

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

HEBREWS LESSON 1 (Overview)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1-2). Welcome to our study of the Book of Hebrews. Today we are going to take an introductory or overview look at the Book of Hebrews to help associate us with the Old Law message of this wonderful book. The Book of Hebrews is all about the supremacy and majesty of Christ and His covenant. The Bible says in Colossians 1:18 that Jesus is “the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.” I’m reminded of what the people said in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 7 verse 37, when they cried out, “He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.” That’s a great summary statement of the life of Christ. “He has done all things well.” The Book of Hebrews cries out this message in a very powerful and passionate way. Hebrews 7:25-26 notes this about the Savior:

“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.”

Look at the majesty of Jesus. He is holy and harmless. He is separate from sinners. He is undefiled. The stresses the wonderful majesty of the Savior. The Hebrew Christians especially needed to hear this wonderful message because some of them were thinking about going back to the old ways of Judaism. Imagine one of those days when nothing seems to go right. You wake up to find that the alarm clock did not go off. You get out of bed and automatically stub your toe. When you turn on the shower, you find out that you have no hot water. You stumble out of the shower to the kitchen table, pour yourself a bowl of cereal, only to find out that you have no milk. It is one of those days when you would rather just crawl back into bed where it’s comfortable—and then start over again. That is the kind of day that the Hebrew Christians were having perpetually. Because of the persecution they were enduring, and because of the things that were happening to them, they were thinking about going back to that which was comfortable and that which was easy to them—the way of Judaism. So, the message to the Hebrews was, “Do not go back. Do not go back to Judaism. Do not go back to the old way. Christ and Christianity—no matter what the cost—are far better than you can imagine. The encouragement of Hebrews 3:12-13 teaches these Christians not to go back. In this passage we read, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” The writer’s message is, “Do not go back! The old way will not work any more. Jesus and Christianity are worth enduring suffering.”

That message—the message of “Do not go back!”—also is a powerful message for us today. The text of 2 Peter 2:21-22 illustrates how foolish it is when Christians go back to the world—to a life of sin, to denominational error, or to whatever it may be. Peter says it is like “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire, or a dog returning to his own vomit.” Once we learn the way of truth, we need not go back. We must endure and stay faithful to Jesus all the days of our lives.

There are some important keys that can help us understand the wonderful Book of Hebrews. The key words that you will find used repetitively in the book are “better,” “much more,” or “more excellent.” This goes hand in hand with the theme of the book. Christ is better. His way is more excellent. And our faith must be much greater than the faith that the people had during the days of Moses. This book is all about Christ, and how the Christian way is better. The key phrase that you will find repeated in the book is found especially in chapter 11—“by faith.” If we are going to endure, and if we are going to make it to Heaven, it will be by faithfulness, trust in God, perseverance, and refusing to give up—no matter how hard things get.

Another key to understanding the Book of Hebrews is to have a good foundational knowledge of the Old Testament. There are over 100 uses of the Old Testament in the Book of Hebrews. You are not really going to understand the Book of Hebrews well unless you understand that it is deeply rooted in and associated with the promises and prophecies in the Old Testament. Romans 15:4 says that whatever things were written before were written for our learning.” How true that is when we come to the Book of Hebrews, which specifically deals with Christ being better than the Old Way.

To help us understand the book better, perhaps it would be good for us to have a brief outline. Here is an easy way to break down, and remember, what the book is about. Chapters 1-7 teach us about the superiority of Christ. In these chapters we will notice that Christ is greater—greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater than Joshua, and greater than Aaron. Then, in chapters 8-10 we will learn that Christ’s covenant is better than the Old Covenant. We now have a new covenant (chapter 8). In chapter 9 we have a greater tabernacle in the New Covenant. In chapter 10 we have a greater sacrifice than that of the Old Covenant. Then in chapters 11-13 we see that Christ and Christian living are better than any other way of life. The latter half of chapter 10 tells that we must endure and keep going. In chapter 11 we find the great “Hall of Fame of Faith,” where we see that under the Christian system, we “overcome by faith.” Chapters 12 and 13 are encouragements to greater faithfulness in Christian living. This breaks down the book and gives us an overview of where the Christian writer is going.

