

STAY ON TASK

HEBREWS 2



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Stay on Task: Hebrews 2
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Hebrews 2: Introduction

The first readers of the book of Hebrews were losing their focus. They were being persecuted for believing in Jesus by some of their Hebrew neighbors, and the writer of Hebrews hoped to get them back on track in their commitment to Christ.

Having established the superiority of Jesus to angels in chapter 1, he now proceeds to show how this great Word and Lord became flesh for us, to deliver us from sin and death and to restore us to our proper task of bringing all creation under the dominion of Christ.

That's a tall order. But by keeping focused on Jesus, on His suffering and exaltation, we can find strength to endure our own sufferings, and guidance to help us in keeping on task for the Lord.

We're pleased to make this resource available for personal or group study at no charge, and we hope you will find this series helpful in realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

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1 Watch for Drift

Introduction

It's not often the case that those who fall away from faith in Jesus do so suddenly and abruptly. Usually, the process is longer, slower, and harder to recognize. More like a drift than a dive. It's a good idea to keep this in mind. The first readers of Hebrews did not, and now they needed help in holding firm their confession.

Meditate on Psalm 8.

Read Hebrews 2.1.

Think it through.

1. What is implied in that word *drift*? What does it look like when someone begins to drift from faith in Jesus? What was causing these first readers to drift from faith in Jesus (Heb. 12.3-8)? What can cause believers today to drift away from Jesus? How might you be able to tell when you were beginning to drift? The writer of Hebrews was not content for these believers to drift away. He determined to confront and counsel them, and to call them back to firm faith in Jesus. How does his example counsel us?

2. According to this verse, what is the antidote to drift? What are "the things we have heard"? What does it mean to "give more earnest heed" to these? How would you do this beyond what you're already doing? How can believers help one another in this matter – to prevent drift from occurring? What can you do to help make sure you don't begin to drift?

Meditate.

"The design of Judas concerning the betrayal of our Lord and Savior did not originate in the wickedness of his mind alone. For Scripture testifies that the 'devil had already put it into his heart to betray him.' On this account Solomon rightly commanded, saying, 'Keep your heart with all diligence.'" *Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD)*

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.
1 Timothy 4.16

Lord, convict me when I begin to drift, and keep me focused in Your Word, so that...

Pray Psalm 8.

As you pray, think of all the ways God reveals His glory in the world around you. Then thank the Lord that each of these reminders can keep you from drift, so that even more His glory can be known (Hab. 2.14).

Psalm 8.1-9 (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

O Savior, how majestic, Your Name in all the earth!
The heav'ns display Your glory, and tell Your wondrous worth!
From babes and nursing infants, Lord, let Your strength increase,
Till all Your foes surrender, and all their boasting cease.

When I regard Your heavens, Your handiwork above,
Ordained by Your good pleasure, according to Your love,
Then what am I, O Savior, that You take thought of me?
Or I should know Your favor and thus delivered be?

Stay on Task: Hebrews 2

Yet we in Your own image with glory have been crowned,
To worship and to serve You throughout creation 'round.
These works that sing Your glory in our poor hands are placed,
That we may rule before You to magnify Your grace.

Let every beast and creature, in sky or sea or field,
In our hands bring You glory as we Your favor wield.
Let all things sing Your praises, let all declare Your worth!
O Savior, how majestic, Your Name in all the earth!

2 So Great a Salvation

Introduction

Building on his argument from chapter 1, the writer of Hebrews urges his readers not to neglect their salvation. For the word of salvation did not come from angels. If it had, of course we know it would prove steadfast and reliable. But the word of salvation came from Him Who is *greater* than the angels, and it was confirmed by God Himself. No wonder this salvation is so *great*.

Meditate on Deuteronomy 18.15-19.

Read Hebrews 2.2-4.

Think it through.

