

Hebrews Bible Study

Lesson 2 Notes / Overview of Hebrews 3:1-10:18

Jesus is Superior to the Mosaic Law

Introduction:

As we continue with our review today, we find the author of Hebrews still teaching deep truths regarding the person of Jesus Christ, specifically transitioning into a large section heavily focused on proving Jesus' superiority to the Mosaic law. As we reviewed last week, chapters 1 and 2 were largely focused on showing how Jesus is superior to the prophets and angels. Now in chapter 3, the author's focus moves away from the prophets and angels, and onto a comparison of Jesus to Moses. Ultimately, by using these types of comparisons, and showing how Christ is better than all His rivals, the author will establish a strong line of reasoning that will flow throughout the book. Indeed, Jesus is infinitely better than any angel, prophet, priest, or old covenant institution. Therefore every reader should hold fast in their confession knowing that the hope they have in Christ is certain.

Greater than Moses (3:1-6)

In chapter 3 the author begins with the word "therefore" signaling to his audience that they need to keep in mind truths he had just taught. The truths referenced surely include all of chapters 1 and 2, but more specifically seem to point to the high priesthood of Jesus mentioned for the first time in 2:17. In 3:1 he says, **"Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him just as Moses was also faithful in all God's house."** Most commentators agree, this verse summarizes well the main exhortation that flows through all of Hebrews: believers are to learn to *constantly* fix their gaze on Jesus. They are to make the primary focus of their life knowing Christ more.

Following this, the author goes on to compare Jesus to Moses. This was an important comparison considering that for a Jew living in the 1st century no person in their history was more highly esteemed than Moses. As a prophet, Moses had been the man who had lead Israel out of Egypt, the one through whom the Mosaic covenant had come, and the one whom God had spoken face to face. He was truly God's man and the author acknowledges this by commending Moses for his faithfulness. In terms of specific ways in which the author highlights how Christ is superior to Moses, the characteristics below are mentioned:

Moses	Jesus
Faithful in God's house	Perfectly faithful in God's house
Worthy of glory	Worthy of far more glory

Fulfilled role of OT apostle, but Aaron fulfilled role of high priest	Perfectly fulfilled office of apostle and high priest at the same time
Appointed by God	Appointed by God yet was God
Servant within the house	Son within the house
Part of the house	Builder of the house
Testified of things that would come	Fulfilled what Moses had testified of

Note: God's house refers to the people of God

Warning: Take note of the failures of the exodus generation. Enter God's rest while you can (3:7-4:13)

Following the comparison of Jesus to Moses, the author pauses to give a lengthy warning about the danger of unbelief. He clearly wants his readers to understand the nature of saving faith, specifically the persevering quality of that faith. His grave concern is reflected in 3:12 when he says, **"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God."** Ultimately, the author is wanting his readers to be sure to lay hold of the true rest found only in Christ. By using the example of the Exodus generation, He shows his readers that it is possible to hear the good news of salvation and to witness the power of God, yet still miss out on salvation.

A question that often arises when studying this passage is, "What is meant by the term rest?" MacArthur speaking of this says, "It means no more self-effort as far as salvation is concerned. It means the end of trying to please God by our feeble, fleshly works. It also means freedom from whatever worries or disturbs you...it does not mean freedom from all nuisances and hassles; it means freedom from being so easily bothered by them. *To enter God's rest is to be at peace with God, and to possess the perfect peace he gives.*"

The rest that is given the believer is also said to be sure because it is based in the finished work of Christ. In 4:3 it even speaks of Christ's atoning work as being **"finished from the foundation of the world."** By stating this, the believer is assured of the absolute sufficiency of the Lord's sacrifice. "God has done it all, and for anyone who wants to enter into His finished work and to share His rest, it is available by faith." (MacArthur)

Jesus our Great High Priest (4:14-5:10)

Moving on from the warning given in the previous verses, the author now begins to encourage his readers about how they can have confidence to draw near to God. He says in 4:14-16, **"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we**

are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." For the original Jewish audience, the truths being taught about Jesus here were highly significant. Was the author indeed saying they were free, even obligated, to leave all their previous ways of approaching God behind—specifically the Mosaic law? The author is answering this question with a resounding yes, and he does this by showing them how the old covenant was pointing to Christ all along. In these specific verses he does this by comparing the Great High Priesthood of Jesus to the Aaronic high priesthood.