Now let us look at each chapter, and notice the highlights for the days ahead. In chapter 1 the Hebrew writer tells us that Christ is greater than angels. “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (Heb. 1:1-2). We see in verses 3-5 that Jesus is greater than angels because right now He is sitting at the right hand of God. Christ’s revelation is greater than the revelation that the angels deliver. In Acts 7, and in Galatians 3:15ff. we learn that angels actually delivered the Ten Commandments, which God wrote with His own hand on the top of Mt. Sinai. They delivered the Old Covenant. Christ is greater than angels because He is God’s spokesman today. God did not send angels to deliver His law this time. He sent His very own Son. So the fact that Christ is better than angels is another proof that Christ’s covenant is greater than the covenant that was delivered by angels. In the latter half of chapter 1 we notice that Christ is greater than angels because He wears a greater name than they do. Christ is seen in chapter 1 as being not only a servant, but also a Son. He is the Son of God. The writer looks back to the Old Testament to

Psalm 2 and other passages that say things like, “Today You are My Son, whom I have begotten.” Jesus is not only a servant, but is, in fact, the Son of God. In chapter 1 we also see that Christ is God in the flesh. In Matthew 1:23 we read, “They shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us.’” Thus, Jesus not only the Son of God, but also is God in the flesh. In chapter 1 the Hebrew writer also notes that Jesus is the Creator and Destroyer of this world. From the beginning, Jesus laid the foundation. Verse 11 says, “They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment.” Here we see Jesus as both the Creator and Destroyer of the world. We must realize how important it is to serve God, not angels. We live in a day and age in which there are a lot of people who are focused on angels. You might say that we have an “angelmania” today. People are crazed concerning the idea of angels. But there is something much greater than angels—the very Son of God, God in the flesh, the Creator of this Universe. He is the One Whom we must serve. The Hebrews writer said in Hebrews 1 that angels are simply ministering spirits sent to do the will of God for those who will receive salvation (Heb. 1:14). But Jesus—the Son of God and God in the flesh—came as a sacrifice to die for all men.

Then, in Hebrews 2 we are going to learn that not only is Christ greater than the angels, but that we have a greater salvation today. Verse 3 asks, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” Under the Old Law people were punished harshly if they did not obey the laws of Moses and God. The point being made by the Hebrew writer is that we have the New Covenant. God in the flesh (Jesus) came to deliver it to us. So how can **we** escape if we neglect so great a salvation? Chapter 2 teaches us about this great salvation that Christians possess. It is greater because of the great sacrifice. Jesus “tasted of death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9). Jesus is the perfect captain of our salvation. He is the victorious leader Whom, if we will follow, will help us make it to Heaven itself. Jesus offers a greater victory than the victory under Moses. Hebrews 2:14 says that “through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” So there is a greater sacrifice, greater Captain, a greater Leader, and a greater victory. Through Christ and Christianity, we can defeat the devil! Chapter 2 teaches us that there is a greater helper. Hebrews 2:18 says, “In that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.” This chapter about our great salvation ends with Jesus being the great Helper to those who are suffering. Look at Jesus’ faith. Look at the tumult, the trials, the division, the beatings (Mt. 27), and the other things that He faced. Since He went through that victoriously, He is able to help those today who are suffering.

Chapter 3 teaches us that Christ is greater than Moses. Apart from Abraham, if you were to mention one person in the Old Testament who was a great hero, it would be the deliverer, Moses. He led God’s people out of Egypt. He led them right up to the brink of the Promised Land. What a great judge and deliverer Moses was! But this chapter teaches us that Christ is greater than Moses, and that our faith must be greater of the faith of those who followed Moses. Here is why Christ is greater. Moses was a **servant in** God’s house. Jesus is the **Son over** God’s house. Moses was a great leader. Christ is Lord over the house of God. He is the Creator of all things. Moses was a servant—a helper. But Christ is the Son, the Lord, the Leader—the One Who is over the house of God. Just as God’s Son is greater than a servant, so Christ is greater than Moses. Then the writer drives the point home by examining Moses, and the people who followed him, a little further. The people murmured and complained. They wandered for forty years while their bodies perished in the wilderness. The writer suggests that not only should we think about Moses, but that we need to be reminded about these people. If our faith is not greater than their faith, then we will perish the same way they did. That is why he says that we need to encourage one another (Heb. 3:12-13). This is why Christians need to realize that the people who followed Moses did not enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief. And we, too, can face

that same judgment. The people believe in God, but they did not follow it out by living faithfully to Him. Unbelief is not always “not recognizing that God exists.” Unbelief can be a sort of “practical atheism” where we believe in God on a mental level, but we do not live out that belief every day in our lives.

In Hebrews 4 the writer stresses for us that Christ is greater than Joshua, and that the rest that Christ offers is greater than the rest that Joshua offered. Joshua was a great leader. He took up where Moses left off. He took God’s people into the Promised Land of rest. But in Hebrews 4 there are really three rests mentioned. First there is the Sabbath rest of God that occurred on the seventh day. There is the rest that Joshua offered the people in the Promised Land. But then in Hebrews 4:9 we see that “there remains therefore a rest for the people of God.” We see here the greatest rest—a **heavenly rest**. Joshua did a wonderful thing by leading the people of Israel into the Promised Land. But the people still died in the Promised Land. They were not without troubles and trials while they were there, even though it was a great land. Yet Jesus, the Great Leader, is able to lead us not to a **physical** Promised Land, but instead to a **spiritual** Promised Land (that is, Heaven itself). Along these same lines in chapter 4, the Hebrew writer offers an incentive—the fact that we have the Word of God that is able to deliver us. We have the great example of Jesus. We have the power of prayer to help us along the way. So, along with the Great Leader, Jesus, taking us to Heaven, we also have other incentives to help us get there.

