

The Patio Pulpit For March 17, 2021

Lessons Drawn From the Letter To the Hebrews

One of the most important lessons a student of the Bible hopefully learns early on, is the lesson of context. Something as simple as learning to pay attention to the **historical context** of a Bible book and the **grammatical context** of a passage or phrase or word and the **Biblical context** of what one is reading and the **identity** of the original audience can solve or resolve practically any question the student may have. Context is that essential. What is necessary when studying the word of God is discovering what the author meant and how his audience understood what he was communicating. Else we will read into the text our opinions rather than extracting out of the text what was actually meant.

And when we come to a difficult book like the one sitting before us, we must apply all the above to it if we hope to ascertain what it is actually saying and not what we might **think** it is saying. This letter to the Hebrews can be disturbing and upsetting to one who reads without taking note of its context. I know I have pointed out the necessity of context many times before but it is that important.

I'm going to let you in on a remarkable and simple insight I had this week concerning this letter, and this is it. **“The author of this book did not have you and me in mind when he wrote it.”** I repeat, **“The author of this book did not have you and me in mind when he wrote it.”** That one statement in and of itself can eliminate any fear we might feel when reading the verses that seem to teach that one can lose his or her salvation. If you begin your study of this book, keeping context in mind, you will find yourself gleaning more truths from it than you would have otherwise. And please don't misunderstand what I am saying. This letter is one of many among the New Testament God-breathed letters and is profitable for the building up of our faith. I am just saying that it is specifically addressed to a Jewish audience and without acknowledging that, we can easily miss the message. The same can be said of the letters written by the apostle Peter.

Let's think about what I just said before we go any further. **“The author of this book did not have you and me in mind when he wrote**

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it.” Rather, he had a congregation of Jews in mind who had heard the gospel of their Messiah, with some of them believing it while others were at the time, debating whether or not to embrace it. **Hebrews 2:1** *For this reason we must pay much closer attention to **what we have heard**, so that we do not drift away from it. ² For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, ³ how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? (Heb. 2:1-3 NAU)*

The Jews who were hesitant about trusting in this Jew from Nazareth were finding it very difficult to turn away from the religion of their forefathers and the Mosaic law. They saw that as betraying their parents and their synagogue and the temple system of worship. It would mean denying everything they had stood for and been brought up to believe, including being declared righteous on account of their obedience to the law. It would mean having to admit that they were wrong about the role of Abraham and Moses and the law. It would mean denying their long-held belief that God loved them because of who they were and what they had done. That is a lot for anyone to turn away from. That's why so many Jews to this day hate their Messiah. And it is why Orthodox Jews consider Christianity a damnable cult.

Consider some people we know who left Roman Catholicism and joined a Christian denomination that is radically different from Catholicism. The Roman cult saw their leaving as apostasy and the Christian group they joined as a cult. Or the Southern Baptists who left their church and joined the cult of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. We say that they are apostate, which they most certainly are. The difference between the above scenarios and the situation these Jews found themselves in is that while apostates find their new religion attractive, the Jews who resisted the gospel didn't.

Now while I stand by the fact that the author didn't have us in mind, this is the inspired word of God and there are many faith lessons

the disciple of Christ can glean from this letter. After all, ¹⁶ *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for*

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correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17 NAU) And as that man of God for my congregation, I am going to draw out of this letter several of those lessons.

Here's the first lesson from the letter to the Hebrews:

First, the canon of Scripture is closed

Read this, **Hebrews 1:1** *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son,* (Heb. 1:1-2)

That one verse has the definite message of finality when it comes to God speaking direct revelation to men. God has spoken "...*in these last days to us in His Son.*" And the New Testament is God speaking to us in His Son.

From the gospel of John, chapter 16, ¹² *"I have many more things to say to you, the context demands that the "you" refers to the apostles, not everyone, but the apostles, but you cannot bear them now.*

¹³ *"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you the apostles, not everyone, but the apostles, into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (Jn. 16:12-13 NAU)*

And this from the lips of the Lord Jesus, ²⁶ *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you the apostles, not everyone, but the apostles, all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you the apostles, not everyone, but the apostles. (Jn. 14:26 NAU)*

Hear this, "The apostles received revelation directly from the Spirit, we who now have the Spirit, receive direct revelation from their written words as taught us by the Spirit. There is no new direct revelation from God. No new books or letters are being added to the Bible.

The phrase, “*thus says the Lord,*” occurs 419 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, but not even once in the New Testament. But there is a New Testament equivalent. The equivalent is “*it is written.*” “It is written”

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occurs 60 times in the New Testament. It is written is to the New Testament what “thus says the Lord” is to the Old. The written word of God is the written word of God, whether it’s in the Old or the New. And that fact, that the canon of Scripture is closed, is a built-in safe guard against the myriad of false teachers who have taken over thousands of our nation’s pulpits who claim every day to have heard directly from God apart from the written word when they have not. They give talks based almost exclusively on their supposed new revelations from God. And this is where we must be Bereans, we must go to the written word of God to see if what they are saying is Scriptural and true.

But what about the rest of the New Testament writings? What about the writings of Paul and John and Peter and James and Jude? Their writings are manifestations of the Son speaking new revelation to the church through His chosen apostles. When we read the word of God, from the gospels to the book of the Revelation, we are hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd. And we would be well advised to not go beyond what is written. ⁶ *Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. (1 Cor. 4:6 NAU)*

Second, God, in Christ, has provided a way far better than the Mosaic law and Jewish traditions.

The word “better” occurs 13 times in this letter and it means “superior to.” It doesn’t mean better as we usually use it, it literally means something is superior to something that was previously seen as good. I might say that Duke’s Mayonnaise is better than Helman’s. I might say that Dunkin’ Donuts brand of coffee is better than Maxwell House. But this better is like saying the Mona Lisa is better than the stick figures I drew as a kid. And by the way, the painting of the Mona

Lisa hanging in the Louvre Museum in Paris is not as small as a postage stamp as many people say it is. It is a full portrait size painting in a full sized frame.

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I have mentioned recently that Beverly and I are reading through the Bible together and we have both been amazed at the demands God put on His chosen people when it comes to their daily lives and how He wants them to worship Him and to pay for their sins. I have read through the Bible many times but this time it is with fresh eyes. I am seeing it as never before. And I have been overwhelmed by the precise details God demanded in the building of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and in the way animals were to be sacrificed. And with the ten commandments and the 600 + other laws and ordinances given to Israel, I can see why the author of Hebrews emphasized the superiority of the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ. The law and the ordinances were a burden that no Jew could bear. God made our justification and redemption and reconciliation and forgiveness so simple through His giving His Son to the world. Why any good Jew would want to stay under that way of life is beyond me.

Listen to the betters found in this letter, and I close with this: a better word, a better payment for sins, a better Man, better blood, a better death, a better throne, a better scepter, a better foundation, a better message, He has a better name, a better ministry, we have a better hope, a better anchor for our souls, better help, One better than Abraham and Moses and David, we are better sons, a better tabernacle, a better covenant, a better commandment, better promises a better rest, better rewards, better sacrifices a better possession a better resurrection a better High Priest

And as a result of those betters, we have been perfected, once and for all. **Hebrews 10:14** *For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.* (Heb. 10:14 NAU)

Again, the author of this letter did not have us in mind but people who were straddling the fence, many of whom had already chosen to remain under the law and face God with only their filthy rags to present

to them in their defense. Read this letter from now on joyfully, giving thanks to the Father for saving us the way He did, through the One who is the way, the truth and the life. In Jesus name. Amen.