

Mount Pisgah A.M.E Church

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Bible Study, Wednesday, March 16, 2016

Survey of the Bible

Lesson 60: Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews

Unlike the previous epistles, Hebrews is a letter written to bring a message to many Christians, not necessarily of the same congregation, or even of the same city. It is often referred to as a “circular letter” – a letter that an overseer would write to be published throughout the Body of Christ. Hebrews is best characterized as a letter of encouragement and exhortation. It gives doctrinal reasons why believers should “keep the faith” and not fall away in spite of criticism and persecution, and practical advice on how to live a life of faith.

Author

There is no biographical information in Hebrews tying it to a particular author. Although there are some that believe that Paul wrote it, the majority of biblical scholars reject that idea. Some of the reasons include:

- (1) The Greek used is different from Paul’s letters;
- (2) Hebrews 2:3 gives the impression that the author did not have first-hand knowledge of Jesus (Paul always claimed to);
- (3) No salutation (even letters where Paul’s authorship is disputed had one).

Other possible authors suggested are Barnabas, Luke, Clement of Rome, Apollos, Silas, Philip, and even Priscilla, however no evidence has been found to substantiate any of these.

The Times and context of Hebrews

There is much mystery surrounding the context of Hebrews, however the tone of the letter suggest that it is written to Jewish Christians who experiencing extensive persecution because of their faith are at risk of falling back into Judaism. The persecution had not yet resulted in martyrdom (dying for the faith), but it was severe. The Roman Empire had become increasingly intolerant of the Jews, and especially of this new movement called Christianity (or “The Way”). In the 60s AD, there was increasing persecution throughout the empire. Eventually, in 70 AD, The Romans destroyed Jerusalem and its temple.

It is thought that perhaps Hebrews was written during the early days of the persecution, perhaps between 60 AD and 64 AD. Because the writer says “those from Italy send their greetings” (13:24), it is thought that perhaps this might be a letter “home” to Jewish Christians in Rome from a Jewish Christian somewhere in the diaspora.

Overview

Hebrews builds a case for the superiority of Christ through an argument in which Christ is repeatedly presented as “better” in every respect than the pillars of the Jewish readers’ beliefs. In His person He is better than the angels, Moses, and Joshua, and in His work He provides a better priesthood, a better covenant, a better sanctuary, and a better sacrifice. The persecution Christians are receiving at the hands of the Romans makes their former life in Judaism seem very appealing. However, by doing so, the writer makes the case that they would be retreating from the “real deal” back into the “shadow.” Added

to his positive presentation of the supremacy of Christ, the writer includes five warnings about the peril of turning away from Christ. These “parenthetical” warnings include cautions against neglect and refusal. After using the Old Testament to demonstrate the superiority of Christ’s person, and the superiority of Christ’s work, the writer applies these truths in a practical way to show the superiority of the Christian’s walk of faith.

Outline

- I. Christ’s Person is Superior (1:1-4:13)**
 - A. Christ is Superior to the Prophets (1:1-1:3)
 - B. Christ is Superior to the Angels (1:4-2:18)
 1. Because of His Name and Diety (1:4-1:14)
 2. First Warning: Don’t neglect the great gift (2:1-2:4)
 3. Because of His Humanity (2:5-2:18)
 - C. Christ is Superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
 1. In His Work (3:1-3:4)
 2. In His Person (3:5-6)
 3. Second Warning: The Danger of unbelief: Learn from the Israelites (3:7-4:13)
 - a) Don’t Harden Your Heart (3:7-3:19)
 - b) Example from Israel’s Past (4:1-4:11)
 - c) God’s Word will judge (4:12-4:13)
- II. Christ’s Work is Superior (4:14-10:18)**
 - A. The Superiority of Christ’s Priesthood (4:14-7:28)
 1. Higher order Than Aaron, yet Still Human (4:14-5:10)
 2. Third Warning: Danger of Not Maturing (5:11-6:20)
 - a) Believers are Expected to Mature (5:11-5:14)
 - b) Either Forwards or Backward – No Middle Ground (6:1-6:8)
 - c) You Don’t Have to Be This Way (6:9-6:12)
 - d) God’s Word is Secure (6:13-6:20)
 3. Superiority of Christ is Like Melchisadek’s Superiority to Aaronic Priesthood (7:1-7:28)
 - a) Melchizadek a Priest Forever Without Genealogy (7:1-7:3)
 - b) Melchizadek Higher than Abraham, and thus Levi (7:4-7:10)
 - c) Jesus like Melchizadek (7:11-7:22)
 - d) Jesus Superior to Levitical Priesthood – No Personal Sin (7:23-7:28)
 - B. Superiority of Christ’s Covenant (8:1-8:13)
 1. A Better Covenant (8:1-8:6)
 2. A New Covenant (8:7-8:13)
 - C. The Superiority of Christ’s Sanctuary and Sacrifice (9:1-10:18)
 1. The Setup of The Earthly Sanctuary (9:1-9:5)
 2. Sacrifice in the Earthly Sanctuary (9:6-9:10)
 3. The Heavenly Sanctuary (9:11)
 4. The Blood of Christ (9:12-9:28)
 5. Christ’s One Sacrifice for All (10:1-10:18)
- III. The Walk of Faith Is Superior to Turning Away (10:19-13:25)**
 - A. **The Full Assurance of Faith (10:19-11:40)**
 1. Hold Fast to the Profession (10:19-10:25)
 2. Fourth Warning: Danger of Drawing Back (10:26-10:39)
 3. Definition of Faith (11:1-11:3)

