

HEBREWS
HIS HOPE:
THE ANCHOR FOR
OUR SOULS

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A Personal Note from Sarah

I hope that it is with great joy that you embark upon one of the most rewarding journeys through one of the most incredible books in God's Word. Though I don't have a favorite, the book of Hebrews would come close. On every page it magnifies Christ and Christ alone. It brings you to your knees in adoration and worship of our most magnificent Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It also shows Christ at the center of the Old Testament and how through every OT sacrifice, it was a type of the greatest sacrifice to come in Christ's sacrificial offering on the cross. You cannot help but see the OT come alive before your very eyes as you study the book of Hebrews. So, it is with great excitement that I have written this study for women to know Christ and to magnify him as the One to whom all Scripture points.

My love for teaching the Word of God was inspired by my own hunger to study it. Longing for the "meat" of God's Word and finding it lacking in so many churches today, I enrolled in Bible Study Fellowship after graduating from high school. It was there that my desire to attend seminary became known, and I was influenced and encouraged by a strong godly woman and mentor in my life to attend Dallas Theological Seminary. During this time I was leading women through in-depth Bible studies and caught a glimpse of how much women desired to be fed the depth of God's Word. This encouraged me even further to receive an education that would best prepare me to deliver God's Word to women that hungered for the truth. Upon graduating with my Master of Theology, I took a position as Assistant Director of Women's Ministry at a large church where I served under a woman who shared my same passion to teach the "meat" of God's Word. Within the year, I had assumed the role of Director and delved into teaching the Word of God in an expository and applicable manner. After three years I resigned in order to stay home with my first child, Caleb Joshua. During these years at home the Lord used my experience in seminary and ministry to lead me back to my roots and the full embracing of the Reformed faith. Raised for the first half of my childhood in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, I had been grounded in the Reformed faith and Reformed catechism. But from middle school on I was not in fully Reformed churches. The questions in my twenties then became "Who am I?" and "What do I really believe?" I knew that I was not comfortable embracing any theological system except Reformed, so I returned to my roots. One of the first steps on my journey was to contact a Reformed seminary, asking them to give me a book list of everything I would have missed by not attending a Reformed seminary. They willingly agreed and that began my journey of reading some of the most renowned Reformed theologians in the world. It was during these days that the question, "Who am I?" was finally answered and I began teaching women from the historic Reformed and Covenantal tradition. In fact, that is how this Bible study came to be published. I had the incredible privilege of teaching it to a wonderful group of women in a morning Bible Study at our PCA church. It was from their encouragement and exhortation that I submitted this study for publication.

I offer you the following suggestions as you prepare to teach. It is my practice that before I ever begin to study a book of the Bible I sit down to read it several times as if I was reading a letter from a personal friend for the first time. I get a feel for the "big picture" of the book and how it fits into the

rest of the books of Scripture. Then with my pen, paper, and Bible I divide the book into my own divisions. I love alliteration so I always use this in my divisions to aid in memory.

Then, I try to grasp what the divisions are saying in a nutshell and write that down. From that point, I move to writing application questions appropriate for each division. This gives me "ownership" of the passage. Before going to read what anyone else has to say, I have studied it by myself and allowed the Holy Spirit to speak to my own heart about it. This adds "uniqueness" to my teaching. I don't want to regurgitate what someone else has said. Following this though, it is important to then study what others have learned from the book. So, I try to have two to three good, solid Reformed commentaries for the book I am studying as well as other study tools such as a Bible dictionary, concordance, and an OT or NT theology. One of my favorite tools for this study was *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* edited by Beale and Carson. As I study the commentaries chapter by chapter, I highlight what I feel is important for the women to know in this study, reorganizing and restating it to fit the purpose and format of the study. When this is done, I write it down and then move to making application from it.

The final step is writing the questions for the women to answer. I always have them read and work on the questions for the passage that I will be teaching the following week—they can "own" it for themselves before they ever hear me teach. That is how the questions are setup in the student's guide.

