

The Book of Hebrews: Introduction, Part 2 – Lesson 2

I. Introduction

The book of the New Testament routinely known as Hebrews is a difficult nut to crack. It is in many ways an enigma, but it is also in many ways the clearest teaching in the whole NT about the value of Christ and his ministry on our behalf before God. By setting forth basic information that we do know about the book, we will begin our study by providing a foundation on which to build.

II. Genre: What type of literature is this?

The genre of a biblical book is important to know as this helps us have a context in which to interpret what we read. Unfortunately, with Hebrews there is debate about what the genre actually is.

- A. There are three main choices:
 - 1. Epistle: The book does have the normal ending for an epistle: personal information, greeting, doxology, and benediction (13:22–25)
 - 2. Sermon/Exhortation: Notice the references to speaking (2:5; 8:1), to time (11:32), to the “message of exhortation” (13:22). There are warnings and admonitions throughout.
 - 3. Exposition: Much of the book is an explanation of OT Scripture and how Christ has fulfilled it.
- B. The sermonic/exhortation and expository elements are both quite strong, but I lean towards the sermonic as having preference: The author wants his readers to understand the truth and ultimately act differently as a result.
- C. Recognition of the nature of this as a sermon is crucial for interpreting many of the exhortations. The author will use terms in a way that are used not for theological precision but for rhetorical effect.

III. The Theological Viewpoint of the Author

- A. There are two primary components of the author’s theology.
 - 1. On the one hand the author is steeped in his understanding of the OT and the promises of God for his people from within that book.
 - 2. On the other hand the author is firmly convinced of the place of Christ as the ultimate fulfillment and agent for God’s plan in this world.
- B. The author weds these two together to provide a basis for firm exhortation of his audience to not draw back from Christ even though circumstances may be difficult.
- C. Central Idea: Jesus’ exalted place as God’s Son and his people’s High Priest acquired through his suffering, death, and resurrection demands growing devotion to him from those related to him even in the midst of difficult circumstances.
- D. Two central verses: 3:6, 14

IV. A Simple Outline

- A. The Prologue: The Son as God’s final revelation (1:1–4)
- B. The Son as superior to angels (1:5–2:18)
- C. The Son as merciful and faithful High Priest (3:1–5:10)
- D. Central Exposition: The Son’s Melchizedekian Priesthood (5:11–10:39)
 - 1. Introductory Exhortation: A Theme to Move Them toward Maturity (5:11–6:20)
 - 2. Christ as priest in Melchizedek’s order (7:1–28)
 - 3. Christ as heavenly High Priest of a better covenant (8:1–13)
 - 4. Christ’s priestly service in the heavenly sanctuary (9:1–28)
 - 5. Conclusion of the exposition: Contrast of the Old and New Covenants (10:1–18)
 - 6. Concluding exhortation: Draw near through Christ in enduring faith (10:19–39)
- E. The need for faith and endurance in the struggle (11:1–12:13)
- F. Final warning and instructions about community life (12:14–13:21)
- G. Epilogue: Epistolary closing (13:22–25)

V. Conclusion

There is a lot we don’t know about the book. There is a lot of debate about what we do know. Even so, the message of the book is clear, and we will begin an indepth look next week.