

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Purpose

A. The Superiority of Jesus Christ

1. The foundational purpose of this epistle is to establish the person and authority of Jesus Christ as superior to all things past, present, and future. Jesus is presented as the greatest revelation because He is the Son of God. First, as the Son of God He supersedes all previous revelations of the prophets, angels, priests, and the old covenant and rituals. Second, His revelation is sufficient to meet all the needs of humanity since He is the fulfillment. Third, His revelation ensures final victory for all those who are in Christ since He is established in Heaven and prepares a place for them as heirs.
2. The author establishes the authority of Jesus by comparing and contrasting Jesus to Old Testament figures in order to show the obvious superiority of Jesus. The author does not do this by denigrating those figures but by showing what their ministry was truly about and how it looked forward to the one who would be greater—God’s Son.
3. “Using material not from the prophets but primarily from the Psalms, with other materials added to elaborate the argument, the writer’s goal was to establish the superiority of the gospel in contrast to all that went before, particularly the levitical system. The primary evidence of the supremacy of Christianity is presented in its *finality*. Coming to Christ means final access to God without any barrier.” (Robert L. Saucy. *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 56.)

B. A Call to Faith

1. By establishing the superiority of Christ the author shows the need to trust Jesus Christ and live a life of obedience to Him because He is the superior One. The epistle is structured more as a sermon—to be an exhortation to trust Christ and persevere in obedience no matter the temptations that lie outside of the community of believers.
2. The author is addressing Jews who belong to the Christian community who have professed Christ, but are not necessarily devoted to Him, and are close to rejecting Christ and going back to the Jewish regulations because they are not willing to maintain their confession in the midst of persecution. Thus the author appeals to them both in a negative and positive way to not abandon the community and place their trust in Christ. Through a series of warning passages (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 6:4-12; 10:26-39; 12:25-29) the author warns them that there is a severe punishment for those who abandon the faith and go back to the ways of the world; on the other side, there are great blessings and vindication for those who are found persevering in Christ.
3. The superiority of Christ becomes the foundation for the warning passages through the implementation of a lesser to greater argument. By explaining the punishment for disbelief and disobedience in the Old Testament, he demonstrates how much greater the punishment will be for those who disbelieve and disobey Christ—who is superior to the old order. Likewise the blessing and rest from perseverance are greater and final for those who are found in Christ compared to the blessing and rest experienced by those of the old order. This becomes the exhortation to all those who read the epistle: to not take lightly one’s commitment to Jesus Christ, who is superior to all things.

Themes

A. Son of God

1. “Christology is the central focus in all the theology of Hebrews, and two titles of Christ are central to its Christology: Son of God and High Priest. Around these two focal points all the major ideas in Hebrews concerning Christ’s person and work can be located. Christ as High Priest is actually the more distinctive and important idea in the theology of the book, but Christ as Son of God is foundational.” (Buist M. Fanning. “A Theology of Hebrews.” In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 370.)
2. The references to Jesus as “Son” or “Son of God” occur frequently in Hebrews and reveal Him in three vital stages of Sonship, which are theologically distinguishable but intermingled through the epistle in their development.
3. The first stage is Jesus as the *preexistent, eternal Son*. This is the foundation of the nature of the Son in which the following two are rooted. The author of Hebrews demonstrates that Jesus is the exact representation of God and His glory (1:3), that it was through Him that the world was created (1:2c, 10; 3:2-6), and thus He is sustaining and maintaining His creation (1:3b). This is all seen as an essential foundation to His priesthood, which is discussed below.
4. The second stage is Jesus as the *incarnate, earthly Son*. This theme is most fully developed in 2:5-18, which begins by quoting a series of Old Testament passages to show that this was ordained from the beginning and that He is the second and perfect Adam who secures the fulfillment of the God-given dominion for humanity. Jesus came to share fully in humanity and to undergo suffering and death in order to provide salvation for humanity and thus has become high priest in heaven on behalf of the believers. “In these verses the breathtaking truth of Christianity shines forth again: the eternal Son did not serve from afar but came to be one of us and to walk the costly path of obedience which leads to glory!” (Buist M. Fanning. “A Theology of Hebrews.” In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 381.)
5. The third stage is Jesus as the *exalted Son of God*. This third stage could not have been accomplished without the previous two, and it is most clearly seen in 1:3b-14 where He is said to be sitting at the right hand of God—an allusion to Psalm 110:1. Because of Jesus’ faithful obedience to the Father, He is given a superior position and name (Son). Jesus as the Davidic king is not just worthy of being worshiped because He is God but also because He has done what no other has done and so has proven His right to rule.

