

## WARNINGS FROM HEBREWS

One of the things I like most about teaching is that it gives me a reason to study. I always seem to learn more from preparing to teach than I would if I were being taught. On Sunday mornings, the auditorium class is studying the letter to the Hebrews, and as is usually the case, I'm learning a great deal about what the Hebrew writer wanted his readers to know. The reason for the letter, it seems, is that many Jewish converts were disillusioned. They were discouraged. Christianity was not what they thought it would be. There were continued temptations to deal with.

There was persecution. There were doubts that Jesus was really who they had been led to believe he was. They were afraid that they had traded their special, secure, exclusive relationship with God for belief in a Messiah who might not be the Messiah at all. And they're leaving the church by the droves and returning to works-based, sacrifice-laden, law-driven Judaism. The Hebrew writer spends much of the letter convincing them that Jesus is superior to anything or anyone they had considered important in their relationship to God during their devotion to Judaism. And he issues them specific warnings and affirmations in order to help redirect their lives. The "good ol' days" were not that good. Life in Christ is inexpressibly wonderful.

In Hebrews 2:1-3a, the Hebrew writer says this: The gospel we preached to you was truth. The salvation we told you about was genuine. You can't afford to drift away from it. If you ignore the message that is the only way to God, you'll be punished just as those who would not listen to the prophets were punished.

In chapter 3, verses 12-19, the Hebrew writer gives his readers a warning from Psalm 95. In Psalm 95, David is warning the people of his day about what would happen to them if they lost faith and rebelled against God. The example he uses is taken from Numbers 14. The children of Israel had been saved, literally, from being worked to death in Egypt.

But in spite of God's obvious presence with them, they complained.

First about food—and God sent quail and manna. Then they complained about water, and God provided that as well. But because they wanted to turn back to Egypt, God punished them—all except Joshua and Caleb died in the desert. The Hebrew writer warns his readers about turning back, too. If we hear and obey the gospel, and then decide to go back, we'll die just as surely as the Jews who doubted died.

They had developed a sinful, unbelieving heart and turned away from God. And so can we if we don't heed the warning to remain faithful and obedient to God.

These are two warnings given to the Hebrews—with two more to come. Space does not allow the other two until another time. It is my intention to write about the others in the Newsletter in a couple of weeks.

