

Dr. David Mathewson, New Testament Literature,

Session 28 - Hebrews

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, everyone. So you've been digging into the book of Hebrews, right? And today we're going to help you sort through some of the trickier ideas you found. We're looking at Dr. Mathewson's lecture today.

I think you'll find it pretty insightful. Especially if you're trying to understand what the author of Hebrews was really trying to say and what was at stake for the people he was writing to. Absolutely.

Yeah. And you know, one thing that I thought was really interesting was this analogy he uses about the Israelites, you know, wandering in the wilderness to talk about faith and what it really means to follow Jesus. It's like this ancient story still has something important to tell us today.

So what makes the wilderness generation such a crucial comparison as Hebrews? Well, the interesting thing here is that Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians, and they're wrestling with this question of whether to stay with this new faith in Christ or to go back to Judaism. Wow. I bet that was a really tough choice.

Yeah. I mean, imagine trying to figure that out when the lines between those two faiths were probably still pretty blurry. Yeah, exactly.

It was a huge decision for them. You know, do they embrace this new way with Jesus or go back to what they knew? And the author of Hebrews is trying to convince them to stick with it. So instead of, like, a sales pitch for Christianity, what approach does the author take? Well, he argues that Jesus isn't just another prophet or teacher.

He actually fulfills and surpasses everything that the Old Covenant represents. So Moses, the law, the tabernacle, even the sacrifices- they all point to Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment. That makes me wonder why he focused on the tabernacle instead of the temple.

Wouldn't the temple have been a more relevant comparison, especially for Jewish readers? That's a good point. And it's something that scholars have debated for centuries. One thought is that the tabernacle, you know, that portable sanctuary used during the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, directly connects to that central wilderness analogy that he's using throughout the book.

Ah, so it ties everything back to that theme of journeying and seeking. And I remember you mentioning something about a promise of rest, something that connected to both the Old and New Covenants. What's that all about? This is where it gets really interesting.

The author uses this idea of rest to bridge the gap between those two covenants and show how they're connected. So you're saying there's a deeper meaning to the word rest than just, you know, taking a nap; I'm all ears. Exactly.

In the Old Covenant, God promised the Israelites rest, entering the promised land, enjoying His blessings, being free from their enemies. But their disobedience and their lack of faith prevented them from fully experiencing it. So it was about more than just, you know, getting a piece of land.

It was about trusting God and entering into a deeper relationship with Him. Right. And with the New Covenant, Christians are offered a different kind of rest.

It's about finding true peace and security in our relationship with Jesus, resting in the assurance of our salvation. So rest in Hebrews becomes this rich metaphor for the fulfillment and peace we find in Christ. What's powerful is that the author uses this idea to warn his audience not to miss out on what Jesus offers, just like the Israelites did.

Precisely. And to really drive home the point, he uses some pretty strong language. Dr. Mathewson highlighted some of those stern warning passages in his lecture.

Yeah, those passages definitely pack a punch. It's clear the author believes the stakes are incredibly high. He does.

He's not just engaging in some kind of intellectual debate. He's trying to warn his readers against making a decision that could have eternal consequences. There's that passage in Hebrews chapter 6, verses 4 through 8, where he talks about those who fall away from the faith even after experiencing God's blessings.

It's pretty intense. It is. He compares them to ground that drinks up rain but produces nothing useful.

Ultimately, it's worthless and destined to be burned. That's a pretty stark image, but it makes you wonder who exactly these people who are in danger of falling away are. Yeah, that's a question that's really challenged interpreters for centuries. I mean, there are so many different perspectives out there.

So what's Dr. Mathewson's take on this? How does he approach that passage? Well, he focuses on the language that the author uses to describe these people who are in danger of falling away. Phrases like, you know, enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of God's word, the powers of the age to come. And Dr. Mathewson suggests that these phrases actually link back to the Israelites' experiences in the wilderness.

Oh, really? That's an interesting connection. How do those phrases relate to the wilderness generation? Well, think about it. The Israelites experienced God's presence through the pillar of fire.

