

BOOK OF HEBREWS

Book of Hebrews (Part 1 of 2) – Chapters 1 to 7

For many Christians, this is the most difficult book in the New Testament. The reasons are:

- 1) The writing is very Jewish because this book was addressed to the Jews for a particular reason, namely, to meet their needs at that time.
- 2) The reader requires a lot of knowledge from the Old Testament to understand this book.
- 3) There are cultural differences. Jews tend to talk about angels, sacrifices, the temple, and genealogy which are foreign to many of us.

Who is the author?

The author cannot be ascertained. This style of writing is very different from that of Paul's so it is unlikely that he could have written it. Perhaps it was written by a Jew who knew Paul but nobody knows for sure as to its authorship. So, most commentators will say that the author is unknown.

What is the purpose of this book of Hebrews?

- 1) The location(s) of the intended recipients of this letter was not mentioned. The book of Hebrews was about the persecuted Jews who were considering whether to give up their Christian belief and to go back to Judaism.
- 2) For a Gentile Christian, it is hard to go back to Gentile beliefs because the difference between the old and new beliefs is so huge, it is like night and day.
- 3) The persecution came from the Roman authorities because to them, Caesar was the king, not Jesus. When persecuted, it was tempting for the Christians with Jewish background to revert to Judaism as they could simply return to the synagogue. While the Romans allowed synagogues to continue to exist as places of worship, churches were badly persecuted.
- 4) The temptation was great for these newly converted Jewish Christians because it would look like they were still worshipping the same God. They only had to deny that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and they would be accepted back into the synagogue.
- 5) So this letter was targeted at those tempted Jewish Christians. It is likely that this happened in Rome where persecution was the worst, though again we cannot be sure.

What is the book of Hebrews about?

- 1) It is urgent pleading and exhorting the Jews to not return to the old faith of Judaism. They have so much more (better) in the New Covenant of Christ than Judaism. The phrase "Let us.... not do this and be strong" or its equivalent appears 13 times in this book.
- 2) Exposition of truth and exhortation alternate throughout the book. This is unlike other books which begin with doctrine and followed by practical instructions.
- 3) It was not written directly to the Gentiles because true Gentile believers were not likely to go back to idolatry. So what is in it for us?

- a) To see the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- b) To note that the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament.
- c) So that we can have a better appreciation of the Old Testament. For us, it is less of exhorting but more of helping us to understand that the Old Testament is a foreshadow of the New Testament.

Chapters 1 and 2 – Jesus is superior to angels

Chapter 1

- 1) Hebrews 1:1. In the past, God spoke via prophets in many ways, such as dreams, drama, visions and poetry. Over a long period of time, each prophet revealed a little about Jesus Christ. Like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, all these bits of information from the Old Testament have to be put together so as to see who Jesus Christ is.
- 2) Hebrews 1:2 says that in the last days, God has spoken by His Son.
 - a) We have the benefit of seeing the final picture, unlike those people in the Old Testament. It is like we have taken a peek at the box cover of the jigsaw puzzle which makes it much easier to put the jigsaw puzzle pieces together.
 - b) This is because we have seen the Son, Jesus Christ. In His first coming, Jesus appeared in 3D form. He came in flesh as a man. This is a benefit we have over the prophets of the Old Testament.
- 3) Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus is the exact imprint of the image of God.
 - a) Jesus is described here. No one can see the Sun itself but we can see its rays.
 - b) It is the same here, we cannot see God but we see the radiance of God in Jesus.
 - c) “Exact imprint” is like making a mould of tooth imprint. When we see the character of Jesus, we see the character of God. Jesus is the Word of God and He is the expression of God. In John Chapter 1, we see that Jesus upholds all things by the word of His power.
- 4) Hebrews 1:4-7. To the Jews, angels occupied a very high position, higher than Moses since it was the angels who gave the Law to Moses. The author said that Jesus is higher than the angels.
- 5) Hebrews 1:8 says that the Son’s throne is forever and He is King forever.
- 6) Hebrews 1:13-14. The author said that no angel can sit at the right hand of God as angels are only servants. Servants do not sit down. These angels are only servants for the saints. This revelation was shocking to the Jews who had a high view of and regard for angels. Jesus is far higher the angels!

Chapter 2

- 1) Hebrews 2:2-4.
 - a) The angels gave the Law to Moses and everyone was expected to obey it! But the author said in verse 3 that now we get the word from the Son, Jesus the Lord.

