

Summary of thoughts on Heb 6.4-9 after our 3/23/05 meeting

In considering Heb 6.4-9, please refer to the overall context and flow of the author's arguments, beginning with Chapter 3. It is my opinion that Chapters 3 and 6 are bookends to the picture illustrating the parallels between Israel in the wilderness and the greater group of all of humanity in this 'generation'. I believe the two are further tied together for the expansive comparison through the promise of Rest to both groups (of which both show members refusing it), as well as the Christ presented in the chapters in between as our High Priest.

However, after a more thorough study, I've reconsidered the following qualifier in regards to the hinge point in Hebrews 6.4b.

Partaker (of the Holy Spirit), *Metochos*, is the deciding word in the qualifiers. The word is inescapably referring to someone who has become a partner, sharer, involved in a way not possible without Regeneration. The qualifiers – enlightened, heavenly gift, partakers, tasted the good word of God and the (as well as the) powers of the age to come – must clearly define the person in question as a believer. So if that is the case, what is the point about this person?

I still hold there is first a parallel to be recognized between the Israelis in the wilderness and the people of 'this generation'. However, this person is shown in a superior position over his Old Testament counterparts, in that while they fell away in unbelief, this person will not be allowed to fall away because 1) He is held in place by a better Covenant, under the auspice of a superior High Priest who sees everything, with nothing hidden (Ch 4 & 5), and, 2) Even if he did fall away (he can't, he's secure) he wouldn't have any recourse because he would be attempting to sacrifice the Christ a second time (won't happen) for himself (God already willed it in Christ for him the first time). Therefore, since this person will be held in Eternal Security, and will not be afforded a second chance at Atonement, (let alone him crucifying Christ again himself, as well as bringing Him shame), it is therefore truly impossible for this to happen. There is merit in the parallels, but this passage shows the situation to be superior in its security, over the first scenario in the wilderness. I hold vs 7&8 to be seen the same as in the original argument.

If this is the case, the passage is simply pointing to the fact it is impossible for a believer to fall away, let alone be reinstated again. The one Sacrifice is sufficient, along with the holding of each believer in the Covenant by an all powerful God and Savior.

This seems to fit better, but still does nothing to help the understanding of the scope of the Atonement.

However, if this is correct, this passage would be more about the superiority of Christ the Priest, the singular nature of the offer of Forgiveness, and the permanence of the Final Sacrifice - than it would be of what happens to those who 'fall away', due to the fact that the person in this example cannot exist.

Thoughts on Hebrews 6.4-9

Hebrews 6:4-9 (New King James Version)

4For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5and have tasted the good word of God and the powers

of the age to come, 6if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

7For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; 8but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

9But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

The question seems to revolve around the identification and scope of those who ‘fall away’, and their fate. To examine this, chapter 3 begins the discourse.

Hebrews 3.1-18

There is an unmistakable difference between the Saved and those destroyed in the wilderness. All heard, yet most would not believe despite the clear evidence before them, as well as their promises to do so.

4.1-2

Author continues to show 1. Concern for those in the midst who hear, yet don’t belong in belief, and 2. The same Gospel presented to those lost in judgment to the wilderness is the same Gospel proclaimed in these last days, His Age of Grace.

4.3-10

The predestined – those promised rest – are yet to be completely revealed, for they are shown to still be scheduled for Redemption even after the wilderness, David, Joshua, and the Lord Himself.

4.11

Therefore, beware of falling short, which would betray the truth of a lack of Salvation, made known through the same sort of disobedience seen in the wilderness.

4.12-13

To assure there is no deception and thus false hope of Salvation lying unrevealed, know that we can rely on the Truth of God’s Word to show the reality of our condition. With it, all issues hidden in the heart will be laid bare for examination, if we would only embrace it.

5.1-4

The high priests we (the Jews) all know are sympathetic in understanding the weakness of our condition, yet they are not without their limitations.

5.5-10

The reason why Jesus is a better Mediator – our perfect, compassionate High Priest.

5.11-14

Rebuke for laziness and exhortation to repent and use the tools given them.

