

How Should We Understand the People Who Fall Away in Hebrews 6?

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[0 : 00] Welcome back. Today's question is how do we properly understand what Hebrews 6 refers to as those who fall away and the impossibility of their redemption? I'll read Hebrews 6, 1-12.

Therefore, laying the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of the laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

And this we will do, if God permits. For it is impossible for those who are once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love, which you have shown towards his name, in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister.

[1 : 18] And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

When you read through the book of Hebrews, what you'll see throughout is a juxtaposition of shadow and reality. You'll see a juxtaposition of the unbelief that draws back and the faith and patience that press forward and receive the promises.

And so we have this contrast that's very sharply drawn. In the preceding chapters, we've had a discussion of the Israelites and the promise, Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, etc.

And the importance of entering into God's rest. And that is a key verse to help us understand what's going on here. There is another wilderness-type struggle here, waiting for 40 years until there's an entrance into, for a generation until there's an entrance into some sort of rest.

Who are the people who rebelled? The people in the wilderness under Moses. And God was angry with them, and then judgment fell upon them, and others entered into rest.

[2 : 40] Now there is a promise of entering into rest that is presented to these people by Christ. Are they going to be those who draw back, or are they going to be those who press forward?

And so Hebrews puts before the readers an array of realities. Are they going to draw back to these shadows things that will have no reality once the reality has come, that they're displaced by the reality itself?

Or are they going to press on to recognize that here we have no continuing city? And it's important to see the book of Hebrews being written in the shadow of the coming event of the destruction of Jerusalem.

The significance of going outside the city in the concluding chapters. The importance of coming to the true Jerusalem, to Mount Zion, to the true mount.

The importance of the Exodus pattern for understanding redemption. All of this is very significant, and will help us to understand what's taking place in Hebrews 6.

[3 : 53] And elsewhere, in some of the other apostasy passages. For instance, if you look at verse 26 of chapter 10. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy, who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

For we know him who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. So he calls then his readers to confidence, to press forward.

The problem is that if they draw back, there remains no longer a sacrifice for sins. And that is not just a loose statement.

It's a more technical statement, in that there remains no longer a sin offering. There's no longer a temple system that will be able to serve them. Once they've drawn back, there's no redemption for them in the shadows that they are moving from.

[5 : 18] Rather, they must press forward into the reality at this point. He goes on to talk about, See that you do not refuse him who speaks, for if they did not escape who refused him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth.

But now he has promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven. Now this, yet once more, indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.

And so he's just previously juxtaposed the true Mount Zion, the true city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, that we come to as Christian believers, and contrasted that with Mount Sinai, that God spoke and he shook the earth at Mount Sinai.

But now he speaks from heaven. Christ speaks from heaven. He is the true high priest, not the Levitical priesthood, which is a shadow of the true, or the, it's not about the, the earthly tabernacle, which again is a shadow of the true tabernacle and temple.

[6 : 44] Rather, it's the voice that speaks from heaven. It's the voice that's going to shake those things that are not designed to remain. The temple is going to fall.

That's not going to endure. You're going to have to leave this earthly city and you're going to have to pursue the heavenly one. And if you draw back at this point, there is no longer any redemption for you there.

The faith of Israel and the faith of the church are in the same God. And this is an important thing to recognize, that throughout the argument of Hebrews is premised upon the fact that Israel was serving the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That that is the God that brought them out of Egypt. And so their faith in that God was a true faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was not a faith in some lesser shadow of Christ, of who Christ is.

It was an anticipation in shadow of his redemption. And so as they experienced the Exodus and the example of Abraham and others, what Hebrews argues is that they looked for a city that was to come.

[8 : 01] They weren't just looking towards being brought into the promised land. They were looking beyond that into being brought into God's true country. And so they saw that as an anticipation, as a reality-filled promise of what was yet to come.

And so as he speaks to these people here, are they going to be people who by faith see those things that are invisible, pursue that heavenly city?

Or are they going to be those who rest their eyes solely upon the earthly city of Jerusalem and remain there in a way that's... All that remains there is the expectation of judgment.

So then, how do we read chapter 6? It's impossible for those who are enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come if they fall away to renew them again to repentance, since

they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put him to an open shame.

For the earth which drinks in the rain often comes upon it and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated receives blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

[9 : 18] What he's talking about there is the state of Israel if it rejects Christ. Christ is Israel's Messiah. Christ is the reality that Israel looked forward to.

And all these types were reality-filled promises of the one who is yet to come, of Christ. And so if they reject Christ, they are falling away from their birthright.

And this is one of the reasons why he brings forward the example of Esau later on. That Esau is the fornicator or profane person who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

And he says, For you know that afterward when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected. For he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. And so the challenge is, are you going to draw back to that old covenant where there no longer remains any means for redemption?

Or are you going to press forward? Are you going to be one who, like Esau, despises the birthright of the covenant? Who counts the blood of the covenant by which you have sanctified a common thing and insults the spirit of grace that was given to Israel?

[10 : 33] Or are you going to be one that receives the promise, that presses forward into the promise that has been opened up? Now, what does it mean for Israel to have been enlightened, to have tasted the heavenly gift, become partakers of the Holy Spirit?

I think all of this is Exodus language, among other things. That Israel was enlightened by God's presence, quite literally, in the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud.

That God's light went before them. This is language that is taken from the Psalms. As we read, for instance, He spread a cloud for a covering and fire to give light in the night.

