

Hebrews: God's Final Word: An Introductory Message (1:1–4)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (8/14/16)

A Foreword

1. The main objective of Hebrews

“Do not throw away your confidence [your unwavering trust in Him]. For you have need of endurance [consistent obedience, the evidence of your unwavering trust], so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. . . . (Heb. 10:35, 36).

The day has arrived when we are all going to find out who really trusts Jesus and who is willing to endure great opposition and persecution.

When the trials come, we need to remember that we belong to Jesus. He is able to deliver us from anything that the enemy may hurl against us. Remember the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace for refusing to worship the golden image. Remember Daniel in the den of lions for disregarding the king's prohibition. Remember the apostles in jail for preaching in Jesus' name. He is able to cool flames, tame beasts, or open locked doors.

2. The Song of Moses (Deut. 32) serves as background to the temptation to abandon Jesus when faced with suffering.

This song was given to Moses by God (31:19) to be a continual reminder to His people of their hearts' natural tendency. He knew that, when He brought them into the Promised Land, they would prosper, become independent, and forsake the Him and serve other gods (31:20ff). That was the inclination of their hearts even as they stood on the banks of the Jordan, ready to pass over. The song was to serve as a witness against them when their apostasy from God brought evils and troubles upon them.

It was these same people who were persecuting the believers in Hebrews. The book warns them against apostasy and encourages them in their search for a city whose builder and maker was God.

Now, let us turn our attention for a moment to the song that Moses taught to them (32:1ff). Moses plays a key role in the book of Hebrews, as we shall see. So, when we read Hebrews 1:1, we expect that Moses is one of the prophets by whom God spoke.

3. This song is foundational to our understanding of the whole biblical narrative as it relates to God's people. There are two prominent features to this self-revelation of Israel's God—who He is and what He wills. It is this foundation that one must have if he is to follow Jesus.

Hebrews is a book of warnings. The very first warning involves those who don't pay attention to the God who speaks.

4. God speaks.

“How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation [by refusing to hear; note verse 1: ‘we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard’] (Heb. 2:3)?

We cannot know God otherwise. He was about to declare that the nation of Israel was not His people. This is before they ever entered the Promised Land. God said it: *“They are no longer his children because they are blemished”* (v. 5). They were idolaters. They never got over that, a fact continually witnessed in their history.

Are you an idolater? John ends his first letter with a shocking warning: *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols”* (1 John 5:21). We may not construct golden calves, but we may

be tempted to reconstructed God in our own image. Do we want an easy Jesus? Do we see Jesus as one who loves and tolerates us in our sins and selfish ways? Do we get confused and angry when we don't get our way? "*Flee from idolatry,*" Paul seconds, addressing the Corinthian saints (1 Cor.10:14)

When He speaks, our business as believers is to simply listen, believe what we hear, and trust in Jesus implicitly, yielding completely, and obeying His will. "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus."

He says, "*Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth*" (v. 1). This is a call for witnesses. Both heavens and earth are called to give testimony because they are to serve as witnesses against Israel.

5. God speaks out of *who* He is.

"*See that you do not refuse him who is speaking*" (Heb. 12:23).

God is a God who speaks. He spoke to previous generations by the prophets. He is speaking today by His Son. Jesus is the Word of God—God's final Word in this end of the age. Listen to Him. Your soul depends on it. "*Hear Him.*"

I. The true nature of His doctrine or instruction

"*May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb*" (v. 2).

1. Two words are used to describe God's speaking: "teaching," and "instruction." They form a parallelism typical to Hebrew writing as aid to understanding and memorization.
2. The Torah is God's speaking out of His own person and character.

The law of God was never meant to be punitive and exacting, a source of legalistic rule keeping, but of life-giving instruction. It is to be as gentle and refreshing rain and dew upon the tender plant of our faith, not impossible edicts backed by harsh penalties and severe judgments.

To follow Jesus means just that. Jesus' is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the embodiment of what God is here speaking.

The warning of Hebrews is very clear: pay attention! Do you not know who it is that speaking to you? Pay attention. Your eternal destiny depends on it.

II. The content of His doctrine

"*For I will proclaim the name of the LORD*" (v. 3; comp. Ex. 33:19).

1. The proclamation—the *name* or *essence* of Yahweh declared
 - a. This is a call to *worship*. Yahweh announces or proclaims His character and attributes—His *name*; that name is worthy of our worship and devotion.
 - b. The hearer *must* respond by enthusiastically ascribing greatness to God.

The term, *name*, indicates the character of the speaker; who He is and what he does. This explains why God sometimes changes a person's name in Scripture, bringing the person's identity and character in line with each other.

Heralding His name is to be met with the enthusiastic affirmation.

The term, *ascribe*, means to put or place something on someone. For example, when the holiness of God is proclaimed, the hearer responds by affirming that what was pro-

claimed is true—that God is, indeed, holy. More importantly, that affirmation is to affect the hearer’s own life. In other words, to acknowledge that God is holy is to reflect one’s own willingness to submit to His holiness in fact and seek holiness for himself.

2. The characterization of Yahweh’s person

a. He is the *Rock*

Rock is what mountains are made of and serve as a synonym for a place of refuge.

The Hebrew believers to whom the book of Hebrews was written were reconsidering Jesus because the opposition was strong and because they were suffering greatly. What is worse, their enemies were the very people to whom they were now willing to capitulate. They were considering compromise for the sake of preservation.

What will we do when those among whom you live begin to pressure us into toning down our commitment to Jesus? Where will *we* take refuge?

Jesus is our Rock and sure defense (1 Cor. 10:4).

“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Psa. 18:2).

b. His work is *perfect* (unblemished) because He is a *“God of faithfulness and without iniquity”*

c. His ways are *justice* —all judgment has been committed to Jesus and He will judge righteous judgment. He is just and upright in all His works.

God never reacts.

III. The Reception of His Doctrine

1. How Israel responded to their great God

“But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation. Who is not safe in Him? . . . You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth” (vv. 15, 18).

“For their rock is not as our Rock; our enemies are by themselves. . . . Then he will say, ‘Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge’ (vv. 31, 37).

a. What they did

They dealt corruptly with God—marring His true worship with an animal-image to represent Him, violating the second commandment.

b. Why they did it

They were *blemished* because they were not His children. They had no love for God, being unregenerate, circumcised in flesh only, but not in heart. They lusted after the flesh, having no desire to walk in the Spirit. Thus, the Spirit warns, *“Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the day that Israel provoked God in the wilderness”* (Heb. 4:7, 8).

c. How they did it

They were a crooked and twisted generation, foolish and senseless people, not understanding that it was God who created them, made them and established them. They were His and He had full claim to them by virtue of their physical redemption from Egypt.

2. An ancient history lesson

a. The days of old

“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God” (v. 8).

The gods that Israel was tempted to worship were these spiritual entities—the sons of God to whom Yahweh assigned the governance of the rebellious nations He abandoned. These princes also failed in their task and will be judged for their failure. Why would Israel prefer them to their faithful covenant God? (See Psa. 82).

b. A glorious present reality

“But the Lord’s portion is his people” (v. 9).

Application

We owe everything to Jesus because He has redeemed us by His own life and blood.

“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:11–13).