

A Fifth View on the Warning Passages in Hebrews

A Paper

Presented to

Dr. William Arp

Baptist Bible Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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December 1, 2013

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The Need of this Study

Hebrews is one of the most controversial books of the New Testament. There is much mystery surrounding this great literary masterpiece. There is debate as to its writer, the date of its writing, the location of the audience, the make-up of the audience, and the occasion for which it was written. These issues are imperative when interpreting the book of Hebrews, and are addressed in the appendix. However, this paper is primarily concerned with a different issue of mystery: what is the appropriate interpretation of the “problem passages” found within its pages?

The book of Hebrews contains five “problem passages” that have also been designated as “warning passages.” These warning passages have aroused great debate within the Protestant church. Are the recipients of this epistle, believers who are in danger of losing their salvation? Are they unbelievers who are cautioned about resisting the message that they have heard, and the judgment that will come upon them should they continue to do so, or is it possible that these warning passages are only hypothetical, describing the ramifications of apostatizing believers, if indeed that were possible? *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, edited by Herbert W. Bateman, is helpful in introducing various interpretations, as articulated by its adherents. It also contains helpful critiques by its opponents. Although very insightful and entertaining, it has several considerable weaknesses in substance: (1) it includes two contributors who share a similar view,¹ (2) it contains one very fringe view,² (3) and omits a view that is more widely held than the before mentioned view. The purpose of this paper is to articulate a variation of that excluded view, which from this point forward will be referred to as the eschatological view. This

¹ Grant R. Osborne and Garth Lee Cockerill’s presentation of “A Classical Arminian View” and “A Wesleyan Arminian View,” respectively, have very little substantive difference.

² Randall C. Gleason defends a view that is not only on the fringe (one this writer has never seen articulated by anyone else) but also is bound to a lot of *a priori* assumptions: (1) a Jewish audience, (2) in Palestine, (3) prior to AD 70. If any of these fails to be true, the whole view collapses.

paper will serve as an addendum to *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, and will assume familiarity with that text.

The Method of this Study

This study will begin by discussing the implications that “pre-understandings,” can have upon the reading of the book of Hebrews generally, and the warning passages particularly. This paper will then develop a few of the reoccurring themes that are especially important to the interpretation of the warning passages. A section will be devoted to the exegesis of the most challenging warning passage, Hebrews 5:11-6:12. Finally, a concluding paragraph will bring together this paper’s findings and propose an alternative view regarding these “warning passages.” Introductory issues will be developed and word studies listed in the appendix for reference purposes.

The Impact of Theological Pre-Understandings

The book of Hebrews is arguably the most debated book of the entire New Testament. How is it that many capable scholars, with the same convictions about “First Theology”³ can come to the same text, and have opposing interpretations? It is because of the issue of pre-understandings. One’s pre-understandings can drastically effect one’s interpretation. This is most visible in the book of Hebrews. It is impossible to come to the text of Scripture with a clean slate. Every exegete has been raised in, or influenced by, certain traditions, denominations,

³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer rightly contends that doing theology requires not a linear progression of priorities: God, Scripture, Hermeneutics, but rather, all three subject matters must be addressed as one “problem.” He argues that it is nearly impossible to discuss the doctrine of Scripture without speaking of God, it is equally hard to speak of God without referencing Scripture, and it is impossible to use Scripture or learn about God without having hermeneutical guidelines of interpretation. Yet, these hermeneutical guidelines also stem from one’s view of God and Scripture. *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics*, Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, 2002.

schools, theologians, and pastors. They all have varying backgrounds, cultures, subcultures, allegiances, and trainings that can alter their reading of the Scripture. Pre-understandings are especially apparent when the interpreter is (1) unaware that they have them or (2) they hold so strongly to them that they are consciously and in some cases unconsciously unwilling to weigh the evidence judiciously.⁴ It appears that particular traditions are so strong, (both Arminian and Calvinist), and theological presuppositions adhered to so vehemently, (both Falling from Grace and Perseverance of the Saints),⁵ that well-meaning, and otherwise quality scholars, are unable to see beyond their theological grid.⁶

However, when we are conscious of our pre-understandings, we can strive to objectively read Scripture and weigh the evidence carefully. In the words of David Wolfe, “The discovery of error is a genuine advance, not a loss of face, for the person who is concerned with truth...⁷ Evangelicals, concerned with truth, should not fear what they find, and not allow their pre-understandings prevent them from looking at the evidence objectively. “The one who is sure he is right invites it [the discovery of truth]. It only illuminates the strength of beliefs and makes them more available to others.”⁸ It is this approach that this paper will seek to follow.

⁴ Fanning, representing a Classic Reformed perspective, openly admits, “In most Reformed circles the warnings of Hebrews require a ‘solution,’ because they seem to go against our larger doctrinal stance regarding security of salvation.” Buist M. Fanning, “A Classical Reformed View,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 157.

⁵ It is important to note that perseverance of the saints is not equivalent to eternal security as is sometimes mistaken. One can hold to eternal security, without adhering to the teaching that the elect will persevere in faith until the end.

