

Prayer

Glorious and faithful God, who carries His people through every manner of trouble and distress, returning over and over again to rescue them when the troubles of this world afflict them; save Your people now. Save them from becoming so absorbed in the trials of the moment that they do not see the glories of Your future; Your Kingdom and Your Victory! Glory be to You, wonderful and faithful God!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: the Elderly in the Church

Pray in thanksgiving for the wonderful work done in your church by the older people you know within the church family. Praise God for them and pray for the whole fellowship of the church to rejoice in each other's gifts, abilities and service. Pray that throughout the church of God, older people would be encouraged to be active in appropriate evangelism and witness.

Meditation

Have you seen a vision?

Have you seen a moving image or scene, like Ezekiel -
Which captures more than can be expressed in words
But explains the deeper, powerful truths of God most High?

Have you seen 'the writing on the wall', like Daniel -
Which plainly speaks the Word of God in Judgement
And makes the future very plain to those who care to hear?

Have you seen a figure, a person in your mind, like Isaiah -
One who, like a suffering servant, shows truth and love in action;
Whose deeds powerfully show God's love for all His people?

Have you seen the future writ large in words, like Jeremiah -
The man who came to see that words on stone meant nothing;
But God could write His will on human hearts - and melt them?

Have you seen a vision?
Do not be mistaken, you may not think yourself a prophet,
But He still has something to say through you ...

Bible Study - Hebrews 2:1-4

¹ How important it is, therefore, that we should pay even greater attention to what we have heard so that we do not fall away from it. ² For if the message spoken by angels has proved to be true, and every sin or disobedience had a just penalty, ³ how is it possible to neglect such a great a salvation and escape? It was first received through the preaching of the Lord and confirmed to us by those who heard Him, ⁴ and God added to His testimony by signs and wonders, works of power, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, divided out according to His will.

Review

For those who read it, this is a truly wonderful passage of Scripture. It lifts the heart and enables the Christian reader to feel deeply connected to the life of Jesus and the work of God in salvation. Within the text there is a threefold testimony to the truth of what Jesus said and did; the testimony of angels (2:2), the testimony of people (2:3) and the testimony of God (2:4), and this testimony constantly calls people back to the essential truths of the Gospel of salvation. Clearly, Hebrews observes the truth of human nature which is that people tend to wander away from what they know, and calls on God's people to heed this profound threefold testimony. The call to hold on to the truth of the Gospel is not a restraint to prevent God's people from

exploring, using their minds or any faculty of their being to enjoy the world God has given, it is a reminder that we are only liberated into this freedom by the saving work of Jesus our Saviour. The Gospel is the indispensable heart of God's creative work within the human soul.

Here, this truth is explained firstly as being a 'message spoken by angels' which has 'proved to be true' (2:2). The writer uses the term 'angels' in the general sense of 'messenger', which is what the word means in Hebrew. With this in mind, all of the Old Testament is 'angelic' in nature. The great individuals, kings, prophets and priests acted as God's messengers and conveyed the truth of His Word before it was fulfilled in Christ Jesus. For this reason, we do not have to search through the Old and New Testaments in order to find words said by angels (such as those who spoke 'peace on earth' at Jesus' birth – Luke 2:14) to which Hebrews refers in this passage. The powerful saving work of God is fully testified to in the Old Testament, making clear the just consequences of sin, and of wandering away from God our maker.

The next great testimony to the saving work of God is the word 'preached' by 'the Lord' (2:3), which Hebrews is at pains to explain as properly checked out. The words used to tell us that what Jesus said have been accurately passed on to us by people who have 'confirmed' its truth; in other words, those who knew Jesus and were present with Him in this life verified what was passed around amongst people in the early church, and made sure that what was said was true (and by implication, threw out what was false). This is good news! The Gospel we have received is not simply a reflection of the opinions of those who wrote Gospels and letters, but the result of careful human scrutiny!

The last testimony to the Gospel is found within the powerful works of God which have accompanied it. The argument is simple. If God had raised Jesus from the dead and then done little else, it would be easy for cynics to say that He had now done what was needed, but left us to make the best of what Jesus has done for us. No. After the Resurrection, Jesus ascended to the Father and then gave the world His liberating and powerful Holy Spirit. He then continued to show Himself through on-going works of Pentecostal power which are the proof of His absolute commitment to Salvation, from the earliest days of the church to this.

The extraordinary nature of these three great testimonies; 'angelic', human and divine, is surely a sufficient reminder to us that we must value what we have received. The secret of life lies not in finding things new, but in discovering afresh the truth of what God has already done. There are no finer words than these to express this; 'how important it is, therefore, that we should pay even greater attention to what we have heard so that we do not fall away from it' (2:1).

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you think it is fair to describe the whole Old Testament as 'angelic' in nature as I have done in this study? If not, why not?
2. Why should human testimony count in a matter of salvation which is divine?
3. To what extent have the works of God's Spirit been evident from the days of the Early Church to this?

Discipleship

There is so much more to this passage than can be covered in such a brief Bible study! The Christian disciple will find in this passage many things to explore. In what ways do we fall away from the truths of salvation today? How do we hand on the great truths we have received? How does God show Himself in works of power in our midst, and are we helping or hindering this? Perhaps you will feel that one of these issues is worth exploring further yourself, through reading, praying and thinking it through.

Final Prayer

The majesty and the power of Your glory O Lord is beyond our comprehension. Yet You continually make Yourself available to us in surprising and helpful ways, showing us Your love and compassion. May we always be alert to Your presence and responsive to Your touch O Lord; AMEN.