

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM HEBREWS?

This is our 27th and final lesson from the book of Hebrews. Let's think about what we have learned from Hebrews.

What have we learned about the *Author*?

We do not know who wrote the book of Hebrews; the author does not identify himself. We do know he was a Jewish Christian very well educated and very knowledgeable about Judaism. He was personally acquainted with the letter's recipients and he cared deeply for them.

What have we learned about the *Original Recipients*?

The original recipients were second-generation Jewish believers living in Judea in the vicinity of Jerusalem and the Temple. They were undergoing tremendous persecution at the time the letter was written. They were residing close enough to Jerusalem that there was great temptation to go back into Judaism and the sacrificial system to gain relief from persecution.

What have we learned about the *Date of Hebrews*?

In 70A.D. the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. When the Preacher refers to the sacrificial system, he uses the present tense indicating that the Temple and sacrificial system were still functioning (7:8; 8:4; 10:1-2, 8, 11). Therefore Hebrews had to be written before 70A.D. The Preacher warned that to return to Judaism would result in being swept up in the Roman invasion and destruction of Jerusalem (10:25-26). The book of Hebrews was most probably written between 64 and 66A.D.

What have we learned about the *Purpose of Hebrews*?

Hebrews was written to Messianic Jews who were undergoing severe persecution. Worn down, some were wavering in their faith and considering returning to Judaism. The Preacher warned them against returning to Judaism. His warning was this: if his readers recant and return to Judaism, they will re-identify with the generation guilty of rejecting Jesus and will place themselves back under the judgment of 70A.D. When the judgment strikes, rather than escaping Jerusalem and Judea as Jesus instructed (Luke 21:20-24), they will remain and physically die as divine discipline. The only way they have of escaping the coming judgment of 70A.D. is to make their break from Judaism once-and-for-all.

The five warning passages are often used to teach the loss of salvation, but they are dealing with physical death, not loss of salvation.

The Preacher also encouraged his readers that by enduring in the faith they would inherit the promises of God (6:11-12; 10:35-36).

What have we learned about *Jesus*?

The ultimate example of enduring and inheriting is our Lord Jesus.

The Preacher's main strategy was to show the superiority of Jesus over Judaism. That which the Hebrew Christians had in Jesus superseded what they had in Judaism. The contrast is not between what is good and bad because the whole sacrificial system was given by God. The contrast is between that which is good and that which is better. Biblical Judaism was good, but Jesus is better because He is the fulfillment of Biblical Judaism. Comparing Him to the three pillars of Judaism – angels, Moses and the Priesthood – the Preacher proved that what they had in Jesus was far superior.

But this is only possible because Jesus endured.

Hebrews 5:7-9 (ESV)

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,

Because Jesus endured He inherited what was promised the Messiah. At His ascension He was crowned King (Ps. 2:7-9; Heb. 1:5-9) and appointed High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (5:5-9; 7:15-22; 9:11-14). Jesus is the ultimate example and encouragement that those who endure, inherit.

Hebrews 10:36 (ESV)

³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

Jesus our Great High Priest...

...secured our eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

...mediates the New and better Covenant.

Hebrews 7:12 (ESV)

¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

Hebrews 8:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

...has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Hebrews 10:11-14 (ESV)

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single

sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

... sympathizes with our weaknesses and invites us to draw near.

Hebrews 4:14–16 (ESV)

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

...intercedes for us.

Hebrews 7:23–25 (ESV)

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Jesus our King...

...is exalted at the right hand of the Father.

Hebrews 1:3–4, 13 (ESV)

³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

¹³ And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

...is coming again to save (deliver) the Jewish Remnant.¹

Hebrews 9:27–28 (ESV)

²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

...will restore mankind's glory of dominion over creation.

Hebrews 2:5–10 (ESV)

⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.⁶ It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor,⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and

¹ Cf. Daniel 12; Romans 11: 25-29; Rev. 12:13-17

honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

What have we learned about *Ourselves*?

The book of Hebrews helps us endure in the faith by revealing to us Who and what we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is far superior to any and everything out of which we were saved and to which we may be tempted to return. Hebrews also warns us that defecting from the faith will bring serious consequences while faithful endurance will bring wonderful blessings.

If we want to endure and inherit here are the things Hebrews teaches us to do.

We need to...

...keep paying attention to God's Word.

Hebrews 2:1-4 (ESV)

¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

...strive to enter the *rest of God* by completing the *works of God*.

Hebrews 4:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

...draw near the throne of grace in times of need.

Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

...imitate men and women of faith.

Hebrews 6:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

...continue to meet together.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

...continually look to Jesus as we run the race of faith.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

...have a right attitude towards suffering.

Hebrews 12:7 (HCSB)

⁷ Endure suffering as discipline (training): God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline (train)?

...strive for peace with everyone.

...strive for holiness.

...help one another obtain the grace of God and prevent the downward spiral into spiritual contempt.

...let brotherly love continue.

...show hospitality.

...remember our Christian brothers/sisters who are in prison.

...honor the marriages of our brothers and sisters in the church family.

...keep our lives free from the love of money and be content with what we have.

...remember our church leaders and imitate their faith.

...not be lead away by diverse and strange teachings.

...continually offer the sacrifices of praise, good deeds and sharing our stuff with one another.

...submit to and obey our church leaders.

Postscript

How did the original recipients of Hebrews respond?

According to three ancient writers, these Jewish believers obeyed and made their break with Judaism complete. Within a year or two of receiving the letter, the First Jewish Revolt broke out in 66A.D. Obeying Jesus' instructions in Luke 21:20-24, they left the country, crossed the Jordan River to the east bank and settled in the city of Pella, south of the Sea of Galilee and outside the war zone. Four years later the war ended. As Jesus predicted, Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed and 1.1 million Jews were slaughtered. According to the three ancient writers, not a single Jewish believer died in the conflict because of their obedience to the letter of Hebrews!