

“IF THEY SHALL FALL AWAY...”

AN APOSTASY WITH FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES

By Arlen L. Chirwood

Hebrews 6:4-6 is looked upon by numerous Christians as possibly the most difficult and/or controversial passage in all Scripture. And the reason why the passage is looked upon after this fashion is because of an erroneous interpretative approach. The passage is invariably approached from the standpoint of teachings pertaining to the Christians' presently possessed eternal salvation — salvation “by grace through faith.”

The passage though, as previously stated, doesn't deal with this subject. And, not dealing with this subject, it is understandable why those who seek to interpret the passage from the standpoint of teachings pertaining to salvation by grace through faith find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. And not only is this the case, but they often, as well, find themselves being forced into erroneous interpretive views concerning salvation.

Then, beyond the preceding, the correct subject matter is not even being dealt with. Rather, through this erroneous interpretive approach, the correct subject matter is, instead, completely obscured. And such can only foster the present work of the enemy as it is outlined in II Cor. 4:4 — *blinding the minds of Christians* relative to “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (ASV).

Contextually, Heb. 6:4-6 must be looked upon as dealing with *four basic issues* surrounding Christians, from the standpoint of possibility (“*If they shall fall away...*”):

First, the Christians referred to in this passage must have come into a mature knowledge and understanding of the things pertaining to Christ as *King-Priest*, “*after the order of Melchizedek* [a position which Christ will realize only during the coming Messianic Era]” (Heb. 5:6ff).

Second, these same Christians must fall away, apostatize.

Third, after these Christians fall away, they can never be restored to the position from which they fell.

Fourth, such a falling away would negatively reflect on Christ Himself.

These four issues will be dealt with under two subsequent headings. The first and second will be dealt with under the first heading, and the third and fourth will be dealt with under the second heading.

Once Enlightened...but Fell Away

Certain descriptive words appearing in verses four and five make it virtually impossible to look upon these verses as describing unsaved people.

There is the word, “enlightened” (v. 4), which is used in Heb. 10:32, translated “illuminated.” And according to I Cor. 2:14, “the natural man” *cannot be enlightened or illuminated in spiritual matters*. Then, beyond that, the passage is dealing with things other than *the “milk” of the Word*; it is dealing with *the “strong meat” of the Word* (5:12-14).

Then there is the word, “tasted” (vv. 4, 5). This is the same word used for Christ *tasting death* “for every man” in Heb. 2:9. The experiences entered into by those in Heb. 6:4, 5 *must* be looked upon as *a tasting to the same extent that Christ tasted “death” at Calvary*. The latter was full and complete, and the former must be as well.

And the last descriptive word is “partakers” (v. 4). This is the same word translated “fellows” in Heb. 1:9 and “partakers” in Heb. 3:1, 14. These are translations of the Greek word *metochoi*, which could be better rendered, “companions.” It is used in chapters one and three describing Christ's co-heirs,

His *companions*, in the coming day of His power.

Being “enlightened,” tasting “of the heavenly gift,” being made “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” tasting “the good word of God,” and tasting “the powers of the world [‘age’] to come” form a description of Christians progressively coming into a mature knowledge and understanding of the things pertaining to Christ as *the great King-Priest* “after the order of Melchizedek” from chapter five. It, thus, has to do with Christians coming into a mature knowledge and understanding of Christ and His companions' coming reign over the earth.

Then, spiritual lessons pertaining to the possibility of Christians *falling away* after coming into this mature state is, contextually, drawn from the type dealt with prior to the introduction of Melchizedek in chapter five — the account of the Israelites under Moses (chs. 3, 4).

The Israelites under Moses passed through similar experiences within the framework of their earthly calling, climaxed by their hearing the report of the twelve spies and tasting the actual fruits of the land which they had brought back with them. And that which happened to the Israelites at this point (in the type) is where one must go in order to understand the falling away and accompanying statements (in the antitype) in Heb. 6:6.

The Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea were in possession of the Word of God (received at Sinai), God dwelled in their midst (in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle, built and erected at Sinai), they had heard the report of the spies, and they had tasted the actual fruits of the land (brought back by the spies). And occupying this position, they were then ready to enter the land, conquer and possess the land, and subsequently realize their calling in the land as God's firstborn son.

They, at this point, were in possession of what could only be looked upon as *a mature knowledge* of the whole of that which was in view. They understood their calling and that which lay out ahead. And it is at this point that they fell away and, within the framework of that stated in the antitype in Heb. 6:4-6, found it *impossible to be renewed* “again unto repentance.”