Other high priests	Jesus the Great High Priest
Appointed by God	Appointed by God
Mediator between man and God	Mediator between man and God
Just a man	Fully man but also God
Had to offer sacrifices for himself as well as the people	Offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the people
Sinful	Sinless
Tempted	Tempted in all ways
Capable of being merciful and sympathetic, but often was not	Always merciful and sympathetic
Entered the holy of holies briefly once a year	Passed through the heavens to the actual presence of God and sat down
Of the temporary order of Aaron	Of the eternal order of Melchizedek
Made temporary, symbolic atonement for the people	Made permanent, actual atonement for the people

Warning: Beware of apostasy (5:11-6:12)

Continuing on in chapter 5, the author pauses to give another warning: He expresses his concern that his readers are not maturing in their faith, have become **"dull of hearing,"** and that some are in danger of falling away. It is important to say here that the author's intent in this section is not to terrify those who are truly in Christ, but rather to remind each person listening that the true believer is someone who bears good fruit in the Christian life, and perseveres. He simply does not want any of his readers to be deceived.

Many who have sought to interpret verses in this difficult section, have used the text to try and prove that it is possible for believers to lose their salvation. The MacArthur study Bible addresses this when it says,

“By far the most serious interpretive challenge is found in 6:4-6. The phrase **“once enlightened”** is often taken to refer to Christians, and the accompanying warning taken to indicate the danger of losing their salvation if **“they fall away”** and **“crucify again for themselves the Son of God.”** But there is no mention of their being saved, and they are not described with any terms that apply only to believers (such as holy, born again, righteous, or saints). This problem arises from inaccurately identifying the spiritual condition of the ones being addressed. In this case, they were unbelievers who had been exposed to God’s redemptive truth, and perhaps made a profession of faith, but had not exercised genuine saving faith.”

The certainty of God’s promise- how the Abrahamic covenant ensures our hope (6:13-20)

Picking up his argument, that Jesus is superior to all His rivals, the author now deems it necessary to discuss the Abrahamic covenant. His goal is to help his readers know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the hope Christ gives is certain, because it is based in the divine oath and Jesus’s finished work. He says in 6:13, **“For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, He swore by Himself, saying , ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you.’”**

The incident being referenced here is found in Genesis 22, where Abraham obeyed God’s command to offer his only son Isaac as a burnt offering. In the context of Genesis 22, we see that God provided a ram as a substitute, then took an oath with Abraham, which was sovereignly designed, not just for Abraham, but for the **“heirs of promise.”** So, what was the nature of the oath, or more specifically what was it guaranteeing? In short, God was guaranteeing that the promises made to Abraham could never fail or be altered. They were defined as follows,

“Under the terms of this covenant Abraham was promised certain regal rights and privileges, involving: first, an innumerable progeny through natural generation (Gen. 12:2,13:16;15:3-5); second, a guarantee of historical continuity by means of divine protection (Gen. 12:3); third, an everlasting and irrevocable title to a definitive land area on earth (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:18; 17:7-8); and, fourth, a final world supremacy though which “great” divine blessings would flow to mankind (Gen. 12:2-3).

This Abrahamic covenant was unconditional in character. That is, the promises originated wholly in God and were not conditioned upon the part of Abraham but were received by him simply by faith. The inspired record states that Abraham **‘believed in the Lord’** and the Lord **‘counted it to him for righteousness’** (Gen.15:6). This does not mean that every individual descended from Abraham will personally share in all the blessings promised under the covenant, apart from moral and spiritual considerations.

