

Hebrews

Purpose: “To communicate the supremacy of Christ.”

Outline: 1:1-3 – The Son, the Superior and Final Word

1:4-2:18 – The Son Superior to the Angels

3:1-4:13 – Christ Superior to Moses and Joshua

4:14-7:28 – Christ the Superior High Priest

8:1-10:18 – Christ the High Priest of a New & Superior Covenant

10:19-13:19 – Faith, the Superior Way

13:20-25 – Benediction and Final Greetings

Author: Unknown (perhaps Apollos, or Barnabas)

Date: Before 70 AD

Highlights:

This letter was written primarily for the benefit of Jewish (Hebrew) converts who were familiar with the OT and who were being tempted to revert to Judaism or to Judaize the gospel. Thus, the recurring theme of this letter is on the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ as revealer and as mediator of God’s grace. There can be no turning back to or continuation in the old Jewish system, which has been superseded by the unique priesthood of Christ.

This theme is introduced at the outset as Christ is placed into the context of the “big picture.” The Word of the Son of God is the superior and final word.

This continues into a lengthy look at the Son as superior even to the angels. Following a series of OT quotes on the subject (1:5-13), the superiority of the Son is put into the context of the 1st of 6 warnings.

The 6 warnings in the book of Hebrews is one of the defining characteristics of the letter:

First Warning – “Pay Attention” (2:1-4)

Second Warning – “Don’t Copy the Wilderness-Israelites” (3:7-19)

Third Warning – “Don’t Fall Away” (5:11-6:12)

Fourth Warning – “Don’t Spurn the Son of God” (10:19-39)

Fifth Warning – “Don’t Sell Out” (12:14-17)

Sixth Warning – “Listen to the Heavenly Voice” (12:18-28)

The superiority of the Son of God over the angels continues in 2:5-18, in the context of Jesus as the pioneer, or author, of salvation. He is the one who suffered to make atonement for our sins.

Chapter three brings the third comparison. Jesus is (1) the superior and final word, (2) superior to the angels, and (3) superior to Moses. Consider this from a Jewish perspective that regards Moses, and then David, as the top two faithful servants of God. The comparison, again, rests on the fact that Moses – like the angels – are servants; but the Son of God is the builder. The superiority of Christ is also seen in light of the failings of the wilderness-Israelites under Moses’ leadership. Moses is certainly not to take the blame for the failures of the Israelites in the wilderness; neither is Joshua (who is examined in 4:8) – the point is merely that Jesus is superior to them.

Notice that the comparisons, which show Jesus’ superiority, do not hinge on the dissimilarities between Jesus and the one to which he is being compared but on the similarities. Jesus is like an angel, just better. Jesus is like Moses and Joshua, only better.

Beginning in the second part of chapter 4 we see that Jesus is likened to the High Priest, only better. Better even than Melchizedek who was both a king and a priest (cf. Genesis 14:18-20). Jesus is the Greatest High Priest. This is because he has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin (4:15).

The third warning – Don’t fall away – is inserted as a side note to the discussion on priesthood. It is as though the author realizes that what he is teaching is difficult stuff, and the lack of growth in the

audience (the ones receiving the letter) makes this teaching even more difficult. None of us should “stay at the beginning of the race!” Rather we should move forward. The biggest fear, though, is the temptation to fall backwards – to revert back to a “not yet” orientation, which would be to renounce the excellence of the work of the Messiah, which has “already” occurred.

Apostasy Defined – 6:4-6 should not be understood as referring to Christians losing their salvation. Rather, it is referring to those who profess faith, but later renounce faith – demonstrating that they never had true faith in the first place. 6:4-8 does not describe a saved person, but 6:9 does.

The discussion on Jesus and the Melchizedek priesthood, interrupted in 5:10, is resumed in 7:1-28. Some wrongly interpret Melchizedek as being a manifestation of Christ before the Son of God because of 7:3a. However, 7:3b clearly shows that he was only “like the Son of God.” Melchizedek is a shadow of which the reality is Christ.

The discussion of Christ as the superior priest goes one step forward to the Christ being the superior High Priest of the superior New Covenant – in Chapter Eight. A new covenant was anticipated in Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, and other places (Davidic Messiah, Aaronic Messiah).

What makes the New Covenant – new? A change in people (v.8ff).

NOTE: Read 8:11 (a quote from Jeremiah 31:34) and compare with Matthew 24:14 and ask yourself how soon you really think we should expect the Second Coming. And then consider what you are doing to speed Christ’s return.

Chapter Eight is a difficult chapter for Jews to read. It appears to them as very offensive; and yet it is true and important to understanding the “big picture” of God’s redemptive plan.

Chapter Nine helps to clarify the New Covenant by considering the earthly sanctuary (temple) and the superior sanctuary, which exists in a life with Christ; it is the heavenly sanctuary that we enter through the sacrifice of Christ.

And so, Chapter Ten focuses on the superior, final, sacrifice of Christ. After reading 10:1-18, it should be clear that Christ is the only sacrifice that can bring atonement, and thus salvation.

The new section begins with “Therefore” (10:19). This new section introduces faith as the superior way by first introducing the fourth warning that we should not spurn the Son of God.

Notice the Christian Triad of faith (v.22), hope (v.23), and love (v.24).

10:24-25 is a great definition for the Church.

10:26ff is another glimpse at the danger of apostasy (cf. 6:4-8).

Chapter Eleven defines and illustrates faith. Reading through the accounts of the people listed in this chapter makes for a pretty awesome Bible Study.

The discussion on faith continues through some athletic imagery in 12:1-4, 11-13. It is also clear that God’s discipline is necessary for us to grow in our faith and holiness (cf. James 1:2-5). Therefore, the fifth warning against ungodliness, and selling out like Esau, is fittingly inserted here.

The sixth warning is piggybacked on the fifth warning. A positive warning in 12:18-28 – which says we need to listen to the heavenly voice, follows the negative warning in 12:14-17.

Faith is seen in our well-pleasing service to God. This is the discussion in 13:1-19. A wonderful verse to memorize is 13:8 – “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”

The letter concludes with a benediction and final greetings. Notable is Timothy who “has been released” (13:23). Timothy was apparently well known to the recipients of this letter.

Hebrews is a wonderfully important book in the canon of Scripture. It assures us that we do not need to make any sacrifice. Nothing is required for our salvation, except what has already been done by Christ on the cross. Thus, the believer can have a cleansed conscience and be free from guilt and sin.

We also see the irreversible logic of the history of redemption. There is no turning back, but a moving forward. The lesser has given way to the greater.

One of the greatest contributions of this letter is the equation between faith and faithfulness. If we have received true faith, it will move us to faithfulness. You cannot have one without the other.