

The Letter

to the

Hebrews

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Introduction

Books written about the Bible must never be read in place of the Bible. This study aims to help you understand how the Bible fits together so that your reading of it will be more profitable.

You will be asked to read many passages of Scripture. The notes in this study will assume that you have read and understood these Scriptures. We will base our study on the Letter to the Hebrews. But first let us look at what happened on the Emmaus Road.

***Read: Luke chapter 24 verses
13 – 33***

Two people who had followed Jesus were returning home one evening, just after the Crucifixion of Jesus. A stranger walks with them and brings out their sorrow and pain about losing their Messiah to a dreadful death on a Roman cross. The stranger gently explains to them “what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself”. A little later, at a meal, the two disciples realise that the stranger is Jesus!

The Letter to the Hebrews

These two people learned two wonderful lessons that evening. The first was that Jesus was really alive again and that because of this the world would never be the same again. The second was that the Old Testament, the Jewish Torah was all about Jesus Christ.

This is what the letter to the Hebrews is all about. It begins by making very plain that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. The writer goes on to show that Jesus is superior to angels, to Moses, to Aaron and to all the other persons and things that Jews held to as vital to their traditions and beliefs. The Hebrew letter also emphasises that God has completed his revelation to humans in his Son Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah, the sent one, the Prophet; there is no need for further revelation or another prophet to come after him. The work of the Church and the Holy Spirit is not to provide new revelations of God's purposes but to declare God's final word. This word or message is called the Gospel – the Good News. So we read that Jesus Christ is the one and only foundation of the Christian Faith. The apostles were commissioned to set down this foundation and to build upon it.

The Letter to the Hebrews

Hebrews is the only New Testament letter that does not name its author. The clues in the text are that the writer was intimately familiar with things Jewish and had a knowledge of seafaring and ships. This would fit Paul well. Many believe Paul wrote this letter. If it was Peter, or one of other apostles, it would make no difference to the truth contained in it or to the fact that it is the inspired Word of God.

Christ Superior to the Prophets

Read Hebrews Chapter 1

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

This passage shows us that the Lord Jesus is central to all God's plans and purposes. All that God foretold and promised was completed in His Son. Jesus is God's final word. There is no changing of mind, no turning back. I want to show you how this central theme of Scripture is the key to seeing all Scripture.

The Letter to the Hebrews

The writer to the Hebrews (the Jewish nation) provides his readers with an overview of Jewish beliefs and history showing that everything points to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He shows that, while these people and things are shadows and pictures of the Messiah, they are all inferior to him. For example, he begins with the prophets. He is writing about Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel and all those other famous and less well known prophets of the Old Testament. Every one of them was a shadow of the great Prophet who would come to redeem and rescue the Jews from all their enemies. Moses is the first of these shadows (or “types”) and he tells the people about the One who would come:

Deuteronomy 18.17-19

The LORD said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.

The Letter to the Hebrews

Every prophet that followed Moses had this prophecy as a standard to honour. In that way they would demonstrate something of what the Messiah would be like. This was true of every prophet up to John the Baptist. So all of them give some indication of the coming Prophet, the Messiah (the anointed prophet, priest and prince) of Israel. It is well worth the effort to study the Old Testament and discover how each gives a foretaste of Jesus. For example, Moses was a *saviour* of Israel, he led them as though their *king* and taught them as *prophet* and *priest*.

John, in his Gospel, is very careful to show that Jesus is the Messiah, God's final word. Note how Jesus explains that he only spoke what the Father taught him and only did what he saw the Father doing (read John chapters 5 to 7 for the detail). This, of course, ties in with what the ultimate prophet had to be like. All the prophets failed in some way due to human weakness. Jesus did not fail or sin. Every word that Jesus spoke was God's word; every work he did was God's work. Now every human being must obey Jesus and bow the knee to him.

The Letter to the Hebrews

So far, we have seen that Jesus is superior to all the prophets and is the last prophet, God's final word. This ought to inform the way we read the Bible, listen to preaching and teaching and live our daily lives. The way Jesus lived is described for us to follow his example. So our daily aim must be to speak only godly words and do only godly deeds.

Christ the Creator

The next point I want to show you is about Christ's central role in Creation. Perhaps, first, I should explain that the title, "Christ" is a Greek word that means the same as "Messiah" (God's anointed servant)

Scripture tells us that God created everything *through* Christ, his Son. We also read that all Creation was made *for* him. Jesus is eternal, he is the Word that was in the beginning, he is Head *over* all creation and all things were made *by* him.

Read Genesis chapters 1 and 2; 1 Corinthians chapter 15;

The Letter to the Hebrews

2 Corinthians chapters 4 and 5.

So, there are two creations! The first is carnal (of ordinary, physical stuff). The second is spiritual (of God's nature). The first creation began with the forming of light. In the same way the second creation starts with the light of Christ. The first creation develops towards an arena where God can fulfil his purpose to make a man in his image. We tend to see this as being Adam. However, reading 1 Corinthians ch.15 shows that Adam was a forerunner or shadow of Christ – “the last Adam” – just like the prophets. Jesus is the man in God's image. Jesus is the exact likeness and representation of God. The new creation centres on Jesus and his glory. All its inhabitants will be joined to him through his death and resurrection. Those who refuse to believe in him will suffer banishment for ever – as did Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

Genesis chapter 1 shows a process of creation that ends in a man in God's likeness. The second creation follows a similar process that culminates in believers and, more particularly, the Church being like Jesus Christ, being in his image.

