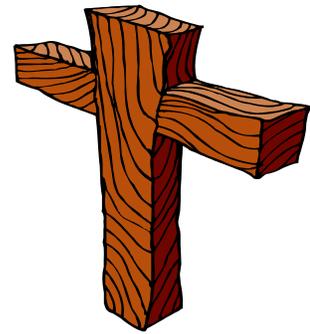




THE SUPERIOR

CHRIST & HIS

COVENANT



Biblical Studies From
The Book Of Hebrews

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The Superior Christ & His Covenant

Biblical Studies From The Book Of Hebrews

Lesson 1 – General Introduction

Overview

Oftentimes, while watching T.V. or reading some magazine, one will come across an advertisement that promotes a “new and improved” product. The makers of this product emphasize all the favorite features have been retained, but there have been improvements made that make the product all the more valuable and irresistible...one consumers cannot do without.

Such a concept is not just for commercials. This notion also seems to be the theme of one of the New Testament's more prevalent epistles...the book of **Hebrews**. Indeed, there has never been a time when God has left man bereft of His revealed will. He has always spoken to us (1:1-2). Viewing the Scripture as a series of “revelations” (from the patriarchs to the prophets to Christ), what God says to us today through His Son is the *ultimate* in improvements. What was once promised to last until its complete fulfillment (cp. Mt. 5:17-19) eventually became ready to be replaced with something superior (cp. 8:13).

God has always interacted with man based on covenants, or agreements. There is now no greater covenant than what can be found in Christ. Patriarchal covenants were limited to the family to whom they were addressed (who else but Noah's family were told about the flood and the life-saving ark?). The covenant through Moses certainly alienated Gentiles (cp. Deut. 5:2-3; Eph. 2:12), and was unable to completely give Jews what was needed...release from the problem of sin (cp. 7:18-19; Rom. 8:3). Yet, now we have a covenant that *will not* and *cannot* be outdone. Saints are reminded of this “great salvation” (2:3), and told to cling to Him who offers it...our Sympathizer (4:15) and Sacrificer (7:27).

Obviously, the title of **Hebrews** tells of the flavor of the book. It was written to Jewish Christians who had graduated from the inferior covenant of the Mosaic Law to the gospel of Jesus Christ (cp. 6:4-5). Its presentation follows a grand thought process in which the Holy Spirit attempts to show just how valuable life is in Christ, and how foolish it is to come to Jesus only to go back to an inferior way of living (cp. 6:6). Needless to say, one attempting to study this book will be hindered if he does not have a good, general understanding of the Old Testament.

Purpose

We allow the author to state the purpose himself...clearly done at the end of the epistle. He wrote to exhort or encourage these Jewish Christians (13:22). No matter how lofty or grandeur his presentation may seem to be throughout the book, his aim was a *practical* one. These Jewish believers were obviously being tempted to return to the ancient covenant of their forefathers. Pressure to do so must have been immense from family, friends, etc. However, they needed exhorting to remain true to Christ. Likewise today, saints need to be encouraged or exhorted to remain faithful and true to Christ. No matter how committed one may begin his walk with the Lord, he will be faced with temptation to quit. Hope can

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eventually fade. He may even forsake assembling with other believers (10:25). Such apostasy can even become complete and irrevocable (6:1-6; 10:26-31).

We, too, can “fall from grace” (Gal. 5:4). We can regress back to whatever inferior religion we left when we came to Christ. The parallels are obvious to our situations today. Christians need constant reminding and exhorting to cling to Christ and not fall into apostasy. Though not initially written to us, **Hebrews** will always be a relevant study for New Testament Christians to undertake.

Theme

It is stated early and emphasized often throughout the book.

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world” (1:1-2). [NASV]

Christ, as Son, Heir, and Creator, is also the *final* Spokesman in the *final* covenant. As Neil Lightfoot states in his commentary ***Jesus Christ Today***, the superiority of Christ and His covenant is emphasized in many ways throughout the epistle. Notice these:

- ◆ **Through sacrifices**

Priests offered sacrifices to atone for man’s sins. However, no dumb, dead animal was offered on our behalf. Jesus offered Himself alive (9:13-14). Nor was it like the offerings that had to be continually sacrificed. Jesus offered Himself once for all time to save us (10:1-3, 11-12).

- ◆ **Through the sanctuary**

The old covenant had regulations re: the worship of Jehovah. The Holy & Most Holy Places were no doubt resplendent with glory with all they represented. However, they were inadequate because

- ✓ the common people could not enter into the Holy Place (cp. Num. 3:10)
- ✓ the priests could not enter into the Most Holy Place (cp. Lev. 16)
- ✓ the high priest could only enter the Most Holy Place once a year (cp. Lev. 16)

All of this tells us the Jewish system offered no real access to heaven itself. Yet, today we have complete and full access to heaven through the death of Christ (9:11-12, 23-24).

