

WHY WRITE THE BOOK OF HEBREWS ?

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who had embraced Jesus as Messiah, but were struggling to follow Him. At the time, the Temple was standing, sacrifices were offered, feast days were observed – *Judaism was at its zenith*. Jewish friends and family were scoffing out loud at these *crazy Christians*.

They were wondering why anyone would leave behind the security blanket of ancient traditions and institutions to follow a no-name preacher from Galilee.

And pressure was being applied. Jewish mamas were disappointed in their children for rocking the family boat. Proud Jewish papas were threatening to write their children out of the will if they didn't renounce their allegiance to Jesus. These new believers were being excommunicated from the synagogue, and banished by their families. Their land and property were being confiscated. The heat was on!

The message was renounce Jesus or be banished from the community. They were being tempted to deny Christ and return to the cozy confines of Judaism.

The book of Hebrews was written to affirm and strengthen the faith of these teetering believers. Hebrews explains how Jesus is better

than Judaism – *better than the prophets, the angels, the Law, Moses, Joshua, the priesthood. He works in a better Temple, makes better promises, establishes a better covenant, offers a better sacrifice*. God has replaced the fixtures of Judaism with faith in Jesus.

The Hebrew believers were right-on when they left their Jewish traditions and embraced a better way of relating to God. The book of Hebrews warns them not to retreat – don't go back – hold on to your faith. Jesus is better than Judaism!

In fact, the book of Hebrews says to all of us, that Jesus is better than any other way of life. Be proud of Jesus! Don't back down from what you believe.

THE AUTHOR

Who wrote the book of Hebrews? *We're not sure*. Suggestions range from Timothy, to Philip, to Barnabas, to Apollos...even Aquila and Priscilla... My opinion is Paul.

Of course, it really doesn't matter. Ultimately, it was written by the Holy Spirit.

GOD IS AND HE HAS SPOKEN

Hebrews begins with the most basic fact in the universe, "God..." God exists...

If I had 10 quarters in my pocket, numbered 1 to 10, the odds of pulling out number one would be 1 in 10. The odds of pulling numbers 1 and 2 in order would be 1 in 100. The odds of pulling numbers 1, 2, and 3 in order would be 1 in 1000. The odds of pulling out 1 through 10 in order would be 1 in 10 billion.

Understand, the simplest living cells are made up of strings of 55 amino acids that have to be assembled in exact order. The odds of these chemicals emerging by chance from a primordial soup, then connecting in exact sequence to form a living cell is beyond responsible speculation. Our planet, and the burgeoning life it contains, can only be explained by the existence of a Creator. The psalmist says, "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God."

But the writer of Hebrews goes on to mention the second most basic fact in the universe – God not only exists, but He has also spoken.

Agnostic philosopher, Christopher Morley, wrote, "My theology, briefly, is that the universe was dictated, but not signed." He accepted a Creator, but contended the Creator had refused to play His cards – He had chosen

not to reveal Himself. An atheist says God does not exist. An agnostic says God is, but He has not spoken. While the writer of Hebrews asserts that God is *and* He has spoken.

Verse 1, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..." The Greek renders it, "polumeros and polutropos" – in many portions and many methods.

The Old Testament revelation of God was like the unrolling of a scroll. The divine drama unfolded bit by bit – a portion at a time – each prophet revealed a various facet of God's nature. The prophets communicated through different means. Some used sermons – others object lessons – others worked miracles.

But eventually the prophets gave way to God's ultimate word to man, "His Son". Today, – in these last days – God speaks to us through His Son, Jesus. God's revelation no longer comes to us piecemeal.

Today, God has summed up what He wants to say and put it a single package. Jesus is His complete and final word to man. If you want to hear what God has to say... behold His Son.

Bible Scan - Hebrews 1-9

SC 97A

DECEMBER 1 2002

THE GLORY OF JESUS

Hebrews 1:3 calls Jesus “the brightness of (God’s) glory and the express image of His person.”