1. As early as Deuteronomy 18, God had been telling of a coming Prophet Whose words all should heed, for they would be the very words of *life*. First-century Hebrews understood well the authoritative role of angels in bringing words and visions from God in the Old Testament; but in the *Son* of God, He Who upholds the vast cosmos by His Word of power (Heb. 1.3), God *Himself* brought the message of salvation. Why should we expect *that* word to be so much greater and more reliable than one brought by angels? The writer refers to our salvation as “so great a salvation”. What makes our salvation “so great”? Meditate on Ephesians 3.20 and Philippians 2.13. What expectations should we hold out for this salvation? Have we realized it in its fullness just by believing in Jesus and being assured of a place in heaven? Explain.

2. The Greek word for *neglect* here is ἀμελέω, and it means “to not think about, and thus not respond appropriately to – to neglect, to disregard, to pay no attention to” (Louw & Nida). What does it look like when one is *neglecting* this great salvation? The writer of Hebrews points to “signs and wonders” and “various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit” which confirmed the message of salvation that came through the Son. Give some examples of each of these. Meditate on Ephesians 2.8-10. What is the *primary* means by which this great salvation is confirmed? The writer of Hebrews chooses to remain anonymous. Compare verse 3 (“what at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard”) with Galatians 1.11, 12. Is it likely that Paul is the author of Hebrews? Explain. Hebrews was early on recognized as Scripture, in spite of its anonymity, because of the consistency of its message with Old Testament revelation, its focus on Christ and His work, and its close association with the apostles (cf. Heb. 13.23).

Meditate.

“I urge you all ... not to neglect your own salvation but in every way to strive to be raised even a little from the earth. For if this wonder should come to be, amazing you—I mean this hanging above the earth in the air—then you would not wish to go down toward the earth and make your stand there.” *Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022 AD)*

Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1.6, 7

Stir up the gift of salvation in me today, O Lord, and lift me above this world to greater heights of glory and obedience, that others might see in me...

Pray Psalm 8.

There is a kind of “in-betweenness” to this psalm, indicating our relationship to God, on the one hand, and to the world, on the other. How does this psalm guide you to pray concerning each?

Psalm 8.1-9 (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

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From babes and nursing infants, Lord, let Your strength increase,
Till all Your foes surrender, and all their boasting cease.

When I regard Your heavens, Your handiwork above,
Ordained by Your good pleasure, according to Your love,
Then what am I, O Savior, that You take thought of me?
Or I should know Your favor and thus delivered be?

Yet we in Your own image with glory have been crowned,
To worship and to serve You throughout creation 'round.
These works that sing Your glory in our poor hands are placed,
That we may rule before You to magnify Your grace.

Let every beast and creature, in sky or sea or field,
In our hands bring You glory as we Your favor wield.
Let all things sing Your praises, let all declare Your worth!
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3 We Have a Duty

Introduction

“Don’t forget who you are!” This seems to be the focus of the writer’s citing Psalm 8 in our text for today. This was such an important theme for David that he rehearsed it again in Psalm 144, where he expanded on what he had written in Psalm 8. God has made us with a specific duty in mind, to rule over His creation so that goodness and uprightness and glory might fill the earth. But we can only fulfill this charge within the framework of our great salvation. If we drift from or neglect that, we become a people with no true purpose.

Read Psalm 144.

Read Hebrews 2.5-8.

Think it through.

1. See how highly God esteems His chosen and saved people! He has entrusted them – not angels, powerful as they are – with the care and oversight of His great creation. The phrase “the world to come” is literally “the economy which is now coming”. The word *economy* means something like *household* or even *administration* (cf. Eph. 1.7-14, where in v. 10 the word *dispensation* in NKJV is the same word as in Hebrews 2, *economy*). What *economy* is he talking about (v. 3)? Does our great salvation encompass all of creation and all of life within that creation (cf. Rom. 8.19-22)? Explain. The word *put* might be easily overlooked. It is the Greek word, ὑποτάσσω, and means “to bring something under the firm control of someone – to subject to, to bring under control” (Louw & Nida). What does this suggest about what God expects of us in our individual spheres of being and influence?

