

HEBREWS

The Superiority of Jesus

Introduction

- The author of Hebrews is anonymous. Possibilities include Paul, Barnabas, and Apollos, though we really don't know
- He had a first-hand relationship with the original disciples of Jesus
- Thus, the letter is anchored in the teachings of the Apostles
- The intended audience is also unknown, but the author assumes that they know the OT, at least the first five books or the Torah
- The readers were likely second generation Jewish Christians (AD 65)
- One of the most important contributions of Hebrews is its balance of continuity and progress in relating the OT and NT to each other

Introduction

- The author observes that they faced persecution for their faith in Jesus, and were in danger of abandoning God (10:32-34):
- ³² Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴ You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.
- This concern explains the structure and purpose of the letter

Structure and Purpose

- Introduction (1:1-3)
- Four main sections, where the author compares and contrast Jesus
 - Angels and the Torah (1-2)
 - Moses and the Promised Land (3-4)
 - Priests and Melchizedek (5-7)
 - Sacrifices and the covenant (8-10)
- Each section ends with a warning not to abandoned Jesus
- Call to follow the people of faith (11-13)

Main Theme

- The superiority of Jesus is argued in the opening paragraph (1:1-3)
- ¹ In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.
- Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the imprint of God's nature
- Thus, Jesus, is God

This "heir of all things" is the "image of the invisible God" (1:3)

Jesus is Superior to Angels

- The fact that Jesus is compared with angels is curious
- In Deut 33:2, the word of God or the Torah was delivered to Moses at Mount Sinai by angels:
- ² He said: “The LORD came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir;
he shone forth from Mount Paran. He came with myriads of holy ones
from the south, from his mountain slopes.
- In other words, Jesus and his message is greater than all previous messengers of God’s word

Jesus is Superior to Angels

- **Warning:** We must pay attention to Jesus' words (2:1-4):
- We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ²For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.
- Given that Jesus is greater than angels, how remarkable is it that he gave up his high status to become man and to suffer and die

Jesus is Superior to Moses

- The author argues that Jesus is greater than Moses, who led the people of Israel through the wilderness and built the tabernacle
- Jesus is not only the leader of God's people but the builder of all things (3:1-6):
- Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. ²He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. ³Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. ⁴For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. ⁵"Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. ⁶But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

Jesus is Superior to Moses

- The author tells the story of Israel's rebellion against Moses and lost their chance to enter the promised land to gain God's rest (3:7-11)
- **Warning:** If Jesus is greater than Moses, how much higher are the stakes if we rebel against him? (3:12-15):
- ¹² See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. ¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. ¹⁵ As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."
- We, too, are wandering through a wilderness situation, where we have to trust God for our future rest in God's new creation (4:1-2)

Jesus is Superior to Israel's Priests

- Jesus is compared with Israel's priests that came from the line of Aaron
- Their role was to represent Israel before God and to offer sacrifices that atone for and cover sins
- But the priests were sinners and had to offer sacrifices for themselves
- Thus, they needed something greater—Jesus (4:14-16):
- ¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Jesus is Superior to Israel's Priests

- Jesus is the ultimate high priest, but he didn't come from the line of Aaron
- Rather, he came from the order of Melchizedek, a priest-king in Gen 14:18-20 (5:10):
- ¹⁰ and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.
- Jesus is the ultimate priest-king. He is morally flawless
- Jesus is superior to any mediator between God and humans
- **Warning:** To reject Jesus is tantamount to rejecting our only chance to be reconciled to God (5:11-6:20)

Jesus is Superior to OT Sacrifices

- The author shows Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice, superior to all animal sacrifices offered in the temple
- Those had to be offered both daily and yearly on the day of atonement
- The fact that only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies and he had to go each year indicated that no final offering for sin was made in the OT (9:7):
- ⁷ But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

Jesus is Superior to OT Sacrifices

- Jesus offered his life once and for all to cover the whole world (9:11-12):
- ¹¹ But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.
- **Warning:** Do not walk away from Jesus and the gracious offer of God's forgiveness. His sacrifice is final and permanent (10:19-39)

Conclusion

- In Jesus, believers have God's word, hope for the new creation, our eternal priest, and the perfect sacrifice
- Believers should follow all the great models of faith found throughout the story of the Scriptures, including Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab (11:1-31)
- Thus, believers should remain faithful to Jesus (12:1-2; cf. chs. 12-13):
- ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Discipleship Pointers

- Recognize our slow drift away from Christ, and be forewarned of apostasy
- Remember and follow your leaders, both past and present (13:7):
- ⁷ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
- Obey your leaders (13:17):
- ¹⁷ Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.
- Pray for your leaders (13:18):
- ¹⁸ Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way.