

# Note

## Hebrews – Part 1 of 2

### Summary

Hebrews was written for Christian Jews who were tempted to renounce Christ under persecution. For Gentile Christians today, the book connects the New and Old Testaments and gives us a better appreciation of the Old Testament.

Hebrews speaks of Jesus' superiority to the angels, Moses, Joshua and the high priests, showing why we must strive to believe in Him even amidst persecution to enter our rest in Christ and gain hope and peace.

# Transcript

## Hebrews – Part 1 of 2

Today we come to the book of Hebrews. For many Christians, this is the most difficult book in the New Testament.

There are several reasons for this:

1. It is very Jewish. The book of Hebrews is written to the Jews for a particular purpose i.e. to meet their needs at that time;
2. You need to have deep knowledge of the Old Testament to be able to understand this book. The writer assumes you have that Old Testament knowledge;
3. Culturally, it is so Jewish that it speaks of things where it matters most to the Jews such as “angels” whereas, we as Christians don't really bother much about angels. Other issues like sacrifices, the temple and genealogies also matter greatly to the Jews but not to Christians.

So for many of us who read this book, it is very foreign to us and seems difficult.

So, who is the author of this book? Some people think it's Paul, but many don't think it's Paul as the style is very different. It is probably written by a person who was close to Paul, likely to be a Jew who could be one of his team members. In any case, nobody knows for sure who is the author of this book.

This was probably written to the Jews who were persecuted. These Jews could be considering whether to give up their new trust in this Messiah or revert to their Jewish religion. When people became Christians in those days, they came from two backgrounds. Either from a Gentile background which is very idolatrous, and sexually immoral; or a Jewish background. For the gentiles, when they became Christians, it was very hard for them to revert to their earlier background as it was like day and night.

When the Jews were persecuted, it was very different as usually the persecution came from Roman authorities. Under the Roman Empire, Caesar is King whereas Christians considered Jesus as King. Thus, the Jews would have a choice to go back to the synagogues because as far Romans are concerned, the synagogues were officially sanctioned. It was a registered religion in the Roman Empire but not the new Christian faith. So for the Jews who are being persecuted, they were tempted to go back to the synagogue. After all, it is the same God that they have worshipped before. In fact, the only difference was if they go back to the synagogue, all they had to say was "I deny that Jesus Christ is the Messiah" and they will be accepted back into the synagogue.

So this letter was written to the Jews who were tempted under persecution to return to the good old ways. Some people said this happened in Rome because Rome had two groups in the Roman churches -the Gentiles and the Jews.

So what is this book really about? I think the book is basically about exhorting, urgently pleading with the Jews not to return to the old faith. They had something so much better in the New Covenant and should not sell it away for convenience and safety just to return to the old faith.

You will find this book has a lot of exhortations – The word "let us...." has been mentioned 13 times throughout the Book. The Book is not a typical book which starts with doctrine in the first half, and the results of the good doctrine in the second half. But in the Book of Hebrews, it is exposition of truth, exhortation, exposition of truth, followed by exhortation. So many expositions and exhortations alternating throughout this Book. So it is quite a different style. Let us now go right into the Book as it is a long book and can be divided into two sections.

The Book has 13 chapters. I want you to understand that this book was not really written directly to Gentile Christians like 99.99% of us. Thus when we read this book, we wonder it's purpose since we are unlikely to go back to the synagogue, or an idolatrous faith. For us Gentile Christians, it is basically to learn to see the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Augustin, a church father, said the New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed, and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.

We have a better appreciation of the Old Testament today because we are New Testament believers, we can now see the Old Testament a little clearer after the study of the book of Hebrews. So for us, it's not about exhortation, which is the primary purpose of this book. It's more about understanding of the Old Testament types and shadows, which actually reflect New Testament truths.

## Book of Hebrews

1:1 Long ago, at many times, and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets

1:2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

In the past, God spoke to the people by the prophets. The prophets spoke in different ways, some by dreams, poetries, dramas and all kinds of ways. Each of them spoke in different ways, revealing bits and pieces of God's redemption plan. In other words, they gave pieces of information on Jesus Christ. Finally, you can see Christ in its entirety.

God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His son. We have the benefit of seeing the jigsaw puzzle. If you take a look at the cover of the box, you can already see the complete picture, and so can easily put the pieces together. I always do jigsaw puzzles with my granddaughters and they don't have the idea that you're supposed to look at the cover first and then try to put the pieces together. They just tried to stick the pieces together and they take 10 times longer than me. So, when we do a challenge, I can finish it very fast because I've seen the final picture and can put the pieces together. Now seeing a jigsaw cover box, you see the cover in 2-dimension only.

