

## AP 45

# Hebrews / Προς Ἑβραίους / Pros Heb·rye·ous to the Hebrews

This week we will be focusing on a book of the New Testament that strangely doesn't get much airtime in the church. The irony is that the letter is considered the literary high point of the New Testament by most scholars, and it adds as much as any other non-gospel book in the NT to our Christology. I suspect the reason that it is not the focus of many sermons is that it requires a more detailed understanding of the Old Covenant and the sacrificial law. In an age of 20-minute sermons<sup>1</sup>, it's very hard material with which to work.

This book has its mysteries: the author is not identified<sup>2</sup>, nor are the recipients. It was attributed to Paul by many in the early church, however, today most attribute the book to an anonymous author. The style of the letter is unique among New Testament books<sup>3</sup>. That characteristic alone piques<sup>4</sup> my interest. It lacks typical epistolary format (Greeting / Introduction, prayer of thanksgiving, teaching on beliefs, exhortation on behavior, and concluding practical matters). It reads more like a sermon than an epistle (except it does have an epistolary ending). The letter has a rhythm that moves regularly from beliefs to ethics. Each teaching builds upon the next in sophisticated way. It seems likely this book was written before the temple was destroyed in 70 CE as the temple is central to the argument. But an early writing is not necessary, suggested dates run between 60 – 90 CE<sup>5</sup>

The main theme of this letter is the Superiority of Christ. Yep, if you want everyone to win and none to be superior you may not like this bit of inspired scripture. The book was indispensable to the early church in helping to create a distinct identity for the Christian Church - differentiating the Old Covenant from the New Covenant. I think we would benefit today from a similar book that focused on the superiority of the gospel Christ to the gospel of secularism. Whatever circumstance or context, that of the 1<sup>st</sup> century or that of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Hebrews offers the Church a high and distinct Christology. Hebrews has shaped my beliefs in easily observable ways. I hope this week your view of Christ and the gospel of Christ is clarified as well.

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<sup>1</sup> No wisecracks, I am fully aware I push you well past 20 minutes. I disdain the 20-minute sermon. But in the mainline church that's probably the average.

<sup>2</sup> Apostolic authorship (which Hebrews did not claim) was an important consideration in canonization, however Hebrews place in the canon was solid. The book was firmly accepted in the East (Alexandria) from the earliest, and by the 4<sup>th</sup> century it was clearly accepted in the West as it is included in all the trusted canon lists

<sup>3</sup> Unique just as Acts and Revelation are unparalleled in the NT.

<sup>4</sup> I hope you appreciate that I used the correct word in this sentence. I wasn't sure if I should use peeks or peaks, funny thing neither were correct – this strange looking word is correct.

<sup>5</sup> Clement of Rome alluded to the book in 95 CE so somewhere near 90 CE seems a hard stop for its writing.

**Sunday, Oct 30**

Hebrews 1<sup>6</sup>

**For Reflection:** The author takes us to the deep end of the theological pool without any preamble. *What in the first 4 verses is new to you or surprising?* These verses had an impact on the church's first creed - The Nicene Creed.

**Lagniappe:** Colossians 1:15-20

**Monday, Oct 31**

Hebrews 2

**For Reflection:** Verse 4 sounds Luke-ish (See Acts 1:3). Chapter 1 shows us the divinity of Christ - with words like, radiance, glory, exact representation, powerful, and majesty. Chapter 2 is focused on the humanity of the Son of God – with words like, death, suffering, brother, humanity and tempted. We are taught that the Son of God is fully and divine fully human. *Which is harder for you to wrap your arms around the divinity of Jesus or the humanity of the Son of God?*

**Lagniappe:** John 1:14

**Tuesday, Nov 1**

Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10 & 6:13-20

**For Reflection:** Jesus is divine (chapter 1), human (chapter 3), and as such the perfect high priest (Chapter 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) to mediate between us and God. 6:19 *Who and What are your anchors?*

**Lagniappe:** Genesis 14:17-20<sup>7</sup>

**Wednesday, Nov 2**

Hebrews 7

**For Reflection:** The superiority of the priestly function of Jesus to the priestly functions of the Levitical priesthood (Aaron). What is the biggest need Jesus has met in your life? What is the most recent need Jesus has met in your life? How would it affect you if you didn't have Jesus as a mediator?

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<sup>6</sup> After verse 4, the rest of the chapter is given to OT quotations. **Although the word "Hebrew" is found nowhere in this book- except its title,** this string of quotations shouts that the audience is likely Jewish Christians.

<sup>7</sup> Melchizedek is this mysterious figure that comes out of nowhere, doesn't fit into the context of Genesis 14 and is only mentioned here, and in the Psalms once (110:4), and in Hebrews 8 times. Many, myself included, believe Melchizedek is God. Here are my reasons: 1) His name: Melchi = King; Zedek = Righteousness. Melchizedek is the King of Righteousness 2) he comes with bread and wine – notably symbolic of Jesus 3) King of Salem, Salem = peace. Salem is possibly a location that has been lost to time, or a shortened form of **Jerusalem**, or a reference to the kingdom of God. 4) He blessed Abraham who had just defeated 5 kings, the superior blesses the inferior. The parent blesses the child. 5) Abraham gave him a tenth of all he had. Tithes are for God. 6) Psalm 110:6 links him to God's anointed/Messiah 7) The many references in Hebrews all connect him with the Son of God (particularly 7:1-3).

**Lagniappe:** Numbers 3:10 and 38<sup>8</sup>

**Thursday, Oct 27**

Hebrews 8

**For Reflection:** Superiority of the covenant Jesus brings continued. *What was wrong with the Old Covenant? Why do we need Jesus if we already had the promises of God (promises =covenant)?*

**Lagniappe:** Jeremiah 31:31-34 (some things are worth hearing twice)

**Friday, Oct 28**

Hebrews 11 (I hate skipping 9 and 10 if you have time read them)

**For Reflection:** A hymn of faith. Verse 1 is the classic Biblical definition of faith. *How has your faith shaped your life and those around you? How has your faith cost you? How healthy is your faith currently? What one thing can you do about it this week?*

**Lagniappe:** Ephesians 2:8-9

**Saturday, Oct 29**

Hebrews 12:1-13

**For Reflection:** This passage inspires me to action. *Who are the witnesses cheering you on as you run the race? On what or whom are your eyes fixed? What causes you to be soul weary or to lose heart?*

**Lagniappe:** 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

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<sup>8</sup> Scary job, huh?