

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Introduction

The book of Hebrews was written about A.D. 65-70 to Jews who had become Christians. We don't know whether these Jews were in a particular city or province, but it is generally supposed that they were in Jerusalem. We don't know who wrote the book, but we do know that whoever it was wrote exactly what God wanted written. He may have been in prison at the time of writing, and that may have been in Italy, possibly Rome (13:18-24).

The identity of the writer is universally debated, with the apostle Paul being the most common choice among those who name a probable writer. It is unlikely that Paul wrote the epistle. He was the apostle to the Gentiles, whereas this epistle was written to Hebrews by someone accustomed to doing so. Certainly Paul, "a Hebrew of Hebrews," as he said himself (Philippians 3:5), was capable of writing of the law and history of the Jews in the detail and passion of this epistle (Acts 13:16-41), but so were many others (Acts 7). Timothy apparently had been recently released from prison as the epistle was being written (13:23), and there is no record of his incarceration during the lifetime of Paul, who is believed to have been beheaded in Rome in about A.D. 67.

The apparently obvious purpose of the epistle was to urge Christians, who were Hebrews and had formerly worshiped according to the Law of Moses, not to forsake Christ and return to the Law, as some already had done, and others were considering doing. The method of argumentation is to show that Jesus is superior to Moses and the angels, and that the gospel is superior to the Law. The writer's purpose is aided by the fact that the temple was still standing (10:11), and the people still offered daily sacrifices there. The readers apparently had great familiarity with the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets, as the writer quotes heavily from the Old Testament as if to people who knew what he was talking about. However, there is considerable repetition in the epistle, apparently to make the point abundantly clear, especially to those who had lost some of their ability correctly to interpret the words that were familiar (5:14).

Chapter by Chapter, the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus as...

1. Prophet, Priest and King,
2. Superior to angels and to the word they brought,
3. Superior to Moses & faithful to God,
4. Superior to Joshua and to the rest he brought,
5. Superior to Aaron and to the salvation he brought,
6. The One in Whom we must persevere "on unto perfection,"
7. A better Priest with a better testament,
8. The One with a more excellent ministry with a perfect salvation,
9. The One with more efficacious blood purging man's conscience of dead works,
10. Fulfillment of the Law, perfecting the sanctified,
11. The only Worthy Object of faith.

The conclusion is, therefore, that Christians should...

12. Stand in faith in the city of the living God, and
13. Suffer the word of exhortation in daily living.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

(A brief topical outline)

- I. The Supremacy of Christ – chs. 1-2
 - A. Superior to the prophets
 - 1. God spoke to the fathers (ancestors) by the prophets 1:1
 - 2. Today God speaks to us by (through) Jesus, His Son
 - B. Superior to angels
 - 1. He is God's Son - a better name – 1:4
 - 2. Angels worship His Son – 1:6
 - 3. Jesus is to rule with God – 1:3, 13
 - a. Angels only serve – 1:14
 - 4. Made lower than angels – 2:7, 9
- II. The Christian's Hope for "Rest" – 3:1 - 4:13
 - A. A rest superior to that given by Moses
 - 1. Christ is the builder of God's house 3:4
 - 2. Moses faithful only as a servant in God's house – 3:5
 - 3. Jesus faithful as a Son, not just a servant – 3:6
 - B. Warning against copying the unbelief of the Israelites
 - 1. Failure to enter the promised rest – 3:12
 - 2. Failure to persevere & continue confidently in God's promise of blessing in Christ
 - C. Promise of Rest still open to Christians
 - 1. We can lose it through disobedience – 4:1
 - 2. Result of not heeding the warning given in 3:18-19 & 4:11
- III. The High Priesthood of Christ – 4:14 - 6:20
 - A. Jesus as our High Priest – 4:15-16
 - B. Law of high priests under the Old Law – 5:1
 - 1. Appointed from among men
 - 2. Mediator between God & man
 - 3. Offered gifts & sacrifices
 - C. Christ is our High Priest today – 5:5
 - 1. Appointed by God – 5:4-5
 - 2. Learned obedience through suffering, & was perfected – 5:8
 - 3. Source of eternal salvation to those who obey – 5:9
 - 4. He is our High Priest forever, with similarities to Melchizedek – 5:10
 - D. Our need to mature – 5:11-14
 - 1. Need to become teachers – 5:12
 - 2. Difference between babes & mature Christians – 5:13-14
 - 3. Possibility of apostasy (falling away) – 6:6
- IV. Christ & Melchizedek – 7:1-28
 - A. Greatness of Melchizedek – 7:1-10
 - B. Imperfection of the Levitical system – 7:11-14
 - C. The "order of Melchizedek" superior to Levitical order – 7:15-25
 - 1. Based on indestructible life – 7:15-17
 - 2. Brings better hope – 7:18-19
 - 3. Confirmed by an oath from God – 7:20-22
 - 4. Permanence of the new order – 7:23-25
 - D. Christ a fulfillment of requirements of the new order – 7:26-28

