

HEBREWS

Work of Exhortation

Writing of the Book

- One of the biggest mysteries of biblical scholarship is who wrote Hebrews.
- Despite not knowing, the book's tone and content (evidence of inspiration), made it clear to those early Christians and the church that it was Scripture, part of the NT.
- Clement of Rome of cites Hebrews in his Letter to the Corinthians (95), so it must have been written well before then.

Writing of the Book

- Timothy was still alive when it was written, and the impression is given that those to whom Hebrews is written heard eyewitness testimony of Jesus' ministry.
- It's also likely the temple still stands, as no reference is made to it even though Christ's superiority to the temple and its sacrifices is a major theme.
- It was almost certainly written between the 40's and 60's.

Writing of the Book

- It was written originally to a Jewish Christian audience, as seen by the title, the assumption of how well-versed the readers were in the OT sacrificial practices and other Jewish teaching, and the main argument of Hebrews, that Jesus has perfected and rendered obsolete the Levitical institutions of the OT.
- Therefore, we should make a decisive break from such practices.

Purpose and Message

- It seems the author wrote the letter to warn his readers not to turn back to Judaism and **to encourage them to stay faithful to Jesus.**
- While the arguments are numerous and sometimes complex, the central purpose is simple: **trust God and stand your ground**, a repeated theme throughout Scripture.
- In the conclusion the writer calls his letter a “**work of exhortation.**”

Purpose and Message

- ...There are two main arguments.
 - One is to remind us of the incomparable greatness of Jesus Christ.
 - Second is to exhort us to reaffirm our faith, no matter our current circumstances. God is faithful to his promises, so we can have confidence no matter what.

Outline of Hebrews

I. The Superiority of the Christian Faith (1:1-10:18)

- A. Jesus Christ is superior to the prophets (1:1-4)
- B. Jesus Christ is superior to the angels (1:5-2:18)
- C. Jesus Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
- D. Jesus Christ is superior to Aaron (4:14-10:18)

II. Exhortations to Persevere in the Faith (10:19-31)

- A. The Danger of Apostasy (10:19-31)
- B. Encouragement to Persevere (10:32-39)
- C. Faith Defined and Exemplified (11:1-40)
- D. Jesus is the superior example of faith (12:1-4)
- E. The meaning and merit of discipline (12:5-13)
- F. Warning not to turn away from God (12:14-29)

III. Concluding Exhortations (13:1-19)

IV. Benedictions and Greetings (13:20-25)

Major Themes

The Old Testament

- Hebrews both assumes a certain degree of continuity between how God deals with his people in both Testaments and points us to the new thing that God has done in Christ, **helping us to see how we should understand the Old Testament as New Testament believers in Christ.**
- Hebrews also refers extensively to the OT as the foundation of **its own teachings and warnings**, assuming that how God deals with his people in the OT is the same as how he deals with them in this age.

Major Themes

The Old Testament *(continued)*

- The fault that the author finds with those who worshipped under the Mosaic covenant **involves their misuse of God's covenant love**, not the covenant itself.
- **Hebrews speaks against a false conception of faith** in the time of the OT, not the OT or the OT's message.
- Even Moses in Deut 9:4-6 addresses the tendency to twist God's gracious provision of salvation into justification by works.

Major Themes

Exhortation to Persevere in Christ

- The major practical concern of Hebrews is that **Christians shouldn't be intimidated by the difficult circumstances they face.**
- **THEY SHOULD STAND FIRM IN CHRIST.**
- In 2:1-4, we are to pay attention to the saving word so that we do not “drift away.”

Major Themes

Exhortation to Persevere in Christ *(continued)*

- There is a common caricature of the Bible that the OT involves strict laws and harsh punishments, while the NT is all love and forgiveness.
- However, Hebrews insists on the opposite.
- **We face a sterner judgment because we have a greater revelation in Christ.**
- **We also have a greater encouragement in Christ**, who stands ready to give assistance in our times of need.

Major Themes

Exhortation to Persevere in Christ *(continued)*

- It is possible to be active in a community of believers without knowing God or caring about his interests, **to profess belief but live in rebellion.**
- Throughout chapter four, OT examples of this are given, and **again Jesus is the answer.**
- **If we turn our backs on Christ, it is difficult if not impossible to turn back.**

Major Themes

Exhortation to Persevere in Christ *(continued)*

- We demonstrate that we were never saved in the first place.
- It is a major thing to turn our backs on God, but **even there we can have hope** because **we can resist temptation through God's faithfulness to us.**
- Throughout the exhortation is that knowing God means **exercising diligent faith in an effort to please rather than dishonor Christ.**