

# The Book of Hebrews Study Guide

## Chapter 2

### Warning against spiritual drifting (vv. 1-4)

“For this reason” (v. 1) is a reference to the point made in chapter 1, in which the author demonstrated the superiority of Yeshua, the Son of God, over the angels. This phrase is also an indication that he wants to apply this initial conclusion before moving on to another point regarding the superiority of Yeshua. It is apparent that he is making this application because he is concerned for the spiritual health of his audience.

So we could restate verse one by saying, “Because Yeshua is superior, we need to pay attention to the message about Him, and resist drifting away from the faith.” The word (*pararreo*) translated as “drift” (KJV, slip) literally means “to flow by” or “to flow from.” It is used elsewhere in the context of water flowing away from something or someone (cf. Jn 7:38). That gives us a word picture of a boat drifting away from a dock. In the physical world the elements that go into a boat drifting away include:

- It was originally tied up.
- Something caused it to become untied.
- The local current takes it away.
- It happens very slowly.
- If you are paying attention, you can see it happening.
- If you are not paying attention, by the time you find out, it may be too late if there are rocks nearby.
- But it may be possible to send another boat to rescue it.
- If it is rescued, you have to determine what caused it to become untied in the first place, so that it doesn’t happen again.

So the writer is alerting the audience to pay attention to the way that they are firmly tied to Yeshua, so that they won’t drift away and be broken up on the rocks of life or have to be rescued. This is a concern for people who originally heard the gospel and received it. But if a significant event occurs in their life, especially a tragedy, they might break their bonds to what they believed. In the case of the recipients of this letter, a significant event was imminent or may have already begun with the first Jewish revolt against Rome, bringing great violence and persecution. If we bring this into our own context, then, we all would be wise to recognize the possibility of spiritual drifting if we experience something significant in a negative way. The same is true if we become aware of something tragic happening in the life of another person.

In verses 2-3, the author employs a rabbinic technique of reasoning, called *kal-ve-homer*, meaning “light and heavy” or “simple and complex.” It is used to make the point that if something is true in a simple, light situation, it will also be true in a more complex, heavy one. In this case, the light situation is the transgression and disobedience of “the word spoken through angels” leading to “a just recompense.” There is universal agreement by commentators that “the word spoken through angels” is a reference to the Torah, because Deuteronomy 33:2 indicates angels were present and

involved somehow in the transmission of the Torah, and Paul confirms that in Galatians 3:19, as well as Steven in Acts 7:53.

The consequences for transgressing the Torah were predominately manifested on this earth, including death. The Torah never provided a means of eternal salvation. That was always a matter of faith, as exemplified by Abraham. The Torah merely provided a standard for living a godly life that should be a reflection of your faith. Even the commandments that provided atonement for sin were only temporary and had to be repeated. It is true that over time, people became convinced that keeping the Torah was the basis for obtaining salvation. And both Paul in his epistles and the other Apostles under the leadership of James in Acts made it very clear that keeping the Law could never accomplish that. Salvation has always been a matter of faith alone.

So another way of stating the light situation then, is that there are earthly consequences of violating God's commandments in the Torah, including physical death. In contrast, the heavy situation is neglecting the superior message of salvation in the gospel because it will be even more severe on a spiritual/eternal level, which we know from the greater context of Scripture, is spiritual death. Both things are true, but one is heavier than the other. Spiritual death is a heavier matter than physical death because it extends into eternity.

Four characteristics of the gospel are cited in verses 3-4 that makes it superior to the Torah:

- **Spoken by the Lord (Yeshua).** Moses transmitted the word (a secondary source); Yeshua *is* the Word (a primary source). Unlike the Law that dealt only with actions, Yeshua addressed the underlying thoughts of people that lead to outward behavior.
- **Confirmed by those who heard it (His disciples).** Having more eye-witnesses gives the Gospel multiple layers of meaning as each one brings a unique perspective, while never straying from the essentials of God's inspiration.
- **Verified by signs and wonders and miracles.** The narrative of the life of Moses included signs, wonders and miracles. These included the confrontation with Pharaoh and his magicians, the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the provision of manna. But once the people were settled in the Promised Land and were called to live under the Torah, those things largely came to an end. But, as the book of Acts describes, the Apostles continued doing signs and wonders and miracles after Yeshua was resurrected. And God is still doing miracles today.
- **Enhanced by the granting of spiritual gifts.** While the Holy Spirit was present in Old Testament times, He did not begin imparting spiritual gifts until after the Gospel message of salvation through faith in Yeshua had been given.

