



FOUR
VIEWS
ON THE
WARNING
PASSAGES
IN HEBREWS



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CONCLUSION BY
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Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews

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PREFACE

This book is a collection of papers initially presented to the Hebrews Study Group during the fifty-sixth annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (November 17–19, 2004). Established in 1949, the society serves as a forum for evangelicals to foster biblical scholarship. While denominational loyalties and doctrinal orientations are diverse, we all agree to these two doctrinal beliefs: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs,” and “God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.”¹ The society provides a medium for oral exchange and written expression of thought and research in the general field of theological disciplines as centered in the Scriptures. The irenic presentations in this book on the warning passages in Hebrews between four men of Arminian and Reformed persuasion epitomize what I appreciate most about the society: an opportunity to agree to disagree via frank and yet congenial discussions about biblical issues.

Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews contains four exegetical presentations, each of which is followed by three

1. Both the purpose and doctrinal basis of the society are stated on the inside cover of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, which is published quarterly.

responses. They are written by four internationally known biblical scholars: Gareth Lee Cockerill, Buist M. Fanning, Randall C. Gleason, and Grant R. Osborne. It concludes with reflections by George H. Guthrie.

Naturally, works like this one involve many people. *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* has been a group effort from its earliest stages, beginning with a discussion between Randall Gleason and myself in November 2003, with subsequent input from Buist Fanning and Grant Osborne, and the willingness of Gareth Cockerill, the point person for our Hebrews Study Group, who graciously agreed to devote our 2004 Hebrews Study Group section to the warning passages. Thus I extend a sincere thank-you to all four men who contributed to this work, all of whom shared considerably in the book's formative stages and helped to make this work a reality. Second, I wish to extend an exuberant thank-you to Jim Weaver, the academic and professional book editor for Kregel. His encouragement to pursue the project, his insightful suggestion to include responses, and his wise counsel about the project during the summer of 2004 has paid off. Thank you, Jim! It's been an honor to work with you on yet another project. Finally, to Jeremy Wike, my teaching assistant, a sizeable thank-you is warranted for proofreading this work. Jeremy's tenacity for detail made an immense contribution in helping to prepare this manuscript for Kregel. He exhibits the traits of a lifelong learner and is a person I have grown to appreciate.

Yet this book would never exist were it not for my family, who tend to make sacrifices regularly so that I might teach, preach, and write on the weekends and during the summer months. Thus my deepest sense of gratitude I extend to my

wife, Cindy Ann Bateman, and to my daughter, Leah Marie Bateman. It is to them that I dedicate this work. I am a blessed man.

—HERBERT W. BATEMAN IV



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George H. Guthrie serves as the Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible at Union University. He is the author of numerous journal articles and seven books, including *The Structure of Hebrews: A Textlinguistic Analysis*, the *NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*, and *Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews*, and *Biblical Greek Exegesis*. He has participated in translation projects, such as the revision of the New Living Translation, and has served as a consultant on the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the New Century Version, and the English Standard Version. He is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society, Institute for Biblical Research, and the Society of Biblical Literature.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the authors'.

Bibles

ESV	English Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version

Extrabiblical Sources

Add Esth	Additions to Esther
<i>Ant. rom.</i>	<i>Antiquitates romanae</i>
Bar	Baruch
<i>2 Bar.</i>	<i>2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)</i>

BGU	<i>Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden.</i> 15 vols. Berlin, 1895–1983.
<i>Cat. Min.</i>	Plutarch <i>Cato Minor</i>
1 Clem	1 Clement
Dion. Hal.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus
<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)</i>
Ep Jer	Epistle of Jeremiah
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
Jdt	Judith
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
2 Kgdms	2 Kingdoms
<i>Let. Aris.</i>	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>
1 Macc.	1 Maccabees
2 Macc.	2 Maccabees
3 Macc.	3 Maccabees
4 Macc.	4 Maccabees
<i>Mor.</i>	Plutarch <i>Moralia</i>
<i>Pan.</i>	<i>Panarion (Adversus haereses)</i>
PGiss	<i>Griechische Papyri zu Giessen</i>
Pl <i>Phlb</i>	Plato <i>Philebus</i>
Plb <i>Hist</i>	Polybius <i>Historicus</i>
POxy	<i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i>
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
Sir	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus
<i>TBenj.</i>	<i>Testament of Benjamin</i>
Th	Thucydides
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon

Josephus

<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>Jos.</i>	<i>Josephus</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>

Philo, Judaeus

<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo (On the Life of Abraham)</i>
<i>Agr.</i>	<i>De agricultura (On Agriculture)</i>
<i>Cher.</i>	<i>De cherubim (On the Cherubim)</i>
<i>Congr.</i>	<i>De congressu eruditionis gratia (On the Preliminary Studies)</i>
<i>Decal.</i>	<i>De decalogo (On the Decalogue)</i>
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat (That the Worse Attacks the Better)</i>
<i>Deus</i>	<i>Quod Deus sit immutabilis (That God Is Unchangeable)</i>
<i>Flacc.</i>	<i>In Flaccum (Against Flaccus)</i>
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga et inventione (On Flight and Finding)</i>
<i>Gig.</i>	<i>De gigantibus (On Giants)</i>
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres (Who Is the Heir?)</i>
<i>Hypoth.</i>	<i>Hypothetica</i>
<i>Ios.</i>	<i>De Iosepho (On the Life of Joseph)</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae I, II, III (Allegorical Interpretation 1, 2, 3)</i>
<i>Mos.</i>	<i>De vita Mosis I, II (On the Life of Moses 1, 2)</i>
<i>Mut.</i>	<i>De mutatione nominum (On the Change of Names)</i>
<i>Opif.</i>	<i>De opificio mundi (On the Creation of the World)</i>
<i>Plant.</i>	<i>De plantatione (On Planting)</i>

<i>Post.</i>	<i>De posteritate Caini (On the Posterity of Cain)</i>
<i>Praem.</i>	<i>De praemiis et poenis (On Rewards and Punishments)</i>
<i>Prob.</i>	<i>Quod omnis probus liber sit (That Every Good Person Is Free)</i>
<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini (On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain)</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>De somniis I, II (On Dreams 1, 2)</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus I, II, III, IV (On the Special Laws 1, 2, 3, 4)</i>
<i>Virt.</i>	<i>De virtutibus (On the Virtues)</i>

Qumran Scrolls

1QH ^a	1QHodayot ^a or <i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i> ^a
1QM	1QMilhamah or <i>War Scroll</i>
1QpHab	1QPesher to <i>Habakkuk</i>
1QS	1QSerek Hayaḥad or <i>Rule of the Community</i>
4Q174	4QFlorilegium or <i>Midrash on Eschatology</i>
4Q246	4QApocryphon of <i>Daniel</i> or <i>Aramaic Apocalypse</i>
4Q266	4QDamascus Document ^a
4Q372	4QApocryphon of <i>Joseph</i> ^b
4QMMT ^a	4QMiqṣat Ma ^c asê ha-Torah ^a or <i>Halakhic Letter</i> ^a
4Q403	4QThe Songs of the <i>Sabbath Sacrifice</i> ^d
4Q504	4QWords of the <i>Luminaries</i> ^a
11QT ^a	11QTemple Scroll ^a
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i>

Periodical, Reference, and Serial

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries

AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BAGD	Bauer, W., W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BDF	Blass, F., A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk. <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>DJBP</i>	<i>Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period</i>
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
<i>EDSS</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls</i>
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
EUS	European University Studies
FC	Fathers of the Church
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
ICC	International Critical Commentary

<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
MM	Moulton, J., and G. Milligan. <i>The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament</i> . London, 1930. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> . Edited by C. Brown. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–85.
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NPNF ¹	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> , Series 1
NRTh	<i>La nouvelle revue théologique</i>
NT	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OT	Old Testament
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
ST NT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76.

- TDOT* *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 14 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.
- TJ* *Trinity Journal*
- TLNT* Spicq, Ceslas. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated and edited by J. D. Ernest. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
- TynBul* *Tyndale Bulletin*
- WBC* Word Biblical Commentary
- WTJ* *Westminster Theological Journal*
- WUNT* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
- ZNW* *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*



INTRODUCING THE WARNING PASSAGES IN HEBREWS

A CONTEXTUAL ORIENTATION

Herbert W. Bateman IV

Addressing any issue in the book of Hebrews for the first time is like entering a degree program. When you apply, you do so with confidence. When you begin your course work, you begin with enthusiasm. When the reality of the educational process and the expectations of your professors set in, you finish because you persevere. Or is it because the institution is committed to your successful completion of the program? Regardless, you endure the educational process and you earn a degree.

In a similar way, many students begin their study of Hebrews with a great deal of confidence and enthusiasm—until they encounter the seemingly endless congenial and sometimes not-so-congenial presentations and interpretations. Delving into the introductory issues alone can be exhausting. Who wrote the book of Hebrews? Was it Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Clement of Rome, or someone else? To whom was it sent? Was it a Jewish, Gentile, or mixed community of believers? Where did the recipients reside? Did they live in Rome or Palestine? Why was Hebrews written, and what is the dominant message of the text? These and other introductory issues are debated regularly. In fact, Hughes has described such introductory issues

in Hebrews as “the battleground of discordant opinion and conjecture: its author is unknown, its occasion unstated, and its destination disputed.”¹

Equally exhausting are the issues that surround the warning passages. How many are there? Where do they begin, and where do they end? Are they *reiterations of certain key topics* placed in between the author’s *expositional* sections?² Or are they well-developed *deliberative exhortations*, strategically placed among the author’s epideictic topics that underscore Jesus’ nobility as a divine king-priest (1:1-14), his moral excellence (4:14-15; 5:7; 7:28), and his illustrious position as king-priest (5:5-10; 7:1-28), his courageous death (2:14-15; 9:11-18; 12:2),³ which serve to motivate the readers to persevere?

Furthermore, the warning passages clearly force us to address the issue of assurance and the doctrine of eternal security. Both Arminian and Reformed theologians alike interact with the frequent mentioning of “brothers and sisters” in Hebrews (generic use of ἀδελφός in 2:11, 17; 3:1, 12, 10:19; 13:22) and their ability to “draw near” with “boldness” to God (4:16; 10:19, 22). Are these genuine believers or not? The biblical theologians who contributed to this book believe that the recipients are true believers. Naturally, this heightens the tension concerning how to address the next three important questions.

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1. Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 1.
 2. See George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 127-39.
 3. For a discussion of “Epideictic Topics in Hebrews,” see David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 52-56. For an excellent discussion about various organizational perspectives for Hebrews, see Daniel E. Buck, “The Rhetorical Arrangement and Function of OT Citations in the Book of Hebrews: Uncovering Their Role in the Paraenetic Discourse of Access” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002), 46-105.

First, if they are believers, how do we understand the concept of salvation in Hebrews? Is salvation merely a future deliverance for those who *are* “to inherit salvation” (κληρονομεῖν σωτηρίαν, 1:14)? Is it limited to those who *are* “diligent to enter” (σπουδάσωμεν . . . εἰσελθεῖν) God’s rest (4:11)? Or is salvation guaranteed to those who *are* being brought “to glory” (πολλοὺς υἱοὺς εἰς δόξαν ἀγαγόντα, 2:10), and *are* “receiving an unshakeable kingdom” (βασιλείαν ἀσάλευτον παραλαμβάνοντες, 12:28)? On the other hand, does salvation in Hebrews have to be limited to future or present deliverance? Can salvation have past, present, and future dimensions?

Closely related to the first question is a second one. If the recipients are genuine believers, to what extent have they been sanctified? Particularly challenging is the use of “sanctify” (ἀγιάζω) and “holiness” (ἀγιότης, ἀγιασμός). On the one hand, the addressees are “those being made holy” (οἱ ἀγιαζόμενοι, 2:11; τοὺς ἀγιαζομένους, 10:14). They are told to pursue sanctification (τὸν ἀγιασμόν, 12:14). On the other hand, the addressees are “those who have been sanctified” (ἡγιασμένοι, 10:10) or “those who have been made holy” (ἡγησάμενος, 10:29). In fact, they seem to share in God’s holiness (τῆς ἀγιότητος αὐτοῦ 12:10; cf. 12:28).⁴

Finally and probably the most challenging issue is this: if they are true believers eternally secure in their salvation, how do we account for the apparent danger of these believers “rejecting” God’s Son and the subsequent danger of incurring God’s punishment? For instance, each warning passage has an exhortation followed by a dire consequence (2:1, 3; 3:12, 16–19; 4:1, 11;

4. Another vexing challenge is the use of “perfection” and “complete” (τελείωσις and τελειόω) in Hebrews. For a fine discussion of these terms in Hebrews, see deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 194–204.

10:23–25, 26–27, 30–31; 12:25, 29). These dire and less-than-attractive consequences are emotionally troubling. There is no escaping God’s future just “penalty” (2:2; cf. 12:25), and there appears to be a potential threat of not entering into “God’s rest” (4:1, 11). What exactly is the future “penalty”? Moreover, how did the original readers—whoever they were—understand the concept of “God’s rest”? Whatever our conclusions, they are exacerbated by the expectation of a “fury of fiery judgment” (10:27; cf. 12:29) and aggravated by the danger of “falling into the hands of the living God” (10:30–31). Are these divine acts of punishment eternal, temporal, or some other form of divine punishment?

Furthermore, the author’s emotive appeals appear to be heightened when he declares that no repentance exists for those who reject God’s promise (6:4–6; cf. 3:12, 16–18). What does this mean? Can believers lose their salvation if they “fall away” from or “reject” God’s grace? Is there absolutely no restoration for a backslidden believer? Or is this a moot point because God guarantees that true believers will indeed persevere? What did these statements mean to the original readers? What do they mean for us today?

The contributors to *Four Views on the Warning Passages of Hebrews* seek to be sensitive to the author’s situation and perspective as revealed in the context of this first-century writing, while at the same time attempting to address how the warning passages contribute to or challenge our inherited systems of theology. Four scholars who have authored various works on the book of Hebrews present their conclusions: Gareth Lee Cockerill, Buist M. Fanning, Randall C. Gleason, and Grant R. Osborne.

Each author provides an exposition that represents a sincere wrestling with the text, yet two offer theological conclusions in concord with an Arminian perspective and two with a Reformed, or Calvinistic, perspective. Yet even within their respective theological traditions, the authors differ among themselves. These differences are highlighted in the congenial responses that offer a point-counterpoint interaction. George H. Guthrie concludes the book with some personal observations and raises some pointed questions for further investigation. Let me begin, however, by introducing the five warning passages.

Identifying the Warning Passages

The five warning passages appear in the form of deliberative speech.⁵ Although I identify the passages as Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; and 12:14-29, it is not unreasonable to limit the warnings to smaller units.⁶ Regardless, these warning passages are strategically placed throughout the author's expositions, or epideictic topics, about Jesus. The warnings facilitate reflection on an explicit course of action. Generally, the author provides two options with clearly defined consequences. Whereas some warnings provide positive affirmations, all reveal an unattractive and dire consequence if the believers choose incorrectly. Furthermore, the author, via the Jewish historical record, exploits a group of Jewish ancestors who are less-than-exemplary models to imitate in order to illustrate how failure to commit to God's mediated message via

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5. Moving beyond the debates about the author's rhetorical method, namely, whether Hebrews employs an epideictic or deliberative approach, I will assume at this point, and as deSilva has most recently argued, that the book of Hebrews exhibits characteristics of both methods of oratory. See deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 39-58.
 6. Guthrie, in his excellent work *Structure of Hebrews*, limits the length of the warning passages. He suggests each warning passage is limited in one case to two verses but no more than six verses: 2:1-4; 4:12-13; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:25-29. Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, 135.

the Son results in divine punishment.⁷ If believers fail to heed the author's emotive warnings, the impending and undesirable consequence that faces them always appears to be some sort of divine punishment.

Of these five warning passages, two invoke the need to hear or listen to God's message (2:1-4; 12:14-29), while two others generate an emotive need and explicit expectation to trust and obey God (3:7-4:13; 10:19-39). At the heart of these warning passages is Hebrews 5:11-6:12. The following exposition intends to orient you to the five warning passages discussed throughout our book. They are presented in a manner that might suggest a chiasmic structure, yet I am not necessarily arguing for such a structure for the book of Hebrews. Furthermore, there is no attempt to explain the theological challenges surrounding these passages. I reserve that responsibility for the contributors, and I respectfully trust that they will correct or contradict anything in my contextual overview of the warning passages. Finally, the contributing authors do not, and were not expected to, respond to this contextual orientation, though they were aware of its existence.

