

## THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

### INTRODUCTION

- A. An outline of Hebrews
  - 1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
  - 2. The superiority of the work of Christ (4:14-10:18)
  - 3. The superiority of faith in Christ (10:19-13:19)
  - 4. Conclusion (13:20-25)
    - a. Benediction (13:20-21)
    - b. Final greetings (13:22-25)
- B. Review of Hebrews 13:1-19
  - 1. It is a passage on application, a how-to manual for the pursuit of spiritual maturity.
  - 2. The writer of Hebrews covers practical areas of loving others, submission to our spiritual leaders with our eyes firmly fixed on our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
  - 3. R. Kent Hughes, . . . *what we think about God has everything to do with our relationship to each other and with the world . . . So the question that our text answers is this: understanding that God is both the consuming fire of Mount Sinai and the consuming love of Mount Zion, how ought we to live—especially in the church?*
- C. Introductory comments on Hebrews 13:20-25
  - 1. William L. Lane, *The request for prayer in vv 18–19 is followed appropriately by engagement in prayer.*
  - 2. Raymond Brown, *The author brings this inspiring letter to a majestic conclusion by praying for those who have listened to his words as they have been read in the Christian congregation.*
  - 3. Donald Hagner, *The letter is rounded out with a magnificent closing prayer in which the author picks up a number of the key motifs in the epistle. The prayer is notable for its beauty and comprehensive scope. Its powerful impact will be apparent to all who have read the letter and noted the deep pastoral concerns of the author's heart.*
  - 4. John Owen, *Having requested their prayers for him, he adds to this his prayer for them, and so gives a solemn end to the whole letter. It is a glorious prayer, including the whole mystery of divine grace, both its origin and the way it was brought through Jesus Christ.*

### HEBREWS 13:20-25, CONCLUSION

- A. Benediction (20-21)
  - 1. The writer begins to pronounce a blessing on the readers (20), ***Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,***
    - a. Introductory notes
      - 1) *Now*
        - a) This directly ties the benediction to the writer's previous exhortations.
        - b) William L. Lane, *The fervent prayer-wish in vv 20–21 serves to summarize the concerns of the previous section and provides formal closure to the homily as a whole.*
      - 2) The writer's benediction is an invocation of God.
        - a) He identifies God as the One to whom prayers must be addressed.
        - b) Raymond Brown, *His confidence in the God to whom he prays is as important as the things he asks for as he prays . . . Their God brought the Lord Jesus up from the dead. Such an invincible God can surely answer their prayers.*
        - c) Douglas Mangum, *His prayer is that readers would be equipped for good by God through Christ . . .*
    - b. Major themes of Hebrews comprise the foundation of the benediction.
      - 1) The God of Peace
        - a) Scriptural references
          - 1] Romans 15:33, *May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*
          - 2] 1 Corinthians 14:33, *For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,*

