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Studies in
HEBREWS



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Scripture cited is taken from the Authorized (King James) Version

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Introduction

The epistle to the Hebrews is one of the most difficult books of the Bible to interpret. Yet it is important to study, primarily because it helps us to understand the relation between the Old and New Testaments. Those who sometimes struggle with the interpretation, but nevertheless persevere will find in Hebrews the rich fruit of learning and edification.

The Time and Place of Hebrews

Neither the time nor the place of the writing of the epistle can be known with certainty. It is generally agreed among biblical scholars that the date of Hebrews is between AD 50 and AD 70. No one knows for certain where it was written, although Italy is a possibility (Heb. 13:24).

The Writer of Hebrews

The Holy Spirit is the author of Hebrews. The identity of the human writer whom the Spirit was pleased to use to author Hebrews is unknown, despite the heading of the book in the King James Version of the Bible as “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.” This heading must be ignored, since it is not inspired and is, in fact, inaccurate. Many have thought that Paul was indeed the author, especially the church during the long period of the Middle Ages, although the early church did not think so. The evidence against Pauline authorship is overwhelming and convincing. The end of the matter is that the writer’s identity is unknown. If God had wanted us to know who wrote the epistle, the Holy Spirit would have told us.

The Addressees of Hebrews

The generally accepted date of Hebrews is important because it confirms that the epistle was written to Jewish Christians

who were recent converts to the faith. In obedience to the divine command, the apostles had preached the gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Undoubtedly, Jews were a large percentage of the early New Testament church, which accounts for the fact that the epistle speaks primarily to the children of the Old Testament. Some have attempted to narrow the scope of Hebrews to specific groups of Jews, but there is no good evidence to substantiate this idea. It is instead correct to assert that the epistle was written to the Jews of the dispersion and by extension to the Gentile Christians as well.

The Theme of Hebrews

The main theme of Hebrews is the relation between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The transition from the Old Testament structure of types and shadows to the New Testament economy of reality was not instantaneous or even swift, but slow and gradual. The Jews were understandably unable to make the transition from the age of types to the day of reality. The writer therefore instructs the church concerning the relation between the old and new dispensations. The relation is not one of dichotomy or of essence, but that of fulfillment.

Two subthemes present themselves. One is the concept *better*, a term used twelve times in the epistle to help define the relation between the testaments. For a correct understanding of Hebrews, it is essential to remember that the two dispensations are not essentially *different* from one another, but that the new is *better* than the old. This also explains why the writer of Hebrews quotes the Old Testament fifty-two times from thirteen different books; the writer emphasizes the idea that the new covenant is the fulfillment of the old throughout the book. There is only one covenant from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, although with ever-clearer manifestation and development. This increasing clarity the writer traces in terms of a better testament.

The other subtheme is the emphasis on faith as contrasted with sight (2 Cor. 5:7). This theme runs throughout the epistle and is particularly evident in the classic chapter 11, which highlights the beautiful faith that was evidenced in many Old

Testament characters. The reason for this is that the epistle was written to people who were accustomed to walking by sight according to the types and shadows. They wanted to see with their eyes, and they were reluctant to believe with their hearts what they could not see.

The Divisions of Hebrews

A suggested division to facilitate an organized understanding of Hebrews is as follows:

1. The superiority of Christ as Savior and High Priest (1:1–2:18)
2. The true home of God’s people (3:1–4:13)
3. The priesthood of Christ (4:14–7:28)
4. The new covenant (8:1–10:18)
5. Walking by faith (10:19–12:11)
6. Practical exhortations (12:13–25)

Methodology

This is a study guide, not a commentary. It therefore does not primarily take a statement or an explanatory format, but a question format that is intended to help God’s people define and understand the teaching of Hebrews. I have deliberately asked the difficult “why” and “how” questions in order to foster an understanding of this scripture. As much as possible, the questions are deliberately leading, interspersed with explanatory remarks, with the goal of encouraging discussion and thoughtful study of Hebrews, whether in Bible study societies or on a personal level. To the extent that the questions are accurately answered, the student of Hebrews will gain an understanding of the epistle.

