

BETTER!
Hebrews Series
Introduction
Part 1

The book of Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians and to Jews considering leaving the Old Testament sacrificial system for the New Covenant under Jesus Christ. The recipients were under intense persecution and some were contemplating returning to Judaism. The writer admonishes them not to turn away from their only hope of salvation.

The main message of Hebrews is that Jesus Christ is superior in every way to the Old Covenant instituted by Moses. As such, those who are following Jesus should not be tempted to return to their former Hebrew ways of worship, for these have been replaced and surpassed by Jesus Christ.

The key word in the book is “better” which is used thirteen times. The author is anonymous, although either Paul or Barnabas are traditionally accepted as the author.

It was written approximately 67 A.D., so it was penned before the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem under the Roman emperor Titus in 70 AD.

Its purpose is to present the Lord Jesus Christ as perfect and superior in comparison to anything Judaism and the old covenant had to offer.

In chapters 1-10:18, the author repeatedly demonstrates Jesus Christ as preeminent over the angels, “*let all the angels of God worship Him*” (1:6); over Moses, “*He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses*” (3:3); over the Old Testament priesthood, “*being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek*” (5:10).

The writer explains that the New Covenant is greater than the Old Covenant because Jesus was the perfect, permanent sacrifice, rather than the Old Testament sacrifices. The author also points out the power and authority of the Word of God:

“*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*” (4:12).

In chapters 10-13, the writer explains that Faith is superior to the works required by the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant Law—summarized in the 10 commandments—could never save because no one could perfectly live it out.

As Paul wrote in Romans, “*For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are*” (3:20 NLT).

And again in Galatians, “*Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law.*

For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law” (Gal 2:16 NLT).

Hence, the writer of Hebrews continuously points out the superiority of salvation by faith: “**Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen**” (11:1). Chapter 11 is Faith’s Hall of Fame where all of the faithful individual’s from the Old Testament are highlighted in this chapter. Faith in Jesus Christ is our source of salvation because He is “**the author and perfecter of faith**” (12:2).

Throughout the centuries, all are able to experience salvation through Christ because He is “**the same yesterday and today and forever**” (13:8).

The writer begins with some powerful Christology—Who Christ was and is:

1:1-2 “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;”

All throughout the Old Testament in your Bible, God spoke in various and sundry ways. He spoke by dreams, as he did for instance, with Joseph. He spoke audibly to Moses out of the burning bush. He spoke through visible signs like the weather, famines, blessings, and miracles. He spoke through the major and minor prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Habakkuk, Malachi, and so on.

But now in these last days He has spoken exclusively and fully through His Son. Notice, the writer claims to already be in the “last days.” So the last days did not begin sometime in our day, but began with the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. We happen to be living in the last of the last days!

And note that the writer immediately points out what John also tells us in the first chapter of his gospel, verse 3: “All things were made through Him (Jesus), and without Him nothing was made that was made.” The writer of Hebrews concurs, saying “through whom also (Jesus) He (God) made the worlds.” Jesus was the Agent of creation; everything we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell flowed through His fingertips!

1:3 “who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,”

The word “brightness” means the “reflected splendor, the out-beaming” of the Father’s glory. We see this “out-beaming” of God’s glory on the Mount of Transfiguration where “His appearance changed dramatically in their presence; and His face shone [with heavenly glory, clear and bright] like the sun, and His clothing became as white as light” (Matt. 17:2 AMP).

He was also “the express image of His (God’s) person...” Jesus perfectly displayed the attributes of the invisible God. As the Nicene

Creed proclaims, Jesus is: “God of God, Light of light, Very God of Very God.”

The “express image” comes from a Greek word once used to describe an engraving tool that would carve out the exact likeness of something. It then came to describe the image on a coin, like today we see the image of George Washington on our dollar bill. It’s a perfect likeness of him. Jesus, says the writer, was the perfect likeness of God.

As Jesus Himself once told Philip, “Have I been with you for so long a time, and you do not know Me yet, Philip, *nor* recognize clearly who I am? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9 AMP).

Next we’re told in this powerful verse that Jesus “upholds all things by the word of His power.” The word “upholds” means He is not only the Creative Word, but the Sustaining Providence of everything.

He is, as once commentator says, “the chain-band of all things,” and He is also their guiding force, the pilot and steersman of everything.”

Paul wrote the same in Colossians 1:17, “And He Himself existed *and* is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. [His is the controlling, cohesive force of the universe.]”

Clearly folks, we are not talking here about some first century nice and kind man who said some things worth remembering and is right there alongside all the other well known religious figures of history! This is very God of God’s, God the Son we’re reading about!

This powerful verse 3 ends with what Christ did for us on the Cross: “when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Purged is katharismos (kath-ar-is-mos’), which means to remove the guilt and punishment of sin. The shed blood of Christ removed the guilt, stain, and punishment that was due us.

God was, as it were, an offended Judge. Any and every sin committed in His universe had to be answered, either by judgment or a sufficient sacrifice. So God sent His only begotten Son to die on the Cross for us, shedding His innocent blood to cover the sin of anyone that looks to Him in faith for forgiveness.

And when He had done it, He “sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high...” Having humbled himself all the way to His death on the Cross, Jesus is now exalted high above all things, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,”—Phil. 2:9 NIV

Next, the writer compares Jesus to the angels:

1:4 “having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”

The angels are the servants of God, but Jesus is the Son of God! So His name is more excellent than theirs! The writer goes on to compare the two:

1:5-13 “5 For to which of the angels did He ever say:

“**You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You”?**

And again:

“**I will be to Him a Father,
And He shall be to Me a Son”?**

**6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:
“Let all the angels of God worship Him.”**

Jesus is so superior to the angels that they are called upon to worship Him!

**7 And of the angels He says:
“Who makes His angels spirits
And His ministers a flame of fire.”**

**8 But to the Son He says:
“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.**

**The angles are fiery ministers of God’s, but the Son has an eternal throne!
Then the writer talks of Christ’s character:**

**9 “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You**

With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”

More than the angels and more than any man of God on earth, Christ has been anointed above all.

10 And:

**You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.**

**11 They will perish, but You remain;
And they will all grow old like a garment;**

As we've already noted, “All things were made through Him, and without nothing was made that was made.”—John 1:3

And when time has come to an end and the judgment of sinners is complete:

**12 Like a cloak You will fold them (the worlds) up,
And they will be changed.
But You are the same,
And Your years will not fail.”**

The universe He made He will also dissolve! And finally, one last comparison is made between Christ and the angels:

**13 But to which of the angels has He ever said:
“Sit at My right hand,**

Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”?

The answer is, NONE.

The writer closes out with a statement about the purpose of angels in the lives of believers:

“14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”

The word “minister” here is the Greek word from which we get deacon and it means “servant.”

We find in the Bible that the angels of God play a great role in God’s dealings with men. We see that:

They have a deep interest in men: “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents”—Luke 15:10

They defend God’s children from evil attack: “The angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear him, and delivers them.”—Ps. 34:7

They are sent to help strengthen us in the hour of temptation. In the wilderness where Jesus battled the devil, there "appeared an angel from heaven strengthening him;"—Lk 22:43

They are there to carry dying saints into the Lord's presence. Jesus said of Lazarus that when he died he was "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom;"—Lk. 16:22

Amen!

Next time: The danger of neglecting so great a salvation!