Warnings to Hear

Naturally all the warning passages share a similar structure. They all exhort the readers to persevere in honoring God's message via the Son, lest some sort of divine judgment befall them.⁸ What sets Hebrews 2:1-4 and 12:14-29 (esp. vv. 25-29) apart from the other three warning passages is that these two place emphasis on the need to "hear" or "listen" to God's

7. Appeals to the Sinai community and their negative example appear throughout Scripture: Psalms 78:12-33; 81:10-12; 95:8-11; 106:24-27; Ezekiel 20:10-22; Acts 7:38-42; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Hebrews 3:8, 17; 12:20, 25.

8. Although I limit the structure of the warning passages to include at least one exhortation to persevere and a dire consequence if the readers fail to heed the warning, McKnight suggests that there are four components within each warning passage: the audience, the sin, the exhortation, and the consequence. See Scot

message and thereby “believe” it.⁹ Both warnings draw a contrast between the mediators of God’s message in a former time period with God’s most recent message mediated through the Son in the present period (cf. Heb. 1:1). Finally, both appear to provide a lesser-to-greater argument (*qal waḥomer*)¹⁰ with emotive appeals in order to achieve a desired response from the readers: to listen to God’s message mediated through or about the Son. I should point out that the degree by which our contributors measure the heightening of the author’s argument varies in the subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, for now, and throughout this introduction, there is the recognition that some degree of heightening occurs within the author’s argument.

Hebrews 2:1–4

Sandwiched between two significant units of thought is the first warning passage. On the one hand, Hebrews 2:1–4 serves as a logical conclusion (διὰ τοῦτο) to Hebrews 1:1–14. In those

McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions,” *TJ* n.s. 13 (1992): 21–29.

9. Terms like hearing and listening may be put for obeying. Jesus says, “The one who belongs to God ‘hears’ (ἀκούετε) God’s words” (John 8:47). Followers of Jesus “hear” God’s word in that they believe and respond. They obey it. But hear and/or listen (ἀκούω) may be put for believing. A formerly blind man says to a group of religious leaders, “I told you already and you did not ‘hear’” (ἀκούσατε; John 9:27; cf. 12:38). Hearing, then, speaks of an unwillingness to believe. In Hebrews 2:1 and 12:25, the emphasis of hearing and listening addresses the reader’s need to believe the message of Hebrews 1:1–14 as well as the message spoken by the Son (12:25). Thus belief appears to be the thrust behind hearing and listening in Hebrews 2 and 12. See also E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 828–29; Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith* (Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 123–25.
10. John Bowker identifies thirteen rules of interpretation that were particularly respected by Jewish interpreters—they are the seven rules (or *middot*) of Hillel (60 B.C.E.–20 C.E.?). *Qal waḥomer* is one of those rules. The rule states that what applies in a less important case will certainly apply in a more important case. The less important case in Hebrews will always be the events of the former era whereas the more important case will always concern events of this present era (2:2–4; 9:13–14; 10:28–29; 12:9, 25). Some commentators may use the term *a fortiori*. See Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 57, 129, 147, 175, 187. For a list of other Jewish rules of exegesis, see J. Bowker, *The*

first 14 verses of Hebrews, the author contrasts the previous era and its mediators with the present era in which the Son is the one and only mediator through whom God has spoken most recently (1:2a).¹¹ This theme resonates throughout the warning passages, but it is particularly important for this first warning. Following the Son's impressive list of credentials (vv. 2b-3), the Son's name is declared greater than that of the angels (v. 4).¹² The author supports his claim with an impressive catena of Old Testament scriptural references in which God describes the Son as a divine Davidic king-priest to whom angels offer worship and service (vv. 5-14).¹³

Targums and Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to Jewish Interpretations of Scripture (1969; reprint, New York: Cambridge, 1979), 315.

11. Donaldson argues that though Jesus may mediate the divine message to people, it is God who ultimately speaks. In the former era, God spoke his word (the law) through a voice (angels, Moses, prophets) to Jewish ancestors intending a blessing of rest and inheritance, but they responded in disobedience. In this new era, God has spoken his word (of salvation) through the Son, desiring that we receive God's blessing and respond in faithful obedience. In both cases, God remains the source who sends essentially the same message. God speaks, and he expects a response. In both eras when God spoke to his people, his relationship with them is described in terms of a covenant. See Amy M. Donaldson, "In Many and Various Ways, God Spoke . . ." (Heb. 1:1): Divine Communication in Hebrews" (paper presented at the Midwest regional meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Grand Rapids, March 2002), 1-27.
12. Although the specific "name" (ὄνομα) is never explicitly stated, the "name" appears to refer to the designation "Son." It is a designation used for Adam (Luke 3:38) and for angelic beings (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), as well as for previous Davidic monarchs. Originally, the concept of "sonship" in Psalm 2 served to reinforce Yahweh's appointment of a royal Davidite (Ps. 2:2, 6-7) as well as to describe his unique relationship with the king (see "You have I fathered" in Heb. 5:5). God calls the Davidite of Psalm 2 "son," which is in keeping with Yahweh's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:14. Some at Qumran believed a human successor to David's throne would arise, one who "will be called great" and "will be called the son of God, they will call him son of the Most High" (4Q246 1:9; 2:1; cf. Luke 1:32-33, 35; "Aramaic Apocalypse," in *EDSS* 51; and Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* [San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996], 268-70). Superiority of name, however, is not limited to one's ordination to rule, because like Davidic monarchs, angelic beings are granted ruling authority (Dan. 10:13; Jude 9; *1 En.* 20:1-8). Rather, superiority of the name "Son" in Hebrews 1:4 (and validated in vv. 5-13) resides in the fact that this designation "Son" quite literally speaks of a divine Davidite.
13. Herbert W. Bateman IV, *Early Jewish Hermeneutics and Hebrews* 1:5-13 (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); idem, "Psalm 45:6-7 and Its Christological Contributions to Hebrews," *TJ* n.s. 22 (2001): 3-21.

On the other hand, Hebrews 2:1-4 appears to momentarily interrupt the author's instruction about the Son. The author delays his presentation of the Son's humiliation and enthronement (2:5-9) and the Son's solidarity and family-like relationship with humanity (2:10-18), particularly those people who are kingdom subjects (2:11-12, 17). Nevertheless this extremely brief, yet clearly connected and salient "interruption" in Hebrews 2:1-4 provides an expectation followed immediately by a warning, and it concludes with a motivation from Jewish history.

¹For this reason (διὰ τοῦτο), we must pay attention (δεῖ . . . προσέχειν) so much more, to what we have heard, lest we slip away or lose sight of it (μῆποτε παραρυῶμεν). ²For if (εἰ γάρ) the word spoken through the angels was legally binding and *if* all those who have deliberately disobeyed *God's legally binding word* received a just penal penalty, ³how (πῶς) shall we escape (ἐκφευξόμεθα) God's future punishment if we are unconcerned about so great a salvation, which, *after it was first spoken* through the Lord (Jesus) during his earthly ministry, was confirmed to us by those who heard? ⁴*At the same time* God, according to His own will, endorsed the verbal testimonies both by signs and wonders, and by various powers, and by the distributions of the Holy Spirit.

The opening exhortation is clear: "we must pay attention," or, translating the phrase in a more literal manner, "it is necessary to pay attention" (δεῖ . . . προσέχειν) to what was "heard"

(ἀκουσθεῖσιν; 2:1a). In other words, believers are to believe. They are to “cling” to God’s message delivered in Hebrews 1:1–14.

The author then moves quickly to warn believers not to “slip away” from or “lose sight” (παραρρέω)¹⁴ of the message spoken through the Son (1:2a), about the Son (1:2b–4), and to the Son (1:5–13). Thus Hebrews 2:1–4 appears to address a possible problem of spiritual apathy, a spiritual regression, or perhaps even a spiritual imprudence concerning what the readers know about the Son. At this point in the text, it is difficult to determine how exactly to understand the metaphor “slip away.” Yet an implicit concern appears to be one of adherence to the message. What can be said is that Hebrews 2:1 is a call to believe and not to forget the message of Hebrews 1:1–14.

Naturally a reason (γάρ) exists for this desired exhortation to listen to God’s message mediated via the Son. Drawing from

14. The verb παραρρέω appears only here in the NT. Frequently translated as “drift away” (NASB, RSV, NIV, ESV, NET, NLT), commentators tend to give παραρρέω a nautical nuance. See Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 37; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 27; Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, 58. Although such nautical applications make for great preaching, an alternative rendering is “slip away” (cf. KJV). Plutarch speaks of a thin man who crimps his ring so that it “might not slip off” his finger (*Mor.* § 754a). In the Septuagint translation of Proverbs 3:21, παραρρέω is used to translate the Hebrew word *lavá* (“lose from sight”). Immediately following twenty verses of instruction (Prov. 3:1–20), the author exhorts “Son, let not my words of wisdom escape from your sight, but pay attention to my counsel and understanding” or “Son, let not (my words of wisdom) *slip away* from your eyes” (cf. Prov. 4:21; *TDOT*, 7:478–79). In Hebrews 2:1, the author exhorts his readers to “pay attention” (προσέχειν) to what was heard and let not what was spoken through the Son (1:2a), about the Son (1:2b–4), and to the Son (1:5–13) “slip away” from them (cf. Ceslas Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, [Paris: J. Gabalda, 1952–1953], 1:66–67). Although both “slip away” and “drift away” are possible, the former translation is favored. Thus the readers are exhorted not to allow the teachings of chapter 1 to slip away from their memory, or we might say that the readers are not to forget the teaching about the Son. To do so endangers reception of their inheritance via the divine Davidic Son, who is worthy of both worship and service. Jesus and what is spoken about him is to be the focal point of the reader (12:2).

the pages of Jewish history, the author directs attention to a former group of people, namely, those of the Sinai wilderness community. Although they are from a previous time period, or era, they received God's legally binding¹⁵ law at Mount Sinai through angelic beings (2:2a; cf. 1:1).¹⁶ Yet they refused to "pay attention to" God's spoken word mediated through angels (to Moses) and apparently "slipped away from," or "lost sight of," or just plain "forgot" God's message. They did not "cling" to it. Thus they suffered a justly deserved physical punishment (2:2b). The author's lesser-to-greater conclusions are quite gripping. Since Jesus is a greater mediator than the angels, his message is even more vital than the covenantal message given at Mount Sinai. Therefore believers in this new era (cf. 1:2a) who "ignore" (ἀμελέω)¹⁷ God's most recent message, which originated with

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15. The adjective, "legally binding" (βέβαιος), occurs four times in Hebrews (2:2; 3:14; 6:19; 9:17) and four times elsewhere in the NT (Rom. 4:16; 2 Cor. 1:7; 2 Peter 1:10, 19). The connection of βέβαιος with "the word," namely, the law of God mediated through angels, suggests that something is "valid" (RSV; BAGD, 138b 2; BDAG, 172d 2), "unalterable" (NASB), "steadfast" (KJV), "reliable" (ESV), "proved true" (NLT), "binding" (NIV), or a legal guarantee (TLNT, 1:280-83; TDNT, 1:602-3). For Philo, the laws of Moses are "*firm*, immovable, stamped, as it were, with the seals of nature herself" (*Mos.* 2.14; cf. *Hypoth.* 6.8-9). Although Hebrews does not present the OT Mosaic law as eternal (cf. 7:12, 18; 8:13), Philo's statement reflects a common Jewish perspective concerning the certainty of the law (*Jos., Ag. Ap.* 2.15§156; *Jesus, Matt.* 5:18). Thus in keeping with first-century Judaism, the OT Mosaic law is presented here as having been God's "legally binding" contract with Israel (cf. *Exod.* 19:3-20:21).
 16. "The word spoken through the angels" speaks of angelic beings mediating the law from God to Moses. Although *Exodus* 20:1 says, "God spoke all these words," elsewhere in the Torah it appears angelic beings were involved in the process. Whereas in the MT *Deuteronomy* 33:1-2 says, "The Lord came from Sinai . . . He came with myriads of holy ones from the south . . ." (NIV), the Septuagint interpretively translates the passage in this manner: "angels were with Him at His right hand." Second Temple sources clearly view angelic beings as mediators of God's law at Sinai (*Jub.* 1:27, 29; 2:1; *Jos., Ant.* 15.5.3§136; *Acts* 7:53).
 17. This verb "ignore" (ἀμελέω) occurs four times in the NT (*Matt.* 22:5; 1 Tim. 4:14; *Heb.* 2:3; 8:9). The term is rendered "neglect" (KJV, RSV, NASB), "ignore" (NIV, ESV), and "indifferent" (NLT). It typically speaks of (1) neglecting or not caring for people (parents: Philo, *Decal.* 118; *Virt.* 202; widows, orphans, poor:

Jesus and was verbally confirmed to Jesus' followers, will not escape God's future punishment (2:3-4).¹⁸ What sort of divine punishment is this? Is God's punishment here eternal, physical, or something else? At this point in the text, we can only surmise about the judgment.

Regardless of how we may wrestle with certain aspects of this warning passage (Heb. 2:1-4), the author's point is simply this: The reason for believing God's message—a message that originated with Jesus and was later confirmed through his followers—is because believers who refuse to believe will not escape God's future punishment. In a similar manner, the author reiterates this expectation to listen to God in his final warning passage in 12:14-29.

Hebrews 12:14-29

Unlike Hebrews 2:1-4, where the author's warning occurs in the midst of a discussion about the Son, the warning in Hebrews 12:14-29 occurs in the middle of a discussion about believers. Chapter 12 may be broken down into two major units

Philo, *Spec.* 2.108; the sick: idem, *Prob.* 87; and people's ancestral customs: Philo, *Flacc.* 43; Israelites: Heb. 8:9) and (2) ignoring or disregarding some spiritual matter (Mosaic law: Philo, *Spec.* 4.41; temple service: Jos., *Ant.* 4.4.3§67; sacrifices: 2 Macc. 4:14; spiritual lesson: Philo, *Somm.* 1.52; spiritual gift: 1 Tim. 4:14). In the wedding banquet parable (Matt. 22:5), Jesus tells of a king who sends his servants for a second time to those who had been invited to come to the wedding banquet. Yet those who had heard the invitation "*paid no attention* and went off—one to his field, another to his business" (NIV; cf. Wis 3:10 = ignore the righteous man). Here, in Hebrews 2:3, as was the case in Jesus' parable, God's message or summons can be ignored, but with dire consequences. Thus the danger is to disregard or pay no attention to God's most recent salvation message.

18. DeSilva may be correct in his assessment that Hebrews 1:1-2:4 appeals to the reasoning of the readers through a rhetorical device known as a syllogism. The first premise of the syllogism is that God has spoken through the Son. The second premise is that the Son is greater than the angels. The conclusion is that his readers pay attention to the Son's message, knowing what befell those who transgressed the earlier message that God spoke through the angels. See *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 103-4.

of thought: Verses 1–13 and verses 14–29. In the first major unit, which we might title “Persevering as an Athlete and as a Child in God’s Family,” the author begins by speaking of activities typical of a Greco-Roman athlete (vv. 1–4) and then moves to activities typical of a Greco-Roman family (vv. 5–13). On the one hand, Hebrews 12:1–4 emphasizes enduring life as a believer through the figure of the Greco-Roman athletic competitions of running and the pancratium.¹⁹ The author’s emphasis is not so much on *winning* as it is on *finishing* the event. The goal of faith is not to win individual honor but to serve others and build community (6:10; 13:1–17). On the other hand, Hebrews 12:5–13 shifts to rebuke: “Have you forgotten the exhortation²⁰ addressed to you as sons?” Here the

19. In Hebrews 12:4 we read, “You have not yet resisted to the point of bloodshed.” The verb “resist,” or “oppose” (ἀντικαθίστημι), occurs only here in the NT. The verb may speak of “rallying” the troops for military resistance (Dion. Hal., *Ant. rom.* 6.11), as well as to actually “oppose” someone in a bloody military encounter (Th 4.93; Jos., *Ant.* 17.10.9 § 289). In other documents, the verb speaks of those who merely “oppose” another in the political arena (Jos., *J.W.* 4.7.1 § 393; perhaps *Ant.* 18.1.1 § 8) or in a court of law over the ownership of a slave (POxy 1.97:9) or some other legal dispute (BGU I 168.11; cf. LXX Deut. 31:21). In Hebrews 12:4 the concept of resisting or opposing something is more than merely courtroom opposition. The imagery is more combative, yet not necessarily one of military resistance. The author appears to shift the imagery of a race in a sports arena (vv. 1b–3) to another sporting contest of the Olympian games. In verse 4, the verb “resist” may refer to two boxers “opposing” one another in the pancratium—a brutal form of sport that combined wrestling and boxing with kicking, strangling, and the twisting of the limbs to defeat one’s opponent. It was often a bloody competition (*TLNT*, 1:128–30; cf. William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, WBC 47b [Dallas: Word, 1991], 417–18; and Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 2001], 36:525). Thus the imagery may be more metaphorical of contestants who grapple with the everyday challenges life brings. Or more probably the reference to a bloody resistance may be descriptive of the fierce opposition of a contestant, perhaps even of brutal grappling with those who oppose the faith that may indeed lead to physical death (MM; BAGD, 74b; BDAG, 88d).

