



HEBREWS

Jesus is **GREATER THAN...SO STAND FIRM**

INTRODUCTION

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

The following lesson is designed to help class participants develop a rudimentary knowledge of the background and purpose for the book of Hebrews. This is important, as it will set a foundation for all of our studies to come. Please realize that many volumes on Hebrews have been written over the centuries. There is no way that we will be able to adequately nor comprehensively provide all introductory material available. However, it is our intent to provide a cursory overview that will help class participants understand the reason for the overarching theme of "**Jesus is GREATER THAN so STAND FIRM**" found throughout the book.

Some might ask, "Why a study on the book of Hebrews and what could it possibly have to do with my daily life?" God's Word provides lessons throughout so that we can understand His overall plan of redemption and salvation. This book offers us great insight into how Christ is greater than any angel, priest, or old covenant institution and therefore Christians should hold on by faith to the salvation found only in Jesus Christ. There is one certainty that the book of Hebrews teaches us all: **THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST.**

Hebrews is a theologically deep book that helps its readers understand how the promises of God and His intention to save His children have been fulfilled in and through His Son, our **ANCHOR**, Jesus Christ. Hebrews demonstrates that the unseen is more real, powerful, and attractive than all that has been seen or touched through millennia. Hebrews portrays Jesus, both human and divine, as the great high priest who calls His followers to become deeply devoted disciples with uncompromising commitment, resolute perseverance, and a willingness to suffer for their faith. However, Hebrews is often seen as difficult to read and understand and therefore causes some to simply give it a passing glance. This is unfortunate as it provides its readers with a deep understanding of God's love and plan of redemption from the beginning. It demonstrates that nothing that has happened has happened out of happenstance. God has known from before time began how He would save His children from themselves and restore them to His presence.

As always, we would encourage you to begin preparing for each lesson by digging into the Word and specifically the text for each of the weeks. As you move through the Word, jot down any thoughts that come to you and particular passages that stand out and speak to you. We assure you that these will come into play as you facilitate this discussion. It is then that you should approach this lesson plan and use it (and others) only as a guide for the weeks to come. Your group is different than all the rest and so your lessons should be adapted accordingly.

PRAYER

Begin your time with a prayer asking God for the guidance of His Holy Spirit as you and your class seek to encounter Him through His Holy Word.

FOCUS

- Presentation of introduction material for the book of Hebrews.
- Develop an interest in studying Hebrews.
- Recognize that **JESUS IS GREATER THAN** and so we should stand firm in our faith.

LESSON

Discussion Starters (OPTIONAL)

- Have any of you ever done an in-depth study of Hebrews? If so, what do you remember learning from the study (biggest takeaway)?
- What are some of the most well known passages in Hebrews and why?
- Hebrews connects us more to the Old Testament and its purpose than any other NT book. It demonstrates how Christ is the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption and is therefore superior to all the angels, priests, law, sacrifices, etc.

Introductory Material

- AUTHOR & TITLE
 - The author of Hebrews does not provide his name or whom he is writing to. The traditional title "to the Hebrews" simply reflects the long held assumption that the original audience was Jewish Christians.
 - Many hypotheses as to identity of the author have been made throughout church history.
 - Very early on, authorship was attributed to individuals such as Barnabas or particularly Paul. Yet, even early church fathers recognized that the writing style of the author was significantly different than that of Paul.
 - Other suggestions of authorship have included Clement, Luke, or Apollos. Some have suggested that it was simply an associate of Paul and have even gone as far to say that the author was Priscilla and the name was left off because of her gender in order that the letter may be more widely circulated and respected.

- However, most today concede that this author remains anonymous. It seems that the judgment expressed by Origen (d. c. a.d. 254) remains correct: *"Who actually wrote the epistle, only God knows"* (cited in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 6.25.14).
- What we know about the author:
 - The author clearly knew his recipients and longed to be reunited with them (13:19).
 - Both the author and the audience had a mutual friend in Timothy (13:23). This was more than likely the same Timothy who ministered alongside Paul.
 - It is more widely presumed that the author was male, since he refers to himself using a masculine participle (see 11:32: "would fail me to tell"). The "us" in 2:3 indicates that the author was included and he was not an eyewitness of Jesus.
 - The author passed on the greetings of those "from Italy" (13:24). Scholars debate whether he was in Italy writing to the church elsewhere or was outside Italy (though accompanied by Italians) and writing back to an audience in Italy (possibly at Rome).
- What we know about the audience:
 - Under Persecution
 - What we know about the audience's social situation is inferred from commands to "remember those who are in prison" and who are "mistreated" (13:3).
 - It appears that Timothy himself had just been set free (13:23).
 - The author commends his audience for their endurance of persecution, for their compassion on those in prison, and for having "joyfully accepted the plundering of your property" (10:32–34).
 - Jewish Christians
 - The audience is warned about "strange teachings" in the church (13:9). It is possible that these teachings may have been related to the use of ritual foods (13:9–10).
 - The author calls the audience to stand firm in the faith and to not give up on Christian communion. He seeks to demonstrate the superiority of Christ in relation to Mosaic rituals and sacrifices (chs. 3–10).
 - Knowing this, it seems probable that Jewish Christians (as well as Gentiles who had previously been drawn to the Jewish religion) were the intended audience for this book (see "our fathers," 1:1).
 - This is further substantiated in that the audience had to have understood the many citations and allusions to the OT.