- V. Superiority of the New Covenant to the Old Covenant – 8:1 - 10:18
 - A. Jesus - our High Priest - dwells in Heaven – 8:1-2
 - B. Jesus the Mediator of a better covenant – 8:6
 - 1. First covenant had faults - wasn't perfect – 8:7
 - 2. Since God said “New Covenant,” He made the first obsolete
 - C. Christ's relation to the Levitical system
 - 1. First covenant had regulations in an earthly tabernacle – 9:1-10
 - a. Inadequacy of the old law
 - b. Earthly tabernacle vs. tabernacle made without hands – 9:24
 - c. The two courts
 - D. Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant
 - 1. Jesus made only one sacrifice – 9:12-14
 - 2. His will is in force upon His death – 9:16-18
 - E. The Levitical system a shadow of the truth – 10:1-18
 - 1. Levitical sacrifice
 - a. Offered continually – 10:1
 - b. Does not make the worshiper perfect – 10:1
 - c. Sins remembered yearly – 10:3
 - d. Animal sacrifice couldn't take away man's sins – 10:4
 - 2. Christ's sacrifice
 - a. Offered “once for all” – 10:10
 - b. Carries no reminder of sin – 8:12
 - c. The perfect sacrifice to purify the conscience – 10:14-18

- VI. Exhortation to perseverance – 10:19 - 12:29
 - A. Draw near & do not fall into apostasy – 10:19-39
 - B. Remember the faith of past saints
 - 1. The character of faith – 11:1-3
 - 2. Examples of faith
 - a. Ante-diluvians – 11:4-7
 - b. Patriarchs – 11:8-22
 - c. Moses & the Israelites – 11:23-31
 - d. Others who demonstrated faith – 11:32-40
 - C. Jesus - example of faith – 12:1-3
 - D. Discipline of sons – 12:4-11
 - E. Exhortation to persevere – 12:12-29

- VII. Concluding exhortation – ch. 13
 - A. To brother love – 13:1
 - B. To hospitality to strangers – 13:2
 - C. To concern for prisoners & the ill-treated – 13:3
 - D. To fidelity in marriage – 13:4
 - E. Concerning the love of money, and contentment – 13:5
 - F. Concerning church leaders and attitudes toward them – 13:7, 17
 - G. Warning against false teachers – 13:9

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Chapter 1

1. God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

Before Jesus came God communicated with man at “sundry” (various, different - Webster) times and by “divers” manners (indicating more than one but indefinite in number - Webster). The term “fathers” often refers to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve sons of Jacob, but that is not the case here. God spoke to them directly. In this introduction references is made to those Jews who lived under the Mosaic Law.

2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

Comparing this verse with Deuteronomy 5:1-6 reveals the limits of the three dispensations of God’s law in the history of the world. From Adam to Moses God spoke directly to heads of households. From Moses to Jesus He spoke to Israel through the written law. From Jesus to the end of time He speaks to the whole world through His Son. In the reference to “these last days” we see that this new dispensation will be the last in human history, and the writer was already in it. The title **PROPHET** suits Jesus by definition: He speaks the words of God to men. He is not *a* prophet, but *the* prophet spoken of in Deuteronomy 18:18 and John 1:21; 6:14. Jesus is that word (John 1:1, 3, 14) by Whom God spoke all things into existence (Gen. 1:3ff; cf Rom. 1:16-17). The word “worlds” is translated from *αἰών* (world, age, eon). It is a metonymy here referring to all things made.

3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

The “glory” here is that splendor surrounding God, described in Revelation, chapter four. Jesus bears that, and is also “the express image” of the person of God. That is, He is an exact representation of God’s character (essence). The Greek (*ὑπόστασις*) is akin to the Latin *substantia*, for which we might say that Jesus was substantially (substantively, in substance) God. “Power” resides in Jesus due to His being “the express image” of God, so that his word is capable of “upholding all things.” Jesus is identified here as a **PRIEST** in that He “purged our sins” (that is cleaned them out, eliminated them from us). Having finished the work that God sent Him to do (John 17:5; 19:30), Jesus “sat down on the right hand” of God. When physical posture is discussed, Jesus is pictured as *on* (Acts 2:25; I Pet. 3:22), *by* (Acts 2:33), *at* (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 12:2), or *sitting* at (Acts 2:34; Col. 3:1; this verse; Heb. 1:13; 8:1; 10:12) God’s right side, with the single exception of Acts 7:55-56, in which He is seen as standing on the right side of God. Being “on the right hand of the Majesty” (the designated position of one who is second in authority), Jesus is shown to be **PRINCE** (Isa. 9:6) & **KING** (Zec. 9:9; Mat. 21:5). Thus, with the previous verse Jesus is seen to hold all three offices which, under the Old Testament, were ordained and anointed by God to be His peculiar servants among men.

4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

“Being” tells how or in what condition He sat. The word “made” does not indicate that Jesus was created, but having first been moved into a position below angels (2:7,9), he was elevated to a position above them (Php. 2:7-11), where, as the eternal Son of God (John 8:58), he had been all along. In showing Jesus preeminent to prophets, the writer shows Him even above angels, who are obviously above prophets. As Daniel (Dan. 7:13) states that Jesus was given His kingdom when He went “to” the Father (not when He will come back later, as many falsely teach), so the writer to the Hebrews says that He received “a more excellent name) when He went to God to lay hold on His inheritance.

Ten facts identifying Jesus are given in the introduction (vv2-4) to this epistle. He is:

1. The Son of God [2]
2. The Prophet of God [2]
3. Appointed heir of all things (*cp.* Dan. 7:13-14; Eph. 1:20-23; Mat. 28:18) [2]
4. Maker of the worlds (*cp.* Gen. 1:26; John 1:3) [2]
5. The brightness of God’s glory [3]
6. The express image of God’s person [3]
7. Upholding all things [3]