

INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS - STUDY OUTLINE

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I. The God who speaks in Scripture

- *The author of Hebrews certainly understands that the Old Testament is the Word of God:*

(Hebrews 1:1) God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

(Hebrews 3:7) Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,"

(Hebrews 4:12) For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

(Hebrews 13:7) Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith

- *In most cases, an Old Testament quotation is cited as God or the Holy Spirit "speaking" so that it is ultimately not the human authors of a given book of the Old Testament that is speaking in and through the text but God who still speaks to God's people (including the reader) today. This striking feature affirms that the Old Testament is God speaking.*
- *The New Testament also accepts the writings of the apostles on the same level as the Old Testament.*

(2 Peter 2:15-16) 15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

II. The Superiority of the person and work of Christ and His High Priesthood

- *The first major theme of the letter is the supremacy of the person and work of Christ. Christ is the eternal, preexistent Son of God, who created the world and was made human to provide atonement for his people, and then sat down in order to return at the end of time for judgment and salvation. The book opens with a series of contrasts demonstrating the superiority of Christ. Jesus is not merely a servant like the prophets (in these last days he spoke by His Son). As the maker of the universe, Christ is also its heir. The angels are merely ministering servants who worship the Son. Moses was a servant in God's house; Christ was the Son over the house.*
- *On the basis of his uniqueness as a person, Christ also rendered a unique work, described in Hebrews against the larger backdrop of the high priesthood of Christ. While this emphasis is virtually unparalleled in the New Testament, it does not represent an innovation by the author. To the contrary, the author uses both Old Testament and New Testament text.*

(Psalm 110:1-4)

- 1 The LORD says to my Lord:
"Sit at My right hand
Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."**
- 2 The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying,
"Rule in the midst of Your enemies."**
- 3 Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power;
In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,
Your youth are to You as the dew.**
- 4 The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,
"You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek."**

(Matthew 22:41-45) 41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: **42** "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They said to Him, "*The son of David.*" **43** He said to them, "Then how does David ⁱn the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, **44** 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET"'? **45** "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?"

- *Clearly the oath of God to this figure pertained to Christ! Hence, Jesus is a priest forever like Melchizedek, as the author of the two major Old Testament passages dealing with the priest-king.*

(Genesis 14:18-20) 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. **19** He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; **20** And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand."

(Psalm 110:4)

**The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,
“You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek**

- *The first reference to Christ’s priesthood involved his sacrifice. Christ redeemed his “brothers” (i.e. human beings) in that he tasted death for everyone, and thus he functioned as their high priest in making the sacrifice.*

(Hebrews 2:17) Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

- *That Jesus was a high priest like Melchizedek means that he was superior to the Levitical priesthood. The author argued that the Melchizedek of the Genesis account was a superior priest because Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abram and Melchizedek blessed Abram; thus the greater blessed the lesser.*

(Hebrews 7:7) But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.

- *Christ was a priest like Melchizedek in that he did not descend from Levi, but even more so because of his eternal existence—he will never die again. As an eternal priest, he represents a far superior priesthood. The Levitical priest had to offer sacrifices for their own sins; Christ did not. Their sacrifices made no one perfect; they had to keep making them year after year; Christ’s priesthood was once for all. The Levitical priests had to be continually replaced because of death; Christ lives forever. Finally, the Levites served in the midst of “shadows” under a covenant that had become obsolete; Christ is the fulfillment of Old Testament typology, the minister of the new covenant, which is far superior to the old.*
- *Jesus was prepared for his priesthood (and qualified for it) by becoming human and by suffering in this life like all other human beings. He was also installed by the oath of God which is clearly stated in Psalm 110:*

(Psalm 110)

- 1 The LORD says to my Lord:
“Sit at My right hand
Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”**
- 2 The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying,
“Rule in the midst of Your enemies.”**

- 3 Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power;
In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,
Your youth are to You *as* the dew.
- 4 The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,
“You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek.”
- 5 The Lord is at Your right hand;
He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.
- 6 He will judge among the nations,
He will fill *them* with corpses,
He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.
- 7 He will drink from the brook by the wayside;
Therefore He will lift up *His* head.

(Hebrews 5:5-6) 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, “YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”; 6 just as He says also in another *passage*, “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”

(Hebrews 7:20) And inasmuch as *it was* not without an oath

- *A Permanent, that is, Eternal Priest...*

(Hebrews 7:24) but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.

(Hebrews 7:28) For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever.

- *His offering is presented in terms of fulfilling the Old Testament typology of the Day of Atonement. Jesus brought his sacrifice outside the camp and carried his blood the holy of holies.*

(Hebrews 13:12-14) 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. 13 So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. 14 For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come.

(Leviticus 16:27) “But the bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken

outside the camp, and they shall burn their hides, their flesh, and their refuse in the fire.

- *As a high priest, he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God and lives forever to make intercession for his people.*

III. Perseverance and Christian Assurance

- *As the author desired to encourage believers to adhere to their confession and progress to maturity, it is necessary to address the very nature of salvation. A key component of his argument is to warn his hearers of the dangers of not heeding his call. The author accomplished this in alternating blocks of exposition and exhortation. Within the exhortations of Hebrews are a group of passages (the warning passages) that sternly warn the hearers about the dangers of not heeding God's Word. These warnings are deemed so strong that they become a common thread in the age-old debate over the preservation of believers.*
 - *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*
 - (1) *The classical Arminian view, which holds that these passages indicate that believers lose their salvation.*
 - (2) *The classical Reformed view, which believes that these passages encourage believers to maintain their confession and that those who repudiate Christ were never really saved in the first place.*
 - (3) *The Wesleyan Arminian view, which contends that these passage contends teach that one can lose one's salvation and never regain it;*
 - (4) *A moderate Reformed view, which argues that these passages merely warn against not reaching maturity.*
- *Two critical considerations:*
 1. *The author of Hebrews affirmed the teaching of Jesus that, by definition, all true believers endure to the end.*

(Matthew 10:22) "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved."