⁶ Gleason rightly concludes, “some utilize a deductive method in which the warnings are primarily interpreted in light of theological concepts found elsewhere in the New Testament Passages that seem to teach the security of the believer...are regarded as clear...while other passages such as the warnings in Hebrews, which seem to teach the possibility of apostasy, are interpreted in line with the clear texts.” Randall C. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (January-March 1998): 62-91.

⁷ David L. Wolfe, *Epistemology: The Justification of Belief*, (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, 1982), 66.

⁸ *Ibid*, 69.

Understanding Reoccurring Themes and Illustrations

The book of Hebrews involves several reoccurring themes and illustrations. A proper exegesis of the warning passages, require investigating these concepts thoroughly.

Inheritance

The noun κληρονομία, “inheritance” is found fourteen times in the New Testament four of which are recorded in the book of Hebrews. The verb κληρονομέω “inherit” is found eighteen times in the Greek New Testament six of those, or one-third, is in the book of Hebrews; no other book of the New Testament uses it more. It appears that the concept of inheritance is very important to the author in accomplishing his purpose for writing. He explains that Jesus has inherited a greater name than the angels (1:4), angels minister to those who will inherit salvation (1:14), the author desires for his readers/listeners to persevere so that they inherit the promises (6:12), under the new covenant there is an eternal inheritance (9:15), Abraham went out to the land that God had promised him for an inheritance (11:8), and Esau was not able to receive his inheritance that he at first rejected (12:17). Whatever the author’s goal may be, an understanding of how he uses both the verb “to inherit” and the noun “inheritance” are essential.

The author speaks of an inheritance or inheriting on three occasions with no condition (1:4, 14; 9:15). However, when the author gives a conditional promise, which results in some sort of inheritance, the object of inheritance is never eternal life, but rather temporal.⁹ The condition always involved obedience that stems from faith in God’s promise(s). The author gives us an example of one individual who received an inheritance promised (Abraham) and one who did not (Esau). Abraham received the inheritance of the land promised him, because he had faith and obeyed God’s command to leave and receive (11:8). Yet, Esau failed to inherit what was

⁹ See word study in Appendix B.

promised him, because he rejected the promise of God (12:17). Esau serves as an example of a short-sighted individual who had his eyes on instantaneous yet minimal satisfaction, rather than delayed satisfaction, with a far superior reward. The author hopes that like Abraham, and unlike Esau, the Israelites will look to their superior reward, their inheritance, rather than a momentary reprieve from persecution.¹⁰ In summary, the author uses inheritance as a promise that is guaranteed, but is conditioned upon reception. The readers are guaranteed an inheritance if they receive it by obedience that stems from faith in God's promises.

Promise

The Greek noun ἐπαγγελία or “promise” is another very important term that must be understood in order to properly interpret the warning passages of Hebrews. It is closely related to inheritance and twice used together (6:12; 9:15). The author uses this noun fourteen times. He uses ἐπαγγελία to refer to the promise of entering the rest (4:1), the better promises of the New Covenant (8:6), the promise of eternal inheritance (9:15), obedience to God's will which results in promises (10:36), and heroes of the faith who received certain promises (11:33). However, the author uses ἐπαγγελία most often to reference the Abrahamic Covenant (6:13,15, 17; 7:6; 11:9a, 9b, 11:13, 17, 39), sometimes focusing on the descendants portion of the promise (6:13, 15), other times the land portion of the promise (11:9a, 9b, 39), and sometimes in general (6:17; 7:6; 11:13,17). The author reminds his readers that he is a promise-keeping God. The promises that He made, no matter how much time has transpired, will be fulfilled. This includes the promised “rest” for the people of God.

¹⁰ See Appendix A for further explanation of the historical circumstances of the author's writing.

Rest

The concept of rest is also very important to the author of Hebrews, although it is closely related to the concept of inheritance as well. The author uses three Greek words to speak of rest. He uses the noun κατάπαυσις, always used in the accusative form in conjunction with a verbal form of εἰσέρχομαι “to enter” (3:11, 18; 4:1, 3a, 3b, 5, 10, 11). The author uses the verb καταπαύω three times, always with the aorist tense (4:4, 8, 10), and the noun σαββατισμὸς a cognate of the word σάββατον, “Sabbath” (4:9). In all of the New Testament, σαββατισμὸς is only found here. While there are cognate words associated with the above verbs, only the book of Acts records any of the exact form, only once is the verbal form καταπαύω used (Acts 14:18), and only once the noun κατάπαυσις (Acts 7:49). It is also important to note that the author of Hebrews only uses these terms during chapters three and four, while warning the recipients not to follow the path of the exodus generation who failed to enter “the rest.”

The author explains that obtaining the rest requires εἰσέρχομαι “entrance into,” and entrance into is prohibited when, like the Israelites, one has σκληπύνητε τὰς καρδίας, “a hardness of heart,” καρδία πονηρὰ ἀπιστίας, “an evil heart of unbelief,” or ἀπειθείαν are “disobedient.” The author is using three different expressions to describe the same action. The exodus generation was never allowed to enter into “the rest” because of their disobedience, which involved unbelief in God’s promises and was a result of the hardness of their hearts. The author warns the readers/listeners that if they follow the same pattern of disobedience/hardness of heart/disbelief¹¹, that they too will miss out on “the rest.”