Impossible to Renew Again...Because...

The report which the spies brought back concerning the land was both *positive* and *negative*. It was a good land, flowing with “milk and honey”; but the inhabitants, infiltrated by the *Nephilim*, were strong and lived in walled cities (Num. 13:26-29, 32, 33).

Caleb and Joshua, exhorting the people, said,

“Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Num. 13:30).

But the remaining ten spies said,

“We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we” (Num. 13:31).

The people of Israel heard the report and both exhortations, but they believed *the evil report* of the ten spies rather than *the true report* of Caleb and Joshua. And their resulting actions said it all. They wept, began to murmur against Moses and Aaron, and then looked back to Egypt, wishing that they had never left. Then, to climax matters, they sought to appoint another leader and return to Egypt (Num. 14:1-4).

They, in the words of the antitype, *fell away*. They had turned their backs upon God; and God, correspondingly, turned His back upon them. Because of that which had transpired, the most severe judgment possible was pronounced upon the entire accountable generation. Every single individual comprising that generation, twenty years old and above, save Caleb and Joshua, was to be overthrown in the wilderness.

And once this apostasy had occurred (with its corresponding pronounced judgment), there could be *no renewal* “again unto repentance” (as in the antitype). And the reason, drawing again from the antitype (“crucify to themselves the Son of God”), is because they had brought shame and reproach upon the One (God) dwelling in their midst, Who was to have led them victoriously into the land.

(“Repentance” simply means *a change of mind*.
And in both the type and antitype, the change of

mind is *on the part of God*, not on the part of the Israelites [type] or on the part of Christians [antitype].)

The Israelites, the very next day, repented (changed their minds). They “rose up early” and sought to “go up unto the place” which the Lord had promised. *But the Lord didn’t repent* (He didn’t change His mind). He was no longer with them relative to their entering the land and victoriously combating the enemy; and, consequently, the Israelites, trying to enter the land apart from the Lord’s leadership, were smitten and driven back (Num. 14:40-45).

And that’s what Heb. 6:4-6 is about. If God allows a Christian to come into a mature knowledge of His Son’s coming reign as *the great King-Priest* “after the order of Melchizedek,” and that Christian apostatizes, the same thing will occur as that which occurred with the Israelites under Moses (it would have to, for the antitype must follow the type in exact detail).

That Christian would be *cut off* insofar as those things surrounding his calling were concerned. He would not be allowed to subsequently enter that heavenly land to which he had been called and victoriously combat the enemy therein. He could never be brought back to the position which he had previously occupied. Which is to say, he could not be *renewed* “again unto repentance.”

Though the Christian may later change *his mind* about the matter (as the Israelites did), God would not change *His mind* (as in the type). The Christian, as the Israelites, would be overthrown on the right side of the blood but on the wrong side of the goal of his calling.

And the reason for such severe judgment on God’s part results from the fact that, through this act, such a Christian could only bring shame and reproach upon the name of Christ.

Note the entire expression,

“...crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh [‘afresh’ is not in the Greek text, though implied], and put him to an open shame” (v. 6).

The thought has to do with *the shame and*

reproach surrounding Calvary, not with subjecting the Son to a second crucifixion, for such an act is impossible (Heb. 7:27).

But subjecting the Son to this same type shame and reproach at the hands of the world is very possible today; and such shame and reproach can result from the act of any Christian falling away in the antitype of the Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea.

A Christian though, to fall away after this fashion, would have to do two things:

- 1) He would first have to come into a mature knowledge and understanding of the things pertaining to Christ’s coming reign over the earth.
- 2) He would then have to apostatize after the same fashion in which the Israelites apostatized (looking away from Moses and the land [an earthly land], back to Egypt; *i.e.*, looking away from Christ and the land [a heavenly land], back to the world).

And doing this, a Christian would be subjecting God’s Son to the same type *humiliation and shame* which He experienced at Calvary. The expression, “crucify to themselves,” is actually explained by the remainder of the verse — “put [expose] him to an open shame.” It is subjecting the world’s coming Ruler to *humiliation and shame* through the one “in Christ” turning from that which lies out ahead and focusing his attention back on the present world system under the incumbent ruler, Satan.

And this is something which *God will not allow*. Thus, the verse introducing Heb. 6:4-6:

“And this will we do [we will go on to maturity in the things surrounding Christ’s coming reign over the earth], if God permit [if God permits us to go on].”

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