Suggested Study Resources

Edgar Andrews, *A Glorious High Throne*, Evangelical Press.

F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

John Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews*, William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Hywel R. Jones, *Let's Study Hebrews*, The Banner of Truth Trust.

Part 1

The Superiority of Christ As Savior and High Priest Hebrews 1:1–2:18

Hebrews 1:1–3

Without any formal introduction the writer plunges directly into his subject. The point of verses 1–3 is that Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets.

A clearer translation of verses 1–2a is: “God, who at many times and in many ways spoke to the fathers in the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us in his Son.”

1. What are the many times (v. 1)?
2. In what ways did God speak?
3. What is “time past”?
4. Who are the fathers?
5. What was the message of the prophets?
6. What are the last days (v. 2)?

7. What is the difference between God's speech by the prophets and his speech by his Son?

Verses 2b–3 state seven facts that show how Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets.

8. God has appointed Christ heir of all things. What is included in all things (v. 2)?
9. Through Christ God made the worlds (literally, ages). What are these ages?
10. Christ is the brightness (literally, effulgence) of God's glory. How was God's glory revealed in the Old Testament?
11. Christ is "the express image [*character* or exact impression] of [God's] person" (literally, being or existence) (v. 3). What implications do these descriptions of Christ have for our knowledge of God?
12. Christ upholds all things by the "word of his power." How does his word do this? What doctrine is taught here?
13. Christ has purged (made purification for) sins. How is this work different from the work of the Old Testament priests?

14. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Why is Christ pictured as being seated? What is the significance of the right hand? What does Christ do while seated?

Hebrews 1:4–14

The premise of these verses is that Christ is superior to the angels, who played a large part in the history of the Old Testament. Christ is made better than the angels. “Better” in Hebrews does not mean qualitatively superior but stronger or more powerful.

1. Who or what are the angels introduced in verse 4? What is their relation to men?
2. What were their functions in the Old Testament?
3. How is Christ better (stronger or more powerful) than the angels?
4. What is Christ’s inheritance?
5. What is Christ’s name that is better than that of the angels?

The writer shows by seven quotations from the Old Testament that Christ is superior to the angels (vv. 5–14).

6. What is the answer to the first rhetorical question in verse 5? What Old Testament passage does the writer use in this verse? How does this verse differentiate between Christ and the angels?

7. To what Old Testament passage does the second question in verse 5 refer? How does this quotation prove Christ's superiority to the angels?

8. When did God bring his first begotten into the world (v. 6)? To what historical event does the writer refer? In what sense is "first" used? The quotation "And let all the angels of God worship him" is not found in the original Hebrew but is taken from the Greek Septuagint, with reference to Deuteronomy 32:43 and Psalm 97:7. How does this quotation show the superiority of Christ?

9. Where in scripture is the quotation in verse 7 found? Spirits (winds) and fire are transient. How does this quotation imply the superiority of Christ?

10. What Old Testament passage is referred to in verses 8–9?

11. What is the significance of beginning verse 8 with "but"?

12. What is the meaning of God's throne? How does the expression regarding God's throne show Christ's superiority?
13. What is the meaning of a scepter?
14. What is the connection between righteousness and God's kingdom (vv. 8–9)?
15. How does the fact that the scepter of righteousness is the scepter of his kingdom show Christ's superiority?
16. What Old Testament passage is referred to in verses 10–12?
17. How is Christ superior to the creation?
18. How is this proved in verses 11–12a?
19. In what way will the heavens be changed?
20. What contrast is drawn in verse 12b?
21. What attribute of God is taught in verse 12b?

22. What are the scriptural references of the quotations in verses 13–14?
23. What is the implied answer to the question asked in verse 13?
24. How does verse 13 show Christ’s superiority to the angels?
25. What is the implied answer to the question in verse 14?
26. What does “ministering” mean? What does this tell us regarding the plan of salvation?

