

Hebrews

The letter to the Hebrews is a rich, beautifully written letter to Jewish believers. The writer of Hebrews examines the Old Testament Scriptures and shows how Jesus fulfills the prophecy of the Old Testament. More importantly, the writer of Hebrews shows that in Jesus, we have something better than all the religious practices of the Old Testament.

Writer: We do not know who the writer of Hebrews is. The writer doesn't include their name in the letter. Most people guess it was one of Paul's coworkers, which seems most likely. We do know that the writer was a friend and coworker of Timothy because the writer gives the news about Timothy saying, "I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you" (13:23).

Date of writing: Between 50-70 AD

Original Audience: Jewish followers of Jesus. The Jewish people spoke a language called Hebrew. That is why this letter is called Hebrews. The Old Testament scriptures were written in the Hebrew language.

The Reason for the Letter: The writer doesn't give the exact reason for sending this letter. But, the message of the letter gives us some clues. The recipients of this letter had endured suffering, and the writer is encouraging them to persevere. It also seems that the Jewish followers of Jesus were tempted to continue following the ways and practices of the old covenant. But, the writer says that the old covenant is now obsolete; it has expired! (8:13). The writer says that Jesus brought in the new covenant that is better than the old one "since the new covenant is established on better promises" (8:6).

The Main Message of the Letter: The main message of the letter is that Jesus is superior. Jesus is superior to the angels (1:4-14). He is superior to Moses. Jesus is a better high priest (4:14-10:39), and His sacrifice is superior to all the sacrifices made by the Levitical priests (9:1-10:18). God has established a new and better covenant through Jesus (8:1-13). With all of that established, the writer calls the believers to persevere in their faith (10:19-39). The writer reminds them of the perseverance and faith of the heroes in the Old Testament (11:1-40). Since such examples of perseverance and faith surround them, followers of Jesus should persevere through suffering and discipline from a loving God (12:1-11). The believers are reminded that they are members of the Kingdom of the Living God, which is like a heavenly Jerusalem. Their names are written in heaven, and this Kingdom of Heaven cannot be shaken. So, be thankful and worship God! (12:18-29). The final chapter encourages believers to love one another, praise God, and pray, followed by closing greetings (13:1-25).



Outline of Hebrews:

1. Jesus Greater than Angels (1:1–2:9)
2. Jesus Made Perfect through Suffering (2:10–18)
3. Entering God’s Rest (3:1–4:12)
4. Jesus is the Best High Priest (4:13–5:10)
5. Encouragement to Mature (5:11–6:20)
6. Jesus Is High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek (7:1–28)
7. Jesus Brings In a New Covenant (8:1–13)
8. Jesus Brings a Better Sacrifice (9:1–10:18)
9. Encouragement to Stay Faithful (10:19–39)
10. Examples of Faith (11:1–12:3)
11. Encouragement to Endure Suffering (12:4–29)
12. Encouragement to Live Righteously (13:1–13:25)

Who is Melchizedek?

The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is a perfect high priest for all time. Some Jewish people may wonder how Jesus could be a high priest when hearing those words. In human thinking, Jesus wasn’t from the priestly line. In the Jewish nation called Israel, there were 12 tribes that came from the 12 sons of a man named Jacob. God later changed Jacob’s name to Israel. One of Israel’s sons was named Levi, and only descendants of Levi were able to be priests. But, Jesus’ earthly mother and father were from the tribe of Judah, and people from Judah were not allowed to be priests. Israel’s kings came from the tribe of Judah. The writer of Hebrews reminds us of a priest named Melchizedek before there was a tribe of Levi. In Genesis 14:18-20, it says, “Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.’ Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything” (Genesis 14:18–20). Abram was also called Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac was the father of Jacob, and Jacob was the father of Levi. So, three generations before Levi, Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and Abraham gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek. Later, the priests from the tribe of Levi would collect a tenth from the people of Israel (7:5). Next, the writer of Hebrews quotes a prophecy about the Messiah from Psalm 110:4, where God says to His Messiah, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek” (7:17). So, Jesus is the king from the line of David in the tribe of Judah. And, Jesus is also a priest in the order of Melchizedek which is an older priestly line than Levi. Even more important, God says that Jesus the Messiah is a priest forever. The writer of Hebrews takes all of this evidence and presents Jesus as the Messiah, Priest, and King. The good news is that “because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him” (7:24–25).

Read each section in the outline above and discuss these questions:

1. What do I learn in this section?
 2. What do I need to do?
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