- b) In the New Testament, words from the Lord Jesus were attested by those who heard, bore witness, did miracles and wrote the New Testament.
 - c) Therefore, the Jews must listen to the New Testament.
- 2) Hebrews 2:14-15. Jesus partook of flesh. He became human in order to be a substitute for us (man); to die for our sins and to deliver us from the fear of death. He paid the penalty and then He was resurrected.

Hence in Hebrews Chapters 1 and 2, the author showed that Jesus is superior to angels.

Chapters 3 and 4 – Jesus is superior to the heroes of the Old Testament

The author then moved on to compare Jesus to the heroes of the Old Testament, namely, Moses and Joshua who delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land respectively. In these two chapters, the author proved that Jesus is superior to both Moses and Joshua. So why would the Jews want to forsake Christ to go back to the inferior path?

Chapter 3 – Jesus is superior to Moses

- 1) Hebrews 3:5-6. Moses was faithful in God's house only as a servant but Jesus is faithful over God's house as His Son. Moses was only a servant created by God but Jesus is the Creator! Moses was only the house but Jesus is the builder. Why look up to the servant when we have the Son?
- 2) Hebrews 3:15-19. "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in rebellion in wilderness."
 - a) Most of the Jews were unable to enter the Promised Land into which Moses was leading them. This was due to rebellion against God, a lack of faith and unbelief.
 - b) Of that generation, only Joshua and Caleb entered the Promised Land.
 - c) If the Jews were to turn back to Judaism and did not believe in Jesus, they too would not be able to enter the place of eternal rest.

Chapter 4 – Jesus is superior to Joshua

- 1) Hebrews 4:8-10. If Joshua had given the Israelites rest, why did God mention another rest?
 - a) Joshua could only lead the Israelites into the Promised Land to give them physical rest. This means not having to physically wander around on Earth.
 - b) But verse 10 refers to God's rest which is only in Christ. This is talking about spiritual rest.
 - i. Spiritual rest is not physical rest. When we enter God's rest, we have spiritual rest.
 - ii. All our sins are settled. We need not struggle to fulfill the Law by our own strength. We rest in Christ's finished work, not our own work.
- 2) Hebrews 4:11 exhorts the Jews to strive to enter that spiritual rest in Christ. Many Israelites led by Moses in the wilderness could not enter the Promised Land. There was a lack of faith as they saw giants and fortified cities rather than God's hand. They

wanted to return to Egypt. If the Jewish Christians were to be afraid of persecution and wanted to return to Judaism, they would be like these Israelites. Instead, they ought to strive to enter God's rest.

Chapters 5 to 7 – Jesus is superior to the Jewish High Priest

Chapter 5

- 1) Hebrews 5:9-10. Jesus is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek! Jesus is not the type of priest Aaron was. Jesus is of a higher order than Aaron.
- 2) Hebrews 5:11-13. The author wanted to teach the Jewish Christians about Jesus being of the Melchizedek order but he lamented that they were babes in faith and could not understand! They were still living on milk and could not digest solid food of truth.

Chapter 6

- 1) Hebrews 6:1-3. The author said that rather than to keep talking about repentance and faith toward God, etc., which was still at milk level, they needed to know Christ and what an amazing Priest they had in Christ Jesus.
- 2) Hebrews 6:4-6.
 - a) Christian Jews who had been enlightened, who were partakers of the Holy Spirit and had seen miracles and transformation of lives, etc. and then wanted to go back were only "almost believers". They had tasted the kindness of their fellow Christians but they were never committed to Christ.
 - b) "Almost believers" are like the Israelites who tasted God's goodness in the wilderness but wanted to return to Egypt.
 - c) There is no hope for these people who have tasted the goodness of God and yet reject Jesus to go back to the synagogue! In John 14:6, Jesus says He is the way, the truth and the life. There is no other way, truth or life for them if they are not willing to partake of the suffering. (See Phil 1:29)
- 3) Hebrews 6:9. The author encouraged those who were still hanging onto Christ, saying they were not like those described in Hebrews 6:4-6.

Chapter 7

This chapter tells us that Jesus is a Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

- 1) Hebrews 7:1-3.
 - a) In the book of Genesis, this man, Melchizedek, mysteriously appeared to bless Abraham after his victory in a war. (Genesis 14:18-20) He was priest of God Most High. Melchizedek was a type of Christ.
 - b) The name "Melchizedek" means king of righteousness. Salem means peace so he was also the king of peace. Even Abraham had to give him a tenth of everything.
 - c) It is unknown who Melchizedek's father and mother were or what his genealogy was. This is unlike all the Jewish priests who had to be descendants of Aaron.