But when we see Jesus , we see Him in 3-dimension, we see Him complete. We are so blessed today having seen the real Messiah while they have seen only bits and pieces of the Messiah over the centuries. In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son whom he appointed the heir of all things, and through Him he created the world.

1:3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

He is the radiance of the glory of God. Who is Christ? Picture this scenario - you and I can never see the sun itself. Nobody, no planet, no rocket can go near the sun as it will melt. Everyone knows and has seen the sun. But in reality, none of us have seen the sun as we have only seen the rays of the sun.

In the same way, no one has seen God the Father but we've seen the radiance of God, the Father in Jesus Christ. So, Christ is the radiance of the glory of God. Verse 3 describes the exact imprint of his image. Exact imprint means you take a seal e.g. you go to a dentist and you need to make a crown for your teeth, they will take some kind of putty and put on your tooth. So when the dentist lifts up the putty, it has the exact imprint of your tooth and he then takes it out to make a mold.

So Jesus is the exact imprint of God. If we don't know the character of God, we can see His character in Jesus. By knowing the character of God is a huge claim for the Jews. That is Jesus - he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of God. And he upholds the universe by the Word of His power.

1:4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Suddenly, the writer is trying to tell the Jews – “do you know who Jesus is? He is higher than the angels”. For the Jews, angels have a very high position, even higher than Moses. At Mount Sinai, angels came down and gave the law to Moses. So, technically angels have a higher position than Moses. So the writer begins by saying “Jesus is higher than the angels”.

Therefore, in chapter one and chapter two, the writer compares Jesus to angels. At the beginning of this book, we will find it very strange as we don't even think about angels.

1:8 But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

He tells us that Jesus is really the king. He's on a throne, and has a scepter. So if Jesus is king, who are the angels?

1:13 And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

He is picturing Christ with the angels. Christ is sitting on the throne with a scepter at the right hand of God. As for the angels, he says God never even asked them to sit down because they are ministering spirits set out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation. They are servants. Servants don't sit down, they are always running around doing things. This is shocking news to the Jews who have always thought they are very high in position. Hence, don't think too highly of angels as Jesus is far higher than the angels.

2:2 For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,

2:3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,

2:4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Moses received the law from the angels. The law was brought down and everybody was expected to obey that law which was brought by the angels, those who do not obey will get their just punishments because it came from the hand of the angels. But the writer says, compared to the Word we got from the angels, now we get the Word from the Son himself. Declared first by the Lord from the Son, and then attested to us by those who heard, by the eyewitnesses who heard and these eyewitnesses bore witness by signs and wonders which they did. So in other words, the Word that you and I receive in the New Testament came from Jesus' mouth, heard by the witnesses, like Peter and John, and the witnesses then wrote these epistles for us. Therefore, you better listen to them. If you listen to the Torah and you know those who don't listen will get punished, what about those who don't listen to the Word that came from Jesus?

2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

2:15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

So he tells us what Jesus did. He partook of flesh because we are humans, he became a human so that he could die in our place. The only way he can be our substitute is to be like one of us. So he died in our place, so that he could pay for our sins, and deliver us from the fear of death. He rose from the dead so that we don't need to fear. We know He paid the penalty for us. So the fear of death is no more our issue. He became man so he could deliver man from the biggest fear- death.

So in chapter one and two, the writer compared the superiority of Jesus to the angels.

We move on to chapter three and four, the writer picks the next one he is going to compare with i.e. heroes of the faith, namely Moses and Joshua. Because Moses and Joshua were the ones that delivered the Jews. Moses delivered them from slavery while Joshua brought them into the promised land. Now the writer is saying Jesus is greater than these two whom you looked up to. They wanted to go back to their old faith which was brought by angels, and making heroes out of Moses and Joshua. Basically, the writer is saying "Why are you forsaking something so much better for something so inferior?"

3:5 Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later.

3:6 but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

The writer is saying Moses was a very good man. But who was he? He was a servant, doing what God asked him to do. But who is Jesus? He is the Son of God. And who is Moses? He is just the house but Jesus is the builder of the house. So the inferiority of Moses - he was a servant, a man created by someone, while Jesus is not a servant, he is the Son of God. And Jesus is not created, He is the Creator. So, Jews, please don't go back to wanting to look up to that servant (Moses) when we now have the Son of God.

3:15 As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion".

3:16 For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?

3:17 And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

3:18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?

3:19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

The writer is telling them about how Moses tried to lead the Israelites out into the promised land. And for forty years, all they did was rebelled and all of them died in the wilderness, none of them in that generation entered the promised land except for two people, Joshua and Caleb. They did not enter the promised land because they were suffering from something called “unbelief or lack of faith in God.”

