

JESUS IS BETTER

An In-Depth Study of Hebrews

Course Outline

<u>Week</u>	<u>Passage</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Hebrews 1:1-4	Introduction to Hebrews, God's Final Word in His Son
2	Hebrews 1:5 – 2:4	Jesus is Greater Than the Angels
3	Hebrews 2:5 – 3:6	Jesus' Sonship is Greater than Moses' Servanthood
4	Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13	Jesus' Rest is Better than Joshua's Rest
5	Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10	Jesus, Our Great Appointed High Priest
6	Hebrews 5:11 – 6:20	Exhortation to Persevere in Light of God's Promises
7	Hebrews 7:1-28	Jesus, The Better High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek
8	Hebrews 8:1-13	Jesus, The Greater High Priest of the New Covenant
9	Hebrews 9:1-28	Jesus' Sacrifice is Greater than the Temple's
10	Hebrews 10:1-39	Persevere On In Light of Jesus' Sacrifice
11	Hebrews 11:1-40	The Faith of the Ancients in Action
12	Hebrews 12:1-29	Running the Race with Perseverance
13	Hebrews 13:1-25	Concluding Words

Recap from Session 5

Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10

- Hebrews 4:14-16 is a transitional passage that concludes the first major part of Hebrews and introduces the next major section of Hebrews at the same time.
- The focus of this next major section is the priesthood of the Son.
 - He compares the Son to the priesthood from the OT. He is just like them, in that he represents the people before God, and he was appointed by God himself.
 - He is completely unlike the priests of the OT, as he is sinless and a priest forever
- As priest, he offered up prayers and petition for God's people. He learned obedience and became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Structure of Hebrews

- Hebrews 1:1-4 – God has Spoken to Us in a Son Who is also High Priest
- Hebrews 1:5 – 4:13 – Jesus’ Greater Sonship
 - Hebrews 1:5 – 2:4 – Jesus is Greater than the Angels
 - Hebrews 2:5 – 3:6 – Jesus’ Sonship is Greater than Moses’ Servanthood
 - Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13 – Jesus’ Rest is Better than Joshua’s Rest
- *Transition Passage - Hebrews 4:14-16 – Jesus, the Son of God who is also High Priest*
- Hebrews 5:1 – 10:39 – Jesus’ Greater Priesthood
 - Hebrews 5:1 – 6:20 – Exhortation to Persevere in light of Jesus’ Priesthood (this session)
 - Hebrews 7:1-28 – Jesus is the Better High Priest in the order of Melchizedek
 - Hebrews 8:1-13 – Jesus is the Greater High Priest of the New Covenant
 - Hebrews 9:1-28 – Jesus’ Sacrifice is Greater than the Temple’s
 - Hebrews 10:1-39 – Persevere in light of Jesus’ Sacrifice
- Hebrews 11 – Perseverance by Faith of the Ancients
- Hebrews 12:1-3 – Fix our Eyes Upon Jesus
 - Hebrews 12:4-17 – Endure God’s Discipline as Sons
 - Hebrews 12:18-28 – We Have Come to a Better Mountain
- Hebrews 13:1-25 – Concluding Exhortations

A Detour

In Hebrews 3:7 – 4:11, the pastor quotes Psalm 95 and applies it to his readers. He uses the example of the Israelites’ disobedience in the wilderness to exhort them to continue persevering in their faith. He then transitions to talking about the priesthood of the Son, after giving short snippets of it in 1:3-4, 2:17-18, and 3:1. He mentions that God appointed Jesus to be a priest in the order of Melchizedek. As listeners, we would fully expect him to continue elaborating on the priesthood of Christ. However, he does not do that. Instead, he postpones further discussion of Christ’s high priesthood until 6:20 “in order to regain his hearers’ attention and rouse them to appropriate action.”¹

His concern, however, is with spiritual inertia more than with wondering thoughts. He has tried to whet their appetite and arouse their curiosity by giving them a foretaste of the great benefits that are theirs through Christ’s priestly ministry. He now turns to shame (5:11 – 6:3), warning (6:4-8), consolation (6:9-12), and assurance (6:13-20) in order to awaken them from complacency and direct them to the path of persevering faith. He would bring them back to his main topic with a renewed determination to comprehend its significance and appropriate its benefits as the adequate and only means of such perseverance. Thus although the pastor temporarily defers discussion of

¹ Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 2012), 251.

Christ's high priesthood, this section is no diversion. It is integral to the overarching concern of this sermon that the hearers appropriate God's adequate provision for endurance in obedient faith until the end.²

Hebrews 5:11 – 6:20

¹¹We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. ¹²In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

6 Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death,^a and of faith in God,² instruction about cleansing rites,^b the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³And God permitting, we will do so.

⁴It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age ⁶and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. ⁷Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. ⁸But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

⁹Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. ¹⁰God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. ¹¹We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. ¹²We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

The Certainty of God's Promise

¹³When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, ¹⁴saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." ¹⁵And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

¹⁶People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹We have this

² Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 251–52.

hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰ where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. ³

Warning Passages in Hebrews

There are passages in Hebrews (2:1-4, 3:7 – 4:13, 5:11 – 6:12, 10:19-39, 12:14, 19) that have been called the warning passages. Of these biblical passages, the most debated and discussed is Hebrews 6:4-6. How are we to read these passages, in particular 6:4-6? Do they indicate that a Christian is able to lose their salvation? Or are they merely used as warnings, but there never really was any danger of apostasy in a true believer? These are important questions to answers as it impacts how we live our Christian lives and how we minister to others.

