

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 10 – August 8th, 2021

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalm 28-30

Mark 9-12

Readings in Class:

Leviticus 22-27

Hebrews 1-13

A Brief Overview of Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews is not so much a letter as it is a sermon. We don't know exactly who wrote it. Popular tradition says it was a sermon that Paul preached. And while this is a good possibility, it is more popular in our day to think Apollos could be the sermon's architect.

But while the letter's authorship is uncertain, its apostolic witness and proclamation of Jesus Christ is not. Hebrews has some of the best theological reading of the Old Testament in light of the advent of Christ. The purpose of the sermon is to look back through the entire Old Testament, especially in the Old Testament cultus—the worship of God—and see Christ shining through.

The key to reading Hebrews is with a good Levitical imagination. The book of Leviticus forms the major backdrop for much of this sermon and Hebrews ties many of the themes and images of the work of Christ as atonement for sin, as a cleaning from guilt, and freedom and life for those who are tied to it. Baptism becomes a way in which Hebrews describes this giving of the New Covenant in Chapter 10.

Throughout the letter, Christ is given supremacy over everything. He is higher than the angels because He is the Son. He is higher than all the sacrifices and the temple. He is even higher than Moses and all the Old Covenant. In fact, the Old Covenant is fading away because of the work that Christ has accomplished.

The letter also covers how Jesus can be a priest since he is from the tribe of Judah and only Levites could be priests. Through a strange character in the book of Genesis, Melchizedek, it is made known that Jesus is starting a different kind of priesthood because his is a different and everlasting covenant in comparison to the temporary priesthood of the Levites.

Hebrews wraps up its book with the promise of Faith in this Jesus Christ, who is the guarantee of a new and better covenant and then lists many Old Testament characters who lived out lives of faith to show that this way of life is not new, but has been the background and sustenance for all those who have come before us.

Here is a brief outline of the book:

1. Introduction: Jesus as the Final Revelation of God (1:1-3)
2. The Superiority of Jesus (1:4-10:18)
 - a. Over Angels (1:4-2:18)
 - b. Over Moses (3:1-4:13)
 - c. Over the Old Priesthood (4:14-7:28)
 - d. Christ's Sacrifice over all (8:1-10:18)
3. Exhortation to Faithfulness (10:19-12:29)
 - a. Invitation to Faithfulness (10:19-39)
 - b. OT examples of faith (11)
 - c. Jesus as ultimate example of faith (12:1-13)
 - d. Warnings against unbelief, Old Testament examples (12:14-29)
4. Final Exhortations (13:1-9)

Below are listed in detail some other key features to this book:

Melchizedek: This character appears in the book of Genesis 14 when Abraham comes arrives in Jerusalem (Salem) following the liberation of Lot from being captured. He meets Melchizedek there (whose name means My righteous King or King of Righteousness). He is the Priest to God Most High and when Abraham meets him, he gives a tenth of all his goods, this validates the priesthood of Melchizedek since Abraham would not tithe his goods to a false priesthood. The book of Hebrews uses this moment from Genesis to describe that Jesus is in a Priesthood like that of Melchizedek. Melchizedek pops on the scene and disappears and in a way he is eternal. He is without beginning or end. So Jesus Christ and his High Priesthood has no beginning and no end.

Old Testament: The Old Testament is quoted nearly 30 times throughout this 13 chapter book. In particular Psalm 110 is heavily used. This Psalm is used by Jesus throughout his Ministry to describe himself as the Messiah. Of particular interest and note is that Jews of the 1st Century did not use this text as a Messianic prediction. This shows how Christ truly recast the entire focus and reading of the Old Testament and how we should be looking for Jesus in the Old Testament as well.

Deliberate Sin: Many have struggled with 10:26-31, which lists how deliberate sins after coming to the faith bring only judgment. This is a reminder to take the matters of our faith seriously and that we can fall away should we despise God's Word. This deliberate sinning does mean that once you sin that you are out, but that a refusal to turn to Christ in repentance when we sin means that there is only judgment to be received since Christ is the only name by which we must be saved.