

Hebrews

Christ is better!

I. Setting

Hebrews is the 17th book of the New Testament and 12th among the Epistles. The Epistles or letters are the primary doctrinal portions of the New Testament.

It is not that Gospels and Acts do not contain doctrine, but that the purpose of the Epistles is to explain to churches and individuals how to appropriate the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus earthly life models ministry. In every area of ministry we must apply the example of Christ. He was filled with the Spirit, sought to honor God, put a high value on people and lowered Himself as the servant of all.

Once He ascended to heaven, He poured His Spirit out on believers and the New Testament church was formed. Acts focuses upon the birth, establishment and furtherance of the work of God in the world through the church.

The Epistles are written to the church further explaining doctrine

A. Hebrews is part of a section among the Epistles commonly known as “The Hebrew Christian Epistles” and includes Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John and Jude.

1. Called Hebrew Epistles because of those to whom the letters were written.

a. James – “to the 12 tribes scattered abroad”

b. Peter – “to the pilgrims of the dispersion

c. Hebrews – the title, “To the Hebrews” dates back to the 2nd century. Content makes it clear the letter was written to Jewish believers

d. Although not all are so addressed

2. Date

a. Because Hebrews is quoted by Clement of Rome circa 96 AD, we know it was written before the close of the 1st century.

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- b. Because Timothy is mentioned we know it was written during his lifetime. Scripture does not record the death of Timothy, but we know it was well within the 1st century.
 - i. The apocryphal book Acts of Timothy states that in the year 97AD, the 80-year-old bishop tried to halt a procession in honor of the goddess Diana by preaching the Gospel. The angry pagans beat him, dragged him through the streets, and stoned him to death.
- c. Because no mention is made of the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 AD, and so much of the argument of the book has to do with temple practices, it is clear it was written before 70 AD.
- d. We should see a touch of prophecy in the book for it speaks of the sacrifices being completed. Sometime soon after the book, the temple was destroyed and sacrifices have ceased.
 - i. Halley's Bible Handbook states: *"The Jewish wars, in revolt against Rome, began in 66AD. Titus with his army arrived before the wall of the city on the day of Passover, 70 AD. Banks of earthwork were built, battering rams placed and the siege began. The Roman army numbered 30,000, the Jewish army 24,000... After 5 months the walls were battered down, the temple burned, and the city left desolate."*

3. Author

- a. It has traditionally been held that Paul authored Hebrews. The book however is anonymous and attempts to determine authorship are conjecture at best.
 - i. The traditional view that Paul wrote Hebrews dates back to the 2nd Century and has been the view of the Eastern church ever since. The Western church accepted this view in the 3rd Century.
 - ii. The Chester Beatty Papyri, copied at the end of the 2nd Century, places Hebrews after Romans attributing it to Paul.

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b. Other views on authorship include:

- i. Origen (AD 185–253) asserted that the thoughts are Paul's, but was written later by a follower, perhaps Luke.
- ii. Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215) says Paul wrote it in Hebrew and Luke translated it into Greek.
- iii. Tertullian believed Barnabas wrote it. Barnabas, a close associate of Paul, was a Levite and would have been familiar with Levitical practices.
- iv. Martin Luther said Apollos, an Alexandrian-trained intellectual associated with Paul (cf. Acts 18:24), wrote it.
- v. Others have suggested, Philip or Aquila and Priscilla.
- vi. What we know for sure:

- The author was a first century Jewish believer
- The author was a second generation believer
Hebrews 2:3 – refers to himself as one who heard about Christ through the witness of those who had come to Christ
- The author was well known to the recipients (cf. 6:9–10; 10:34; 13:7, 9)
- The author was a close associate with Timothy (13:23)
- The author wrote from Italy (13:24)
- And the author was clearly moved by the Spirit of God

- c. Since we cannot know for certain who the author is, and all arguments are based upon conjecture, my favorite argument for Pauline authorship was relayed to me through Pastor Dave Rolph who said; *“I believe Paul wrote Hebrews, because if Paul*

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did not write it then he wrote 13 letters and 13 is an unlucky number.”

