

Intro to **HEBREWS**

Authorship: The question of the authorship of the book of Hebrews is one that has been up for discussion and debate for centuries. The common line of thought is that the Apostle Paul wrote the book, and in many versions of the Bible, the opening title will read, "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews." There are some similarities in Hebrews to other of Paul's writings, which lends some credibility to the claim that Paul wrote the book. However, there are just as many differences which lead many scholars to conclude that Paul was not the writer of the book. One of those stark differences is the very opening of the book. In all of Paul's letters, he uses the same salutation and greeting to address the recipient. In Hebrews, there is no such opening. Among the other possible writers that scholars put into the pool of possibilities are Apollos, Silas, Luke, and even Barnabas. The bottom line is that we will never know who the actual author was, but the early church fathers knew, and had no qualms about including this important book into the Biblical canon. Getting too hung up on debate of the author can cause us to "miss the forest for the trees," as far as its theme and message are concerned.

Theme: The theme of the book of Hebrews is the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ as God's final revelation and mediator of His grace. Hebrews could be called "the book of better things," since the two Greek words for "better" and "superior" occur 15 times in the letter. The book is written from a Hebrew perspective and context, and it has been suggested by Dr. Walter Martin, author of "Kingdom of the Cults," that the Book of Hebrews was written by a Hebrew to other Hebrews telling the Hebrews to stop acting like Hebrews. In truth, many of the early Jewish believers were slipping back into the rites and rituals of Judaism in order to escape the mounting persecution. This letter, then, is an exhortation for those persecuted believers to continue in the grace of Jesus Christ.

One characteristic that reflects Paul's possible authorship is the way in which the book is structured. With the universal theme being "The Superiority of Jesus Christ," the book is logically divided into two distinct sections: a theological dissertation and a practical application. We will discuss the book of Hebrews along these two lines of thought.

I The Theological Basis for Christ's Superiority

A. Christ is superior to the prophets. (1:1-4)

It is here that the writer communicates with crystal clarity the thesis for his argument. "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 has appointed..."

B. Christ is superior to angels (1:5-2:18)

As prophets were, angels were also highly regarded as messengers of God to the devout Hebrew believer. Here, the writer establishes that Christ was not only superior to the prophets, but also to the angels, also.

C. Christ is superior to Moses. (3:1-4:13)

In regards to the one who many looked to as the standard bearer of their faith, Moses, with all his majesty and authority as one who had actually seen and spoken with God, pales to the majesty and authority of the Son, Christ Jesus.

D. Christ is the Great High Priest (4:14-7:28)

In Hebrew religion and practice, the High Priest was highly regarded as the only one who could enter the presence of God through the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, the meeting place of worship in the OT. In the next few chapters of the book of Hebrews, the author establishes the premise that now, everyone has access to the throne of God through Jesus Christ the Son, and what he did on the cross. References to the temple veil being torn on that day are made and the analogy drawn that now the Holy of Holies is accessible to all through Christ. The writer also makes the case that two highly regarded priests—Aaron and Melchizedek—while revered in the priestly ordered, are still inferior to the high priesthood of Jesus Christ.

E. Christ, the New and Superior Covenant (8:1-9:28)

The writer is building his argument and making his case to the Hebrews that not only is Christ, as God's anointed, higher than the prophets, the angels, and the high priests, but that he also ushered in a new covenant that fulfills the demands of the old covenant...which dovetails into the last significant point of the theology:

F. Christ is the Ultimate and Supreme Sacrifice for All (10:1-18)

The final point and exclamation point in this theological lesson is that the requirements demanded by the law for the satisfaction of the sin debt and payment were made once and for all through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord, I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds...their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

II. The Practical Outworking of Christ's Superiority (10:19-13:17)

A. Holding Fast to our Faith (10:19-39)

The writer frames out his practical exhortations with the introductory phrase, "Let us..." As a preface to those practical teachings in the remaining part of the text, let's visit three that were in the first part of the text:

- **"Let us pay more careful attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." (2:1)**
- **"Let us be careful that we do not fall short of the promise of entering the Lord's rest" (4:1)**
- **"Let us leave the simple truths of Christ and go on to more mature "meat." (6:1)**

In this section of scripture, encouraging us to persevere in our faith, there are several principles embedded here:

- **"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith." (10:22)**
- **"Let us hold fast to the faith that we profess" (10:23)**
- **"Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (10:24)**
- **"Let us not quit meeting together, but rather, encourage each other." (10:25)**

B. Exercising our Faith (11:1-40)

Here in this classic passage of scripture, sometimes called the "Hall of Faith," the writer eloquently and effectively gives a word of teaching that is central to our beliefs—the principle of faith.

"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see....and without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (11:1,6)

To reinforce this teaching, the writer gives many examples of people in the scriptures—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, and others—who operated by faith and not by sight.

C. Walking in the light of Faith (12:1-13:21)

The writer begins his final challenge with an inspirational encouragement. That in light of these who have been pioneers in believing God and trusting Him by faith...

"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us"

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us"

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."

The writer then deals with the subject of persecution and trial, and how the believer is to see that, in light of this faith relationship with the Lord...to endure it as discipline. He ends his teaching with some practical exhortations:

- Make every effort to live at peace with all men (12:14)
- Keep on loving each other as brothers (13:1)
- Keep marriage honorable and holy (13:4)
- Honor the leaders who came before you (13:7)
- Obey the leaders you have now (13:17)
- Pray, pray, pray (13:18,19)