

# The Warning Passages of the Book of Hebrews

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1986 (Rev. 89,92,00,06,07)

1. When studying the book of Hebrews, the reader studying the book notices right away the introduction of various subjects and then several verses afterward challenging the reader. These intermittent challenges are what some commentators call “warning” passages. The readers were warned against the danger that existed in the relationship between their faith and their walk. This was a serious doctrinal challenge. To loose hold of Christ and go back to Judaism, was not just to choose a different way to God, but rather was to fall away from God altogether. Faith in Christ is essential to the Christian life.
2. Some have questioned the right to call these “warning” passages and shingling them out from the rest of the book. Within these so called “warnings” are also great words of “encouragement,” (6:9-12; 10:32-39).
3. The reader is summoned to take these “warning” passages seriously as seen by the words, “hear,” “listen,” and “believe,” (2:5; 5:11; 6:9; 8:1; 9:5; 11:32).
4. Why does the book of Hebrews have “warning” passages? The “warnings” are really “conclusions” containing applications and exhortations which are a very unique style of writing. The writer of Hebrews didn’t want to wait until the end of the Epistle to write a conclusion, but included a conclusion at various points to grab the attention of the reader.
5. Concerning the so called “warning” passages, four questions come into mind: (1.) Are they deliberative exhortations strategically placed? (2.) How many of them are there? (3.) Where do they start? and (4.) When do they end?
6. Traditionally, commentators have suggested 3 to 4, but modern scholarship and depending how one outlines the books, there could be as many as 5 to 8.
7. The concept of a “warning” passage comes from several paragraphs that contain such words as, “if,” “lest,” “therefore,” “hear,” “listen,” and “let us,” which many scholars believe are “markers” for the “warning” passages.
8. The “warnings” are arguments to keep the readers from going back to Judaism due to the trials and hardships they were facing as Christians.
9. The “warnings” are a pastoral call not to repeat the same sins as did the saints in the Old Testament (Ps. 8,95,110; Jer. 31; Hab. 2; Prov. 3) trying to persuade these new Christians to change their minds and course before its harms them.
10. The greatest challenges to the student and reader of the book of Hebrews falls along three lines of related doctrines: (1.) “salvation,” what does it mean to inherit salvation in light of these warning passages? (2.) the “security of the believer” in light of these passages, (Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26), what does it mean to hear the dire consequences in light of rejecting Christ? and (3.) “sanctification,” to what extend have the genuine believers been sanctified, in light of these

warning passages? Are the harsh warnings against falling speaking to the backslidden condition experienced by believers who have drifted away from the Lord?

11. The “warning” passages have caused some readers and interpreters to be confused. This is due to poor English translations with reference to language. Most of these confusions and misunderstandings can be cleared up by studying: (1.) the tenses of the verbs not being translated properly, (2.) the conditional clauses not being translated properly, and (3.) the descriptive action words being understood in relationship to the context. I really believe a majority of problems can be resolved through this avenue.

12. Some confusion over the “warning” passages may be cleared up by understanding some of the groups of Jews being addressed. There has been a suggestion that three groups are being addressed: (1.) The primary group was the Jew who has accepted Christ as Savior and has been experiencing persecution and rejection from fellow Jews; (2.) The second group consists of unbelieving Jews who had accepted the basic truths of the Gospel, but have not yet placed their faith in Christ; and (3.) The third group consists of unbelieving Jews who had experienced exposure to the Gospel but were not convinced of the truth of the Gospel. “The problem arises from inaccurately identifying the spiritual condition of the ones being addressed.”

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