- d) Aaron was the type of priest who had a beginning and an end. Like all other priests, he had to start to serve at age 30 and to retire at a fixed age.
 - e) Melchizedek was not a priest based on lineage but, like Jesus, he was both priest and king at the same time.
- 2) Hebrews 7:14. Jesus is not from Aaronic lineage. He is from the tribe of Judah and not from the tribe of Levi.
 - 3) Hebrews 7:15-17. Melchizedek was a priest not by lineage. Verse 17 says Jesus is a Priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.
 - 4) Hebrews 7:22-28.
 - a) Jesus is the High Priest forever! So He can save forever!
 - b) He is the perfect High Priest who continues forever, unlike the Jewish high priests who die. So we only need Jesus.
 - c) He is different from the Jewish high priests who must offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for the nation of Israel. He is sinless! He died for us once for all but resurrected!

In Chapters 1 to 7, we learn that Jesus is superior to

- 1) Angels (Chapters 1 and 2)
- 2) Moses and Joshua (Chapters 3 & 4)
- 3) The Jewish high priests (Chapters 5 to 7)

So, the author's call to the Jewish Christians was "Jesus is superior! Do not turn back to the Old Covenant (Mosaic Covenant)!"

Book of Hebrews (Part 2 of 2) – Chapters 8 to 13

Chapter 8 - Jesus is the superior Sacrifice who brings on the superior Covenant

- 1) Hebrews 8:4-6. Moses made the tabernacle according to the pattern (copy) of what is up there in heaven. Jesus does not minister in the copy but in the real temple up there in heaven!
- 2) Hebrews 8:10-13. God makes a New Covenant of putting His laws into our mind and writing them on our heart.
 - a) This New Covenant makes the old one obsolete. (See verse 13) Jesus has brought in the new Law. Moses' law was written on stone tablets. Jesus' Law is not written on stone but in the heart of the believer!
 - b) This means that we want to serve God. Unlike the stone which is about having no choice, the heart is about want, desire and love. We are given a new heart that has a desire to obey Jesus' Law!
 - c) In the past, people needed to be taught about God (see verse 11) but now, anyone born of the Spirit will, instinctively, want to know more about the Word. There is no need to know more to get to heaven but the desire to want to know more will be in believers!
 - d) Verse 12 tells us that all our sins are forgiven. This New Covenant is so superior! Verse 13 says that the Old Covenant which "is becoming obsolete and growing old, is ready to vanish." At the time of writing (which was before AD70), the

temple of Jerusalem was still there as it was destroyed by the Romans only in AD 70. As such, the Old Covenant (given through Moses) was still in existence to the Jews (as they were able to continue making animal sacrifices and worship in the temple until its destruction in AD 70) and was competing with the New Covenant (given through Christ). The Jewish Christians could, therefore, be tempted to go back to the Old Covenant. However, according to the author, the temple was going to go away.

Chapter 9 - Sacrifices of the Old Covenant versus Jesus' sacrifice in the New Covenant

Hebrews 9:13-14 show the difference between the blood of animals and Jesus' sacrifice.

- 1) Under Moses' Law, animals were slaughtered all the time in the temple. Their blood was used for ceremonial cleansing and purification of the flesh to provide the ceremonial right to enter the temple. (See verse 13.) But sins were still not settled.
- 2) Verse 14 tells us that the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. We know that Christ has settled all our sins and we can now call God our "Abba Father" and walk right into His presence. (See Hebrews 4:15-16)

