



The Background of Hebrews



**Twelve Steps to a Good Year
(Part 2)**
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again. For the sake of those who may have missed yesterday's message, let me reaffirm to each one of you, my radio listeners, my good wishes for a truly blessed New Year. I'll sum up my good wishes for you in a beautiful verse in which the apostle John conveyed his good wishes to a dear Christian friend. It's found in the third epistle of John verse 2:

Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers." (NAS)

That is my prayer for each one of you. That in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.

The theme of my talks this week is "Twelve Steps to a Good Year." This series is specially designed to equip you with an attitude and an outlook that will enable you to appropriate the fullness of God's provision and God's blessing in the year that lies ahead. You see, so much depends on these two things: your attitude and your outlook as you move on into all that God has planned for you in this New Year.

This special series of talks is based on the epistle to the Hebrews. Twelve times in this epistle the writer says "Let us." I pointed out yesterday two aspects of that phrase "Let us." First of all, those words indicate a resolution, a decision; but secondly, they are a decision or a resolution that we need to make together with our fellow believers. It is not something that each of us can do completely on our own as individuals. We are dependent on one another. If we are going to attain the goals set before us, we've got to make it through together with our fellow believers.

In subsequent talks, I'm going to examine each one of these "Let us" resolutions from Hebrews and show you how each one can help us in a special way to achieve the attitude and the outlook essential for success in the New Year.

Today however, I'm going to say something about the background of the Hebrew believer. I believe this provides some very important lessons for us as Christians today. In

many respects the Christians of today have inherited the special privileges that were enjoyed by the early Hebrew believers, but also the special problems that go with those privileges. You see, the Hebrews, as the very name indicates, had a different background from all other New Testament believers. All the other epistles, perhaps with the exception of those of James and Peter, are addressed to believers who'd come from a non-Jewish background, to Gentile believers. But this epistle is specifically and primarily addressed to believers from a Jewish background, and that background gave them many advantages, many special privileges, which were not enjoyed by the Gentiles or the pagans from other nations and backgrounds.

Let me just mention three main advantages. First of all, these Jewish believers had been freed for many centuries from the awful iniquities of idolatry and false cults. The law of Moses by which they ordered their lives abounds with warnings against these two things which are abomination with God. Secondly, they had a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, the special, unique revelation which God gave through His Word in the Old Testament to the Jewish people. Thirdly, they had familiarity with the temple, with its sacrifices, with the forms of worship, with the beautiful liturgy, with many, many things that could have strengthened and purified their faith. But the sad truth is that many of them had not made proper use of these benefits. That's why the writer of the epistle had to say this to them, some very sad and solemn words, which he writes to them in the fifth chapter, verses 11-14:

“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. [Isn’t that a tragic condition to be in, slow to learn, with that special background?] In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” (NIV)

That's what I call the tragedy of arrested spiritual development. They should have been mature and grown-up, but they were still spiritually infants, not able to take more than milk. I believe the same is true of many, many professing Christians in our world today. You see, the reason why the Hebrews were in that condition is they had failed to do what the writer said. They had not, by constant use, trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. They hadn't applied

themselves to the study of Scripture. They hadn't given sufficient priority to spiritual things in their lives. As a result of this condition, the epistle to the Hebrews contains more solemn warnings of the danger of falling away than any other book in the New Testament. That's remarkable. I'll give you just five brief quotations from five different passages in Hebrews which contain these solemn warnings. First of all, in Hebrews 2:1-3:

“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.” (NIV)

See the two dangers: drifting and ignoring? Then in Hebrews 3:12:

“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” (NIV)

The great danger there, really, is unbelief. Hebrews 6:12:

“We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” (NIV)

What's the danger there? Laziness. Spiritual laziness. And then in Hebrews 10:35-36:

“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” (NIV)

The danger there is failing to persevere, not holding on. And finally, in Hebrews 12:25:

“See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?” (NIV)

The danger there is just refusing to hear God when He speaks. Isn't it remarkable that people with such spiritual

privileges had to be warned of these terrible dangers?

We've looked at the condition of the Hebrew Christians, the Jewish believers, at the beginning of the New Testament age, nearly two thousand years ago. Today I believe, in a certain sense, the shoe is on the other foot. It's not primarily Jewish believers who are in danger of these things, but believers from non-Jewish backgrounds. People from so-called Christian nations. People who have been "born" in the Christian church. People who've automatically called themselves Christians without ever really stopping to consider what that means. I think that we see many professing Christians today enjoying the same kind of privileges that the Hebrew Christians enjoyed at the beginning of this era. I mentioned three. First, they'd been delivered from idolatry. Well, that's true of multitudes of professing Christians. They have no thought of deliberate idolatry. Secondly, the Hebrews had a knowledge of the Scripture. And that's true, to a degree, of many professing Christians today. In some measure, they are familiar with the Scriptures, the Old Testament and the New. Thirdly, the Hebrews were familiar with the services at the temple and I find many, many Christians who are in some measure familiar with church services, with religious terminology, with forms of prayer, with ceremony, all of which probably contain within them somewhere tremendous gems of spiritual truth. And yet it's a sad fact (to use a phrase borrowed from the world) that many times "familiarity breeds contempt." We're so used to things, we take them for granted. We don't appreciate what's available to us and we tend to be in need of the same warnings that the Hebrews received, warnings against drifting, being negligent, being lazy, presuming on God's grace, taking things for granted that are extremely precious and extremely important.

I believe, as I've already said, that's a picture of multitudes of professing Christians. Could it possibly be a picture of you? I want to suggest to you that the remedy is just the same as it was for the Hebrew Christians. I believe that's exactly why, in that epistle to the Hebrews, we have that phrase "let us" twelve times. Those twelve "let us" resolutions of Hebrews are the answer to that spiritual condition which was the particular problem of the Hebrew Christians and which, I believe, almost by an inheritance, is the particular problem of multitudes of professing Christians, especially in our Western culture today.

Well, our time is up for today, but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll continue with this theme "Twelve Steps to a Good Year." Tomorrow I'll be explaining the first step.

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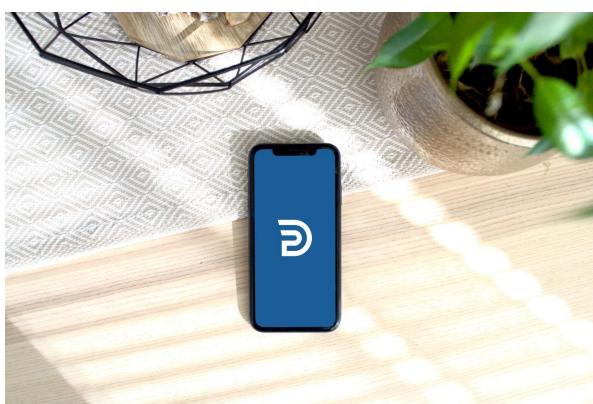
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