20. The term “exhortation” (παράκλησις) in the clause “You have quite forgotten the exhortation” in 12:5 is translated various ways. Occurring for the second time in Hebrews (see 6:18), some translate this noun as “encouragement” (NIV, NLT), while others translate it as “exhortation” (KJV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NET). Evidently,

emphasis shifts from being an athlete to being a legitimate child within God's household who thereby receives divine guidance for responsible living, guidance that appears to be nonpunitive yet educationally challenging, which was typical within a Greco-Roman family situation.

In the second major unit, Hebrews 12:14–29, another warning is given.²¹ The author returns to and once again addresses the need to hear God's message, particularly the one spoken through the Son (cf. 1:2 with 3:1 and 12:24). Whereas verses 14–24 serve to introduce the warning by way of a string of exhortations, verses 25–29 clearly serve as a direct warning, a warning that echoes an expectation previously expressed in Hebrews 2:1–4. You need to believe and not refuse God's message.

The passage opens with an exhortation to “pursue peace with everyone” and to pursue holiness (Heb. 12:14). This is an abbreviated rendering from Psalm 33:15 (LXX).²² The author

the elements of exhortation and encouragement in the OT citation from Proverbs 3:11–12 (cited only here in the NT) are reasons for this split rendering. The identification of the community as “My son” is reassuring (cf. 2:10); but the more salient admonition is that, as “son,” they are not to treat lightly the Lord's didactic discipline (παίδεια, cf. Deut. 8:5), which the author defines as suffering (“endure your suffering as discipline,” 12:7). Extrabiblical material favors the latter rendering and also reveals a similar paternal discipline of the father/God to educate a son/beloved one (of God: Philo, *Congr.* 177; Sir 22:27–23:6; Jdt 8:27; cf. Ps. 94[93]:10; of Wisdom: Sir 4:11, 17–19). Finally, the vividly forceful application that follows in Proverbs 3:11–12 is a reminder that sonship and suffering are linked together (12:7–13; cf. Jesus in 5:8–9). Thus this *exhortation* from Proverbs 3:11–12, addressed to this Christian community of believers (Heb. 12:1–6), as well as the subsequent application (vv. 7–13), serves to remind believers that sonship entails didactic discipline/suffering, which evidences that they belong to the Son, the divine Davidic king-priest.

21. Guthrie limits this warning to 12:25–29. See Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, 133–34. McKnight, however, argues that 12:1–29 is the fifth warning passage, while admitting that some may even differ with the inclusion of any portion of chapter 12 as a warning passage (“The Warning Passages,” 21–29). Like McKnight, Buist Fanning will also include a wider range of verses as part of this warning.
22. Psalm 33 (LXX; 34 MT) is a declarative praise psalm that calls the people of God to praise the Lord for their salvation (33:1–10) and exhorts them to *listen* (i.e.,

then contrasts the previous era and the spoken word given at Mount Sinai (Heb. 12:18–21) with the consummative word, which presently comes from heaven (vv. 22–24). Finally, our attention is directed to an explicit warning in verses 25–29 in which the author first exhorts, then warns, then provides some motivation from Jewish history, and finally concludes with a call to worship:

²⁵Do not refuse (μη παραιτήσησθε) the one who is speaking. For if (εἰ γάρ) they did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, how much less (πολὺ μᾶλλον) *will we escape* if we *now* reject “the one” (Jesus or God) who *warns* from heaven. ²⁶And his voice shook (ἐσάλευσεν) the earth then, but now (νῦν δὲ) he has promised (ἐπήγγελλται), “Yet once more I will shake *not only* the earth, *but also* heaven.” ²⁷Now this *phrase*, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what can be shaken or changed, namely, created things which were made and remain in existence, so that what (lit “the things”) is not shaken may remain. ²⁸Therefore (Διό), because we are *in the process of* receiving an unshakeable kingdom, let us offer grace (ἔχωμεν χάριν), *and* through this (δι’ ἧς) let us offer service (λατρεύωμεν) pleasing to God with reverence and awe; ²⁹for (γάρ) our God is a consuming fire.

believe) and *learn* how to live a long life (33:11–22). The verse to which the author alludes in Hebrews 12:14 is Psalm 33:14 (LXX; 34:15 MT). In its original context, the verse is part of the exhortation about living a long life. God’s people are not to speak treacherously about others but rather to seek and promote peace. The author recontextualizes the verse in Hebrews 12:14 to begin his final warning.

The exhortation is both simple and direct: “Do not refuse (μὴ παραιτήσησθε)²³ the one who is speaking” (12:25a). The expectation is clear: the readers are not to ignore or reject God’s message. The one who is speaking appears to be Jesus, who presently mediates the new covenant (cf. v. 24) and thereby speaks from heaven. Thus, the exhortation is to listen to Jesus. They are to *believe* what he says.

An event at Sinai serves as the author’s historical precedent, allowing him to set up another lesser-to-greater argument in Hebrews 12:25. The reason (γάρ) given for the exhortation is once again drawn from the annals of Jewish history. When the Sinai wilderness community failed to give attention to or ignored their mediator, Moses (vv. 25b–26a; cf. vv. 18–21), they did not escape God’s judgment but died in the desert. As in Hebrews 2:2–4, so here, there is a warning about the inability to escape God’s future judgment. The author’s lesser-to-greater argument once again seizes our attention. His point is this: if the previous community suffered a physical punishment, certainly a similar or perhaps even harsher punishment exists for believers who ignore God’s Son and God’s most recent message mediated through the Son (cf. 1:2). But how much harsher a judgment are believers to incur? Is this judgment merely a

23. In contrast to verse 19 where *παρατέομαι* is employed to depict “rejection of” (*παρητήσαντο*) or “begging” (*NET*) not to hear any more (BAGD, 616c 2c; BDAG, 764b 1b), here the negated term “not to refuse” (*μὴ παραιτήσησθε*, BAGD, 616c 2a; BDAG, 764c 2b) picks up the Sinai account as it concerns the “ignoring” or the “repudiation of the divine revelation” (Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989], 379); thus it means “to listen to and by implication to obey” *him*, namely, God, a divine object (Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 683). See *Jos. Ant.* 7.8.2 § 167; *Let. Aris.* 184; *Philo, Det.* 38.

greater form of physical punishment, or is it something eternal? If it is eternal, is it a loss of one's reward, or is it eternal separation from God? However we understand this punishment, 2:1-4 and 12:25-29 are parallel warnings. In fact, Cockerill will contend in his contribution to this book that the first warning "reaches its climax" in 12:25-29.

Unlike the first warning in Hebrews 2:1-4, however, the author recontextualizes a verse from the Old Testament.²⁴ Through his edited and subsequent interpretation of Haggai 2:6,²⁵ believers are called to direct attention to God's future "shaking" of the earth: "Yet once more, I will shake *not only*

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24. The book cited is Haggai, which consists of three oracles, or sermons, spoken to the Jewish people who had returned from Babylonian captivity. The oracles were meant *to motivate* people to rebuild the temple, to encourage contentment with the temple they built, and yet *to look forward* to a future temple. The first oracle in 1:1-11 exhorts the people to reorder priorities and to rebuild the house of God and is dated 1 Elul (= August 29, 520 B.C.E.). Haggai 2:1-9 contains Haggai's second oracle, which addresses the glory of the new house, namely, the temple. God spoke the second oracle to Haggai during the Jewish month of Tishri on the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles (dated October 17, 520 B.C.E.) The third oracle (dated 24 Kislev = December 18, 520 B.C.E.) offers a promise of a future blessing (2:15-19).
25. Haggai 2:6 is taken from Haggai's second oracle (2:1-9). The oracle may be divided into two major sections. The first section is meant to be an encouragement to the governor Zerubbabel, the high priest Joshua, and the remnant of the Jewish community in Judea (vv. 1-5). The second section contains a promise of a glorious new house (vv. 6-9). There are at least two assurances given in this section. One assurance is that the wealth of other nations, "desired things" or "their treasures" (NET), will be brought to Jerusalem (Hag. 2:6-7; cf. Isa. 60:5; Ezra 6:8-12 [from Darius the Great]; 7:12-26 [from Artaxerxes]; 2 Macc. 3:3 [from Seleucus IV]). The other assurance emerges in the two promises made by God: (1) that the present house, or temple, would be greater than the glory of the former house and (2) that God would grant peace to the place. The promises would have been understood with an earthly orientation and not a heavenly one. For the temple as being of greater glory than the former in earthly orientation, see Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969, 1988), 73-84; and Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 87-102. For a historical presentation of the rise of Darius the Great, see Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 107-38.

the earth, *but also* heaven” (Heb. 12:26b).²⁶ Obviously, the phrase “yet *but once more*” indicates a previous shaking of the earth. Perhaps this was at Mount Sinai, an event alluded to in Hebrews 12:18–21 (cf. Exod. 19:16–19; Deut. 4:11–13; 5:22–26; Ps. 68:7–8), as well as at Kadesh-Barnea, alluded to in Hebrews 3:19 (cf. Ps. 29:8).

In contrast to the previous era when God’s voice shook Mount Sinai and Kadesh-Barnea, however, God promises “once again” to shake things up but on a much larger scale. From the author’s recontextualized and interpretive perspective, both the earth (the physical world) and the heavens (the spiritual world) are to be shaken. God’s future shaking of “heaven and earth” will not be local but an all-inclusive shaking of the created universe. In fact, all created things will be removed (cf. Ps. 102:25–27 in Heb. 1:10–12). However we might interpret this “rattling of the universe,” when the dust settles what remains is described in Hebrews 12:28 as “an unshakeable kingdom,” namely, the Son’s kingdom (cf. Heb. 1:2b, 8). Thus the intention for God’s repeating an event from the past, with far greater force, is so that he might establish the Son’s kingdom.

Yet in the midst of this warning, believers are invited to worship God (Heb. 12:28b). Based (διό) upon the fact that they are *in the process of receiving* the Son’s unshakeable kingdom (1:14; cf. 4:3; 5:9–10; 9:28; 10:39), the subsequent invitation to worship emerges—“Let us give thanks” and “let us

26. In Haggai 2:6 we read: “Moreover, the sovereign Lord says: ‘In just a little while I will once again shake the sky and the earth, the sea and the dry ground’” (NET). In Haggai’s time the object shaken by God is heaven (“sky”) and earth. The totality of God’s shaking things up is evident in the additional wording of “the sea and dry land,” a phrase excluded from the quotation of the verse by the author of Hebrews. In all probability, these metaphors in Haggai reference the political instability of Darius’s accession to power in 522 B.C.E. after the death of Cambyses. This interpretation may be supported by the subsequent verse (2:7).

offer worship pleasing to God in devotion and awe” (NET). An additional reason (γάρ) also is given for this “offering of thanks to and worshiping of God,” namely, that God is “a consuming fire.”²⁷ Thus believers are invited to give thanks and worship God because they are in the process of receiving the Son’s kingdom and because of the less-than-attractive alternative—God’s judgment (cf. Heb. 1:8).

Needless to say, verse 28 appears to orient us to the present dimension of a believer’s salvation journey in that believers are *in the process of receiving* the Son’s unshakeable kingdom. In fact, in chapter 2 Fanning admits that though salvation in Hebrews is “predominantly future-oriented” with a future consummation yet to come, the operative word is *predominantly*. He then presents a case for the present dimensions of salvation evident not only here in 12:28 but throughout Hebrews. How do Osborne and Cockerill address this issue? How does Gleason? Regardless of how we might define or interpret the issue of salvation at this time or for that matter how we might define the extent or type of divine judgment for disobedience, what can we conclude about verses 25–29? For now, let’s suggest that the reason for listening to God is because he judges or punishes believers who ignore him or his mediator, the Son.

27. It is somewhat ironic that the author appeals here to Deuteronomy 4:23–24, which says, “Be on guard so that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he has made with you, and that you do not make an image of any kind, just as he has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (NET; cf. Deut. 6:15; 9:3). Originally, God’s judgment, which was physical, was directed against those who rejected the Mosaic Sinai covenant, but now Deuteronomy 4 is recontextualized in Hebrews to speak of God’s future judgment, which is directed against those who reject God’s new covenant inaugurated through the Son (cf. Heb. 12:22). The question is whether or not this is a heightened form of judgment (i.e., eternal judgment: Osborne, Cockerill, Fanning) or merely another form of physical judgment (i.e., 70 C.E. destruction of Jerusalem: Gleason).

Conclusion

Hebrews 2:1-4 and 12:14-29 (esp. vv. 25-29) share a similar exhortation and parallel warning: namely, “hear” or “listen” to the message about or spoken by the Son, because if you do not, you will not escape God’s future judgment. Thus the author calls for readers to believe God’s message.

The author employs two lesser-to-greater forms of argumentation, whereby he appeals to Jewish historical events from the Sinai wilderness community. First he directs attention to the mediators of the previous era—angels and Moses—and God’s most recent mediator of this present era, the Son (cf. 1:1-2a). Then he points out the dire consequences incurred by the Sinai wilderness community for ignoring God’s message, which are contrasted with a future set of consequences that are even less desirable. Just as God’s physical punishment for the Sinai generation was severe for those who rejected God’s message presented via previous mediators, so also are the future judgments (whatever they might be) for those who refuse God’s message mediated through the Son. The chart below summarizes 2:1-4 and 12:14-29.

	Hebrews 2:1-4	Hebrews 12:14-29
Exhortation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to the Son’s message (1:1-14; 2:4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue peace and holiness (12:14) • Do not fall short of God’s grace (12:15) • Do not practice sexual immorality (12:16) • Do not refuse the Son’s warning/message from heaven (12:25) • Be thankful (12:28)

	Hebrews 2:1-4	Hebrews 12:14-29
Concern (i.e., sin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a concern about slipping away or forgetting the message about the Son (2:1) • There is a concern about ignoring, rejecting, or disregarding one's salvation (2:3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a concern about falling short of God's grace (12:15a) • There is a concern about becoming bitter (12:15b) • There is a concern about becoming involved in sexual immorality (12:16) • There is a concern about believing the Son's message (12:25a) • There is a concern about rejecting Jesus (12:25b)
Jewish historical precedent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wilderness community at Mount Sinai 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wilderness community at Mount Sinai
Lesser-to-greater mediator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angelic beings (lesser: 2:2; cf. 1:4-14) • The Son (greater: 2:3-4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses (lesser: 12:18-20 with 12:25b; cf. 3:1-6) • The Son (greater: 12:25c)
Lesser-to-greater dire consequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judgment of the Sinai community in the wilderness versus no escape from some future judgment (2:2-3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judgment of the Sinai community in the wilderness versus no escape from some future judgment (12:25)
Desirable consequence		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Christian community is receiving an unshakeable kingdom
OT citations used as a testimony or witness		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quote about God's judgments: Haggai 2:6; Deuteronomy 4:24b

Warnings to Trust and Obey

Whereas Hebrews 2:1-4 and 12:14-29 warn the readers using terms like to “hear” or “listen” to God’s message (i.e., believe God’s message), the next two warning passages, Hebrews 3:7-4:13 and 10:19-39, heighten with emotional language the need to trust and obey God’s message rather than disobey and turn away from him. Once again, both warning passages contrast the former era and its mediators of God’s message with the present era and God’s most recent message mediated through the Son. These two warnings, however, are longer and offer many more interpretive challenges. More significantly, they differ from the previous warnings in that they both make explicit emotive appeals “to fear.” However, both provide similar persuasive and quite provocative lesser-to-greater arguments to achieve the author’s desired response from his readers, namely, to trust and obey God.

