

## 11. Hebrews

### A. Authorship

Nowhere in Hebrews is the author identified, but the readers seem to have known him well (see 5:11-6:12; 10:32-34; 12:4-5; 13:7, 18-24). **Paul** is the most popular suggestion as to who wrote Hebrews. There are some good reasons why he might have been the author, but there are also good arguments against him as the author as well.

As the text does not say who wrote Hebrews, we must have the same opinion as the early church teacher, Origen—“who the author of the epistle is God truly [only] knows...”

Because we do not know who the author of Hebrews was, in these notes I will abbreviate the “author of Hebrews” as “AH.”

### B. Recipients

This letter was written to **Jewish** Christians. This is seen from the following:

- 1) The superscription “to the Hebrews” from very early has been part of the letter’s transmission, and there is no evidence of any other superscription.
- 2) The OT is used *a lot*, which would be expected of readers who are familiar with the Bible of the Jews.
- 3) The AH wrote to prove the superiority of Christ to OT Judaism, which we should expect if the readers were Jewish rather than Gentiles.

### C. Occasion and Purpose

- 1) **Occasion** – the readers were in danger of falling away from Christ and the Christian faith and returning to Judaism because of persecution.
- 2) **Purpose** – the AH demonstrates to his readers the **superiority** of the person and work of Christ to the OT religion.
  - a. Jesus Christ is the perfect **priest** and **sacrifice**
  - b. Jesus is the “better” hope, testament, promise, sacrifice, substance, country, and resurrection
  - c. Jesus is the Fulfiller and Finisher of what the OT began and looked forward to
  - d. The AH therefore exhorts his readers to **persevere** in the faith, **grow** in Christ, and **warns** them of the terrible consequences of falling away from the faith

## D. Characteristics

- 1) The occasion of this letter shows the danger of being **immature** in the Christian faith (5:11-14). They should have been teachers (5:12), able to discern between good and evil (5:14), and should have had strong enough faith to persevere (10:36-39).
- 2) Warning passages
  - a. There are five passages where the AH warns his readers of the danger of falling away (apostasy) from Christ and the Christian faith:
    - 2:1-4
    - 3:7-4:13
    - 5:11-6:8
    - 10:26-31
    - 12:14-29
  - b. We must interpret these warning passages consistent with this letter and the rest of Scripture.
    - These are genuine *warnings*, and so they should not be weakened
    - Genuine salvation cannot be lost, so these passages cannot teach that (see John 6:39; Rom 5:9-10; 8:30, 38-39 and **Appendix H**)
    - Those warning passages describing one who falls away from Christ describe individuals who had professed to be believers but were really not genuine believers (see **Luke 8:4-15** [parable of the sower and soil] and **Judas** [professed to follow Christ but was not a genuine believer]).
  - c. God uses *means* to accomplish His *ends*—in this case, exhortations to persevere in the faith

## E. Keys

- 1) Theme – The superiority of Christ
- 2) Word – “**better**” (1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24)
- 3) Verses – **1:1-2**

## F. Outline

*Here’s a basic outline of Hebrews—*

- 1) Argument: Christ is Superior to Judaism, 1:1-10:18
- 2) Application: Marks of Persevering in Christ, 10:19-13:25

*Here's a more detailed outline of Hebrews —*

**1. Argument: Christ is Superior to Judaism, 1:1-10:18**

**A. Christ is Superior to the Prophets, 1:1-3**

- 1) God's revelation through the prophets, 1:1
- 2) God's revelation through His Son, 2:2-3

**B. Christ is Superior to the Angels, 1:4-2:18**

- 1) In his divine nature, 1:4-14
- 2) In his human nature, 2:5-9
- 3) In his redemptive nature, 2:10-18

**C. Christ is Superior to Moses, 3:1-4:13**

- 1) The argument for Christ's superiority, 3:1-6
- 2) Application to the readers, 3:7-4:13
  - a. Do not abandon truth faith, 3:7-19
  - b. Beware of the consequences of unbelief—missing God's rest, 4:1-13

**D. Christ is Superior to the Levitical Priesthood, 4:14-10:18**

- 1) A Better Position, 4:14-7:28
  - a. Initial exhortation in light of Christ's position, 4:14-16
  - b. Initial support comparing Christ with the OT priesthood, 5:1-10
  - c. Application to the readers, 5:11-6:8
  - d. Exhortation in light of God's faithfulness, 6:9-20
  - e. Christ is shown to be superior to the Aaronic priesthood by comparing Christ with Melchizedek, 7:1-28
    - The priesthood of Melchizedek, 7:1-10
    - The priesthood of Christ, 7:11-28
- 2) A Better Ministry, 8:1-10:18
  - a. His ministry is in the true sanctuary, 8:1-5
  - b. His ministry is based on a better covenant (the new covenant), 8:6-13
  - c. His ministry is a better sacrifice, 9:1-10:18

**2. Application: Marks of Persevering in Christ, 10:19-13:25**

- A. Be faithful to God, 10:19-25
- B. Endure and believe God, 10:26-39
- C. Illustrations of those who believed and endured, 11:1-12:2
- D. Understand God's discipline, 12:3-29
- E. Concluding exhortations, 13:1-25
  - 1) Social obligations, 13:1-6
  - 2) Church obligations, 13:7-17
  - 3) Personal obligations, 13:18-25

## 1. Argument: Christ is Superior to Judaism, 1:1-10:18

The AH here proves to his readers that Jesus Christ is superior to the prophets, angels, Moses, and the Levitical priesthood—all essential aspects of Judaism.