4. Recipients – Who were “The Hebrews” this letter as written to?
 - a. It is clear the letter is written to Jewish believers because of the emphasis placed upon Old Testament writing and practices.
 - i. The gentiles would have no idea of obscure OT Characters like Melchizedek or Rahab.
 - ii. The gentiles would not be familiar with Old Testament practices of sacrifice or temple arrangements.
 - b. It is clear these believers came to Christ because of the faithful ministry of others.
 - i. **Hebrews 2:3-4**
“. . .how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”
 - c. These particular Jewish believers were facing very difficult times:
 - i. **Hebrews 10:32-34** – speaks of persecution which included having their property ceased.
 - ii. **Hebrews 12:4** – speaks of them being under great temptation. It seems that the temptation is to return to life before Christ.
 - iii. **Hebrews 12:7** – speaks of chastening that came from God. They were walking out of bounds and needed to be corrected by the Lord. It is common for God to use difficulty to get our attention
 - d. These particular Jewish believers are described as:
 - i. **Hebrews 6:10** – serving Christ and others.

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- ii. **Hebrews 5:12** – having failed to continue to grow in Christ.
 - iii. **Hebrews 10:24-25** – having forsaken fellowship with others.
 - iv. **Hebrews 3:12** – and that they were in danger of turning back from following Christ.
5. The book of Hebrews is called a letter of exhortation.
- a. **Hebrews 13:22** “And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.”
 - i. Exhortation – parakelesis – to call near in order to comfort, persuade and stir up.
 - ii. It is designed to encourage believers to press forward and grow in Christ.
 - b. **Hebrews 6:1** “Let us go on to perfection...”
 - i. In order to accomplish this, Hebrews is filled with exhortations and warnings, as well as giving one of the most exalted descriptions of Christ in all of Scripture.
 - ii. We might best think of this letter as a message to “Keep going because Christ is Better”
 - The word better appears thirteen times in the book

II. Situation

Reading through Hebrews you will be struck by the exalted place Christ is given, the numerous exhortations to continue on in Christ as well as the harsh warnings against turning back.

This is partly due to the conditions in 1st Century Christianity.

- A. The book of Acts records that a great number of Jews confessed Christ and became believers. However, as time went on, those who refused Christ began to persecute those who received Him. This coupled with an increasing antagonism from the Roman government, led many Jewish believers to revert to their former life. As time elapsed, a hybrid of Christianity seems to have formed in Jerusalem. People believed in

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Christ, but also believed it was necessary to keep all of the Old Testament regulations. Not only did this put a heavy burden on gentile believers, but also caused the Jewish believers to easily conform to their culture. Many were in danger of rejecting the 'once and for all' sacrifice of Christ, in favor of returning to the practice of temple sacrifice.

- B. Some of the most difficult passages in the New Testament are found in Hebrews, including:
 - 1. **Hebrews 6:4-6** "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame."
 - 2. **Hebrews 10:26-27** "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries."
- C. These passages are best interpreted in light of the whole purpose of the book; to encourage believers not to turn back to their past life, but to press forward in following Christ. One of the great exhortations is:
 - 1. **Hebrews 10:39** "But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."

III. Outline

- A. The 13 chapters of Hebrews naturally divide in two sections.
 - 1. Chapter 1- 10 – Christ is better
 - 2. Chapter 11- 13 – Walk by faith
- B. The focus of these chapters is first the faith of others, then the responsive faith of us.
- C. Key verse might be:

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1. **Hebrews 12:1** “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, . . .”
- D. The book of Hebrews is an example of a perfectly crafted message.
1. Begins with doctrine
 2. Ends with application
 3. And is filled with examples
 - a. Israel’s failure to enter Canaan is an example to avoid.
 - b. Chapter 11 is filled with positive examples to follow
- E. Some have suggested it is not signed as a letter because it was originally given as a message to a group of believing Jews

IV. Doctrines in Hebrews

While time will not permit an exhaustive look into the details of this amazing book, we will focus our attention upon four facets:

- ❖ Christ in Hebrews
- ❖ Exhortations in Hebrews
- ❖ Warnings in Hebrews
- ❖ Promises in Hebrews

A. Christ in Hebrews:

1. People seem to invent opinions regarding Christ and cling to them as though they were historically reliable. Some say he was a great man, teacher, philosopher or religious leader. Others think he was a mythical figure, or a man used as the figurehead of a new movement. We are not free to shape Christ into whatever we want Him to be. He is not some form of theological tofu that takes on the shape and taste of His

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surroundings. If we want to know who Christ is, we must look into scripture and let it speak. We then have to decide whether or not we want to believe Him.