Hebrews 3:7-4:13

Although Hebrews 3 begins with a portrayal of Jesus as a faithful Son (vv. 1-6), the chapter moves quickly to a negative example from Jewish history of Jewish believers who failed God due to their unfaithfulness, or disobedience (vv. 7-19). Knowing exactly where this warning passage begins is a challenge. Let me suggest, however, that this warning passage has three distinguishable yet gradually intensifying parts: 3:7-19; 4:1-10; and 4:11-13.²⁸ Whereas Hebrews 3:7-19 recalls the wilderness community’s demise, Hebrews 4:1-10 appeals to believers not

28. DeSilva rightly observes the repetitive use of the verb “entering” (3:18-19; 4:1, 3 [twice], 5-6, [twice], 10-11), as well as the repetitive recontextualization of Psalm 94:11 (LXX; Ps. 95:11 MT) as a means to create coherence for this warning passage. See deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 152-53.

to rebel like the wilderness community but rather to obey God's most recent promise mediated through the Son. The author then concludes with a final appeal to his readers to be diligent in their faith in and obedience to God (4:11-13).

Hebrews 3:7-19

In Hebrews 3:7-19 the author introduces this long warning passage with a lengthy quotation from Psalm 94 (LXX; Ps. 95 MT),²⁹ in which the former Sinai wilderness community is mentioned. He then moves on to apply the text to his readers. Thus the author quotes from the Greek translation of Psalm 95 (Ps. 94:7b-11 in the LXX).

⁷Therefore (Διό), just as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear (ἀκούσητε) his voice, ⁸do not harden (μὴ σκληρύνητε) your hearts as in the *rebellion*, in the days of *testing* in the wilderness. ⁹There *your fathers tested* me by trial and *they saw* my works for forty years. ¹⁰Therefore (διό), *I became provoked* at that generation, and *I said*, “Their hearts are always wandering and they have not known my ways.” ¹¹So (ὥς) *I swore* (ᾠμοσα) in my anger, “They will never enter my resting place.”

The appeal to this psalm serves to draw attention to the Sinai wilderness generation (Heb. 3:7-11). Yet in its original historical and literary setting, Psalm 94 (LXX) is a summons

29. Recognized as a “Psalm of Ascent,” Psalm 95 was sung by pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for feasts three times a year (Exod. 23:14-19). Although the psalm begins with praise to the Creator and King (vv. 1-7a), it shifts to a warning for worshipers not to “harden” their hearts and thereby forfeit their opportunity to enter God’s place of rest, namely, the temple sanctuary (vv. 7b-11).

to praise and pay homage to the Creator-King (vv. 1–7a), as well as a warning to obey God and not rebel against him as “in the *rebellion*, in the days of *testing* in the wilderness” (vv. 7b–11).³⁰ The latter portion of this psalm serves as a warning to all readers: Do not pattern your life after those of the wilderness congregation who “hardened their hearts”³¹ against God by distrusting and disobeying him. Thus, as the psalmist draws particular attention to specific events from Jewish history, so too does the author of Hebrews by way of the recontextualized words of the psalmist.

After citing Psalm 94 (LXX), the author of Hebrews applies the text to his readers through two exhortations, a warning, and a motivation from Jewish history, specifically, the events of Kadesh-Barnea (Heb. 3:12–19).

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30. The Hebrew terms *Meribah*, meaning “strife” (Exod. 17:1–7; Num. 20:1–13), and *Massah*, meaning “testing” (Exod. 17:1–7; Deut. 6:16; 9:22; 33:8), are translated “rebellion” (παραπικρασμός) and “testing” (πειρασμός) in the Septuagint. The Septuagint’s literal rendering of Meribah as “rebellion” and Massah as “testing” more pointedly speaks of the events of Kadesh-Barnea, where the Sinai community distrusted and disobeyed God’s message. They did not trust and obey.
31. The Hebrew verb *qsh* in Psalm 95:8 is rendered σκληρύνω (“harden”) in the Septuagint (94:8). The term has the metaphorical sense of stiffening one’s neck, which conveys an attitude of stubbornness. It is used to describe Pharaoh and King Zedekiah (Exod. 13:15; 2 Chron. 36:13), the Exodus/wilderness community (Exod. 32:9; 33:5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; 31:27), the predynastic community (Judg. 2:19), the dynastic communities of Judah and Israel (2 Kings 17:14; 2 Chron. 30:8; Isa. 48:4; Jer. 7:26; 17:23; 19:15; Ezek. 2:4; 3:7), and the Jewish community’s ancestors (2 Chron. 30:8; Neh. 9:16–17; 9:26; 4Q504 frag 4:7), and is a characteristic *not to be observed* at the Qumran community (1QS 5:5, 26; cf. Prov. 28:14; 29:1). Psalm 94[95] specifically cites the wilderness community’s stubbornness at “Meribah as in the day of Massah in the wilderness” (cf. Exod. 17:1–7; Num. 20:1–13). This concept is carried over into Greek as well. As the ass or the horse that refuses to move tightens and stiffens its neck, because efforts to resist are localized in the neck (Philo, *Leg.* 3.136), metaphorically speaking, to stiffen the neck or “harden” (σκληρύνω) means to be stubbornly disobedient or obstinate in rebellion against God (*TLNT*, 3:260–61). Although the author of Hebrews modifies aspects of Psalm 95, the warning from verses 7–11 provide a model *not* to be followed. Thus the point is simply this: Do not to be an obstinate or stiff-necked ass or horse.

¹²Take care (βλέπετε), brothers and sisters (ἀδελφοί), lest there be (μήποτε ἔσται) in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But (ἀλλά) encourage (παρακαλεῖτε) one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that (ἵνα) none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For (γάρ) we became and we remain partners with Christ, if (ἐάνπερ) we hold fast (κατάσχωμεν) our “initial” (NET) confidence firm until the end. ¹⁵As it says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as they did in the rebellion.” ¹⁶For (γάρ) who heard and rebelled? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷And with whom (τίσιν) was he angry (προσώχθισεν) for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸And to whom (τίσιν) did he swear (ὄμοσεν) that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹So (ὅτι) we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Concern about deliberate distrust and disobedience is evident in the exhortation for self-evaluation (βλέπετε) (Heb. 3:12a). Believers are summoned to be watchful. Obviously, the author does not want the historical events of Kadesh-Barnea repeated (Exod. 17:1-7; Num. 14). Thus he clearly warns of the dangers of an evil, unbelieving heart that leads one to “forsake” (ἀφίστημι)³² God (Heb. 3:12b).

32. The verb ἀφίστημι is translated various ways in this verse: “falls(ing) away from the living God” (NASB, RSV, ESV, BAGD, 127a; BDAG, 157d), “turn(ing) away

In the second exhortation (Heb. 3:13–15), believers are further summoned to encourage one another regularly (v. 13a). The intention (ἵνα) for this mutual encouragement among believers is to avoid or to help prevent the hardening of hearts (σκληρύνητε τὰς καρδίας, vv. 8, 15)³³ by sin’s deception (v. 13b). Thus the author appears to recognize a real, not an imagined danger, for believers. Believers are obviously prone to wander from God’s message and his messenger.

The reason (γάρ) for avoiding this wandering away from God is because believers have entered into a “partnership” (μέτοχοι)³⁴ with the Son (3:14a). But is a believer’s “partnership”

from the living God” (NIV, NRSV, NLT), “forsakes the living God” (NET), “in departing from the living God” (KJV). Yet, the translations all echo the same concept of apostasy evident in the LXX; and they reverberate the heartbeat of the Exodus community, which had a heart that *turned away* from God (Num. 14:9; 32:9; cf. 13:1–14:45). Ezekiel parallels the wilderness community’s *turning away* from God with that of the First Temple (966–586 B.C.E.) Jewish community’s departure from the living God (Ezek. 20:8, 38; cf. Jer. 2:5; Dan. 9:5, 9; Bar 3:8; Sir 47:23–24; 48:15). Likewise, Second Temple (515 B.C.E.–70 C.E.) Jewish communities departed from God through “abandoning the religion of their fathers” (1 Macc. 2:19) through the actions “of the lawless who had rebelled against God” (1QpHab 8:11, 16; s.v. *mrđ*, *TDOT*, 9:1–5). To turn away from God, then, is deliberate rebellion against God: “Far be it from us that we should rebel (ἀποστραφῆναι) against the LORD, and turn away (ἀποστῆναι) this day from following the LORD” (Josh. 22:29 LXX; cf. Wis 3:10). As is the case in Hebrews 3:12, one’s heart condition frequents the discussions of forsaking the living God (Jer. 17:5; Sir 10:12). Thus the author cautions (“take care” or “see to it,” βλέπετε) about hardened hearts (Heb. 3:8, 15) or evil hearts (v. 12) that affect one’s relationship with the living God.

33. Unlike Hebrews 3:8, 15; and 4:7 (cf. n. 28 above), here in 3:13 the term “harden” does not refer to the people of the Exodus community but rather serves as an exhortation to the present believers to resist “becoming hardened.” In contrast to children who are in need of discipline lest they “become stubborn” and disobey (Sir 30:12), believers here are summoned to encourage one another daily in this present era. Whereas the negative report of the ten spies discouraged the hearts of an entire community (Num. 13:32–4:4; 32:9), sharing and reminding one another of God’s faithfulness on a regular basis will help believers avoid similar stubborn unbelief.
34. The term “partnership” (μέτοχος) is an important term in Hebrews. With the exception of Hebrews 1:9, where μέτοχος is translated “companions,” the term generally describes the believer’s partnership with God and others in a technical

with the Son *dependent* (“if,” ἐάνπερ) upon the believer maintaining a belief in what God has spoken through, by, and about the Son (v. 14b)? Who exactly is responsible for maintaining one’s “partnership” with the Son? Is it the believer who maintains his or her faith, or is it God who secures the believer? Is assurance based upon a “cause” (believers are responsible to maintain their believing faith) and “effect” (thereby they remain partners with Jesus) understanding of the “if” clause? Fanning will address this significant grammatical issue in chapter 2. At this point, let me suggest that believers are to encourage one another regularly because the partnership they have with the Son appears to be *dependent* upon their maintaining faith in what God has spoken through, by, and about the Son (1:1-14). Yet as you read the following essays, be open to this question: “Is there another option for this conditional clause?” If so, is it a valid option? If it is valid, how might it impact your understanding of security?

and moral sense (cf. Ps. 119:63 [118:63 LXX]). In Hebrews 3:1 the term is used in connection with “holy brethren.” It emphasizes the community’s partnership with one another, sharing together in spiritual realities as sons of God (2:9, 13), as members of the same family (2:11), and as common recipients of God’s riches (6:4; *TLNT*, 2:490). They are also joined to God due to their “heavenly calling.” Thus they are “fellow Christians,” partners with one another due to their call from God via Jesus, the Son (cf. 2:11-12). Here in Hebrews 3:14, μέτοχος emphasizes the community’s partnership with the divine Davidite and thus with God. Three slightly different nuanced translations exist. (1) “We have become partakers of Christ” (*NASB*; cf. *KJV*) and the closely related (2) “We . . . share in Christ” (*RSV*, *NIV*, *ESV*, cf. *NLT*) applies both to possession of and activities with Christ. The better rendering, (3) “We have become partners with Christ” (*NRSV*, *NET*) implies that the community takes part in activities and experiences with King Jesus. The added presence of βέβαιος with μέτοχος would appear to emphasize an associate “partnership” with Christ in a legal sense, one that is similar to a business relationship. Indeed, μέτοχος is used in Luke 5:7, where Simon and the others who were in the same boat “signaled to *their associates* (or partners) in the other boat that they should come help them” (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, WBC 47a [Dallas: Word, 1991], 87). Thus it may be said that believers are described as having a legally binding partnership “with Christ.”

In Hebrews 3:16–19 the author continues to provide motivation from the pages of Jewish history. The three rhetorical questions followed by three succinct answers about the Kadesh-Barnea community provide a threefold reason (γάρ) why believers are not to repeat their recorded mistakes. First, the people of Kadesh-Barnea were offered a promise from God, yet they hardened their hearts and “rebelled”³⁵ against God (v. 16). Second, their deliberate disobedience (Num. 14:22) and distrust angered God (Heb. 3:17; cf. Num. 14:11–12a). God’s anger against those who deliberately sinned lasted for forty years, until they all died in the wilderness. Even after they repented, God condemned those of the wilderness community who were twenty years old and above to die in the desert (Heb. 3:17; cf. Num. 14:23, 29, 39–45). Third, God swore that these rebels would never enter into the place of rest he had promised, the land of Canaan (Heb. 3:18). So (ὅτι) the people of Kadesh-Barnea never entered God’s promised “place of rest” in Canaan. This punishment later served as a warning for a subsequent

35. “Rebellion” and “rebel” (παραπικρασμός, παραπικραίνω) occur only in Hebrews. The noun παραπικρασμός is not found prior to the LXX and even then occurs only once (Ps. 94[95]:8). Its usage is equally sparse in the NT, occurring only twice, when the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 94(95):8 in Hebrews 3:8 and 3:15. The verb “rebel” (παραπικραίνω) occurs in the NT only in Hebrews 3:16. Two different English renderings of this term exist. Some supply “*him*” to indicate God’s being made angry or provoked: “For who provoked *Him* when they had heard?” (NASB; in keeping with the Septuagint “to provoke me,” referring to God in Jer. 39:29 [32:29 MT]; 51:3, 8 [44:3, 8 MT]). Other translations do not insert the direct object “*him*” and thereby emphasize the wilderness community’s rebellion: “Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious?” (RSV, NRSV) or “who were those who heard and yet rebelled” (ESV), and most simply put, “who rebelled (against God)” (NLT, NET, cf. BADG, 621b 2, BDAG, 769d, TDNT, 6:125–27). The Septuagint’s reflection of the Exodus/wilderness event (Ps. 77[78]:17, 40, 56), as it is alluded to here in Hebrews 3:12b, favors the latter English rendering (cf. Deut. 31:27; Pss. 5:10[11]; 106[107]:11). Thus the author appeals to the Israelite wilderness community as a negative example, an example of an unfaithful community that is not to be followed or imitated.

Jewish generation lest similar distrust and disobedience occur (Heb. 3:19; cf. Num. 32:13–15; Ezek. 20:4–8, 38).

Thus the concern about Jewish history repeating itself appears to be a potential reality. The twofold summons made in Hebrews 3:12–13 to be watchful (βλέπετε) and to encourage one another (παρακαλεῖτε) is intended to counter the propensity for deliberate unbelief and rebellion and thereby prevent repeating events from Jewish history. Yet the caution intensifies in Hebrews 4:1–10 with a twofold deduction. One is an emotive appeal (vv. 1–5), and the other is presented in the form of a motivation (vv. 6–10); both are clearly set apart by “therefore” (οὖν).

Hebrews 4:1–10

The author’s first deduction (οὖν) occurs in Hebrews 4:1–5. He offers an explicit emotive appeal to fear failure, namely, failure to secure “God’s rest.” People who believe in this present era are privileged both to enter “God’s rest” and to participate in God’s “Sabbath rest-celebration” because the Exodus community failed to do so. As he has done in the previous warning passages, the author once again presents an exhortation, followed by a warning, followed by a motivation from Jewish history.

¹Therefore (οὖν), let us fear (Φοβηθῶμεν) lest, while a promise remains of entering his rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. ²For (γάρ) indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they did; but (ἀλλά) the word they heard did not profit them, because they were not united (μὴ συγκεκερασμένους) in

faith with those who heard. ³For (γάρ) we who have believed are entering that rest, just as God has said, “As I swore in my anger, they shall not enter my rest,” though his works were accomplished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For (γάρ) he has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works”; ⁵and again in this passage, “They shall not enter my rest.”

