

Ponderings in Hebrews

The following is a Messianic Study on

Hebrews 6

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ברית חדשה

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Pondering Hebrews 6:4-8

Hebrews 6:4-8

- *“⁴ For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. ⁷ For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; ⁸ but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.”*

This is not a church debate about

These verses have been hotly debated in the ‘gentile’ churches since the days of Jean (John) Calvin (1509-1564) and Jacobus **Arminius** (1560 –1609). They were both significant theologians of the church, and while I have much to say about them, this is not the time.

Context, Context, Context....

Much of the debates would not have happened if the context of these verses in the chapter, and in the context of this book, were noted.

Who was the epistle addressed to? It was addressed to Messianic Jews; after all it is called HEBREWS! This is not a ‘general epistle’ to the predominantly gentile believers, as many of Paul’s letters were.

When was it written? It was written prior to the year 70 CE. This means the Temple in Jerusalem is still standing and the Messianic Jews would have had family and friends who were still worshipping there.

What was happening at the time? In John 9 we read that the Jewish leadership had decided to ostracise Jewish believers in the Messiahship of Jesus from Jewish life (the Synagogues). This meant exclusion from all Jewish life. Some who were weak in the faith turned their back on Messiah and went back to Temple worship. Before we condemn them harshly, note that the Jewish believers had been mocked (Acts 2:13), threatened (Acts 4:21), arrested (Acts 5:18), beaten (Acts 5:40) and some even killed (Acts 7:58). The recipients of this letter though had not yet shed blood (Hebrews 12:4), though they were being severely persecuted.

What was the effect of the persecution and the rabbinic ruling? The result was that some Messianic Jews started to waver as they wanted the persecution to stop, and longed to be part of the Jewish communities in peace.

What was the purpose of the letter? The author has demonstrated to the Jewish believers that:

1. Messiah Yeshua brought a better revelation (Hebrews 1:1-2).
2. And so He is greater than the Prophets (1:1-3)
3. That Messiah Yeshua is better than the angels (Hebrews 1:4-2:18).
4. That Messiah Yeshua is better than Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6)

5. That Messiah Yeshua is greater than Joshua (4:1-13)
6. That Messiah Yeshua's priesthood is better than Aaron's (Hebrews 4:14-7:28)
7. That Messiah Yeshua brings in a better Covenant than Moses (Hebrews 8:1-13)
8. He does this in a better Tabernacle (8:1-9:11)
9. That Messiah Yeshua has a superior blood offering (Hebrews 9:11-28)
10. That Messiah Yeshua brings a better sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-18)
11. And that Messiah Yeshua is the better hero of the faith than the saints mentioned (Hebrews 11:1-12:2)

In light of this sermon, this letter is asking how can they consider going back to live under the Levitical order.

Five Warnings

Therefore the author disperses five warnings:

1. The danger of drifting away (Hebrews 2).
2. The danger of not entering into rest (Hebrews 3-4).
3. The danger of not growing in maturity (Hebrews 5-6).
4. The danger of wilfully sinning (Hebrews 10).
5. The danger of being indifferent to the point of denial (Hebrews 12).

Note the progression in the warnings. Firstly they are drifting away, then not progressing but becoming indifferent to spiritual things, until they wilfully sin and finally they deny "*Yeshua the author and perfecter of our faith*".

Hebrew clarification: in the Tanach (the Older Testament) salvation was almost always, if not always, physical not spiritual. This too helps us understand that if these Messianic Jews went back to the Levitical sacrificial system they would be lost, i.e. lose their lives.

Gift of God Romans 11:29

A good principle to remember is that God does not contradict Himself, since the Holy Spirit is the inspiration of all scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). In Romans 11:29 it is written: "*for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*" In other words when God chooses someone and by His grace imparts gifts to him, He will not rescind either the gift or the calling.

The five spiritual experiences

With *all* this in mind let us consider the words of Hebrews 6:4-8. The recipients are true believers of five spiritual experiences.