2. The writer turns to Psalm 8 both to clarify his meaning in verse 5 and to show that this understanding of God’s great salvation has long roots, going back to David and beyond (cf. Gen. 1.26-28). Verses 6 and 7 reflect on human beings as unique beings among all the creatures of God. Humans are a kind of “in between” being, lower than angels (and, of course, infinitely lower than God), but higher than animals. In what sense has God crowned human beings “with glory and honor”? The best Greek texts omit the last part of verse 8, which seems to have been inserted in later texts to tie the reader back to verse 5. What does the idea of creation being put under our feet imply? How much of creation does that include? What is implied by our being crowned with glory and honor to subject all of creation? Does this include all culture as well? And all social and moral life? How great is the salvation that God has given us? If we neglect this salvation in any way, can we expect to fulfill the duty with which God has charged us? Explain.

Meditate.

“For do not suppose, he says, that because they have not yet been made subject, they are not to be made subject; for that they must be made subject is evident. It is on this account that the prophecy was spoken. ‘For,’ he says, ‘in that he has put all things under him, he left nothing not put under him.’ How then is it that all things have not been put under him? Because they are hereafter to be put under him.” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s. 1 Corinthians 3.21-23

As I go into my sphere of being and influence today, O Lord – my Personal Mission Field – give me a vision of how good and upright and glorious this can be, and help me to...

Pray Psalm 8.

As you pray Psalm 8 today, ask God to give you a vision of what your Personal Mission Field will look like as, crowned with His glory and honor, you diligently obey His command to subject all things to Him.

Psalm 8.1-9 (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

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The heav'ns display Your glory, and tell Your wondrous worth!
From babes and nursing infants, Lord, let Your strength increase,
Till all Your foes surrender, and all their boasting cease.

When I regard Your heavens, Your handiwork above,
Ordained by Your good pleasure, according to Your love,
Then what am I, O Savior, that You take thought of me?
Or I should know Your favor and thus delivered be?

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To worship and to serve You throughout creation 'round.
These works that sing Your glory in our poor hands are placed,
That we may rule before You to magnify Your grace.

Let every beast and creature, in sky or sea or field,
In our hands bring You glory as we Your favor wield.
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4 The Key to Our Success

Introduction

Restoring creation and everything in it to its upright and proper condition before the Lord can seem like a difficult challenge. But it's what God intended from the beginning, and He hasn't changed His mind. What does that even look like? Where do we begin? How do we keep going on such important work? It's easier than you might think.

Read Genesis 1.26-31.

Read Hebrews 2.8, 9.

Think it through.

1. I want to review only the last phrase in verse 8: "But now we do not yet see all things put under him." What was the writer of Hebrews saying about his own times? Do we see any improvement since his day? That is, have God's people made any progress in bringing more of His goodness and uprightness to the world since the first century (Gen. 1.31; Eccl. 7.29)? Give some examples. Can we still say the same thing the writer did? What are the greatest obstacles facing us as we continue this important duty of subjecting creation and everything in it to the rule of King Jesus?

2. OK, so we're not there yet. "But..." (v. 9). But what? How should we understand this? What does it mean to "see Jesus"? Verse 9 mentions four aspects of Jesus' work that we should look to and consider. What is suggested by each of the following phrases?

- "made a little lower than the angels"

- "the suffering of death"

- "crowned with glory and honor"

- "taste death for everyone"

How do you "see Jesus" in each of these important ways? Should this be the primary focus of corporate worship? Of your daily devotions? Explain. How would seeing Jesus more clearly and more consistently affect your work of restoring your world to God?

Meditate.

"The man Jesus was like all humans and differed in no way from those whose nature he shares, save that to him a grace was given. The grace that was given does not change his nature. But after death was destroyed, 'God gave him the name which is above every name.' The one who gave is God. The one to whom it was given is the man Jesus Christ, the first fruits of those who are raised. For he is the 'firstborn from the dead.' Therefore, he ascended and sits at the right hand of the Father and is above all." *Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 AD)*

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3.1-3

Lord Jesus, when I contemplate Your beauty and goodness, Your self-sacrifice, Your exaltation in glory, and all You have done for me, I want to...

Pray Psalm 8.

