

Exegetical Paper: Hebrews 2:1–4

John Oglesby

BT701: Advanced Hermeneutics and Theological Method

April 12, 2020

Verify Text and Translation

Chapter 1 of Hebrews ends with a question. The answer is picked up in verse one of chapter 2. Δὲ, as found at the beginning of verse 1, is an adverbial key showing a movement in the train of thought, pointing to the beginning of a new pericope. An implication is presented in verse 1, leading to the next question, which continues through verse 4. This pericope ends with that question. Verses 1-4 of chapter 2 of Hebrews is a complete pericope and should be studied as a unit.

Within the verse of Hebrews 2:1–4, there are five textual variants.¹ Three of the five variants only appear in a single manuscript giving little validity to the variants. For this reason, the focus will mainly fall on two variants.

The first variant is the omission of the entire first verse of Hebrews 2. This variant reading appears in manuscripts 0243 (10th century), 1739 (10th century), and 1881 (14th century). Due to the late dating of these manuscripts, the weight of evidence is not enough to agree with the variant reading.

The second variant is found in verse 4 and omits τε which is a correlative conjunction. While this variant is seemingly insignificant, it needs addressing. The only significant manuscript is P (024), which is a sixth-century manuscript of the Byzantine text-type. The text-type of every other manuscript is also Byzantine, dating the ninth century or later. Because of this, the family of manuscripts, the lack of diversity in family, the late dating of the manuscripts, and lack of manuscripts showing the variant (11), the reading as found in the NA28 is the correct reading.

The reading of Hebrews 2:1-4, as found in the NA28 is the correct reading.

¹ This information is according to the Nestle Aland 28 Critical Apparatus

Historical and Cultural Background

Author

The author of the letter to the Hebrews does not name himself/herself. Because of this, the author must be deduced from details within the letter. Hebrews 2:3 eliminates the possibility of an apostle writing the letter as an apostle would fall into the category of “them.” The author received the information from “them,” as opposed to directly from the Lord. This detail lends a hand to someone like Luke or Apollos. The author has an extensive knowledge of the Hebrew Old Testament as Hebrew deals extensively with the priesthood², quotes the Old Testament extensively³, and works through Old Testament topics such as the Old and New Covenants⁴. It is highly likely that the author wrote the letter from Italy, possibly Rome⁵. Cross-referenced with 2 Timothy 4:11, this gives great weight to Luke being the author.⁶

Audience

Two things need to be distinguished when discussing the audience. Is the audience a Jewish, gentile, or mixed audience? Secondly, is the audience a believing, unbelieving, or mixed?

Jewish or Gentile?

Hebrews 1:1 could potentially point to a Jewish audience. However, the lack possessive first-person pronoun suggests the author is pointing to “the fathers” instead of “our fathers.” If “our fathers” was the correct translation, there could be some viability of a Jewish audience; however, it is absent.

² 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 4:15; 5:1; 5:5-6; 5:10-6:20; 7-10:21; 13:11

³ Hebrews obviously quotes the Old Testament 31 times and potentially alludes to the Old Testament much more.

⁴ 7:22; 8:6-13; 9; 10:16-29; 12:24; 13:20

⁵ 13:24

⁶ There have been some great works to derive who the author of Hebrews could be. It is outside the scope of this work to do so. However, there is a great weight of evidence pointing to a Lukan authorship, especially with the closing three verses.

Believer or Unbeliever?

The audience seems to be believers for two reasons. First, the author addresses them as brethren nine times⁷, directly four times⁸, and indirectly five⁹. This is similar to other letters that address the audience in the vocative case¹⁰. These believers were certainly immature¹¹, but believers none¹².

Purpose for Writing

The nature of the letter is located in Hebrews 13:22. The author wrote in order to exhort the audience in response to the identity and work of Jesus Christ, which can be seen throughout the letter and will be revealed in great detail in the next section as the structure of the letter is shared.

Structure

Hebrews can be broken into two major sections. Chapters 1–11 address mostly doctrine and subsequent implications, while chapters 12–13 address practice as it results from the previous chapters. The first eleven chapters are broken into four smaller sections addressing Jesus as revelation, as high priest, as priest from the order of Melchizedek, and as the sufficient sacrifice.

