

NT Survey – Hebrews
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
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Introduction

The title “To the Hebrews” is a scribal addition from when the NT books were brought together into one collection shortly after AD 100 and was attested to as early as ~AD 200 in church history.

Most commentators date the writing of Hebrews at AD 67-69. The use of the present tense throughout the letter when referring to the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system indicates the Temple was still standing and in use which would bound the writing before AD 70 when the Temple was destroyed by Titus. According to 13:23, Timothy had just been released from prison. It seems probable that this is in conjunction with his ministry to Paul just before Paul’s death which places the date in the late 60’s.

The view of the church that this epistle is Scripture is seen early in church history. Clement of Rome (ca AD 35-101) was the leader of the church in Rome ~AD 91-101. He wrote an Epistle to the Corinthians (~AD 96) in which he makes at least four quotations from the book of Hebrews providing evidence of the letter’s authenticity and early use as Scripture in the church.

The author is not identified. This has caused much consternation, particularly among modern scholars. Disagreement over authorship is seen as early as the second generation beyond the apostles. The list of potential authors is long: Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Luke, Philip, Priscilla, Aquila, and Clement of Rome. Paul appears to be the most likely “author”. Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215) believed that Paul was the author, but that Luke translated the book and published it in Greek. Origen (ca AD 185-254) also viewed Hebrews as the work of Paul, but as more of a recounting of a sermon than a letter (both in Eusebius’ (ca 260-340 AD) Ecclesiastical History). The author may have been imprisoned with Timothy (13:23 and 13:19) and is urging prayer for his own release which also fits with Paul’s second imprisonment. However, Origen does admit that “... who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows.”

The recipients of the letter are identified as Jewish since it is filled with references to Jewish history and religion and does not refer to any Gentile or pagan activity. The recipients were most likely living in a Gentile area based on the exclusive use of the Septuagint (LXX). Jerusalem (Palestine), Alexandria (Egypt), or Rome (Italy) have been suggested, with the weight of evidence leaning toward Rome. Among any gathering of believers, there are those attached the group of true believers who are not believers (2 Cor 13:5-6; Matt 7:21-23; Matt 13:24-30). This is an important interpretative point to understand the warning passages.

The author of the book of Hebrews wrote this letter to strengthen the faith of Hebrew Christians living in Rome during a period of great persecution; encouraging them to remain faithful. The writer urged the original readers to persevere in their faith rather than turning from Christianity and returning to Judaism. The theme of Hebrews is the superiority, or preeminence, of Christ. He interweaves magnificent teaching on the person and work of Christ into frightening passages that warn against apostasy.

Eternal Security

In addressing the warning passages in Hebrews it is important to apply the Biblical interpretation principle of allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture. Since the Bible is the Word of God and God cannot lie or contradict Himself (Num 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18), then one passage will never contradict another. Based on this interpretive principle, we know that the warning passages cannot mean that a true believer can lose their salvation. A true believer cannot lose their salvation for the Scriptures declare that nothing can separate the believer from Christ. All true believers once saved are kept by God’s power and are always saved (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rom 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Cor 1:4-8; Eph 4:30; Heb 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pet 1:5; Jude 24).

²⁴“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, **has eternal life**, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. John 5:24

³⁷"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. ³⁸"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹"This is the will of Him who sent Me, **that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing**, but raise it up on the last day. John 6:37-39

²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and **they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.** ²⁹"My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. John 10:28-29

¹Therefore **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** Rom 8:1

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 8:38-39

⁵who are **protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Pet 1:5

This doctrine is called the "Perseverance of the Saints" or "Eternal Security" and we often say "Once saved, always saved". This doctrine also includes the teaching that the true believer is changed and will therefore bring about fruits in their life in keeping with repentance (Matt 3:8; Luke 3:8).

⁶For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect** it until the day of Christ Jesus. Phil 1:6

¹⁷Therefore if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.** 2 Cor 5:17

The saved sinner loves Jesus and will (as a general pattern of life) seek to obey His commands.

⁸and **though you have not seen Him, you love Him**, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. 1 Pet 1:8-9

¹⁵"**If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.** John 14:15

If a person professes faith in Christ and then turns away, this demonstrates that they never exercised saving faith to begin with.

¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but **they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.** 1 John 2:19

Outline

- I. The Superiority of the Person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
- II. The Superiority of the Priesthood of Christ (5:1-7:28)
- III. The Superiority of Christ's Priestly Ministry (8:1-10:18)
- IV. The Superiority of the Believer's Privileges (10:19-12:29)
- V. The Superiority of Christian Behavior (13:1-19)
- VI. Personal Remarks (13:20-25)

Summary

The Superiority of the Person of Christ (1:1-4:13)

1:1-3 – Superior to OT Prophets – The author of Hebrews begins without the normal greeting noticed in other epistles. He begins right away presenting Christ as superior. He is superior to the OT prophets because He is the culmination of divine revelation and He is God incarnate. He is Heir, Creator, Revealer, divine Reflection, Image of God, Sustainer of the universe, Perfect Sacrifice, and sits at God's right hand (the highest place of honor).

1:4-14 – Superior to the Angels – Christ is superior to the angels because he has returned to his pre-incarnate glory (v4). The writer then scours the OT to illustrate Jesus’ superiority to angels:

v5 – He is the Son of God (Psa 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14)

v6-7 – He is worshipped by angels (Psa 97:7; 104:4)

v8-9 – He is King-God (Psa 45:6-7)

v10-12 – He is eternal (Psa 102:25-27)

v13 – His work is successfully completed (Psa 110:1)

The contrast between angels and Jesus is a powerful one. Angels are servants of God created to minister to believers (those who will inherit salvation) (v14); Jesus is the Savior.

❖ What do I think about Jesus?

2:1-4 – WARNING #1 – This is the first of five warning passages in Hebrews. Since Jesus is the culmination of God’s revelation and superior to the prophets and angels, salvation through Him must not be rejected. Those that have yet to recognize Christ as superior and bow before Him are in danger of drifting away from the gospel. If the Mosaic Law is unalterable and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, the punishment for disregarding the great salvation that God has given us through His Son will be even more severe. The gospel was validated, confirmed by those that heard the Lord and by God Himself with signs, wonders, various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit.

❖ Am I drifting away from the gospel?

2:5-2:18 – Superior in His Saving Purpose – The writer continues the theme of the superiority of Christ. He is superior because all things are not subject to angels, but are subject to Christ (v5-8). He is superior because He humbled himself to be the fully sufficient sacrifice for mankind; He tasted death for everyone (v9). He is superior because He is our brethren (v10-13). He is superior because He took on human flesh and nature (v14-18) to become a sympathetic, merciful, and faithful high priest.

...that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.
Heb 2:14b-15

❖ Do I fear death?

3:1-6 – Superior to Moses – Jesus and Moses were both faithful. However, Jesus is superior to Moses because Moses was a servant, but Jesus is the Son; and Moses was in God’s house (people of God), but Jesus was over God’s house (the church). The one who perseveres is the one who is truly saved: “if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.”

3:7-19 – WARNING #2 – Jesus’ superiority over Moses makes it a more dangerous thing to reject Him than to reject Moses. The writer refers to the experience of Israel in Numbers 14 as an illustration. The people hardened their hearts and refused to believe and obey God again and again. God was angry with His people who sinned. The punishment for this rebellion was a just punishment: they did not enter His rest (they lost entrance into the Promised Land).

The true believers (brethren) are to ensure that all those who associate with the body are encouraged to believe and become partakers of Christ and remain faithful to the end. The unbelieving ones either believe to the saving of their soul or the fall back to damnation (10:39).

❖ Do I encourage those in the body to remain faithful to Christ?

4:1-13 – Entering Rest – This chapter is laid out with “let uses”.

Let us fear (v1-8) – Among the true believers are those who do not believe; they will come short of entering eternal life because of unbelief which results in disobedience.

Let us be diligent (v9-11) – We cannot earn our salvation through diligence, but diligence shows that we have been changed.

¹⁰Therefore, brethren, **be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you**; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; ¹¹for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. 2 Pet 1:4-11

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, **be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless**,...¹⁷You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, ¹⁸but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... 2 Pet 3:14 18

❖ Am I diligent to make my calling certain?

All will be laid bare (v12-13) – The Word of God exposes disobedience and judges our sin.

¹²For 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. ¹³And 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. Heb 4:12-13

❖ Am I a doer of the Word?

