

FULFILLMENT IN JESUS

When life is hard, it's especially essential to have a solid foundation. The book of Hebrews was written to a group of Christians who were facing difficult times. They needed the reassurance that what, and even more importantly, who, they believed in was absolutely trustworthy. And they needed encouragement that would help them to persevere in persecution.

While technically a letter, the book of Hebrews reads like a well-crafted sermon. The author uses the Old Testament to prove the greatness and superiority of Jesus over all who had gone before. Salvation had been foreshadowed in an imperfect priestly system, but now is fulfilled in the one eternal High Priest, Jesus, whose offering of Himself meets all requirements for humanity's salvation.

This book establishes that the Mosaic system is no longer binding upon New Testament believers. We now have a new standing before God because Christ has made obsolete the law of sacrifice and ritual by His blood atonement. Yet Hebrews does not negate the Old Testament; rather it sums up its Law because the Law finds its fulfillment in the finished work of the Son of God. The Old and New Testaments are inseparably linked as God's revelation of Himself.

The author has two purposes: to instruct and to challenge. The goal of instruction is to prove that Jesus is God's perfect revelation of salvation. The challenge focuses on (1) an emphasis on God's Word; (2) a call to perseverance; and (3) a call to obedience in faith. The writer intends to show from Scripture that Jesus is the uniquely begotten Son of God, yet a truly human mediator. By offering His life, He paid the death penalty due all people.

The term *Hebrews* is not used in this letter. The unnamed author is writing to a community of believers he cares about. They are probably Jewish Christians, who have never heard or seen Jesus in person. They have suffered some persecution and their spiritual progress has been arrested.

THINK ABOUT change. Is change hard for you? It is for many people. Change often means that our comfortable status quo is interrupted. Our familiar routines, lifestyles and ways of relating to others are disrupted. We don't know what to expect anymore. The author of Hebrews challenged his readers to change. He asked them to let go of tradition and embrace the freedom and rest—and possible hardship—that come from making Jesus supreme in their personal lives and corporate gatherings. Although change would obviously be for their good, it was probably pretty uncomfortable. Similarly, as you read this book, God may also challenge you to change. Are you ready? Do you trust Him enough to follow His lead, even if it takes you out of your comfort zone? Ask Him to increase your faith so you will not only learn important truth from Hebrews, but so that your life will be transformed by that truth.

Hebrews was probably written between AD 60 and 70. Due to a lack of evidence, we must accept uncertainties about the author, the audience, and the origin.

The beginning of Hebrews contains no greeting typically associated with a letter. The author describes the writing as a "*word of exhortation*" (Hebrews 13:22). Although the beginning reads more like a sermon, the writing ends like a letter, with brief personal news, greetings, and benedictions.

The author begins by explaining the truth he wants his readers to know—the uniqueness and finality of God's revelation through His Son, Jesus Christ. This revelation was given first to the Jewish forefathers through the prophets, and finally, "*to us by His Son.*" With the coming of the Son, a new era has begun. The old era, marked by incompleteness and promise, is fulfilled by the life and work of Jesus. This new era is characterized by permanence, completeness, and finality. Continuity is evident in that God spoke in both eras. Thus the opening verses state the theme of Hebrews: Christ's revelation is superior to all that had come before His arrival.



Being "*appointed the heir of all things*" cannot mean that the Son has been given some-

thing He lacked, or that ownership has passed to Him from the Father. The universe has always belonged to the Son, because through Him all created existence came into being. God the Son, by His choice to identify and save, inherited the right to be worshiped in heaven and on earth. His heirship is connected to His work of redemption. In the beginning, the Son is Creator, and in the end, He inherits His creation. Hebrews 1:2 establishes the exclusiveness of the Son. Christians are also called sons and heirs of God, but solely by virtue of their incorporation by faith into the only begotten Son.

Christ pre-existed all created things and co-existed with the Father from the beginning. *“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature”* (1:3). The idea of a brilliant reflection refers to the glory of the Son’s eternal nature. Here, we are tempted to wander into complex formulas to express the mystery of God the Son bending down and assuming human limitations. But instead we choose to rely on simplicity when faced with the mystery of God’s presence with us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, born of a woman and truly man, is of the same order of existence as God—in fact, is God. His radiance reminds us of the *Shekinah* glory, which signified God’s presence, and also of the glory seen at His transfiguration.

As the radiance reveals the light, so the Son reveals the Father. The Greek word translated *“exact imprint”* suggests an engraving on a coin; the Greek word translated *“nature”* denotes the very substance of God. The substance or essence of God is in Christ. His radiance reminds us of the shekinah glory, which in the Old Testament signified the very presence of God among the people, and also of the revelation of glory seen by the friends of Jesus at the time of His Transfiguration.

The Son does not resemble certain aspects of His Father; He is the exact representation of His essence. Son Himself said, *“Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father”* (John 14:9). The author asserts that Jesus *“upholds the universe by the word of His power”* (1:3). Just as the universe was called into existence by the Father’s word, so it is actualized and sustained by the utterance of His Son. The one in whom all things were created is also the one in whom *“all things hold together”* (Colossians 1:17).

THINK ABOUT how Scripture shows that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in essence, thus one in purpose. The church has held to the truth that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, one with the Father in purpose and personality. Jesus prayed that we would be in the Father and in Him, as the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. God wants us to be one with Him in purpose and behavior. Just as the Son was strengthened by doing His Father’s will, so He desires that we submit ourselves to Him so that His will becomes ours. Then we can say with Jesus, *“I can do nothing on My own”* (John 5:30), and with Paul, *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:13).

The theme of Jesus as our High Priest is evident in the last sentence of verse 3. By providing purification for sins, the Son accomplished something no other representative could do. He then *“sat down,”* demonstrating that the work of purification was complete. Seated at God’s right hand—a position of honor and authority, Christ now rules with God.

The Son, who for our redemption humbled Himself for a time to a position lower than that of the angels, has been exalted by His ascension to a position higher than theirs. The Son’s eternal character is not suddenly superior, but the *work* of the Son is proven incomparable. The *“name”* that distinguishes Christ from the angels and elevates Him above them is that of *Son*.

REVIEW: FULFILLMENT IN JESUS

1. Explain any new understanding you have gained from your study of Hebrews 1:1-4.