Basic Outline

- A. Doctrine (1–11)
 - a. Revelation of God found throughout history (1–2)
 - i. Summary/Thesis (1:1–2)
 - ii. Finally delivered in Jesus (1:3–4)
 - iii. Superiority of the medium, Jesus (1:5–14)
 - iv. Implications of the message being delivered through the new and complete medium (2:1–4)
 - v. Future subjection of all things to Jesus (2:5–9)

⁷ 2:11, 12, 17; 3:1, 12; 7:5; 10:19; 13:1, 22

⁸ 3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22

⁹ 2:11, 12, 17; 7:5; 13:1

¹⁰ Note, especially James and 1 Peter.

¹¹ Heb. 5:12

¹²theless, which lends a hand to the purpose of writing.

- vi. Humility of Jesus (2:10–16)
- vii. Purpose of that humility (2:17–18)
- b. Jesus as High Priest (3–6)
 - i. Foundation of Jesus' High Priestly Character (3:1–11)
 - ii. Woe against unbelief (3:12–19)
 - iii. The rest of the believer [obedient unto belief] (4)
 - iv. Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5)
 - v. Growth of the obedient believer (6)
 - 1. Woe for those of unbelief (6:1–8)
 - 2. Encouragement and exhortation of confidence (6:9–20)
- c. Character of Jesus' Priestly Office (7–9)
 - i. Superiority and eternity of Jesus' priesthood (7)
 - ii. Heavenly nature of Jesus' office (8:1–6)
 - iii. Insufficiency of the first covenant (8:7–13)
 - iv. Jesus' place in the New Covenant yet to come (9)
- d. Sufficiency and Implications of Jesus' Sacrifice (10–11)
 - i. Christ is the sufficient sacrifice (10:1–18)
 - ii. Result in relation to believers of the sufficient sacrifice applied (10:19–39)
 - 1. Positive result and implication (10:19–25)
 - 2. Warning against negative result brought about by disobedience (10:26–39a)
 - iii. Faith: The method, result, and examples (10:39b–11)
- B. Proper Response (12–13:19)
 - a. Exhortation of proper perspective (12:1–3)
 - b. Result of the Father's love; Purpose of discipline (12:4–24)
 - c. Gratitude instead of disobedience (12:25–29)
 - d. Continued Sanctification (13:1–14)
 - e. Continued exhortation (13:15–19)
- C. Benediction (13:20–25)

Grammatical and Syntactical Keys

Διὰ – The original διὰ is a causal adverbial clause. Therefore, one should look to the previous text, which is discussing the superiority of Christ to the angels or messengers in discussion.

Μήποτε – This is a purpose clause answering the question “Why?” It is giving the reason for the necessity of paying especially more attention to the things which “we have heard.”

εἰ γὰρ – This is a conditional statement. If the following is true, how will the following happen?

διὰ – This is a clause of means. The object is the salvation that was communicated to those who heard. The means is the Lord.

κατὰ – This is also a clause of means. The signs, miracles, and distribution of the Holy Spirit was by means of God's will.

Διὰ τοῦτο δεῖ περισσοτέρως προσέχειν ἡμᾶς τοῖς ἀκουσθεῖσιν, (Cause)
Because of this it is especially necessary we pay attention to the things we have heard

μήποτε παραρυῶμεν. (Purpose)
so that we do not drift away/lest we drift away

εἰ γὰρ ὁ δι’* ἰ ἀγγέλων λαληθεὶς λόγος ἐγένετο βέβαιος καὶ πᾶσα παράβασις καὶ παρακοὴ ἔλαβεν ἔνδικον μισθαποδοσίαν, (Condition)
For if the word spoken through angels proved binding, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty,

3 πῶς ἡμεῖς ἐκφευξόμεθα τηλικαύτης ἀμελήσαντες σωτηρίας, (Means)
how will we escape neglecting (part.) so great a salvation

ἥτις ἀρχὴν λαβοῦσα λαλεῖσθαι (Temporal)
which it was at the first spoken

διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ὑπὸ τῶν ἀκουσάντων εἰς ἡμᾶς
 ἐβεβαιώθη, (How – Means)
 through the Lord and confirmed by those who
 heard to us

4 Γ συνεπιμαρτυροῦντος τοῦ θεοῦ σημείοις τε
 καὶ τέρασιν καὶ ποικίλαις δυνάμεσιν καὶ
 πνεύματος ἁγίου μερισμοῖς (How– Means)
 God also testifying with them, both by signs and
 wonders and by various miracles and by
 distributions of the Holy Spirit

κατὰ τὴν ^Fαὐτοῦ θέλησιν;¹³ (Manner)
 according to His own will.

