

THE WEAKNESS OF THE HEBREW RECIPIENTS | VV. 11-14

- Verse 11 - The work of Melchizidek is **hard to be uttered**.
 - Literally a "difficult hermeneutic" or "hard to interpret."
 - The Greek is δυσερμήνευτος [dushermaneutos]. The *dus* prefix brings the idea of opposition into a word.
 - The English language has carried the *dus* prefix as *dis--*, such as disfunction, disharmony, disarm, disown, etc.
 - Note that difficulty of interpretation can be due to a listener who is **dull of hearing**.
 - Perhaps one of the reasons we understand so little of Melchizidek is because the author of Hebrews was unable to explain it due to the dullness of hearing of this audience.
- Verses 12-14
 - The Hebrew believers ought to be teachers **for the time** (KJV) not "by this time" (ESV / NASB). Because of the urgency of the hour, everyone needed to step up to the plate, become a student and a teacher of the word. A time of crisis is no time to simply sit and listen.
 - **The first principles of the oracles of God** are the *elements of the beginning* of God's revelation. This concept will come again in 6:1.
 - **Unskillful in the word** – the word **unskillful** is ἀπειρος [*apeiros*] – it is the opposite of *peiros*, which is to be tested or proven. The one who uses milk only is by extension **unskillful**, but more directly he is "unproven" or "untested," and "not ready for prime time.
 - **Strong meat** is for those **of full age**. The word for **full age** has nothing to do with age. It is used 19 times in the KJV, and 17 times translated "perfect." It is from the root τέλος [*telos*] which is "the end" or "the goal." It is shameful for anyone of any age to stop with milk and never pursue the goal.
 - Those who go to the goal **have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil**. Too many of the epistle's day (and ours) do not exercise their senses, thus have no discernment. The senses were being exercised **by reason of use**, or literally, "through use."

MOVING ON | VV. 1-3

- What the writer is doing: *moving on*
 - **Leaving the principles** is literally, "having left."
 - This is more testimony about what the writer is doing than instruction on what the reader should be doing. Though such instruction would be valuable, the primary meaning of the words is that the writer is saying, "Now I'm moving on to deeper subjects." Since this is in the plural, the writer is making an assumption that the recipients of the letter are with him, "having left."
 - Translation alert: **leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ**
 - Literally, it is "the word of the beginning of Christ" which Judaism needed to leave behind, and which the author was doing.

- KJV "the principles of the doctrine of Christ" is a poor translation. Such principles should never be left behind. The Greek contains no word that could rightly be translated as "principles" (as in 5:12) or "doctrine" (as in 6:2)
 - NASB, NKJV, HCSB, ESV, and NIV all go with some version of "elementary principles of Christ." This also confuses *principles* in v. 1 with *principles* in 5:12
 - TEV says we are to, "leave behind the first lessons of the Christian message." This makes the same error as the KJV, since what follows is not at all the first lessons of the Christian message (nor should the first lessons be left behind).
 - *The Message* gets ridiculously artsy, saying, "Let's leave the preschool finger-painting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art."
- Where is the writer going? **Let us go unto perfection**
 - This is a passive verb, but translators are making it an active verb.
 - The word (phero) is "to bring," and in the passive would be "to be carried or taken."
 - Therefore, "let us be carried on to perfection."
 - Thus, again, the primary meaning of the words is the author's testimony, "I'm moving on to bigger subject matter, and I'm hoping I can carry you on the journey."
 - A foundation is only laid once. What the text is about to declare has *been laid* but now the writer is ready to move on.
- What the writer is leaving: *Jewishness without the Messiah*
 - The author is about to mention six things that are each fully explained in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) (vv. 1-2)
 - There is no need for the writer to further dwell on Judaism. Rather, it is time to move on to the full completion of these things.
 - If these six things are the foundation for Christianity, then it is a Christ-less Christianity.
 - The six things are: **repentance from dead works, faith toward God, doctrine of baptisms** (ceremonial cleansings), doctrine of **laying on of hands** (ordination), the **resurrection from the dead** in the last day, and the doctrine of **eternal judgment**.
 - The writer explains that these six elements of *Judaism* have been taught enough, but now it is time to go to maturity, to build on the foundation rather than laying it again.
 - The message is that the writer has moved on, and he is hoping the nation will as well.
 - Verse 3 - The writer is saying they have already left the elements of Christ in Judaism, and now, if God permit, they will **go on** to the full maturity of Judaism as it was designed to ultimately become.

MISSING OUT | VV. 4-6

- The five things of vv. 4-5 are things which Judaism had experienced.
 - **Those who were once enlightened** - Judaism had both the revelation of God through the Prophets and through His Son (Hebrews 1:1)
 - **Tasted of the heavenly gift** - likely a reference to Christ, sent from Heaven to Israel.
 - **Made partakers of the Holy Ghost** - Partaker does not need to mean that they were filled with the Spirit. Israel was a partaker of the Spirit in that the Spirit came to Jerusalem, a city which became "bewildered, amazed, and astonished" (Acts 2:6-7, 12) when they saw what was happening.
 - **Tasted the good word of God** - as with the Heavenly gift, this was more than "hearing" to a real experience of "tasting."
 - Tested of the **powers of the world to come** - the miraculous works of the Gospels and the Pentecostal era were a display of the powers of the coming age (the Messianic age).

- Can these five things be claimed of Christians today?
 - On some level 5 of the 6 could be claimed by Christians today, although not in the manner in which Israel had experienced them. The final one, however, is not something we have experienced except through reading about it.
 - It is significant that there is nothing here that speaks of justification by faith (nor can it be implied).
 - In short, the description is of unsaved Israel, with no other people in the history of man having less excuse for not coming to Christ for salvation.
- **If they shall fall away** - Because this is an active verb, it is not by accident or neglect that they **fall away**.
- Summary of vv. 4-6: Israel experienced five blessings which inexcusably bring them to the point of an impossibility of renewal should they walk away.
 - In the Greek, this words "it is impossible" is the beginning of v. 4, vv. 4-6 being one long and grammatically difficult sentence. KJV has a closer rendering in the word order of the Greek than most modern translations.
 - If that generation of Jews (having received the 5 things they experienced) were to walk away from Jesus as the Christ, they would have no refuge.
 - In the Hebrew context, the City of Refuge was for those who accidently or inadvertently killed someone. That generation of Jews killed Jesus out of ignorance (Acts 3:17). However, now they have had this ignorance revealed. If they walk away now, they "crucify to themselves the Son of God" and will have no refuge.

MAYHEM ONCOMING | VV. 7-8

This particular illustration is of the ground and its crop. Israel as the vineyard had received the five blessings (above), yet the vegetation it had brought forth was "thorns and thistles." At the time of the writing of the epistle, Israel was then "close to being cursed." When the land is burned, it is the vegetation that is destroyed, not the land itself, which remains to give another (and more healthy) crop in a future day.