

“The Promise: An Introduction to Hebrews”

INTRODUCTION:

- **John Owen (1616-1683)**, in his preface to his two-million word exposition to Hebrews, *"After all my searching and reading, prayer and assiduous meditation have been my only resort, and by far the most useful means of light and assistance...I always went nakedly to the Word itself, to learn humbly the mind of God in it, and to express it as he should enable me."*
- **Hebrews 4:12-13**

I. Background

- A. Author
 - 1. The Possibilities
 - a) Paul, Appollos, Luke, Peter, Barnabas, later Clement
 - b) Apostle
 - c) Earliest adoption was for Pauline authorship
 - 2. The Fact
 - a) We just don't know
 - b) There's purpose in our not knowing
 - c) Affirmed by the early church: In spite of questions of authorship, the status of Hebrews as a canonical book has not been questioned much due to the Apostolic nature of the content.
- B. Occasion
 - 1. Judaizers are spreading their distorted message of Christ PLUS adherence to the Law
 - 2. Affords the writer the opportunity to bolster the Gospel with biblical Christology
- C. Audience
 - 1. Appears to be written to predominantly Jewish believers
 - a) No references to Gentiles

- b) Appropriate for Gentile readership, however, as they are grafted into the Abrahamic covenant through Christ (most churches were mixed)

- 2. John MacArthur divides the audience into 3 main groups that I find useful

- a) Hebrew believers (the main audience for the writer)
 - b) Hebrew unbelievers who were intellectually convinced
 - c) Hebrew unbelievers who were intellectually unconvinced

II. Purpose

- A. To Exalt Christ
 - 1. The book is written to exalt Christ not only in principle, but actually in the minds and hearts of every Hebrew reader.
 - 2. This helps us see clearly that the message of the supremacy of Christ as the satisfaction of His people is the message for the believer, non-believing convinced, and non-believing unconvinced.
 - 3. This is a critical truth for the church today, whether Hebrew or Gentile.
- B. To Warn Against the Apostasy of Judaism
 - 1. Throughout the book, there are exhortations in light of who Christ is and what He's done, NOT to fall away from the faith.
 - 2. We would not take this to mean that losing salvation is possible. Rather, there are many who, while theologically and intellectually convinced, are actually unsaved as proven by their falling away due to disbelief (in the finished work of Christ, adding to His work, Judaistic practices)
 - 3. Presents a warning for us today NOT to rely on previous experiences for assurance, rather our current trust in Christ and His finished work. Good fruit will bear out.
- C. To Help the Church Persevere in the Faith

1. There is an understated tone of encouragement to persevere throughout the book that becomes quite central by the last 2 1/2 chapters.
2. With false teachers pressing in and seeing supposed brothers / sisters "fall away" there would be a great deal of discouragement.
3. However, the writer uses positive and negative examples of their own community as well as the Old Testament to show the faithfulness of God to His people.

III. Structure

* Took helps from George Guthrie, Peter O'Brien, and David Chapman (contr. for ESV Study Bible)

A. Jesus is Supreme (**Heb.1:1-4:13**)

1. Superior (1:1-4)
2. Superior to angels (1:5-2:18)
 - a) Biblical evidence of Christ's superiority (1:5-14)
 - b) Warning against neglecting this Superior Christ (2:1-4)
 - c) The Founder of Salvation (2:5-18)
3. Superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
 - a) Superior as a son (3:1-6)
 - b) Supreme rest for God's people (3:7-4:13)
 - (1) Warning against hardening (3:7-15)
 - (2) Example of the Exodus generation (3:16-19)
 - (3) Entering God's rest (4:1-13)

B. Jesus is Supreme as the Promise of God (**Heb.4:14-10:18**)

1. Superior Priest (4:14-7:28)
 - a) The Great High Priest (4:14-5:10)
 - b) Warning against rejecting the Great High Priest (5:11-6:12)
 - c) The Great High Priest of God's Promise (6:13-20)
 - d) Superior to Melchizedek (7:1-28)

- (1) Order of Melchizedek (7:1-10)
- (2) Our Superior Priest (7:11-28)

2. Superior Covenant (8:1-13)

- a) Our Superior Priest of the Covenant (8:1-2)
- b) Christ's Superior Mediation (8:3-6)
- c) The Superior Covenant (8:7-13)

3. Superior Sacrifice (9:1-10:18)

- a) The Shadow of the Superior Sacrifice (9:1-10)
- b) The Reality of the Superior Sacrifice (9:11-10:18)
 - (1) Superior Tent (9:11-12)
 - (2) Superior Blood (9:13-14)
 - (3) Superior Death (9:15-22)
 - (4) Superior Place (9:23-28)
 - (5) Superior Duration (10:1-18)

C. Jesus is Supreme among His People (**Heb.10:19-13:25**)

1. Supreme in confidence (10:19-11:40)

- a) Present Confidence (10:19-25)
- b) Sufficient Confidence: A Warning of rejecting Christ's sufficient work (10:26-31)
- c) An recent example of confidence (10:32-39)
- d) An historic example of confidence (11:1-40)

2. Supreme in endurance (12:1-29)

- a) Endurance with focus (12:1-2)
- b) Endurance through discipline (12:3-17)
- c) Endurance with perspective (12:18-24)
- d) Endurance by enduring: A Warning of rejecting the Word of God (12:25-29)

3. Supreme in community (13:1-25)

- a) Superior in our relationships (13:1-6)

- b) Superior in church leadership (13:7-19)
- c) Superior in equipping: The Benediction (13:20-21)
- d) Conclusion (13:22-25)

IV. Approach

A. Exposition

1. This is the explanation of the text and its meaning in light of Jesus Christ
2. This is particularly noticeable at the beginning of each of our 3 main sections
 - a) Jesus is Supreme (**Heb.1:1-4**)
 - b) Jesus is Supreme as the Promise of God (**Heb.4:14-16**)
 - c) Jesus is Supreme among His People (**Heb.10:19-25**)

B. Exhortation

1. Upon explanation, appeals and warnings are made in light of the truth of who Christ is and what He's done
2. This is impassioned

C. Application & Purpose

1. While response is implicit throughout, it is explicitly called for after the exhortations
2. This isn't perfect in its arrangement everywhere in the book, but it's a strong enough pattern to help in interpreting the book, keeping the individual from mere intellectual assent, and actually benefitting the local church

D. Source: O'Brien and Guthrie take special note of this pattern in Hebrews and it was a common approach by one my heroes, Jonathan Edwards, in preaching particularly narrative or theologically rich texts

V. Relevance

A. The Supremacy of Christ

1. Whether gnostics, Arians, Mormons, JW's -- the Supremacy of Christ will always be in question

2. The Supremacy of Christ and His word must be altered in order to legitimize unbiblical church practices

B. The Centrality of Christ in the Gospel Message

1. In view of many movements, even in evangelical circles, it is critical to preserve the centrality of biblical Christology in the gospel message
2. This message is one that is proclaimed
3. This message demands intellectual assent (but cannot stop there)
4. This message demands a response of repentance and faith

C. The Encouragement to keep pressing on

1. The times make true gospel living difficult
2. The need for the church to be purified

APPLICATION:

Hebrews 13:20-21

- A. Believer, press on looking to Jesus, growing in knowledge and faith so that you do not lose hope in practice.
- B. Unbeliever who is intellectually convinced, you must respond to the truth you ascend to believe and follow Christ, turning from the Law and self as righteous, trusting only in Him as all-satisfying.
- C. Unbeliever who is not convinced, you must see that Christ is the fulfillment of all of God's promises and only those who believe and trust in Him will have eternal life.