B. High Priest

1. “The picture of Jesus Christ as High Priest is the most distinctive theme of Hebrews, and it is central to the theology of the book. As already stated, its doctrine of sonship is foundational to its teaching about Christ’s priesthood. Likewise its view of salvation, of the Christian life, and of salvation-history are all vitally connected to the theme of His high priesthood.” (Buist M. Fanning. “A Theology of Hebrews.” In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 388.)
2. There are Old Testament examples of the priestly function for Israel’s king, offering prayer and sacrifices on behalf of the people (2 Sam. 6:12-23; 24:21-25; 1 Kg. 3:4; 8:22-53, 62-64; 12:32-33; Ezk. 45:17-46:17). In the intertestamental period there was

- an expectation for the Messiah to fulfill the roles of priest and king, whether through one or two figures. These motifs were developed in the New Testament through Jesus' sacrifice (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18), His intercession (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 8:34; 1 Jn. 2:1-2), mediation (1 Tim. 2:5), and replacement of the temple and its sacrifices (Matt. 12:6; Mk. 14:58; Jn. 2:19-21).
3. The author of Hebrews takes Psalm 110 and its promises and of a priestly king and uses it to develop Christ as the fulfillment of this figure as was seen in His earthly ministry. Though it may be somewhat of an exaggeration to say that the book of Hebrews is simply a theological exposition of Psalm 110, it would not be far off.
 4. The author shows that Christ is the only one who is truly qualified to be high priest (5:1-10) and so supersedes all previous high priestly ministries (the levitical priesthood). And because He is the preexistent, eternal God whose death was all sufficient, His priesthood will last forever (7:16-17). Thus Christ now serves in heaven, continually and forever interceding on the behalf of the believers (6:19-20; 7:3).

C. From Shadow to Substance

1. Central to the thought of Hebrews is the idea that the Old Testament foreshadowed the days of fulfillment that have begun in Jesus Christ. This is seen in three ways: First, Christ is seen as the final revelation of God and supersedes all previous revelations (1:1-4). Second, because Christ is the Son and accomplished more than any other revelation (for He was the one they were speaking about), His covenant, through His death and resurrection, is superior to the old covenant. (The word *better* is used thirteen times in Hebrews, and similar wordings are seen in 2:2-4; 3:3-6; 5:4-10; 10:27-28; 12:25.) Third is the self-confessed inadequacy of the old covenant by the Old Testament. The author uses quotations from Ps. 8, 95, 110, and Jer. 31 to show that even the Old Testament saw the old covenant as insufficient and so was looking forward to a better one.
2. Thus the author shows that the old covenant was merely a shadow of the real thing (Jesus) that was coming around the corner. After showing that the old covenant was not sufficient to deal with the needs of humanity, the author establishes that it needs to be abolished (10:9b) through the coming of Jesus Christ—who set up a far superior covenant that *is* sufficient to deal with the needs of humanity (7:18-23; 8:6-7, 13).
3. A good illustration is that you are standing along the wall of a building and from around the corner you see the shadow of a man; this is the old covenant. Because of the shadow, you can see that someone is coming and can even make out a few of the details, but it is not until the man (Jesus) comes from around the corner that you see what he really looks like and can interact with him. This is the danger with the old covenant: that one gets so focused on the shadow that he does not see the man, or how much better he is, when he comes around the corner.

