

The Book of Hebrews

Part 10: The Two-edged Sword (Heb. 4:12-16)

ARISE GROUPS – LEADERS STAND

I. Revelation and the Piercing Logos

We are approaching one of the most quoted and well-known passages of Scripture where the writer of Hebrews compares the Word of God to a sword. Before we get there, it's important to establish the context of *rest*. Here are the last few verses from the Passion Translation:

8 Now if this promise of “rest” was fulfilled when Joshua brought the people into the land, God wouldn’t have spoken later of another “rest” yet to come. 9 So we conclude that there is still a full and complete Sabbath-rest waiting for believers to experience. 10 As we enter into God’s faith-rest life we cease from our own works, just as God celebrates his finished works and rests in them. 11 So then we must be eager to experience this faith-rest life, so that no one falls short by following the same pattern of doubt and unbelief. (Hebrews 4:8-11 TPT)

To summarize our previous insights from Hebrews 4: The Sabbath is not about a day, or even a general lifestyle—it is a heart awakened to the finished work of Christ.

Christ finished our redemption. Entering the “Sabbath-rest” is when your heart is resting in your identity before God (which then affects how you live, work, play, sleep, minister, etc.). This Sabbath-rest is an inner heart reality, not a specific way you structure your time. (Even though organizing time for reflection, prayer, and relational connection is vital in tuning the heart to this restful state.)

The call of the letter is to experience this faith-rest life by not resisting the voice—or the *Word*—of God’s limitless grace. With that said, the writer goes on to now talk about the *Word of God*, comparing it to a sharp two-edged sword:

12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

The Greek term behind “word” is *logos*. This is the term used as a title for Jesus in John’s Gospel. He is called the *Logos*—or Word—of God. The author of Hebrews has already used it twice. Earlier in this chapter it was used in connection with the gospel (“good news”).

2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word (*logos*) they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. (Hebrews 4:2)

The “Word of God” is Christ and it’s the Good News. In other words, Christ *is* the Good News. **What this means is that who Jesus is and what he’s done *is* the Word of God.**

The writer is not talking about the Bible here. The New Testament hadn’t even been fully written yet. He’s talking about the Word from heaven and the message of grace. The Scriptures, commonly called “the written Word of God,” are inspired to testify to this greater *Word*.

This brings us back to the beginning of Hebrews where we saw Christ and the reality of sonship as the message God is now “speaking.” In that passage, Jesus is also compared to sunlight when he’s described as being the very radiance of God.

2 But to us living in these last days, God now speaks to us openly in the language of a Son, the appointed Heir of everything, for through him God created the panorama of all things and all time. 3 The Son is the dazzling radiance of God’s splendor...

(Hebrews 1:2-3a TPT)

Amazingly, this connects to an important verse in the final book of Scripture where we also see “a sharp two-edged sword.”

16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

(Revelation 1:16)

John is encountering the Word of God here. He has a vision of Jesus that manifests what the entire book of Hebrews teaches. Jesus is the living and active Word who pierces us with the revelation of our true Father and our redemption as his sons and daughters.

After he has this intense vision of Christ, John falls to the ground like a dead man—but, incredibly, the first verbal communication from Jesus (i.e. the words that come out of sword-filled mouth) is this:

... "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

(Revelation 1:17-18)

His sharp two-edged words—*do not be afraid*—releases peace and rest. They also communicate his death and resurrection, which is his victory over darkness.

II. Ehud: O.T. Picture of the Two-Edged Sword

Since the written Word testifies to the living Word, we can find this message hidden in one of the only places a “two-edged sword” shows up in the Old Testament.

- **Note:** The other time this phrase shows up is in Psalm 149:6 where the “mouth” is also brought up in the same verse as a two-edged sword.

16 Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak.

(Judges 3:16)

Throughout the book of Judges, Israel comes under different forms of tyranny and defeat, leading them to cry out for a deliverer. God sends different leaders to break the power of the enemy and guide the people back into prosperity and peace. Each of these leaders—*judges*—are foreshadows of the Messiah.

The second deliverer God raised up for the people was Ehud. The name Ehud can be translated as “joined together,” or “undivided,” “union.” He speaks to the One who came to bring us back into the revelation of our union with God.

Ehud uses a two-edged sword to kill the enemy king who was controlling and enslaving God’s people.

A key part of the story involves Ehud being left-handed. The original Hebrew text says his right hand was crippled. In ancient times, being left-handed was a sign of significant weakness. But it was because of this weakness that Ehud was able to get past the king’s guards who only checked people’s left side for weapons they would draw with the right hand.

