

The Book of Hebrews

“Jesus – The Better Way”

- Part 1 -

Prepared by Chris Reeves
www.TheGoodTeacher.com

I. Introduction.

A. Title.

1. The title “Hebrews” (*Pros Hebraious*, To the Hebrews) is not original with the book, but was later assigned to the book. Hebrews is the first of eight books known as the General Epistles. These eight books are called General Epistles because they are addressed to a “general”, widespread audience rather than a particular local church (Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, etc.) or particular individual (Timothy, Titus, Philemon).
2. “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews” is a title that is found in some editions of the King James Version, but there is no early manuscript evidence to support this wording and it was not a part of the original letter. It was added later.

B. Author.

1. Like the genealogy of Melchizedek (7:3), the author of Hebrews is unknown. Different authors have been suggested (Barnabas, Luke, Apollos, Silas, Paul, etc.).
2. The language and style of writing used in the salutation is very similar to what Paul would use (13:18-25), but the typical mention of Paul’s name in a greeting is missing from the book (see Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; etc.). Also, the author appears not to have been an apostle, but one who received the gospel message from the apostles (2:3). Another consideration is to note that the author quotes exclusively from the Septuagint and not from the Hebrew text as Paul often does in his epistles.
3. Men like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Athanasius believed that Paul wrote the book. The original recipients knew who he was (13:18-25), but no one knows for certain who wrote the book. However, we can all know for certain what his message was.

C. Audience and Purpose.

1. Hebrews was written to “brethren” (3:1,12; 10:19; 13:1,22). The traditional view is that the audience was primarily a group of Jewish Christians. There are several references to Old Testament passages, persons (Moses, Joshua, Melchizedek, Aaron, Abraham, etc.), and institutions (priesthood, tabernacle, sacrifices) which would have been understood by a Jewish audience more so than a Gentile audience. The repeated use of the present tense in connection to the sacrificial system points to the temple still being in use (8:4,13; 9:4,5,9; 10:1,8,11; 13:10-11). Also, there is no specific mention of

Gentiles in the book. The readers may have been Jewish Christians in or around Rome (13:24).

2. The readers were Christians who had obeyed the gospel (2:3-4; 3:1,12,14; 6:9). They knew the author (13:19) and Timothy (13:23). They were not novices (5:12; 6:1-3) and they had been ministers to the saints (6:10). They had been persecuted, but not to the point of bloodshed (10:32-34; 12:4; 13:3). They had leadership (13:7,17,24). However, they were in danger of drifting (2:1), neglect (2:3), and falling away (3:12; 4:1,11; 12:12-15). They were dull of hearing (5:11) and needed to press on to maturity (6:1). They were going after strange teachings (13:9-10). Some were even making a custom of forsaking the assemblies (10:25), sinning willfully (10:26), and shrinking back to perdition (10:39).

3. Hebrews is a book of exhortation (13:22). It was written to exhort the readers not to fall away from Christ. These readers who once stepped out of Judaism into Christianity, are now turning back to the Old Law or turning aside to worldliness (2:1,3; 3:12-13; 4:1,11; 5:11; 6:1,4-8; 10:25,26,39; 12:12,15,25; 13:9-10). They may have done this to avoid persecution.

4. Hebrews exhorts the readers to mature and press forward (6:1,9-12) rather than fall away. They are exhorted several times to “hold fast” what they have in Christ (3:6,14; 4:14; 10:23). The author’s appeal to mature is based upon the absolute sufficiency, supremacy and superiority of Jesus Christ. He is the “better” way! The author’s appeal in the book peaks with the statement: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (13:8). It has been suggested that the author begins his book like an essay, proceeds like a sermon, and ends like a letter (*Introduction to the New Testament*, H.C. Thiessen, page 297). The author makes use of typical homiletical devices (3:1; 5:11; 7:4; 6:3; 9:5b; 11:32; 12:3; 13:22), frequent exhortations (2:1; 3:1-2; 4:11,14; 10:19-25,35; 12:1-5,12-13; 13:13-15), and sharp warnings (2:2-4; 3:6,12-13; 4:1,12-13; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:14-17,25-29; 13:9). The author also exhorts the readers using the words, “let us”, twelve times (4:1,11,14,16; 6:1; 10:22,23,24; 12:1,28; 13:13,15). The author warns against apostasy (6:4-8; 10:26-29; 12:14-19) and encourages his readers to renew their zeal for Christ (6:9-12; 10:19-39; 12:12-17).