Outline

- I. The Superiority of the Person of Jesus Christ (1:1-4:13)
 - A. Christ Is Superior to the Prophets and Angels (1:1-2:4)
 - B. Jesus and the Destiny of Humanity (2:5-18)
 - C. Jesus Is Superior to Moses (3:1-6)
 - D. Hearing God's Word in Faith (3:7-19)
 - E. God's Promised Rest (4:1-13)

- II. The Superiority of the Ministry of Jesus Christ (4:14-10:18)
 - A. Jesus, Our Compassionate High Priest (4:14-5:10)
 - B. The Need to Move on to Maturity (5:11-6:12)
 - C. The Oath of God (6:13-20)
 - D. The Nature of Melchizedek's Priesthood (7:1-10)
 - E. Jesus and the Priesthood of Melchizedek (7:11-28)
 - F. Jesus, the High Priest of a Better Covenant (8:1-13)
 - G. Christ's Service in the Heavenly Sanctuary (9:1-28)
 - H. Jesus Christ's Sacrifice Is Superior to the Old Sacrifices (10:1-18)

- III. The Outworking of Jesus Christ's Superiority (10:19-13:25)
 - A. Drawing Near to God in Enduring Faith (10:19-39)
 - B. People of Faith (11:1-40)
 - C. The Lord's Discipline (12:1-14)
 - D. Do Not Reject God's Warning (12:15-29)
 - E. Final Exhortations (13:1-25)

“The language of becoming, inheriting, and begetting used in 1:4-5 of this third stage of Jesus’ sonship must not be misunderstood as ‘adoptionist Christology’ [that Jesus was just a man, but when He was resurrected, He was made divine and therefore God, yet only the Son]. It is clear from Hebrews that Jesus did not become God’s Son for the first time at His exaltation nor is He called Son only in view of His exaltation. Jesus’ three stages of sonship portrayed in Hebrews are distinguishable but vitally connected. He was always the Son in the preexistent sense (1:1-3; 7:3), He became the Son in earthly, incarnate terms as He learned obedience in suffering (2:5-18; 5:7-10; 6:6), and He was exalted to a new stage of sonship (1:4-5; 5:5). Thus it is wrong to label this ‘adoptionist’ in any sense, since He was already the Son before His exaltation. There is no indication in Hebrews that one who was *not* God’s Son at all has been exalted to that relationship because of earthly obedience. Jesus was appointed to a new stage of sonship, not made Son for the first time in His exaltation to His royal status.” (Buist M. Fanning. “A Theology of Hebrews.” In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 385-86, comment in brackets added.)

5. What points do the next three quotations make in verses 7-12?

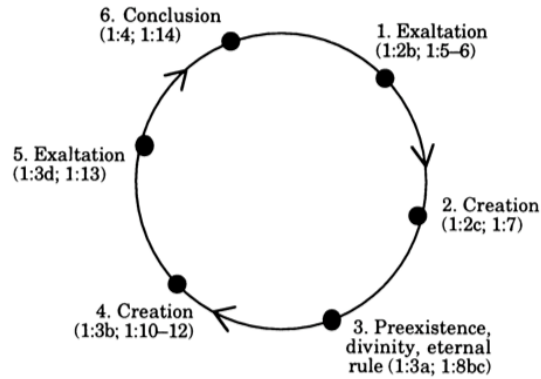
6. What point is the quotation in verse 13 making?

In verse 14 “God revealed a primary purpose and ministry of the angels in this verse. It is to assist human beings in reaching their final deliverance over their spiritual enemies. This includes bringing us to conversion. However, it also involves protecting and strengthening us so that we may one day obtain our full inheritance with Christ in glory. This ministry of service is obviously inferior to Jesus Christ’s ministry of ruling.” (Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Hebrews*, p. 20.)

7. Why does the author argue that Jesus is superior to the angels (Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2)?

“What, then, is the relationship between 1:1-4 and 1:5-14? A comparison of these two passages reveals that they are related thematically. Many scholars agree that verses 5-14 give proof of the Christological statements the author made in verses 2b-4. The author cited a catena of seven Old Testament passages to demonstrate that Jesus is the exalted Son. Meier suggests that the Christological points in both verses 2b-4 and verses 5-14 are designed as a ring structure, using the exaltation of the Son as the beginning and the final point. He asserts, ‘In each case, the train of thought begins with Christ’s exaltation (1, 2b;

1, 5-6), moves back to creation (1, 2c; 1,7), moves ‘farther back’ to preexistence, divinity, and eternal rule (1, 3a; 1:8bc), moves forward again to creation as well as governance and guidance of creation (1, 3b; 1, 10-12), moves all the way up to exaltation again (1, 3d; 1, 13), and draws a final conclusion comparing Christ’s exalted status to the angels’ inferior role (1:1, 4, 14).” (Victor (Sung Yul) Rhee. “Christology and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 1:1-2:4,” pp. 179-80.)



