



ERSKINE
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

For Christ and His Church

NT 774

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Spring, 2012

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Thursdays, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce the student to the historical circumstances, themes, and concerns of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Of special interest will be Christology and eschatology of the epistle and their relevance for preaching and teaching.

ELECTIVE (Exegesis). Three hours credit.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

“The mission of Erskine Theological Seminary is to educate persons for service in the Christian Church.” (ETS 2011-2012 *Catalog*, p. 40) Understanding the person and work of Christ is central to Christian ministry. A study in the book of Hebrews is a direct expression of this mission statement.

More specifically, by the end of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Describe the basic characteristics of the Christian church in the Roman Empire in the last 30 years of the first century A.D.;
2. List and explain the major options for identifying the author of Hebrews;
3. Describe the probable historical circumstances out of which Hebrews came;
4. Describe the features of Hebrews that make it unique among the writings of the New Testament;
5. Summarize the major options for understanding the purpose(s) of Hebrews;
6. Outline the structure of Hebrews;
7. Reproduce the argument of Hebrews;
8. Explain the use of the Old Testament that is shown in Hebrews;
9. Describe the Christology presented in Hebrews;
10. Trace the theme of eschatology in Hebrews;

11. Suggest specific ways that Hebrews addresses the life of the church today;
12. List and describe major critical works on the book of Hebrews.

III. REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Students are expected to secure their own copies of all required textbooks. As a convenience, the seminary has a bookstore portal of the website at <http://www.erskineseminary.org/bookstore.html>. There you will find links to familiar vendors (CBD, Amazon, B&N, and Books-A-Million) and can check availability of texts, compare prices, and place orders. The ETS SBA will receive a modest percentage of the profits from students' and professors' purchases through this portal. The Erskine Campus Bookstore will carry a limited number of copies of every required text and orders for books can be placed through the Campus Bookstore.

Each student must purchase the following textbooks for the course:

- F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990. **ISBN 0-8028-2514-1**
- Kenneth Schenck, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews: The Story Behind the Sermon*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2003. **ISBN 0-6642-2428-8.**
- Andrew H. Trotter, Jr., *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997. **ISBN 0-8010-2095-6**

In addition, the student will need an English version of the New Testament in a translation of his/her choice. Students who work with Greek are encouraged to use the Greek New Testament.

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Students must attend every class meeting. If a student must be absent for all or part of a session, he/she is responsible for all work done and due for that session. Normally, a student who misses all or part of a session will be required to do additional work. This extra work must be negotiated with the professor. **A student who misses more than a total of 3 sessions will not pass the course.**
2. Students must be adequately prepared for each class session. Adequate preparation consists of completion of all reading and/or writing assignments for that day. The format of this course will largely be lecture-discussion. Thus, it is imperative that each student be adequately informed about the text to be studied in order to participate in an intelligent manner in classroom discussions. It is especially important that the student read thoughtfully the section of Hebrews that is to be studied in a particular class session.

3. Students may occasionally be given short, informal research-type assignments on which to report back to the group. These are voluntary and are not graded. Nothing written is required to be turned in.
4. All work must be turned in on time and the tests must be taken on the assigned dates. Late work may be penalized at least one letter grade. The professor reserves the right to reject any work that is excessively late.
5. **Three one-hour tests will be given.** See the **COURSE OUTLINE** for the material to be covered on these tests. Prior to each test, specific instructions will be given about how to prepare for it.
6. **One major paper will be required.** If the student is taking this course to fulfill his/her New Testament exegesis requirement, then he/she must choose a passage from Hebrews and do a thorough, detailed exegetical study of it using the exegetical procedure learned in the basic course in exegesis. To fulfill the exegesis requirement, the student must have successfully completed **BI 102: Principles of Exegesis**. The student who does an exegesis paper is strongly advised to read carefully Andrew H. Trotter, Jr., *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 81-222.

