

and the children of Israel Shall be gathered together (*sunagō*, LXX 2:2), And appoint for themselves one head; And they shall come up out of the land, For great will be the day of Jezreel!" They then argue that Hebrews 10:25 is not talking about church assemblies, but the gathering together of the Jews under the Messiah—which they argue didn't happen on Pentecost, but in AD 70. So, they define "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" as turning back to Judaism and ignoring (what they argue was) the spiritual gathering that would happen in AD 70. To further their theory, they appeal to 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2, where Paul writes, "Now, brethren, concerning the coming (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together (*episunagōgē*, as in Heb. 10:25) to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come." So, to express it mathematically, for them Matthew 24:31=Hosea 1:11=2 Thessalonians 2:1-2=Hebrews 10:25.

First, we should note that Hebrews 10:25 speaks of "the assembling of OURSELVES (*heautōn*) together." *Heautōn* is a reflexive pronoun that directly applies to those to whom the writer is speaking. His readers are

the ones whose "assembling" is in danger of being forsaken. Turning back to Judaism or ignoring a future gathering under the Messiah would not be abandoning their own assembling. Second, Hosea 1:11 foretold a restoration of Israel and Judah under "one head." The Hebrew writer described Jesus as "that great Shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20). The Jewish Christians to whom the book was written had already "come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22), they were already part of "the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven" (12:23). So, the *gathering* of Hosea 1:11 had already occurred. Third, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, in speaking of the "coming (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ" Paul uses the word *parousia* that literally means "being beside" some one or some thing (cf. Phil. 2:12). It is applied to Christ's first coming in a literal, visible, and actual manner (2 Pet. 3:4) and is never used in biblical or non-biblical writing of a figurative or representative coming.¹ Christ was not literally present in the events of AD 70, so 2 Thessalonians cannot be describing the destruction of Jerusalem. Finally, Matthew 24:31 comes in the same discourse that ends with the description of Final Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). That description begins, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (25:31-32). This parallels wording in Matthew 24:30-31. "All the nations" were not judged in AD 70. Paul wrote that at the "last trumpet" the "dead will be raised incorruptible" (1 Cor. 15:52). That did not happen in AD 70, so Matthew 24:31 has not yet occurred. This theory is a forced attempt to connect diverse passages that all describe *gatherings* but ignores the details and context of the different texts. Hebrews 10:25 is talking about assemblies of local congregations for worship and exhortation.

¹ For a thorough analysis of the biblical and extra-biblical use of this word see my study, "What is the Focus of the Mount of Olives Discourse," in "When Will These Things Be?": Questions on Eschatology, Mark Mayberry and Kyle Pope, eds., Athens, AL: Truth Publications Inc., 2021, pp. 343-370.



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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
10:00 AM
11:00 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Walker McNear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Justin Smiley
Kevin Wise
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

What Does Hebrews 10:25 Teach?

By Kyle Pope

Near the end of the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit led the author to write: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:23-25, NKJV). This last verse has been emphasized in many sermons addressing the importance of faithful attendance of studies and services of the local church. Is this a valid use of this text? What is the context of the passage? What is it teaching? And what application does it have for Christians today?

Context and Content

From the earliest times, and in the earliest extant manuscripts this book is titled "To Hebrews." Unlike many other epistles, no addressees are named in its introduction, but the content of the book supports the validity of this historic title. The book acknowledges God's past communication "to the fathers by the prophets" (1:1). It quotes extensively from Old Testament Scripture (1:5; Ps. 2:7; 1:7; Ps. 104:4; 1:8-9; Ps. 45:6-7; et al.). It assumes the readers' knowledge of Abraham (2:16), Moses (3:2), the Israelites wandering in the wilderness (3:16-18), David (4:7), Aaron (5:4), Melchizedek (5:6), and scores of other things that would have been common knowledge to Jews but demand explanation to Gentiles. Hebrews is not, however, an evangelistic book aimed at converting Jews to Christ. It is written to Jews who considered Jesus "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession" (3:1), who were members of the household of Christ (3:6), to whom he could say "we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (4:14; cf. 8:1). So these were Jewish Christians whom the author is urging to "hold fast" to their confession of faith in Jesus "without wavering" (10:23; cf. 4:14).

To encourage this, the author challenges them in a number of areas. He urges them to, "Give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift

away” (2:1). They must not “neglect so great a salvation” (2:3). He warns them, “Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion” (3:8) and “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (3:12-14). Here we see wording repeated in our text in Hebrews 10:23-25. He includes himself in the warning, declaring, “Let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it” (4:1) and “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience” (4:11). He does not want himself or his readers to “drift away,” to depart “from the living God,” to “become sluggish” (6:12a), to develop “an evil heart of unbelief” given over to “the deceitfulness of sin,” leading them to “fall” by “disobedience” and “come short of” or “neglect so great a salvation.” To prevent this, he urges them to maintain their “confidence steadfast to the end.” They must move beyond “the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ,” and “go on to perfection” (6:1). They must “show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end” (6:11). Here, once again he speaks of “the end.” What end is he discussing? Throughout the book he describes a “rest” that awaits the people of God (4:11, et al.). He will describe a “judgment” that awaits all souls (9:27) and

a “second time” Christ will appear bringing “salvation” (9:28). That suggests “the end” towards which they must remain faithful is the end of life or the day of Christ’s second appearing. In the context, this is the “Day approaching” of which Hebrews 10:25 speaks.