Pray for a clearer vision of what can happen *in* you and *through* you as you set your mind on Christ and take up your work of ruling all things in your life for His glory.

Psalm 8.1-9 (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

O Savior, how majestic, Your Name in all the earth!
The heav'ns display Your glory, and tell Your wondrous worth!
From babes and nursing infants, Lord, let Your strength increase,
Till all Your foes surrender, and all their boasting cease.

When I regard Your heavens, Your handiwork above,
Ordained by Your good pleasure, according to Your love,
Then what am I, O Savior, that You take thought of me?
Or I should know Your favor and thus delivered be?

Yet we in Your own image with glory have been crowned,
To worship and to serve You throughout creation 'round.
These works that sing Your glory in our poor hands are placed,
That we may rule before You to magnify Your grace.

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In our hands bring You glory as we Your favor wield.
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5 Victory through Suffering

Introduction

Why did God become a Man? Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) addressed this question eloquently in his classic work, *Cur Deus Homo* or, *Why the God/Man*. Our writer makes the same case and point in fewer words, and perhaps even more eloquently. Unless God had become Man in Jesus, we could have no part with God. Now, however, we are His children – so great is our salvation! – because of the suffering of our great Lord Jesus.

Read *Psalm 22.22-31*.

Read *Hebrews 2.10-15*.

Think it through.

1. Psalm 22 divides into two dramatically different sections. The first, verses 1-21, is taken up with the suffering of God's Servant. The second, verses 22-31, shows the results of that suffering: God accepted it, gave His Servant the Kingdom, and now the world is being put under the dominion of our saving God. But getting to that place involved significant suffering, as we know. What does the writer of Hebrews mean when he says "it was fitting for Him [God]" to bring His Servant Jesus through such suffering? What could be *fitting* about that? Why does the writer of Hebrews, after having urged us to "see Jesus" (v. 9) now turn the focus of our seeing Him to His suffering? Why did his first readers need to focus on this? Should we, as the brethren of our Lord, expect to know some suffering in this life? Explain.

2. Note that, according to verse 14, those who believe were "children" even before Jesus came in the flesh to redeem them (cf. Gal. 4.6). How could this be (Eph. 1.4)? When Jesus came among us, the writer implies, we were prisoners of death (vv. 14, 15). Paul says the same (Eph. 2.1). In what sense were we "dead", and why were we in this condition? In whose power did we exist at that time? With what effects? Do people today still exist under that power and in that condition? What alone can deliver them from that bondage? Why can this alone suffice? We note also that those who are thus dead live in "the fear of death" all their lifetime. How can you see that this is true? Are those who are dead trying to avoid dying? What does this say about them? How should we be encouraged by this?

Meditate.

"Insofar as he is the only begotten, he is without sibling, but insofar as he is the "firstborn" he has deigned to call all those his siblings who, subsequent to and in virtue of his being first, are born again unto God's grace through filial adoption, in accordance with the teaching of the apostle." *Augustine (354-430 AD)*

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. Romans 5.10, 11

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for becoming a Man and for suffering according to the will of God, so that I...

Pray Psalm 8.

Praise God for the way His excellence is seen in the suffering of Jesus.

Psalm 8.1-9 (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

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6 Priest and Mediator

Introduction

The Word and Son of God had to become flesh to fulfill His mission of redeeming and saving God's people. He Who is greater than angels condescended to become one with us, in our flesh, so that we in our flesh might become one with God. Jesus is Priest and Mediator on our behalf, and Sufferer with us in our sufferings.

Meditate on Psalm 40.6-10.

Read Hebrews 2.16-18.

Think it through.

1. The writer refers to Jesus as the "seed of Abraham." This is important covenant language. Why? The writer introduces this idea here, and he will return to develop it a bit later. We might say that God gave to Jesus the promises He made to Abraham, so that He might fulfill them (2 Cor. 1.20). What are those promises (cf. Gen. 12.1-3)? What makes them so "exceedingly great and precious" (2 Pet. 1.3, 4)? What is our relationship to those promises? One of the roles of the High Priest in Hebrew religion was to go, once a year, before the Lord, sacrifice in hand, to make atonement for the sins of the people. Jesus is the great and final High Priest (v. 17). What sacrifice did He present to God? The Greek word for "make propitiation" is from the root *ἁλσχομαι*, and means "to forgive a debt". What does it mean that Jesus has made "propitiation for the sins of the people"? Why is this "Good News" (Ps. 40.9)?

