

Hebrews

Summary

Hebrews was a general letter designed for distribution throughout the regions where Christians would be found. The persecution of Christians by the Romans was increasing, and many believers were living in fear for their lives and for the lives of their loved ones. In the book of Hebrews, the author is exhorting and pleading with the believers to stay the course and to follow Jesus instead of returning to Jewish practices, even though that could save them from physical persecution. He does this by reminding them who Jesus is; the greatest High Priest and King, greater than Moses, greater than angels, and the only One who can save. The ultimate sacrifice for everything is fulfilled in Christ. The readers knew they only needed to deny their faith in Jesus to save their life, and Hebrews reminded them that, in doing so, they would lose everything that matters.

Author

The book of Hebrews does not have a stated author. In the early church, the book of Hebrews was most commonly attributed to Paul. However, within modern scholarship, there has been intense debate about the identity of this author. Some scholars attribute Hebrews to Barnabas, others say Apollos, and still, others believe it to be written by Priscilla.

Date

Some say it was written prior to A.D. 70, as the destruction of the temple is not mentioned and surely would have been. Another time suggested is somewhere between the two great persecutions, A.D. 64 and A.D. 85.

Primary Characters

Jesus (Hebrews 1-13)

Melchizedek (Hebrews 6-7)

Historical Moments

Author Refers to the Time of Moses (Hebrews 3)

Author References the Encounter of Melchizedek and Abraham. (Hebrews 6-7)

Major Theological Themes

The Superiority of Christ - Jesus Christ is superior to anything and anyone. He is the best Priest/King, higher than the angels, superior to Moses, and the ultimate sacrifice. Only he can guarantee a believer's salvation and eternal life.

We Are the Priesthood of Believers - Christ serves as our mediator, eternally interceding on our behalf with the Father. We no longer need a priest or anyone else to intercede for us, which was done in the temple by the Jewish priests through unending animal sacrifices. His sacrifice for our sin was perfect and complete, once and for all, after which he sat down at the right hand of God. The Jews only had access to God as long as they conformed to the law perfectly, which mankind can never do. The new, and better, covenant through Jesus works for us because of what He did, not because of our own efforts.

Belief Requires Sacrifice - We must persevere through trials and persecution, and sometimes difficulties that are beyond our imagination. Through obedience, through faith that holds on to God's promises, and through the hope that Jesus brings, we can endure.

Lessons Learned from Hebrews

Christian Life Is a Journey, Not a Destination - Salvation is the beginning of a life spent drawing near to Jesus. Our salvation is secure once we have truly accepted Jesus as our Savior. We must then grow and mature in our walk with Him. This journey never ends.

Accountability for Believers Is Important - We must practice living as though we know God's truth. Temptation will face us day in and day out, so constant reminders are an important part of staying strong. This works best when believers live in community.

Do Not Be Distracted - We will have things that pull on us or lead us astray. These things may slowly dilute our faith if we are not vigilant and careful. By focusing on the reality that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Savior prophesied in the Old Testament, we can better resist the temptations to return to our former ways, or conform to the ways of society.

Persevering Through Hardship - Walking in faith can be extremely difficult at times, and the things we most desire in our lives may not come in the timing and manner we want. Holding on in faith, and trusting that God has our best in mind while He works out His will in our lives, allows us to keep the fire for Him burning within us.