Believers are clearly exhorted to fear (4:1a). The direct emotive appeal “Let us fear” (Φοβηθῶμεν; NASB, KJV) is disturbing to most twenty-first-century believers because the concept of “fear” is seldom part of the Christian message. In fact, some translations render Φοβηθῶμεν as “we must be wary” (NET) or “let us be careful” (NIV, TNIV; cf. NRSV). Nevertheless, the exhortation is more pointedly to “fear.” Thus we must ask, “What exactly is to be feared?” It appears that believers are to fear failure of securing “God’s rest,” which is presently available to them (v. 1b). That’s the warning. Believers might fail to enter “God’s rest.” Obviously, we must define what it means to “enter God’s rest.”

On the one hand, the phrase could speak of a believer’s ability to enter God’s promised “heavenly place of rest.”³⁶ Thus a believer would not enter heaven and thereby surrender the

36. Laansma argues convincingly that the concept of rest in Hebrews 3–4 speaks of two “parallel” communities and their respective response to God’s voice, namely, the Kadesh-Barnea community and the community presently reading the book of Hebrews. The term “rest” (κατάπασις), derived from the Septuagint rendering of the Hebrew term *mēnūah* in Psalm 95:11, occurs only in Hebrews 3:7–4:13. Psalm 95:7–11 draws attention to the Exodus community’s failure to enter and

privilege of participating in God's "Sabbath rest-celebration."³⁷ But what does this mean? Can a believer, as Osborne will suggest in chapter 1, lose the opportunity of entering God's "heavenly place of rest" entirely and thereby be denied eternity with God?

secure their resting place (see Num. 14). "My rest" (Heb. 4:3) quoted from Psalm 94:11 (LXX; 95:11 MT), is ambiguous. It may speak of the land as Israel's "resting place" (Deut. 12:9; cf. Isa. 11:10; 32:18, which promises a "secure resting place"), or it may refer to the temple as YHWH's resting place (Ps. 132:14; cf. Isa. 66:1 with 2 Chron. 6:41). The latter option, however, speaks indirectly of the land as Israel's resting place as well, in that, the temple symbolizes the place where YHWH mediates "rest" to the faithful community throughout the land (cf. 1 Kings 8:27-53; 9:1-9; Jer. 7:1-15). Qumran captures this OT connection when speaking of the future Davidite to and through whom YHWH will bestow rest (4Q174 2:18-3:13; 4Q504 4; cf. Ps. 132; Isa. 66:1). Thus "the oath [in Ps. 95:11] sums up covenantal blessings promised to God's people— *blessings of a secure life in the land* —which were connected with God's [temple] presence among them" (Jon Laansma, "I Will Give You Rest": *The "Rest" Motif in the New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 and Heb. 3-4*, WUNT 98 [Tubingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997], 41-45, 67-75; BAGD, 416a 2; BDAG, 523d 2). Later in 4:4, the "place of rest" in the land via the temple, shifts to a place of rest that belongs to God. Thus in Hebrews "*my resting place*" moves beyond a physical earthly place of rest to a heavenly one.

37. An erroneous assumption often made about "God's Sabbath" is that it is synonymous with "God's rest" or that they are interchangeable in Hebrews 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 10-11. Some of the reasons presented for a synonymous rendering are: (1) σαββατισμός occurs only here in the NT; (2) the nouns "Sabbath" (σαββατισμός) and "rest" (κατάπαυσις) are parallel in 4:5 and 4:9; and (3) σαββατισμός is often translated "Sabbath rest," which limits σαββατισμός in Hebrews 4:9 to speak of a "rest from works" (KJV, RSV, NASB, NIV, ESV, NET; "special rest" NLT). Laansma defines σαββατισμός as a Sabbath celebration and not a quietistic ideal or a locale. In recognizing the two terms as distinct, he defines κατάπαυσις as a local reality, a place, similar to other eschatological, local realities (i.e., "the coming world" in 2:5; the heavenly city in 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14; the unshakeable kingdom in 12:28, etc.). In his exposition of Hebrews 4:1-11, he demonstrates that God's resting place is where God holds his own Sabbath celebration, a place that was always intended for human entrance and was promised to the "fathers," and is yet to be realized in heaven. Laansma, "I Will Give You Rest," 252-366. Furthermore, deSilva has correctly observed that there is no earthly millennial kingdom alluded to in Hebrews (deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 157-63). This is not to say, however, that there is no earthly millennial kingdom. I merely acknowledge that the author of Hebrews directs his attention to contrasting existence on earth with a future existence in heaven.

On the other hand, could the phrase speak of a believer's loss of heavenly celebration? In chapter 4, Gleason will counter that genuine believers cannot lose their salvation. Thus rather than losing the opportunity to enter God's "heavenly place of rest," heaven becomes a place where sins are exposed (4:12-13), rewards are lost (10:35-39), and discipline is received (12:4-11) for all those who "fall away." Thus what is forfeited is not entrance into God's "heavenly place of rest" but rather a believer's entering into God's "Sabbath rest-celebration." Yet as you read the following essays, be open to this question, "How are we to understand God's rest"? How do Fanning and Cockrill view it? Are they similar? Are they different? As you read, gather and weigh the biblical evidence from Hebrews presented by the contributors, evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, and then you decide.

In Hebrews 4:2-5, the author moves from warning to affirmation based (*γάρ* three times) upon three historical facts. (1) Like the Sinai community, believers have heard God's message, and yet, the Exodus community did not profit from hearing God's word because they did not unite in faith with those who listened believingly (v. 2). (2) The believers in Hebrews appear to be *in the process of entering* God's "place of rest," whereas God swore that the Exodus community would not enter into "God's rest" (v. 3). (3) Whereas God entered into rest on the seventh day after all his work of Creation was completed, the Exodus community will not enter "God's rest" (vv. 4-5). Thus the motivation from Jewish history appears to be this: Room for believers to enter "God's rest"—however we might define it—exists because the Exodus community failed to believe God and thereby forfeited their rightful opportunities with God.

In summary then, the point of Hebrews 4:1–5 appears to be a warning to fear failure of securing “God’s rest,” which again finds its motivation in the Exodus community’s failure to enter God’s promised “place of rest.” Even though the Kadesh-Barnea community heard God’s message mediated through Moses, they disbelieved and thereby disobeyed it. In a similar manner, believers in this new era also have heard God’s message and are in the process of entering God’s “place of rest.” Once again, regardless of how we define “God’s rest,” believers are exhorted to fear lest they too *distrust* God and his message mediated through the Son, *disobey* God and his message, and thereby *be denied* eternal worshiping opportunities with God.

The author’s second deduction (οὖν) is stated in Hebrews 4:6–10. Unlike verses 1–5, verses 6–10 appear to make an appeal to believers in a more positive manner. An opportunity to enter God’s “heavenly place of rest” for “Sabbath rest-celebration” has been instituted by God during this current era for those who continue to trust God and do not disobey him. The author conveys this opportunity by way of a contrast between two time periods (i.e., eras), followed by a revised promise. Yet the emphasis continues to be an explicit call to trust and obey God’s message.

⁶Therefore (οὖν), it remains (ἀπολείπεται) for some to enter it. Yet those to whom the good news was formerly proclaimed did not enter because of disobedience, ⁷He again fixes (πάλιν . . . ὁρίζει) a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time, just as it has been said before, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” ⁸For if (εἰ γάρ) Joshua

had given them rest, God would not speak of another day after that. ⁹So then (ἄρα) a Sabbath *rest-celebration* remains (ἀπολείπεται) for the people of God. ¹⁰For (γάρ) the one who enters his rest has himself also rested from his works, as God *rested* from His.

In this ongoing discussion of “God’s rest,” the author makes it clear that “God’s rest” remains available to believers due to the failure of the Kadesh-Barnea community. Why? They failed to trust God and obey his message (4:6). Although God declared to them that the land of Canaan and subsequent “rest” were theirs to experience (Deut. 12:9–10; Josh. 21:44), they were denied access to it because of disobedience. Thus God draws a line in time between two eras and two groups of believers. Then he proceeds to announce a new message to a new group of believers.

In fact, God has instituted another time period in which people are once again called to enter into his “place of rest” (Heb. 4:7a). In other words, God establishes this new period (i.e., “today”)³⁸ via Psalm 94:7a (LXX), a psalm the author

38. The term “today” (σήμερον) occurs eight times in Hebrews (1:5; 3:7, 13, 15; 4:7 [twice]; 5:5; 13:8). In each case it does not refer to a literal twenty-four-hour day but rather to an extended time period or era. Its usage first captures our attention in the twice-quoted Psalm 2:7, which underscores the Son’s entrance into his role as king-priest (kingship, 1:5; priesthood, 5:5) as well as the Son’s eternity (13:8). The five occurrences in 3:7–4:11 seize our attention due to its use in the often-quoted Psalm 94 (LXX; 95 MT) in Hebrews 3:7, 15; 4:7. In Hebrews 3:13, “today” speaks of the present era (BAGD, 749a; BDAG, 921d), in which the Word of God, namely, the OT Scriptures, remains living and active. In Hebrews 4:7, the term “day” and its connection with “today” in verses 4 and 7 link Psalm 94[95]:11 and Genesis 2:2 together. Moving beyond the historical events of Moses’ Exodus community (3:16–19; 4:2), Joshua’s wilderness community (4:8), and David’s community (4:7), the author emphasizes a promise that remains unrealized “after so long a time” (4:1a, 6a) in that even the forefathers who entered Canaan never entered “God’s place of rest” (see 4:4). Thus “today” is this present era.

of Hebrews attributes to David (4:7b). Yet this present group of believers are to hear God's message. They are exhorted not to harden their hearts but rather to obey God's new message (v. 7c). The reasoned assumption (εί γάρ) is simply that God, through Joshua, did not grant the second generation of the Exodus community entrance into his designated "place of rest"³⁹ and therefore makes it available to believers in this new era (v. 8). Is there, however, an exact one-for-one correspondence between the "rest" denied to the Exodus believers and the rest promised the believers addressed in Hebrews? In what ways are they similar, and in what ways do they differ, if at all? How do Cockerill and Gleason view the similarities and differences? How do their respective views emphasize the continuity or discontinuity of the Old and New Testaments?

In conclusion (ἄρα), and based (γάρ) upon the actions of Jesus and God, who have rested in the "heavenly place of rest" where "Sabbath rest-celebration" occurs, there remains available for "today's" believer an opportunity to enter God's "heavenly place of rest" (4:9-10). Consequently, believers go where God and Jesus are. Furthermore, the existing opportunity to enter God's "heavenly place of rest" has an incentive, namely, to participate in God's "Sabbath rest-celebration."⁴⁰ Whereas

39. While some form of rest was attained under the leadership of Joshua (Josh. 21:43-45), it was obviously incomplete because a stern warning also was issued to turn away from the peoples of the land of Canaan lest the Lord take them out of the land (Josh. 23). Further evidence of the incompleteness of that rest is evident in Psalm 95, where David raises the topic of rest many centuries after the events of the Exodus generation. Thus the Exodus generation serves as a paradigm of unfaithfulness. Subsequently believers who hear (i.e., trust) and obey God's new message in this new era will enter God's "rest," a "rest" that was not granted to Joshua during the previous era (Heb. 4:7-8).

40. In keeping with the Jewish concept and theology of Sabbath, God's Sabbath speaks not merely of cessation from works (Exod. 20:8-10; cf. 31:13-17; 35:1-3; Neh. 13:15-22; Isa. 58:13) but also of festive celebration of God with temple visits, special foods, and Sabbath songs that unite the worshiper with the angelic

“God’s rest” may be a heavenly place to experience rest, “God’s Sabbath” involves cessation from working and thereby participation in the celebration of God.

The point of Hebrews 4:6–10 is simply this: An opportunity exists for “today’s” believers to enter God’s “heavenly place of rest” for “Sabbath rest-celebration.” At this point, it appears that one community’s failure (Kadesh-Barnea) is another community’s opportunity (“today’s” believer). God institutes a new era, or time period, for a new group of people. It seems this new opportunity for believers to enter God’s “heavenly place of rest” exists *provided* they continue to trust and obey God’s message. Thus the exhortation for diligence in Hebrews 4:11–13 appears to be a natural way to end this warning in verses 1–10.

Hebrews 4:11–13

Hebrews 4:11–13 concludes (οὖν) this extremely long warning passage with a call for diligence.⁴¹ Once again the author exhorts, warns, and provides a motivation.

¹¹Therefore (οὖν) let us do our best (σπουδάσωμεν) to enter (εἰσελθεῖν) that rest so that

worshippers in heaven (Isa. 56:2, 7; Jer. 17:19–27; *Jub.* 50:8–11; “The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice” [4Q403]; *DJBP*, 538–39). “For great is the honor which the Lord gave to Israel to eat and to drink and to be satisfied on [the Sabbath] day of festival and to rest in it from all work” (*Jub.* 50:10, cf. 2:21–22; 2 Macc. 8:27). Thus σαββατισμός more appropriately speaks of a “Sabbath celebration,” which includes a cessation of work but more specifically speaks of a Sabbath celebration of salvation in which believers join in God’s Sabbath celebration along with a myriad of angelic beings (Heb. 12:22–24; cf. Rev. 4:1–11; Laansma, “*I Will Give You Rest*,” 276–77).

41. As this passage began with a severe emotive warning in 4:1, so too it ends with a severe emotive warning. Structurally, the hortatory subjunctives with imperative force “let us fear” (Φοβηθῶμεν) in 4:1 and “let us do our best to enter” (σπουδάσωμεν . . . εἰσελθεῖν) in 4:11 mark this subsection within the author’s larger discussion. The latter expectation, however, builds upon and intensifies the first. Obviously the author is concerned with the possibility of distrust of and disobedience to God’s word and subsequent punishment.

(ἵνα) no one might fall (πέση) by following the same example of disobedience.¹² For (γάρ) God's message (ὁ λόγος) is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.¹³ And there is no creature hidden from God's (αὐτοῦ) sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of the word of God to whom we must give an account.

The author's expectation is clearly stated: believers are to be especially conscientious or zealously engaged (σπουδάσωμεν)⁴² in entering "God's rest." However we might define "God's rest," it is something to be pursued with diligence. His intention (ἵνα) is also clearly stated. The author expects diligence to enter God's "place of rest" so that believers might not fall (πέση; 4:11b). Once again the author's intention serves as a warning to believers not to disregard or disobey God's message. Implicitly assumed from the verse is the author's desire that his readers not repeat the pattern of disobedience that plagued the Jewish believers at Kadesh-Barnea.

As is the author's custom, he provides for us a reason (γάρ) for his exhortation to diligence. Here in Hebrews 4:12–13, he

42. The Greek word σπουδάζω in Hebrews 4:11 has been rendered "Let us do our best" (NLT), "let us be diligent" (NASB), "let us make every effort" (NRSV, NIV, NET), "let us strive" (RSV, ESV), and "let us labour" (KJV). In effect, σπουδάζω conveys the idea of being "especially conscientious," of "applying oneself diligently," or of being "zealously engaged" to enter God's resting place (BAGD, 763b 2; BDAG, 939b 3; TDNT, 7:559–68; TLNT, 3:276–85). Just as Paul "sought strenuously" to honor the apostolic council's concern for the poor (Gal. 2:10) and exhorted Timothy to "make every effort to come" to Rome before his death (2 Tim. 4:9), so also a sense of zealotry and urgency exists with the use of σπουδάζω here in Hebrews 4:11. Thus *not* to strive earnestly to enter God's heavenly place of rest and participate in God's Sabbath rest-celebration is open rebellion.

sets forth God's judgment as the reason for diligence, namely, that the timeless and the living power of God's message⁴³ probes and his divine judgment penetrates, separates, and judges the innermost thoughts and attitudes of all living creatures. No one escapes God's word. Everything lies disrobed and prostrated⁴⁴ before it. The need for diligence then is based upon the future judgment of God.