After presenting a gift, Ehud tells the king he has a secret message—a *word*—just for him. This is a prophetic picture of the “mystery of the Word” which is also called “the hidden wisdom of God” (see Colossians 1:25-26 and 1 Corinthians 2:7).

Ehud leans in to give this mysterious word and instead releases his two-edged weapon into the belly of the overweight king whose fat enfolds and completely covers the weapon.

As graphic as it is, this story points to Gospel. Firstly, Jesus defeated the enemy in a *left-handed way*. In other words, the true Deliverer did not come with the right hand of military power. He defeated darkness through the “weakness” of compassion in a surprise attack on the Kingdom of darkness.

At the cross, Jesus allowed his strength to be “crippled,” but in that same act he took the sword of judgment on himself. The Scriptures also say he became our sin—thus, he enfolded himself around our sin and swallowed it up.

In the story, the wicked king is named Eglon, a word meaning “calf.” It comes from the same word used for the golden calf the Israelites worshiped in the wilderness (Exodus 32).

So, the two-edged sword defeats the “Calf King.” This is significant because idolatry is at the heart of humanity’s problems and the core issue behind sin. Idolatry is about worshipping a false image of God—which produces a broken or false image in us since we’re made to reflect what we worship (Romans 1:21-23).

Jesus, being fully God and fully man, came to destroy this issue by redeeming and correcting our image of both God and humanity. As both Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus came as the radiant sunlight of God, revealing his true glory; and he also revealed our true glory as his children.

The cross was a left-handed attack against our broken identity where he restored us to the true knowledge of God as a perfect Father and us as his beloved Image Bearers. The cross was also the release of forgiveness for all the sins we committed in our deceived idolatrous state.

So now Gospel penetrates us with these words: *Don’t be afraid! I was dead and now I’m alive, and I have conquered your idolatry and all the death it produced!*

After Ehud defeats the king with his two-edged sword, he goes on to call the people of Israel into action. Everyone goes to the Jordan River—a place that clearly represents Jesus’s death and resurrection (see Joshua 3 & Matthew 3:13-17). It’s there they defeat the rest of the enemy nation. It says they didn’t let anyone “pass over” the Jordan, but rather “struck them down” with the sword (Judges 3:28-29).

In the same way, Jesus defeated the “king” of sin itself. The war with sin and idolatry is over—but now we are called to fight for people’s freedom by slaying their false identity under this defeated authority. We do this by baptizing people into the faith. In the baptismal waters of the “Jordan,” a person’s false self is drowned, and they are raised back to their true image in God (see Colossians 3:9-10). Again, all of this speaks to the mystery of Christ crucified, the word of redemption.

This message is now the sword that shows up later in Revelation when Jesus “strikes down the nations.”

**15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.
(Revelation 19:15)**

This *striking down* is about destroying the idolatry of humanity with our false images of God and self.

The “*winepress of the fierce wrath of God*” is the place of the cross where the fierce passion of God (his “wrath”) caused him to send his only Son not to condemn the world but to save it. Jesus saved the world by being crushed for *our* iniquities (Isaiah 53:5 & John 3:17). Like juice in a press, Jesus’s blood poured out like wine in order to release joy and healing to the world!

III. The Two Mouths

We're gaining more insight into the powerful and living sword of God. Hebrews 4 then goes on to say this:

12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Hebrews 4:12-13)

Similar wording about the "thoughts and intentions of the heart" comes up in a prophecy given to Mary when Jesus was born. Interestingly, a sword mentioned in this prophecy as well. It is spoken by a man named Simeon whose name means "he hears" (another connection to the voice/word).

34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:34-35)

The word "fall" in this prophecy can mean destruction while the word "rise" is literally translated as "resurrection." This is the "word of the Gospel" in a hidden way. Simeon—the one who hears—says, "*This Child is appointed for the fall (crucifixion) and rise (resurrection) of many...*"

The Gospel declares we were crucified with Jesus and resurrected with him. Jesus is the High Priest of our salvation—in him our sins are gone and we are new creations.

The "thoughts from many hearts will be revealed" speaks to how God will ultimately reveal everyone's need for Jesus's salvation. All humanity has fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23) and everyone is in need of cleansing. There are many who hide behind religion and self-righteousness (and many other things), but nothing will be able to hide their need for grace.

Hebrews 4 is reinforcing this reality when it says that everything is exposed and open before God. A person may look right on the outside, but their deepest thoughts, intentions, and motives are what matters, and God will expose that in all people one way or another.

With that said, there's an encouraging message hidden in the original language of the text. The term *logos* shows up again here, though our English Bible do not translate it directly. It is the final word in verse 13...