- DATE

- It is commonly agreed that Hebrews was written in the first century before a.d. 70.
 - Reasons include:
 - The mention of Timothy (13:23), who was known to be active in the first century
 - The influence of Hebrews (and its way of thinking) on *1 Clement* (written c. a.d. 96).
 - An important issue in dating Hebrews concerns whether the Jerusalem temple destruction (a.d. 70) had occurred.
 - The letter addresses the Jewish sacrificial system as if it were a still-present reality (Heb. 7:27–28; 8:3–5; 9:7–8, 25; 10:1–3; 13:10–11)
 - This casts doubt that it was written after the cessation of the Jerusalem temple sacrifices in a.d. 70.
 - The fact that the letter does not mention the destruction of the Jerusalem temple is also another indication that the letter was written before it happened. As the author is trying to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus over the Mosaic law, the destruction of the temple would have been a hot topic to mention.

- THEME

- JESUS IS GREATER THAN angels, priests, temple, or Mosaic laws/rituals/sacrifices. This is the reason to persevere in the faith rather than leave such a great salvation. The church should be encouraged to carry on in Christ and with each other and hold on to the redemption and rest found only in Jesus Christ.

- PURPOSE, OCCASION, BACKGROUND

- The unusual structure of Hebrews indicates that it is perhaps best understood as a “sermon letter.” It does not have a typical greeting/introduction yet the final verses share greetings and blessings (13:23–25). The author indicates having written the audience earlier (13:22) but also identifies the letter as a “word of exhortation” (13:22). The careful rhetorical flavor of the letter and its practical exhortations has led many to believe it is more of a sermon.
- Hebrews frequently encourages the audience to persevere and cautions against falling away from Christ (2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–39; 12:1–29). These passages encourage disciples of Christ to remain faithful.

- The emphasis on the supremacy of Christ and His new covenant over angels, priests, Moses, the temple, and sacrificial system shows the readers that it is futile to return to them (or to go anywhere else). The audience is encouraged to remain in the faith because that faith is grounded in the most superior revelation.
- The teaching of salvation found in Hebrews is rooted in Christ—the Son of God who became the once-and-for-all high priest AND sacrifice. Christ is the author and perfecter of faith (12:2) and has obtained salvation for all who are faithful (6:1; 11:6; cf. 4:2) to the end, when the faithful shall receive their reward (6:12; 10:22, 38–39).

Key Themes in Hebrews (Taken from the ESV Study Bible)

1. Jesus is fully God and fully man.	1:1–14; 2:5–18
2. Jesus as Son of God reveals God the Father, is the agent of creation, and sustains all creation.	1:1–14
3. Jesus serves as the eternal high priest, who as a man sympathizes with human weaknesses, and yet who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin.	1:3; 2:10–18; 4:15–16; 9:11–10:19
4. Jesus is superior to angels, to Moses and the Mosaic covenant, and to the earthly tabernacle and its priesthood.	1:4–2:18; 3:1–6; 5:1–10; 7:1–10:18
5. All humanity faces eternal judgment for sin.	4:12–13; 9:27–28; 10:26–31
6. Faith is necessary to please God and to participate in his eternal salvation promises. Faith requires conviction about the unseen realities of God and his promises. Such faith produces perseverance.	4:2–3; 6:1, 12; 10:22, 38–39; 11:1–40
7. Perseverance is necessary in the Christian life, and thus church participants are warned against a lack of endurance.	2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–39; 12:1–29
8. God's promises are trustworthy, including his promise of eternal salvation.	6:13–20
9. With the advent of Jesus Christ, the last days have begun, though they await consummation at his return.	1:2; 2:5; 4:9–11; 9:9–28; 12:22–29

LESSON OUTLINE – Here are the lessons we will be studying the weeks to come.

- INTRODUCTION (January 5)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...Angelic Beings–Chapter 1 (January 12)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...Angelic Beings–Chapter 1 (January 19)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...But Still Human–Chapter 2 (January 26)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...Moses–Chapter 3 (February 2)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...The High Priest–Chapter 4 (February 9)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...The High Priest–Chapter 5 (February 16)
- THEREFORE, Don't Fall Away–Chapter 6 (February 23)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...Melchizedek–Chapter 7 (March 2)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...The Law–Chapter 8 (March 9)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...The Tabernacle –Chapter 9 (March 16)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...Sacrifices–Chapter 10 (March 23)
- THEREFORE, Have Faith–Chapter 11 (March 30)
- THEREFORE, Stand Firm–Chapter 12 (April 6)
- THEREFORE, Offer Acceptable Sacrifices–Chapter 13 (April 13)
- CONCLUSION (April 27)

REFLECTION

- What makes you most nervous about this study? The most excited?
- Considering the theme of this book, do you consider JESUS GREATER THAN anything and everything in your life? What sorts of things do we make GREATER THAN JESUS?
- After considering how Hebrews uses the OT and the issues it addresses, what are your thoughts on its contemporary significance? Does it have merit today? How?

PRAYER
