

# General Epistle: **HEBREWS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The book of Hebrews is a profound letter that exalts the supremacy of Christ and encourages believers to persevere in their faith. Hebrews explores themes of faith, endurance, and the fulfillment of the Old Testament in Jesus Christ. This book, while written as a theological treatise, addresses deep questions of faith, sacrifice, and the ultimate purpose of God in the lives of believers. Hebrews is more than a theological discourse; it is a masterpiece that demonstrates how Christ's priesthood and sacrifice surpass the old covenant. Although the authorship is traditionally attributed to Paul, the exact author remains unknown. Hebrews continues to inspire and challenge believers, presenting truths that are simple enough for a new believer to grasp yet profound enough to challenge the most seasoned theologian. Hebrews reveals how God's plan, fulfilled in Christ, offers believers a superior covenant and calls them to a deeper, enduring faith.

Beginning with a majestic presentation of Christ as the ultimate revelation of God, Hebrews chronicles the superiority of Jesus over angels, Moses, and the old covenant priesthood. The letter emphasizes the new covenant's better promises, urging believers to remain faithful and to enter God's rest. Hebrews portrays Jesus as the perfect High Priest, who offers a once-for-all sacrifice for sins and continually intercedes for his people. Throughout the book, we see a call to hold fast to the confession of faith and to endure in the face of trials and persecutions. Hebrews addresses the vital question: How can believers persevere in their faith? We witness exhortations, warnings, and deep theological reflections that offer profound insights into living a life centered on Christ.

By the end of Hebrews, we see a clear demonstration of God's faithfulness and encouragement to believers to stand firm in their faith. Despite numerous challenges, they are encouraged to fix their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of their faith. This reflects the truth that God's plans, though sometimes mysterious, are always good and sovereignly directed. The book of Hebrews reminds us that the journey of faith involves trusting in God's ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ and finding strength in his completed work. Hebrews teaches us about the necessity of faith, the supremacy of Christ, and the importance of enduring in the faith. It underscores the hope, assurance, and strength that come from Christ, who empowers believers to endure and overcome. The book culminates in the realization that Jesus, as our High Priest and perfect sacrifice, provides ultimate redemption and anchors our faith during all trials.

In conclusion, Hebrews is a testament to the supremacy of Christ, the unshakeable sovereignty of God, and the enduring hope we have in Jesus. It encourages believers to remain faithful, to trust in God's perfect plan, and to persevere in faith, no matter the obstacles faced. Hebrews serves as both a theological treatise and a personal letter of encouragement, illustrating the fulfillment of God's promises through Jesus and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

## **IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING**

Imagine a mountain range with the highest peak rising above the clouds, its summit bathed in brilliant sunlight. This image captures the essence of Hebrews as it portrays the supremacy and elevation of Christ above all. Just as the highest peak represents the ultimate goal, so, too, does the message of Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of all promises and the ultimate High Priest. The journey to the summit, filled with challenges and perseverance, mirrors the believer's journey of faith, inspired by the vision of Jesus at the highest point.

As the summit stands above the clouds, Hebrews invites us to lift our eyes and hearts to Jesus, who stands above all and brings clarity and hope. It urges us to persevere in faith, empowered by the assurance and strength that come from knowing Christ. Hebrews calls us to fix our eyes on Jesus, who has completed the work and offers the ultimate revelation of God.

## **BOOK ORGANIZATION**

Chapters 1-4: Superiority of Christ's Person

Chapters 5-10: Superiority of Christ's Work

Chapters 11-13: Superiority of the Christian's Walk

## **JESUS IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS**

The book of Hebrews provides a profound insight into the nature and character of Jesus Christ, highlighting his supremacy, priesthood, and perfect sacrifice. Hebrews reveals Jesus as the ultimate High Priest, whose once-for-all sacrifice surpasses the old covenant offerings. The book underscores Jesus' role as both the perfect revelation of God and the perfect mediator between God and humanity. The presence and work of Jesus are central, bringing believers into a new covenant relationship with God.

In Hebrews, we witness the transformative power of Christ's sacrifice and priesthood, which bring believers into the fullness of God's promises. Hebrews teaches that Jesus' priesthood is eternal, his sacrifice is sufficient, and his mediation is ongoing. Jesus' role as the High Priest provides assurance and access to God, encouraging believers to hold fast their faith and to draw near the throne of grace with confidence.

Hebrews illustrates Jesus' supremacy over angels, Moses, and the old covenant, showing that he is the fulfillment of all the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. The letter encourages believers to look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of their faith, and to endure in their faith journey, empowered by His completed work. Hebrews serves as a testament to Jesus' ultimate sacrifice and ongoing intercession, encouraging believers to trust in his perfect priesthood and to persevere in their faith in him.

## **BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOK OF HEBREWS**

### **OBSERVATION**

- Identify the author: The authorship of Hebrews is unknown, though originally attributed to Paul.
- Note any contextual information given in the heading.

- What is the organization of the book of Hebrews, if anything is noticeable?
- What is God teaching us in the text?
  - Location: Where are we?
  - Events: What is happening?
  - Purpose: Why is it happening? Or do we know?
  - People: Who is speaking? What is the point?
  - Time: When did this happen?
- What literary devices and types are being used? Literary devices to look for:
  - **Parallelism:** Hebrews often uses parallelism in which similar ideas or phrases are repeated for emphasis or to draw connections. For instance, the comparison of the old and new covenants emphasizes the superiority of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13).
  - **Contrast:** The contrast between the old covenant sacrifices and Jesus' perfect sacrifice highlights the sufficiency of Christ's work (Hebrews 9:11-14).
  - **Typology:** Hebrews uses typology in which events or persons in the Old Testament prefigure and foreshadow Jesus Christ and his work. For example, Melchizedek is a type of Christ's eternal priesthood (Hebrews 7:1-17).
- What is the author emphasizing, contrasting, and bringing attention to?

