

## **Hebrews: The People of God—Yesterday, Today, and Forever**

By Bob Young

A familiar verse in Hebrews is 13:8 where Jesus is described as “the same, yesterday, today, and forever.” This three-fold description provides a possible approach to the book of Hebrews and may provide us fresh insights in understanding the message intended by the Hebrew writer. Consider the following outline of the book of Hebrews, using a past, present, future scheme.

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Jesus introduced, 1:1-4

#### **First Warning**

The experience of God’s people in the past, 1:5-14 (numerous OT quotes)

People of God today have Jesus, 2:1-18 (2:1-4—warning against drifting)

[While there is no clear “forever” section attached to this section, the affirmations of this section make it possible for us to anticipate a forever future.]

#### **Second Warning**

The people of God yesterday, 3:1-18 (includes warning)

The people of God today, 4:1-6

The people of God forever, 4:7-16 [For thought: is the word of God quotation a more direct reference to Jesus than we have realized?]

#### **Third Warning**

The people of God yesterday, 5:1-10

The people of God today, 5:11-6:11 (includes warning)

The people of God forever, 6:12-20

#### **Fourth Warning**

The people of God yesterday, 7-10:18

The people of God today, 10:19-35 (including warning)

The people of God forever, 10:36-39

#### **Fifth Warning**

The people of God yesterday, 11

The people of God today, 12:1ff (includes warning)

The people of God forever, 12

#### **Conclusion**

Chapter 13

### **Introduction: Hebrews 1:1-4**

In times past, God spoke through prophets, but now through his Son. This section includes seven descriptors of Jesus. The point is that Jesus is connected to God. Because Jesus is connected to God intimately as a Son, he is superior to the angels. The angels are mere servants ministering to those who will inherit, that is, to human beings. The angels are servants. They were mediators of the first covenant. That covenant was steadfast, secure. Here is a clear reference to the word. In Hebrews, the solution to danger is always the word. The warning is issued; the focus is on the word. This is a secure word, a confirmed word, even more so than for the first covenant. This is our today experience. As we work through the book, we note that the yesterday, today, and forever theme is repeated in each section and provides a context for each warning.

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<sup>1</sup> The reader will have to decide if the past, present, future outline of the first section is too artificial. The first section does not fit quite as nicely into the yesterday, today, forever framework, but the suggested parallel outline of the introductory section seems to have some validity.

### **Studying Hebrews 1-2**

- The experience of God's people in the past was that they were distanced from God, 1:5-14, even though his plan and purpose were being communicated, as seen in the seven Old Testament quotes.
- Today that purpose is clearly seen in Jesus Christ. The people of God today must therefore be careful, 2:1-4 (warning against drifting). Note that Jesus is a part of our experience today, 2:5-9. Jesus is leading many to glory to participate in his power and nature. Notice the conceptual sequence in this section—sons, brothers, family. Jesus is a son, so can we be.
- This makes it possible for us to anticipate a forever future. Because of what Jesus has done, we can see the people of God in the future, forever. This is reflected in 2:14-18.

### **Studying Hebrews 3-4**

- The people of God in the past (yesterday) are described through a summary of Old Testament events. First, there was high hope. Moses was a faithful servant. But there were also problems. Christians are to learn from the problems of the past.
- The people of God in the present can yet inherit the rest. The promise remains.
- That is the ultimate goal (forever), and the solution is in Jesus, the word. The solution is in both written and living. How do the characteristics listed in this context apply to the written word? How is the word, given these characteristics, a reference to Jesus?

### **Studying Hebrews 5-6**

- This section begins with a description of how God's people in the past related to God through the high priest.
- God's people in the present have a high priest in Jesus Christ. The new high priestly model is superior and thus demands a new model of allegiance and relationship. Ritual is replaced by relationship.
- Depending on God's nature and promises provides security and focuses the forever nature of hope.

### **Studying Hebrews 7-10**

- This is the longest section in this outline. The first and longest part of the section gives a careful explanation of the nature of the first covenant and its details. These things were only shadows of the reality which is found in Christ. The past is useful in understanding the present realities, but is not dependable as a foundation for relationship with God.
- The warning appears in the present. God's people today have boldness in Christ and are called to appreciate and accept the blessings realized in Christ.
- This confidence carries one to the future with hope and guards against the temptation to turn back and discard faith.

### **Studying Hebrews 11-12**

- Hebrews 11 is a description of the great power of the people of God yesterday, on a basis of a faith that was not yet revealed.
- With such a witness around us, certainly we can today live faithfully, looking to Jesus.
- The clear future God has in store is visible in the new assembly.

### **Hebrews 13: Conclusion**

The imperatives of this chapter are poignant. A careful reading will see several repetitions of the past-present-future theme.