Jesus is to God’s glory what a flash is to the light in this room. He is the blaze or concentration of the glory of God. And Jesus is not just a representation of God – He is the “express image” – or exact reproduction of God. He’s not just in similar form, but He consists of the same stuff. He is God- not just in form, but in substance.

Devotion Box - The Perfect Priest

According to Hebrews 2:17 Jesus qualifies as the perfect High Priest.

The Latin word “*priest*” means “*bridge-builder*” – which is what a priest is – he’s an intermediary between God and man. He represents God to man – and man to God. A priest has to be faithful to God’s truth, and merciful to man’s needs.

And this is what makes Jesus the perfect priest. He never waters down or distorts God’s will! He is faithful! Yet He’s also merciful! He knows our needs and how to meet them.

Chapter 4 ends by reminding these Hebrews of the priesthood of Jesus.

Through His work on the cross, Jesus secured for us access to the throne of God. There are always tickets in my name waiting at heaven’s will call window. I can come “boldly to the throne of grace” to “obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Hey, there is nothing I feel that Jesus has not felt. His grace is tailor made for human aid. He’s there with what I need when I need it most.

I love the close of chapter 4 from Peterson’s paraphrase, “So let’s walk right up to Him and get what He is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help!”

Devotion Box - Consider Jesus

In his paraphrase of chapter 3, Eugene Peterson, renders verse 1, “So, my dear Christian friends, companions in following this call to the heights, take a good hard look at Jesus. He’s the centerpiece of everything we believe...” Notice his words, “take a good hard look at Jesus.” *Consider Jesus... keep your eyes on Jesus...* Hey, this is the key to a victorious Christian life. Don’t get distracted. Resist the theological tangents. Keep the main thing the main thing!

THE WORD OF GOD

Verse 12 tells us of the power of God’s Word... It’s “living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.” It’s active, it’s effective, it’s incisive...

It’s sharper than a two-edged sword. Not only is it a weapon we can use against the enemy, it’s a surgical instrument we can use on ourselves. The Bible untangles flesh from faith. It manicures motives. When we study it we train our hearts to differentiate between what is heavenly and what is human.

Every fisherman knows it’s best to use live bait – and the Word of God is live bait. It wiggles in the water. Guys, learn the Word, and then share it with others.

BETTER THAN THE ANGELS

Hebrews 1:4 says of Jesus “having become so much better than the angels...”

Jesus, not only better than the prophets, but better than the angels - *and keep in mind the Angels were World Series champs this year.*

In Judaism, angels were revered too highly - they were practically worshipped. Since angels lived in God’s presence, and since they helped convey the Law to Moses – angels were considered by some to be mediators between God and man.

Isn’t it ironic, how people today make the same mistake - our pseudo-spiritual culture has become preoccupied with angelic visitations. Everybody wants to be touched by an angel - but Hebrews says it’s far better to be touched by Jesus!

Chapter 1 quotes several Old Testament passages to prove Jesus’ superiority over the angels. Jesus is the Son of God, while angels are mere servants. Jesus is eternal - angels are created. Jesus is worshipped. The angels are His worshippers.

Verse 6 tells us that when Jesus was born “the angels of God worshiped Him.” How ironic, the Jews were worshiping beings that were worshiping Jesus. Verses 13-14 tell us that Jesus reigns over us, while the angels minister to us.

I do believe in guardian angels, and when I get to heaven I’ll thank mine for the overtime I caused him. But I don’t trust in angels. I trust in their boss. Your angel doesn’t love you. All you are to him is an assignment. It’s Jesus that loves you.

Chapter 1 tells us the deity of Jesus makes Him superior to the angels – while chapter 2 tells us the humanity of Jesus makes Him better than the angels...

What angel knows what it’s like to get tired, or sleepy, or feel pain, or bleed, or be rejected by a friend?

But 2:18 says of Jesus, “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.” Jesus can help us in a way no angel ever will, because He’s been where we’re at – Jesus has shared and experienced and overcome the human dilemma.

