

Session 1: The Book of Hebrews

Question:

Do any of you want to hear God speak to you?

God has spoken!

Through prophets in the past

And through God's Son...to and for us!

The Book of Hebrews is:

A letter of promise...

A letter to promote practical, yet peaceful Christian living...

A letter of Purpose...

A letter of Praise and Prayer.

The Theme of the Book...

Christ is Superior....

The Title of the Book could have been "The Superiority of Christ."

- *The writer of Hebrews continually makes mention of the superiority of Christ in both His personage and in His ministering work.*
- *In the writings of the Old Testament, we understand the rituals and ceremonies of Judaism symbolically pointed to the coming of Messiah. In other words, the rites of Judaism were but "shadow of things to come".*
- *Hebrews tells us that Christ Jesus is better than anything mere religion has to offer. All the pomp and circumstance of religion pales in comparison to the person, work, and ministry of Christ Jesus.*

It is the superiority of our Lord Jesus, then, that remains the theme of this eloquently written letter.

To Whom was the Book of Hebrews written?

The book of Hebrews addresses three separate groups:

1. *Believers in Christ,*
2. *Unbelievers who had knowledge of and an intellectual acceptance of the facts of Christ*
3. *Unbelievers who were attracted to Christ, but who rejected Him ultimately.*

Hebrews was written to a group of suffering, persecuted Jews somewhere in the east outside of Israel. There are no references to Gentiles. The problem faced in Jerusalem of having both Gentile and Jew in the church is not discussed in Hebrews. The letter was written to Jewish believers and unbelievers to reveal the merits of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant as opposed to the Old Covenant.

Why should the church be addressing the Book of Hebrews if it was for Jews with no reference to Gentiles?

Because Scripture is for man to understand the full impact God has on His creation. God has made a covenant with His people (first to the Jew and now to the Church of Jesus Christ and its members).

Who are the members? They are:

- Those that have placed their faith and trust in Jesus, the Son of God, and*
- Have been washed in the blood of the Lamb.*
- Those that have had their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life.*

If we want to know Christ and His fullness, to know what our purpose is in life, and to know the full duty and responsibility God has placed on us, then we need to study the Book of Hebrews.

Author of Hebrews: Important:

- ❖ *The certain identity of the author remains an enigma (unknown).*
- ❖ *Some scholars state that it is the Apostle Paul's writings. While others state that it is not because:*
 - *Missing is Paul's customary salutation common to his other works.*
 - *The suggestion that the writer of this epistle relied upon knowledge and information provided by others who were actual eye-witnesses of Christ Jesus (2:3) makes Pauline authorship doubtful.*
 - *Some attribute Luke as its writer;*
 - *Others suggest Hebrews may have been written by Apollos, Barnabas, Silas, Philip, or Aquila and Priscilla.*

NOTE: There is still much evidence that Paul wrote the letter.

- ✓ *The most compelling comes from Scripture itself. Remember that Peter wrote to the Hebrews (that is, the Jews; see Galatians 2:7 and 1 Peter 1:1). Peter wrote: "...just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him [emphasis added]" (2 Peter 3:15). In that last verse, Peter is confirming that Paul had also written a letter to the Hebrews!*
- ✓ *The theology presented in Hebrews is consistent with Paul's. Paul was a proponent of salvation by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8, 9), and that message is strongly communicated in this epistle (Hebrews 4:2, 6:12, 10:19-22, 10:37-39, and 11:1-40).*
 - *Either Paul wrote the epistle, or*
 - *The writer was trained by Paul.*
- ✓ *Although it is a small detail, this epistle makes mention of Timothy (Hebrews 13:23), and Paul is the only apostle known to have ever done that in any letter.*

VERY IMPORTANT!

Regardless of the human hand that held the pen, the Holy Spirit of God is the divine author of all Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16); therefore, Hebrews speaks with the same canonical authority as the other sixty-five books of the Bible.

Date of Writing:

I believe the date is somewhere between A.D. 60 and A.D. 69, perhaps about A.D. 65.

- *The letter to the Hebrews had to have been written sometime after Christ's ascension (about A.D. 30) and sometime before the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) because the Temple was still standing.*
- *There had to be time for the apostolic missionaries to evangelize the area. We know that apostolic missionaries were not sent out from Jerusalem for at least seven years after the church had been founded. It was sometime after those seven years before this Jewish community was reached.*
- *There also had to have been a certain amount of time for this community to grow spiritually. Hebrews 5:12 says, "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God." The writer was saying that they had enough time to be mature, but were not.*

They should have been mature, but they weren't.

- *They had no confidence.*
- *They were in danger of returning to the patterns of Judaism. They might have accepted Jesus as the Savior, but they were looking back to their old pattern of life-style.*
- *They were in danger of confusing their salvation with legalism.*
- *They couldn't make a clear-cut break between the New Covenant in Christ and all the ceremonies and patterns of their old life in Judaism.*

The Hebrew Christians were still hung up on Temple ritual and worship. That's why the Holy Spirit tells them about a new priesthood, a new temple, a new sacrifice, and a new sanctuary that are better than the old ones. These people had gone beyond Judaism by receiving Jesus Christ, but they were still hanging on to many of the Judaistic rituals that had been so much a part of their life. That's understandable when their friends and countrymen were persecuting them. They were in great danger of creating a ritualistic, legalistic Christianity. They had become a congregation of weaker brothers (Rom. 14:2), who were still calling unclean what the Lord had sanctified (Rom. 14:14).

A Lesson of Encouragement from the Past:

God's "faith heroes"

- *Rich in foundational Christian doctrine, the epistle to the Hebrews also gives us encouraging examples of God's "faith heroes" who persevered in spite of great difficulties and adverse circumstances (Hebrews 11).*
- *These members of God's Hall of Faith provide overwhelming evidence as to the unconditional surety and absolute reliability of God.*

- *Likewise, we can maintain perfect confidence in God's rich promises, regardless of our circumstances, by meditating upon the rock solid faithfulness of God's workings in the lives of His Old Testament saints.*

Key Verses:

Hebrews 1:1-2: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."

Hebrews 2:3: "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation..."

Hebrews 4:14-16: "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Hebrews 11:3, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

Hebrews 12:1-2: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

We Christians today have the writings of the Apostles and the Church fathers...therefore, we can go to the Scriptures and know that what is said in the Word of God is real, true, and is based on actual facts. The new Christian converts relied on what they experienced, what they had heard, and what they were hearing from the excited and convincing members of the Christian "Way".