The author chooses the Exodus generation and their sin of disobedience to emphasize the urgency and importance of their pending decision. The “rest” that the Israelites failed to receive,

¹¹ From this point forward this writer will use the term disobedience, which is the visible action that resulted from invisible hardness of heart and disbelief.

or in the common usage of the author, failed to “inherit” is the land of promise. There is no debate concerning the original historical event. The author had in mind the occupying of the promise land. Because of the disobedience of the Israelites, they were not allowed by God to enter into the land, which was called “rest.” Not only is the land referenced as rest, but the author explains that Joshua did not “cause them to rest” (4:8). Entering into κατάπαυσις “the rest” (noun - the land) would result in them καταπαύω “resting” (verb).

What is meant by this verb resting? To explain the qualitative nature of the “resting,” the author of Hebrews introduces his third Greek word involving rest, σαββατισμὸς or “Sabbath rest.” He explains that the time of “rest” for the people of God will involve resting from their works (4:9-10). The author uses the seventh day of the creation account in Genesis to illustrate what the coming time of rest will be like for the people of God. Just as God rested from his work of creation on the Sabbath day, or the Sabbath rest for the people of God, man will rest from his work. This coming time characterized by rest, is still future from the perspective of the author of Hebrews. It was not received by the Israelites, nor had it been received prior to the first century AD author, therefore it is yet future. The author uses this information to motivate the recipients of this letter. Using the conjunction οὖν, the author argues “therefore” make sure you do not follow the example of Israel and come short of entering into the rest.

The most natural explanation, given the illustration chosen by the author of Hebrews, is that “the rest” involves occupying the land, and the “resting,” is what takes place when the people of God fully inhabit that land. The qualitative nature of rest is indeed the Old Testament description of the coming millennial period. This millennial period is also the time that Israel will finally fully receive the land promised to Abraham thousands of years prior. Isaiah describes the millennial period as a time in which the lion will lay down with the fox (Isaiah 11:6, 65:25),

children will play with serpents (Isaiah 11:9), and crying will not exist (11:19). Creation will be renewed, set free from its bondage (Rom 8:19-23). The author of Hebrews later describes in a similar fashion as did the prophets, that there is a coming judgment that will precede the coming kingdom (Heb 12:26; Zech 14:3-5; Hag 2:6-7; Joel 3). Following that “shaking,” a kingdom will be established that is unshakeable (Heb 12:27-28). A period of time characterized by rest, not by work, is in view. The millennial rest is in sight. It is this reading of Hebrews which most satisfactorily explains: (1) the parallel account with the exodus generation, (2) the prophetic teachings of a coming period characterized by rest, (3) and the prophetic judgments that precede the unshakeable kingdom.¹²

Judgment

As stated previously, the “problem” passages of Hebrews have been characterized as “warning passages.” While they include a word of encouragement, they also give a very serious warning. They warn of judgment for disobedience.

In the first warning passage (2:1-4), the author uses a lesser-to-great argument about judgment. He compares the judgment that occurs for violation of the message spoken by angels (Old Covenant) and the message spoken by the superior mediator, Jesus Christ (New Covenant). He argues, if disobedience of the Old Covenant resulted in ἔνδικον μισθαποδοσίαν “righteous punishment,” how much greater ought the judgment be awaiting those who disobeyed the message delivered by Jesus.¹³

¹² It is worth noting that this particular view is not an option for most Christendom because of their pre-understandings. The vast majority of Christianity does not believe in a literal earthly reign of Christ on earth. Since their system does not allow for such a time period, an honest investigation of the evidence is often not possible, and a reception of this view by the majority of scholars is virtually impossible.

In the second warning passage (3:7-4:13), the author reminds his recipients of the judgment of the wilderness generation for their disobedience. Their judgment involved inability to enter into “the rest,” which is clearly a reference to inhabiting the land promised to their father, Abraham. Using the wilderness generation as a caution, the author warns his readers of the potential judgment they could incur, if they too disobey. Their judgment would also involve missing out on “the rest.”

The third warning passage (5:11-6:12) also involves a warning of judgment. The author informs them that it is impossible for someone who has fallen away, to be renewed to repentance. The consequence of continuing without repentance is missing out on the promises (6:12).

In the fourth warning passage (10:26-31), the recipients are told that they should anticipate judgment if they deliberately sin.¹⁴ He returns to the lesser-to-greater argument, to say, those who violated the Law of Moses were severely judged, therefore those who violate the New Covenant which was initiated with blood of the Son of God, deserves a much more severe judgment. He then states, “the Lord will judge His people (10:30).” Judgment is clearly not only for the pagan, but for God’s people who are unfaithful.

In the final and shortest of the warning passages (12:25-26), the author continues using his favorite lesser-to-greater argument. If those in the past did not escape judgment although warned from earth, how do they, who have been warned from heaven, think that they will avoid

¹³ It should be noted that the author here and in 10:26-31, speaks of the severity of judgment that ought to occur, not was actually does occur.