¹³ Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Edition. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), Heb 2:1–4.

Lexical Keys

παραρυῶμεν found in verse 1. This word is used only once in the New Testament, which is found here in this verse. It is used twice in the LXX; Proverbs 3:21 and Isaiah 44:4. Proverbs 3:21 seems to point to something moving away from someone. Isaiah points to the idea of running water, particularly streams of water. In the context of Hebrews 2, it seems to point to the drifting away, as wood would do in running water, from the revelation which has been given.

Βέβαιος found in verse 2. This word is used eight times in eight different verses within the New Testament and is used four times in the LXX. Four of the uses within the New Testament is found in the book of Hebrews. BDAG gives three possible meanings, namely 1) reliable, 2) abiding or unwavering, 3) or valid. The NASB translates the word differently each time (unalterable, firm, steadfast, and valid, respectively). Both Hebrews 6:19 and 9:17 should be translated as valid. Hebrews 2:2 should be understood as reliable as the author is arguing for the reliability of the message the audience now has in Jesus Christ. The author adds surety to the penalty, which will be given to those who "neglect so great a salvation."

μερισμοῖς found in verse 4. This word is used only twice in the New Testament, in this text and Hebrews 4:12. It is also found twice in the LXX in Joshua 11:23 and Ezra 6:18. The range of meaning given by BDAG is 1) division or 2) distribution. It seems both instances in the LXX point to a distribution, first among the different tribes (Joshua) and then the priests of the Levites to their duties (Ezra 6:18). Hebrews 4:12 is more difficult, but even then could be the distribution of soul and spirit as the word pierces to the immaterial, and even the intricacies of the

immaterial. In Hebrews 2:2, the NASB translates the word "gift," but this seems to be unwarranted. It should be translated as distribution of the Holy Spirit. This distribution would have been in addition to the signs, miracles, and wonders given.

Παράβασις found in verse 2. BDAG defines the word as “act of deviating from an established boundary or norm, *overstepping, transgression*¹⁴” It seemingly points to an active breaking of a rule of law (versus maybe a passive disobedience). This is also found in Hebrews 9:15.

Παρακοή found in verse 2. BDAG defines the word as “refusal to listen and so be disobedient, *unwillingness to hear, disobedience*¹⁵” In contrast to Παράβασις, this word seems to be more of a passive or a negation of positive action. This word is used three times in the Greek New Testament. The other two instances are found in Romans 5:19 and 2 Corinthians 10:6.

Μισθαποδοσία found in verse 2. BDAG defines the word as “recompense” or, most literally, “the payment of wages.¹⁶” It is found two other times, both in Hebrews and points to a reward in the positive sense on both occasions. In this verse, it seems to be seen in a negative light, pointing to a penalty. However, in light of the other two uses, it could more accurately be seen as a loss of reward.

Biblical Context

The book of Hebrews is addressing the superiority of Christ and his role as the believer’s high priest. In chapter 1, the chapter before Hebrews 2:1–4, the author begins by arguing the

¹⁴ William Arndt et al., [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 758.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 766.

¹⁶ Ibid

superiority of Jesus, “having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.” Jesus is the Son of God¹⁷, the anointed King¹⁸, Creator¹⁹, and the inheritor of all authority²⁰. Angels are simply messengers, and servants of those will inherit salvation²¹. However, with this in mind, the message of the angels was valid, so if Jesus is far more superior, “how will we escape neglecting (part.) so great a salvation...” more This neglecting such salvation will not go unpunished because of the following verses, especially, "For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him."²²

Theological Context

The salvation, which is the main thrust of this passage deals with issues of sanctification. As can be seen in 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 shows the future judgment for believers which will receive a penalty, or loss of rewards, for the work done on this earth. 2 Corinthians 5:10 also points to this recompense which believers will receive. Neither of these texts points to an escapable judgment, but an inescapable judgment for those who have received this great salvation. While in a different context, the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–28 points to this judgment which will be given to the servants of Jesus. In this parable, the master [Jesus] has left for a time leaving different levels of talents for each servant. Depending on the faithfulness of the servants, when the master returns, the servants will be rewarded or suffer loss. Compare this with John 14:1–3.