8. What purpose do verses 2:1-4 serve in the context?

9. To what salvation does the author refer in verse 3?

10. What point is made by verses 3b-4?

B. Jesus and the Destiny of Humanity (2:5-18)

Here the author returns to the main argument in order to develop more fully the destiny of Jesus Christ to further demonstrate His superiority. This is the central passage on the incarnate, earthly Son and can be divided into two sections, 5-9 and 10-18.

In verse 6 the phrase “someone testified somewhere” does not mean that the author does not know where the quote comes from, rather that the emphasis is on what is said. Likewise, the original audience would have known exactly where this quote was found.

1. For what purpose does the author quote Psalm 8:4-6 in verses 5-8?

In verse 7 the word “angels” is the LXX’s rendering of the Hebrew word *‘elohim*, which should be understood as “heavenly beings,” referring to the angelic host in heaven (See *The Meaning of ‘Elohim* excursus).

In verse 7 the phrase “a little while” does not appear in the Hebrew text (MT). The Hebrew word for “a little bit” is replaced with a more ambiguous expression in the LXX, which can indicate either “a little bit” or “a little while.” The author takes advantage of this to show that Christ was lowered only for a short time and then to return to His exalted position.

In verse 6 “the phrase ‘son of man,’ which in Psalm 8:4b meant simply ‘man’ (by synonymous parallelism with 8:4a), becomes an elegant reference to Jesus as the Son of man, with contextual emphasis on His incarnation, human nature, vicarious death, and subsequent vindication by God.” (Buist M. Fanning. “A Theology of Hebrews.” In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 378-79.)

2. In what three ways is Jesus the typological fulfillment of Psalm 8:4-6 in verse 9?

3. How are all things put under Jesus’ control (8a), yet they are not in verses 8b-9a?

In verse 9 the phrase “taste death” (NIV, NASB) does not mean to “sample a small amount,” but rather to “experience” (NET) something cognitively or emotionally or to come to know something.

4. Why did Christ suffer and what was the result, according to verse 9?

5. What part did God the Father have in the plan of salvation in verses 9-10?

6. What two points is the author making about Christ in verses 10-18 in contrast to the angels?

In verse 10 the word “pioneer” (NET) or “author” (NIV, NASB) carries the idea of a leader or the representative head of a family and carries the nuances of a “trailblazer,” one who clears a new path for those who follow him.

7. What is the point of the three quotations in verses 11-13 (Ps. 22:22; Isa. 8:17, 18)?

8. What did Christ become and accomplish according to verses 14-16 and why?

9. What was the reason for Christ’s incarnation according to verses 17-18?

“Verses 5-18 present eight reasons for the incarnation of the Son: to fulfill God’s purpose for man (vv. 5-9a), to taste death for all (v. 9b), and to bring many sons to glory (vv. 10-13). He also came to destroy the devil (v. 14), to deliver those in bondage (v. 15), to become a priest for men (vv. 16-17a), to make propitiation for sins (v. 17b), and to provide help for those who are tested (v. 18).” (Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Hebrews*, p. 27.) As repeatedly seen, it was Jesus’ suffering and obedience as the “earthly Son” that gave Him the right to be given the position of the “exalted Son.”

C. Jesus Is Superior to Moses (3:1-6)

The author of Hebrews has just developed for his readers what Jesus has accomplished in His earthly ministry, which has given Him the right to reside in heaven on their behalf. Now in light of this (“therefore” v. 1) he calls the community of believers “holy” and “partners in a heavenly calling,” and he tells them to “take note of Jesus.” All this is to focus them on Jesus who resides in heaven and on what they are to be striving for (Phil. 3:12-21) instead of on the temptations and teachings of the world that have been distracting them.