Each of these ways reinforces the position of the author that Judaism with the Messiah is superior to Judaism without the Messiah. And for that reason, he is warning his audience not to neglect it.

### **The temporary inferiority of Yeshua (vv. 5-9)**

The author resumes his comparison of Yeshua and the angels by addressing their roles in the way that the world is ruled. In order to understand his point in these verses, we have to consider the general context of Scripture. From the very beginning, God intended for humanity to have dominion over the earth: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (Gen 1:26).

But because of sin, not only has humanity been corrupted by a sin nature, it might be said that creation itself has rebelled against humanity. Disease, for example, came into the world because of sin. Paul writes in Romans 8:22 – “For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.” But we are also promised that a new heaven and a new earth is part of God’s redemptive plan. When that happens, “the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21).

If God intended for man to rule over the earth, but imperfect humanity is not up to the task because of sin, how can God’s intent be realized? There has to be a perfect man, uncorrupted by sin who can rule over the earth, and that is Yeshua. This issue is the greater context behind verse 5, in which the author refers to the fact that the angels were never given the authority to rule over the earth, and in particular, “the world to come.” And that makes them inferior once again.

In verses 6-8 the author quotes from Psalm 8 in order to prove his point.

v. 6 – **“What is man, that you remember him?”** This is a reference to God remembering his original intent for humanity for dominion in Gen 1:26.

**“The son of man”** This was Yeshua’s preferred title when referring to Himself. It reflects His genuine humanity. But it is also a title of power and honor, because Daniel describes the Son of Man as the one who will be given supreme authority and everlasting dominion over the world (Dan 7:13-14). So clearly that makes Psalm 8 a prophetic passage, and that is confirmed by the rest of the quotation from the Psalm.

v. 7 – **“You have made him for a little while.”** This is a reference to time. Micah 5:2 prophesied that the Son would be born, but He existed from eternity. So the Son entered into time, but in comparison to eternity, that is a little while. Living on earth is lower than the angels since it means being restricted to the physical realm, not the spiritual one. It means having to deal with the limitations and complications of physical bodies. And it means facing the insults of other people, instead of continual glory. About this subject Paul writes: “[He] emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:7-8). The angels never have to endure death, so that made Yeshua lower than them for a little while.

The remaining part of the quotation from Psalm 8 is consistent with the exaltation of the Son that has been repeatedly brought out to this point in the book of Hebrews – “You have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of your hands; you have put all things in subjection under his feet” (vv. 7-8). That is the fulfillment of God’s original intent for the world to be ruled by man. Since it will be ruled by one man in particular—Yeshua the Son of Man and the Son of God—that makes Him ultimately superior over the angels, even if He appeared to be lower for awhile.

In verse 9, the focus shifts specifically to the death of Yeshua. Elsewhere in Scripture we told that He died as an act of His own will (Jn 10:18) and that He died as an act of love by God for humanity (Jn 3:16). But that is not the point in this particular context in Hebrews. Here, the subject concerns how Yeshua’s death firmly established His humanity. Death is one primary thing that we all share in common. The only difference is that the rest of us die because of the sin of humanity, but Yeshua, who had no sin nature and never committed a sin, died not because of Himself, but for us. And since Yeshua was both fully divine and fully human, He is our perfect representative.

### **The superior relationship of Yeshua with humanity (vv. 10-18)**

In the remainder of this chapter, the author uses the metaphor of family to show how God blesses humanity. He uses the words, “many sons” (v. 10), “brethren/brothers” (v. 11), “children” (vv. 13,14). Those terms are all about establishing a close relationship.