Hebrews 6.4-8

Now, tying back to those in the wilderness in Chapter 3, the author returns to the subject of ‘those who fall away’. Beginning with a solid statement of ‘It is impossible’, he continues on to the qualifying factors of these people, enumerating one issue upon the next until all of the parallels with those who perished in the wilderness, are revealed.

In the wilderness, the Hebrews were ‘enlightened’ to the Gospel and God’s expectations. After the Cross, so were the Hebrews, and later the Gentiles. As well, everyone in all Creation is aware of God (Rom 1.20).

In the wilderness, they also ‘tasted the heavenly gift’, as do we now, after His Incarnation and thus the Cross. The Preincarnate Christ protected Israel, and God’s Wrath was stayed if they would adhere to His expectations. So too do we all enjoy peace, both the unregenerate are yet spared God’s wrath, and those who believe and obey the Call to Salvation now have peace with God.

What is it to ‘partake in the Holy Spirit’? If this means to be under His blessings, be it His presence or His edification, then both those in the wilderness as well as all of mankind now living, share this experience. They had God’s Truth revealed to them. After His Ascension, the Spirit poured out on us all to witness God’s Truth. Even more so, He is given to the Saved He indwells.

‘And have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come’ – Have not both groups done so? Moses brought the Word and mediated many mighty works of God. At the time of Hebrews’ writing, as well as even now, we too share claim to this experience.

All of these qualifiers point to the reality of Chapter 3 and the parallels between those of the Exodus and the contemporary Hebrews (and so, all of us now who believe). This is an illustration of the precarious place we still hold today on the brink of damnation, unless we believe and are shuttled to the surety of Salvation. Anyone not yet Saved stands at the cliff’s edge, only one breath away from a sealed fate.

The meat of the passage is obviously verse 6. The focus is primarily on the impossibility of crucifying the Lord again, once the only opportunity for Atonement has expired upon our death. The passage is meant to show the one-time supremacy and finality of the High Priest’s Sacrifice, and the futility of expecting another chance at Salvation once one has irrevocably ‘fallen away’ from that opportunity of Redemption, through death. He will not be put again to an open shame – He has already done this; it was most sufficient, and “It is done”.

This cannot mean a true believer, anchored in Christ, who has fallen away. To think so would mean Salvation is not sure, and defy numerous evidences in Scripture.

But what of the person who “backslides”? It must mean one of two things – either that person never belonged to Christ, or, he is a very poor example of a Christian, who’s ‘works will be burned in the fire’, and who continues to ‘grieve the Holy Spirit’. But before we dismiss this thought, how else might we reconcile never losing our Salvation, and the command not to grieve the Spirit, and our inability to never be completely away from sin while still in the corrupt flesh? What is the ramification to an irrevocable Salvation of a lifelong ‘smaller’ sin versus a lifelong ‘bigger’ sin, if both are commanded to be submitted to God? Is not all sin abhorrent to God? Since it is the Father’s prerogative to chasten His children, as well as to see their Salvation through, isn’t this His issue to judge? This is not permission to sin, but perhaps a realization of the mystery of God’s Grace. Does this raise questions seemingly irreconcilable? Perhaps, but the existence of all three concepts cannot be erased from Scripture. Therefore, we are left with either a vast swath of God’s grace, or still a bad assumption. None the less, this issue is confined to what defines a backslider, not the meaning of ‘falls away’.

This phrase ‘falls away’ might be further defined in **Luke 8.13** and **2 Thess 2.3**. In our nomenclature, we say Salvation and Saved, both in the present tense. The reality is, however, we are yet to be Saved in deed, but are for now preserved in a Covenant promising it will indeed happen, shown so with the deposit

of the Holy Spirit. In the mean time, we are held in Forgiveness and shielded from Wrath. The Promise is so sure, that even now we can go before God's Throne under the Righteousness imparted to us. We can actually stand before God as Forgiven, with that Act overcoming the fact we are still yet sinners. This is a very busy time for our Redeemer as He continually mediates our sin, holding us in the Covenant until we are removed from the flesh. The actual Salvation will come on the Day of Redemption, but we, and more importantly God, recognize its validity now, before the fact.