¹⁷ Heb. 1:5–6

¹⁸ 1:8–9

¹⁹ 1:10–12

²⁰ 1:13

²¹ 1:7, 14

²² 2:8

Verification

Thomas Constable²³

After viewing Dr. Constable's work, it would seem there is agreeance amongst the process, and nothing missing can be identified. The connection was made with the superiority of Christ in chapter 1. Constable agrees that the audience is a believing audience. Constable connects this passage with the loss of rewards as well as further believers' judgment.

John Calvin²⁴

John Calvin would also agree with the conclusion of this paper. The thrust of the passage is the surety of the penalty that comes for the neglect of the gospel. Calvin brings up some interesting questions as to the difference between that spoke of Jesus and that of the angels, but exegetes the passage correctly, nonetheless. Interestingly, in Calvin's work titles *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul...*, he concludes, based on Hebrews 2:1–4, that Paul could not be the author of Hebrews.

David Allen²⁵

David does a detailed work on the syntax and semantics of the passage. His work in the Greek is superb. In his methodology, he revealed a piece of this work which wasn't quite as emphasized, and that is the emphasis on warning in verse 1 of chapter 2. "The combination of *dei* ("must," lit. "it is necessary") with the comparative adverb *perissoterōs* ("more careful") followed by *prosechō* ("pay attention to") and *pararuōmen* ("drift away") arrests the attention of the reader with a strong warning.²⁶" Allen also identified a hapax legomena,

²³ Thomas Constable, "Notes on Hebrews"

<https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/hebrews/hebrews.htm>. Accessed on April 19, 2020.

²⁴ John Calvin and John Owen. *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010.

²⁵ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*. The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 191.

“*sunepimartuountos*” which was missed in this work. This does not change the interpretation but adds emphasis on the work of the Lord in the signs, miracles, wonders, and distribution of the Holy Spirit.

Raymond Brown²⁷

Much like the other commentators, Dr. Brown agrees with the main thrust of the passage. Verse 1 is the main sentence in this pericope, followed by verses 2–4. The focus is on the superiority of Christ, the validity of the revelation through Him, and strong warning to not neglect that revelation. This is all founded upon the foundation laid in chapter 1.

Thomas Lea²⁸

Dr. Lea brings out a point that must be addressed. Dr. Lea agrees that the audience is a believing audience, but concludes a divine judgment leading to the loss of salvation²⁹. He is correct in his view of the audience as well as the impending judgment. The nature of the judge simply does not seem to fit other passages within the Bible. It seems clear, based on other contexts, that believers are secure in their salvation³⁰. The implied penalty for neglecting “so great a salvation” in verse 2 does not require a loss of salvation. The nature of the penalty or judgment is left open-ended, to be defined in a later context.

²⁷ Raymond Brown. *The Message of Hebrews: Christ above All*. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

²⁸ Thomas D. Lea. *Hebrews, James*. Vol. 10. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999.

²⁹ It is important to note, Dr. Lea does not state this explicitly, but implies it in his statement on page 22, “Hebrews 2 tells us to listen to Jesus. Listen to Jesus because the penalties for ignoring him are too severe. If we ignore Jesus, we will miss out on his salvation (2:1–4).”

³⁰ Ephesians 1:14; 1 Peter 1:3–5; Romans 8:1, 31–39; etc.

David Brown³¹

David Brown does a great job working through the Greek text but makes an unnecessary leap when he reads the New Covenant into the passage. There is no justification for doing so. Sure, the author of Hebrews speaks of the New Covenant in later passages, but at this point, it has not been mentioned in the letter. Interestingly, Brown did distinguish the nature of “transgression” and “disobedience.” These words have been added to the lexical keys.

Ray Stedman³²

It would seem that Dr. Stedman also agrees with the conclusions drawn. He adds an interesting note to the word *παρῆρθε* in verse 1, “Plato used it of something slipping away from memory, and Plutarch of a ring slipping from a finger. Another figure often suggested is that of a ship loose from its moorings³³”

Donald Guthrie³⁴

Again, it seems the conclusion is agreed upon within this passage. Guthrie works through the context of chapter one, the theme of Hebrews, as well as syntactical and lexical keys. He does connect the "word spoken by angels" to the giving of the law, as seen in Galatians 3:19. He also notes the importance of *μισθαποδοσία* in verse 2. This word has been added to the lexical keys.

