Hebrews “The Supremacy of Jesus”
An Introduction and Outline

**Authorship:** “God knows the truth” - Origen
- **Pauline:** Many have embraced this view to warrant its inclusion in the canon.
  - Close association of the author with Timothy (13:23) and strong emphasis on the New Covenant.
- **Non-Pauline:** Many scholars since the reformation have rejected Pauline authorship.
  - The author did not state his name or claim to be an Apostle (2:3-4).
  - The vocabulary and style of the author varies greatly from the Apostle Paul’s.
  - At the end of their ministries, both Augustine and Jerome held to an anonymous author.
  - Some have suggested author to be Clement of Rome, Luke, Barnabas, or Priscilla & Aquila.
  - Apollos has also been suggested because of his eloquence (Acts 18:24f) and ministry with Paul (1 Cor).
- **Conclusion:** Ignorance is the most honest position. Its apostolic links (2:3-4), unity with the rest of Scripture, exaltation of Jesus, and long-standing acceptance within the church give us certainty of its inspiration.

**Audience:** Appears to be a community of predominantly professing Jewish and Gentile Proselyte believers.
- These believers suffered strong social persecution and the temptation to forsake Christ and return to Judaism.
- Some have suggested the church was in Jerusalem, but those believers had already shed blood for Jesus by the time this letter was written (Acts 7:54-60; Heb 12:4). Heb. 13:24 could indicate the church was in Rome.

**Date:** Due to ambiguity of author and audience, the dating of the book is not certain.
- **The external evidence** (quotation by Clement of Rome, 96AD) requires a 1st century date.
- Three pieces of internal evidence also lend to a date prior to the end of the first century. First, in 2:3 the author clearly states that the recipients of the letter heard the gospel directly from people who been with Jesus. Second, in 12:4 the community is said to not have suffered death for Christ yet. This would rule out the Roman church after 65 A.D. because of the Neronian persecution. Third, the temptation to put their hope in the animal sacrifices and other temple practices of Judaism would not be nearly as relevant if the temple were already destroyed. The Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
- **Conclusion:** Hebrews was likely written prior to 65 A.D. and certainly before 70 A.D.

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1 Quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.25.11-14
2 Clement of Alexandria proposed it was written in Hebrew by Paul & then translated to Greek. (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.14.3)
3 For an excellent comparison see Ellingsworth *The Epistle to the Hebrews* in the NIGTC, p. 7-12.
4 John Calvin
5 Tertullian, *On Modesty*, 20
6 Harnack
7 Martin Luther, *Preface to Hebrews*, 1522, p. 344; *Commentary on Genesis*, 1545, p. 709
**Theological Issues:** Issues of soteriology are weighty and present some interpretive challenge because we don’t have other writings by this author to help us understand his use of language.

- Hebrews is a pastoral book in which the author applies New Covenant truths that exalt Christ to encourage his congregation to persevere in faith and warn them of judgment that falls on those who forsake Jesus.

**Salvation:** In Hebrews, salvation is primarily viewed as a future promise God will bring to pass for those who persevere in faith in Jesus.⁸

- 5 warnings of judgment are given to encourage the church to persevere in faith.
- Forsaking Jesus for Judaism is seen as rejecting God. There is no “plan B.”
- A Christian is one who believes in Jesus. Those who persevere in belief inherit salvation and prove to be elect. Those who leave Jesus (apostatize) do not inherit salvation, despite any initial profession of faith.

**Warning Passages:** There varying views on the warnings in Hebrews.⁹

In our study, we will approach them with these assumptions:

1. **The warnings are real.** People must persevere in Christ in order to be saved. Apostasy is a real threat.
2. **The warnings are in regards to salvation, not just rewards.** While it is true that rewards are forsaken when Christ is forsaken, these warnings must not be reduced to anything shy of warning about eternal judgment.
3. **Believers cannot lose salvation.** Since salvation is a gift from God, those who have been born again cannot lose salvation. God gives the gift of perseverance (Rom 15:5, 1 Thess 5:23-24), keeps those He calls to Himself (Jn. 6:37-40, Rom. 8:29-30) and promises that no one can steal us out of His hand (Jn. 10:27-29).
4. **Persevering belief proves faith.**¹⁰ There are people who have joined the church’s community and have displayed signs of belief, but prove that their faith is not saving faith (Matt. 13:18-30; 1 John 2:19).¹¹ God uses these warning passages to strengthen His people’s faith in Jesus as the all-sufficient Savior.
5. **The Role of the Church.** One of the primary means of grace God gives to help believers persevere in faith is the community of believers (4:13; 10:24).

**Old Testament Usage:** The author uses many Old Testament passages to prove that Jesus did indeed fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 5:17). Reading these texts before your study of Hebrews will prove helpful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Psalm 2, 8, 95, 110</em></th>
<th><em>Genesis 14:17-24</em></th>
<th>Psalm 40, 45, 97, 102, 104</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Jeremiah 31:31-34</em></td>
<td>2 Sam 7:14; Exodus 14-20</td>
<td>NT: 1 Cor. 10:1-13</td>
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⁸ See 1:14; 2:3-5; 6:9-12; 9:27-28; This is in contrast to the majority of the NT which places an emphasis on salvation as something God provides in the present life to overcome the power of sin and Satan in preparation for the final judgment.

⁹ For an excellent resource on the warning passages, *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, Herbert Bateman IV.

¹⁰ Aside from Hebrews, the NT is filled with commands to persevere: Matt. 5:13, 24:13; Jn 8:31, 15:6; Rom 11:22; 1 Cor 9:27, 10:12, 15:1; Col 1:22-23; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 2:12; 1 Jn 2:19; 2 Jn 1:9; Jude 20; Rev 2-3, 14:12, 21:7.

¹¹ Luke 8:13 (they believe, but fall away and are not saved); Judas Iscariot (walks with Jesus, then betrays Him); Simon the magician (Acts 8:14-24); 1 Tim 4:1 (people will depart from the faith to follow false teaching). The phrases “true belief” and “false belief” might be better described as “hearts that believe and perseveres to salvation” and “hearts that harden and fall away.”
Outline of Hebrews

1:1-4:13 – Jesus: The Ultimate Revelation

1:1-3a – Jesus: Greater than the Prophets
1:3b-14 – Jesus: Greater than the Angels
2:1-4 – Warning #1 “Do not drift”
2:5-18 – Jesus: the Foundation of Our Salvation
3:1-6 – Jesus: Greater than Moses
3:7-4:13 – Warning # 2 “Do not harden your heart”

4:14-10:39 – Jesus: The Ultimate High Priest

4:14-5:10 – Jesus: Greater than Aaron
5:11-6:20 – Warning #3 “Do not fall away”
7:1-28 – Jesus: Greater Order of Priesthood (Melchizedekian)
8:1-13 – Jesus: Mediates a Greater Covenant (New Covenant)
9:1-10:18 – Jesus: Offers a Greater Sacrifice (Himself) in a Greater Tabernacle (Heaven)
10:19-39 – Warning #4 “Do not regard as unclean the blood of the Covenant”


11:1-40 – Examples of Endurance through Faith
12:1-3 – Jesus: Our Ultimate Example of Faith
12:4-11 – Refining Our Faith Through Discipline
12:12-24 – Encouragement to Endure in Faith
12:25-29 – Warning #5 “Do not refuse Him”
13:1-6 – Call to Live Out a Pure Faith
13:7-17 – Learn the Faith from Your Leaders
13:18-25 – Closing comments