Devotion Box - Labor To Enter God's Rest

In the Old Testament God's intention was to give His people rest... rest from their enemies, and their labors, and their hardships. Hebrews 4:1 suggests that since Israel failed to enter God's rest, it's still available to people who have faith.

God's rest should be the goal of every human. In six days God created the world and set in motion His plan for redemption. On the seventh day He rested – and God has been resting ever since. God never gets uptight or stressed out. He has everything under control. God knows contentment and perfect fulfillment... And you can too, if you join Him in His rest...

Several years ago I owned a hammock. When I had finished working in my yard, I would spend an hour or so, in that hammock – and my kids loved to join me. They would stop whatever they were doing to swing with dad in his hammock.

God invites us to join Him in His hammock – but we too have to stop what we are doing – *even doing for God* - and rest in what He has done for us. God invites us to join His rest – not create our own. Rejoice, take hope, find sufficiency, and realize your fulfillment... in

what God has done – not in what you might do.

Verses 10-11 appear to be contradictory, "For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest..." The NKJV puts it, "labor to enter that rest..." *After telling us to cease from our works we're told to labor to enter God's rest?*

A relationship with God requires effort, but the type of effort is crucial. Work to earn or deserve God's blessing will leave you stressed out and frustrated. By faith we enter God's rest! *But faith requires effort.* Faith is active not passive. We labor to build our faith. It takes effort for a kid to climb into a hammock... The key is the type of effort we exert... Cease all *obligatory effort* – you don't have to do a thing to earn God's favor - rather show some *celebratory effort*.

The Sabbath remember, was a feast day. It was a party - and of course, it requires effort to throw a party, but a party isn't viewed as work... it's fun! You throw a party because you want to – not because you have to – it's a joy. Hey, if you want to enter God's rest... live your life as a party in God's honor.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS

Once a little girl came home from Sunday School and said, "Mom, God can do anything! He works miracles with His left hand, and heals with His left hand, and holds us close with His left hand."

The mother was thrilled that her little girl was so excited about God, but she didn't understand this fixation with God's left hand. She said, "Honey, God can also use His right hand." But the little girl shook her head. She was so sure of herself, "No Mommy, God can't! We learned in Sunday School that Jesus is *sitting on His right hand*."

This little girl was slightly confused – Jesus is not sitting on the right hand of God - He is sitting *at* the right hand of God. Hebrews 7-8 teach us that when the resurrected Christ ascended into heaven He sat down at the right hand of God, and today functions as our High Priest... "He ever lives to make intercession."

The temple priests were from the family of Levi, but Jesus was of the family of Judah. Thus the Hebrew believers wondered how could Jesus be their priest?

The answer was in a Messianic psalm that predicted Messiah's ministry. Psalm 110:4 said that Jesus would be a priest after the order of Melchizedek – not Levi.

And chapter 7 explains why a priest after the order of Melchizedek was a far better priest than one after the order of Levi. Jesus was also a superior priest.

Verses 1-4 introduce Melchizedek. Genesis 14 says He was the priest to whom Abraham paid his tithes. Verse 1 says He was both a king and priest. Under Mosaic Law this was prohibited. There was a separation of church and state. The priests were from the tribe of Levi. The kings were of the lineage of Judah. And this confused the Hebrews. How could Jesus hold both crown and censer?

Melchizedek is the key that unravels the mystery. Because Messiah is a priest after Melchizedek the Levitical rules did not apply. Jesus could be king and priest.

Verse 3 says of Melchizedek, he was "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither begin-

ning of days nor end of life..." The FBI would've had a hard time doing a background check on Melchizedek... He had no parents, no birthday, no date of death... This is why many scholars believe the man Melchizedek was none other than a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews saw a precedent being established when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek - and was blessed by Melchizedek. This was a big deal.

Verse 7 concludes, "Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better." When Abraham put himself under Melchizedek's authority he accepted that the priesthood of Melchizedek was superior to him and his descendants. This is how this Hebrew writer asserts that Jesus is superior to the Levites.