Hebrews 2:1–4

Based on the quotations in chapter 1, the writer in 2:1–4 draws a conclusion. These verses are connected to the previous chapter with “therefore” (2:1).

1. What are the things we have heard (v. 1)?
2. What does the exhortation to “give the more honest heed” mean?
3. What is the reason we must do this?

4. To “let them slip” creates the figure of a drifting and sinking ship. What does it mean to let the things which we have heard slip? The writer now gives reason not to let them slip.
5. What was the word spoken by angels (v. 2)?
6. What does it mean that it was steadfast?
7. What are some examples of how this steadfastness showed itself?
8. How would you answer the question, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation” (v. 3)?
9. Why is that salvation great?
10. When did the Lord begin to speak of salvation?
11. Who are those who heard him? Why is their confirmation important?
12. How did God bear witness to the word of the gospel (v. 4)?

13. What are signs?
14. What are wonders?
15. What are miracles?
16. What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit?
17. Why is the phrase “according to his own will” important?

Hebrews 2:5–9

In these verses the superior glory of Christ is compared to the status of the angels.

1. What is “the world to come” (v. 5)?
2. What world is now administered by the angels?
3. What is the “certain place where one testified? What is the point of the questions quoted in verse 6?

4. How does verse 7 answer this question?
5. How is man “a little lower than” or inferior to the angels? What scripture is quoted here?
6. In what way did God crown man with glory and honor?
7. What are the works of God’s hands?
8. How is the all-comprehensive subjection of God’s handi-works to man emphasized (v. 8)?
9. We do not yet see all things subjected to man. When will we see that?
10. How do we see Jesus (v. 9)?
11. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Why was Jesus “made a little lower than the angels” (Heb. 2:9)?
12. What is the meaning of his being “crowned with glory and honour”?

13. What was the way for Jesus to be crowned?

14. Does “every man” in verse 9 imply universal salvation?
What is your proof for your answer?

Hebrews 2:10–18

In these verses Christ is pictured as the savior (vv. 10–16) and the high priest (vv. 17–18) of his people. Verse 10 starts with “for,” which introduces the idea that Christ’s being the savior is the reason for the foregoing verses.

1. Who is the one spoken of in verse 10? What is it that “became him”?

2. What does it mean that all things are for him? That all things are by him?

3. Who are the “many sons”?

4. Who is the “captain of their salvation”?

5. Why is it appropriate that he is made perfect in the way of suffering?

Verses 11–13 teach the unity of the sanctified with Christ.

6. What is sanctification?

7. Who is the sanctifier (v. 11)?

8. Who are the sanctified?

9. What does it mean that the one who sanctifies and the sanctified ones “are all of one”?

10. How does the writer prove the teaching that the sanctified ones are brethren (vv. 12–13)? With whom are they brethren?

11. What Old Testament references are used for that proof?

12. Why is the mention of children in verse 13 important?

Verses 14–16 portray Christ as the deliverer of his people.

13. What is the significance of “flesh and blood” (v. 14)?

14. What truth is taught by the statement that Christ “took part of the same”?
15. Why did Christ have to go through death to destroy the devil?
16. Does the devil have absolute power over death?
17. Who are those who fear death (v. 15)? How is this fear removed?
18. What does it mean to be “subject to bondage”?
19. How did Christ accomplish deliverance—negatively and positively (v. 16)?

In verses 17–18 Christ is described as the high priest of his people.

20. What does it mean that Christ was “made like unto” his brethren (v. 17)? Why was this necessary?
21. What is a high priest? What is his calling? What is his function? What is his character?
22. How is Christ our high priest?

23. What does it mean that he is merciful? Faithful?

24. What are the “things pertaining to God”?

25. What does “reconciliation” mean?

26. How does our high priest make reconciliation?

27. When and how was Christ tempted (v. 18)?

28. Who are those who are tempted?

29. How does Christ succor, or aid, them?