But it does mean that the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham is in no sense dependent upon human character or action, but rests upon divine grace and sovereignty, and therefore cannot fail.” (McClain)

Going further the ESV study Bible says of the divine oath,

“The divine oath recorded in these verses (Genesis 22:15-18) should not be overlooked for it brings to a climax a process that started with the conditional promises made by God to Abraham in 12:1-3. The fact that God swears by himself gives to these words a unique authority, assuring Abraham that they will indeed be fulfilled. The oath falls into two parts: whereas the first half focuses on Abraham’s many descendants, the second part concentrates on a single descendent who will overcome his enemies (Gen. 22:17) and mediate blessing to all the nations of the earth (Gen. 22:18). Although the second half of the oath is often taken to refer to all of Abraham’s descendants, Genesis as a whole is interested in tracing a single unique line of offspring that will eventually bring forth a special King who will rule over the Gentiles and the reference to “his enemies” points in this direction. This is why Paul in Gal. 3:16 can insist on one offspring, who is Christ. And this explains why Isaac is clearly set apart from Ishmael as Abraham’s heir. From the perspective of the whole Bible, this oath comes to fulfillment in Jesus Christ”

Melchizedek (7:1-28)

Flowing out of the discussion about Abraham, the author moves on to teach about Melchizedek. For the sake of time, only a few important points will be made regarding this significant Old Testament figure, but as with everything else, last year’s study can be referenced for more detail.

1. Who was Melchizedek?

Melchizedek, whose name means “**king of righteousness**” was a king and priest who served “**God Most High.**” He ruled in Salem (later known as Jerusalem) and lived during the time of Abraham, although his actual genealogy is a complete mystery. In this sense it is said that, he “**resembles the Son of God**” because it as though “**he continues forever.**” Notably, Melchizedek had an encounter with Abraham described in Genesis 14:18-20, during which time the patriarch honored Melchizedek by paying tithes to him, signifying the superior spiritual role Melchizedek was playing in God’s kingdom. Additionally, Melchizedek blessed Abraham by bringing out bread and wine to him and publicly acknowledged God’s role in his successes.

2. Why is Melchizedek significant?

God sovereignly ordained that he would prefigure the person of Jesus Christ in Melchizedek. In this way we would say that he is a type of Christ, most specifically in the sense that his priestly ministry was unending and superior in all ways to the Levitical order. In teaching his readers about Melchizedek, the author is showing that God never intended for perfection to come through the Levitical priesthood. Instead, He had always planned that the Messiah would be of the order of Melchizedek and it would be proven by the power of **“His indestructible life.”**

Jesus- high priest of a better covenant (8:1-13)

In 8:1, the author makes a summary statement about all that he has been teaching about Christ so far when he says, **“Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.”** Herein, lies the crux of what this Jewish audience needed to understand. The Levitical system, particularly the tabernacle with all its ordinances and sacrifices, was designed by God to be a **“copy and shadow of heavenly things.”** Its value was that it served the grander purpose of God, namely the ministry of Jesus Christ.

This ministry of Christ, now expressed in the new covenant, was far better than the old covenant ministry this Jewish audience was so familiar with. As the author says, **“But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is much more excellent than the old, as the covenant He mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.”** It is important to remember that under the old covenant, the promises God made to the nation of Israel were conditional. If they would obey, then God would bless them. It seemed so simple! Yet as history revealed, the nation rebelled against the Lord and failed to keep the old covenant. A remnant was always preserved, but by and large the nation rejected the Lord and the covenant relationship He had offered them. And yet God foresaw these failures and had sovereignly planned all along to provide something better. Through Christ, believers would be given a new unconditional covenant that could never fail, because God Himself would ensure its success.

