

Hebrews: Exhortation to Faithfulness in the Last Days

Course Overview

Are you looking for the city of God, a city which has foundations, and whose builder is God? This is the hope and prospect of the temple pilgrims in Psalm 107, and the great desire of the patriarch Abraham, as recorded in Hebrews 11. The author of Hebrews is a pastor, deeply concerned for an assembly of Hebrew Christians living in challenging times, and exhorts his audience to live towards the heavenly Jerusalem, the city established in the blood of Jesus, the true Mediator and Priest of the new Israel of God. His readers are encouraged to look to this city which had been the great goal of Israel's patriarchs and prophets, a goal which however they had not lived to see. The readers of this exhortation, however, living at the end of the age of Israel, have had the unique privilege of witnessing to and participating in this great culminating project of God. They will have to restrain the impulse to "return" to the earthly Jerusalem which has been judged by Christ.

Session One (February 14, 2024)

"Remember Lot's wife." Jesus rather cryptically concludes his remarks to his disciples having to do with the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem (Luke 17). Using a number of passages across the New Testament, we want to establish an understanding of the eschatological time frame in which the letter to the Hebrews appears. Additionally, we want to consider the genre of literature to which this little book belongs, and connect our conclusions to the particular time frame in which the book was written.

Session Two (February 20, 2024)

Who are the "holy brethren" that are addressed in the book of Hebrews? What was the nature of the challenge facing Jewish Christians at the end of Israel's age? What does the sequence and structure of the author's argument reveal about both the challenges which the readers faced as well as the point of view of the author?

Session Three (February 28, 2024)

This final generation of Israel, facing the great challenge of the last days, is exhorted to run the race of faith. It is for them to complete this great event as the final lap (as it were) of Israel's race. Nevertheless, they are exhorted to look to Jesus who has already run this race and is now seated at the Father's side. What is the relationship between the readers and Jesus, the "pioneer and forerunner" of the race? How is it that previous generations of the faithful have persevered yet not received what was promised? Why does the author present the readers as those who, by running their own race, bring about the completion of the race as a whole?

Session Four (March 5, 2024)

In this session we will explore the great theme of the city of God from the perspective of Hebrews 11-13, for the author takes the reader through a history of Israel, beginning with Abel, and concluding with a description of unnamed martyrs faithful to the end. Perhaps the author is alluding to Jesus' words recorded in Luke 11, but here his purpose is to demonstrate how representatives of the faithful of Israel sought God's city. As 21st century readers, we want to understand how this "looking to the city whose builder and maker is God" is an important metaphor for understanding the idea of redemptive fulfillment.

Session Five (March 13, 2024)

As with each and every book of Scripture, both of the Old and New Testaments, we must continually be reflecting upon the fact that we are not the originally intended audience. By God's grace we too have been brought into this great company of believers, but we do well to consider how each book of Scripture specifically applies to ourselves and our times. We wish to complete this study of Hebrews by considering to what degree its message of exhortation is dated and yet entirely apropos to our own time.