Hebrews 5 is a very interesting chapter. In the first half, we find mentioned that Jesus is greater than Aaron and the Levitical priesthood. There is a division within this chapter. In verses 1-11 we see that Christ is greater than Aaron because He is not of the Levitical priesthood, but is of the order of Melchizedek. However, the writer says, “I want to talk to you about this, but you’re not ready—and shame on you!” Hebrews 5:12-14 is one of the strongest rebukes you will find in the Bible. He says, “Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God.” Chapter 5:12 through chapter 6 is a strong rebuke, along with an encouragement for these people not to give up. They needed to rethink their faith. They needed to evaluate their knowledge. And the writer told them what they needed to do—and then gave them the encouragement to do it. Chapter 5:12 all the way through the end of chapter 6 is a sort of interlude.

Chapter 7 picks up with the main argument of the first half of chapter 5: **Christ is greater!** The message of chapter 7 is that Christ is greater than the Levites and the Levitical priesthood because He is of the order of Melchizedek. Although chapter 7 is rather lengthy and, at times, somewhat difficult, it breaks down simply to this: Christ is greater than the Levites because, unlike those Levites, His priestly order never ends. He has no father or mother (i.e., His priesthood is not based on His genealogy). In fact, Hebrews 7 notes that Christ was not of the tribe of Levi, but instead was of the tribe of Judah. Furthermore, His sacrifice is so much greater than the sacrifices that the Levitical priests offered. They offered animal sacrifices, which Hebrews 10:3-4 informs us could never really take away sin. But Jesus offers Himself as the “once-for-all” sacrifice for mankind. This is why Hebrews 7:25 says that Jesus “is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” As our High Priest, Christ offered Himself. And He stands between God and man. Through Jesus we **can** make it to Heaven.

Hebrews chapters 8 through 10 teach us that Christ’s covenant is better than the Old Covenant. Chapter 8 teaches us that Christ’s covenant has always been the will of God. This is not something unheard of. This is not something for which the Jews were unpre-

pared. Hebrews 8 and Jeremiah 31:31-34 teach us clearly that under the Old Law, God had promised and prophesied that a New Covenant was coming. In Jeremiah 31:31-32 we read,

“Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,’ says the Lord.”

The people broke God’s covenant—the one He made with them right after He had taken them out of Egyptian bondage and given them the Law at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 20)—the Old Testament Covenant (or the Ten Commandments Covenant). The writer says that Christians have seen the fulfillment of the previous promise in Christ’s New Covenant. This is one of the strongest passages in Hebrews 8 to teach us that we no longer are under the Old Law. Notice Hebrews 8:13, “In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” The Old Law had become obsolete, and as such was no longer of value. It was ready to vanish way then. Today we no longer live under the Old Testament. This chapter in this book clearly teaches that. It is one of the defining characteristics of this wonderful message.

Chapter 9 teaches us that Christ has a greater tabernacle. Under the Old Testament system, throughout the Books of Exodus and Numbers, the Israelites had a tabernacle that they moved with them as they moved. They set it up and took it down. It included such things as the Holy of Holies, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments—all of which were important historical features associated with the Old Covenant. However, these were things that would perish, and that over time would not last. The writer makes the point that our tabernacle is in Heaven itself, and that we, through Jesus as our High Priest, can approach God. Along with that, he also teaches us that unlike the old tabernacle that had to be moved, we do not have the same types of sacrifices that went along with that tabernacle. The Israelites would offer a bull, or sprinkle the ashes of a heifer for the unclean, and so on. But the blood of Jesus, through His eternal Spirit, is what sanctifies us today. That covenant has now been initiated, and in Hebrews 9:22 we read, that “without shedding of blood there is no remission.” Thank God that we are not living under the old tabernacle/Old Covenant system where animal sacrifices could not really take away sins. It is the blood of Jesus in the covenant today through the church that takes us into the very presence of God Himself.

Hebrews 10 identifies the weakness of the Old Testament sacrifices. In this chapter the writer shows that Christ’s sacrifice is greater than the Old Testament sacrifices. There are several verses that identify this, including Hebrews 10:3-4, which tells us that the blood of bulls and goats could never really take away sin. The writer’s point is, “You are thinking about going back to the old system, but why return to a system that could not really take away sin? Do you want to go back and be a part of something where salvation is not fully realized?” He is showing them the fallacy of what they are about to do. One of the key ideas is found in Hebrews 10:12. The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin, but “this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.” Jesus’ sacrifice—which was given once for all time—is the final sacrifice, and through it our sins can be completely removed (Acts 2:38). We are washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 1:4-5).