## INTERPRETATION

- Literary context:
  - How do you read your passage considering the given genre of General Letters? Hebrews is a theological treatise with pastoral elements, written to a community of Jewish Christians. The genre serves to provide deep theological insights and practical exhortations for believers to persevere in their faith.
  - What is the significance of the literary devices used? What do they teach or emphasize? It uses sophisticated literary devices such as typology, parallelism, and contrast to emphasize the superiority of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice.
- Narrative context:
  - Who is the author, who is the original audience, what was the intended message, and where/how does this book fit into the overarching narrative of Scripture? The author of Hebrews is unknown, addressing the letter to Jewish Christians facing persecution and the temptation to revert to Judaism. The intended audience is both the specific community and all believers, as the exhortations and theological reflections have universal application. The overarching message of Hebrews is the supremacy of Christ and the call to enduring faith.
  - How does the author want the reader to respond? The author wants readers to respond by holding fast to their confession and drawing near to God through Jesus.
- Historical context:
  - What was happening at this point in history? Hebrews was written in the first century, likely before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70. The early Christian community was navigating their faith amidst persecution and a strong pull to return to traditional Jewish practices.
  - The letter reflects the need for believers to understand the fulfillment of the old covenant in Christ and to persevere in their faith.
- Cultural context:

- What customs, practices, actions, and attitudes were common then? In the first-century Jewish context, various customs, practices, and attitudes influenced daily life and religious observance. Hebrews addresses the Jewish Christians' need to understand the supremacy of Christ's priesthood over the Levitical priesthood and to embrace the new covenant.
- The letter's cultural backdrop involves a strong emphasis on temple worship, sacrifices, and adherence to the Mosaic Law, all of which are reinterpreted in light of Christ's fulfillment.

## APPLICATION

- In Hebrews, Jesus is the central figure, and the entire letter revolves around his supremacy, priesthood, and sacrifice. Every exhortation and teaching can be interpreted in light of Jesus' completed work and ongoing intercession. How does the depiction of Jesus as the High Priest and perfect sacrifice in Hebrews 4:14-16 influence your understanding and application of the teachings in the rest of the letter?
- Is there a command to obey? Yes, throughout Hebrews, there are commands given by the author. For example, in Hebrews 10:23, believers are commanded to "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering." This command emphasizes the imperative for believers to remain steadfast in their faith. What practical steps can you take to obey the command in Hebrews 10:23 to "hold fast the confession of our hope" in your daily life?
- Is there a sin to repent from? Hebrews portrays various instances of attitudes and behaviors that believers are called to avoid. For example, the author warns against hardening your heart and falling away from the living God (Hebrews 3:12-13). Reflecting on Hebrews 3:12-13, in what ways can you identify and repent from any hardness of heart or unbelief in your relationship with God?
- Is there a promise to cling to? In Hebrews, there are numerous promises given by God to his people. One significant promise is the assurance of entering God's rest through faith (Hebrews 4:9-11). How does the promise of entering God's rest in Hebrews 4:9-11 provide comfort and strength to you as you navigate your faith journey?
- Is there an example to follow? Or one to avoid? Hebrews provides numerous examples of faith and endurance for believers to emulate. For instance, the "cloud of witnesses" in Hebrews 11 serves as a powerful model for believers. Conversely, the warnings against apostasy urge believers to avoid falling away. How can you emulate the faith and endurance of the "cloud of witnesses" described in Hebrews 11 in your own life?

## PRAYER

- Pray for endurance and faith (Hebrews 12:1-3): Reflecting on the call to run the race with endurance, how can you cultivate perseverance in your faith? Pray for the Holy Spirit to grant you strength and endurance to keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.
- Pray for understanding and insight (Hebrews 4:12-13): Consider the power and insight of God's Word as described by the author. How can you grow in your understanding and application of Scripture? Pray for the Lord to help you discern his Word and apply its truths to your life.
- Pray for assurance and confidence (Hebrews 10:19-23): Reflecting on the boldness we have to approach God through Christ, how can you grow in your assurance and confidence

in God's promises? Pray for the Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith and deepen your assurance in God's promises.

### **WHAT CHURCH HISTORY HAS SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF HEBREWS**

"The occasion of his introducing it, is this: in the next verse but one preceding he mentions Christ's being a high priest after the order of Melchizedek: 'Called of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.' This Melchizedek being in the Old Testament, which was the oracles of God, held forth as an eminent type of Christ, and the account we there have of Melchizedek containing many gospel mysteries, these the apostle was willing to point out to the Christian Hebrews."

—Jonathan Edwards

"The apostle, having treated largely of Christ, and faith, and free grace, and gospel privileges, and warned the Hebrews against apostasy, now, in the close of all, recommends several excellent duties to them, as the proper fruits of faith (Heb. 13:1-17); he then bespeaks their prayers for him, and offers up his prayers to God for them, gives them some hope of seeing himself and Timothy, and ends with the general salutation and benediction, Heb. 13:18-25."

—Matthew Henry

