

Through the Bible Book by Book

New Testament

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HEBREWS

Theme: The Epistle to the Hebrews was written, as its name suggests, particularly to the Jewish believers, although it has a permanent value and an abiding appeal for all believers in all ages.

The reading of the Epistle will reveal the fact that the body of Hebrew Christians addressed were in danger of falling away from the faith. Compared to the nation as a whole they were an obscure little company, regarded as traitors by their fellow countrymen, and the objects of their suspicion and hatred.

They felt their loneliness, cut off as they were from the nation.

- Persecution was looming large before them.
- Oppressed by present trials and by the thought of future adversity, they had yielded to discouragement.
- They were lagging behind in spiritual progress (5:11-14);
- Many were neglecting attendance at worship (10:24, 25).
- Many, wearied of the walk of faith, were looking toward the magnificent temple at Jerusalem with its sacrifices and imposing ritual.

The temptation was to forsake Christianity and to turn to Judaism. To check this apostasy, this Epistle was written, the chief purpose of which is to show the relation of the Mosaic system to Christianity, and the former's symbolical and transitory character.

The writer first of all sets forth the superiority of Jesus Christ over all Old Testament mediators; then points out the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old, as a superiority of substance to shadow, of antitype to type, of reality to symbol. These believers were perplexed and disheartened by manifold temptations and, by the fact of their having to walk in the midst of adversity by faith in the naked word of God, without any visible support or comfort.

The writer of the Epistle proves to them that the worthies of the Old Testament passed through similar experiences, walking by faith, trusting in the word of God in spite of all adverse circumstances and even in the face of death (Ch. 11). Therefore, like their forefathers, the believers were to “**endure as seeing him who is invisible.**”

The theme may be summed up as follows: the religion of Jesus Christ is superior to Judaism for it has a better covenant, a better high priest, a better sacrifice and a better tabernacle.

Authorship: There is no Book of the New Testament whose authorship is so disputed nor any of which the inspiration is more indisputable. The book itself is anonymous. Because of difference in style from the other writings of Paul, many orthodox scholars have denied that he himself wrote it. Tertullian in the third century declared that Barnabas was the author. Luther suggested that Apollos wrote it. "Finally we may observe, that, notwithstanding the doubts which we have recorded, we need not scruple to speak of this portion of Scripture as 'the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.' ... Whether written by Barnabas, by Luke, by Clement, or by Apollos, it represented the views, and was impregnated by the influence of the great apostle, whose disciples even the chief of these apostolic men might well be called. By their writings, no less than by his own, he being dead, yet spoke." - Conybeare and Howson's *"Life and Epistles of St. Paul."*

Why Written: To check the apostasy of Jewish Christians who were tempted to return to Judaism.

Where Written: Evidently from Italy (13:24).

Contents:

I. The Superiority of Jesus to Old Testament Mediators and Leaders. Chs. 1:1 to 8:6.

II. The Superiority of the New Covenant to the Old. Chs. 8:7 to 10 :18.

III. Exhortations and Warnings. Chs. 10:19 to 13:25.

I. The Superiority of Jesus to Old Testament Mediators and Leaders. Chs. 1:1 to 8:6.

1. Jesus is superior to the prophets because -

(a) In times past God's revelations to the prophets were partial, and given at different times and in different manners. v. 1.

(b) But in this dispensation God has given a perfect revelation through His Son. vv. 2, 3.

2. Jesus is superior to the angels, (1:4,.14) for the following reasons:

(a) No individual angel was ever addressed as Son. v.5.

(b) The Son is the object of the angel's worship. v. 6.

(c) While the angels serve, the Son reigns. vv. 7-9.

(d) The Son is not a creature, but the Creator. vv. 10-12.

(e) No angel is promised universal authority, for their function is service. vv. 13, 14.

3. Exhortation in view of the foregoing statements (2:1-4). If disobedience to the word of angels brought punishment, what will be the loss if the salvation declared by the Lord Himself be unheeded?

4. Jesus was exalted above the angels.

Why was He made lower than they (2:5-18)? For the following reasons:

- (a) In order that human nature might be glorified and that man might take his God-given place as ruler of the world to come. vv. 5-8.
- (b) That He might fulfill God's plan in dying for all men. v. 9.
- (c) That the Saviour and saved might be one. vv. 11-15.
- (d) That he might fulfill all the conditions of a faithful priest. 2:16-18.

5. Jesus is greater than Moses (3:1-6) , because -

- (a) Moses was only part of God's household; Jesus was the Founder of the same. vv. 2, 3.
- (b) Moses was only a servant; Jesus was a Son. vv. 5, 6.