4. Examples of Faith (11:4-11:40)
- B. Endurance In Faith (12:1-12:29)
 1. Christ Endured (12:1-12:4)
 2. We Should Endure God's Chastening (12:5-12:24)
 3. Fifth Warning: Danger of Refusing God (12:25-12:29)
- C. Walking In Faith Requires Love (13:1-13:17)
 1. Love In Every Area of Life (13:1-13:6)
 2. Loving Commitment and Obedience (13:7-13:17)
- D. Concluding Encouragement and Blessing (13:18-13:25)

Keys to Understanding Hebrews

- The basic theme of Hebrews is found in the word *better*, describing the superiority of Christ in His person and work. The two words "better" and "superior" occur 15 times in the original Greek. The words *perfect* and *heavenly* are also prominent. He offers a better revelation, position, priesthood, covenant, sacrifice and power. The writer develops this for the readers to prevent them from giving up on the substance for the shadow by abandoning Christianity and retreating into the old Judaic system.
- Hebrews is also written to encourage believers to become mature in Christ and to put away their spiritual dullness and degeneration. Thus, there is heavy stress on doctrine, concentrating on
 - Christology – study of the nature and person of Christ
 - Soteriology – the study of salvation.
- Hebrews powerfully paints the picture of Christ's divinity balanced by Christ's humanity, and why both are necessary for our salvation
 - Humanity – so that he might be a fitting substitute for us
 - Divinity – so that he can satisfy the righteous requirements of propitiation (payment) for sin and offer a sacrifice that will cleanse not just the hands but the heart.

Some Lessons from Hebrews

- Often people mistake the role and relevance of Angels. Angels are servants at the beck and call of God, and created to minister to the needs of those who are about God's will.
- There is a real danger in allowing the hard circumstances of life to make one lose faith. While it is questionable whether a person can lose their salvation if they ever really had it, we certainly can compromise its power in our lives.
- Hebrews encourages us not to be satisfied with just having salvation, but to press toward "sanctification." (i.e., the "perfecting" of the saints). We may never SEE actual perfection in this life (only JESUS displayed it), but our lifelong quest ought to be becoming as much like Jesus as we can even during this life. Settling for spiritual immaturity is unacceptable.
- We must always remember that God stands by God's Word – God's promise is true whether WE get to see it prove itself to be so or not.
- Although we are so far removed from the old sacrificial system that required payment when sins were committed, we should never take Jesus' shed blood and broken body for granted. A tremendous price was paid to free us from the bondage of sin. We ought to remember that whenever we are tempted to "just let ourselves" engage in that which would not be pleasing to God.
- Viewing life by faith is a fundamentally different way of looking at life. Through our human eyes, we expect to see tangible results from our efforts. Living by faith may not yield tangible results, but we engage in things *merely because they are right in God's sight* and know that the results WILL come, whether tangible or not, because this life is not all that there is.

- Praising God becomes “a sacrifice” when it costs us something – when we praise God even during times of struggle. But praise God for what God has already done, AND IN FAITH because we trust God’s promise that “there’s more to this than I see with my eyes” We will always encounter God in the midst of the praise and leave the encounter feeling freed to continue on.