D. Date.

1. Clement of Rome quoted abundantly from Hebrews in his epistle *1 Clement* (c. A.D. 95), so it would have been written prior to that time. We know that it was written while Timothy is still alive (13:23). The book was probably written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Reference is made to the old Jewish sacrificial system which would imply that the temple in Jerusalem was still standing at the time the book was written (5:1-3; 7:23,27; 8:3-5; 9:6-9,13,25; 10:1,3-4,8,11; 12:26-27; 13:9-11).

2. A date between A.D. 64 and 68 is suggested.

E. Theme: “Jesus – The Better Way” .

1. The theme of the book of Hebrews centers on the concept of Jesus Christ being “better” (supreme and superior). For the use of “better” in the book, see the following references: 1:4; 6:9; 7:7,19,22; 8:6 (twice); 9:23; 10:34; 11:16,35,40; 12:24. For the use of “more excellent”, see 1:4 and 8:6. For the use of “greater and more perfect”, see 9:11. Jesus is better than the angels because they worship him (1:6). Jesus is better than Moses because he created him (3:3). Jesus is better than the Aaronic priesthood because his sacrifice was once for all time (7:27). Jesus is better than the Old Covenant because his covenant provides better promises (8:6).

2. In short, there is more to be gained in Jesus than to be lost in returning to Judaism or worldliness. Jesus is “better” for these Christians rather than going back to the Old Law or going aside into worldliness. These Christians who were in danger of falling away needed to understand that they were leaving behind a Savior who is “better” for them than anyone else or anything else. Hebrews is “the book of better things”. The original readers were exhorted not to leave the superior (“better”) to go to the inferior. Jesus is a “better” messenger (1:1 - 2:18), apostle (3:1 - 4:13), and high priest (4:14 - 7:28). Jesus also offers a “better” covenant (8:1 - 9:28), sacrifice (10:1-31), and way of faith (10:32 - 13:25). If these Christians fall away for good (6:4-6), they will forfeit all their blessings and benefits from Jesus Christ (1:14; 2:10-12,18; 3:1,13; 4:9,14-16; 5:9; 6:18-19; 7:25; 9:14,24,28; 10:10,14,19-26,34-35; 11:6,40; 12:11,22-24; 13:8,10,14-15,20-21).

F. Outline: “Jesus – The Better Way”.

1. The Better **NAME OF CHRIST** (Hebrews 1:1 – 4:13). Key Verse: 1:4.
 - a.) Christ is *better than the prophets* (1:1-3).
 - b.) Christ is *better than the angels* (1:4 – 2:18).
 - c.) Christ is *better than Moses* (3:1 – 4:13).
2. The Better **MINISTRY OF CHRIST** (Hebrews 4:13 – 10:18). Key Verse: 8:2,6.
 - a.) Christ *serves a better priesthood* (4:14 – 8:5).
 - b.) Christ *mediates a better covenant* (8:6 – 10:18).
3. The Better **WAY OF CHRIST** (Hebrews 10:19 – 13:25). Key Verse: 10:20.
 - a.) It gives an *assurance of faith* (10:19-39).
 - b.) It requires an *obedience of faith* (11:1-40).
 - c.) It demands an *endurance of faith* (12:1-13).
 - d.) It encourages a *service of faith* (12:14 - 13:17).
 - e.) Closing remarks and benediction (13:18-25).