Obviously Hebrews 3:7–4:13 is an extremely long warning passage with three distinguishable yet gradually intensifying

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43. In verse 12 the author creates a strikingly powerful visual of “the word of God” by using a traditional image of God's word as a sword (Isa. 49:2; Wis 18:15–16; Eph. 6:17). Τομώτερος occurs only here in the NT. Speaking comparatively (ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν), God's word is described as “sharper (τομώτερος) than any” two-edged sword. At issue is *not* whether the “sword” (μάχαιραν) depicts a *small sword/dagger* (Judg. 3:16, 21–22; Mark 14:43, 48; Heb. 11:34, 37; 1 Macc. 3:12; cf. IQM 5:11–14; 6:2–6) or a *sharp knife* (Gen. 22:6, 10; Luke 22:38; BDAG, 622a 1). Rather *the renderings* “double-edged sword” (NIV, NET; Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, 47a:93, 102), “two-edged sword” (KJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, ESV), or “sharp knife” (NLT, TDNT, 4:526–27) *reveal the powerful function of God's word*. “The word of God” probes (“piercing”) like a sharp knife, poses divine judgment (“able to judge”) like a sword as in the case of Israel's physical judgment after the Kadesh-Barnea event (Num. 14:43–45), and thereby renders people totally defenseless (cf. IQH^a 14:29–33; Rev. 19:15; cf. Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 262).
44. The verb τετραηλισμένα occurs only here in the NT. The parallel word “naked” (γυμνός) in the immediate context complements the English rendering of “laid bare” (NIV, NASB, NRSV, BAGD, 824d–25a; BDAG, 1014a) or “exposed” (ESV, NET, NLT). It is a difficult metaphor to understand, but it has been suggested that the term speaks (1) of the bending back of the neck of a sacrificial animal, bared for the knife, before slaughter (see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 136) or (2) of being gripped by the neck as in an athletic competition. Philo uses the term to speak of reason, which “grapple[s] with the vast number of particular subjects . . . grows exhausted and collapses just as an athlete ‘with his head gripped in a neck-hold’ (ἐκτραχηλιζόμενος) by superior power” (*Praem.* 29; cf. of a person overwhelmed by suffering that grips his or her soul, *Cher.* 78; of passions that hold the soul of a person fast in its grip, *Mut.* 81; of the soul helpless in the grip of anger, *Prob.* 159). Although both options have merit, in this context the author of Hebrews appears to shift the metaphor to an athletic competition. God's word, like a wrestler who grips his opponent in a neckhold, lays the community prostrate before the divine referee. The force of verse 13 asserts that all of creation, everything, is disrobed. And as if nakedness is not enough, the resultative state is one of discomfort before God, the one to whom the community must give an account.

parts. Yet the bottom line of this entire warning may be simply stated in this manner: Believers are to fear lest they fail one of two things: (1) entrance into God's "heavenly place of rest," thereby forfeiting the opportunity to take part in the "Sabbath rest-celebration" of worship (Osborne); or (2) merely the loss of reward, thereby forfeiting the opportunity to take part in the Sabbath rest-celebration of worship (Gleason). You will need to evaluate these two options as well as the responses of Fanning and Cockerill.

Hebrews 10:19–39

Equally long and as equally complex is the warning passage in Hebrews 10:19–39. Chapter 10 has two major units of thought: verses 1–18 and verses 19–39. In the first unit (vv. 1–18), the author points out the ineffectiveness of the Jewish sacrificial system in the Old Testament. He addresses the law (10:1–4; cf. 5:1–5) and then quickly points out the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice (10:5–10), priesthood (vv. 11–14), and covenant (vv. 15–18).

The second unit of thought (10:19–39) introduces the fourth warning passage. Admittedly, this warning passage may be limited to verses 26–31. Yet, the warning is bracketed by two appeals. Hebrews 10:19–25 is an appeal for believers to worship God, while Hebrews 10:32–39 is an appeal for believers to persevere. Sandwiched between these two appeals is the explicit warning for believers to maintain their relationship with God (v. 19; cf. v. 35), knowing that God judges willful disobedience harshly (vv. 26–31). Thus Hebrews 10:19–39 begins and ends with statements to bolster confidence, but between these statements is a direct and harsh warning that provokes fear.

Hebrews 10:19–25

In Hebrews 10:19–25,⁴⁵ the author briefly revisits what it is Jesus has done and then pointedly presents three expectations for believers' worship.

¹⁹Therefore (οὖν), my brothers and sisters (ἀδελφοί), since we have (ἔχουτες) confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰that he opened for us by the new and living way through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹and since we have (. . . ἔχουτες) a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us approach (προσερχώμεθα) with a true heart in full assurance of faith, because we have had our hearts sprinkled clean (ῥεραντισμένοι) from an evil conscience and because our bodies are washed (λελουσμένοι) with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast (κατέχωμεν) *unwaveringly* to the confession of our hope, for the one who has promised *is* faithful. ²⁴And let us *give thought to how* (κατανοῶμεν) to spur one another on to love and good works, ²⁵by not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but by encouraging one another, and all the more because you see the Day approaching.

This section is reminiscent of what the author introduced in Hebrews 6:19–20 and later developed in 9:11–12, 24–28, for the writer once again underscores the fact that Jesus makes

45. Grammatically, verses 19–25 form an elegantly designed and a well-proportioned unit referred to as a period (cf. Luke 1:1–4; BDF § 464). Similar stylistic elegance exists elsewhere in Hebrews (1:1–4; 2:2–4; 3:12–15; 4:12–13; 5:1–3, 7–10).

it possible for believers to enter with confidence (παρρησία)⁴⁶ into God's presence, that is, into the heavenly sanctum where God resides (10:19–20). He then states that Jesus is the Great High Priest ruling over God's people (10:21; cf. 3:6). Recalling Hebrews 4, the author again emphasizes the "open" access to God.⁴⁷ Thus, because of Jesus' self-sacrifice, believers have free access to God, and they have, through Jesus, a great high priest ruling over them (10:19–21a).

Based upon two restatements in Hebrews 10:19–21a, the author gives three exhortations: (1) seize the opportunity to corporately worship God (προσερχώμεθα, 10:22; cf. 4:14–16),

46. The term *παρρησία* occurs four times in Hebrews (3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35). With few exceptions, most translations render *παρρησία* as "confidence." Yet its meaning varies in Hebrews. For instance, in 3:6 the context suggests a *conviction*, a *resolve*, or a *determination* that "takes possession of" or "holds firmly to" one's status as members of God's house ("we are of his house"). The house (perhaps kingdom, 1:8–9) is ruled over by the divine royal Son (3:6a; 10:21; cf. 1 Macc. 13:42), whose function is that of king- (1:5–13) priest (3:1). Thus "hold firmly to our confidence" might also be rendered as "hold firmly to your *resolve* about the Christ" (Gareth Lee Cockerill, *Hebrews: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* [Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 1999], 92), or paraphrased as "Do not give up your citizen's rights" (Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 211). Here in Hebrews 10:19, however, *παρρησία* has been translated "since we have confidence" (RSV, NASB, NRSV, NIV, NET), "having . . . boldness to enter" (KJV), "and so we can boldly enter" (NLT). These renderings appear to echo Hebrews 4:16, where the author calls for *boldness* to enter God's presence; in 10:19 that quality is assumed. Nevertheless, the author warns the readers in 10:35 "do not throw away your confidence" or "do not throw away your *resolve*," which in turn recalls his concern for these believers in Hebrews 3:6.

47. Jesus "opened" (ἐγκαίμισεν) the way to God for us. The verb "open" (ἐγκαίμω) was first used in Hebrews 9:18, where animal sacrifice put into effect the first covenant and thereby granted people access to God via the earthly sanctuary. In Hebrews 10:20, the term refers to one's access to the "heavenly sanctuary" by the blood of Jesus, which put into effect God's new covenant (10:1–18). Although sometimes translated as "consecrated" (KJV), the English renderings "inaugurated" (NASB, NET) or "opened" (RSV, NIV, NRSV, ESV, NLT) are two preferable translations. Thus Jesus has opened for God's community of believers a *new way* into God's presence (6:20; 9:24–28), which in turn makes for a much more heightened and more intimate relationship with God (4:16; 10:19, 22).

(2) hold fast to the confession of faith (κατέχωμεν, 10:23),⁴⁸ and (3) pay attention to one another's situations and personal needs (κατανοῶμεν, vv. 24–25). Why? Because (ἔχοντες; cf. 10:19) Jesus has placed into effect a new way to enter God's presence and has a presiding/ruling influence as King-Priest (cf. 1:1–14 with 5:5–6; 6:20–7:1; 7:11–28). Believers are therefore invited to worship God.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, in Hebrews 10:26–31 the author provides a warning, with vivid and emotive language, for believers who might spurn the sacrifice of Jesus.

Hebrews 10:26–31

Historically, Hebrews 10:26–31 has raised a great deal of consternation for biblical theologians, and rightfully so, because the author declares that the effects of Jesus' sacrifice do not extend to persistently willful sinners.

²⁶For (γάρ) if we persist in willful sin (ἀμαρτανόντων), after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,
²⁷but (δέ) *there is* only a fearful prospect of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries (or “*enemies of God*”).²⁸ Anyone who

48. The verb κατέχω appears in Hebrews three times (3:6, 14; 10:23). When used in the context of received teachings, as it does here, the verb takes on a technical sense, namely, remember what you have been taught. Philo bemoans wicked people who thirst for human knowledge but are undiscerning and need teachers to indoctrinate them so that they can “hold fast” what they are taught (*Fug.* 199–200). Paul, on the other hand, commends believers when he says, “you hold firmly the traditions” of the faith and later confirms their salvation “if they hold firmly to the message” (1 Cor. 11:2; 15:1–2). Here in Hebrews the community is expected to *retain* or *keep in their memory* what they had been taught about the Son, namely, their “confidence” (παρρησία).

49. James Kurianal, *Jesus Our High Priest: Ps. 110,4 As the Substructure of Heb. 5, 1–7:28*, EUS (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

violated the law of Moses died without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses.”²⁹ How much worse (πρόσω . . . χείρονος) punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God and by those who have profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and by those who outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For (γάρ) we know (οἶδαμεν) the one who said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” And *he said* again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹It is terrifying (φοβερόν) to fall into the hands of the living God.

The exhortation to worship God in 10:19–25 is foundational for the author’s present warning to fear in verses 26–27. Corporate worship is important because to neglect worship gatherings leads to either (1) contemptuous behavior or (2) a deliberate rejection of God and his message given or spoken through the Son. Obviously the author’s concern is disobedience. He points out that the effects of Jesus’ sacrifice do not extend to believers who sin persistently or willfully (ἐκουσίως . . . ἀμαρτανόντων).⁵⁰ Such people will face the “fearful”

50. The term “willfully” (ἐκουσίως) occurs twice in the NT (Heb. 10:26; 1 Peter 5:2). It refers to doing something without compulsion—intentionally or deliberately (BAGD, 243c; BDAG, 307b). The desire appears to originate within the person and is *voluntary* (ἐκούσιος, noun; Philo, *Decal.* 142; cf. idem, *Spec.* 4.157; and idem, *Praem.* 54). On the one hand, people of their own volition employ skills to build the tabernacle (Exod. 36:2), offer a sacrifice (Ps. 54:6 MT; 53:8 LXX), endure suffering (4 Macc. 5:23), exercise church leadership (1 Peter 5:2; cf. the noun form in Philem. 14), and submit to a ruler (Jos., *Ant.* 12.3.3 § 133). On the other hand, a high priest intentionally defiles himself (2 Macc. 14:3), a couple has premarital sex (Jos., *Ant.* 4.7.23 § 251), people withhold service from God (Jos., *J.W.* 2.16.4 § 394), a person speaks falsehoods (noun: Jos., *Ag. Ap.* 1.1 § 3), and people commit murder (Jos., *Ant.* 7.8.4 § 185; Philo, *Det.* 26 § 97; even suicide: Jos., *J.W.* 4.7.5 § 435). The adverb is also used to speak of a host of people in Noah’s generation who willfully and with premeditation competed for

(Φοβερός)⁵¹ prospect of God's judgment (Heb. 10:26–27; cf. Num. 15:30–36). Once again, an appeal is made to the annals of Jewish history (Heb. 10:28; cf. 3:7–4:13), and a lesser-to-greater argument is given. The author contends that believers living in this present era who trample over God's present mediator, who profane God's new covenant, and who arrogantly insult God's Spirit will suffer a worse punishment (10:29) than that suffered by the people of Kadesh-Barnea because (γάρ) God avenges sin and judges people (10:30).

But how, exactly, are we to understand this “willful sin”? Is it an allusion to high-handed sin in the Old Testament, as

who could be the most sinful (Philo, *Abr.* 40). In Hebrews 10:26, the author is concerned about premeditated sin. “If we go on sinning *willfully*” (NASB, cf. KJV), or “if we *willfully* persist in sin” (NRSV), or “if we *deliberately* keep on sinning” (NIV, NET), or “if we *deliberately* continue to sin” (NLT), no sacrifice remains for us. We are left to ask, What exactly is this willful sin? Is it sin in general, or is it to be limited to apostasy?

51. This adjective, “fearful” (Φοβερός) occurs only in Hebrews (10:27, 31; 12:21). Although more frequently translated “fearful” (KJV, RSV, NIV, NRSV, ESV, NET), it is also translated “terrifying” (NASB; Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 47b:273; Koester, *Hebrews*, 36:452) or “terrible” (NLT) for justifiable reasons. The term most frequently occurs in Josephus to speak of a person's attitude toward someone in power. Sometimes that person is a political figure (Herod: *Ant.* 14.11.5 § 286; *J.W.* 1.32.3 § 631; Antipater: *Ant.* 17.2.4 § 33; Agrippa: *Ant.* 19.8.2 § 344; cf. Philo, *Mut.* 173). In a similar vein, the LXX uses the term to speak of fearing Xerxes (Add Esth 15:5–6) and even God (Pss. 46:3 [47:2 MT]; 95:4 [96:4 MT]; Sir 1:8; cf. Philo, *Her.* 23–24). At other times in Josephus that person or group of people has acquired military power (Judas: *Ant.* 17.10.5 § 272; Simon: *J.W.* 4.9.4, 10 §§ 510, 558; the Jewish mercenaries in Egypt: *Ant.* 12.2.5 § 45). Here in Hebrews 10:27 it is not a person to be feared but rather the prospect of judgment. Similar usage occurs in other literature. For instance, there is the fearful prospect of punishment for neglecting one's duty as a Roman soldier (Jos., *J.W.* 3.4.7 § 103; cf. Acts 12:1–4, 18–19) and of “fearful and woeful things to come” to one's soul for living in an unethical manner (Pl *Phlb* 32c; cf. Philo *Det.* 140; idem, *Gig.* 47). Here in Hebrews the author uses the adjective to issue a severe warning that has as its basis the Jewish practice of sacrifice (10:26–31). Whereas the appropriate response to Jesus' sacrifice is set forth in verses 19–25, in verses 26–31, the author warns against an inappropriate response (i.e., deliberately sinning). A believer's attitude toward being judged for persistent and willful sin should be one of fright, or terror (BAGD, 862b; BDAG, 1060d).

suggested in chapter 1 by Osborne? What is “high-handed sin” in the New Testament? Is it when a believer rejects the Son, profanes the new covenant, and insults the Spirit, and is thereby condemned to eternal damnation? Is this “high-handed sin” in the New Testament what the author means when he speaks of apostasy? If so, Osborne rightly recognizes in his discussion that “corporate fellowship is a deterrent to apostasy.”

Or is it possible that there are degrees of apostasy, as Gleason suggests in chapter 4? Perhaps the author is not speaking of absolute apostasy here but merely of a refusal to press on to maturity, which represents a general state of spiritual retrogression. However we might define “willful sin,” the point appears to be simply this: Believers need each other in order to prevent it. But is “willful sin” to be limited to apostasy? Or does it extend to all forms of contemptuous behavior? How will you decide after reading and weighing the biblical evidence presented in the subsequent chapters? Regardless of our thoughts at this time about “willful sin,” the repeated warning is based upon the fact that God avenges willful sin. He judges it, and he therefore is to be feared (Heb. 10:30–31). Thus the provocation of believers to fear occurs because God judges the distrustful and the disobedient. Yet Hebrews 10:32–39, which follows this harsh warning, has an entirely different tone.

Hebrews 10:32–39

In contrast (δέ) to the expressed concern in 10:26–31, the author interrupts his harsh and somewhat unsettling warning for the moment with an appeal to remember the past in what appears to be an effort to bolster the confidence of his readers.