So too, is the phrase 'fall away' in the present tense while yet to be fulfilled in the end.. The falling away is an act of unbelief and rebellion, carried out in action, and if its course is unchanged, will result in damnation. The falling away began with sin's entrance, and all flesh fathered by man is held to the inheritance. This is our natural response, unless we are overcome and preserved in Christ, to which He can expect us to cooperate in our Sanctification. We are all disobedient to varying degrees, but no one will thwart God's claim on a soul.

All of this requires an Atonement different than what Calvin apparently saw. If this is to be true, then Christ died for all mankind, not just the Elect. A universal Atonement is necessary for verse 6 to come together, for it forbids the attempt of the lost who have died without claiming Christ's offer to reinstate the Sacrifice a second time. To paraphrase, "Once the unregenerate leave the flesh in death, while rejecting and refusing to believe the fact that Christ is the Savior of all mankind, as well as the only way to Redemption to the Father, they can no longer expect a second chance. He bought them wholesale, and now He will use His ownership against them in Judgment." This anchors the argument beginning in verse 4, "It is impossible".

Does this mean all who come to Christ have made a decision to accept what He claims as true? Sure does. What then, does this mean in terms of the so called 'free will' of those who chose? Perhaps we need to ask "Why then, did you choose?" God's effectual call arrests the Elect, compelling us to action in the Truth. We do not typically black out, only to awaken to Salvation. Instead, God lovingly takes us by the hand, or by the hair if necessary, and pulls us into the Boat.

The example given in verses 7 & 8 shows a clear differentiation between fruit and briars. Again, their existence is not questioned, but to whom each belongs is the issue. Aside from application to the above line of thinking, (in regards to a sinning believer, backsliders, etc.), a key point must be reckoned concerning verse 8. In the original, the Scripture confirms that a three step process takes place – bearing thorns, rejected and brought near the curse, and finally, the burning. If this is a picture of an unregenerate life, flirting with the curse of Hell, which exhibits that fact in it bears briars without value, then that person will die without changing course. Verse 7 is an affirmation of the rain falling on the just and not – common Grace – with all of us, Saved or not, benefiting God's blessing. We are the wheat amongst the tares, but in the end we will all be separated for Glory or for the Fire.

Hebrews 6.9-12

Finally, the author comes back to the believers he exhorts, assuring them they need not worry as they continue to show evidence of Saving faith though the fruits promised to accompany Salvation. Now, these cannot be confused with the regular works of the unregenerate, but instead need to be reckoned as the evidence the Spirit always produces. While James argues that the faith preceding the works is what separates their value, the works themselves are still the same. There are better ways God points to in discerning our spiritual health. However, verse 10 shows that God watches and the readers were to be encouraged. In closing, verses 11-12 bring final balance to the discourse, urging them to press on, in agreement to the points made.

My summary is that the scope of who it is that 'fall away' is centered on the whole of the unsaved, whether in the Church, or violently battling against Her. And no one, including the staunchest of enemies, will escape our Sovereign God if He has them slated for Salvation – nor will any of His Elect ever be allowed to exit the Covenant of the Blood, even if they press It to It's limits. Once Saved, this person is now God's responsibility, for the defense of His Good Name.

This passage is a warning to both the carpet baggers and the deceived who are yet to be Saved among us in the Church. But it also needs to include anyone still alive yet resisting the Truth of Christ and His ownership of us all. In either case, God's means are deep and unknown, but we do know He will not lose any given to our Lord, and that offer is open to any who would believe and repent.

James 2:18 (New King James Version)

18But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Hebrews 3:6

6but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope.

Hebrews 3:12

12Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

Romans 1:20

20For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

Luke 8:13

13But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.

2 Thessalonians 2:3

3Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin^[a] is revealed, the son of perdition,

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Assumptions

Can anyone be beyond the Saving Grace of God, now, in this age of Grace, yet before they die? No.

Fruit: The man challenged by James in 2.18 has works – ‘fruit’ – yet is shown still damned by his lack of faith despite his works.

Once across the threshold of Salvation, who can be lost? None.

Salvation is sure, once we are lashed to our only Salvation, the Christ.

All will be enlightened to the Gospel, per Romans 1.20; partakers of Common Grace, partakers of the Holy Spirit who visits and convicts all in the world, and edifies only the Saved He indwells.

Christ’s Work had to be a universal Atonement, not limited. Seems to fit better with Scripture.