Different Approaches

Christians Can Lose Their Salvation

Christians Cannot Lose Their Salvation

Perseverance of the Saints

The Golden Chain of Salvation (Romans 8:28-30, John 6:38-40 etc.)

³ [*The New International Version*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Heb 5:11–6:20.

Moving Beyond Elementary Teachings

5:11-12 – “...by this time you ought to be teachers...”

5:13-14 – “...solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

6:1-3 – “...let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ...”

Not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death	
And of faith in God	
Instruction about cleansing rites	
The laying on of hands	
The resurrection of the dead	
Eternal judgement	

Crucifying the Son of God Again

6:4-12 – “It is impossible for those...to be brought back to repentance”

The structure of the sentence:

It is impossible for those...

Who have once been enlightened	
Who have tasted the heavenly gift	
Who have shared in the Holy Spirit	
Who have tasted the goodness of the word of God	
[Who have tasted] the powers of the coming age	
Who have fallen away	

To be brought back to repentance

6:6 – “...crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”

6:7-8 – “Land that drinks in the rain...” vs “Land that produces thorns and thistles...”

Which group of people in the Old Testament can these descriptions be applied to? (Cf. Heb 3:7-19)
 How about the New Testament? (cf. Matt 7:21-23, 13:18-23)

Salvation According to the Pastor

Salvation is an eschatological reality to the pastor in Hebrews. It is not merely a future reality, but it is also the present. For many of us today in our Christian culture, our understanding of salvation can be quite simplistic. We tend to think that we receive salvation when we say the sinner’s prayer. However, the pastor has a more holistic view of what salvation is (past, present, and future).

A great indication of this is what he has just mentioned in Hebrews 3:7 – 4:11. Using the wilderness generation as an example, he called us to persevere on and not be like them. He is comparing that generation with us. They were “saved” out of slavery from Egypt, but they were not “saved” into the Promised Land. They fell away through their own unbelief. They experienced salvation from God, but they did not persevere on with their trust in God. Thus, when we read the description here in Hebrews 6:4-6, these are not ontological descriptions of salvation, they are phenomenological (first-person *experience* of salvation) descriptions. We must also remember that he is preaching a sermon to his listeners. He is not giving a systematic theology of salvation to his listeners. He is trying to accomplish a purpose with his sermons – to encourage his listeners to persevere on in their faith. So, in the earthly human perspective, it is completely true that if someone does not persevere on in their faith, they will fall away.

For the pastor, the evidence of their true salvation is if they persevered on until the end. Thus, it is the same for us. We need to persevere on in our faith. These warnings that we read in Hebrews are real warnings. They have a past experience of God in the covenant community, but they still needed to trust God in the Gospel. This is what Jesus himself mentioned at the end of the Sermon of the Mount (Matt 7:21-23) – “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven....” We trust in God for our salvation, and we persevere on in our faith. Our salvation is not based upon our experience of our Christian faith, but rather on God and what he has done for us. However, as we will come to see in the later parts of Hebrews and in many other parts of the New Testament, God doesn’t leave us to our own devices. When we truly trust in God, God dwells in us by his Spirit and helps us to persevere on. (cf. Hebrews 13:20-21)

The Certainty of God’s Promise

The Threefold Promise to Abraham

Genesis 12:1-7, 15:1-17, 17:1-27 – God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing

6:13-15 – “...Abraham received what was promised.”

6:16-18 - ...he confirmed it with an oath.”

6:19-20 – “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul...”

Persevere!

Beginning in Hebrews 4:14, the pastor focuses on the priesthood of the Son. However, in 5:11-6:20, he seems to take a detour to exhort his listeners to persevere on in their faith. This time, he wrote one of the strongest worded exhortation in 6:4-6, warning his listeners that those who fall away after experiencing all the blessings of following God will not be able to be brought back to repentance. How could they when they have rejected the one and only person that could save them? The Israelites who did not enter the Promised Land (and who died in the wilderness) were examples that the author gave in the previous chapters. They were enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift (manna in the wilderness), shared in the Holy Spirit (the instruction of God’s Spirit during the wilderness), and tasted the goodness of the word of God (received God’s laws) and the powers of the coming age (experienced what it means to live under the rule of God). But that generation fell away through unbelief. So, in the same way, for those who have experienced all the blessings of God today in the Gospel, if we fall away, not only are we losing these blessings, we are also bringing mockery and shame to the Gospel message of God. We are “crucifying the Son of God all over again” to the wider world.

Thus, once again, the author urges his readers to cling on to their faith, because we will receive from God what has been promised. When God makes a promise, he keeps his promises, just like how he kept his promises to Abraham (Heb 6:14-15). To make it even clearer for us, God swore an oath by himself, and given that it is impossible for God to lie, we can be certain that he will fulfil his promises. Because of that, we can trust God, obey God, and follow God. As we continue learning about him, we will eventually be to teach others (5:12), and not live on milk anymore.

Homework

How many times does the figure Melchizedek appear in the Old Testament? Feel free to use a Bible app or Bible Gateway to do the search. List out all the biblical references to Melchizedek in the Old Testament.

What you can find out about this Melchizedek from your references?

What do you find surprising about Melchizedek?

Bibliography

Cockerill, Gareth Lee. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Eerdmans, 2012.