The Levites were priests by virtue of their pedigree, while Melchizedek was a priest by virtue of his character and endless life. This too, is what qualifies Jesus as our High Priest – He lived both a sinless and an eternal life.

The Levitical priests were sinners and had to sacrifice for themselves before they sacrificed for others. In addition, their ministry was temporary - interrupted by their own death. But Jesus is a priest forever. He ever lives to make intercession. With Jesus on the job you can count on favorable treatment from God for all eternity. Possess an eternal Savior and you possess an eternal confidence.

Verses 26-27 sums up the priesthood of Jesus, "For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."

The potency of a cleanser is measured by the number of applications needed to get out the stain. The Levitical sacrifices were offered perpetually and never got the dirt out - but Jesus was offered once. One application of the blood of Jesus is all it takes to remove sin once and for all!

Bible Scan - Hebrews 1-9

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - Wednesday, 12/4, 7:30 pm—Men's Huddle....Friday, 12/13 @ 7:00 pm & Saturday, 12/14 @ 1:00 pm—Ladies' Tea...12/20-22, Gift Wrapping Outreach...Sunday, 12/22 Family Night, "Reindeer Games" at Lenora Park Gym...

Next Bible Scan - December 8, 2002 - Hebrews 10-13

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." - Hebrews 4:16

Bible Scan
Memory Verse

Devotion Box - From The Guttermost To The Uttermost

Hebrews 7:25, "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

I've heard people say of struggling saints, "If he gets into heaven it'll be by the skin of his teeth." But that's not true. No one barely makes it to heaven.

When Jesus saves you He doesn't do it half-way! You're as saved as you can get! Jesus saves us as fully and completely we can be saved - "to the uttermost". From *the guttermost to the uttermost*.

A NEW DEAL

At the end of chapter 8 the writer of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34. It's the promise of a new covenant. Old Testament saints knew of the necessity of a New Covenant.

The old covenant *exposed our sin*, but it was powerless to *expunge our sin*. It convicted, but couldn't save. God knew we need a new covenant, and that's what he promised... It had 3 elements: a new heart, a new start, a new part.

Verse 10 says God writes His law in our hearts. Under the Old Covenant God's law was written on stone tablets - it was an external standard. But under the New Covenant God writes His law on our hearts. His will becomes intuitive. Our instinctive desire is to love God, and love others. We get a **new heart**.

Verse 12 speaks of a **new start**. God promises to forgive and forget. "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." What a promise!

And our **new part**... is to simply believe! Trust in His promise and it becomes yours!

Verse 13 is an important verse, "A new covenant" - He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." Judaism had become obsolete. God struck a new deal with man! *Hey, we're under a new covenant—let's stop living as if we were under the old.*

THE REAL TABERNACLE

Like all priests, Jesus is not without His temple. Chapter 8 explains that the earthly temple was a replica - a small scale model - of the heavenly temple. When Moses walked down Mount Sinai he had commandments in one hand, and blueprints in the other. Verse 5 called the tabernacle a "copy and shadow of the heavenly things..."

But this meant the Levitical priests were only working in the model. Jesus conducted His priestly duties in the real tabernacle. Judaism was a toy religion - played out in a dollhouse. Those who believe in Jesus have access to a real priest, and can enter a real temple.

Devotion Box - Paroled Not Pardoned

Physical washings and rituals could not affect the spiritual cleansing we as spiritual beings need. But Jesus enters a spiritual temple with a spiritual sacrifice. 9:12 says Jesus entered heaven "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."

Rather than a superficial cleansing that purifies the flesh - verse 14 says Jesus is now able "to purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God..." Under the Old Covenant we were *paroled*, but in Christ we've been *pardoned*.

AFTER YOU DIE

Verse 27 tells us, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment..." This is an important verse. There is no such thing as reincarnation. You get no second chances. No opportunities to start over in another form. You die once, then after that the judgment.

When you die don't expect long tunnels or bright lights... CS Lewis tells us what to expect the moment following your death, "There will be God without disguise: something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we have really chosen, whether we realized it or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it."