³¹ David Brown, A. R. Fausset, and Robert Jamieson. *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Acts–Revelation*. Vol. VI. London; Glasgow: William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited, n.d.

³² Ray C. Stedman. *Hebrews*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1992.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Donald Guthrie. *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 15. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983.

Joseph Exell³⁵

Again, Exell seems to read the loss of salvation into the text. It could be strongly argued the other way based on distant context, but also, as noted in the previous paragraph, the nature of the penalty or retribution to be received is that of loss of reward, not the loss of salvation. It could be argued that the reward being lost is the salvation found in verse 3, but the connection is unwarranted.

Linda Belleville³⁶

There seems to be nothing new to add in this commentary. Belleville does an excellent job utilizing the grammar and lexical keys to understand the meaning of the passage, connecting the purpose and exhortation of the passage.

Exposition

Hebrews is a letter written by an unknown author to a, probably Jewish, believing audience. The purpose of the letter is to exhort the audience to obedience because of the character, work, and office of Jesus Christ. Chapter one establishes the authority and, ultimately, the position of Jesus Christ as deity, king, and ultimate authority. Because of this position of Jesus, the author of Hebrews begins a strong exhortation in 2:1–4.

The audience is being told, in an emphatic way, to pay attention to the things they had heard. This exhortation is attached to a purpose statement – this is to be done so they do not drift away as a piece of driftwood would drift down a stream, or a boat without power would drift in the current. This first verse is the main sentence.

³⁵ Joseph S. Exell. *The Biblical Illustrator: Hebrews*. Vol. I & II. London: James Nisbet & Co., n.d.

³⁶ Linda Belleville. *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews*. Vol. 17. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009.

Verse 2 begins a conditional comparative statement. If what was spoken through the angels, which is probably pointing to the Law as found in Galatians 3:19, proved binding, then how much more will what was spoken through Jesus? Again, this statement is founded upon the identity of Jesus, as seen in chapter 1.

There are a couple of words worth noting in Hebrews 2:2b as it parallels the result of that spoken through the angels and that spoken through Jesus Christ. The NASB translates them as transgression and disobedience. These words likely encompass both the active and passive sins of the individual. The word translated as "penalty" in the NASB points to a loss of rewards. This word is utilized in two other instances in the New Testament, both in Hebrews. In both occasions, it is used in a positive sense and translated reward. The negative sense, found in our passage, would likely imply the loss of reward.

The author then, in verse 3, continues to emphasize the authority behind the message heard. This message was first spoken through the Lord, in contrast to the previous which was spoken through angels, and confirmed "to us by those who heard." It does not stop there, however. Acts of God confirmed it; namely, signs, miracles, wonders, and distribution of the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, all three persons of the trinity are involved in this message, which was delivered. God spoke through Jesus and confirmed the message through acts of the Holy Spirit. The message is sure and should not be neglected!

The application for the primary audience is clear – do not neglect the teachings of Christ as you have been because the one doing the teaching is the Lord and has confirmed His message. According to Hebrews 5:12, the audience was not paying attention as they should and gives rise to the exhortation found previously in 2:1–4. In holding to the theme of the letter, the author is

encouraging or exhorting the audience to move their attention back to the salvation they have received in Jesus, halting all neglect of such a message.

Principles: Jesus' character and position require the close attention of the believer to His message. This message is tried and true, trustworthy, and worthy of all diligence. It was given by the Creator and attested to by the Holy Spirit. The neglect of doing so will ultimately result in judgment where the believer will suffer loss.

The application to today's Christian is similar to that of the primary audience. Listen to the Scripture. These Scriptures have been communicated from the Lord and attested by the apostles through signs, miracles, wonders, and distributions of the Holy Spirit. Even the Old Testament attests to the validity as they proved binding.

Getting specific: The Scriptures are worthy of a morning routine or daily study. Maybe that means an in-depth study of a pericope a day. Alternatively, potentially thirty minutes of reading every morning. Whatever routine works for you, open your Bible every day. Consider Jesus, as Hebrews 3:1 states. Renew your minds daily so that we do not drift away.