Author

Perhaps no other aspect of **Hebrews** has been debated as much as who wrote it. Shamefully, many Bible students spend more time on this than they do attempting to learn its message. We are not able to go any farther on this point than the Scripture will allow us. We are not told who wrote this epistle; the author is anonymous.

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Even though **Hebrews** is anonymously written, some information about the author can be found within the book. Consider the following:

- ◆ He was familiar with his readers (**5:12; 6:9**)
- ◆ He was also familiar with Timothy (**13:23**)
- ◆ He had been with his readers previously and longed to be reunited with them (**13:19**)

The most popular choice among N.T. writers as being the author of **Hebrews** has been the apostle Paul. Among many reasons, supporters of a Pauline authorship point to the closing verses in **Heb. 13** and his remarks about Timothy, reminding us they are similar to statements he makes about his young comrade in his other epistles.

We only have one word of caution...students should take notice of one passage we believe has some bearing on the authorship issue → **Heb. 2:3**. Whoever wrote **Hebrews** appears not to have been an apostle of Jesus. He also appears to have been one to whom the apostles had confirmed the Lord's word. That would rule out the apostle Paul (**cp. Gal. 1:11-17**).

Thankfully, we do not need to know who wrote the book in order to know what the book teaches.

Date

Like the authorship aspect, we also cannot be dogmatic about when **Hebrews** was written. However, the internal evidence seems to indicate the epistle was written prior to Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70. This seems plausible mainly because of the numerous references to sacrifices and the priesthood. Obviously, such activities would have ceased after Rome's leveling of Jerusalem. The references at **7:8; 9:6-10; and 13:10** are in the "present tense" and appears to indicate the temple was still standing and such activities were still on-going.

Also, if the epistle were written after A.D. 70, it seems almost certain the Holy Spirit would have inspired the author to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. No doubt, this would have been a powerful argument in convincing the epistle's readers that the Old Testament order of things had come to an end. Yet, the wording at **8:13** indicates otherwise...*"But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear."*

Many Bible commentators and students choose a date of around A.D. 65 for **Hebrews**. Reasons for this date include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ The audience has been in Christ for some time. They are not new converts & Christianity is not in the early days of its infancy (**5:12**).
- ◆ The audience's first leaders are now dead (**13:7**).

A.D. 65 seems as good a date as any, and is the one we'll use for our study.

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Audience

Unlike knowing who wrote **Hebrews**, knowing the intended readers does have a direct impact upon a proper interpretation. If it can be determined who the author's audience was, that will help modern-day readers make proper application of the content of the epistle.

Consider these points found throughout the book regarding the audience:

- ◆ They had been acquainted with the author previously (13:19).
- ◆ They had not yet resisted to bloodshed (12:4).
- ◆ They are encouraged to recall their "former days" when they "endured a great conflict of sufferings" after they were enlightened (10:32).
- ◆ They had suffered the loss of their possessions, but accepted such because they looked forward to something that was "better and abiding" (10:34).
- ◆ They had ministered to saints who had been mistreated (6:10).
- ◆ Though they had lived for some time as Christians, they had not grown as they should have. They should have been "teachers" but were still "babes" (5:11-14).
- ◆ They were apparently about to "drift away" (2:1; cp. 10:25).

Outline

Though many good outlines have been written that would accurately represent what is taught in **Hebrews**, we will follow the basic outline on the following page. We believe it emphasizes the two main thematic points the epistle makes...the Superior Christ and His Superior Covenant.

Questions

1. What strong arguments can be made for the dating of the book of **Hebrews**?

2. What appears to be the theme to this epistle?

3. What was the primary purpose for which this epistle was written?

4. What modern-day application can Christians today make from **Hebrews**?

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Outline Of The Epistle To The Hebrews

- A) The Superior Spokesman [Heb. 1-7]
 - 1) His Divinity [1:1 - 2:4]
 - 2) His Humanity [2:5-18]
 - 3) Belief In Him [3:1 - 4:13]
 - As the Son of God
 - Perils Of Unbelief
 - Rest For The Believer
 - 4) His Priesthood [4:14 - 5:10; 7:1-28]
 - Pause In Discussion [5:11 - 6:20]
 - Hearers had become dull
 - Hearers were in danger of falling away

- B) The Superior Covenant [Heb. 8-11]
 - 1) A More Excellent Ministry [8:1-13]
 - 2) Contrasts Of The Two Covenants [9:1-28]
 - 3) A Better Sacrifice [10:1-18]
 - 4) Privileges & Obligations [10:19-25]
 - 5) The Need For Endurance Through Faith [10:26-39]
 - 6) Examples Of Enduring Faith [11:1-40]

- C) Concluding Exhortations [Heb. 12-13]
 - 1) The Example Of Christ [12:1-13]
 - 2) The Value Of Discipline [12:14-17]
 - 3) The Contrast Of The "Two Mountains" [12:18-24]
 - 4) The Stability Of The New Testament Kingdom [12:25-29]
 - 5) Various Admonitions & Benediction [13:1-25]