refused to respond in faith, who rebelled, who disobeyed. Don't you do the same thing because now you have something greater? You live in a time of fulfillment.

You live in a time where the coming age has been fulfilled in Christ. So, the door that you stand poised to enter is far greater than even was true in the Old Testament because now you live at the time of fulfillment in Christ. So don't make the grave mistake of missing that.

Instead, press on and embrace Christ in faith. You have everything to lose if you turn your back. You have everything to gain if you press on and embrace Jesus Christ in faith, no matter what the cost.

Any other questions? I want to talk just briefly about, you'll notice in your notes there's an excursus. Every once in a while, we stop and when there's a dominant theme, we stop and show how it grows out of the Old Testament and gets fulfilled in the New. But any other, before we go on, any questions about Hebrews? You kind of get the idea of what Hebrews is about.

Hebrews is actually, it's one of those books where it's pretty easy to see overall what the author's doing. Where the difficulty is when you start looking at the details and trying to figure them out. Who's this Melchizedek? Where in the world does he come from and how does Christ get linked to Melchizedek? Who is he? The only place he's mentioned in the Old Testament, besides Psalm 110, is that brief cryptic reference to his life in Genesis, in the early chapters of Genesis.

And a little bit of his interaction with Abraham. Otherwise, you hear nothing about him. I mean, who is Melchizedek? What is this priesthood in Melchizedek's order? How does Christ belong to that? So, there are a number of things like that that provide plenty of things to keep you busy thinking about and exploring for the rest of your life.

Yet, on a broad level, reading Hebrews, it's fairly straightforward what's going on, what the readers are in danger of doing, and what he's trying to get them to do. Just

when you try to fill in the details, sometimes things get a little sticky. But overall, I think the main thrust of Hebrews, again, is that he's trying to show the readers they have everything to lose if they turn their backs on Christ.

They have everything to gain if they press on and embrace him in faith. All right. Just to get started on the excursus, and that is the covenant, the idea of a covenant, especially the New Covenant, plays a crucial role in Hebrews.

But it actually has a long history that we've hinted at a couple of times. The idea of covenant actually, in my opinion, goes all the way back to creation. Although the word covenant is not used in Genesis 1 and 2, God's relationship to Adam and Eve was basically a covenant relationship.

And covenant probably includes a number of features, but at the very least, it contains these three ideas. A covenant is where God acts, God takes the initiative and acts to establish a relationship with his people where he adopts them as his children or as his people. So that's why you find the phrase frequently throughout the Bible, I will be your God, you will be my people.

That's covenant language. God takes the initiative and acts to establish a relationship with a people, and he will adopt them as his people. They are not naturally his.

He will adopt them as his people. As part of the covenant, there are conditions that must be met in order to retain that relationship, to maintain that relationship. Usually obedience is on the part of the lesser party.

Usually, again, God will enter into a relationship with someone who is under him or someone in an inferior status. God will adopt them as people. And in order to maintain that relationship, there are stipulations as far as they must obey.

So in the Garden of Eden, the stipulation was, that you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That was the covenant stipulation. So, God adopted Adam and Eve as his people, and he would bless them, but in response, they were to obey and keep their end of the deal, in a sense.

To maintain that relationship, they would obey God's command not to eat of this tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The covenant relationship also included God's promises to those who live or who fail to live up to the covenant relationship. So, you see this in Israel's history when God says, if you obey the law, I will bless you.

If you fail to, I will curse you. And again, in terms of Adam and Eve, they suffered the consequences. Because of their failure to keep the covenant, they were cursed and expelled from the Garden.



So, the idea of the covenant that contains at least these three things, and there may be better ways to phrase them and understand them, but the idea of God entering into a relationship, establishing a relationship, whereby he adopts a people as his own, he promises to bless them or curse them based on their obedience to the stipulations of the covenant. Now, without going into a lot of detail, you find that this covenant that God makes and establishes with his people gets reinforced or repeated with Abraham, the covenant God makes with Abraham, the covenant he makes with David, where he promises, I will be your father, you will be my son, but also the covenant that God makes ultimately with Moses, where, again, there, clearly the idea is that obedience to the law is the primary stipulation, and God will bless them or curse them, the last one, based on whether they respond in obedience to the law. Now, this all leads up to the way that the covenant, the way that the covenant will ultimately be fulfilled, the way that God's intention to enter into a covenant relationship with humanity will ultimately be fulfilled is through the promise of a new covenant.

In Jeremiah, for example, Jeremiah chapter 31, and in Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37, God promises that one day he will establish a new covenant that will be the ultimate expression of the covenant relationship that he desires to enter into with his people. Especially because Israel failed under the old covenant, God would now initiate and inaugurate a new covenant where he would establish a relationship with his people and adopt them as his people make provision for them, and will act to bless them. So, God will enact a new covenant as promised in Jeremiah chapter 31, but also in Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37, and I think a number of other places in the Old Testament as well.

Now what happens in the New Testament then, especially Hebrews, is the New Testament authors are convinced that now with the coming of Jesus Christ, that new covenant salvation, that new covenant arrangement has now been inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ. And the way it's been inaugurated is also to be understood in terms of the already but not yet. It's already been inaugurated in advance of its ultimate and final fulfillment in the future.

And we'll look at that a little bit more next Monday actually. On Friday there is an exam. But Monday we'll pick up on covenant and then move into the book of James as well.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in New Testament History and Literature, lecture 28 on the book of Hebrews.