Instead of inventing a Jesus to fit your fancy why not discover the Jesus of Scripture:

- a. He is the maker of heaven and earth.
 - b. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end
 - c. He is the Son of God.
 - d. He is the God-man.
 - e. He is our humble servant.
 - f. He is the man of sorrows.
 - g. He is the good shepherd.
 - h. He is the Prince of Peace.
 - i. He is the Wonderful Counselor.
 - j. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah.
 - k. He is the dragon slayer.
 - l. He is the sinless Savior.
 - m. He is the resurrection and the life.
 - n. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
 - o. He is the sinner's friend.
 - p. He is the great high priest.
 - q. He is the King of kings.
 - r. He is the Lord of lords.
 - s. And he is the way, the truth, the life! Hebrews
2. The superiority of Christ is presented in Hebrews in a way like no other New Testament book.
- a. Many different titles are ascribed to Christ in Hebrews. Each one reveals something about His role in our lives.
 - i. Hebrews 1:2 – Son of God
 - ii. Hebrews 1:2 – Heir, Creator
 - iii. Hebrews 1:3 – Brightness of God, Express image of God, The upholder
 - iv. Hebrews 2:10 – Captain of Salvation
 - v. Hebrews 2:11 – Sanctifier
 - vi. Hebrews 3:1 – Apostle
 - vii. Hebrews 6:20 – Forerunner
 - viii. Hebrews 6:20 – High Priest
 - ix. Hebrews 7:22 – Surety of a better covenant
 - x. Hebrews 9:15 – Mediator

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- xi. Hebrews 12:2 – Author and finisher of faith
- xii. Hebrews 13:20 – Great Shepherd

3. We will see Christ in His deity, His humanity and his current ministry.

a. His Deity:

i. **Hebrews 1:2-3** “He 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; 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[b] sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,. . .”

- Heir – through the Cross, Christ purchased fallen mankind back to Himself. Revelation 5 tells of a time when He will loose the seals and redeem all creation
- Creator – Christ brought all things into being
Brightness and Expression – Christ alone reveals who God is and what He is like
- Upholding – the universe is held together by Christ
- Purger – He washed our sins on the cross
- Sat down – pictures a completed work, the way of salvation has been paved, all that is left is for men to believe

ii. **Hebrews 1:4**

- Christ is better than the angels for He has a more excellent name.

iii. **Hebrews 1:6-10**

- Christ is called God and Lord

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iv. **Hebrews 1:11-13**

- Christ is the eternal Ruler

b. His Humanity:

i. **Hebrews 2:9**

- Man was made lower than the angels

ii. **Hebrews 2:9**

- Christ became a man (lower than angels) in order to taste death for all men.

iii. **Hebrews 2:10**

- As a man, Christ was experienced suffering, shame and death (12:2)

c. Through the Cross, Christ:

i. **Hebrews 1:3**

Purged our sins

ii. **Hebrews 2:14-15**

Destroyed the devil and set us free from sin

iii. **Hebrews 9:26**

Put away sin

iv. **Hebrews 8:6**

Mediates a new covenant based upon His shed blood. This covenant is received by placing faith in Christ for Salvation.

d. His Current Ministry:

i. **Hebrews 1:3**

He sat down at the right hand of the Father marking the completion of a judicial work.

