

Chapter 2:1-4**"LEST WE DRIFT AWAY"**

As we are told at the beginning of our lesson, this week we will focus on the first of five warnings given to the reader in the book of Hebrews. Warnings are also known as "exhortations" or "admonishments".

What is the difference between an exhortation and an admonition?

To exhort means to urge or strongly suggest or advise; you might say it's an urgent appeal, but it can also be encouraging. Let's look at these examples in scripture:

Titus 2:6
2 Thessalonians 3:10-12

To admonish is to warn or caution someone, but it can also mean to notify them about, or correct them (in a gentle manner) of a fault. Here are some biblical examples:

Acts 27:9-10
Ephesians 6:1-4

Looking at these definitions and examples, we can see the power of the word of God to exhort and/or admonish, just as it also teaches, comforts and encourages us. Because God's word is also just, there can also be "rebukes" in the word that go beyond exhortations or admonishments and are of a far more serious nature. We can see an example of this in Matthew 18:15-17.

Verse 1: *"Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away."*

In the first four verses of Chapter 2, we're given a strong warning about the dangers of "drifting away" from the word of God. The believers of that time were no different than we are today. Many were still immature in their faith and many were still held captive by the lust of the world. In this first verse, we're warned about paying close attention and really listening to what we have heard. It is making reference, of course, to the importance of the message of the gospel. In using the term "drift away", we are reminded of the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:14, *"that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine ..."* The author knew that it was easy for believers to be deceived, especially new believers. The Hebrews had been transformed by the word of God. They had received the Lord Jesus; their sins had been forgiven; eternal life was theirs, and they had been freed from the religious rites that had held them captive in Judaism. But was it enough to keep them from wanting to go back to their traditions and old ways? The risk was there, and it's the same for us today? It's very tempting to accept compromise, for example, when we know in our hearts that something is wrong. It's so much easier to go along with the program of popular opinion and not make waves. Our faith needs to be nurtured on a daily basis, so that we can stand against those temptations when they come. That's the importance of being in God's word; that's what gives us assurance and makes us strong. And here's a promise for staying in the word: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death."* John 8:51

Vs. 2 and 3: *"For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, ..."*

The angels referred to here are the tens of thousands who were present when God gave Moses the ten commandments. In Deuteronomy 33:2, Moses describes the event: *"The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints; ..."* God, in all His glory and awesomeness, brought these angelic beings with Him to present His commandments and covenant to Moses. We cannot even imagine such splendor and majesty!

So, the author poses the question: if the believers who heard these commandments were justly punished in the time of Moses, how can we expect not to be punished today when we disobey God's word that was spoken by His very own Son? Even though we didn't personally hear it, it was confirmed by to us by those who did, and documented in the bibles we hold before us today. We are to guard our gift of salvation, which is eternal life, with everything and all that we are. Having eternal life means that our names are written in the Book of Life ... we will reign with Jesus Christ forever. It is the desired destiny of every believer, and it is to be cherished. Missing out on being with Jesus for eternity would be the worst punishment of all.

Verse 4: *"God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"*

We read throughout the New Testament of all the miracles performed by Jesus while He walked the earth. We know that these were done in fulfillment of the scriptures regarding the Messiah, just as it was prophesized in Chapter 61 of Isaiah. Jesus, Himself, proclaimed that He had come in fulfillment of the scriptures. Let's read this in Luke 4:16-21.

And then there were the signs and wonders performed by the apostles even after Jesus' death and resurrection. Here are two examples:

"Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints that dwelt in Lydda. There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.' Then he rose immediately. So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord." Acts 9:32-35

"Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds." 2 Corinthians 12:12

We also read what Jesus told the disciples in the Great Commission in Mark 16:15-18:

"Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover."

Some people may argue that we no longer witness signs and wonders, but is that really so? As believers, we would have to disagree. Borrowing a scripture from a little further into this book we're studying, we read in Chapter 13:8: *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."* This is one of the scriptures upon which we can build our faith and testify to the rest of the world ... OUR GOD CHANGES NOT!

"Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that he might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire." Deuteronomy 4:36