Then, in the latter part of the Book of Hebrews the writer enters into more of a devotional or encouraging section. Hebrews 11-13 shows us that not only is Christ’s covenant greater, but also that Christian living is a greater way. Hebrews 11 mentions a greater faith (in

the chapter we know as the “Hall of Fame of Faith”). Such a faith is based on evidence and substance (Heb. 11:1), and is the type of faith, without which, we cannot please God. This is such an important chapter because of the essentiality of true faith. Look at Hebrews 11:6—“Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” This is such an important characteristic of Christianity because without real faith we will never please God. The writer mentions people like Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Sarah, and other important people of the Old Testament. How did these people overcome? They overcame “by faith.” The word “faith,” as used in this chapter, means “by faithful obedient trust to God,” and includes such things as perseverance (never, never giving up). That is how they overcame and won the battle. But that same principle is true today for us. If we are going to make it to Heaven as Christians, it will be because we never gave up and persevered even to the end.

In chapters 12 and 13 the writer brings the book to a close by offering some final encouragements. Hebrews 12 stresses that we need to continue looking to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith. We must never take our eyes off of Him. We need to realize that sometimes God does discipline His own children. But it is always for our own good. We need to realize how important it is to be a member of God’s eternal kingdom (Heb. 12: 28ff.). In Hebrews 13 the writer encourages Christians by showing them that they need to let brotherly love continue. They need to realize that God will never leave them or forsake them, and that Jesus is “the same yesterday, today, and forever.” This is such an important message in this book for us today.

Maybe you are thinking about going back to your old life. Maybe you are thinking about going back to a life of sin. Maybe you are thinking about going back to the world where it seems easier in some ways. Maybe you are thinking about going back into denominational error. The Book of Hebrews stresses so passionately that Jesus is the only way, and that we must not go back because if we do there “no longer remains a sacrifice for your sins.” Jesus and Christianity are the only way you can be saved.

If you are not a Christian, we want you to know today exactly how much God loves you. He loves you so much that He sent His Son into this world to die for your sins. His sacrifice and death were for all people. You can be a part of the wonderful blessing that God offers. If you believe in Jesus as the Son of God, then you must be willing to repent of the things in your life that are not right. Then you must be willing to confess the wonderful name of Jesus before men and be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus said in Mark 16:16, “He who is believed and is baptized will be saved.” Are you a child of God? If not, why not take advantage of the wonderful salvation Christ offers? If, as a child of God, you are not living your life correctly, then the message for you is that you need to be right with God before it’s too late so that Jesus can be supreme in your life.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today’s broadcast, please write to:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST
607 McLish Ave.
Ardmore, OK 73401

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at www.thegospelofchrist.com. We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where “the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached.”

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS OVERVIEW

1. According to Hebrews 1:1-2, how does God speak to us today?
2. What does Hebrews 7:25 say that Christ can do for those who come to God through Him?
3. Hebrews 7:26 describes Christ as being “separate from sinners.” What information is contained in Hebrews 4:15 that helps explain that statement?
4. In Hebrews 3:12-13 the writer of the book warned the people to whom he was writing **not** to do something? What was it?
5. In 2 Peter 2:21-22, Peter used two examples to vividly describe the mistake that a person makes when he or she leaves Christ to return to the world. What are those two examples?
6. In Hebrews 11 there is a two-word phrase used repeatedly that helps describe the message of the entire book. What is that phrase?
7. In chapters 1-7 of the Book of Hebrews, we find the message that Christ is better than certain people or things. Name some of them.
8. According to Hebrews 1:3, where is Jesus Christ right now?
9. According to Matthew 1:23, another name for Christ was “Immanuel.” What does that name mean?
10. What does the ending of Hebrews 2:9 say that Christ did for us?
11. What does Hebrews 2:18 say that Jesus is able to do for us—and why?
12. What does Hebrews 4:9 promise Christians?
13. What rebuke did the writer of Hebrews offer in Hebrews 5:12-14?
14. According to Hebrews 10:4, what can the blood of bulls and goats never do?
15. In Jeremiah 31:31, what did Jeremiah prophesy?
16. According to Hebrews 8:13, what was “becoming obsolete,” “growing old,” and “ready to vanish away”?
17. What important piece of information is contained in Hebrews 9:22?
18. What important piece of information is contained in Hebrews 10:12?
19. Of whom is Hebrews 10:12 speaking when it says, “But this Man...”?