That's a form of enlightenment, right? They ate manna, which was a direct gift from heaven. They even witnessed the powers of the age to come through the miracles that God performed. Okay, I see the parallels, but it also raises some questions.

Did the Israelites truly share in the Holy Spirit? I always thought that was a New Testament concept. Yeah, it's a good question. And the lines aren't always as clear as we might think.

You know, there are instances in the Old Testament where the Israelites experienced God's spirit. For example, Isaiah 63 talks about God's spirit guiding and empowering the Israelites. So it's more nuanced than we might assume at first glance.

What's the takeaway from Dr. Mathewson's analysis then? He's essentially saying that just like the Israelites witnessed God's power and provision in the wilderness, but still failed to enter the promised land, the audience of Hebrews could experience the wonders of Christ without fully committing to Him in faith. They're on the brink of turning back even after encountering the truth. So it's not just about knowing facts about Jesus.

It's about resting in Him, putting your full trust in Him for salvation. Even those who had firsthand experiences with God in the wilderness struggled with that. Exactly.

And that's a challenge for us today as well, isn't it? We can have all the knowledge and still wrestle with doubt and temptation. Absolutely. Now, I know Dr. Mathewson also touched on the idea of covenants in his lecture.

How does that fit into the bigger picture of Hebrews? Well, it's a crucial part of understanding the author's argument. Throughout the Bible, we see this idea of a covenant developing from Adam and Eve to Abraham, Moses, and David. Each covenant reveals more about God's character and His plan for humanity.

It's like this beautiful tapestry woven throughout Scripture, each thread building upon the last. That's a great way to put it. And it all culminates in the promise of a new covenant, one that surpasses all that came before.

And that's where Jesus comes in. Exactly. The New Testament writers and the author of Hebrews specifically view Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of that new covenant.

Through Jesus, God's promise of forgiveness, salvation, and a restored relationship with humanity becomes a reality. So the author of Hebrews is showing his audience that the blessings they experienced in Christ aren't just a continuation of the old covenant. They're part of something entirely new and far greater.

He's essentially saying, don't go back to the shadow when you have the substance right here in Jesus. Precisely. He's offering them and us something far more profound and lasting than anything they could find in their old ways.

It's incredible how this letter, written so long ago, still speaks to our human struggles with doubt, temptation, and the desire for true rest. It really does. The author of Hebrews understood human nature, and he knew how easy it is to be distracted by the things of this world and lose sight of what truly matters.

Yeah. And that's really what it comes down to, isn't it? We get so busy with life that we forget about that deeper need for rest and security that only a relationship with Jesus can give us. Right.

And I think that's why those warning passages are so important. The author of Hebrews isn't trying to scare people; he's trying to wake them up to the reality of what's at stake. You know, we often talk about the cost of discipleship, the sacrifices involved in following Jesus.

But you're right. Hebrews also makes us think about the cost of disobedience. What are we missing out on when we choose to turn away from Christ? It's like trading a priceless inheritance for something fleeting and temporary.

You know, in this case, the inheritance is eternal life, the fullness of joy and rest that we find in Christ. To reject that is to settle for something far less satisfying and ultimately to be separated from God. So looking back at everything we've talked about, it seems like the author of Hebrews is using this incredibly vivid analogy of the Israelites, you know, wandering in the wilderness to highlight the urgency of really embracing Christ.

It's not just about knowing the facts; it's about surrendering to him and allowing him to be our ultimate source of rest and security. That's a great way to put it. He's showing his readers and us that true faith requires more than just intellectual assent.

It demands a complete reliance on Christ, a willingness to follow him, even when it's difficult. It's a challenging message, but also incredibly hopeful because it reminds us that even when we stumble and struggle, the invitation to find rest in Christ is always there. Absolutely.

And that's a truth worth clinging to, no matter what challenges we may face. Well, that's our deep dive into Hebrews for today. We've only scratched the surface, but hopefully you've gained some new insights into this powerful and timely letter.

We'll be back soon with another fascinating topic, so stay tuned.