I want to encourage you as you embark upon this journey to do so with excitement and great joy and yet with seriousness as well. As Hebrews says, "the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12). It is an incredible privilege to be able to stand before a group of women to teach the Word of God. May we always do so humbly, pointing them to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as we teach for the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

HOW TO GO ABOUT THIS STUDY

At the beginning of every lesson we will identify the aim of the lesson concerning our:

Mind (What do we need to know from this passage in Scripture?),

Heart (How does what I learn from this passage affect my internal relationship with the Lord?)

Hands (How does what I learn from this passage translate into action for God's Kingdom?).

We also want to ask ourselves some questions as we study in order to have a covenantal perspective on Scripture:

- What do I learn about God in this passage?
- What do I learn about His Son, Jesus Christ?
- What do I learn about God's covenant with His people?
- How does this passage reveal God's covenantal story of redemption and restoration?
- How will I apply this information to my life today and in the future?

INTRODUCTION

It was a dark night in May and I was at the end of my rope. For months I had endured physical suffering in every part of my body you can imagine. From my head to my toes, not one thing had gone untouched. It began in January with an emergency trip to the hospital by ambulance that almost ended in my death. My role as a wife and a mother was wearing on me. My role as a daughter, a friend and every other hat I was wearing was depleting me. I was tired and I wanted rest. My new fitness equipment I had bought in order to stop walking the streets in the dark of the night had broken unexpectedly, leaving me even more frustrated and disappointed. So, after I got the children in bed, I put my running shoes on and took off to run my neighborhood. I still feel the cool, spring night air on my face and my legs. I started slowly, but gaining momentum with each step, it wasn't long before I was in a full-blown run. It felt so good to be running the opposite direction of my house, my family, my stress, and my pain. In fact, it felt so good that I ran two neighborhoods that night and again the next night. But that second night, about three-quarters of the way through my run, I came down on one of my feet the wrong way and felt an excruciating pain. I couldn't take another step. Both of my ankles, knees and every bone in my feet felt bruised and strained. I had run too hard and too fast. So for the next several weeks I was out of commission. I have never felt so much pain in my feet, ankles and knees in my life. I could barely walk. I couldn't exercise my lower body at all. But in the pain God softly spoke to my heart. "I know you are tired, Sarah. I know you want to come home. But I am not through with you yet. And until I am, you need to find your rest in Me and in Me alone. I will carry you, I will sustain you, I will be everything that you need. But don't run away from the place that I have you. Remain faithful to Me. I will remain faithful to you."

If there is one thing the author of Hebrews wanted to convey to his audience, it was to remain faithful to their faith in Jesus Christ. To not settle for the things that were less superior to Christ, to believe in the sufficiency of His work and to have faith in Him for salvation. In other words, be faithful to Christ and Christ alone. They already had the One who would give them true rest. Why would they look for it in something or someone else? Why do we? We grow tired, impatient, weary, and get weak. We are enticed and lured into sin and we give into those things that satisfy momentarily, but which wreak havoc in our souls. We are left disillusioned, disappointed, guilty, ashamed and even more weary, weak, and impatient than when we began.

I have divided today's overview of Hebrews into several sections. We'll begin with the author and then move to the recipients, destination, date, canonization, how the OT is used in Hebrews, content, and finally, theology.

AUTHOR

The author of Hebrews, though unknown to man, is of course, known and appointed by God, as well as discovered and accepted by His Church. But that has not kept many a scholar from putting forth arguments on who the author might have been. Early in church history Paul was certainly the winning candidate, although that idea has now been widely accepted as wrong. One of the major reasons for this is from the book itself in Heb 2:3 where the author and his readers are said to have received the gospel from those who heard it. Obviously, Paul had not heard it firsthand. Other suggested authors include Clement of Rome, Luke, Barnabas, Peter, Jude, Stephen and another six names that have no known writing in existence. Among these are Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos. One thing is certain, the author was an incredibly gifted writer who was very familiar with the Old Testament and wrote as a loving shepherd to his flock (sheep). This was most likely a book written by a pastor away from his congregation for a period of time. He knew their situation and this letter exhorts them to remain faithful to Christ.