Hebrews, unlike the book of Galatians, is not focused on a specific false doctrine (i.e. turning back to the Law of Moses). He warns generally about “various and strange doctrines” (13:9a), but the Hebrew writer is concerned about the individual faithfulness of his readers. He writes, “Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (10:35-36). They must not *draw back* but “live by faith” (10:38). In faith, like those of faith in the past (chapter 11), they must, “lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us,” including himself “and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (12:1b). Only if they “consider” Jesus, will they avoid becoming “weary and discouraged in your souls” (12:3). His hope for them is that they look “carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God” (12:15). They must not “refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape” including himself once again “if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven” (12:25). The way to avoid this is through reverent service and worship of God. Finally, he encourages them including himself yet again, “Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (12:28b)—“let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God” (13:15a).

Meaning in Context

Hebrews 10:23-25 falls within this context. To those who have confessed Christ (3:1; 4:14), he urges them (as in 4:14), to “hold fast” their confession. To avoid drifting away (2:1) and wavering they must cling to their hope, the “anchor of the soul” (6:19). In this text the author spells out a vital way to do that. They must “consider one another” with the goal of stirring up “love and good works.” This tells us something important about what this means. How can I “stir up” something in someone if I am not with them? This is more than just a few Christian friends talking every now and then. How can we “stir up” these things in “one another” if we are not together as a group? The writer clarifies even further by warning what must not be done if we hope to accomplish the stirring up of “love and good works”—we must not (1) *forsake* something; (2) that something is “the assembling of ourselves together”; instead, we must be “exhorting one another.” Let’s consider each of these elements.

What Is “Forsaking”? The word translated “forsaking” in Greek is *egkatalēpō*. It is used nine times in the New Testament. Jesus used it of His sense of being forsaken on the cross (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). It describes how Jesus, in death was not left in Hades (Acts 2:27). Paul used it of those who deserted him in his trials (2 Tim. 4:10, 16) and yet his confidence that God had not forsaken him (2 Cor. 4:9). At the close of Hebrews, the writer echoes this same confidence, quoting Jesus to say, “I will never leave you, nor forsake

(*egkatalēpō*) you” (Heb. 13:5). From these examples we get a picture of what this means. We are not forsaken when we must face a trial, when others have done all within their power to support us, or a circumstance places us in an unusual condition. To forsake is to abandon care, support, association, and encouragement.

What Is “the Assembling of Ourselves Together”? The word translated “assembling” is the Greek noun *episunagōgē*. It is only used here and in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 (which we will discuss later). Its verb form is used several times of different types of assemblies, including gatherings of people seeking healing or teaching from Jesus (Mark 1:33; Luke 12:1), of the desire of Jesus to gather Jerusalem like a hen gathers her chicks (Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34), and even of the gathering of Christ’s “elect” at the Final Judgment (Matt. 24:31; Mark 13:27). The root of this word is very familiar to us and has come into English as the transliteration *synagogue*—meaning “a gathering together” which came to apply to the place Jews assembled for worship and Bible study. It is clear that among Jewish Christians some used this name for their own place of assembly to worship Christ. This is the word used in James 2:2 of an “assembly” of Christians gathered for worship. In the context of Hebrews, this is the assembly they must not forsake. Remember, this is intended to “stir up love and god works.” The nature of the assembly is made clear in describing its purpose. It is in these assemblies that they may “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (12:28b) and “offer the sacrifice of praise to God” (13:15a). Paul would speak of the same assemblies in 1 Corinthians chapters 11-14, and 16. These were times when Christians came “together as a church” (1 Cor. 11:18), came “together in one place” (1 Cor. 11:20), would “come together to eat” the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:33; cf. Acts 20:7), “when the whole church comes together in one place” (1 Cor. 14:23), as they would “come together” to sing (1 Cor. 14:26; cf. Heb. 13:15), and offer the collection for the saints (1 Cor. 16:1-2). The Hebrew writer is commanding his readers not to abandon the regular observance of these assemblies of Christians in the local church.

What Is “Exhorting One Another”? Earlier in the book, like Hebrews 10:23-25, the writer urged them to “exhort one another daily” (3:13). When the church was first established in Jerusalem assemblies of the church were held daily (Acts 2:46; 5:42). As the gospel spread into Gentile regions this practice doesn’t seem to have been possible among all churches, as worship on the first day of the week became the prominent time of assembly (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). It is unclear, however, if the daily assembly ever ended in Jerusalem. Was the book of Hebrews addressed to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea—a region with probably the largest population of Jewish Christians prior to AD 70? Perhaps. The word translated “exhorting” is translated by a number of different English words, including *consolation*, *comfort*, and

even *encouragement* in some translations. It describes efforts to motivate behavior. In the context of Hebrews 10:23-25, “exhorting one another” is another way of saying “stir up love and good works.” While exhortation and encouragement often involves our actions as individuals, the New Testament emphasizes that assemblies in the church (or synagogue) are vital to “exhorting one another.” Proper use of spiritual gifts allowed “edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor. 14:3; cf. Acts 15:30-31). Those who spoke in the synagogue offered a “word of exhortation” (Acts 13:15). The verb form is often a way of describing preaching and teaching within such assemblies (cf. Acts 2:40; 11:23; 15:32; 20:2). So clearly, Hebrews 10:25 does encourage faithful attendance of studies and services of the local church as a means of encouraging one another and avoiding drifting away from faith in Christ.

Hebrews 10:25 and the AD 70 Doctrine

Unfortunately, this passage has been misused to promote an erroneous theory espoused by advocates of the AD 70 Doctrine. Here is how. Matthew 24:31 reads, “And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together (*episunagō*) His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” AD 70 advocates (and even some who don’t accept all of its teachings) argue this is talking about what happened in the destruction of Jerusalem—not Final Judgment! They argue it is a fulfillment of prophecies such as Hosea 1:11: “Then the children of Judah