³²But (δέ) recall (ἀναμνησθε) those earlier days after you had been enlightened, you endured

a great or harsh contest (θλίψεσις) with sufferings, ³³sometimes by being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes by being partners (κοιῳνοί) with those so treated. ³⁴For (γάρ) you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, because you knew, you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting. ³⁵Therefore (οὖν) do not abandon (μὴ ἀποβάλητε) your confidence, because (ἥτις) it has a stupendous (μεγάλην) reward. ³⁶For (γάρ) you need endurance, so that (ἵνα) you might do God's will, *and so that you might* receive the promise. ³⁷For (γάρ) yet "in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay; ³⁸and my righteous one will live by faith. My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back." ³⁹But (δέ) we are not among those who shrink back to *eternal* destruction, but *we are among those* of faith to preserve life (εἰς περιποίησιν ψυχῆς).

An appeal is made immediately to reflect upon past successes, after these believers "had been enlightened" (perhaps a reference to "receiving the knowledge of the truth" in 10:26; cf. 6:4). The author expects believers to recall "those earlier days" (10:32a), in which they endured a "harsh contest" (ἄθλησιν) with suffering, at times with "public humiliation" (θεατρίζω; vv. 32b–33a).⁵² At other times they were

52. The word used to convey public humiliation is θεατρίζω (BAGD, 353c; BDAG, 446a). This extremely rare word never occurs in the Septuagint, only once in the NT (Heb. 10:33), and only once in an inscription from the time of Trajan (ca. 102 to 114 C.E.). A prefixed form of the verb occurs in a second-century work

“partners” (κοινωνοί)⁵³ with those who experienced public abuse (vv. 33b–34). Whether “those earlier days” are in the remote or recent past is unclear. Nevertheless the reason (γάρ) for recalling such difficulties is because the author wants to remind them that they made such personal sacrifices because they expected an eternal reward (10:34b).

The passage concludes (οὖν) with an exhortation: Do not abandon your resolve to trust and obey the message (v. 35a). The motivation to maintain this resolve is threefold: (1) because (ἵτις) it brings a “stupendous reward” (μισθαποδοσίαν; v.

of history to speak of the Carthaginians “giving a spectacular exhibition” of their enemy’s timidity (Plb *Hist* 3.91.10; cf. 5.15.2; 11.8.7). The noun form “theaters” (θέατρον), however, typically serves to describe the place where Diaspora and Palestinian Jews were made a public spectacle. It was “in the middle of the theater” (or “amphitheater”) that Flaccus, Rome’s appointed governor of Alexandria and Egypt (ca. 32 C.E.), tortured Jews with fire and sword (Philo, *Flacc.* 84–85; cf. Jos., *Ag. Ap.* 1.8 § 43). A Roman historian describes Nero’s public humiliation of Christians, who were either tortured or employed as torches to light the circus by night in 63 C.E. (Tacitus, *Annales* 15.44; *TDNT*, 3:42–43; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 298). In Hebrews 10:33 the verb is translated “[you] were made a gazingstock” (KJV), “by being made a public spectacle” (NASB), “being publicly exposed” (RSV, NRSV), “you were publicly exposed” (NIV, NET; similarly NLT). Although the community fell short of suffering martyrdom, the author points to the community’s success in enduring suffering by their exposure to public humiliation (cf. 1 Cor. 4:9).

53. This noun, “partner” (κοινωνος), occurs ten times in the NT (Matt. 23:30; Luke 5:10; 1 Cor. 10:18, 20; 2 Cor. 1:7; 8:23; Philem. 17; Heb. 10:33; 1 Peter 5:1; 2 Peter 1:4), yet the term is translated various ways: “partners” (RSV, NRSV, ESV), “sharers” (NASB), and “companions” (KJV). Although similar in meaning to “partnership” (μέτοχος; 1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8), κοινωνος does not share the same technical and moral sense of meaning in Hebrews. (See footnote 33). The emphasis of κοινωνος in Hebrews 10:33 points to one person sharing with another person’s experience, namely, that of persecution. The NIV captures this sense with “you stood side by side with those who were so treated” or as the NET translates it “at other times you came to share with others who were treated in that way.” What appears to be difficult to determine is whether believers shared in the same sort of persecution (as of a martyr who shares a bloody death *with* Christ: BAGD, 4539d lb; BDAG, 553d lb) or whether they came to one another’s aid during another’s persecution as it is understood in the NLT: “sometimes *you helped* others who were suffering the same things.” Regardless of which is the best rendering, the point is simply this: they shared together in a common and difficult experience.

35b),⁵⁴ (2) for (γάρ) believers need to build endurance in order to receive the reward (v. 36), and (3) for (γάρ) Jesus is coming soon (v. 37). In contrast (ἀλλά) to those who “shrink back” and perish (ἀπώλεια), believers who live by faith will “preserve” (περιποίησις) their lives (ψυχῆ, v. 39).⁵⁵ Thus Hebrews 10:32–39 moves from a positive recollection about the community’s ability to endure past sufferings to an appeal: continue to endure or persevere in your faith together as a community.

This long warning passage in Hebrews 10:19–39 with its numerous interpretive issues might be summarized in this manner: Believers are called to corporate worship of God for numerous reasons. Yet, ultimately, the appeals for corporate worship appear to be given to help believers maintain their relationship with God (v. 19; cf. v. 35), knowing that God judges willful disobedience harshly (vv. 26–31).

Conclusion

Hebrews 3:7–4:13 and 10:19–39 share a similar explicit warning about disobedience. Clearly the call is for believers

54. The term μισθαποδοσία is a rare NT term that occurs three times in Hebrews (2:2; 10:35; 11:26; BAGD, 523a, BDAG, 653a). Unlike in 2:2 where μισθαποδοσία serves to motivate the community to heed his warning in 2:3, here “reward” has a positive motivation (cf. Isa. 40:10; 62:11; Wis 5:15; Sir 2:8; 11:22).

55. The noun “perish” or “destruction” (ἀπώλεια) appears eighteen times in the NT but only once in Hebrews. Unique to the NT is its reference to an everlasting state of torment for ungodly people (2 Peter 3:7; cf. Matt. 7:13) and for the Beast and people whose names are not written in the Book of Life (Rev. 17:8, 11). It also speaks of people who attempt to thwart God’s program (Judas, John 17:12; Antichrist, 2 Thess. 2:3) and distort God’s message (2 Peter 2:3; 3:16). It is used specifically of those who oppose the church at Philippi. Paul says they are doomed to destruction (Phil. 1:28 and 3:19, cf. Herbert W. Bateman, “Were the Opponents at Philippi Necessarily Jewish,” *BSac* 155 [January–March 1998]: 39–62). Here in Hebrews 10:39, the author encourages believers by noting that those who continue to persevere in their trust in God’s deliverance will not perish or experience an everlasting state of torment and death like those people who opposed God and his program. See also *TDNT*, 1:394–96.

not to disobey God, or to state it positively, it is a call to trust and obey God (3:18–19; 4:11; 10:19–20, 26, 39). The emotive force used to urge believers to trust and obey God is the explicit appeal to fear, namely, fear of being denied the opportunity to secure opportunities associated with God’s “heavenly place of rest” (4:1) as well as fear of God’s judgment (4:1, 7–8, 11–13; 10:27). As in Hebrews 2 and 12, the mediation of Moses during the previous era (3:16; 4:2a; 10:28) is contrasted with God’s most recent mediator of this present era, the Son (4:2b; 10:29). Yet the lesser-to-greater arguments are quite a bit more gripping. Serving as the author’s Jewish historical precedent, the Sinai wilderness community and particularly the events at Kadesh-Barnea (3:16–19; 4:11; 10:26–28) are used to remind believers of the severe physical punishment that the previous generation suffered for their disobedience. In fact, their punishment is put forward as an incentive to trust and obey God, because God’s future punishment, however we define it, will be far more severe (4:1, 12–13; 10:29).

	Hebrews 3:7–4:13	Hebrews 10:19–39
Exhortation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not rebel (3:8, 15; 4:17) • Be watchful of unbelieving hearts (3:12) • Encourage one another (3:13) • Let us fear failure to enter God’s rest (4:1a) • Be diligent to enter God’s rest (4:11a) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach God with confidence (10:22) • Maintain confession of faith (10:23) • Encourage one another (10:24) • Remember former days (10:32) • Do not throw away your confidence with its reward (10:35)

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	Hebrews 3:7–4:13	Hebrews 10:19–39
Concern (i.e., sin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a concern about a sinful and unbelieving heart (3:12a) • There is a concern about turning away from God (3:12) • There is a concern about becoming hardened by sin’s deception (3:13) • There is a concern about disobedience (3:16, 18; 4:6, 11b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a concern about deliberate sin (10:26) • There is a concern about becoming an enemy of God (10:27) • There is a concern about rejecting the sacrifice of Jesus (10:28) • There is a concern about trampling the Son under foot (10:29) • There is a concern about treating the Spirit with contempt (10:29) • There is a concern about throwing away their confidence (10:35)
Jewish historical precedent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The distrust and disobedience of the wilderness community at Kadesh-Barnea (3:16–18; 4:2b, 6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allusion to the disobedience of the wilderness community at Kadesh-Barnea (10:26–28) • Disobedience to the old covenant law of Moses (10:27–28)
Lesser-to-greater mediator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses (lesser: 3:16; 4:2b; cf. 3:1–6) • The Son (greater: 4:2a) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covenant mediated through Moses (lesser: 10:28; cf. 9:1–10) • New covenant mediated through the Son (greater: 10:29; cf. 8:6–13; 9:15–28)

	Hebrews 3:7–4:13	Hebrews 10:19–39
Lesser-to-greater dire consequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whereas the disobedient are denied entrance into Canaan and condemned to die in the desert (3:17–18), the disobedient in Hebrews are by God’s judgment denied opportunities to experience God in his heavenly place of rest (4:1, 12–13) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whereas there was a sacrifice in the OT, in Hebrews (10:26) there is no more sacrifice Whereas the disobedient suffered physical death under the law (10:28), the disobedient in Hebrews will suffer greater punishment before a vengeful God (10:27, 29, 30–31)
Desirable consequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entrance into God’s place of rest (4:10–11) Participate in God’s Sabbath rest-celebration (4:9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive the great reward (10:35) Build endurance (10:36) Be watchful of the Son’s return (10:37) Live by faith (10:38–39)
OT citations used as a testimony or witness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warning about God’s judgment: Psalms 95:7b–8, 11; vv. 7b–8 (twice), v. 11 (twice) Quote about God’s rest: Genesis 2:2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allusion to God’s judgment: Zephaniah 1:18; Deuteronomy 17:6 Quote about God’s judgment: Deuteronomy 32:35–36

A Harsh Warning (Heb. 5:11–6:12)

Unlike the previous four warnings, this warning passage prepares believers for further teaching about the Son. But as with previous warning passages, where to begin and end the warning seems problematic. Let me once again suggest that though many may limit this third warning passage to Hebrews 6:4–8, it too appears to be sandwiched between two other closely connected units of thought: Hebrews 5:11–6:3 and 6:9–12. The warning begins with a call for the readers to be learners (5:11–6:3), proceeds with a harsh reality for those who reject God’s promises (6:4–8), but ends with a call to persevere (6:9–12). Unlike the previous four warning passages, however, this warning passage makes no *explicit* appeal to Jewish history, yet there is the expectation to “hear” or “listen” to God (2:1–4; 12:25–29), as well as the explicit and emotive call to not disobey God (3:7–4:13; 10:19–39). Nevertheless, it is apparent that Israel’s past failures hover over this passage.

Hebrews 5:11–6:3

Hebrews 5:11–6:3 provides insight into why some difficulty surrounded the teaching of more advanced truths about the Son as King-Priest. The passage begins with a description of the recipients of the letter, followed by an explicit exhortation.

¹¹Concerning whom (the Son) *we have* much to say, and *it is* hard/difficult to explain, because (ἐπεὶ) you have become dull of hearing. ¹²For (καί γάρ) though you ought to be teachers *by* this time (τὸν χρόνον), you need someone to teach you the beginning elements of God’s message and you have come to need milk and not

solid food. ¹³For (γὰρ) everyone who lives *only* on milk is not accustomed to teaching (λόγου) about righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴But (δέ) solid food is for the mature who, because of practice (διὰ τὴν ἔξιν), have trained their senses, to discern good and evil. ^{6:1}Therefore (διό) let us press on to maturity, by leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, not by laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. ³And this we will do, if God permits.

Transitioning from Hebrews 4:14–5:10,⁵⁶ Hebrews 5:11–12 introduces a very unbecoming description of the original recipients. They are lazy (lit. “dull of hearing”). Despite the author’s desire to address the topic about the Son’s typological relationship with Melchizedek as King-Priest, he appears to feel at a disadvantage for the simple reason (ἐπεὶ) that the readers are “sluggish” (νωθρός),⁵⁷ or, more pointedly, they are negligent of their responsibility to study, to learn, and to teach

56. Just prior to this third warning, attention is given to the believer’s obligation to observe Jesus as High Priest (4:14–5:10). Based upon the fact that Jesus is a high priest who serves believers in heaven, believers are expected to cling to their convictions about Jesus as King-Priest and to approach God with a degree of security (4:14–16). Similarities between previous high priests and Jesus are addressed. On the one hand, previous high priests, who are very much like other men and women, are divinely chosen men from the line of Levi, appointed to represent God to humanity and to perform priestly duties for themselves as well as for others (5:1–5a). On the other hand, the exalted Jesus, who was also divinely appointed by God to be King-Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, has learned experientially what radical obedience entails and is fully equipped for high priestly service as God’s King-Priest (5:5b–10).

57. The adjective “sluggish” (νωθρός) occurs twice in the NT, both times in Hebrews (5:11; 6:12). In the Wisdom literature of the Septuagint, the term speaks of

the truth about the Son. The author's reason is supported (καὶ γάρ) by the simple fact that they themselves need a teacher. Thus teaching these readers about Jesus as King-Priest is going to be difficult.

Then by way of metaphor, two groups of people are described: those who are reluctant to move beyond the basic teachings about the Son are contrasted with those who are lifelong learners capable of discerning between good and bad teaching (5:13-14). On the one hand, these believers are charged with being reluctant to learn, "inexperienced" (ἄπειρος)⁵⁸ people, milk drinkers. They lack the skills to move beyond and apply the basics to everyday life situations. Thus the need to revisit

unskilled workers (Prov. 22:29), of workers who talk big but do little (Sir 4:29; Patrick W. Skehan, and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1987], 177), and of an unambitious person (Sir 11:12; Skehan, Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 239). Plutarch uses the term to speak of a person's effort in study: "In his studies Cato was *lazy* and slow to catch on" (*Cat. Min.* 1.6). Figurative expressions of the term speak to a person's intellectual ability. "This same man was *slow of thought*, timid in accomplishment, and incapable of facing danger head on" (Plb *Hist* 4.8.5). It also may be used to characterize (1) a donkey as "the dullest among living creatures" (Philo, *Post.* 161; idem, *Abr.* 266) or (2) a person as "dull minded" (Philo, *Sacr.* 32; idem, *Deus* 63). Philo argues that one of the two lines of thought that exists in the law addresses "the ways of thinking of the duller folk, of whom it is said 'the Lord God will chasten you, as if a man should chasten his son' (Deut. 8:5)" (Philo, *Somm.* 1.237). Here in Hebrews 5:11, the author charges his readers with having become and remaining (γεγόνατε) lackadaisical, slothful, negligent of their responsibility to study, to learn, and to teach Christian truth. It is not so much that they are dull-minded and incapable of learning; it is more that they have become dull-minded due to laziness or indifference and thereby neglect the truth (cf. 2:3; cf. *TLNT*, 2:552-54).

