

Hebrews

AUTHOR: Probably the Apostle Paul wrote Hebrews. No one knows for sure who wrote it, but most Bible students feel it was Paul. If Paul did not write it, perhaps Barnabas did. Some think it may have been Apollos, but the book of Hebrews has every evidence of being a Pauline epistle.

THEME: "Encouragement to the Hebrew Christians to Keep Going on for God"

KEY VERSE: Hebrews 2:3, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." The general feeling about this verse is that it has to do with the unsaved man neglecting his salvation. If, they say, he neglects this salvation, he will not escape the wrath of God. This is a Bible truth, but it is not the teaching of this verse. This verse teaches that the Christian should not neglect the great salvation that he has. It is like a person who owns a coat; he should keep it clean. A person who owns a house should keep it clean. A person who owns shoes should keep them shined. The person who owns a yard should keep it mowed. A person who owns salvation that is so great as ours should keep it up. This does not mean that we have to hold on to our salvation; it means that since we have salvation, we should be the best Christians that we possibly can be!

I. THE PHRASE "SO GREAT" IS USED TWICE IN HEBREWS. The first "so great" is "so great salvation" in Hebrews 2:3. The second "so great" is "so great a cloud of witnesses" in Hebrews 12:1. The entire book of Hebrews may be outlined by these two "so greats." Hebrews 1-10 tells us how great salvation is. Hebrews 11 tells us how great a cloud of witnesses watch us from Heaven while we live on earth. Then because of this "so great salvation" in Hebrews 1-10 and this "so great a cloud of witnesses" in chapter 11, we are to do the things Paul admonishes us to do in Hebrews 12:1, 2. We are to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

When the Lord uses the word "so" in front of a word, He is saying that there is no way He can describe it adequately so man would understand it. How much did God love the world? John 3:16 says He "so loved" the world. How did the Apostle Paul preach in Acts 14:1? He "so spake" that multitudes believed. All of us have heard people say to one another, "That sermon was so good," "That song was so pretty," "I love you so much," etc. This means that it is beyond description. The greatness of salvation is beyond description.

1. "So great salvation." In Hebrews 1-10, the Apostle tells us how great it is. He is talking to the Jews; hence, he uses things that they understand as he describes the greatness of salvation.

- 1) In Hebrews 1. salvation is greater than the prophets. The prophets were very important to the Jews, but God is reminding them that Jesus and salvation in Him are greater than the prophets.
- 2) In Hebrews 2. Jesus and salvation are greater than the angels. The angels were very important to the Jews; hence, the greatness of salvation is described as excelling the angels in importance.
- 3) In Hebrews 3. salvation is greater than Moses. Moses, of course, was one of the great men in Jewish history. Paul reminds them that salvation is greater than Moses.
- 4) In Hebrews 4. salvation is greater than the Sabbath.
- 5) In Hebrews 5. salvation is greater than the high priest.
- 6) In Hebrews 6. salvation is greater than Melchisedec.
- 7) In Hebrews 7. our salvation is greater than Aaron.
- 8) In Hebrews 8. our salvation is greater than the covenants.

9) In Hebrews 9. our salvation is greater than the tabernacle and temple.

10) In Hebrews 10. our salvation is greater than the sacrifices.

Hence, you can see that the author takes pains to mention the things most sacred and most precious to the Jews and reminds them that salvation through Christ is greater than any of those.

2. "So great a cloud of witnesses."

Notice Hebrews 12:1. In Hebrews 11 we have a list of great people of the Old Testament. In Hebrews 12:1 we are reminded that these people watch us from Heaven. Paul likens the Christian life to a race or an athletic contest. There is a great crowd in the grandstand. These are the saints of the Old Testament. They watch us from the grandstand while we perform. We are the players; they are the spectators. We are the present student body; they are the alumni. This means we should be careful what we do, what we say, and how we act, for we are being watched by "so great a cloud of witnesses." (Teacher, liken life to an athletic contest with the crowd watching us. Go back to Hebrews 11 and remind the pupils of all who are watching. Tell them Abraham, Abel, Isaac, Moses and the other greats of the Old Testament watch all that we do. Think of that! It should drive us to live for God and to run the race better.)

II. THE PURPOSE OF HEBREWS IS TO PERSUADE US TO DO THREE THINGS.

1. *Lay aside every weight.* Again, read Hebrews 12:1, 2. This goes back to the athlete running a race. There are things that are not wrong for an athlete to do, but they would be "weights" for him if he ran a race. When I was young I ran track. One of the races I ran was to 100 yard dash. In practice I would strap on leg weights and run and run. It would strengthen my legs and I would become faster. However, I always removed the weights before a race. This Scripture likens this to a runner about to run the 100-yard dash wearing weights!

How foolish this would look! How foolish it would be for a runner to try to win a race wearing weights. You can't win the race unless you strip yourself of all the weights. There are things that are not wrong for the Christian, but they are "weights," and they keep him from running as fast as he ought to run.

2. *Lay aside every sin.* Because we have such a great salvation, and because we are being watched by so many, we should lay aside every sin in life and do our best for God.

3. *Run with patience the race that is set before us.* We are running a race. That is why the Apostle Paul could say when he had finished his life, "I have finished my course." See II Timothy 4:6, 7. In other words, he had run the race. Paul is admonishing us to run the race for God, to lay aside every weight before we run, and to lay aside every sin. (A good runner would not smoke, drink, abuse his body, etc.)

CONCLUSION: The entire book of Hebrews is written to persuade new Christians, especially the Jewish Christians, to do these three things: Lay aside every weight, lay aside every sin, and run the race for God. The two arguments presented are the greatness of salvation and the greatness of the cloud of witnesses who watch us. Because of the great salvation that we have and because of those who watch us, let us heed the admonition of this book. (Note to teacher: Discuss with the pupils something that has been given to them, especially a valuable gift. Show them they should care for it because it is a gift. Maybe someone gave them a ring, a watch, a bicycle, a coat, a suit, or another gift that is expensive and precious. Because it is a gift does not mean that we can abuse it; it means we ought to care for it and keep it up. Such is our salvation. It is a gift by grace through faith, but we ought to be the best Christians we can be, thereby not neglecting "so great salvation.")