What the writer is saying is “If you want to get the eternal rest, you must not turn your backs on Jesus, or do not believe that Jesus is superior and he died for all your sins. If you go back to animal sacrifices and all the talk in the Old Testament, you will not enter your place of rest.”

In Chapter 3, the writer compared Jesus with Moses and moving on to Chapter 4, he compared Jesus with Joshua, one of the heroes.

4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.

4:9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,

4:10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

So he says, Joshua could bring them into the promised land which was the place of physical rest only. When they entered the promised land, they would have their own land, would not be worried about having to travel all the time and trampling over other people's land and being unwanted. He compared that with what we can have in Christ. When we believe in Jesus, we enter a new kind of rest. It's not physical rest, as we rest spiritually knowing that all our sins have been settled. We who could not do the works of the Law, nor fulfill God's demands in the law because we are sinners, we don't need to struggle to fulfill those because we can now rest in Christ who lived a perfect life for us, and died for our sins.

4:11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of this obedience.

There were many Israelites during the time of Moses and Joshua that were on the verge of entering the promised land but couldn't go in due to lack of



belief. The Jews that the writer is addressing in Hebrews were struggling. Same with the Israelites who said that the giants were too big.

In Chapter five, we come to a new area which is not about Moses and Joshua, but it is about priests. Jesus is better than any priests you ever had.

5:9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

5:10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

This couldn't be a new priest from the line of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek.

5:11 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,

5:13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

So he says, I want to teach you about Jesus because you are dull of hearing. You are like a baby, you don't understand a lot of things. And so he laments that he wants to tell them about something interesting, but he can't. Sometimes this is the struggle of preachers who want to teach something solid, but can't because they keep having to go back to giving baby food i.e. the basic stuff.

6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

6:2 and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

The writer goes on to say – everybody knows we need to repent, must have faith towards God. Everybody knows we have sins and need to be washed, the laying of hands etc. In the Old Testament, every Jew knows about the resurrection of the dead and they want to be resurrected someday. We are going to be judged one day. However, you are going to know about this new amazing Priest called Jesus Christ and the things He did for you.

6:4 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,

6:5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,

6:6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Verse 4 says you've been enlightened. You heard all the preaching about Jesus, tasted the heavenly gift, seen things around you, shared in the Holy Spirit and seen life change. Only the Holy Spirit could change the drunkards, make horrible people repent to make good their lives. You've tasted the goodness of the word of God, seen miracles that you have never seen before. And then now

Some people say these are believers who fall away from their faiths. I do not think so - these are almost believers. Some may say to Pastor Paul Choo that they have seen his life really changed. His kindness to a member and how he prayed for the member's mum and she got well. Yet at the end of it, they can't believe in Jesus. For such people, there is no hope as the only hope is in Jesus whom they have rejected. Jesus says "I am the way and the truth of life", but if you reject Him, then what more can be said. All we have in this faith and makes the difference is Christ. However, if you choose to go back to the synagogue and deny Jesus as the Messiah, there is nothing else to offer.

6: 9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure better things - things that belong to salvation.

7: 1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,

7:2 and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.

Who is this Melchizedek? In Genesis Chapter 14 when Abraham fought a war with some people and he won the war, this man appeared and the Bible says this Melchizedek was a priest of God Most high and Abraham gave a tenth of everything i.e a tithe. This priest called Melchizedek means

king of righteousness and also king of the city of Salem which means peace or shalom. A type of Christ. God has to punish our sins because he's righteous and when he punished our sins, we have peace.

So Melchizedek is a type of Christ's righteousness and peace. He allowed God's righteousness to be satisfied in punishing Jesus and to give us peace. So Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek.

7:3 He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

This verse simply means we don't know who Melchizedek's father and mother was, we don't know his genealogy as opposed to the priests in the Jewish religion where the lineage is very clear before they could be a priest. So Melchizedek had no beginning and end, different from the priests in the Old Testament. Those priests had a beginning and an end i.e. at a certain age they could be a priest and at a certain age, they have to retire from priesthood.

7:14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

7:15 This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek,

7:16 who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life.

7:17 For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek".

So Jesus obviously did not come from the Aaronic priesthood, not the right lineage but after the order of Melchizedek.

7:22 This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

7:23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,

7:24 but he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever.

7:25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

7:26 For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

7:27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when offered up himself.

7:28 For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

So he compares Jesus with the high priests of those days. They had many high priests because they died. This priest Jesus, will not die. The other high priests had to give offerings for themselves first because of their own sins, and then for the people. Our high priest, Jesus who is sinless, just brought one offering once and for all for us.

To recap, the writer compares the superiority of Jesus to the angels (Chapter 1 & 2), Moses and Joshua (Chapter 3 & 4) and finally to the high priests (Chapter 5 -7).

We shall continue in the next session on the remaining chapters of Hebrews.