¹⁴ Given the historical context, the deliberate sin here appears to be a return to the Old Covenant after having been a benefactor of the New Covenant, and all its blessings. This will be developed further in the warning passage of Hebrews 5:11-6:12.

judgment? He then speaks of the final “shaking” or judgment that will occur which was predicted by the Old Testament prophets.

It is also significant that the author, nearing the end of his epistle, reminds the recipients that God is the judge of all (12:23). Judgment is a key theme of this book. Such a theme must be given its necessary attention when interpreting the warning passages.

The Eschatological View of Hebrews 5:11-6:12

The limitations of this paper prohibit investigating all five warning passages, but an analysis of Hebrews 5:11-6:12, built upon a proper understanding of inheritance, promise, rest, and judgment will suffice in laying out the major tenants of the eschatological view of the warnings of Hebrews.

The warning passage recorded in Hebrews 5:11-6:12 is challenging for the exegete, and especially challenging for one who holds to the perseverance of the saints.¹⁵ Beginning in 5:11, the author states that the recipients *νωθοι γέγονατε τᾶς ἀκοᾶς* “have become sluggish/lazy of hearing.”¹⁶ Because of their laziness of hearing, they are still immature. Enough time has transpired that they ought to be *διδάσκαλοι* “teachers.” However, the audience has remained in a state of spiritual infancy. Having determined to progress past *γάλακτος* “milk,” and to *στερεὰ τροφή* “solid food,” the author begins his warning in 6:4-6.

The author uses a long and complex sentence beginning with the adjective *ἀδύνατον* “impossible” and concludes with the statement...*πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν* “to be

¹⁵ Bruce’s comments represent the typical Calvinist reading of this passage, also adhered to by Buist Fanning, “In these verses he is not questioning the perseverance of the saints; we might say that rather he is insisting that those who persevere are the true saints.” Hebrews, F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 144.

¹⁶ The warning passage is marked off by the use of *νωθοι* as an *inclusio*. The author uses it in verse 5:11 and again in 6:12. Not only does it serve as markers, it also points to the root cause of their problem, and the reason for which the author must write a severe warning.

restored to repentance.” Between these words is a series of aorist participle phrases. These phrases include very experiential language (as argued in the appendix on introductory issues), language that depicts the familiarities of a believer: (1) who have been enlightened, (2) who have come to know the heavenly gift, (3) who have become sharers in the Holy Spirit, (4) who have become partakers of God’s good Word and the power of the age.¹⁷ The plain, simple reading of this text requires one to conclude that the experiences described by the author are those of genuine believers. It is only when one recognizes that this text does not fit his/her theological system that he concludes otherwise. Referencing the fourth aorist participle, Marshall rightly states, “Any attempt to interpret tasting as only partial appropriation (i.e., the idea that they tasted it but did not swallow it) is not credible.”¹⁸

One more participle phrase requires further investigation, *παραπεσόντας* “having fallen away.” Although some translations include a condition like “if,” (NIV¹⁹⁸⁴, KJV, NKJV, RSV, ASV) or “and then” (ESV, NASB, NRSV, NLT, NET) none is warranted. The best rendering does not include any condition, but rather follows the similar translation as the previous four participles, simply, “who have fallen away” (HCSB, NIV²⁰¹¹, ISV, YLT). This participle is in the aorist, just as the previous were. The other translations appear to reflect the theology of the translators. The series of aorist participles here does **not** indicate that the author is speaking of

¹⁷ Dave Mathewson points out that each of the warning passages include five components: (1) an audience, (2) sin, (3) exhortation, (4) a consequence, and (5) an Old Testament example. The Hebrews 6 warning passage is the only one where an explicitly stated example is not employed. However, Mathewson makes a strong case that the experiences found in these participle phrases would have caused the audience to have thought back to the wilderness generation, who encountered parallel events. He states, “the Old Testament depiction of the wilderness generation and the incident at Kadesh-barnea, which has ‘bled over’ from its use in 3:7-4:13, provides a compelling background (through allusion and echo) to Heb 6:4-6 and yields valuable semantic results.” Dave Mathewson, “Reading Heb 6:4-6 in Light of the Old Testament,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 61 (1999): 209-225. If Mathewson is correct, then this is yet another example that the failure of the exodus generation to receive their “inheritance,” “promises,” and “rest” are an important part to understand this, and all other warning passages. Gleason agrees with Mathewson on this point and goes a step further, “the Exodus generation at Kadesh-barnea is a central motif behind the warning passages.” Randall C. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (January-March 1998): 64.

