

New Testament History and Literature – Book of Hebrews

Author: Dr. Dave Mathewson | Session 28

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Keywords

Book of Hebrews, Typology, Wilderness Generation, Rest, Warning Passages, Apostasy, New Covenant, Tabernacle, High Priest, Faith

Abstract

Dr. Dave Mathewson explores the Book of Hebrews as a theological message urging Jewish Christians to remain faithful to Jesus Christ rather than returning to ancestral Judaism. The lecture analyzes Old Testament typology, drawing explicit parallels between the struggles of first-century readers and the wilderness generation who failed to enter God's promised rest through unbelief. Mathewson systematically evaluates four historical views on the stern warning passages in Hebrews 6 and 10, asserting that falling away describes a willful rejection of Christ and the New Covenant salvation. Finally, an excursus on covenant theology traces God's initiative from Creation through Jeremiah's prophecies, demonstrating how Christ's redemptive work inaugurates the ultimate Sabbath rest.

Outline

I. Course Announcements and Introduction

A. Class Review Session and Study Guide

1. Extra credit review session scheduled for 8:00 PM
2. Exam #2 grades finalized and posted by Friday
3. Study guide distributed via email and Blackboard

B. Scope of Upcoming Exam #3

1. Covers Ephesians through Titus (including Philemon)
2. Excludes the Book of Hebrews

C. Introductory Prayer

1. Thanksgiving for divine revelation in Jesus Christ
2. Request for wisdom and practical application of Hebrews

II. Context and Central Purpose of Hebrews

A. The Danger of Returning to Judaism

1. Readers teetering between Christ and former religious traditions
2. Blurring lines between early Christianity and Judaism
3. Old Testament internal evidence pointing to the temporary nature of the Old Covenant

III. Typology in Hebrews Chapters 3–4: The Wilderness Generation and Rest

A. Focus on Israel's Wilderness Generation

1. Historical backdrop: Exodus from Egypt up to Canaan
2. The failure of 10 spies and rebellion vs. Joshua and Caleb
3. 40-year wandering and judgment due to disobedience

B. Typological Comparison of Old and New Covenant People

1. Old Covenant people: Wilderness trek accompanied by the Tabernacle
2. New Covenant readers: Standing on the brink of entering God's rest

C. The Promise and Nature of "Rest"

1. Old Testament rest: Physical settlement in Canaan and freedom from enemies
2. New Testament fulfillment: Spiritual rest and salvation in Jesus Christ
3. Danger of repeating Israel's ancestral mistake of unbelief

D. Implications for the Sabbath

1. Old Testament 7th-day Sabbath vs. fulfillment in Christ
2. Ceasing from self-works and trusting in Christ for daily rest
3. Sunday worship celebrating Christ's resurrection rather than a mandatory new Sabbath day

E. Appeal to the Tabernacle over the Temple

1. Tabernacle as portable sanctuary for the wilderness generation
2. Focus on wilderness typology rather than post-70 AD temple destruction

IV. Analysis of the Stern Warning Passages (Hebrews 6 & 10)

A. Function and Rhetorical Purpose of Warnings

1. Flip-flop structure between exposition and exhortation
2. Shocking readers to recognize spiritual danger

B. Key Warning Passages Examined

1. Hebrews 6:4–8: Impossible to restore those who tasted heavenly gifts and fall away
2. Hebrews 10:26–31: Fearful prospect of judgment for willful persistence in sin

C. Four Historical Perspectives on Apostasy and Warnings

1. Hypothetical View: Real warnings against an impossible situation
2. Loss of Salvation (Arminian View): True believers forfeiting salvation through disobedience
3. Loss of Assurance / Non-Believer View (Calvinist View): Falling away proves faith was never genuine
4. Loss of Rewards View: Believers losing future or present heavenly rewards, not salvation

D. Dr. Mathewson's Synthesis and Interpretation

1. The specific sin: Conscious, willful turning away and rejection of Jesus Christ

2. Spiritual status of readers: Jews within the church orbit who have not fully embraced Christ in faith (Hebrews 4:2)

3. Consequences: Complete forfeiture of New Covenant salvation and gospel blessings

E. Wilderness Background behind Hebrews 6 Language

1. "Enlightened" → Pillar of fire guiding Israel
2. "Tasted the heavenly gift" → Manna from heaven
3. "Shared in the Holy Spirit" → Israel experiencing God's Spirit in the wilderness (Isaiah 63)
4. "Tasted the good word of God" → Reception of the Mosaic Law
5. "Powers of the age to come" → Miracles, plagues, and Red Sea deliverance
6. "Falling away" → Refusal to enter Canaan at Kadesh-Barnea

V. Excursus on Covenant Theology

A. Definition and Core Elements of Covenant

1. Divine initiative: God adopting a people ("I will be your God, you will be my people")
2. Stipulations: Required obedience to maintain covenantal relationship
3. Sanctions: Promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience

B. Historical Progression of Covenants

1. Creation / Edenic Covenant: Adam and Eve (prohibition of the Tree of Knowledge)
2. Abrahamic, Davidic, and Mosaic Covenants

C. Prophecy and Inauguration of the New Covenant

1. Old Testament promise of a New Covenant (Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36–37)
2. Inauguration through Jesus Christ ("Already but Not Yet" eschatology)