1. What is the significance of Jesus being called an “apostle” and “high priest” in verse 1?
2. How are Moses and Christ similar?
3. How is Christ superior to Moses in verses 3-4? What is the implication of verse 4?

In verses 3-4 one must “bear in mind that ‘house’ can refer to a physical structure or to an extended family (‘household’) and ‘builder’ can refer to the craftsperson who assembles the physical structure or to the person who ‘establishes’ a household and gives it distinction as God established the house of David or the house of Samuel, where the LXX also uses a word for ‘build’). Hebrews 3:3 then aligns Jesus with the founder of a house and aligns Moses with the house that is being founded. Jesus is involved in ‘building’ the house and thus deserves greater honor than those who merely belong to the household (however faithful they are).” (David A. DeSilva. *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews,”* p. 137.)

4. How is Christ superior to Moses in verses 5-6?
5. Is Moses seen in a positive light and why?

“The universe is God’s house over which Jesus Christ sits in authority. He sits in the heavens, the holy of holies of this house. The tabernacle illustrated this house of God. The tabernacle was a microcosm of God’s greater house. Moses served in it faithfully. Jesus rules over the larger house faithfully, not as a servant, but as God’s Son with full authority.” (Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Hebrews*, p. 33.)

6. What is relationship in verse 6?

D. Hearing God's Word in Faith (3:7-19)

Just as the superiority of Jesus to the angels demanded responsibilities, so also does the superiority of Jesus to Moses demand responsibilities. The author demonstrates in this section the need to adhere to Jesus in light of the previous discussion.

1. What judgment is the author speaking about in verses 7-11 (Num. 14)?
2. Why does the author quote Psalm 95:7b-11 in verses 7-11?

In verse 12 the Greek word *apostenai* translated “turns away” (NIV) or “falls away” (NASB) implies a too passive sense and should instead be translated “forsakes” (NET), “deserts,” or “rebels against” (1 Tim. 4:1).

3. What is the warning in verses 12-14?
4. What is the significance of the word “today” in verse 13?
5. What were the sins of the wilderness generation according to verses 15-19?
6. What does the author want his hearers to learn from what he has written here?

E. God's Promised Rest (4:1-13)

1. What is the warning in verse 1?

“An eschatological understanding of ‘my rest’ in Ps 95:11 is presupposed in v. 1 and is fundamental to the exhortation to diligence to enter God’s rest in 4:1-11.” (William L. Lane. *Hebrews 1-8*, p. 98.)

2. Why did the good news do no good for the wilderness generation according to verse 2?

3. What is the contrast in verse 3?

4. Why does the author quote Gen. 2:2 in verses 3b-4?

5. Why does the author repeat himself in verse 5 from verse 3?

6. What is the result of the previous verses in verses 6-7?

7. What is the point about the rest in verses 8-10?

8. What is the exhortation in verses 11-13 and what is the reason?

“What the author is saying is that God’s Word can reach to the innermost recesses of our being. We must not think that we can bluff our way out of anything, for there are no secrets hidden from God. We cannot keep our thoughts to ourselves.” (Leon Morris. “Hebrews.” In *Hebrews-Revelation*. Vol. 12 of *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 44.)

9. What is the “rest,” and is the warning to those who are already saved or not?

See *The Meaning of “Rest” in Hebrews* excursus on page 15

The Meaning of “Rest” in Hebrews

The two questions here are what does the author mean by “rest” and when does one enter this rest? To answer these questions one must first understand the concept of the rest in the Old Testament.

Old Testament Background

God made a promise to Abraham and then to his descendents that He would give them a land as an inheritance where they would be able to find rest from their enemies (Gen. 12:1, 7; 13:15, 17; 15:7, 18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:2-3; 28:13; 49:8-12). Moses later led Israel out of Egypt to the promised land in order to receive that inheritance, but the people did not have faith and they rebelled against God, so He swore that they would never enter His rest (Ps. 95:11) except for Joshua, Caleb, and the following generation since they combined the promise of God with faith and obedience (Num. 14:7-9; Deut. 1:36, 39). The Old Testament stated that Joshua provided rest for Israel in the land (Deut. 12:8-11; Jos. 1:13, 15; 11:23; 21:44-45; 22:4; 23:1), as did David, Solomon, and others after Joshua (2 Sa. 7:1; 1 Chr. 22:9; 2 Chr. 14:5-6; 15:15; 20:30; 1 Kg. 8:56).