2. How is the writer using the word *suffer* in verse 18? Narrowly, with respect only to Jesus' passion? Or broadly, in terms of what Paul suggests in Philippians 2.5-11? What did Jesus' "being tempted" have to do with His suffering? Is temptation a form of suffering? Is temptation sin? Explain. Why is Jesus able to "aid" us who are tempted? Of what does that aid consist? How do we gain access to that aid?

Meditate.

"The Only Begotten operated not through his own nature, for that would in no way have improved our state, or through the nature of angels; but he operated through 'the seed of Abraham,' as Scripture has it. For in this way and no other could the race, fallen into corruption, be restored to salvation." *Cyril of Alexandria (375-444 AD)*

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all... Romans 4.16

Father, help me to cherish Your exceedingly great and precious promises and to live toward them day by day, so that I...

Pray Psalm 8.

In prayer, recount the many ways that God's Name is excellent in all the earth, in your life, and in your Personal Mission Field. Claim His promises to help you in serving Him today.

Psalm 8.1-9 (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

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7 Stay on Task

Introduction

Having established the greatness and superiority of Jesus in chapter 1, the writer of Hebrews, in chapter 2, reminds his readers of their duty to work out their salvation by extending the rule of Jesus over all things. He offers encouragement by reminding them that Jesus, Who suffered for them, can help them in their times of suffering to remain faithful. Staying on task involves looking not to our suffering or the difficulty of our duty, but to Jesus, exalted through suffering to glory and rule.

Read Psalm 47.

Read and Meditate on Hebrews 2.

Think it through.

1. In chapter 2, the writer fuses several important ideas into one teaching. How would you explain his connecting of *salvation* (vv. 3, 10), *the world to come* (v. 5), *putting all things in subjection* under our feet (vv. 7, 8), and *crowned with glory and honor* (vv. 7, 9)? How do these ideas, taken together, help us to understand our “so great” salvation? Just how great is the salvation we have received?

2. The writer, having exalted Jesus above the angels in chapter 1, now brings Him down amongst us mortals. Why? Why is the incarnation of Jesus so important (vv. 9, 10, 17, 18)? What was the effect of the work Jesus did during His incarnation on the spiritual condition of the world (vv. 14, 15)? Why is Jesus our “merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God” (v. 17)? How was our writer hoping this reminder of Jesus’ work would encourage his readers? Summarize the message of Hebrews 2.

Meditate.

“Now he is not ignorant of our sufferings, not only because as God he knows them, but also because as man he knows them through the trial with which he was tested. Since he suffered many things, he knows how to sympathize with suffering. It is certainly true that God is impassible, but the statement here is made of the incarnation, as though it were said, ‘The flesh of Christ itself suffered many fearful things.’ He knows what tribulation is. He knows what temptation is, not less than we who have suffered, for he himself also has suffered.” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says:

“When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men.”

(Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) Ephesians 4.7-10

Lord, You intend to fill all things – the entire earth – with Your great salvation. And I have a role in this. Help me today to...

Pray Psalm 8.

Focus in your prayer on the aspects of our great salvation mentioned in this psalm, and ask the Lord to help you fulfill your duty in His Kingdom.

Psalm 8.1-9 (*Aurelia: The Church’s One Foundation*)

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From babes and nursing infants, Lord, let Your strength increase,

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How do people drift from their confession of faith? How might you be able to tell when you were beginning to drift?
2. The writer says we have received “so great a salvation”. What makes our salvation “so great”? How can we experience more of that greatness?
3. Why did the Son and Word of God become a man? What did He achieve, and how did He achieve it?
4. How should the sufferings of Jesus help us during our own times of suffering?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.