



The Message of the Bible

Week 36: Hebrews

The Teaching of Hebrews

The Work of the Son of God (1:1–2:4)

1. Fittingly, the book that will demonstrate the superiority of Christ in His person and His ministry begins with a summary of the significance of His superiority as the Son of God.
2. The Son was the completion, the final word, in God's revelation. As the writer demonstrates in constantly referring back to Scripture, the Old Testament spoke much about who the Son is and what He would accomplish. Hebrews is thus invaluable in our putting the pieces of the Bible together.
3. Not only the Son the one through whom the Father spoke, He is also
 - a. the appointed heir of all things,
 - b. the means by which the world was created and is sustained,
 - c. the perfect image of God,
 - d. the one who made purification for sins,
 - e. the one seated at the Father's right hand, and
 - f. the superior of angels.
4. In light of the supremacy of Christ and the greatness of the salvation found in Him, we must be careful that we heed, pay close attention to, and do not neglect the teaching about Christ (2:1–4).

Jesus' Incarnation and Exaltation (2:5–4:16)

1. As prophesied in Psalm 8, Jesus was made for a little while lower than the angels so that (1) all things might be made subject to Him and (2) He might taste death for everyone (2:5–9). Note that in 2:9, it is the suffering of death that brings glory and honor.
2. Jesus' incarnation and subsequent exaltation provide the basis upon which He could be our high priest (see 2:14–18).
3. As Heb 3:6 has raised the necessity of persevering in hope, the writer elaborates upon this in 3:7–4:16 by quoting and developing Psalm 95:7–11.
 - a. Important to the author's point is the reason they fell in the wilderness—lack of faith (see 3:12, 14, 19; 4:2, 3).
 - b. As a result of disobedience, then, those in the wilderness would not enter the rest that God had offered them.

- c. Lest we think the generation after those in the wilderness entered this rest, 4:7 shows and that David still desired to enter that rest, and 4:8 states that Joshua was not able to provide rest.
- d. Using the rest promised them as a picture of the salvation believers find in Christ, the writer shows that entering that rest requires faith in the good news (4:2, 3).
- e. The word of God, whose message must be united with faith (4:2), is able to discern the reality of the “thoughts and intentions of the heart” (4:12).
- f. Therefore, believers must consistently test whether their trust is in their great high priest and whether that faith coincides with the message of the word of God. Examples of what this looks like are found in Hebrews 11.

Jesus’ High Priesthood (5:1–10:18)

1. The writer begins his description of Jesus’ role as high priest by demonstrating the superiority of His work to that of human, Aaronic priests. The key issue is that these priests offered sacrifices not only for those they served but also for themselves (5:3).
2. Jesus, while offering prayers and supplications, became a priest of a different order—like Melchizedek. More will be said of this in chapter 7.
3. The writer, recognizing that what he is discussing is difficult to understand, pauses to address the issue of maturity in the faith and those who turn away (5:11–6:20). Hebrews 6 is one of the most difficult chapters in the New Testament; yet, we should be sure to understand it against the larger testimony of Scripture.
4. According to Hebrews 7, it was necessary for Jesus to be a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, who was both king and priest.
5. As such, Jesus’ priesthood was superior to that of Levitical priests (7:23–28). These things are also summarized at the beginning of chapter 8.
 - a. Jesus’ priesthood—since He lives forever—is perpetual. Therefore, He makes permanent intercession.
 - b. Jesus did not have to offer sacrifices for Himself.
 - c. Jesus Himself was the perfect sacrifice.
6. Not only is Jesus the perfect, permanent high priest; the covenant that He mediates is also a superior covenant to that administered by others. The writer now turns to a description of this new, better covenant.
7. Thus, the author, elaborating upon Jeremiah 31, spends a significant amount of material to demonstrate how Jesus’ ministry surpasses that of Moses and how the New Covenant surpasses the Old.

The Consequences of These Things (10:19–13:17)

1. In light of all that he has said previously, as summarized in 10:19–21, the writer immediately gives three exhortations to the body: (1) draw near, (2) hold fast the confession of hope without, and (3) consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds by encouraging the body instead of forsaking it (10:22–24).
2. In 10:26–31, the writer warns of the danger of refusing to pay heed to the truth when it occurs. Such neglect results in judgment by the living God who judges and takes vengeance.

3. He then encourages his readers (1) to remember their previous sufferings and good deeds and (2) to persevere in true faith, as described in the quote from Habakkuk 2:3–4.
4. Since endurance in the truth is based upon faith, the writer elaborates in Hebrews 11 upon the nature of faith and what it looks like in practice.
 - a. Faith defined is the confidence that those things that one hopes for and yet does not see are true and certain.
 - b. Moreover, faith is the means by which saints of old were approved before God (see vv. 2, 6), as the author now demonstrates from the Old Testament.
 - c. The writer summarizes his point about these individuals in vv. 13–16 and vv. 39–40.
5. In light of the clear testimony of those that have gone before, the writer exhorts the reader to pursue holiness and endurance. The believer’s motivation is the example of Jesus (12:2–3) and the reality of being children of God (12:5–13).
6. Although in the new covenant believers have come to the heavenly mountain (as opposed to Sinai), this does not mean that God’s judgment upon those who refuse Him has changed. God has not changed (cf. 12:29). In the new covenant, however, the believer’s relationship has changed in Christ, the mediator of the new covenant (12:24).
7. In light of the believer’s new identity in the new covenant, the writer describes through a series of commands and exhortations how this demonstrates itself in the community of faith.

Conclusion (13:18–25)

The Purpose of Hebrews

The general theme of Hebrew is not in dispute: the unqualified supremacy of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, a supremacy that brooks no challenge, whether from angelic or human beings. Correlatively, the covenant he has inaugurated is superior to any covenant that has preceded it, his priesthood is better than Levi’s, the sacrifice he has offered is superior to those offered under the Mosaic code, and in fact the very purpose of antecedent revelation was to anticipate him and point to him and to all the blessings he has brought with him.¹

Hebrews is an orderly and systematic treatment of the person and work of Christ, based on the exposition of certain key passages from the OT.²

The readers are instructed and exhorted to progression, steadfastness, endurance, and maturity by looking to Jesus, the Son of God and great High Priest, the better way.

How should I respond?

¹ Carson, Moo, & Morris, 391.

² Peterson, “Hebrews,” NBC.