Let us hold fast our confession (v14) – Since the Son of God is our high priest who has done so much to save us from our sin, we must hold fast our confession.

❖ Am I holding fast my confession?

Let us come boldly (v15-16) – Since the Son of God can sympathize with our weaknesses, when we are in need, He will come to our aid. “Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

❖ Do I come with confidence through Jesus to receive mercy and grace in time of need?

The Superiority of the Priesthood of Christ (5:1-7:28)

5:1-10 – Superior Qualifications – The qualifications for the high priest are stated in these verses – to represent the people before God by offering gifts and sacrifices for sins. Aaron, the first man to be appointed by God for this office, is used as the example of what a high priest does. Because Aaron was surrounded by weakness and "beset with weakness himself," he was able to have compassion on the people (v1-4). Since he is a sinner, he must offer sacrifices for his own sin as well as the sins of others, over and over again. Jesus was also appointed to the priesthood by God (v6) and what made Him different was that, "...having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation" (v9). Jesus, who was not a Levite but from the tribe of Judah, was appointed by God to be a high priest not in the order of Levi, but, according to the order of Melchizedek which is explained more fully in chapter 7.

5:11-6:12 – WARNING #3 – The writer desires to speak more on Christ, the high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Unfortunately, this is a complicated exposition that those who are not maturing/growing, but have become dull of hearing, cannot understand. The mature, by contrast can understand the “word of righteousness”. They are described as those “who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” The maturing believer needs to move past hearing about the elementary teaching about the Christ (repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment) (5:11-6:3).

❖ Am I pressing on toward maturity or am I stagnated?

A particular case of the immature are those that have actually never exercised saving faith to begin with (6:4-8). The terms here are never used to refer to salvation:

- “Enlightened” means to “give light by knowledge or teaching”.
- “tasted of the heavenly gift” means to nibble at Jesus but never come to drink the living water (John 4:20) or eat the bread (John 6:51).
- “been made partakers of the Holy Spirit” means to associate with, but not possess the Holy Spirit; to be around when the Spirit was manifested.
- “tasted the good word of God” means to nibble on parts of Scripture, but the Word is not their delight (Jer 15:16)
- “tasted the powers of the age to come” means to have witnessed signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

These unbelievers have been brought close to salvation, but then chose to “fall away” from the knowledge of the truth; not the personal possession of it. Someone so close to salvation who then spits on Jesus’ sacrifice will not be brought back to this point of repentance again.

The true believers are not like this; they display the things that accompany salvation. The recipients of this letter/sermon do indeed display the fruits of a changed life.

¹¹And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹²so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

❖ Do I display fruit of salvation?

6:13-20 – Certainty of God’s Promise – Speaking of the “full assurance of hope” (v11) moved the author to present God as faithful to fulfill His promises (v13-18). Since He is faithful, we have hope; and “this hope is an anchor for our soul” (v18-20).

❖ Is my soul anchored?

7:1-20 – Christ’s Superior Priestly Order – Not only is Jesus superior in His qualifications for the priesthood, He is superior in the order of His priesthood.

7:1-3 – Presentation of Melchizedek – The writer reached back to Genesis 14 and the account of Melchizedek to explain the nature of Jesus' priesthood. His name and hometown suggest that he was the "king of righteousness" and "king of peace,". The Bible does not record a beginning nor ending for his life. He was a priest-king, clearly a type of Christ, who "like the Son of God, remains a priest perpetually."

7:4-28 – Preeminence of Melchizedek – His greatness is evident since Abraham paid him tithes (v4-10). Because the priesthood of Aaron did not bring people into obedience to God, He changed the priesthood. He installed Christ as the priest of another order, the Order of Melchizedek (Psa 110:4). His priesthood was superior for three reasons:

1. It was founded not on the law, but God initiated it with a personal oath (v16-24).
2. Christ's priesthood is permanent and will not be passed on (v 25).
²⁵Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.
3. Christ's character is far superior to that of any Aaronic priest since He has no sin of His own for which to atone. He provided one sacrifice that was effective, once and for all (26-28).
²⁶For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; ²⁷who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

The Superiority of Christ's Priestly Ministry (8:1-10:18)

8:1-6 – The Main Point – Jesus is our high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.