- b) Comments
- 1] Raymond Brown, *Peace in biblical thought is something far more than serenity; it denotes the quality of salvation God is able to give to his people. He has obtained peace for us through the work of Christ, who brought man's greatest warfare to an end by his victory over sin, death and the devil. By that triumphant conquest we have peace with God and peace with man . . . he thereby prays that any strife or disharmony in this local fellowship (12:14) will be removed by the God of peace . . .*
  - 2] David Brown, *"The God of peace" by giving unity of true doctrine, will unite them in mutual love.*
  - 3] R. Kent Hughes, *The truth for all of us who are his children is that our God is "the God of peace," and his plans for every one of us are for shalom, well-being. None of his children are an exception and never will be!*
  - 4] William Barclay, *It is only the God of peace who can make us at peace with ourselves, at peace with each other and at peace with him.*
- 2) Jesus who is the risen Shepherd.
- a) Scriptural references
- 1] Acts 2:24, *God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.*
  - 2] John 10:11, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*
  - 3] 1 Peter 5:4, *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*
- b) Concerning Jesus' resurrection
- 1] William L. Lane, *This is the only direct reference in the homily to the resurrection of Jesus. What is implicit elsewhere (e.g., 7:16, 24) is here made explicit. The resurrection of Jesus demonstrates God's decisive intervention by which he acknowledged and ratified the cross of Christ as the means of the redemption of the human family . . .*
  - 2] Warren Wiersbe, *As the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ died for the sheep (John 10:11). As the Great Shepherd, He lives for the sheep in heaven today, working on their behalf. As the Chief Shepherd, He will come for the sheep at His return (1 Peter 5:4). Our Shepherd cares for His own in the past, present, and future. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever!*
  - 3] John Owen, *We are taught here that he died as part of his work, as the great Shepherd of the sheep, which shows the excellency of his love and the certainty of the salvation of the elect.*
- c) Concerning Jesus as the Great Shepherd
- 1] Robert Gundry, *This figure of speech also implies a comparison of the author and his audience to sheep, who as such are bound to follow Jesus' lead, that is, submit to his lordship . . . "The great shepherd of the sheep" places him above the aforementioned leaders (13:17) just as "a great high priest" placed him above the Levitical high priests (4:14; 10:21).*
  - 2] Raymond Brown, *Throughout his lifetime Christ exercised the caring, compassionate ministry of a 'good shepherd.' He loved the sheep so much that he gave his own life for them and, by his risen power, he continues to guard and protect them . . . As the great shepherd nothing is impossible for him and no detail too insignificant for his attention.*
  - 3] William L. Lane, *Although Moses is "the shepherd of the sheep" whom God "led out" from the land of Egypt, Jesus is "the great shepherd of the sheep" whom God "led out" from the realm of the dead. He alone is the mediator of an everlasting covenant.*
  - 4] R. Kent Hughes, *Our risen Shepherd lives not only to give us life, but to tend us so that we will be sheep who bring him glory. This means that our grandest spiritual desires are never audacious and that any spiritual aspirations less than the loftiest are not grand enough.*
- 3) The eternal covenant based on Jesus' sacrifice.
- a) Scriptural references
- 1] Hebrews 9:12, *he entered once 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.*
  - 2] Hebrews 9:15, *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*
  - 3] Hebrews 10:29, *How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?*

b) Comments

- 1] Thomas Constable, . . . *the “eternal covenant” is the New Covenant in contrast to the temporary Old Covenant. Jesus’ blood was superior to animal blood offered under the Old Covenant.*
- 2] Raymond Brown, *He has pledged himself in love to his people to pardon their sins (10:15–18) and meet their needs. This covenant God, who is bound to his people in such a strong and eternal relationship, is always true to his word.*
- 3] William L. Lane, *The phrase “blood of the covenant” alludes to Jesus’ death as a covenant sacrifice (cf. Exod 24:8; Heb 9:20) . . . Although the covenant is called “eternal” only here in Hebrews, the general theme of eternal validity has been a matter of persistent importance throughout the homily.*
- 4] R. Kent Hughes, . . . *the foundation for our highest dreams is the everlasting, unbreakable New Covenant promise earlier quoted in 8:10 where God says, “I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people” (cf. Jeremiah 31:31–34). The promise is nothing less than a renewed heart and a personal relationship with God through the atoning work of God the Son and the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit. We have his word for it that all this is ours if we come to him!*

2. The blessing is that they be equipped to do God’s will (21a), ***equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight,***

a. *equip*

- 1) It means *put into proper condition, make complete, to cause to be fully qualified, adapting to an end to repair.*
- 2) Thomas Constable, *It was the writer’s concern that his readers be ready to reign with Jesus Christ. This is the purpose for remaining faithful to God throughout the epistle.*
- 3) Robert Gundry, *By equipping us with every good thing so as to do his will, God is “doing in us what’s pleasing in his sight,” so that we have no basis for self-righteous boasting.*

b. *his will, working*

- 1) Hebrews 10:36, *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.*
- 2) It is God working in us so that we can do what pleases Him.
- 3) His will is that we may be conformed to the image of Christ, Romans 8:29, *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*
- 4) Donald Hagner, *The actual petition is that this great God, who has already done so much, would now meet the needs of his people by supplying them with everything good for doing his will, and remarkably that he would at the same time work (lit., “doing”) in us what is pleasing to him.*
- 5) William L. Lane, *“Everything good” has reference to the gifts of God as the prerequisite for godly action.*
- 6) Warren Wiersbe, *How does He equip us? By tracing this word katartidzo in the New Testament, we can discover the tools that God uses to mature and equip His children. He uses the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16–17) and prayer (1 Thes. 3:10) in the fellowship of the local church (Eph. 4:11–12). He also uses individual believers to equip us and mend us (Gal. 6:1). Finally, He uses suffering to perfect His children (1 Peter 5:10), and this relates to what we learned from Hebrews 12 about chastening.*
- 7) Raymond Brown, *In equipping his people with everything good, our God is able not only to supply what is necessary, but also to repair what is broken. Some of the believers who first received this letter may well have felt that their compromise with Judaism had marred their distinctive Christian witness, that their inadequate view of Jesus had led to devastating effects, not only in their own Christian experience, but in the lives of others. Could they ever be restored to their former devotion? The writer urges them to believe that they can, because the God of peace is able to do this for them.*
- 8) R. Kent Hughes, . . . *this prayer is built on the idea that God can and does equip us with everything good to do his will—and our experience confirms the truth of this . . . Can you hear the prayer as its benediction lingered over the beleaguered congregation with its sweet, healing hope?*