¹⁸ Howard I. Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God*. (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1969), 142.

events that have already occurred, but that in the hypothetical situation where all of these would occur, including “falling away,” they would not be renewed to repentance. It should be stated categorically, this is not a hypothetical situation which is impossible to occur, rather the writer is speaking of a hypothetical scenario with the potential of occurring, but he is **hopeful** that it will not (6:9). The warning is genuine, and the failure possible.¹⁹ At this point, the Arminian is on better exegetical ground than the Calvinist. However, both the Arminian and the Calvinist misinterpret the statement “to be renewed to repentance.” The present infinitive verb ἀνακαινίζω means “to cause a change to a previous, preferable state.”²⁰ The author explains that it is impossible for those who have experienced all of this, including falling away, to repent of their actions. They will continue in their “falling away” state. The author uses the Greek adjective ἀδύνατος four times in the book of Hebrews. Just as it is impossible for God to lie (6:18), impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to permanently atone for sins (10:4), and it is impossible to please God without faith (11:4), so too, it is impossible for such a person to be renewed to repentance.²¹

The Greek noun μετάνοια, translated “repentance,” when approached by the New Testament reader is often unnecessarily burdened by theological assumptions. What does it mean to repent? What is the object of repentance? As always, context is the key to understanding the author’s usage of a particular word. It would be wrong to project one’s assumed understanding of repentance into this passage. Unfortunately, all too often this is the case. Many assume that the

¹⁹ Robert Utley, in his commentary states, “There is a disagreement among Greek scholars whether this is a mild conditional structure or a consistent parallel structure from verse 4. Those who insist on a conditional structure do so for the theological purpose of asserting that verse 6a is a hypothetical situation.” Robert James Utley, vol. Volume 10, *The Superiority of the New Covenant: Hebrews*, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International, 1999), 63.

²⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 156.

²¹ For a list of all the times the New Testament authors used this adjective, please see Appendix B.

author is speaking of salvific repentance. The Arminian, who contends that believers can lose their salvation, naturally points to this passage as a proof text. In their estimation, the one who cannot be renewed to repentance has fallen from grace. The Calvinist, who believes that once a believer is saved he will persevere until the end, must conclude they were “professors” but not “possessor.” In his view, they may have appeared to have believed, but in fact they were never believers, which becomes evident by their failure to persevere to the end. There is an alternative view that does not require imposing either system on the text, and gives a satisfactory response to the evidence in the text. The Arminian is right about the fact that these are believers who have “fallen away.” However, they wrongly conclude, they have lost their salvation. There is nothing in the text that requires such a position. On this point (eternal security) the Calvinist is correct. What then is meant by “renewed unto repentance?” The believers spoken of here, who fall away, will not be restored to the preferred state of fellowship with God. They will continue in their falling away. It is impossible to be renewed, because God will not allow it.²²

The author gives the reason why he will not allow the reverse of their condition of falling away. Their act of returning to the Old Covenant, after having received the New would have two dreadful ramifications. It would amount to: (1) ἀνασταυποῦντας ἑαυτοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ “crucify the son of God” and it would (2) παραδειγματίζοντας “publically disgrace Christ.” The author is warning them, if they return to the Old Covenant, there is no coming back. God will not allow it. It is such a heinous thing in the eyes of God, to turn away from the sacrifice of Christ, which sanctified them (10:29), and about which they had experienced many confirmatory signs (2:4). So horrific, that God will not allow their repentance. Morris points out, “The author is saying that those who deny Christ in this way are really taking their stand among those who

²² Thomas L. Constable, “Hebrews,” <http://www.sonlight.com/constable/notes/pdf/hebrews.pdf> (accessed September 21, 2013).

crucified Jesus...they make themselves one with those who put him to death on the cross at Calvary.”²³ Kempson adds, “their infidelity also exposed Christ once more to the world’s taunting.”²⁴ Although, they may slip back into the Old Covenant quietly, their action would be seen by others as indicating Christ’s blood was insufficient. It is not that God cannot restore them for this or any other sin. Certainly God can do whatever He wishes within his character. But he will not do this because of the reproach their behavior would bring to His Son.

Following such a serious warning, the author sees the need to give a word of encouragement. The author says he has confidence about them. He also reminds them of the great efforts that they had accomplished, and of which God would not ever forget. Although, they have done great things in the past, the author emphasizes that their future laziness/sluggishness could prevent them from inheriting the promises. The repeating of *νωθοροὶ* in 6:12 concludes the *inclusio* started in 5:11. In 5:11 the author uses the perfect form of the verb *γίνομαι* to indicate that they have already become lazy of hearing and that laziness has had significant present consequences, their faith is still in its infancy. Now the author uses a *ἵνα* clause along with the negative *μὴ* and the future imperative *γένησθε* to warn them to be diligent until the end, “in order that they may not become lazy/sluggish.” It becomes apparent that the author believes diligence will prevent laziness, and the prevention of laziness will insure that they *κληρονομοῦντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας* “inherit the promise.” Laziness is the root problem (5:11, 6:12) that has caused their current immaturity and could prevent them from receiving their future inheritance.

Conclusion

²³ Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed Frank E Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 1255.

²⁴ Wayne R. Kempson, “Hebrews 6:1-8,” *Review and Expositor* 91 (1994): 570.

These first generation Christians had come to faith as a result of eyewitnesses of Christ (2:3), and personally witnessed the confirmatory signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit (2:4). They were facing persecution by the authorities (10:32-34) and would face martyrdom (12:4). In the midst of these persecutions, the temptation would have been great for them to avoid oppression and possibly martyrdom by returning to the Levitical system, but by doing so, they would be trampling on the blood of Christ (10:29).²⁵ The author knew they were in danger of, “drifting away” (2:1), “becoming hardened by the deceitfulness of their sin” (3:13), “falling away” (6:6), “throwing away their confidence” (10:35), and “refusing” God (12:25).

