

The Book of Hebrews

We are nearing the end of our Sunday AM study of the book of Hebrews. This article shall give an overview of the book and note practical applications for Christians today.

Overview of Hebrews

The Hebrews Christians were suffering “*reproaches and afflictions*,” being “*made a gazingstock*,” and having their “*possessions spoiled*” due to their faith in Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:32ff). Many were apparently falling away from the faith due partly to persecutions and partly to their lack of spiritual maturity (cf. Heb. 5:11 – 6:12). The author of Hebrews brought the reality of their apostasy to their attention and the severe consequences thereof (Heb. 3:12; 4:11; 12:15).

Overall, the book of Hebrews is a work of encouragement. The Hebrews were apparently being pressured by both Jews and Judaizing Christians (those who held to a belief in Christ but taught that one must adhere to the Mosaic Law to be saved; cf. Acts 15:5) to reject such a stringent adherence to the Law of Christ. The author set out to prove the superiority of Jesus Christ to angels, Moses, and the priests and High priest of first covenant due to His offering the forgiveness of man’s sins (Heb. 1:3). Only through Christ could man obtain a state of eternal glorification (Heb. 2:5-18). Herein was the “*weakness and unprofitableness*” of the first covenant, “*for the law made nothing perfect*” (Heb. 7:18-19).

Jesus is set forth as a new high priest in the book of Hebrews (Heb. 6:20 etc.). The author of Hebrews explained that because the Levitical priesthood could not provide man’s perfection (i.e., the forgiveness of sins), a change was needed in the priesthood (Heb. 7:11). He further stated, “*For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law*” (Heb. 7:12). Jesus Christ, as high priest, is represented in a different law than that of Moses. The author of Hebrews termed Christ’s law as a “*better covenant*” because it does not have the “*faults*” of the first covenant (i.e., the inability to make man perfect) (cf. Heb. 8:6-7). Interestingly, the author of Hebrews told us that the first covenant was simply a “*copy and shadow of the heavenly things*” (Heb. 8:5; 9:23) and then told us that the heavenly things are the “*sanctuary and true tabernacle*” that Christ serves (Heb. 8:1-2). Under Christ’s Law, He makes a one time sacrifice that purifies man of sin once for all (Heb. 10:10). Again, the Mosaic system was not designed to offer man redemption but rather provide man with a “*remembrance*” of sins year by year (Heb. 10:1-4). The Christian, on the other hand, can enter into fellowship with the Heavenly Father today through Christ’s sacrifice (Heb. 10:19ff). This being so, now was not the time to give up on their faith.

The author of Hebrews encouraged the battered Hebrew Christians, who were suffering afflictions due to their faith, by telling them about others who had gone on before them. Hebrews 11 tells of the faith of both men and women who suffered much yet remained faithful till death. The author explained to the Hebrews that their afflictions were God’s way of “*chastening*” them as a Father would a son. The point is that they should be learning from these afflictions as opposed to being bitter and falling away from the faith as did Esau (Heb. 12:11, 16-17).

The theme of the entire epistle seems to be, “Now is not the time to fall away from your faith.” They had come so far, and their hope was sure to be realized if they would remain faithful (Heb. 12:8ff) and if they would not allow themselves to be dissuaded from the faith by false teachers (Heb. 13:9).

Practical Application

Christians today are deluged by various doctrines of men. Our faith is put on trial on a daily basis. There are a multitude of doctrines concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Other doctrines of various false teachings that do not stand the test of scripture assault our faith. We are often made to feel isolated with derogatory statements such as, “you all think you’re the only one’s going to heaven” and so forth. What will be our response? Shall we neglect our studies and, even worse, give up our faith? Let us take courage from books like Hebrews. Jesus Christ is indeed “*the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever*” (Heb. 13:8). When our faith is challenged let us give book, chapter, and verse answers and thereby grow through the chastening hand of God. When we feel like giving up, let us think of other faithful brethren who have gone on before us having gone through the same heartaches. Let us meditate on “*mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*” (Heb. 12:22). We can overcome today because Jesus comes to our aid (Heb. 2:18) giving us well-timed help (Heb. 4:16), bearing us gently that we may repent (Heb. 5:2), and thereby providing purification of our sins (Heb. 1:3; 2:17).