3. The enablement is through Jesus Christ (21b), *through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*
  - a. William L. Lane, *What is pleasing to God will be accomplished “through Jesus Christ” as the mediator of the grace and power of God within the new covenant community . . . The final word of the homily is the only adequate one: “Amen.”*
  - b. Donald Hagner, *It is to be noted that the agency of that activity of God in us is expressed: through Jesus Christ. This is in complete accord with the view of Christ and his work throughout the book (cf. 7:22).*
  - c. R. Kent Hughes . . . *the power to do what is pleasing to God will always be given to us through Jesus Christ—if we want it! But some of us live as if that is not true. The real question is, Do we want it? Do we desire it? Do we expect it? Do we desire it! Then pray for it!*

B. Final Greetings (22-25)

1. The writer encourages the readers to heed his exhortation (22), *I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.*
  - a. Notes
    - 1) Thomas Constable, *The closing verses of Hebrews are an addendum to the body of the homily. The writer added them because he felt concern for his addressees and wanted to add a few personal remarks.*
    - 2) Raymond Brown, *The closing sentences of the letter bear all the marks of the pastoral compassion which has been dominant throughout its earlier chapters.*
    - 3) Donald Hagner, *Although the epistle has ended with a concluding prayer, as often happens in the letters of the NT, the author has yet a few more words for his readers. Again we get a few bits of tantalizing information, which are followed by a word of greeting and a final benediction.*
    - 4) *Brothers* may be translated *brethren* or *brothers and sisters*.
  - b. Comments
    - 1) *bear with my word of exhortation*
      - a) *Bear with* means to accept, to receive as valid or true as in 2 Timothy 4:3, *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,*
      - a) William L. Lane, *The definite expression ‘the exhortation’ is a synonymous designation for the sermon. It referred specifically to the exposition and application of the Scripture that had been read aloud to the assembled congregation.*
      - b) Thomas Constable, *The writer urged his readers again to accept the word of exhortation contained in this epistle rather than rejecting it.*
      - c) Raymond Brown, *Throughout the entire letter there has been recurrent emphasis on the importance of the word of God in the experience of the believer. The truth is not only a message to read, or a story to inspire, but an exhortation to heed and an instruction to be obeyed.*
      - d) Warren Wiersbe, *No doubt some members of the congregation responded negatively to this letter, while others received it and acted on it.*
    - 2) *I have written to you briefly*
      - a) Robert Gundry on *I have written to you briefly*, . . . *the similar statement in 1 Peter 5:12 suggests a conventional statement that has the purpose of encouraging an audience not to dismiss the letter because of what they might think to be its excessive length.*
      - b) Donald Hagner, *He notes further that he has written “briefly” . . . the implication being that he is able to elaborate these matters at greater length when the occasion presents itself . . . In the meantime he covets the readers’ attention to the important document he is sending to them, though it seems lengthy and difficult.*
      - c) John Owen, *But how can this said to be a short letter since it is of considerable length? Considering the importance of the subject matter, the whole purpose and mystery of the covenant and institutions of the law, and the office of Christ, and the danger of their eternal ruin, all that the apostle had written might be thought of as a short letter.*

