

HEBREWS: AN OVERVIEW

New Testament Lesson #165

The book of Hebrews appears to be addressed to Jewish Christians who were being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. The persecution was so strong that some were tempted to give up Christianity and return to Judaism. But the writer reminded them that the new covenant through Jesus is far superior to the old covenant, and so they should continue to serve Christ.

The author of Hebrews believed that the Old Testament finds its ultimate meaning in Jesus Christ. To illustrate this point, the author wrote in a systematic way to show that Christ was superior in all things. To do this he used the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews quotes from the Old Testament 30 times and contains about 70 indirect references to the Old Testament Scriptures as well.

The author began by saying that Jesus is God's son. As a son, he is superior to the angels even though they delivered God's word to Israel. Jesus is greater than Moses even though Moses delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. Jesus is greater than Joshua even though Joshua was the person who brought Israel into the Promised Land.

Jesus was also greater than the priesthood and the sacrifices they offered because Jesus was the sacrifice and he offered himself. And not only was Jesus the sacrifice, he has become the perfect priest to intercede between God and people.

Because Jesus sacrificed himself in obedience to His Father, a new covenant was established; one that is based on better promises than the old covenant. This covenant is the way that people can find forgiveness from God and be made righteous in God's eyes.

The recipients of the letter are reminded to hold fast to their faith because they are receiving "a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (12:28) and can rely on Jesus Christ, who "is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8).

The book of Hebrews may be outlined as follows:

- 1:1-3 – Introduction.
- 1:4-2:18 – The superiority of Christ over the angels.
- 3:1-4:13 – The superiority of Christ over Moses and Joshua.
- 4:14-7:28 – The superiority of Christ's priesthood over the priesthood of Aaron's line.
- 8:1-10:18 – The superiority of the new covenant.
- 10:19-12:29 – The superiority of faith. A call to endure in faith.
- 13:1-25 – Conclusion.

POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- We do not know who wrote Hebrews. Most believe it was Paul but others suggest different possibilities such as Luke, Barnabas or Apollos. Either way, it's clear that whoever wrote Hebrews was a strong student of the Old Testament and gives us valuable insight into God's word.

Hebrews: An Overview

- I. The book of Hebrews is addressed to Jewish Christians.
 - A. Jewish Christians were being persecuted for their faith in Jesus.
 - B. Some were tempted to give up Christianity and return to Judaism.
 - C. The author says that the new covenant through Jesus is superior to the old covenant, and thus they should cling to Christ.
- II. Hebrews refers to the Old Testament.
 - A. There are 30 quotes from the Old Testament
 - B. There are about 70 indirect references to the Old Testament.
 - C. The Old Testament finds its ultimate meaning and goal in Jesus Christ.
- III. The two covenants
 - A. Under the old covenant the Hebrew people offered animal sacrifices.
 - B. Christ's death established the new covenant. He became the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.
 - C. Jesus is the perfect priest of the new covenant.
- IV. Jesus and his covenant are superior to:
 - A. the angels.
 - B. Moses and Joshua.
 - C. the Jewish priesthood.
 - D. the sacrificial system.
 - E. the old covenant.

ANSWER KEY:

sacrifice, covenant, promises, hope, things, country

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.