

Prayer

Glorious Lord, Your promise is given for our life and salvation, Your grace is given for our holiness and strength, Your love is given for our comfort and peace, Your compassion is given for our healing and restoration, Your assurance is given for our eternal hope and its fulfilment in heaven, here and now. We praise You, glorious Lord, for all You have given us! AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

(Offering alternatives that can broaden your experience of prayer)

Prayer ideas

Ask the Lord to help you to do the mundane and ordinary tasks of the day, and do them well

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who are handicapped** *Pray for people in government who are involved in legislating for people with physical and mental impairment. Pray that they will truly understand the needs of those they serve.*
- *Pray for those who suffer because of being unnecessarily exposed to the media, such as members of the public who get caught up in high profile court cases*
- *Give thanks to God for your hands and for their great abilities to hold and manoeuvre*

Meditation

You speak to us, Lord God, in love

You are firm when we need to direction
You are gentle when we need love
You are direct when we need instructions
You are silent when we need to decide
You are challenging when we need to face facts
You are encouraging when we need to affirmation
You are heartening when we need courage
You are cautious when we need warning
You are critical when we need guidance
You are welcoming when we need care

You speak to us, Lord God, in love

Bible passage - Hebrews 2:1-4

¹ How important it is, therefore, that we should pay even greater attention to what we have heard so that we do not fall away from it. ² For if the message spoken by angels has proved to be true, and every sin or disobedience had a just penalty, ³ how is it possible to neglect such a great a salvation and escape? It was first received through the preaching of the Lord and confirmed to us by those who heard Him, ⁴ and God added to His testimony by signs and wonders, works of power, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, divided out according to His will.

Bible Study

Review

This is a truly wonderful passage of Scripture. It lifts the heart and enables the Christian reader to feel deeply connected to the life of Jesus and the work of God in salvation. Within the text there is a threefold testimony to the truth of what Jesus said and did; the testimony of angels (2:2), the testimony of people (2:3) and the testimony of God (2:4). This is powerful testimony, because history proves that people have a tendency to wander away from what they know, so they need more evidence than their own memories! Moreover, the call to hold on to this truth is not to be thought of as a restraint, as if it prevents God's people from exploring their faith or using their minds to explore what God has done for them. Hebrews testifies to one truth about God, found through Jesus Christ alone, for salvation comes through Him, there is no other route. The Gospel is the indispensable heart of God's creative work within the human soul.

Here, the truth of the Gospel is explained firstly as a '*message spoken by angels*', a word that has which has '*proved to be true*' (2:2). The writer uses the term 'angels' in the general Biblical sense of 'messenger', and in this sense, he suggests that all of the Old Testament is 'angelic' in nature. We do not have to search in Scripture for particular stories of angels or their messages in order to work out what Hebrews says here. The '*message spoken by angels*' means all the stories of the great kings, prophets, priests and other individuals who conveyed the truth of God's Word in Old testament times before it was fulfilled in Christ Jesus. These people did not necessarily appreciate the full extent of God's gracious work, and most of them merely played their part by passing on God's Covenant through the generations. At the very least, these 'angelic' stories tell us about God's love for His own, about the consequences of sin, and about God's power to intervene in human history to do as He pleases, as our passage today aptly describes (2:2).

The second great testimony to the Gospel is found in verse 3; '*It was first received through the preaching of the Lord and confirmed to us by those who heard Him.*' The focus here is on the preached 'Word of God', that is, the communication of the Gospel. Hebrew reflects the concern of early Christians to make sure that what was passed on was in fact the truth, and passed on by people whose lives and witness '*confirmed*' the Gospel (2:3). Of course, those who could do this most fully were those who knew Jesus and experienced His life and ministry; their testimony was gradually being written down and comes to us now in the form of the new Testament. Consequently, no written 'Gospel' was considered valid unless it was connected with someone who knew Jesus (remember, the Gospel of Mark reports the testimony of Peter), and no 'letter' was considered authoritative unless it was written by Paul or one of the other accredited apostles. For us, this is good news! The Bible is not simply a reflection of the opinions of those who wrote Gospels and letters, but the result of careful human scrutiny!

The last testimony to the Gospel is identified as the powerful works of God (2:4); the 'signs and wonders' which accompanied the ministry of Jesus and His disciples. The argument here is simple. If God had raised Jesus from the dead and then done little else, it would be easy for cynics to say that God, having now done what was needed, left His people to make the best of faith and the teachings of Jesus; but as Hebrews says, this is not the case. After the Resurrection, Jesus ascended to the Father and then gave the world His liberating and powerful Holy Spirit. He then continued to show Himself through on-going works of Pentecostal power, which are the proof of His absolute commitment to Salvation, from the earliest days of the church to this. Consequently, the on-going work of the Holy Spirit is the evidence of God's work in the world to this day. It is not a sectional interest, or the preserve of Pentecostals!

These three great testimonies, 'angelic', human and divine, are surely a sufficient reminder that we must value what we have received by grace. The secret of life lies not in finding new things, but in discovering afresh the truth of what God has already done. There are no finer words than these to express this; '*how important it is, therefore, that we should pay even greater attention to what we have heard so that we do not fall away from it*' (2:1).

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Do you think it is fair to describe the whole Old Testament as 'angelic' in nature as I have done in this study? If not, why not?
2. Why should human testimony count in a matter of salvation, which is by its own nature divine?
3. To what extent have the works of God's Spirit been evident from the days of the Early Church to this?

Personal comments by author

There is so much more to this passage than can be covered in such a brief Bible study! The Christian disciple will find in this passage many things to explore. In what ways do we fall away from the truths of salvation today; how can we recognise these things and what should we do about them? How do we rediscover and value again the great truths we have received, and work to hand them on to future generations? How does God show Himself in works of power in our midst, and are we helping or hindering this? The more we look into this scripture, the more we will find.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Take one of the issues mentioned in the paragraph above, and consider exploring it further yourself, through reading, praying and thinking it through. If possible, talk about it with a variety of people and see whether there is anything you can do to help the communication of the Gospel message today.*
- *Pray for those organisations that are dedicated to the proclamation of the Word today; the Bible Societies, evangelistic organisations and others.*

Final Prayer

Help us, heavenly Father, to appreciate the message of salvation each and every day. We ask You to help us especially on days when we find it easy to forget it, or to be cynical, or conveniently leave it to one side. Heavenly Father, bless us by staying close to us, particularly at times of stress. AMEN