RECIPIENTS

The recipients of Hebrews were most likely a group of experienced Christians, having both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds.

DESTINATION

The destination of the letter is most likely seen in Heb. 13:24. "Those who come from Italy send you greetings." Rome is the most likely city due to the importance of the church there.

DATE

The date of the letter, though not certain to us, is certain and ordained by God. It was most likely written before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The author made no mention of either the destruction of the temple or to the cessation of sacrifices, which is most unusual if the fall had already occurred.

CANONIZATION

The placement of Hebrews in the NT was controversial from a human perspective, but sovereignly ordained by God from a divine perspective. God used the belief by the early church fathers that Paul was the author to preserve its placement in the canon. One of the major reasons for the controversy of its placement in Scripture was over the interpretation of the warning passages concerning apostasy. Many were uncomfortable with some people's interpretation of "falling away" from the faith being permanent. This was due to the Catholic Church's desire to readmit Christians to communion that had renounced their faith under persecution, but had later repented.

THE USE OF THE OT IN HEBREWS

I am indebted to George Guthrie for his breakdown of the OT use in Hebrews in his book, *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament*. There are:

- 19 quotations and 15 allusions from Psalms
- 9 quotations from the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible)
 - 3 from Genesis
 - 2 from Exodus
 - 4 from Deuteronomy
- 15 allusions from the Pentateuch
 - 8 from Genesis
 - 1 from Exodus
 - 2 from Leviticus
 - 2 from Numbers
 - 2 from Deuteronomy
- 5 quotations from the major prophets
 - 3 from Isaiah
 - 2 from Jeremiah
- 2 quotations from the minor prophets
 - 1 from Habakkuk
 - 1 from Haggai
- 1 quote from Proverbs and 2 Samuel
- 1 allusion from Joshua, Proverbs and Job

It is clear that the author of Hebrews believed Christ had been active since creation and thus, felt free to see Christ in any part of the OT.

CONTENT

As for the content, I have divided the book into 3 major divisions:

- I. Superior Savior (Heb. 1-10:18) [Doctrinal]**
- II. Superior Saints (Heb. 10:19-11:40) [Historical]**
- III. Superior Servanthood (Heb. 12-13) [Practical]**

THEOLOGY

As we study the theology of the book of Hebrews, and study it with a covenantal perspective, we need to seek to understand

1. what the book is teaching us about God.
3. what the book is teaching us about His Son, Jesus Christ.
4. about God's covenant with His people.
5. how the book helps to further reveal God's covenantal story of redemption and restoration.
6. how the Holy Spirit would have us apply what we have learned to our own lives.

Remember to read the text as a whole and to subject it to other teachings of Scripture. This will become especially important in the warning sections that often make people question the doctrine of eternal security. This doctrine states that true believers cannot lose their salvation.

Hebrews is probably best known for its Christology (the study of how the human and divine natures co-exist in Jesus Christ) and soteriology (the study of the saving work of Christ).

Hebrews emphasizes not only Christ's divinity, but also His humanity. He was not 50% divine and 50% human. He was 100% divine and 100% human at the same time.

We will also see Jesus as greater than Adam, Moses, Joshua and David. We see Him as a Melchizedekian priest, as the Son of God and High Priest, Savior, Redeemer, and one who makes propitiation for sin. Propitiation simply means that Christ reconciled God the Father with His people by pacifying God's wrath when He died on the cross. We see Him as the one who forgives sins, the one who sanctifies, the one who was resurrected and the one who is coming again to judge the living and the dead.

One of the best ways to see the significance of the letter is to look at passages from the text that clearly summarize the author's purpose. As I read through Hebrews, my favorite passage is the one that I believe is key to the point of Hebrews is 6:17-20. The name of this study comes from this passage, Hebrews — His Hope: The Anchor for Our Souls.