If the student is using this course simply to fulfill his/her Bible elective or free elective requirement, then he/she may choose to do an exegesis paper or a research paper related to the background, structure, theology, etc. of Hebrews. A list of possible topics is included in this syllabus. The student may choose one of these or may devise his/her own. The major paper for the course should be no more than 20 pages long (typed, double-spaced). The paper must be well-researched, well-written, show use of at least 10 scholarly sources, and must be fully documented using Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th edition or later as the guide. The paper will be graded primarily on content but also on style and form. **The finished copy of the paper is due no later than May 4.**
7. The student is encouraged to keep a loose-leaf notebook for the course. He/she can use it for class notes, reading notes, hand-outs, sermon/lesson ideas, bibliographical information, etc. If done properly, this notebook can be a great resource for further study, teaching, and preaching from Hebrews.
8. No specific bibliography is included with this syllabus. The student is encouraged to use the bibliographies in the textbooks used for the course. Major works of importance on Hebrews will be suggested throughout the course.
9. The student should review pertinent Seminary policies which will be followed in this class by going to the following link:
http://seminary.erskine.edu/content_policies/SeminaryPoliciesforETSStudents.pdf
10. If the student is using his/her exegetical paper in this course for his/her portfolio requirement, then it is the student's responsibility to provide a clean copy to the

staff to go into his/her file. The student should review the portfolio requirement for his/her particular degree program.

11. My spring semester office hours are posted on my office door (Office 20). It is advisable for the student to make an appointment before coming.

V. EVALUATION

The Seminary grade scale (ETS 2011-2012 *Catalog*, p. 99) will be used. The student's final grade will be calculated as follows:

3 Tests	=	70%
Research or exegesis paper	=	30%

COURSE OUTLINE

2-2 Course introduction, requirements, procedures, etc.

2-9

- I. An Introduction to Hebrews
 - A. Introduction
 - B. The place of Hebrews in the New Testament canon and in the life of the church
 - C. The Hellenistic thought-world of Hebrews
 - D. The place of the Old Testament in Hebrews
 - E. The literary form of Hebrews
 - F. The authorship of Hebrews
 - G. The recipients of Hebrews
 - H. The date of Hebrews
 - I. The conditions/circumstances of the church in the Roman Empire from A.D. 70 – 100

ASSIGNMENT FOR 2-2 AND 2-9:

1. Read Hebrews 1-13 in an English translation of your choice. Note any peculiar, puzzling, or distinguishing features of the book. Note the tone and style of the book. What do you conclude about the situation of the readers of Hebrews?
2. Read F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Revised, pp. xix – xxii, 3-43.
3. Read Kenneth Schenck, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews*, pp. 1-23.
4. Read Andrew H. Trotter, Jr., *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 9-80.

- 2-16**
- II. The Purpose(s) of Hebrews
- A. Introduction
 - B. The danger of returning to Judaism
 - 1. The view of Alexander Nairne
 - 2. The view of C. Spicq
 - 3. The view of H. W. Montefiore
 - 4. The view of Walter Schmithals
 - 5. The view of Barnabas Lindars
 - C. A look at Hebrews 13 as a key to understanding Hebrews

ASSIGNMENT FOR SESSION 2-16:

1. Read Andrew H. Trotter, Jr., *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 81-114.

- 2-23**
- III. The Finality of God's Revelation in Christ (Hebrews 1:1—2:18)
- A. Introduction
 - B. God's ultimate revelation in His Son (1:1-4)
 - C. The superiority of Christ to the angels (1:5-14)
 - D. **First admonition:** the Gospel and the Law (2:1-4)
 - E. The humiliation and glory of the Son of Man (2:5-9)
 - F. The Son of Man as the Savior and High Priest of His people (2:10-18)

ASSIGNMENT FOR 2-23:

1. Read Hebrews 1:1—2:18 in a translation of your choice. What stands out to you as you read these chapters?
2. Read F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Revised, pp. 44-89.

3-1 **TEST # 1 ON I – III ABOVE (first part of period, 3-1)**

3-8

- IV. The True Home of the People of God (Hebrews 3:1—4:13)
- A. Introduction
 - B. The superiority of Jesus to Moses (3:1-6)
 - C. **Second admonition:** the rejection of Jesus as more serious than the rejection of Moses (3:7-19)
 - D. The possibility of forfeiting the true rest of God (4:1-10)
 - E. An exhortation to attain God's rest (4:11-13)

ASSIGNMENT FOR 3-1 AND 3-8:

1. Read Hebrews 1:1—4:13 in an English translation of your choice. Note what is emphasized in this part of the text.
2. Read F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Revised, pp. 90-114.
3. Continue reading Kenneth Schenck, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews*.