6. Exhortation in view of the statements in Ch. 3:1-6 (3:7 to 4:5).

The Christian is a member of a spiritual household presided over by the Son of God. But let him beware, for this privilege may be lost, just as the privilege of entering Canaan was lost by many Israelites through their faithlessness and disobedience. Though these Israelites had experienced The Lord's salvation at the Red Sea, they did not enter the Promised Land. The sin that excluded them was the sin of unbelief - a sin, that if persisted in, will exclude the Jewish Christian from the privileges of his inheritance.

7. Jesus is greater than Joshua. 4:6-13.

- (a) Joshua led the Israelites into the Rest of Canaan, which was but a type of spiritual rest into which Jesus leads the believers. vv. 6-10.

(b) Exhortation in view of this statement (vv. 11-13).

“Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:11-13).

8. Jesus' high priesthood. 4:14 to 5:10.

- (a) The fact of Jesus' priesthood (v. 14).

The believers are to cling to the faith they possess, for they are not without a faithful priest, as their non-Christian brethren might lead them to believe. Their high priest though invisible, ever intercedes for them.

- (b) Jesus' qualifications as a priest:

- (1) He can sympathize with human infirmity (4:14 to 5:1-3, 7-9), for He Himself, like men, has suffered temptation, and borne suffering, but with this difference - He did not sin.
- (2) He was called of God, as Aaron was (5:4-6, 10).

9. The writer breaks the thread of his thought in order to utter words of rebuke, exhortation, warning and encouragement:

(a) *A rebuke* (5:11-14). He is about to discuss a deep typical subject-concerning Melchizedek - but he fears that their spiritual immaturity will make it difficult for him to explain it.

(b) *An exhortation* (6:1-3). They are to pass the elementary state of Christian doctrine and press on to matured knowledge. The expression “**principles of the doctrine of Christ**” may have reference to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity in which converts were instructed before baptism.

(c) *A warning* (6:6-8). The warning contained in these verses is against apostasy, which is a willful rejection of the truths of the Gospel on the part of those who have experienced its power.

The true nature of the sin referred to in these verses will be better understood when we remember who are being addressed and the peculiar relation of the Jewish nation to Christ. The Jews of the writer's time could be divided into two classes in relation to their attitude toward Christ: those who accepted Him for whom He claimed to be - the Son of God; and those who rejected Him as an impostor and a blasphemer.

The Jewish Christian who fell away from Christianity and returned to Judaism, would by this act testify that he believed that Christ was not the Son of God but a false prophet who merited crucifixion; he would be taking sides with those who were responsible for His death.

Before his conversion, this same Jewish Christian in a sense, shared the guilt of his nation in crucifying Christ; in forsaking Christ and returning to Judaism he would be rejecting the Son of God a second time and crucifying Him afresh (v. 6).

(d) *An encouragement* (vv.9-20). Though he thus warns them the writer is confident that the believers will not fall away from the faith (v. 9).

They have been earnest in the performance of good works (v. 10); he desires that they display the same earnestness in the attainment of the hope of their spiritual inheritance (v. 11). In this they are to be followers of those, who through faith and patience attained to the realization of their hope - for example, Abraham (vv. 12, 13).

The Christian's hope is a sure one; it is an anchor of the soul, holding him fast in a heavenly harbor (vv. 19, 20). It is a sure hope, for it is founded on two unchangeable things: God's promise and God's oath (vv. 13-18).

10. Christ's priesthood (typified by that of Melchisedec) is superior to the Aaronic. 7:1 to 8:6.

Melchizedek is mentioned in this connection as a type of Christ. The writer uses a Jewish mode of illustration. He takes a scriptural fact as it stands and shows its typical value. Melchizedek is a type of Christ in the following respects:

(a) *By reason of the meaning of his name, “King of righteousness,” “King of peace.”* v. 2.

(b) *His priesthood was not hereditary*; Jewish priests were required to produce their genealogy before being admitted to office. Ezra 2:61-63. Though Melchisedec was a priest there is no record of his genealogy, and this is what is meant by the expression, “**without father, without mother**” (v. 3). In this respect he is a type of Christ who did not have a priestly genealogy. Hebrews 7:14.

(c) *The fact that there is no record either of his birth or his death is typical of the eternal nature of Christ’s priesthood.* This is what is meant by the expression, “**having neither beginning of days nor end of life.**” v. 3.

11. The priesthood of Christ, typified by that of Melchizedek, is greater than that of Aaron, as shown by the following facts:

(a) In a manner of speaking, Levi, while yet in Abraham’s loins, paid tithes to Melchizedek. 7:4-10.

(b) Spiritual maturity was not attainable through the Aaronic priesthood and the covenant of which it was the mediator.