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ii. **Hebrews 9:12**

Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption

iii. **Hebrews 2:17**

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

- He sat down to establish a whole new ministry as High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary

iv. **Hebrews 4:14-16**

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who as passed through the heavens; Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

- Because his readers were Jewish they would immediately reject the idea of Christ being a High Priest, for He was of the Tribe of Judah and the priests came from Levi. Paul responds to this by going into great lengths to explain that the order of His priesthood precedes the Levitical Priesthood; Christ came from the order of Melchizedek.

v. **Hebrews 7:12-15** “For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest. . .”

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- vi. **Hebrews 5:5-6** “so also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: You are My Son, today I have begotten You’. As He also says in another place: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

e. Christ is our High Priest

As High priest, Jesus serves to aid us in our walk with Christ by:

- i. Praying for us
 - **Hebrews 7:25** “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”
- ii. Helping us in temptation
 - **Hebrews 2:18** “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”
- iii. Sending angels to our aid
 - **Hebrews 1:14** “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”
- iv. Pouring out His Holy Spirit.

The first act Jesus accomplished upon ascending to heaven was to fulfill His promise and pour the Holy Spirit out upon His church.

This is recorded in Acts 2 and referred to in Hebrews 2

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- **Hebrews 2:3-4** “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”

f. Exhortations in Hebrews

i. The book itself is called a word of exhortation.

- **Hebrews 13:22** “I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.”

ii. The exhortations are necessary because many were discouraged by the difficulties they faced, tempted to give up on following Christ and return to a life where they fit in with the culture around them.

This is always the struggle of every believer.

The difficulties they faced were in the form of persecution, trials, chastening and temptation to sin

iii. Some of those exhortations:

- **Hebrews 2:1** “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.”

Warning against drifting from Christ-Drifting is different from being led away, walking away, or falling away, but the result is the same. The believer who drifts finds himself distanced from Christ.

- **Hebrews 2:3** makes it clear that neglecting things they should have been focusing upon caused their drifting.

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- **Hebrews 5:12-14** declares that they were failing to grow beyond spiritual infancy. That as the years passed they were still behaving like baby believers
- **Hebrews 6:1** “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God. . .”
 - ❖ Moving on to maturity-The remainder of Chapter 6 exhorts us to maturity and gives Abraham as an example.
- **Hebrews 3:1** “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus . . .”

Keeping our attention on Christ is the secret to success.

- **Hebrews 12:3** “For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”
- **Hebrews 10:19-25** “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but

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exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

In light of the danger of falling away, each of us should:

- ❖ Draw near to Christ by entering into the throne room of grace.
- ❖ Hold fast to the confession of faith in Christ.
- ❖ Consider one another by assembling together regularly and stirring one another to serve the Lord.
- **Hebrews 13:13** “Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”

It is time to break away completely from our past life. Do not hold on to any of the things that tempt you to fall from Christ

g. Warnings in Hebrews

- i. Because of the severity of the danger of falling away, the warnings found in this book are quite severe.
- ii. Remember the Devil is capable of using Scripture against the child of God. He seems to be a master of comforting those who need to be stirred and condemning those who are in need of comfort.
- iii. If you are living a sinful lifestyle, these verses should shake your foundation, get you out of your complacency, and lead you to repentance.
- iv. If you are living a life committed to Christ, understand that you are forgiven of past sin and encouraged to move on to perfection
 - **Hebrews 6:4-6** “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the

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Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”

Two things must be kept in mind as we seek to interpret this passage.

- ❖ First – this is written to a group of people on the verge of completely turning from Christ in order to fit in to their world. It is a warning designed to get their attention
- ❖ Second – this verse does not stand alone in Scripture. In fact, all of Scripture tells the story of those who have tasted of the Lord, fell away, and turned back. That does not lessen the severity of the warning, but does remind us that, what is impossible with men is possible with God (Mark 10:27) and He is the great reconciler.

Perhaps it would be good to read this passage while considering the parable of the prodigal son

- **Hebrews 10:26-2** “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation, which will devour the adversaries.”
 - ❖ Willful sin will result in judgment

h. Promises in Hebrews

- i. The severity of some of the warnings might cause us to neglect some of the great promises tucked away in this amazing book.

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- **Hebrews 4:12-13** “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”
- **Hebrews 4:15-16** “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
- **Hebrews 6:10** “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”