Later, during the time of the monarchy, the “rest” became associated with the blessings of the Messianic rule, the full inheritance of the land, and total peace under the reign of the messiah who would bring the kingdom of God (Ps. 95; 132:8-18; 2 Sam. 7:1, 11; Isa. 11:10-16; 14:1-3; 32:17-18; Ezk. 34:15). This idea carried on into the intertestamental period (1 Enoch 45:3-6; 4 Ezra 8:52; 2 Baruch 78-86; Jubilees 4:30). The Jews saw that because God had excluded the wilderness generation from entering the land that this implied their exclusion from participation in the kingdom of God to come (*t. Sanh.* 13:10; *b. Sanah.* 110b; *y. Sanh.* 10:29c).

Psalms 95 was written in order to show that the wilderness generation had not negated the promise through their disobedience but that God re-extended it to each generation. It also became the central passage that showed that the rest was more than just the land. This rest was so special that God called it “His rest” (Ps. 95:11; Isa. 66:1).

Rest in Hebrews

The author of Hebrews then takes this concept of “rest,” using it as an equivalent to entering into all the inheritance that God promised His people (Deut. 3:18-20; 12:9-11; cf. Heb. 1:14; 3:11, 18; 4:3-5, 10-11; 6:12, 17), and shows that there is even more to the “rest” than the Old Testament stated. He quotes Ps. 95 to show that the offer for rest is still available for those who are now under the new covenant. He then shows that just as Christ is superior to the old order so is the rest that He provides superior.

The author states that Joshua never provided rest for his generation and that that is why God speaks of another “rest” (4:8). This rest has to be more than land because, when speaking of the land, the Old Testament said that Joshua did enter the rest (Jos. 21:44-45). The author connects this rest to the Sabbath rest of God from Gen. 2:2, showing that this is a heavenly rest that God initiated and partook of after His finished works of creation; it is this same heavenly rest that He now offers through the good news of Christ (4:9-11). Paul even mentioned in Col. 2:16-17 that the Sabbath rest was a shadow of greater things to come (Jn. 5:16-17). Hebrews 11:16 makes this point by mentioning that the rest that Abraham was looking for was a heavenly one, and 11:39-40 states that they did not receive the rest they were looking for but receive it now together with the present

believers. It is clear from this and the use of future tense verbs (4:1, 11) that the rest is heaven and future, something that believers are yet to receive.

Different Views of Rest

Some have argued that this rest is the millennial earthly rule of Christ; however, this does not fit the context. Revelation makes it clear that the millennial kingdom is temporary and so that would not be much of a rest. Though the millennial rule is a portion of the rest, just as the land was in the Old Testament, it is heaven that is the true rest, for it is where Christ has gone before us to provide a place for the believers.

Though the author of Hebrews states that the promise of rest is yet to be received, it is also something that believers can partake of now and are called to enter now (4:3, 10). This has led some to say that one can receive a portion of the rest in this life as a believer (faith/rest life), but if they apostatize, then they will experience a premature death in this life and/or a loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

“As it is possible to receive a greater or a lesser inheritance, it is also possible to enter into more or less rest. The generation of Israelites that crossed the Jordan with Joshua only entered into partial rest in the land due to their failure to trust and obey God completely.”

“...they might fail to enter their rest in the sense of losing part of their inheritance if they apostatized. Losing part of one’s inheritance means losing the privilege of reigning with Christ in a position of significant responsibility (cf. Matt. 25:14-30).” (Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Hebrews*, p. 38.)

The problem with this view is that the author of Hebrews said that Joshua did not enter the rest in his lifetime, whether wholly or partially. Between the positive example of Joshua and the negative example of the wilderness generation, it is clear from the context that it is all or nothing; there is no partial rest mentioned anywhere.