Because of these trials, the author feels a dire need to write to this Roman audience, primarily Jewish Christians, to: (1) rebuke them, (2) warn them, and (3) encourage them. The author rebukes them for their neglect which has resulted in their immaturity; he warns them that disobedience will result in them not entering “the rest.” They would not receive the promises, just as the exodus generation never received theirs. It would amount to forfeiting their inheritance just as Esau relinquished his. The author encourages his reading/listening audience to imitate the faithfulness of past generations, remaining steadfast in their obedience, knowing that by doing so they will inherit what has been promised, entrance and reward in the land of blessing, which, when correlated with other passages, will apparently be fulfilled during the Millennial Kingdom.²⁶ This Millennial reward is worth their temporal discomfort and even potential death.

²⁵ The book of Hebrews, frequently references the Levitical system, includes copious Old Testament quotations, references many Jewish heroes of the faith, and compares the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. This evidence makes a Jewish audience reasonable. They were probably saved out of Judaism. Familiarity with this system, and having at one point been a part of it, would have made the temptation even greater and the “falling away” or return to it, much easier.

²⁶ See further: Thomas L. Constable, “Hebrews” <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/hebrews.pdf>, (accessed September 21, 2013), Zane Hodges, “Hebrews” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, pp. 777-813. Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man*, (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992). Robert G. Gromacki,

The Eschatological View best explains the repeated themes of reward (inheritance, promise, rest) for faithfulness and warning of judgment (forfeiture of inheritance, the promises, and rest) for disobedience. It best explains the illustrations found within it (failures of the exodus generation, the Esau episode, heroes of the faith). It also allows for an interpretation that correlates with the rest of Scripture, without requiring exegetical gymnastics to explain why the recipients are not genuine believers. However, it does require the openness of the interpreter to re-evaluate his theological pre-understandings regarding the perseverance of the saints, and a future earthly reign of Christ. If one is willing to do so, he will find the eschatological view to be both consistent and convincing.

Appendix 1: Introductory Issues

Many names have been postulated as potential authors of the book of Hebrews, including but not limited to: Paul, Apollos, Phillip, Priscilla and Aquila, Barnabas, Luke, even Clement of Rome.²⁷ In recent days, scholars have become content not making dogmatic assertions as to authorship. Instead renewed attention has been given to what **can** be determined from the text. The author was a close associate of Timothy (13:23), not an original eye-witness of Christ (2:3-4), was very familiar with Judaism, and was highly educated.

The book of Hebrews contains elements of an epistle: (1) it was sent by one person or party to a group of people in a distant place, (2) develops an argumentation and exhortation based upon doctrine, and (3) certainly concludes like an epistle.²⁸ There is also evidence that may indicate that it is a homily: (1) it begins in a sermonic fashion, (2) it speaks of a ‘word of exhortation,’ (3) a typical Hellenistic-Jewish and early Christian tripartite pattern (exempla, conclusion, exhortation) is utilized,²⁹ and (4) many rhetorical elements are implemented.³⁰ It is safe to conclude that the book of Hebrews is an epistle with sermonic elements. As Stanley states, “It is a sermon turned epistle.”³¹

The first references to the book of Hebrews is in the writings of Clement, found in 1 Clement dated AD 95, and his letter to the Corinthians dated AD 70.³² Obviously, the writing of

²⁷ Allen counts at least 17 individuals who have been promoted as possible candidates. David L. Allen, “The Authorship of Hebrews.” in *Criswell Theological Review* Spring 2011: (3-18), 3.

²⁸ Trotter points to four aspects of this conclusion that is typical of an epistle, (1) “writing them briefly,” (2) pedantic information about Timothy’s release and the author’s future visit, (3) plain greetings, and (4) a normal closing with a reference to grace. Andrew H. Trotter Jr. *Interpreting the Epistle of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 78.

²⁹ W.L. Lane, “Hebrews,” *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*. Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids, Editors, (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 450.

³⁰ Trotter points to 15 different rhetorical elements, 67.

³¹ Steve Stanley, “The Structure of Hebrews from Three Perspectives,” in *Tyndale Bulletin*, 45.2 (1994), 249.

Hebrews must predate the citing of its record. This external evidence coupled with internal evidence: (1) the apparent continuation of the sacrificial system, and (2) lack of reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, indicates the book of Hebrews was written previous to the destruction of the temple in AD 70.³³

The author includes a clue when he says, “those from Italy send their greeting” (13:24). The events depicted in Hebrews, including the confiscation of property, public reproach, and suffering for Christ (10:32-34), describe what took place under the persecution of Claudius in AD 49, and during the early years of the Neronian persecution beginning in AD 64. However, the author states they, “had not resisted until bloodshed” (12:4). Since no known martyrdom took place under the reign of Claudius, the imminent death of the saints for the cause of Christ, most likely describes the persecution that took place under Nero’s rule following the great fire of AD 64 and prior to his suicide in AD 68.

