

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

HEBREWS

- Book Outline, Author and Date
- Jesus, the Great High Priest
- Encouragement in Suffering

ROSE
PUBLISHING

“Hold unswervingly...”

The letter to the Hebrews was written to Christians who faced a strong temptation to abandon or move away from the teachings of the apostles. At that time, the world around them was in continuous change. Many cultures and religions of the Greek way of life (known as Hellenism) were coming together under influence of the Roman Empire. Rome allowed these various religions to coexist, but only if they also adhered to the Roman forms of worship—especially the worship of the emperor.

These first generations of Christians faced two powerful challenges:

- (1) Temptation to return to the “purity” of Judaism
- (2) Fierce persecution by authorities who threatened their lives

The writer of Hebrews encourages these believers to persevere through suffering and withstand the temptation to abandon their faith.

“to the hope we profess...”

The letter to the Hebrews is important for Christians today because temptations to move away from the teachings of Christ and the apostles continue to exist. Just as the writer to the Hebrews encouraged readers to “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23), so we, too, need the same encouragement.

In the entire New Testament, the book of Hebrews is written in the most sophisticated Greek. Its main points are made in a careful and thoughtful way, as a very educated person of the times would write. In this way, it is very much a “Hellenistic” letter. However, it is also deeply rooted in the Old Testament. Knowledge of Old Testament doctrines and practices helps readers understand the message of the letter.

Who Wrote the Book of Hebrews?

The author of the letter to the Hebrews is unknown. Some scholars suggest that the apostle Paul wrote Hebrews. However, Paul identified himself as the writer in his letters, and the author of Hebrews does not identify himself. Also, the difference in themes and style between Paul’s letters and Hebrews argues against Paul as the author.



Dating the Book of Hebrews

Many scholars suggest that the letter to the Hebrews was written between AD 60 to 69 for two main reasons: (1) The author of Hebrews mentions Timothy (Heb. 13:23), and (2) the temple in Jerusalem, which was destroyed in AD 70, still appears to be standing. The author speaks of the temple in the present tense and does not make reference to the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system.

The author of Hebrews explains Jesus' teachings by means of contrasts. The author makes the main point early on: Jesus reveals God in new and more complete ways (1:1–3). In other words, Jesus is superior to everything that preceded him. In fact, Jesus Christ is the *fulfillment* of every promise that preceded him. In him, we have a better hope, a better covenant, a better sanctuary, and a better inheritance. Jesus is the High Priest, and no more human priests are necessary because there is no longer a need for repeated sacrifices. Jesus is the one and only sacrifice.

“for he who promised is faithful.”

OUTLINE

The letter to the Hebrews can be divided into seven sections as follows:

1. THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER ANGELS, MOSES, AND PRIESTS (HEB. 1:1—7:28)
 - a. Supremacy of Christ's Revelation (1:1–4)
 - b. Supremacy of Christ over Angels (1:5—2:18)
 - c. Supremacy of Christ over Moses (3:1—4:13)
 - d. Supremacy of Christ over Priests (4:14—7:28)
2. THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST AS THE HIGH PRIEST OF THE NEW COVENANT (8:1–13)
3. THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW TABERNACLE (9:1–12)
4. THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE (9:13—10:18)
5. A CALL TO PERSEVERANCE, FAITHFULNESS, AND DISCIPLINE (10:19—12:29)
6. RULES FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING (13:1–17)
7. REQUEST FOR PRAYER, FINAL GREETINGS, AND BENEDICTION (13:18–25)

1 THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER ANGELS, MOSES, AND PRIESTS (HEB. 1:1–7:28)

Jesus reveals God in new and more complete ways.

SUPREMACY OF CHRIST'S REVELATION (1:1–4)

Main Idea: Jesus is superior because of who he is and what he did.

- Jesus is God. He is the exact representation of the Father's being.
- Jesus made the full and final sacrifice of purification for sins.

SUPREMACY OF CHRIST OVER ANGELS (1:5–2:18)

Main Idea: Jesus rules! He is far above the angels because he alone is God's Son, and he became human in order to accomplish what no angel could ever do—bring about the salvation of the human race.

Son of God

“Son of God” can be used metaphorically to describe a special relationship with God: that of creator and creature. For example, Adam is called the “son of God” in Luke 3:38 because he was the first created human. Angels are also referred to as “sons of God” (Job 1:6; 38:7) because they are spiritual beings created by God. Jesus is not the Son of God in either of these senses. The Bible makes a clear distinction in the use of the term “Son of God” for Jesus. John calls Jesus “the only” or “only begotten” Son (John 1:14, 18). In Jesus' case, “Son” refers to his divinity, as the eternally begotten Son of God. “Son” can also be used metaphorically for Jesus in that he is the descendant of David, and hence, the Messiah, the rightful King of Israel. When both senses (divine and human) are combined, Jesus is effectively the Messiah, the Son of David, and God in the flesh—God and man at the same time. And for that reason, Jesus is superior to angels and to all previous revelation.

SUPREMACY OF CHRIST OVER MOSES (3:1–4:13)

Main Idea: Jesus' authority is superior to the authority of Moses.

Moses

Moses was perhaps the most important person in the Old Testament. He was born to a Hebrew slave family in Egypt. When Pharaoh issued a decree to kill all Hebrew boys, Moses' mother put him in a basket and placed it in the Nile. He was rescued by an Egyptian princess and was raised in the palace. When Moses was forty years old, he reached out to his Hebrew people. He murdered an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave. Fearing

Pharaoh, Moses escaped to Midian. When Moses was eighty, God called to him from a burning bush and commanded him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses felt inadequate, so God revealed to Moses his divine name and provided him with the ability to perform several miracles to prove his authority.

Moses reluctantly obeyed, and after calling down ten plagues on Egypt, he led the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Moses died on Mount Nebo, within sight of the Promised Land.

Wilderness Wanderings

As the Israelites approached the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to send twelve men to explore the land. Their report confirmed all that God had promised: a land flowing with milk and honey! However, they also brought bad news; the people already in the land were too strong. Filled with fear despite the assurances from Moses, Joshua, and Caleb, the Israelites rebelled and refused to follow God’s instructions to conquer the land. God’s punishment was terrible: that whole generation died in the wilderness, except for Joshua and Caleb, the two faithful spies who trusted God.

Moses the Faithful Servant	Jesus the Faithful Son
Moses had direct communication with God (Num. 12:4-8).	Jesus is God’s “word” and has had direct communication with the Father from eternity (John 1:1).
Moses was God’s primary spokesman—the chief prophet of the Old Testament (Deut. 18:17-20).	Jesus is God’s primary and final Word to us. He is the Prophet—the supreme revelation of God.
Moses represented the people of Israel before God. He acted as a priest on occasion, pleading for God’s people (Num. 14:10-20).	Jesus represents all of humanity before God. He is the High Priest of our faith.
Moses led Israel up to the entrance of the Promised Land, but was not able to complete the journey to the Promised Land.	Jesus has gone ahead of his people to prepare a place for them (John 14:1-3) in our “Promised Land” of God’s rest.