- v. 10 – **“He brings many sons to glory.”** That indicates that He knows the way to the place of glory because He has already been there. And it is a picture of someone leading children by the hand, and bringing them to a destination. That is a picture of care for your family.
- v. 11 – “He who sanctifies” (Yeshua) and “those who are sanctified” (believers) **“are all from one.”** That latter phrase is literally how it reads in Greek. Various translations, however, render this phrase in different ways.

KJV – “are all of one.”

NIV – “are of the same family”

NASB – “are all from one Father”

They all are accurate, to an extent. The KJV is literally the same as the Greek. The NASB supplies the word Father because we and Yeshua are called brethren/brothers at the end of this verse, which implies a common Father. And for the same reason, you can see how “the same family” is also valid. This is a really good example of the dynamic nature of the original languages and the importance of not getting hung up on a particular English translation.

The bigger point here is the significance of being considered like a brother to Yeshua. The writer says that Yeshua isn’t ashamed to call us brothers. One of the common characteristics of humanity is the relationship of siblings. It is very easy to have a brother who does foolish things and another brother doesn’t want to be seen anywhere near him. But that is not the case here. Yeshua is pleased to call us brothers or family because we are sanctified/made holy. In keeping with the sibling metaphor, the older brother is not ashamed because we know how to behave, we know what is right and true, and we love our older brother and want to be just like Him. So Yeshua takes pleasure in having taught us everything we need to know, just like an older brother can do for a younger one. He is the one who sanctifies us. The author backs up this brotherly relationship in verses 12-13 by quoting from Psalm 22:22 and Isaiah 8:17-18.

- v. 14 – The subject then returns to the issue of the necessity of Yeshua living as a man. If Yeshua truly is our brother, He had to live much in the same way as we do. He had to be born and live and die. But what if He didn’t die? When Yeshua talked about His impending death, Peter proclaimed, “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Mat 16:22). That is also what unbelievers in the Jewish community say about the Messiah today. They claim that He didn’t have to die. So what would have been the result concerning God’s plan for humanity if Yeshua never died?
- There would be no lasting atonement for sin (Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:10).
  - There would be no victory over death itself (1 Cor 15:54-55).
  - There would be no victory over the power of Satan (v. 14).
  - There would be no deliverance from the fear of death and our enslavement to the devil (v. 15).

- v. 16 – The author contrasts the way that Yeshua helps the descendants of Abraham, but never helps the angels. When humanity rebelled in the Garden of Eden, God instituted a plan of redemption. But He never did that for the angels. When some of the angels rebelled, He just let them go, and they have no hope of redemption, so that ultimately they are condemned to destruction.
- v. 17 – The conclusion is that Yeshua “had to be made like His brethren in all things.” He had to be born and live like other people, He had to die, and He had to complete God’s stated plan for humanity to be delivered from the consequences of sin. That would re-establish the broken relationship with the Father, because Yeshua represented all of us in what had to be done.

This is especially true by becoming our propitiation for sin (NASB). Other translations used different terms (KJV uses reconciliation and the NIV uses atonement). The most precise meaning inherent in the Greek word *hilaskomai* is propitiation. But the problem with that word is that most people don’t know what it means. It literally means the satisfaction that comes with a debt being paid. It appeases God’s wrath. So for that to take place, as this verse brings out, it called for Yeshua to exercise mercy and faithfulness to the plan of God. And what better motivation could there ever be, than for the Son of God to become one of us for a little while, and to rescue His own family from destruction. That is why the Son of God had to become a man.

- v. 18 – The author tacks on one more benefit to the Son’s humanity being His ability to come to the aid of those who are tempted. He will develop that subject further in chapter 4.

In summary, Yeshua is superior to the angels in many ways. But in some respects, we too are superior to the angels. Not in terms of power, but in terms of worth, because God’s plan, as fulfilled in Yeshua, never called for the redemption of the angels. That was reserved for us alone.