Chapter 10 – Comparison of animal sacrifices with the Perfect Sacrifice

- 1) Hebrews 10:1-4.
 - a) The Law is only a foreshadow. Animal sacrifices need to be done every year. An animal cannot be a substitute for man! (E.g. A bicycle cannot replace a car!) When an animal dies for our sins, it is an insufficient sacrifice. So animals have to be brought in every year as a reminder that sins have not been fully recompensed!
 - b) Christ must die as a Man to redeem mankind; it is the life of a perfect Man for sinful man.
- 2) Hebrews 10:10 says Jesus was offered "once for all". There is no need for any more animal sacrifices.
- 3) Hebrews 10:12-14. Verse 12 says "for all time a single sacrifice" and verse 14 says "a single offering". Unlike animal sacrifices which had to be done every year, Jesus offered His life once for all because it is the perfect Sacrifice. One Sacrifice is sufficient. It is the perfect payment, Man for man.
- 4) Hebrews 10:19-23. With the blood of Jesus who is the High Priest, believers can enter the Holiest place. All Christians can draw close to God with confidence. Therefore, the Jewish Christians need not be physically present in temple but be right in the Holy of Holies which is the presence of God because Christ lives in Christians through the Holy Spirit. Verse 22 says, "Let us draw near", verse 23 says, "Let us hold fast" and verse 24 says, "Let us consider how to stir". These were encouragement to the persecuted Jewish Christians not quit but to hold fast to Christ! The author was encouraging the Jewish Christians that they should not go back to the Old Covenant, it was alright to be barred from entering the synagogue.
- 5) Hebrews 10:24-25. Due to the persecution, the Jewish Christians were afraid to get together. However, the author told them to hold fast, get together and encourage one another. The phrase "the Day" mentioned in verse 25 could refer to two possibilities:
 - a) the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, or

b) the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus.

The verses here were to encourage the Jewish Christians not to fear persecution and run but to continue to gather and serve one another.

- 6) Hebrews 10:37-38. We are to live by faith and not shrink back especially in persecution. Wavering could mean that a person is not really a believer yet and has no faith.

Chapters 11 to 13 – Words of Encouragement to the Jewish Christians not to turn back

Chapter 11 - Hall of fame of heroes of the Faith

- 1) The author wrote this chapter to encourage the struggling Jews. He showed how these heroes of faith suffered more than them and saw much less than them as they (the heroes) did not see the promise of the Messiah happen with their physical eyes. Yet they believed in the coming Messiah! They did not see Jesus and they had only bits and pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. In contrast, the Jewish Christians had seen the Messiah clearly preached, died and rose from the dead and they had studied the heroes of the faith. How could they then consider running away?
- 2) These heroes of the faith should be their examples of walking by faith and not by sight for eternal rewards! See 2 Corinthians 5:7. They are also great examples for us.

Chapter 12

- 1) Hebrews 12:1-2. These Jewish Christians were encouraged to run with endurance like the heroes of the faith in Chapter 11 and Jesus as their perfect example. Jesus endured and is now seated at the right hand of God. The sufferings of the Jewish Christians were nothing compared to Christ's sufferings.
- 2) Hebrews 12:3-4. The persecution of the Jewish Christians was just being caused to feel "shame" and, perhaps, threatened but it was not to the point of shedding blood or being martyred yet.
- 3) Hebrews 12:5-13. The Father chastises those whom He loves!
 - a) Verse 11 talks about the peaceable fruit of righteousness that will make them stronger in their faith.
 - b) Those who have no correction and do not get chastised by God may not even be His children!
 - c) Do not get upset with the chastening from God. Chastisement is painful for the time being but is needful for the long term.

Chapter 13

This chapter encourages the Jewish Christians to not forget to love one another and reminds them of their responsibility in times of persecution.

- 1) Hebrews 13:13 -14. Christ suffered outside the camp. The crucifixion on the Cross was outside of Jerusalem. We should go out of the Church into the outside world and be prepared to suffer for Christ!
- 2) Hebrews 13:15-17. Sacrifice of praise to God should happen even if we are being chastised. We have to do good and share. Sacrifice to God is not about animals anymore! The Jewish Christians were being persecuted, so they had to share their

possessions in order that the body of Christ could survive. Verse 17 also called on them to obey their leaders during persecution.

- 3) Hebrews 13:20-21. God equips us to be complete in every good work. His will is for us to praise Him, do good and obey our leaders.

What have we learned from this book of Hebrews?

Although this book was originally written for persecuted Jewish Christians who were tempted to go back to the Old Covenant, it is also for us. In it, we see the following:

- 1) Jesus is the perfect Savior. He is far more superior to the angels, all the heroes of the faith and the Jewish high priests (and church leaders).
- 2) Jesus is the perfect Sacrifice. People, like our parents, make sacrifices for us but this Sacrifice is far better.
- 3) The perfect New Covenant in Jesus Christ is superior to any other covenants. It is written in our heart. We get a total heart transplant and we are a new creation. (See the new heart given as stated in Ezekiel 36:26-27 and the new creature in 2 Corinthians 5:17.)
- 4) Jesus is amazing! This book is beautiful because it shines the spotlight on Jesus who is the radiance of God, the expressed image of the invisible God. The beautiful God is seen in His beautiful Son and revealed in this beautiful book!