

2024-04-10 - Hebrews 6-8

Introduction to Hebrews

- Start with a review of the structure and contents of St Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews
- Remember that St Paul is writing this epistle to the Hebrews - a nation of people whose religion is based on the Torah. The Law of Moses. Those who would worship in the Temple, practice animal Sacrifices, have Levitical Priesthood, celebrate Feasts, etc. And St Paul wants to convince them that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah and He is God, and He is the fulfillment of everything they are doing. Christianity is not seeking to abolish Judaism, but to preach its fulfillment. He is going to take them systematically through their religion, and show how the Lord Jesus fulfilled it.
- Chapter 1-2: Christ is Superior to Angels and Prophets
 - He is the Son of God, the Lord, the King, the Anointed Messiah, the Creator, the Pantocrator, the Ruler - in just a few verses, St Paul shows all of these characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ, and shows how the Old Testament prophesied of those characteristics.
 - These show that Christ is superior to Angels and Prophets who were previously sent to Israel
- Chapter 3-4: Christ is Superior to Moses
 - Moses built the tabernacle; Christ created the Universe
 - The Israelites who rebelled against Moses failed to enter the Promised Land... so how much worse when they rebel against a greater than Moses?
 - And what is the Promise from Christ? What is the equivalent to the Promised Land? It is God's Rest... the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Chapter 4-5: The Priesthood
 - From there, St Paul transitions to talking about the priesthood. It is the priesthood and the system of Sacrifices that the Jews depend on for atonement. So St Paul will go back to basics with them - what is the priesthood? And then show that Christ is the Great High Priest, and the fulfillment of the Priesthood.
 - Qualifications for Priesthood
 - Taken from among men
 - Appointed for men in things pertaining to God
 - Offer gifts and sacrifices for our sins
 - No man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God
 - He now wants to talk about Christ as the High Priest according to the Order of Melchizedek, but it is "hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you need milk and not solid food." (5:11-12)
- Chapter 6: The Promise of God
 - 1-2

- First Principles: Repentance, Faith, Baptism, Laying of Hands, Resurrection of the Dead, Eternal Judgment
- An unbeliever will start with repentance and faith (believing in Christ). From there, he will move on to the necessary sacraments - Baptism and Chrismation (delivered by Laying of Hands). Belief in the Resurrection is necessary (or else our faith is futile). Belief in eternal judgment is necessary because it will motivate us in doing good works and in our spiritual progression in defeating Satan.
- 3: "And this we will do if God permits" - going on to perfection
- 4-8:
 - St Paul is talking about those who leave the faith and return and says it's impossible. He does not mean theologically impossible. All sins are forgivable with repentance. But he means the practically impossible.
 - "once enlightened" - "have tasted the heavenly gift" - "have become partakers of the Holy Spirit" (Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation)
 - "if they fall away" - apostasy, not just falling into sin
 - "Crucify Him again" - refers to re-baptism (which is not possible). If someone falls away they need to return via repentance and not via baptism
 - "the earth which drinks the rain" - we are all like land and we drink the grace of God. But if we don't bear fruits, and rather bear thorns, we will be rejected and near to being cursed. Near because repentance is possible.
- 9-10:
 - After a difficult message, the people need a word of encouragement and support
 - "We are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation"
 - His confidence comes from two things: God's justice ("God is not unjust") and their "work and labor of love"
- 11-12:
 - Do two things: Be diligent until the end; imitate those who inherit the promises
- 13-20:
 - We can have full assurance in the promises of God, and the example is the promise God made to Abraham
 - "Blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you"
 - God makes an oath by Himself because He is the highest power
 - And now look! You Hebrews are everywhere - you are all the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham.
 - 18 - What are the two immutable things? God's word and God's oath.
- 20: "where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."
 - St Paul now returns to the prophecy of Christ as High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. He mentioned it in Chapter 5, but now he will go deep into it. He has established for them the assurances of God, and that the Word of God and the Oath of God are immutable (unchangeable). One of those words comes from the Psalm 110:4 - You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.
- Chapter 7: Christ a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek

- 1-10:
 - Melchizedek the Type of Christ
 - Melchizedek = King of Righteousness
 - King of Salem = King of Peace
 - King & Priest
 - Offered bread and wine
 - Abram tithed to him (i.e. he is greater than Abraham)
 - He blessed Abram (who is the father of Jacob and Levi and the Levitical Priesthood)
 - His blessing to Abram was in the name of the Most High God
 - His father, mother and genealogy are not known
 - His priesthood is without beginning or end (contrast with Levitical priesthood which started with Aaron and ended with the destruction of the Temple)
 - St Paul is making the argument that the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to that of Levi. And if he can show that, and show (by Psalm 110:4) that Christ's priesthood is according to the order of Melchizedek, then the priesthood of Christ is Superior to that of Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood
- 11-14
 - If perfection could be attained by the Levitical Priesthood, then what is the need for another system of priesthood? If God's goal for all of us to be saved was accomplished according to the order of the Levitical Priesthood, then why would another order of priesthood be needed? It's because the Levitical Priesthood failed to fulfill and accomplish the goal of God in saving humanity. So a new order is needed.
- 15-21
 - Christ's priesthood is legitimate as being made by oath from God (which is immutable)
- 22-28
 - The superiority of the priesthood of Christ over that of the Levitical Priesthood
 - In the OT there were many priests because they were mortal, so eventually they would die and someone else would take their place. Christ's priesthood continues forever and is unchangeable because He is Immortal.
 - Christ is unique and superior in His Priesthood (and thus, elevates the Order of Melchizedek)
 - Holy, Harmless, Undefined, Separate from Sinners (i.e. without sin)
 - Thus, because of these characteristics, He did not need to offer up sacrifices for Himself and then for the people, but He offered one Sacrifice for all. Once.

Christ	Levitical Priests
Appointed by an oath	Appointed by the law
Incarnate Son of God	Man

Perfected	With Weakness
Forever	Temporary

- Chapter 8: Superior Covenant

- 1

- Now St Paul is going to start this conclusion which will go from Chapter 8 to Chapter 10. He started with Christ being superior to angels and prophets, then superior to Moses, then Christ as High Priest and His Priesthood being superior to that of the Levitical Priesthood - now we get to the climax.

- 2-5 - A Superior Tabernacle

- Being a superior High Priest, the Altar or Sanctuary or Tabernacle that He Ministers is a Superior Tabernacle. It is not a tabernacle made by hands like Moses' Tabernacle of Meeting or Solomon's Temple, but it is a Heavenly Tabernacle
 - The word "Minister" here in Greek is Leitourgous - this is a Liturgical Priesthood
 - The tabernacle on earth was a copy and shadow of the heavenly tabernacle. It was a shadow of what was to come. God, on the Mountain, showed Moses what he was to build and told him "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."
 - Christ is not a Priest on Earth, since He is not from the Tribe of Levi or the line of Aaron, but He is from the tribe of Judah. So He must be a priest elsewhere.... if not on earth, then in heaven!

- 6-13 A Superior Covenant

- Not only does He Minister in a Superior Tabernacle, but He Ministers to a Better Covenant
 - In the old days, there was a ritual for establishing a covenant:
 - They would take an animal and cut it in half and place the halves down leaving a line of blood between them. Then, they would walk hand in hand down the middle signifying that if one of them broke the covenant, the punishment is shedding of blood - death.

We see this in Genesis 15 when God makes a covenant with Abram:

 - "So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away."
 - But God gives this covenant a twist:

"Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces."

 - If Abram broke the covenant, who would die? The person who walked down the path. And who walked down the path? Abram didn't walk... so it's God. And this is what happened - when the descendants of Abraham

broke the covenant, who died? God died. The Lord Jesus Christ, after His Incarnation, was crucified and shed His Blood.

- So our relationship with God is a covenant relationship
- When we break the covenant, who mediates between the sinner that broke the covenant, and God? The priest. When someone sinned, they went to the priest who would offer the sacrifices and do the rituals and mediate.
- But Christ, who serves in a Superior Sanctuary, is the Mediator of a better covenant
- What is the Old Covenant?
 - God established the covenant with Adam based on a promise: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15)
 - God renewed the covenant with Noah with a sign: “I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth... The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” (Genesis 9:13)
 - God renewed the covenant with Abraham with a sign in the flesh: “This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.” (Genesis 17:10-11)
 - God renewed His covenant with Moses with the blood of animals: “And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words.’” (Exodus 24:8)
 - So the covenant was established by a promise, then a sign in nature, then a sign in the flesh, then the blood of animals. And the new covenant, by the precious blood of the Son of God.
- A Superior Covenant
 - The old covenant was based on the righteousness of the law. You needed to keep the entire law, not break any of its commandments. If you follow the entire law without violating any of its precepts, then you are righteous and can enter into the covenant with God.
 - The starting point is as a sinner... and to become righteous, you must fulfill the whole Law.
 - No one was able to keep all the commandments of the law
 - The new covenant is based on accepting the Lord Jesus Christ, turning our lives towards Him, being baptized into a new nature in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The starting point is righteousness and you maintain it by refraining from sin and increasing in virtue! And if you sin again, go to Christ – confess and repent, receive the Eucharist.
 - “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16)

- Was the covenant, in itself, faulty?
 - No! It was faulty because of our weakness - because we couldn't keep the commandment of God
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