This is witnessed by the fact that another order of priesthood was to arise - the Melchizedek order. This change of priesthood implies a change of law. The change was effected because of the inability of the Mosaic law to bring spiritual maturity. (Compare Romans 8:1-4).

(c) Unlike the Aaronic priesthood, the Melchizedek priesthood was instituted with an oath (vv. 20-22). God’s oath, accompanying any statement is a sign of immutability.

(d) The ministry of the priests of the Aaronic order was ended by death; but Christ has an eternal and unchangeable priesthood, for He lives forever. vv.23-25.

(e) The Aaronic priests offered sacrifices every day; Christ offered one eternally efficacious sacrifice. 7:26-28.

(f) The Aaronic priests served in the tabernacle which was but an earthly type of the tabernacle in which Christ ministers. 8:1-5.

(g) Christ is the mediator of a better covenant. 8:6.

II. The Superiority of the New Covenant to the Old. Chs. 8:7 to 10 :18.

This superiority is manifested in the following ways:

1. The Old Covenant was only temporary (8:7-13). This fact is witnessed by the Old Testament Scriptures which teach that God will make a new covenant with His people.

2. The ordinances and sanctuary of the Old Covenant were simply types and shadows that did not bring perfect fellowship with God (9:1-10).
3. But Christ, the true priest of the heavenly sanctuary, by one perfect sacrifice - His own Person -brought eternal redemption and perfect fellowship with God (vv. 11-15).
4. The New Covenant was sealed with better blood than that of calves and goats - the blood of Jesus (vv. 16-24).
5. The one sacrifice of the New Covenant is better than the many sacrifices of the Old. 9:25 to 10:18.

III. Exhortations and Warnings. Chs. 10 :19 to 13:25.

1. An exhortation to faithfulness and steadfastness in view of the fact that they have sure access to God through a faithful high priest. 10:19-25.
2. A warning against apostasy (vv. 26-31; compare 6:4-8).

Let not those who will turn away from Christ as the sacrifice for their sins think that they can find another in Judaism. To willfully and knowingly reject Him is to thrust from themselves the sacrifice that will shield them from the fiery indignation of God. One scholar suggests that, from verse 29, it may be inferred that Jewish apostates from Christianity were, before being readmitted to the synagogue, required –

- (1) to deny that Jesus was the Son of God,
- (2) to declare that His blood was rightly shed as that of a malefactor,
- (3) to ascribe (as the Pharisees did) the gifts of the Spirit to the operation of demons.

3. An exhortation to patience in view of the promised reward (vv. 32-36).
4. An exhortation to walk by faith (10:37 to 12:1-4). In this section it is the writer's purpose to show that those in past ages in whom God took delight were those who walked by faith, and who trusted Him in spite of all circumstances.

- (a) *Faith enjoined* (10:37-39).
- (b) *Faith described* (11:1-3).

Faith is that which makes the believer confident that the objects of his hope are real and not imaginary. It is manifested as shown in the case of the Old Testament saints, by an implicit obedience to and trust in God, in spite of appearances, and adverse circumstances.

- (c) *Faith conquering through God* (vv. 32-36).
- (d) *Faith suffering for God* (vv. 37-40).

(e) *Faith's supreme example* - the Lord Jesus, the One who gave the first impulse to our faith, and who will bring it to its final maturity (12:1-4).

5. An exhortation to scrupulous obedience because of their heavenly calling (12:18-24), and because of their heavenly Leader (vv. 25-29).

6. Concluding exhortations. 13:1-17.

(a) *To sanctified living* (vv. 1-7).

(b) *To steadfast living* (vv. 8, 9).

(c) *To separated living* (vv. 10-16).

Dr. Way's paraphrase will clarify verses 10-14: "Such restrictions (v. 9, concerning clean and unclean meats) have no application to us: we already have an altar of sacrifice of which we partake; but such as still cling to the superseded temple service are disqualified from partaking of it. I say so, because, when the blood of the victims slain for the sin-offerings on the Day of Atonement is borne into the Holy Place by the high priests, the bodies of these victims may not, like other sacrifices, be eaten by the worshipers, but are burnt outside the precincts of the camp. For this reason, also, Jesus that He might consecrate God's people by His own blood, suffered without the gate, symbolizing the fact that those who remain in Judaism have no part in Him. Therefore let us, who accept Him, go forth to Him outside the limits of Judaism bearing the contumely which is heaped upon Him. We shall not be homeless: an abiding city we have. but not here: we aspire to that which is yet to be."

(d) *To submissive living* (v. 17).

7. Conclusion (vv. 18-25).

~ end of Hebrews ~

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