58. The noun ἄπειρος, translated "inexperienced" (NET), "not accustomed" (NASB), or "unskilled" (RSV, NRSV) occurs in the NT only here. It refers to one's lack of knowledge or acquaintance (with astrology: Philo, *Opif.* 171; with interpretation: Jos., *J.W.* 6.5.3 § 291; with places: *PGis* 1.68.17), lack of skill (in the arts and sciences: Philo, *Gig.* 2; in seamanship: Philo, *Deus* 129; in swimming: Philo, *Plant.* 144), or lack of experience or proficiency (of a beginner: Philo, *Agr.* 160; of a child with regard to life: Philo, *Ios.* 225, Jos., *Ant.* 7.14.1 § 336; of people with regard to conduct: Philo, *Prob.* 52). Due to the contrast between a child's (νήπιος) consumption of easy instruction ("milk") and an adult's (τέλειος) ability to digest

the basics about Jesus rather than struggling with the more advanced teaching about the Son as King-Priest is because the believers are reluctant learners (5:13). In contrast to the reluctant learners (δέ), the author describes another group of people. They are lifelong learners, meat eaters, capable of digesting teaching about the Son as King-Priest and able to discern between good and bad teaching (5:14).

Therefore (Διό) believers, according to the author of Hebrews, are expected to move from being reluctant learners to lifelong learners (6:1a). They need to advance in their understanding about Jesus. Lifelong learning occurs by addressing more advanced teaching about the Son as King-Priest. (Such learning is not limited to facts, however, but includes the idea of life experience.) Learning does not occur by rehashing the basics of the faith (6:1b-3). The point is simply this: Believers are not to rehash and wallow in the basics like reluctant learners, but rather they need to advance and press on to be lifelong learners about the Son as King-Priest. Thus there appears to be an intentional refusal here by the author to rehash basic issues of the faith. Eventually the author returns to teach about the Son as King-Priest, beginning in 7:1, but first he provides additional information (γάρ-6:4-8) concerning the importance for believers to broaden their knowledge base about Jesus.

Hebrews 6:4-8

Whereas Hebrews 5:11-6:3 reveals an unhealthy attitude that makes believers vulnerable, 6:4-8 warns that such an

more significant teachings (“solid food”) in verses 12-14, the translation “lack of experience” or “inexperience” captures the truest sense of ἀπειρος in verse 13. Thus the readers lack the skills to move beyond and apply the basics to everyday life situations, particularly as this concerns what is right, in contrast to spiritually mature adults who are able to discriminate between good and evil (v. 14).

attitude can lead to abandoning the only foundation for faith, which results in divine judgment.

⁴For (γάρ) it is impossible (ἀδύνατον) to renew *people* again to repentance, *namely*, those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have eaten the good word of God, and *have eaten* the powers of the age to come, ⁶and *yet* (emphasizing a fact as surprising or unexpected or showing temporal succession, “and then”) have fallen away, because they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and because they put him to open shame. ⁷For (γάρ) soil (γῆ) that has soaked up (πιοῦσα) the rain that often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled receives a blessing from God. ⁸But (δέ) if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and ends up being burned.

Obviously Hebrews 6:4–8 presents a harsh reality, yet it does so in both a positive and a negative manner. Positively, some believers appear to have been granted the promise and partnership of salvation and have experienced sharing in the Spirit’s gifts and God’s works (vv. 4–5). Negatively, these same believers “turn away” (παραπίπτω)⁵⁹ from God’s partnership,

59. The verb παραπίπτω (text: παραπεσόντας) is translated “have committed apostasy” (NET; cf. RSV), “have fallen away” (NASB, NRSV; cf. NIV, KJV, ESV), or “turn away” (NLT). It occurs only here in the NT. Παραπίπτω has the unmistakable literal sense of losing something. “Since your bond has been lost and cannot be found, I declare that it is null” (POxy 8.1133:12; 42.3015:24; cf. Jos., *Ant.* 19.5.2 § 285).

and thus no hope exists for them, in that it is “impossible” (ἀδύνατον)⁶⁰ to renew (ἀνακαινίζειν)⁶¹ them again to repentance” (v. 6). But what exactly does it mean that it is “impossible” (ἀδύνατον) for these believers to repent again?

On the one hand, Osborne argues in chapter 1 that to actively repudiate the Son, as described in Hebrews 6:4–6, is to commit “the unpardonable sin.” Those who are guilty of this sin will be prevented from ever wanting to come back. Indeed, God

Figuratively, the term may mean “to make a mistake” (Plb *Hist* 18.36.6), to fill a position that is “vacant” (*POxy* 40.2894:ii.14, iii.14), or to fail to follow through on a contractual agreement *with a person* (“if the terms of the contract ‘should be broken’ or it is in any other way rendered invalid . . .”; *POxy* 1.95:34) or *with God* (“if a country sins against me ‘by acting faithlessly’”; Ezek. 14:13; 22:4; cf. Exod. 19:1–20:21; Deut. 11:26–29; 28:58–68; CD, 1:3; 4Q266 2i:8; BAGD, 621b; BDAG, 770a; MM 488–89). Here in Hebrews 6:6, παραπίπτω speaks of people (whether the community or group of individuals within the larger community) who might turn away or break off their legally binding partnership with Christ (cf. 3:14). Thus after “having been enlightened” and having experienced with the believing community the “heavenly gift,” “the word of God,” and “the miracles of the coming age” an impending danger exists for all those who turn away—an impossible renewal to repentance (cf. FC, 28.51–56).

60. The adjective “impossible” (ἀδύνατος) is derived from a group of words, which always conveys the idea of power, strength, and capability (δύναμαι, δύναμις, etc.; cf. BAGD, 207–9, BDAG, 261–64). The negating “a” prefix (ἀδύνατος) signals the opposite idea: (1) *powerless* (of people: Bar 6:53–54; of idols: Ep Jer 6:27; of violence: 4 Macc. 11:26; of the Law: Rom. 8:3), (2) *weakness* or *helplessness* (of people: Joel 3:10; Bar 6:28; of the law: Rom. 8:3), and (3) *an impossibility* (to restore peace: 2 Macc. 14:10; to accomplish a task: 3 Macc. 4:18, Jos., *Ant.* 3.14.2 § 304; to provide a sacrifice: Jos., *Ant.* 3.9.3 § 230; for people but not God: Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 18:27; Jos., *Ant.* 1.11.2 § 198; Philo, *Mos.* 1.174–75; and to escape or hide from God: Jos., *Ant.* 5.1.26 § 109; Philo, *Leg.* 3.4; idem, *Det.* 155; cf. *TLNT*, 1:37 n. 7). In Hebrews, there are four different types of impossibilities. In 6:4 the author claims it is impossible to lead a person to repent after turning away from God. In 6:18, while speaking of God’s unchangeable bond of promise (vv. 13–18), in light of the overwhelming Jewish conviction that God cannot lie (1 John 1:10; 5:10; cf. 1 Clem 27.1–3; *TDNT*, 9:600–603), the author declares the absolute impossibility of God making a false assertion. In Hebrews 10:4, the author asserts the absolute impossibility of animal sacrifices taking away sin. Finally, 11:6 declares the absolute impossibility of pleasing God without faith. Like Enoch, pleasing God *begins* with believing that he exists and that he rewards those who live in light of that belief.
61. The verb “renew” (ἀνακαινίζειν text: ἀνακαινίξω) occurs in the NT only here. Extrabiblical sources sometimes use it in connection with the restoring or

will never convict that person again. In a similar way, Cockerill argues that the verbs in verses 4–6 picture a willful rejection of Christ and severance from Jesus. But he falls short of calling it an “unpardonable sin.” How, exactly, does Cockerill differ from Osborne?

On the other hand, Fanning and Gleason argue that God’s security is certain. Although Fanning provides a straightforward reading of Hebrews 6:4–6, his conclusions differ from Gleason. But moving beyond the differences within their respective traditions, how do the Reformed and Arminian interpretations differ? How are they similar? Where are you in this debate? How does your evaluation of the biblical evidence support your view?

However we understand this inability to repent, the reason is clearly stated: believers create a woeful experience for themselves when they “turn away” and in essence join with those who humiliated Jesus publicly during his crucifixion experience (6:6). The inability to repent appears to be illustrated with an agricultural excursus. Whereas the faithful thrive on God’s gifts, respond, and thereby are blessed (6:7), the apostate person does not respond to God and so is consigned to judgment (6:8). Thus it appears that reluctant learners who limit themselves to rehashing the basics of the faith are faced with the danger of “turning away” from the Son and ultimately

rebuilding of the temple (of Joash’s desire: Jos., *Ant.* 9.8.2 § 161, of Demetrius’s promise: Jos., *Ant.* 13.2.3 § 57, and of a future restoration: *T. Levi* 17:10; cf. *T. Benj.* 9:2). In the Septuagint, ἀνακαίνιζω speaks of God, who renews our youth (Ps. 102:5; 103:5 MT) and who will renew the ground (Ps. 103[104]:30). Lamentations issues a call to God for the nation of Israel to be restored: “Renew our days as of old” (5:21 NIV). Here in Hebrews, the author appears to warn unequivocally: Restoration does not exist for those who turn away from the divine King (Jesus the Christ; cf. 1:5–2:4). Restoration is “impossible.” A close parallel may exist in Philo: “To educate a disbeliever (ἀπιστοῦσις) is difficult or rather impossible (ἀδύνατον)” (*Praem.* 49).

opening themselves to the prospect of divine judgment (however we might define God's judgment here). Perhaps the point of Hebrews 6:4–8 may be stated in this manner: Believers who are reluctant learners are prone to abandon the only foundation there is for repentance and faith and thereby liable to face some sort of divine punishment. Hebrews 6:9–12, however, has an entirely different tone.

Hebrews 6:9–12

Despite his harsh warning in Hebrews 6:4–8, the author contrasts (δέ) the people of verses 4–8 with his readers in verses 9–12. The passage begins with a statement of the author's conviction and a basis for that conviction. This is followed by an intentionalized exhortation.

⁹But (δέ) in your case, dear friends (ἀγαπητοί), we are convinced (πεπεισμεθα) of better things *namely, things* relating to salvation though we speak in this way. ¹⁰For (γάρ) God *is* not unjust so as to forget your work and love which you have shown toward his name, in having ministered to the saints and in continuing to minister *to the saints*. ¹¹And we passionately want each one of you to exhibit the same eagerness for the fulfillment of your hope until the end ¹²so that (ἵνα) you will not be dull minded but (δέ) imitators of those who through faith and perseverance (μακροθυμίας) inherit the promises.

This motivational statement begins with the author clearly expressing his conviction, or a great deal of “confidence”

(v. 9),⁶² about his readers' salvation and his "passionate desire" (ἐπιθυμέω, v. 11)⁶³ that they press on with purpose—not as indifferent, lazy, or dull minded believers (νωθροί, v. 12a),⁶⁴ but as imitators of those who faithfully persevere and thereby inherit what God has promised (v. 12b). Furthermore, the community's work and expressions of love for each other provide an additional reason (γάρα) for the author's expressed conviction about their eternal destiny (vv. 9–10). Hebrews 6:9–12 serves as an extremely important passage of assurance for both Fanning and Gleason. Why? How does this passage support

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62. The phrase "dear friends, we are convinced . . . of better things" serves as a powerful expression of the author's certitude that the community will experience the "better things" of salvation (i.e., "the blessing of God," 6:7). Although "we are convinced . . . of better things" is translated numerous ways (KJV: 'persuaded'; NRSV, NIV, NLT: 'confident'; NASB, NET: 'convinced'; and ESV, RSV: 'we feel sure'; BAGD, 639d 4–640a; BDAG, 792a 2b), the author's rhetorical use of the plural "we" is an intense expression of his personal confidence in them. In addition, the use of the intimate "dear friends" (NIV, NET), or "beloved" (KJV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, ESV), a direct address used only here in Hebrews, also serves to reinforce the author's desire to encourage rather than discourage the community in their present spiritual condition.
63. The author's affection for the community continues with "our great desire" (NLT) or "we passionately want" (NET). Once again, the author's rhetorical use of the masculine plural "we" is an intense expression of his personal confidence in them. Although at times translated "we desire" (KJV, NASB, RSV, ESV) or "we want" (NIV, NRSV), such renderings minimize the author's earnest and reassuring desire for this group of "dear friends." In other contexts, this verb often communicates strong yearnings of sexual passions (Matt. 5:28; Rom. 13:9 and 4 Macc. 2:5, both cite Exod. 20:15, 17; Deut. 5:17, 21), of coveting things (Acts 20:33; Rom. 7:7; 1 Macc. 4:17; cf. 11QT^a 2:8 [Isa. 2:8]; 57:20–21), of cravings for nourishment (Deut. 14:26; 2 Kgdms 23:15; 1 Chron. 11:17; Luke 15:16; 16:21), or of aspiring for things of value (Isa. 26:9; Luke 22:15; 1 Tim. 3:1; Wis 6:11; Sir 1:26; 4Q372 f2:6). In Hebrews 6:11, the author's desire is an intense yearning, an urgent longing, a passionate wanting for every individual ("each of you"; cf. 3:12–13; 4:1, 11; 10:25; 12:15) to progress in faithfulness toward God and others by continuing on as each has been doing (v. 10).
64. This second occurrence of the adjective "sluggish" or "dull" (νωθρός; see 5:11 above) recalls the author's initial critique of the community in 5:11–14, which preceded his exhortation (6:1–3) and warning (6:4–8). In verses 9–12, however, the author expresses his confidence and desire that they continue on and inherit what God has promised.

arguments for eternal security? How does Osborne address this passage in light of verses 4–8?

Regardless of how we might answer some of the typical theological debates surrounding Hebrews 5:11–6:12, the unit as a whole appears to be an excursus to scold believers into advancing in their knowledge about Jesus. This well-known warning occurs in the midst of what appears to be the heart of the book of Hebrews, as the author will now focus more attention on the Son as King-Priest in the order of Melchizedek (5:1–10; 6:13–7:28 or perhaps to 8:2).

Conclusion

Obviously my intention for this contextual orientation has not been to draw any theological conclusions. Nor has it been to resolve the numerous issues surrounding these passages. Rather, it is to serve as a means to introduce you to the warning passages and to some of the issues that are discussed in the subsequent chapters of this book. Furthermore, it is not the intention of the contributors, necessarily, to represent every aspect of their respective theological systems. This will be particularly true of those representing the Reformed view. Nor is their intention to resolve all the tensions these warning passages raise for the systems of theology they represent. Rather, *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* seeks to expose existing tensions and provide various ways in which four scholars with differing theological grids interpret them in the literary and historical context of Hebrews.

As to my organization and presentation of the warnings, I must confess that the propensity of the author of Hebrews to organize his material through the use of the recognizable literary patterns of chiasmus evident throughout the smaller units

of thought in the book⁶⁵ interests me. Perhaps the author has arranged the warning passages in the form of a chiasmus to reinforce the idea that they are indeed “an organic whole” as suggested by McKnight.⁶⁶

- A Hebrews 2:1-4: “hear” (believe)
- B Hebrews 3:7-4:13: trust and obey (explicit concern about distrust and disobedience)
- C Hebrews 5:11-6:12: be lifelong learners
- B Hebrews 10:19-39: trust and obey (explicit concern about distrust and disobedience)
- A Hebrews 12:14-29: “listen” (believe)

Toying with the prospect that the warning passages may be a chiasmus for the book of Hebrews has served nicely to introduce *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*. Obviously, within my presentation, Hebrews 5:11-6:12 is the heart of the author’s concern.⁶⁷ Yet together the five warning passages are all emotive exhortations to believers to persevere because the Son is the one through whom God has spoken and the one through whom the Old Testament has been fulfilled. They call believers to believe (2:1-4; 12:14-29) rather than distrust and disobey (3:7-4:13; 10:19-39) what God has promised through the Son. Furthermore, believers are to grow in their understanding about the Son (5:11-6:12). In general, the warning passages of Hebrews reference the historical events and failure of the Sinai wilderness generation, as well as God’s

65. Victor Rhee, “Chiasm and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 12:1-29,” *WTJ* 63.2 (2001).

66. McKnight, “Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 21-59; Guthrie, *Structure of Hebrews*, 136; Buck, “Rhetorical Arrangement and Function of OT Citations.”

67. Compare George E. Rice, “The Chiastic Structure of the Central Section of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *AUSS* 19 (1981): 245.

punishment of that community as an example not to be repeated. The wilderness community serves as a reminder that God, in a previous era, punished those who distrusted and disobeyed him and his messengers. God has not changed. The warning passages reveal that God is consistent in dealing with the lack of belief and disobedience. The consequences, however, appear to be greater in this new era. As a result, these five warning passages not only challenge our theological systems, but, more importantly, they ought to challenge us in the way we are to live for and offer worship to God.