Likewise, the wilderness generation’s punishment for disobedience was death and, obviously, given the language of Num. 14 and Ps. 95, a loss of heavenly rewards, and yet the author of Hebrews says that the punishment for disobedience for those today is greater than what the wilderness generation received. Understanding the lesser-to-greater argument that the author employs here, the punishment for one who does not trust and obey God has to be more severe than physical death and loss of reward since that was the punishment of the wilderness generation.

The faith/rest life view also argues that when the believer has entered the rest, by means of their salvation, that they have rested from their fleshly works to achieve salvation. This implies that the works that God rested from were evil since He ceased from His works and entered the rest (4:3b-4, 10).

Thus if the author is addressing believers, then the only option is the loss of salvation due to the apostatizing life of a believer, which is a view that some do hold. The problem is that though there may be a few verses in Hebrews that seem to suggest this, it goes contrary to the overwhelming evidence in Scriptures for the assurance of the believers—especially when there is also a present reality to the rest with the use of present tense verbs and the assurance that there are those who have already received salvation.

The Heavenly Rest

The best view seems to be that the author is addressing non-believers who have confessed that they are believers, but in reality they are not. The author warns them to not ignore the promise and to place their faith in Christ so that they will enter the rest that is offered by God. The key words, italicized, are that he calls them to not have an *unbelieving* heart, which *forsakes* God (Heb. 3:12) just as the wilderness generation was guilty of *unbelief* (Heb. 3:19) and *did not have faith* in God (Heb. 4:2); these are not the words used of believers.

This rest that the believers are called to enter (4:10) is compared to the same rest that God entered into in heaven from His works and). Just as God rested from His tasks and enjoyed the fruit of His labor so are the believers called to faithfully complete the task that God has given them and enter the heavenly rest and enjoy the fruit of Christ's and their labor. The author has and will continue to develop this same theme when showing the superiority of Christ as one who accomplished a task during His earthly ministry and then entered the heavenly rest to sit down on the right hand of God. This is demonstrated by the "therefore" in verse 14, which ties this section to the following section that makes the point that Christ has enter the heavenly sanctuary. Furthermore this rest is said to be prepared from the foundation of the world (4:3-4), which is the same terminology used of God's kingdom in Matt. 25:34.

Though salvation is not in view of the context of Num. 14 and Ps. 95 concerning the wilderness generation, one cannot assume that the same is true for Hebrews 3-4. The author has already made the point that due to Christ's superiority, the rest and punishment for not entering the rest are far greater than those of the Old Testament, which leads to the understanding that salvation is in view here (see David A. DeSilva. *Perseverance and Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 160-61).

The author is urging those who are attracted to Christ to place their trust in Him so that they can receive the blessings of salvation and begin to enter into the "rest" through their walk with Christ. Through their perseverance they will receive the promise and fully enter the "rest" that Christ has made available to them.

"They are those who have responded to the message with conviction and who live in the present in light of the promise extended for the future (cf. Grasser, *Glaube*, 13-17). Faith brings into the present the reality of that which is future, unseen, or heavenly. For that reason, those who have believed can be said to enter God's rest already." (William L. Lane. *Hebrews 1-8*, p. 99.)

II. The Superiority of the Ministry of Jesus Christ (4:14-10:18)

A. Jesus Our Compassionate High Priest (4:14-5:10)

1.

B. The Need to Move on to Maturity (5:11-6:12)

1.

C. The Oath of God (6:13-20)

1.

D. The Nature of Melchizedek's Priesthood (7:1-10)

1.

E. Jesus and the Priesthood of Melchizedek (7:11-28)

1.

F. Jesus the High Priest of a Better Covenant (8:1-13)

1.

G. Christ Service in the Heavenly Sanctuary (9:1-28)

1.

H. Jesus Christ Sacrifice Is Superior to the Old Sacrifices (10:1-18)

1.

III. The Outworking of Jesus Christ's Superiority (10:19-13:25)

A. Drawing Near to God in Enduring Faith (10:19-39)

1.

B. People of Faith (11:1-40)

1.

C. The Lord's Discipline (12:1-14)

1.

D. Do Not Reject God's Warning (12:15-29)

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E. Final Exhortations (13:1-25)

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