The first experience: once enlightened

The Greek literally reads *once for all enlightened*, indicating that this was a one-off occurrence, that happened once they received the Light of Yeshua, i.e. when they first believed (2 Timothy 1:10; Ephesians 1:18; Hebrews 10:32).

[A good study which goes beyond my purposes today would be to note all the references where believers are called "children of light"¹ or "of the light"² and contrast this with those who are still in "darkness"³.]

¹ "Children of light" see: Ephesians 5:8; Colossians 1:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:5.

² In or of "the light" see: Matthew 5:14-15; Luke 16:8; John 3:20-21, 8:12, 12:36; Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:14; Colossians 1:12; 1 John 1:7, 2:9-10.

³ Those who are in or of "the darkness" see: 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 4:18, 5:8; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 John 1:6, 2:8-11.

The second spiritual experience: *tasted of the heavenly gift.*

The word *tasted* (Hebrews 2:9) shows Yeshua as tasting death, and He really did die, so too here the believers had the real experience of tasting the heavenly gift. What is the Heavenly gift? The Messiah invites us to drink His living water (John 4:10) and partake of Him as He is the bread that came from heaven (John 6:51-56).

The third spiritual experience: *partakers of the Holy Spirit.*

This is a true participation, they received the Holy Spirit and ministered in the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) who worked through them (Hebrews 2:4).

The fourth spiritual experience: *the good word of God.*

In Greek there are two words for Word, **Rhema and Logos**. Here the word is *rhema*. A “*rhema*” - word of the Lord is when the Holy Spirit quickens an utterance to a specific person for a specific situation. As it is the same Holy Spirit, it will be in line with the Logos. What is the *good word*? It is a word that makes the heart glad (Proverbs 12:25). In context here it may well refer to the Gospel message as a whole, and specifically the message of salvation.

The fifth spiritual experience: *the powers of the age to come.*

The *age to come* is a common Jewish designation for the Messianic – Millennial Kingdom, *the powers* refers to God’s supernatural power that transforms believers. Currently they and we can only have a foretaste of this; during the kingdom we will experience it fully. It is then that the believer will be fully *enlightened*, fully *partake* of the Lord Yeshua, the *Heavenly gift* and the *Holy Spirit*, and the *Good Word* will dwell in us fully. These are the powers of the age to come.

In light of all this, it is *impossible* (*verse 4*) to restore them for if they forsook Yeshua and returned to sacrifices in the Temple, it was like they were crucifying the Son of God all over again. Remember that the nation had rejected Yeshua (Matthew 12:22-32) and His sacrifice brought forth an Eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9), not a temporary atonement. Thus going back into the sacrificial systems would *put Him to an open shame*, it would deny the finished work of Yeshua for them on the cross. Note they cannot lose their salvation, but they could lose their physical life. In the Tanach (Older Testament) salvation was usually seen as a physical salvation not spiritual. As such the recipients of this letter were warned that by their actions they will choose the wrong side and lose their physical lives. In the Exodus we see that the children of Israel murmured ten times against God and even disbelieved at Kadesh – Barnea (Numbers 13). The physical punishment was that they could not enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:22), but we also read that God had forgiven their sins (Numbers 14:20).

In the context of the rejection of Yeshua, the warning of Hebrews 6 deals with the imminent threat of the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE). If they did choose to walk away, the believers would lose their lives if they chose the wrong side. As such they are urged over and over to press on to maturity.

In verses 7-8 the author gives the illustration, the dire consequences of *falling away*.

The believer is seen here as soil. Will we bring good vegetation and be blessed by God, or only thorns and thistles, which ends up being burned up (John 15:6) at the judgement seat of Messiah.

In light of all this, the author is therefore not talking about spiritual salvation, something that cannot be lost, since it is a gift of God. But they could lose their physical salvation, and the rewards that Yeshua will give as we will all stand before Him.

Friends in light of this may we too press on to maturity.

I hope this illuminates your understanding of this difficult passage

Blessings in Messiah Yeshua

Paul & Sue Cohen