Of special import to the discussion of this paper is the salvific status of the hearers/readers. It is significant that the author identifies himself with the recipients by using various forms of the plural pronoun ἡμεῖς, “we” (1:2; 2:1,3a,3b; 3:1,6; 4:13,15; 6:20; 7:14,26; 9:14,24; 10:15,20,26,39; 11:40a,40b; 12:1a,1b,1c,9,25,29; 13:6,20,21,³⁴ 23) and third person plural verbs (2:1, 2:3,8 9; 3:6,14a,14b,19; 4:1,2,3,11,15,16a,16b,16c; 6:1,3,12,18; 7:18; 8:1; 10:10,22,23,24,30; 11:3, 12:1,9a,9b,9c,28a,28b; 13:13,15). The recipients are called, ἀδελφοί, “brothers” (3:1,12; 10:19; 13:22), πιστεύσαντες, “ones who have believed” (4:3), and ὁ ἡγιασθη, “those being sanctified” (10:29). They had been persecuted for the faith (10:32-34),

³² David L. Allen, “The Authorship of Hebrews.” in *Criswell Theological Review* Spring 2011: (3-18), 3.

³³ An argument from silence is regarded as the weakest form of argumentation. However, since the content of Hebrews refers repeatedly to the levitical system, it would be odd for the author to bypass the most important historical event to that generation of Jewish people which involved the same system referenced.

³⁴ This reading is probable since it is found in p46, a, D, K, the majority of MSS and the Peshita, however, some manuscripts, A, and the TR, read ἐν ὑμῖν.

but none as of yet, have died for it (12:4). They are referenced as God’s “righteous” δίκαιός μου (10:38). Hebrews 6:4-6 includes a long series of participle clauses, experiential in nature, describing the recipients of this book.³⁵ On this basis it is best to accept the straightforward interpretation of the evidence, the recipients were genuine Christians. Only imposing one’s theological pre-understandings would prevent this seemingly obvious conclusion.

³⁵ Concerning this passage, Osborne rightly states, “If this passage were found in Romans 8, we would all hail it as the greatest description of Christian blessings in the entire Bible.” Grant R. Osborne, “A Classical Arminian View,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 112.

Appendix 2: Word Studies

“Inheritance in Hebrews”

Reference	Result	Part of Speech	Mood	Tense	Status	Condition(s)	Object of Inheritance
Heb 1:4	κεκληρονόμηκεν	verb	indicative	Perfect	Received	None – Sonship	A Superior Name
Heb 1:14	κληρονομεῖν	verb	infinitive	Present	Future Guaranteed	NA	Eternal Salvation
Heb 6:12	κληρονομοούντων	verb	participle	Present	Not Guaranteed	Faith and Obedience	“The Promises”
Heb 9:15	κληρονομίας	noun	—	—	Future Guaranteed	“Called”	Eternal Inheritance
Heb 11:8	κληρονομίαν	noun	—	—	Received	Obedience	Abraham's inheritance, land
Heb 12:17	κληρονομήσαι	verb	infinitive	Aorist	Failed to Receive	Acceptance	Birth Right

“Inheritance in the New Testament”

Reference	Result	Part of Speech	Mood	Tense	Speaker	Reference
Mt 5:5	κληρονομήσουσιν	verb	Indicative	Future	Jesus	the earth
Mt 19:29	κληρονομήσει	verb	Indicative	Future	Jesus	eternal life
Mt 21:38	κληρονομίαν	noun	—	—	Jesus	parable, earthly inheritance, to teach about the kingdom inheritance
Mt 25:34	κληρονομήσατε	verb	imperative	Aorist	Jesus	kingdom
Mk 10:17	κληρονομήσω	verb	subjunctive	Aorist	Lawyer	eternal life
Mk 12:7	κληρονομία	noun	—	—	Jesus	parable of vineyard, human inheritance
Lk 10:25	κληρονομήσω	verb	indicative	Future	Rich Ruler	eternal life
Lk 12:13	κληρονομίαν	noun	—	—	Person in Crowd	earthly inheritance
Lk 18:18	κληρονομήσω	verb	indicative	Future	Rich Ruler	eternal life
Lk 20:14	κληρονομία	noun	—	—	Jesus	parable of vineyard, earthly inheritance
Ac 7:5	κληρονομίαν	noun	—	—	Stephen	Abraham's inheritance, land
Ac 20:32	κληρονομίαν	noun	—	—	Paul	uncertain, eternal
1 Co 6:9	κληρονομήσουσιν	verb	indicative	Future	Paul	kingdom of God
1 Co 6:10	κληρονομήσουσιν	verb	indicative	Future	Paul	kingdom of God
1 Co 15:50	κληρονομήσαι	verb	infinitive	Aorist	Paul	kingdom of God
1 Co 15:50	κληρονομεῖ	verb	indicative	Present	Paul	kingdom of God
Ga 3:18	κληρονομία	noun	—	—	Paul	Abraham's inheritance, land
Ga 4:30	κληρονομήσει	verb	indicative	Future	Paul	that which was promised to Abraham's free son
Ga 5:21	κληρονομήσουσιν	verb	indicative	Future	Paul	kingdom of God
Eph 1:14	κληρονομίας	noun	—	—	Paul	unspecific, probably eternal
Eph 1:18	κληρονομίας	noun	—	—	Paul	unspecific, probably eternal
Eph 5:5	κληρονομίαν	noun	—	—	Paul	kingdom of God
Col 3:24	κληρονομίας	noun	—	—	Paul	a reward for faithfulness