The tabernacle- a detailed portrait of Jesus (9:1-10)

Continuing in chapter 9, significant truths regarding the plan and purpose of the old covenant continue to be discussed and contrasted with new covenant realities. At the end of chapter 8 the author had made clear that old covenant practices were **“growing old and ready to pass away,”** and yet the author still wants to highlight something very important- the old covenant tabernacle. In 9:1 he says, **“Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.”** Here he begins to emphasize how the tabernacle operated in

the early part of Israel's history. In reminding his readers of these details, he intends to show that the tabernacle indeed had purpose but was wholly inadequate to **"perfect the conscience of the worshipper."** Nevertheless, by highlighting the design and operations of the tabernacle, the author shows that Christ was the one it was pointing to all along.

So, how did the tabernacle point to Jesus Christ? While there are many ways, the following aspects are highly significant:

The Tabernacle- as whole represents Christ, the believer's access to God and the only basis of fellowship with God

The Outer Court

The Courtyard and Entry – Jesus the door, the one way to God

The Bronze Altar- Jesus the perfect sacrifice for sin

The Laver or Basin- Jesus the cleanser of His people

The Holy place

The Golden Lampstand –Jesus lights out path

The Table of Showbread- Jesus feeds us

The Altar of Incense- Jesus our intercessor

The Most Holy Place

The Veil- represents the barrier that separates man from God. In Christ the veil is removed and we are now able to approach God's throne of grace boldly

The Ark of the Covenant- Jesus is our true mercy seat- the one who brings us into the glorious presence of God

The Offerings

Burnt offering- represents Christ's offering of Himself as the perfect sacrifice

Grain offering- represents Christ offering of Himself as the perfect sacrifice of the highest quality

Fellowship offering- represents Christ's offering of Himself as the basis for fellowship with God

Sin offering- represents Christ's death for the sinner in the relationship to the guilt of sin

Guilt offering- represents Christ death as an atonement for the injury of sin

Events

Day of Atonement- points to the substitutionary character and sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ

Sabbath- points to the Christian's spiritual rest

Passover- points to the necessity of the sacrifice of Christ

Redemption through Christ's perfect atoning sacrifice (9:11-10:18)

Finally, in 9:11-10:18 the author continues to compare the ministry of the Mosaic tabernacle to the superior ministry of Christ. He says in verse 11, **“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once and for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”** As was stated earlier, the sacrificial system maintained under the tabernacle ministry, was designed by God, from the beginning, to foreshadow the ministry of Christ. As it says in 10:1, the law was but **“a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form in these realities”** for **“it can never by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.”** In other words, the huge inadequacy of the old covenant system was that it had no saving power. It had no power to put away sin for good, purify the conscience of man, or enable the worshipper to draw near to God personally and confidently. And yet when Christ came, everything changed. His single superior sacrifice, made efficacious through His perfect atoning blood, ushered in the new covenant which changed everything. No longer was there any need for the priest to **“stand daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sin.”** This was because **“Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins and sat down at the right hand of God,”** and through that single offering, **“perfected for all time, those who are being sanctified.”**

All these truths, brought to a climax in this last section, prove overwhelmingly that Christ is indeed better than any angel, prophet, priest, or old covenant institution. In fact, it has been shown that all these ministries were set in place by God to highlight the superior ministry of His Son Jesus Christ! That is why the author of Hebrews strongly pleads with his readers to put away their doubt and attachment to the old covenant- to persevere in their relationship with Christ knowing that He is the only one who can save them from the wrath to come, and purify their hearts to genuinely serve the living God.

Basics of Bible Interpretation by Roy B. Zuck

ESV Study Bible

Hebrews: Christ Perfect Sacrifice; Perfect Priest by John Macarthur

Hebrews Commentary John Macarthur

Hebrews Tyndale New Testament Commentaries by Donald Guthrie

Macarthur Study Bible

The Tabernacle by M.R. DeHann MD

The Greatness of the Kingdom by Alva J. McClain