8:7-13 – A Better Covenant – The author expositis Jeremiah 31:31-34 showing that God inaugurated a new covenant. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. The old covenant has been made obsolete. The new covenant provides a complete forgiveness for sins and new nature by which to obey God.

❖ Have I rejected the walk of works?

9:1-12 – A Better Sanctuary – In these verses the writer gives a brief description of the Tabernacle. It was provided to make possible the removal of external pollution by use of animal sacrifice. "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through that greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands ... and not through the blood of goats or calves, but through His own blood, He entered into the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." (v11-12).

9:13-10:18 – A Better Sacrifice – Christ's sacrifice is much better than animal sacrifices because:

1. It removes more than the external stain of sin; it completely forgives sins and frees to serve the living God (v13-14).
2. It resulted in the complete removal of sin by Christ's blood (v15- 22).
3. By entering God's presence, Christ showed the sacrifice to be perfect and sufficient and guaranteed He will come again to complete our salvation by taking us to His Father (v23-28).
²⁷And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment, ²⁸so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him. Heb 9:27-28
4. It is a permanent sacrifice. The once-for-all death of Jesus forever took away all our sins and no need for further sacrifice remains (10:1-18).

¹⁴For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. Heb 10:14

❖ Do I stand amazed at the person and work of Jesus?

The Superiority of the Believer's Privileges (10:19-12:29)

10:19-25 – Access Through Faith – Since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God:

1. Let us – draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water
2. Let us – hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful
3. Let us – consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

❖ Do I consider how to stimulate my brothers and sisters to love and good deeds?

10:26-39 – WARNING #4 – Those that profess Christ, but have not been transformed through saving faith will go on sinning willfully. “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment... It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

A changed life is a source of confidence in salvation (v35). The true believer is not of “those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”

❖ Do I have confidence of my salvation?

11:1-40 – Faith – Carrying on with his theme of faith the writer first defines it, then, to make sure we understand, gives a host of examples.

¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²For by it the men of old gained approval. ... ⁶And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Heb 11:1-2, 6

❖ Is my faith like this?

The author gives example after example of OT saints who believed God, trusted Him completely, which moved them to obedience. These are examples of faith in action. In the generations before the flood, Abel, Enoch, and Noah responded by faith and demonstrated obedience to God; their faith pleased Him (v4-7). Abraham demonstrated his faith by forsaking the comforts of Ur and Haran to follow God to the Promised Land. By faith Abraham and Sarah had a son Isaac even though they were too old (v8-12). By faith Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph looked forward to the fulfillment of God's promises (v13-22). Moses showed his faith by leaving the wealth and power of the Egyptian palace to suffer with the Hebrew slaves (v23-28). By faith the Israelites left Egypt and entered the Promised Land (v29-31).

The writer went on to present Gideon, Samson, David, Samuel, and many other heroes, both men and women, as examples to help us understand faith. The promises that the OT believers expected, because they believed God, were coming true in the very events that the NT Christians experienced, including the Messiah (39-40).

12:1-29 – Persevering Faith– Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

❖ Do I lay aside EVERY encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles me?

God does not discipline only professors, He disciplines true believers. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (v7-11).

❖ Do I respond quickly to God’s discipline?

12:14-29 – WARNING #5 – The true believer pursues sanctification and listens to God’s Word.

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

❖ Do I pursue sanctification, listen to God’s Word, and show gratitude to God?

The Superiority of Christian Behavior (13:1-19)

The last chapter of this letter presents some of the characteristics of the true believer which portray the true gospel to the world and encourage others to believe in Christ and bring glory to God.

1. Love the brethren (v1)
2. Show hospitality (v2)
3. Show sympathy to those being persecuted (v3)
4. Be sexually pure (v4)
5. Be free from the love of money; be content (v5-6)
6. Imitate the mature (v7)
7. Be doctrinally pure (v8-14)
8. Walk in the Spirit (v15)
9. Do good and use God’s resources to serve others (v16)
10. Obey and submit to leaders and make it a joy for them to lead (v17)
11. Pray for believers (v18)

❖ How am I doing?

Benediction and Personal Remarks (13:20-25)

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The author calls his sermon/letter a “word of exhortation” and asks that the readers “bear with it.”

❖ Do I surrender to God’s “word of exhortation”?

Homework

Read James.