(Hebrews 3:14) For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

(Hebrews 6:9-12) 9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The author asserted that Christ is able to save his own eternally because of his eternal intercession.

(Hebrews 7:25) Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Believers are not among those who draw back to destruction but among those who believe, resulting in the salvation of their soul.

(Hebrews 10:39) But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Clearly the author of Hebrews affirmed the perseverance and eternal preservation of believers.

- 2. The author acknowledged that some are related to Christ only superficially. He likened these kinds of people to the wilderness generation which rebelled at Kadesh Barnea (**Numbers 13-14**), noting that they heard the word but that this hearing did not meet with faith.*

(Hebrews 4:2) For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

In fact, the author described their action in terms of rebellion (as does Psalm 95, which he quoted), and to be like these disobedient individual is to have:

(Hebrews 3:12) Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

Thus the author contrasted hearers as falling either in the category of those who perished in the wilderness or under the rubric of those who believed and were allowed to enter God's rest, namely Joshua and Caleb. The all-important contrast, then, is between those who believed and were allowed to enter God's

rest, namely Joshua and Caleb. The all-important contrast, then, is between those who trusted in God and his promise and those who were connected to God only nominally, those who in truth resembled a fruitless field good only for being burnt

(Hebrews 6:8) but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

IV. The Benefit of the Sacrificial Death of Christ

- *Hebrews depicts the death of Christ as the superior ultimate sacrifice, offered once for all.*

(Hebrews 7:27) who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

- *Sealed by Jesus' ascension to the right hand of the heavenly throne...*

(Hebrews 1:3) And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and ^upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

(Hebrews 8:1) Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

(Hebrews 10:12) but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

(Hebrews 12:2) fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- *His sacrifice is the blood of the new covenant.*

(Hebrews 9:15-17) 15 For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were *committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. 16 For where a covenant is, there must of

necessity be the death of the one who made it. 17 For a covenant is valid *only* when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.

(Jeremiah 31:31-34) 31 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. 33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

- *Now that the promised new covenant has been enacted, the old covenant—which was intended to be temporary from the beginning, only a shadow of the good things to come—has been made obsolete*

(Hebrews 8:13) Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

- *The description of the new covenant is vitally connected to the purpose of the letter in at least two ways:*
 1. *Because of the inauguration of the new covenant in Christ, reverting back to the old covenant is an invalid option. Since there is no sacrifice for sins other than the one made by Christ, it is vital to hold fast to one’s Christian confession.*

(Hebrews 4:14) Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

(Hebrews 7:26) For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;

2. *Because the stipulations of the new covenant are unconditional, believers have unprecedented access to God and should take advantage of this to move on to maturity.*

(Hebrews 3:16) For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?

(Hebrews 10:19-22) 19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, **21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

- *Ultimately, his intercession for believers is an ongoing reality.*

(Hebrews 7:25) Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

- *What is more, psychologically, the death of Christ also cleanses the conscience of those who come to him...*

(Hebrews 9:14) how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

- *...on the basis of the actual cleansing of human sins accomplished at the cross.*

(Hebrews 10:14) For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

- *Finally, there are social benefits to the death of Christ as well. Since the sacrifice is the blood of the new covenant, all the benefits of that covenant are available to participants, including knowing God.*

(Hebrews 8:11) “AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, ‘KNOW THE LORD,’ FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM.”

- *What is more, on the basis of believers’ access to God through the blood of Christ, they are encouraged to assemble together to spur each on to love and good works.*

(Hebrews 10:23-25) 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; **24** and let us consider how to stimulate one another

to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

- *Because of the believers' response of faith, they are in direct continuity with believers of all time. (see **Hebrews 11**)*
- *In essence, their story is not complete until our story is finished.*

(Hebrews 11:40) because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

V. The Nature of Discipleship

- *In Christian circles, discipleship is often treated as series of disciples practiced by the believer. The author did refer to several Christian disciples.*

(Hebrews 13:15-19) 15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. 17 Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. 18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. 19 And I urge *you* all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner

- *Yet not as the means but as the results of progressing toward maturity. At the conclusion of the letter, the author petitioned God to equip his readers:*

(Hebrews 13:21) equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

- *The last phrase suggests that accomplishing the will of God is a matter of God effecting in believers to accomplish his will.*

(Hebrews 6:1) Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to ^maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

- *God will move his children on to maturity on the premise that they have not become sluggish.*

(Hebrews 5:11) Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

- *This seems to build on the nature of the new covenant, in which God does all the foundational work He writes the law on believers' hearts and reveals himself to those who entered into covenant with him. In this covenant those who participate are equipped to do God's will. Believers, above all, need endurance, which they are already promised.*

(Hebrews 3:14) For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come.

- *Thus, the exhortations in chapters 10-12 construe the nature of discipleship as running a long-distance race with endurance. Believers are to be like Abraham, who:*

(Hebrews 11:10) for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

- *They must look to Jesus as the supreme encouragement...*

(Hebrews 12:1) Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

- *...for the call to follow him is to follow him in suffering. Thus, in the midst of all the pressures faced by believers, they are admonished to:*

(Hebrews 13:13-14) 13 So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. 14 For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come