The people asked and He brought quail and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. So He gave them the gift, the heavenly gift, bread from heaven itself. He gave them the manna, He gave them the quail, He gave them the light to keep them light by night.

Then also the language of the land taking in water. In Deuteronomy 11, verse 11, or 10 following, For the land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt, which you have come from, where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot as a vegetable garden.

[12 : 05] But the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the Lord your God cares. The eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.

And it shall be, if you diligently obey my commandments, which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine and your oil.

And so Israel is the land that is receiving this rain, that is drinking in the rain that often comes upon it, these different rains that are discussed in Deuteronomy. And this land is not bearing good fruit. It's borne thorns and briars and its end is to be burned. It's facing imminent judgment. And so they become partakers of the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah 63 we read, Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people saying, Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock?

Where is he who put his Holy Spirit within them, who led them by the right hand of Moses, with his glorious arm dividing the water before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the deep, as a horse in the wilderness, that they might not stumble.

[13 : 33] As a beast goes down into the valley and the Spirit of the Lord causes him to rest, so you lead your people to make yourself a glorious name. And so Israel had become partakers of the Holy Spirit.

They had tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. They had seen the crossing of the Red Sea, in the manna from heaven, in the other miracles that they had witnessed. They had seen the powers of the age to come. They had experienced the good word of God. And if they fall away from all that they have experienced, all the blessings they have had, there remains no longer a hope for them, just the expectation of judgment.

And I think these references intensified still as a reference also to Christ. They had experienced Christ in their midst. They had been enlightened by the light of the world that had come from heaven.

They had become partakers of the Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit had been working in their very midst. They had tasted the good word of God. They had heard Christ speak. And they had experienced the powers of the age to come as he had acted in their midst and as he had been raised from the dead.

[14:49] And if they fall away, and this falling away is not, the assumption should not be that only Christians can fall away in this sense. This is a falling away that is possible for Israel because Israel was the covenant people.

And if they fall away from the covenant, when the reality comes, if they reject the reality and persist in that rejection, so it's not just a stumble, but they persist in that rejection, then there's no longer any hope for them.

What does Jesus mean when he talks about the sin against the Holy Spirit? The sin against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the sin against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. In Luke, in Acts, the book of Acts, we see a twofold visitation pattern.

That Moses comes to the people first as he judges the Egyptian that killed the Israelite. And he kills the Egyptian. And then the people reject him.

And then he comes again and he delivers them. And those who reject him on that occasion, there's no longer any salvation for them. Joseph comes once to his brothers. He's rejected by his brothers and put into slavery.

[15:58] He comes again and he brings deliverance. What happens when people reject Christ as he comes again in the ministry of the church?

If they reject that testimony, the testimony of the Holy Spirit, there's no longer any hope for them. They rejected the Son of Man. They crucified him. And when Christ comes in the witness of the church and they reject that too, and they persecute the church, all that remains for them is judgment.

And so the sin against the Holy Spirit is the sin against the Spirit-anointed church. You can sin against the Son of Man. They can crucify Christ and he will call for their forgiveness. But if they sin also against the witness of the Holy Spirit, not just against the first witness, but also against the second witness, there's no longer any hope for them.

There's a final judgment on AD 70. And after that, that's the conclusion of the story for them. So that's a crucial point to understand, I think, what's taking place here.

If you draw back to this group that has rejected Christ, that has rejected the Messiah, that has rejected the true temple, that has rejected the true Mount Zion, that has rejected the true city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, that has rejected Melchizedek, this true high priest, that has rejected the greater Joshua, what remains for you?

[17:30] What remains is just judgment. There's no longer a true sacrifice because all those sacrifices were just anticipations of the sacrifice that has truly come now in Christ.

And so the author of Hebrews is speaking into that situation and saying if you draw back to that and the people that draw back are the people who have rejected Christ.

And this helps us to understand what it says, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put him to an open shame. What does that mean? Well, they crucified him once.

That generation had crucified Christ and then in their rejection of Christ again in the ministry of the church, the rejection not just of the voice speaking from earth in the earthly ministry of Christ, incognito, the messianic secret not yet being revealed, but the voice speaking from heaven, ascended on high, seated at God's right hand.

If they reject that voice, then they have crucified, as it were, Christ again for themselves and put him to an open shame. And that is why the expectation of judgment exists.

[18:48] This land has taken in the reins of God's blessing again and again. God has sent prophet after prophet after prophet. And then he sent his Son and they rejected his Son.

And after that, the Son called for their forgiveness from the cross. And after that, he sent his Spirit. And in the ministry of the Spirit, the church witnessed to them.

And when they rejected that too, all that remained was the judgment of AD 70, the destruction of the temple, the bringing down of that old order, and the people who are drawn back from entering

into the promise of rest that God put before them, into the realities that God had stretched forth in Christ and in the witness of the church.

There's nothing left. And so I think this needs to be read against the background of AD 70. And once we do that, it makes a lot more sense of the argument of Hebrews, the integrity of it, why it's focused so much upon Israel, certain of the language that's used, the despising of the birthright, the language of crucifying Christ again, of no longer remaining a sin offering, all these sorts of things. And also the significance of the Exodus example and the juxtaposition between those who went forward and those who drew back. This will help us to explain so much, I think, of the argument of Hebrews.

[20 : 06] I hope this helps. If you have any further questions, please leave them in my Curious Cat account. And if you've found these videos helpful, please tell your friends and pass them on. And if you would like to support future videos like this, please consider supporting my Patreon account.

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