2. He informs them of Timothy's release and their intent to visit them (23), ***You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.***
  - a. William Barclay, *What the reference to Timothy means, no one knows; but it sounds as if he, too, had been in prison because of Jesus Christ.*
  - b. Warren Wiersbe, *What Timothy's relationship to the group was, we do not know. He was a prominent minister in that day and most of the Christians would either know him or know about him.*
  - c. Ray Stedman, *Nothing further is known of Timothy's imprisonment, though it suggests that Paul's warning to him in 2 Timothy 4:15 to be on his guard against Alexander the metalworker was not without substance. It may well be that Alexander obtained Timothy's incarceration, and if so, it would probably have been at Ephesus. Timothy would have had many friends throughout the province of Asia, and it is likely that the recipients of this letter live somewhere in that area, or in a neighboring province such as Phrygia or Galatia.*
  - d. Robert Gundry, *"I'll see you" carries an implicit warning that he, perhaps with the backing of Timothy in person, will check up on the audience's response to this "word of urging."*
  - e. William L. Lane, *He will not wait long. If necessary, he will travel alone to implement the exhortations he was forced by circumstances to commit to writing. The inclusion of the brief travelogue is a forceful reminder that the writer regarded what he had written only as a substitute for his own presence. His personal preference was to speak directly with the men and the women for whom he was profoundly concerned.*
  
3. He and others send greetings to the recipients of the letter (24), ***Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.***
  - a. *all your leaders*
    - 1) Hebrews 13:7, *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*
    - 2) Hebrews 13:17, *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*
    - 3) Ray Stedman, *He asks his readers to greet their leaders for him, indicating that the letter was not addressed to the leaders themselves but to the church at large, including possibly some home churches (all God's people). This is the third mention of leaders within this chapter, showing the author's respect for their position and value.*
  - b. *all the saints*
    - 1) Donald Hagner, *The reference to all may suggest those of a larger church community than that simply of the readers, but this is far from certain.*
    - 2) Robert Gundry, *"All your leaders," "all the saints," and "with you all" exhibit the goal of not losing even one soul to apostasy.*
    - 3) Raymond Brown, *The personal references to Timothy, the author, the leaders and members of this local church, and the Italian Christians who wish to convey their greetings, all indicate the importance of fellowship.*
  - c. *Those who come from Italy*
    - 1) Thomas Constable, *"Those from Italy" probably refers to Christians who had left Italy rather than to believers currently living there (cf. Acts 18:2). If this is true, the writer probably wrote from somewhere other than Italy.*
    - 2) Robert Gundry, *The phrase probably implies as well that the audience are living in Italy and therefore would welcome greetings from Italian expatriates. These voluntary greetings and the commanded ones have the purpose of strengthening Christian cohesion so as to guard against apostasy because of persecution.*
  
4. He pronounces grace on his readers (25), ***Grace be with all of you.***
  - a. William Barclay, *And so the letter closes with a blessing. All through, it has been telling of the grace of Christ which opens the way to God; and it comes to an end with a prayer that that wondrous grace may rest upon its readers.*
  - b. Ray Stedman, *The closing Grace be with you all is another indication of his close association with Paul, for this is identical with the ending of the letter to Titus (3:15), and the conferring of grace is Paul's habitual way of closing his letters (2 Thess 3:17).*

- c. Douglas Mangum, *Grace governs the message of the letter. It is the loving grace of the Father, exhibited through the high-priestly mediation of the Son, that offers motivation and encouragement to continue in steadfast faith and the hope of a heavenly future in the unshakable, eternal kingdom of God.*
- d. Raymond Brown, *The letter has contained passages of serious and necessary warning, but it closes on the note of radiant confidence. Whilst believers are depending on such grace they cannot be shaken (12:28) and they will not be lost.*
- e. William Barclay, *And so the letter closes with a blessing. All through, it has been telling of the grace of Christ which opens the way to God; and it comes to an end with a prayer that that wondrous grace may rest upon its readers.*

## CONCLUSION

- Warren Wiersbe, . . . *the total impact of Hebrews answers the important question, "How can I stand firm in a world that is shaking all around me?" The answer: know the superior Person, Jesus Christ; trust His superior priesthood; and live by the superior principle of faith. Build your life on the things of heaven that will never shake.*
- Ray Stedman, *The epistle to the Hebrews magnificently links the things which cannot be shaken with the fresh sweep of the Spirit in carrying forward the purposes of God as history moves toward its predicted consummation. It is a document greatly needed as the world lurches toward judgment and a new creation, based on the new covenant, gradually emerges from the crashing chaos of human events. Let us be grateful for its wise and careful teaching and obedient to its passionate concern for a constantly maturing faith.*