3-15 V. The High Priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 4:14—6:20)

3-22

- A. Introduction
- B. The figure of Melchizedek
- C. Christ's high priesthood as an encouragement to His people (4:14-16)
- D. The qualifications for being the high priest (5:1-4)
- E. Christ's qualifications for being the Great High Priest (5:5-10)
- F. **Third admonition:** a warning against spiritual immaturity (5:11-14)
- G. No second beginning (6:1-8)
- H. Encouragement to persevere (6:9-12)
- I. The steadfastness of God's promise (6:13-20)

ASSIGNMENT FOR 3-15 AND 3-22:

1. Read Hebrews 4:14—6:20 in a translation of your choice. Note any peculiar features of this passage.
2. Read F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Revised, pp. 114-155.
3. Complete your reading of Kenneth Schenck, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews*.

3-29 V. The Order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1-28)

3-29

- A. Introduction
- B. Melchizedek the priest-king (7:1-3)
- C. The greatness of Melchizedek (7:4-10)
- D. The imperfection of the Aaronic priesthood (7:11-14)
- E. The superiority of the new priesthood (7:15-19)
 1. The divine oath of the new priesthood (7:20-22)
 2. The permanence of the new priesthood (7:23-25)
 3. The character of Jesus (7:26-28)

ASSIGNMENT FOR 3-29:

1. Read Hebrews 7:1-28 in a translation of your choice. Pay careful attention to the argument used by the writer of Hebrews. What is his point? How does he use the Old Testament here?
2. Read F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Revised, pp. 156-170.

4-5 NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK.

4-12 TEST # 2 ON IV-VI ABOVE (first part of period, 4-12)

4-19

4-26 VII. Covenant, Sanctuary, and Sacrifice (Hebrews 8:1—10:18)

5-3

- A. Introduction
- B. Priesthood and promise (8:1-7)
- C. The old covenant superseded (8:8-13)
- D. The sanctuary under the old covenant (9:1-5)
- E. A temporary ritual (9:6-10)
- F. Christ's eternal redemption (9:11-14)
- G. The Mediator of the new covenant (9:15-22)
- H. The perfect sacrifice (9:23-28)
- I. The old order as a shadow of reality (10:1-4)
- J. The reality of the new order (10:5-10)
- K. The enthroned high priest (10:11-18)

VIII. A Call to Worship, Faith, and Perseverance (Hebrews 10:19—12:29)

- A. Introduction
- B. Access to God through the sacrifice of Christ (10:19-25)
- C. **Fourth admonition:** the willful sin of apostasy (10:26-31)
- D. A call to perseverance (10:32-39)
- E. The faith of the people of God (11:1-40)
- F. Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfector of faith (12:1-3)
- G. The necessity of discipline for sons(daughters) (12:4-11)
- H. A call to be up and doing (12:12-17)
- I. The earthly Sinai and the heavenly Zion (12:18-24)
- J. A strong warning to listen to the voice of God (12:25-29)

IX. Concluding Exhortation and Prayer (Hebrews 13:1-21)

- A. Introduction
- B. Ethical injunctions (13:1-6)
- C. Examples to follow (13:7-8)
- D. The true Christian sacrifices (13:9-16)
- E. Submission to guides (13:17)

- F. A request for prayer (13:18-19)
- G. Prayer and doxology (13:20-21)

- X. Postscript (Hebrews 13:22-25)
 - A. Introduction
 - B. Personal notes (13:22-23)
 - C. Final greetings and benediction (13:24-25)

- XI. The Preaching and Teaching Value of Hebrews
 - A. Introduction
 - B. A review of the major themes of Hebrews
 - C. Suggested ways to teach/preach Hebrews

ASSIGNMENT FOR SESSION 4-12, 4-19, 4-26, AND 5-3:

1. Read Hebrews 8:1—13:25 in an English translation of your choice. Note the method of argument used here. Describe what seem to be the pastoral concerns of the author toward his readers.

2. Read F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Revised, pp. 171-392.

5-9 TEST # 3 ON VII-XI ABOVE.

RESEARCH/EXEGETICAL PAPER DUE ON FRIDAY, MAY 4.

POSSIBLE RESEARCH TOPICS ON HEBREWS

1. The Thought of Philo Judaeus and the Book of Hebrews
2. The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews
3. The Christology of Hebrews
4. The Eschatology of Hebrews
5. Hebrews and the Dead Sea Scrolls
6. The Figure of Melchizedek in Judaism
7. Jewish Angelology and Hebrews

8. Church-Synagogue Relations from A.D. 70-100
9. Hebrews and the Epistle of Barnabas
10. The High Priesthood in Judaism in the First Century A.D.
11. The Rituals of the Day of Atonement in Judaism
12. Apostasy in Hebrews and in the Early Church
13. A History of the Interpretation of Hebrews