Heb 1:4	κεκληρονόμηκεν	verb	indicative	Perfect	AH	a name (Jesus)
Heb 1:14	κληρονομεῖν	verb	infinitive	Present	AH	salvation
Heb 6:12	κληρονομούντων	verb	participle	Present	AH	the promises
Heb 9:15	κληρονομίας	noun	—	—	AH	eternal inheritance
Heb 11:8	κληρονομίαν	noun	—	—	AH	Abraham's inheritance, land
Heb 12:17	κληρονομήσαι	verb	infinitive	Aorist	AH	Esau's blessing
1 Pe 1:4	κληρονομίαν	noun	—	—	Peter	imperishable inheritance
1 Pe 3:9	κληρονομήσητε	verb	subjunctive	Aorist	Peter	uncertain, "obtain" for faithfulness
Re 21:7	κληρονομήσει	verb	indicative	Future	John	a relationship with God

“Rest”

Reference	Word	Part of Speech	Case	Gender	Person	Tense
Heb 3:11	κατάπαυσίν	noun	accusative	feminine	singular	—
Heb 3:18	κατάπαυσιν	noun	accusative	feminine	singular	—
Heb 4:3	κατάπαυσίν	noun	accusative	feminine	—	—
Heb 4:4	κατέπαυσεν	verb	—	—	third person	aorist
Heb 4:5	κατάπαυσίν	noun	accusative	feminine	—	—
Heb 4:8	κατέπαυσεν	verb	—	—	third person	aorist
Heb 4:9	σαββατισμός	noun	nominative	masculine	—	—
Heb 4:10	κατάπαυσιν	noun	accusative	feminine	—	—
Heb 4:10	κατέπαυσεν	verb	—	—	third person	aorist
Heb 4:11	κατάπαυσιν	noun	accusative	feminine	—	—

“Impossible”

Reference	Result	Part of Speech	Case	Gender	Number	Referent
Mt 19:26	ἀδύνατόν	adjective	nominative	neuter	singular	salvation is impossible for men
Mk 10:27	ἀδύνατον	adjective	nominative	neuter	singular	salvation is impossible for men
Lk 18:27	ἀδύνατα	adjective	nominative	neuter	plural	salvation is impossible for men
Ac 14:8	ἀδύνατος	adjective	nominative	masculine	singular	lame man unable to walk
Ro 8:3	ἀδύνατον	adjective	accusative	neuter	singular	law was unable to do
Ro 15:1	ἀδυνάτων	adjective	genitive	masculine	plural	bearing the infirmities of the unable
Heb 6:4	Ἄδύνατον	adjective	nominative	neuter	singular	impossible to be restored
Heb 6:18	ἀδύνατον	adjective	nominative	neuter	singular	impossible for God to lie
Heb 10:4	ἀδύνατον	adjective	nominative	neuter	singular	impossible for the blood of bulls and goats
Heb 11:6	ἀδύνατον	adjective	nominative	neuter	singular	impossible to please God without faith

“Promise”

Reference	Result	Part of Speech	Case	Gender	Number	Referent
Heb 4:1	ἐπαγγελίας	noun	genitive	feminine	singular	the promise of entering rest
Heb 6:12	ἐπαγγελίας	noun	accusative	feminine	plural	those who inherit what is promised
Heb 6:13	ἐπαγγελάμενος	verb	nominative	masculine	singular	God promised descendants to Abraham
Heb 6:15	ἐπαγγελίας	noun	genitive	feminine	singular	Abraham received his promised descendant
Heb 6:17	ἐπαγγελίας	noun	genitive	feminine	singular	Abrahamic covenant
Heb 7:6	ἐπαγγελίας	noun	accusative	feminine	plural	Abrahamic covenant
Heb 8:6	ἐπαγγελίας	noun	dative	feminine	plural	the better promises of the New Covenant
Heb 9:15	ἐπαγγελίαν	noun	accusative	feminine	singular	promise of the eternal inheritance
Heb 10:23	ἐπαγγελάμενος	verb	nominative	masculine	singular	Jesus Christ is the one who promises
Heb 10:36	ἐπαγγελίαν	noun	accusative	feminine	singular	obedience to the will of God results in receiving His promises
Heb 11:9	ἐπαγγελίας	noun	genitive	feminine	singular	the land of promise
Heb 11:9	ἐπαγγελίας	noun	genitive	feminine	singular	abrahamic promise, specifically the land
Heb 11:11	ἐπαγγελάμενον	verb	accusative	masculine	singular	Abrahamic promise, specifically descendants
Heb 11:13	ἐπαγγελίας	noun	accusative	feminine	plural	the patriarchs did not see the promises fulfilled
Heb 11:17	ἐπαγγελίας	noun	accusative	feminine	plural	Abraham received the promises from God
Heb 11:33	ἐπαγγελιῶν	noun	genitive	feminine	plural	heroes of the faith gained promises
Heb 11:39	ἐπαγγελίαν	noun	accusative	feminine	singular	heroes of the faith did not receive “the promise”

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