The phrase "*with whom we have to do*" is literally translated as "**with whom we have the Word.**"

This looks and sounds awkward so translators usually interpret *logos* as “reason” or “give an account” (because *logos* can be interpreted that way). However, it is no coincidence the author used *logos* several times now, and every time it has to do with message of the Gospel—the death and resurrection of Jesus and our union with him in those events.

So, in using *logos* again, it appears the author is saying that even though all our “stuff” is exposed before God—there is a Word we can cling to in order to find hope and restoration. This completely lines up with the next verse in the passage:

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

This is the same “confession” we discussed earlier in Hebrews 2. This is the confession of our forgiveness and righteousness before God; that our sins were crucified and now we are raised to new life with Jesus.

Amazingly, *logos* shows up again here. It is the root word of confession—“*homologia*.” *Homo* meaning “same” and *logia* meaning “word.” The term “same word” calls us to confess or **say the same word as God**.

In other words, this means we are to agree with God about our sins and about the salvation of Jesus. We confess our sin, but then we take hold of **the Word** that those sins are forgiven and we are redeemed as God’s righteous sons and daughters, raised with Christ.

What’s also incredible about this is the word “two-edged” sword in both the Hebrew and Greek translates to “two-mouths.” It is a literally a *two-mouthed sword*.

Our mouth is called to confess what his mouth is saying! When that confession happens—when the two mouths agree—the two-mouthed sword cuts and penetrates us and releases life and grace within us.

IV. Entering Rest = Entering Eden

Remember, all of this is coming off the heels of a call to enter into *the rest of God*. This effect of embracing the two-mouthed sword is a Sabbath rest in your soul. In other words, agreeing with God is powerful enough to produce peace in your heart and give you victory over guilt and sin.

The first time a “sword” shows up in Scripture is in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve are exiled from paradise. A flaming sword is held by mighty angels called “cherubim” who are set up on the eastern side of the garden, threatening to cut down anyone who comes back that way (Genesis 3:24).

The last time a “sword” shows up in the Old Testament is this:

**7 "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd,
And against the man, My Associate,"
Declares the Lord of hosts...
(Zechariah 13:7)**

This is quoted by Jesus himself on the night of his betrayal (Matthew 26:31 & Mark 14:27). What we find in the Gospel is that the sword of judgment released in Genesis becomes the cross, where Jesus takes that sword upon himself—and he transforms into a sword of mercy and grace. Now we pass through his mercy and grace to come into Eden, the place of rest and intimacy with God.

When God called Moses to design the Tabernacle, there was a veil put on the east side that barred entrance to the Holy of Holies. That veil had images of cherubim on it—just like the cherubim guarding the way to Eden.

We've previously looked at how the tabernacle speaks to the human frame—the outer court, the holy place, and Holy of holies speaks to the body, soul, and spirit. Our spirits, which carry the true image and glory of God, have been locked away behind a veil of unbelief and idolatry.

The Garden of Eden points to the place of the Spirit within us. There's a garden inside of us that has been locked up behind sin-consciousness and doubt and fear.

So, Jesus and his Word of redemption is the Sword that cuts down through joint and marrow, body to soul, then dividing it, tearing through the veil to unleash our spirit—which is the glory of God within us. He does this by forgiving sin and exposing sin as a lie in the first place, revealing the truth of who we really are as his holy brothers and sisters.

Earlier in Hebrews 4 we discussed how the original Hebrews resisted the call into the Promised Land because they doubted the Word of God over them. This included a wrong view of themselves ("*we were grasshoppers in our own sight...*").

Interestingly, they had to come into the Promised Land by way of the eastern side. The eastern entrance of the Promised Land was blocked—not by an angel or a veil, but by the Jordan River. Joshua ("Yeshua") led the people through the river into the Promise.

The Promise is a life of fruitfulness and grace and God's glorious presence flowing in your life. You are called to grip, to hold this sword for yourself, which means you come into agreement with his word of your true identity and his glory as a good and delightful Father. That confession cuts the veil, parts the sea, and releases us into the fruitful garden of rest.

Follow-up Encounter:

Prepare to take communion.

Ask the Lord to show you where there is a “veil” blocking the release of the Spirit in your life. Is it a false belief about yourself ... or about God? Is it a sense of shame or unforgiveness toward yourself or someone else? Ask the Lord to reveal it to you and seek him for the grace to rise above it.

Ask him to show you Jesus’s righteousness as your own.

In other words, ask yourself this: Is Jesus able to overcome this particular issue?

*If so, begin to see yourself as one with Christ. **Begin to confess that his ability to overcome this issue is your ability.** Confess that you are an overcomer! His righteousness is yours. This also means his faith is yours. His forgiveness is yours. His hope is yours.*

Take communion in celebration of this... Then share what God is speaking with others.