### A. Christ is Superior to the Prophets, 1:1-3

- 1) God's revelation through the prophets, 1:1
- 2) God's revelation through His Son, 2:2-3

### B. Christ is Superior to the Angels, 1:4-2:18

This was important to Jews, as the angels were the **mediators** through whom God gave the Law to Moses (Deut 33:2; Ps 68:17; Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19)

- 1) In his divine nature, 1:4-14

*First warning passage, 2:1-4* The readers should not reject God's new revelation through Christ by going back to the OT.

- 2) In his human nature, 2:5-9
- 3) In his redemptive nature, 2:10-18

### C. Christ is Superior to Moses, 3:1-4:13

Moses is the lawgiver and the “architect” of the OT way of life and worship. Moses is not depreciated but his position compared with Christ is shown to be “inferior.”

- 1) The argument for Christ's superiority, 3:1-6
- 2) Application to the readers, 3:7-4:13

This is the *second warning passage*, warning against abandoning Christ and going back to the Law and the OT system of worship. The AH warns against two things:

- a. Do not abandon truth faith, 3:7-19
- b. Beware of the consequences of unbelief—missing God's rest, 4:1-13

### D. Christ is Superior to the Levitical Priesthood, 4:14-10:18

- 1) A Better Position, 4:14-7:28
  - a. Initial exhortation in light of Christ's position, 4:14-16
  - b. Initial support comparing Christ with the OT priesthood, 5:1-10

The OT priesthood had the necessary qualifications to be priests but they had limitations (**sin**). Christ also has the necessary qualifications to be a priest, but does not have the limitations that the OT priests did.

- c. Application to the readers, 5:11-6:8

This is the **third warning passage**, warning against abandoning Christ and His priesthood and going back to the Aaronic priesthood (5:11-14). The AH exhorts them to persevere (6:1-3) and warns them of the consequences if any of them were not to persevere in the faith (6:4-8).

- d. Exhortation in light of God's faithfulness, 6:9-20

- e. Christ is shown to be superior to the Aaronic priesthood by comparing Christ with Melchizedek, 7:1-28

Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to Aaron's as the patriarch Abraham (from whom Aaron descended) **yielded** out of respect to Melchizedek.

- The priesthood of Melchizedek, 7:1-10

Melchizedek (Gen 14) was a king-priest (Heb 7:1-3) to whom Abraham paid tithes (showing deference, 7:2, 4-5, 8-10), who has no record of ancestry (the Levites had to prove theirs, 7:3), and who blessed Abraham (7:6-7). "The lesser is blessed by the greater" (7:7).

- The priesthood of Christ, 7:11-28

Christ's priesthood is superior to Aaron's as Christ—after the pattern of Melchizedek—has an indestructible life (7:15-19), a priesthood based on God's oath (7:20-22), an unending ministry as He lives forever (7:23-25), and offers Himself as the perfect sacrifice (7:26-28).

- 2) A Better Ministry, 8:1-10:18

Christ's superior ministry ultimately involves a superior **sacrifice**. Christ's ministry is superior as...

- a. His ministry is in the true sanctuary, 8:1-5
- b. His ministry is based on a better covenant (the new covenant), 8:6-13
- c. His ministry is a better sacrifice, 9:1-10:18

Christ's sacrifice is superior as it provides true, complete, final forgiveness, whereas everything involved in the OT sacrifices (sanctuary, priesthood, sacrifice, etc) were only shadows and copies.

## 2. Application: Marks of Persevering in Christ, 10:19-13:25

A. Be faithful to God, 10:19-25

B. Endure and believe God, 10:26-39

This is the ***fourth warning passage***, warning that to leave Christ is to reject God's Word, and to turn away and reject God's Word is to fall into the hands of the living God, which is a terrifying thing (10:31). Instead of rejecting God's Word the readers should believe God's Word and "live by faith" (10:38).

C. Illustrations of those who believed and endured, 11:1-12:2

Here the AH shows what true faith and faithfulness looks like through the lives of OT believers. These believers faced trials yet never stopped trusting in God. In like manner, Christians must persevere in their faith and follow Christ.

D. Understand God's discipline, 12:3-29

This (12:14-29) is the ***fifth and last warning passage***, warning against the danger of letting trials and persecution cause one to leave Christ.

E. Concluding exhortations, 13:1-25

- 1) Social obligations, 13:1-6
- 2) Church obligations, 13:7-17
- 3) Personal obligations, 13:18-25