II. Survey (Hebrews 1:1 – 4:13).

A. The Better **NAME OF CHRIST** (1:1 – 4:13).

There were three Old Testament figures that the recipients of Hebrews would have held in high esteem: prophets, angels, and Moses. The author of Hebrews argues that Jesus is “better” (superior) to each one in every way. Thus, the readers should not fall away from nor forsake the very one who is “better” than all.

1. Christ is *better than the prophets* (1:1-3). The author of Hebrews omits the usual opening salutation and immediately launches into the theme of the superiority (supremacy) of Jesus Christ. He opens by praising the superiority of Jesus over the prophets who revealed the OT Law (1:1-2). Jesus' revelation is God's complete and final word (1:2). Jesus is superior to the OT prophets because of his divine privilege (1:2), divine creation (1:2), divine glory (1:3), divine nature (1:3), divine providence (1:3), divine sacrifice (1:3), and divine authority (1:3).

2. Christ is *better than the angels* (1:4 – 2:18). Jesus is also superior to the angels who were mediators (messengers) of the OT Law. Jesus is the Son of God (1:2,5,8); angels are merely the servants of God (1:7,14). Jesus is "better" because of his name (1:4), his position (1:5-6), his worship (1:6), his deity (1:7-9), his eternity (1:10-12), and his authority (1:13-14). "Therefore" (2:1) marks the **FIRST** concluding statement in the book: because Jesus is superior over the prophets and the angels, his "great salvation" should be heeded and not be neglected (2:1-4). Jesus' superiority over the angels is further demonstrated by his human incarnation (2:5-18). He is both divine (1:1-14) and human (2:5-18). The subjection of the world to Jesus (2:5-8), his suffering (2:9-10), his sacrifice (2:11-17), and his succoring (2:18) all point to his superiority over the angels.

3. Christ is *better than Moses* (3:1 – 4:13). Jesus is also superior to Moses the great OT lawgiver. Indeed, Moses was a great man, but Jesus has "more glory" than Moses. First, Moses was a faithful *member* of God's house, but Jesus is the *builder* of the house (3:1-4). Second, Moses was a *servant in* God's house, but Jesus is a *Son over* the house (3:5-6). "Wherefore" (3:7) marks the **SECOND** concluding statement in the book: because Jesus is superior to Moses, the readers are exhorted to "hold fast" their faithfulness and not fall short of their rest-reward through unbelief (3:7-19). The readers are exhorted not to fall away from God and Christ on their pilgrimage to heaven (3:12-14) like the Israelites fell away from God and Moses on their pilgrimage to Canaan (3:15-19). "Let us ... therefore..." (4:1,11) marks the **THIRD** concluding statement in the book: because of the superiority of Jesus over Moses, the better promised rest of heaven which remains ahead should not be met with disobedience, but should be entered with diligence (4:1-13). The generation of the exodus (under Moses) did not become the generation of the promised rest (under Joshua) because of their disobedience (4:1-8). Since a "Sabbath rest" or heavenly rest remains ahead for God's people, the readers are exhorted to give diligence to remain faithful and not become disobedient to God's word (4:9-13).

III. Applications For Today (Hebrews 1:1 – 4:13).

- A. God Speaks to Us Today Through His Son (1:2) and Jesus Is The "Better" Way (1:4).
- B. Christians Can Fall Away (2:1; 3:12-13) and There Is No Escaping God's Judgment (2:3).
- C. Jesus Died to Give Us Help (2:16) and to Give Us Aid (2:18).
- D. Remember, Christians are Partakers of a Heavenly Calling (3:1) and We Are God's House – Let's Act Like It (3:6).
- E. We Must "Hold Fast" Our Boldness and Confidence to the End (3:6,14).
- F. An Evil Heart of Unbelief and the Deceitfulness of Sin Will Ruin a Christian (3:12-13).
- G. Have Fear and Give Diligence to Enter Into the Heavenly Rest That Await Us (4:1,9,11)
- H. Our Heart and Life is Completely Exposed to God and His Word (4:12-13).