

A STUDY IN HEBREWS

week 6

Have you ever walked in halfway through a movie? Try as you might, it is usually difficult to understand what is going on. This is why context always matters- we need to understand who the characters are, and why they find themselves in this unique situation. This week, we will reset the context for the letter of Hebrews. This will help us reframe as we enter into the second half of the series.

The identity of the author of Hebrews has been hotly debated among Christian scholars for almost as long as the letter has existed. What we do know is that this letter was written to Jewish people who then converted to the way of Jesus and formed a church. The author is using the letter to encourage them, warn them and challenge them.

This group of believers seemed to be under much persecution at the time. Many scholars think this was due to the fact that they had left their Jewish system of faith behind to embrace this new way. Much like the very early church in Acts 2-5, they were being criticized and even persecuted for their new beliefs.

In the face of these hardships, it seemed that they wanted to return to an old way of doing things. They also seemed as if they could not get past the most elementary teachings of Christianity. They lacked spiritual maturity, and were in real spiritual danger.

What do you think this group of Christians has in common with the 21st Century American church?

When we look at Hebrews, we find it to be a very long epistle, similar to the book of Romans. The author is making a theological case that the people need to understand. It is obviously very, very important, simply considering how long this letter is. Why do you think the author felt the need to hammer these points home to the people? What's at stake? Read Hebrews 2:1-4 to find a clue.

As we read the book, we find that the author makes comparisons between Jesus and the "Old Way" of the Law. The writer refers to Moses, the Levite Priests, the Temple, animal sacrifice, Abraham and more.

Why do you think the author feels the need to keep reminding the people that Jesus is better than the things of the past?

One of the themes that we continue to stumble upon is that the author wants these believers to understand the incredible gift that has been given to them, much like a kid who receives an incredible gift at Christmas and instead plays with the box. They needed to be warned that trying to return to the Old Way disrespects the work of Jesus, and that it is foolish not to put our total trust in such a good God!

In what ways do we need a similar reminder as modern believers?

In stark contrast to the church that Hebrews is addressed to, Luke, the author of Acts, tells us about another group of Jewish Christians who are held up as an example to all believers:

As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed...

-Acts 17:10-12a

As we go into the second half of our Hebrews series, we want to encourage you to be like the Bereans, and thoroughly study and pray to discern what God might be trying to say to our congregation.

What are one or two ways you can be like the Berean believers over the next few weeks?

If you feel inclined, pray this silently or out loud, alone or in a group:

Father, may our church receive what you have for us as we continue to study your Word together. May we understand what you are calling us to and obey your ways. And may we not attempt to do this by our own strength, but instead may we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit and the finished work of Jesus. Give our pastors and teachers wisdom and discernment as they continue to lead us on this journey with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.