Heb. 1:2a, 3c, 4; 2:1, 3a, 17; 3:1b, 3a, 6, 12-14; 4:1, 9-12, 14-16; 5:7-14; 6:1, 4-6, 9, 11-13, 17-20; 7:11, 18, 22, 25; 8:1-2, 6; 9:11-12, 14-15a, 23, 26b, 28; 10:14, 19-27, 29-30, 34-36, 39; 11:1, 16, 39-40; 12:1-3, 9, 12-13, 25, 28; 13:8-9, 12-14.

CONCLUSION

The night I went running I was trying to escape from months of physical pain, the demands of raising children, the demands of being a wife, and the stress of changing circumstances. I needed to cling to the unchangeable character of God and His purpose. I needed to flee for refuge to His unchanging arms. I needed to hold fast the hope that Christ gives me. I needed to remember during the dark, frightful, stormy waters, which were beating down upon me, that I had an anchor for my soul. And that anchor wouldn't let me run away that night. Instead, He whispered in the stillness of the night air, "The storm is raging Sarah, but I am with you. The waters are rough, but I give you my peace. The wind is beating against you, but I am your anchor. Now rest in Me."

The following are the works that I used the most:

Beale, G. K., and D. A. Carson, eds. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Ellingworth, Paul, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993.

Phillips, Richard D., *Hebrews* (Reformed Expository Commentary). Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2006.

Other helpful works:

Brown, Raymond. *The Message to the Hebrews*. (The Bible Speaks Today Series). Downers Grove: IVP, 1984.

Bruce, F.F., *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New International Commentary on the NT Series). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964.

Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (Preaching the Word Series), 2 volumes. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993.

Guthrie, Donald. *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries). Downers Grove: IVP, 2009.

O'Brien, Peter T. *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Pillar New Testament Commentaries). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010.

Questions for Next Lesson

HEBREWS 1:1-4

SEE GENERAL STUDY GUIDE ON THE INSIDE BOOK COVER.

Don't rush through this. It is critical to cement the verses in your heart and mind. It will also pay rich dividends when you're trying to interpret and apply the text later.

INTERPRETATION

1. Based on your observations of the text, what is the basic content of this passage?
Try to summarize it in your own words, using a sentence or two.
2. In the context of Heb. 1:1-4, why is it significant that God the Father is the subject of v.1-2?

3. Let's look at the first time God spoke to mankind in recorded Scripture. Read Gen. 2:16-3:21. Note in pertinent verses who spoke with whom and what was said. How were words used to convey truth and/or falsehood? How was God's Word misrepresented?
4. Read John 1:1-5. Compare these verses with Heb. 1:1-4.
5. What is the comparison in Heb. 1:1-2? How is this significant in the greater context of the chapter and the book as a whole?
6. How many attributes of Christ are seen in Heb. 1:2-3? Is this a significant number in other places of Scripture? If you have a concordance, look up the number "seven" and see where and when it is used elsewhere.
7. Read Psalm 2:8. Is this quoted or alluded to in v.2?
8. Look up the word "created" in a concordance. Who made the world? How?
9. In the context of Heb. 1:1-4, why is it significant that there's a subject change in v.3?
10. Read Psalm 110:1. Is this quoted or simply alluded to in v.4?
Look up the following words from this passage in a concordance and/or Bible dictionary: last days, Son, angels, name.
What do you learn about each from other passages of Scripture and/or the Bible dictionary?
11. Using a concordance, commentary, lexicon, or Bible dictionary, do a word study on radiance (1:3) and better (1:4).

APPLICATION

12. Whose voice has the greatest influence in your life that is good or bad? What are you doing with that voice? How is that voice impacting your actions towards or away from God? Make a plan—right now—to change. What will you do THIS WEEK to change who you are listening to?
13. How are you letting Christ be your Priest? What sins continue to bombard you for which you need to acknowledge He has made purification? How are you going to acknowledge these today and receive God's forgiveness? Again, you need a plan for change. We can only change when we become sensitive to the voice of God's Holy Spirit. Throughout this week, keep track of every time you realize you are being tempted to sin. Then, make a conscious choice to not sin, pray that the Holy Spirit will fill you as He promised in Eph. 5:18, and then walk God's path with Him.