

Note: Please read through the book of Hebrews aloud (recommended version: [NLT](#))



A. What about the Book of Hebrews

What is it we are reading when we open the book of Hebrews? Or preferably, when we read the book of Hebrews publicly, what are the people hearing?

In comparison with other epistles in the New Testament—

1. Hebrews lacks:

- The typical prescript like we find in Paul's letters
- No opening prayer/greeting of grace and peace
- No expression of thanksgiving or blessing
- No concluding signature

2. Hebrews has:

- A majestic opening:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³ He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high... (1:1-3 NRS)

- A fabulous closing benediction:

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (13:20-21 NRS)

- A specific expression of purpose and genre:

²² I appeal to you, siblings bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. (13:22, ESV)

- A chosen method: speech

- Paraenesis: Pastoral exhortation

2:1–4; 3:1–2, 12–14; 4:1, 11; 4:14–16; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–29, 32–36; 12:1–2, 3–29; 13:1–19

- The Emphasis on “hearing”

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (Heb. 2:1 ESV)
 Three times he quotes Ps 95:7, “Today if you will hear his voice.” (3:7–11; 3:15; 4:7)

g. The speaker's personal relationship with his audience:

- (1) We, our, ours, us
- (2) He addresses his hearers as "beloved" (ἀγαπητοί, 6:9)
- (3) His reference to the congregation as a household (3:6)

h. The speaker's bases of authority:

- (1) His personal relationship with the people and their respect for him as a leader.
- (2) The Greek First Testament Scriptures

Note the anchor texts:

Psalms 8	2:5–18	2:6–8
Psalms 95	3:1–4:13	3:7–11
Psalms 110	4:14–7:28	5:6
Jeremiah 31	8:10–10:31	8:8–12
Habakkuk 2:3–4	10:32–12:2	10:37–38
Proverbs 3	12:3–13:19	12:5–6

i. Date: Probably prior to Nero's purge (AD 68)

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him." (12:3-5 ESV)

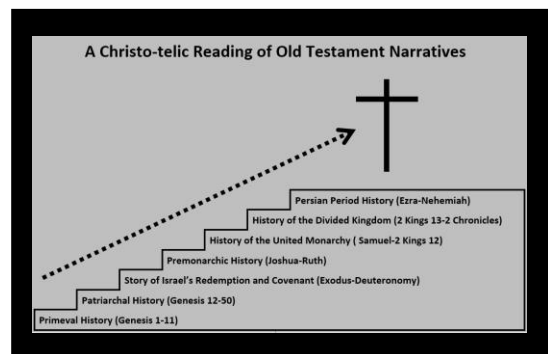
Note reference to Timothy's release (13:23)

Conclusion: When we read Hebrews, we are reading someone's sermon notes. But this is not the transcript that the secretary at your church types up off a recording after the preaching event; the author imagines himself personally present with his audience. The sermon is in his head and on his lips before it is on paper!

B. What about the Relationship of Hebrews to the rest of Scripture?

1. Interpretive guidelines for reading the whole Bible as a single canon.

- a. As Christians, we take Jesus comments in Matthew 5:17–18 and 2 Timothy 3:15–17 as the starting point.
- b. The First and New Testaments present an essential theological and ethical unity embodied in Romans 12:1 but reflecting Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and John 14–15.
- c. We must let the First Testament establish the basic disposition of ancient Israelites with true faith toward the law (Deut. 4:7–8; Ps. 119).
- d. From a hermeneutical and theological perspective, later revelation cannot correct or annul earlier revelation, as if there were some defect in it.
- e. From a Christo-telic perspective (Rom. 10:4), not every text in the First Testament points to Jesus (as the incarnate Son of God), but every text points to God [YHWH], who is embodied in Jesus Christ (John 1:14–18; Phil. 2:9–11), and every text in the First Testament concerns a vital step in the history of revelation and God's grand plan of redemption, climax in the incarnation, ministry, sacrificial death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ.



2. What about Hebrews 8:6–8?

Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. ⁸ For he finds fault with them when he says: “Look, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”

But how shall we interpret the narrator’s declaration in 8:7, that the very existence of the second proved the first faulty? (*amemptos*, which normally means “blameless,” or “without fault”)

This cannot mean the first covenant was flawed. Why not?

- The terms of the Israelite covenant were revealed by YHWH to Israel from beginning to end. This included the entire sacrificial system, with its design of the sanctuary for YHWH, the rituals to be performed in them, and promises of forgiveness if people performed the rituals as revealed (Lev. 4–6).
- Unlike other gods in the ancient Near East, YHWH was never capricious, arbitrary, or inconsistent in his actions or in his revelation. The opening characterization of him in “Israel’s national anthem” applies to both his actions on Israel’s behalf and his revelation of himself and his will for his covenant people:

The Rock, his actions are perfect (*tāmîm*),
for all his ways demonstrate justice (*mišpāṭ*).
He is a God of faithfulness (*’ēl ’ămûnâ*)
and without caprice (*’ēn ’āwel*),
righteous (*šaddîq*) and true (*yāšār*). (Deut. 32:4)

God’s promise to inscribe the Torah on people’s hearts cannot involve the replacement of the graciously revealed terms of one covenantal system with another, as if the first was trashed as flawed, imperfect, and ineffective. Shadow, earthly, humanly executed, and replica institutions involving the sanctuary, the high priesthood, and sacrifices of atonement inside the Holy of Holies have become obsolete and irrelevant in the new order.

C. What about the sacrifices?

1. The critical texts:

“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (9:22)

“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.” (10:4)

How can both statements be true? And how can we reconcile them with Leviticus 4–6 and Psalm 32?

2. The location of these texts in Hebrews

3. The foundation of Israel’s forgiveness

1 Peter 1:17b–21

Matthew 13:35; 25:31–34

John 17:24

Ephesians 1:3–10

Revelation 13:7–8; 17:7–8

4. The graciously provided means of access to forgiveness: Exodus 25:8-9, 40

*“And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the paradigm (Hebrew *tabnîth*; LXX *paradeigma*) of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it (Ex. 25:8-9)*

...

*And see that you make them after the paradigm (Hebrew *tabnîth*; LXX *typos*) for them, which is being shown you on the mountain” (v. 40).*

5. The Relationship between First Testament Rituals and the Heavenly Ritual

Designations for the Heavenly Dwelling of God	Designations for the Earthly Dwelling of God
“type” (<i>typos</i>) Ex. 25:40; Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5	“replica” (<i>hypodeigma</i>) Heb. 8:5; 9:23 “antitype” (<i>antitypos</i>) Heb. 9:24
“true” (<i>alēthinos</i>) Heb. 8:2; 9:24	“shadow” (<i>skia</i>) Heb. 9:24
“heavenly” (<i>epouranion</i>) Heb. 8:5; 9:23	“earthly” (<i>kosmikon</i>) Heb. 9:1 “of this creation” (<i>ktiseōs</i>) Heb. 9:11 “hand-made” (<i>cheiropoiētos</i>) Heb. 9:11, 24

Clues to resolving the tension:

- a. Hebrews’ references to “a better hope” (7:19), a better covenant (7:22; 8:6), better promises (8:6), better sacrifices (9:23), and a better possession (10:34).
- b. Hebrews references to sanctuary rituals as “becoming obsolete and outdated and about to disappear” (8:13), and that they were normative and applicable “until the time when the new order is instituted” (9:10).
- c. The “Prayer to Every God”
- d. Two Analogies

- (1) The Stanley Cup
- (2) Electrical Engineering

