

➤ Read Hebrews 2:1–18.

➤ Reread Hebrews 2:1–4.

Two Messages

In these verses the author discusses two messages: the old message “spoken through angels” (v. 2),^a which is the Law given to Moses at Mount Sinai, and a new and better message that fulfills and replaces the old one.

1. The writer opens this passage by saying, “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard” (v. 1). What have they heard? (v. 3)

2. There are many reasons why the readers of Hebrews—including us—must “pay the most careful attention” to this particular message. Consider the following:
 - a. Who delivered this message? (v. 3)

 - b. What has the author of Hebrews already shown about this messenger that demonstrates that he is someone we must listen to?
1:1–3

1:4–14

 - c. This message “was confirmed to us by those who heard him” (v. 3b), perhaps Jesus’ original disciples.¹ Who else corroborated this message, and how? (v. 4)

 - d. What is the danger in *not* “pay[ing] the most careful attention...to what we have heard” (v. 1)? (v. 1)

“How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?” (v. 3)

Those who disobeyed the earlier, lesser message—the law—were punished (v. 2). The rhetorical question in verses 2–3a warns us that it is much more dangerous to ignore the greater message of salvation by grace through God’s Son: “grace carries with it greater sanctions and risks than the law because more is at stake. To refuse God’s grace is far more serious than breaking God’s law. Grace is available for those who disobey the law, but once grace is refused nothing else remains.”²

^a Angels and the Law: Although the Hebrew Old Testament does not explicitly mention the presence of angels at the giving of the Law, Deuteronomy 33:2 does mention God’s coming with “myriads of holy ones”; in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was widely used in New Testament times) this verse states that “angels were with him at his right hand.”³ In the New Testament, the presence of angels at the giving of the Law is mentioned by Stephen in Acts 7:53 and by Paul in Galatians 3:19.⁴

➤ Read Hebrews 2:5-9.

3. In verses 6b-8a, the writer quotes Psalm 8, in which the psalmist considers first the smallness of humans in comparison with the heavens (Ps. 8:3) and then the high status God bestowed on humans, "crown[ing] them with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5). Because of the Fall, however, humans are not now "crowned...with glory and honor" (v. 7), nor "at present [do we] see everything subject to them" (v. 8). But there is One in whom those verses have been fulfilled.

a. Who is this One? (v. 9)

b. How has he fulfilled the verses from Psalm 8?

"made lower than the angels for a little while" (v. 9)

Jn. 1:1, 14

"now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death" (v. 9)

Phil. 2:7-11

Eph. 1:19b-22

➤ Read Hebrews 2:10-18.

4. In verse 9 we saw one way in which the author of Hebrews described the incarnation, Jesus' becoming man. Find all the other ways he describes the incarnation. (vv. 10-18)

5. What answers does the writer of Hebrews give to the question "Why did God become man?" In other words, what was Jesus able to accomplish for us because he became man?

v. 9

v. 10

v. 14

v. 15

v. 17

6. In verse 10 Jesus is called “the pioneer of [our] salvation.” Why is this an appropriate description of him?

Made Perfect

What does it mean that God needed to “make” Jesus “perfect through what he suffered” (v. 10)? “This does not mean that suffering cured the Lord Jesus Christ of moral faults. This was impossible, for he was without sin (see iv. 15; cf. 2 Cor. v. 21). The Greek word *teleiōsai* means ‘to make adequate’ or ‘completely effective’. Apart from these sufferings Christ would not have been completely effective in his role of representing and [aiding] mortal man.”⁵ In addition, “As a human being, he needed to live his life and obey God (which he did perfectly) to become the perfect sacrifice for sins.”⁶

7. The quotation in verse 12 is from Psalm 22, one of the most clearly Messianic psalms. Read the psalm.
- How is Psalm 22:22, quoted here, a turning point in the psalm?
 - Why do you think the writer of Hebrews quotes this psalm? (Can you think of more than one possible reason?)
8. Read the verses below. How do they expand our understanding of the way Jesus “by his death...[broke] the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free[d] those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (vv. 14–15)?
- Rom. 6:3–11
- 1 Cor. 15:51–57
- Rev. 1:18; 20:14; 21:4
9. In Judaism the high priest acted as a kind of mediator between God and humans.
- In verse 17 the writer of Hebrews calls Jesus a high priest. “Jesus’ priesthood will be the dominant theme throughout the rest of the book....”⁷ What kind of a high priest is he? (vv. 17–18)

- b. In the Old Testament God demanded that the high priest sacrifice animals to atone for the sins of the people (📖* Lev. 16:3–33). How did Jesus the better high priest “make atonement for the sins of the people” (v. 17)? (1 Pet. 1:18–20; 2:24)

10. Although Hebrews may at times seem to us very dense and academic, it is in fact “intensely practical.”⁸ The original audience of the book had a “serious problem”: “though they had at first gladly endured suffering, now their zeal was flagging and they were in need of endurance.”⁹ Thus our passage opens with a warning against drifting away from the message of salvation we have heard. (This is just the first of many warnings we will encounter as we read through Hebrews this year.)

- a. Suffering is one reason why believers might be tempted to drift away. What are some other possible reasons?

- b. Think about swimming in the ocean and being pulled by the current down the shore. What do you think spiritual drifting (v. 1) looks like? Do you think it feels dangerous to the one who is drifting?

- c. What are some ways believers can guard against drifting?

- d. Commentator F. F. Bruce writes this about the original audience of Hebrews, who were feeling tempted to drift: “What a source of strength it was to them to be assured that in the presence of God they had as their champion and intercessor one who had known similar and even sorer temptations, and had withstood them victoriously!”¹⁰
Take a moment now to bring any concerns you have to your merciful and faithful—and victorious—high priest.

*📖 For further study

¹ Leon Morris, *Hebrews*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 22.

² J. Ramsey Michaels, *Hebrews*, in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2009), 343.

³ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), 75.

⁴ Hughes, 75.

⁵ Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 70.

⁶ Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2364n2:1

⁷ Michaels, *Hebrews*, 351.

⁸ Hughes, *A Commentary*, 72.

⁹ Hughes, 100–101.

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The English Text with Introduction Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), 53.