The Letter to the Hebrews

1 John 3.1-3

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

It is worth comparing the first creation with God's creative work in us and in the Church. From the essential light of knowing Christ as Saviour (Day 1) we move to space for spiritual growth (Day 2) and fruitful lives (Day 3). Next we come to discernment and understanding concerning the sources of light (Day 4). Out of this comes abundant life (Day 5). Finally, out of all the inadequate animal life (which we learn in Genesis ch.2 could never provide a friend and partner for Adam) we have a man made in the likeness of God (Day 6). Following this there is perfect rest (Day 7). Hebrews

The Letter to the Hebrews

ch.4 shows that the rest we find in Jesus is superior to any rest brought in the Old Testament whether by creation or by flood or by entering Canaan.

This overview of the two creations is vital to understanding the allegorical prophecies (such as those found in Daniel, Zechariah and Revelation). They describe and foretell God's times of intervention as he develops his purposes in Christ Jesus the Son. We are mistaken if we let the prophecies focus on humanity and politics, on wars and rumours of wars. Even prophecies about Israel or the Church can become meaningless if separated from the whole purpose of God. That purpose is that Jesus Christ will glorified in all creation. The actions of nations against Israel, the foolishness of wicked kings, the failure of prophets and priests, the efforts of Satan, have all failed to prevent God's purposes in Christ being completed.

Nothing could stop God's creation purpose to be glorified in his Son, the man Christ Jesus. Nothing can stop God's further creation purpose to bring many "sons to glory" (Hebrews ch.2 verse 10). How ought this to affect us? Well, Charles Wesley wrote these words:

The Letter to the Hebrews

Finish then Thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.

The writer to the Hebrews exhorts his readers many times with the phrase “Let us”. Look them up and ask God for the Grace to do the things you read.

Hebrews 12.1 - 3

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, **let us** throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and **let us** run with perseverance the race marked out for us. **Let us** fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the*

The Letter to the Hebrews

throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Christ is Superior to Angels

Read Hebrews chapters One and Two

Hebrews chapters 1 and 2 deal thoroughly with this aspect of Scripture and Truth. We are told what angels are and what they do. We are told what they could and could not do. We are told what they cannot be. The Lord Jesus contrasts all this and he is shown to be superior in every way to any angel.

1:2-3 The superiority of the Son's revelation is demonstrated by seven great descriptive statements about him: 1. appointed heir of all things. The incarnate Son, having performed the work of redemption, was gloriously exalted to the position of the firstborn heir of God, i.e., he received the inheritance of God's estate ("all things"). See Ro

The Letter to the Hebrews

8:17. 2. through whom he made the universe. See Jn 1:3; Col 1:16. 3. radiance of God's glory. As the brilliance of the sun is inseparable from the sun itself, so the Son's radiance is inseparable from deity, for he himself is God, the second person of the Trinity (Jn 1:14, 18). 4. exact representation of his being. Jesus is not merely an image or reflection of God. Because the Son himself is God, he is the absolutely authentic representation of God's being (cf. Jn 14:9; Col 1:15). 5. sustaining all things. Christ is not like Atlas, the mythical Greek god who held the world on his shoulders. The Son dynamically holds together all that has been created through him (Col 1:17). 6. provided purification for sins. Through his redeeming death on the cross. 7. sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Being seated at God's right hand indicates that the work of redemption is complete and that Christ is actively ruling with God as Lord over all (see v. 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; 1Pe 3:22; see also note on Mk 16:19).

(from the NIV Study Bible Notes)

In the rest of chapter 1 there are seven Old Testament quotations that show the superiority of Christ over the angels. These include clear teaching

The Letter to the Hebrews

that Jesus is the Son of God, the Deity of the Messiah and that angels must worship him.

Some angelic appearances in the Old Testament are seen as The Son of God himself appearing to speak with his servants. The word “angel” simply means, “messenger” and forms part of the word *evangelist*. The appearances of angels in both Old and New Testaments are all to do with conveying God’s message – even those appearances that some feel were actually Christ appearing. These are called “Christophanies” by some and apply, for example, to the angel who met Jacob. So, Christ’s coming into the world in the “likeness of sinful flesh” is superior to his appearing in angelic form in the Old Testament.

The first angel mentioned is the one who was set to guard the way to the Tree of Life and to prevent anyone getting back into the Garden of Eden. We need to see here that angels became the link between God and men after the entry of sin and death. Before then God walked with Adam in the cool of the day. So angels are to do with helping sinful humanity find its way back to God. This is an extremely good work and it is understandable that some people would want to respect angels and

The Letter to the Hebrews

worship God through them. Some Hebrews felt this way. The writer to the Hebrews makes it absolutely clear that this is not necessary or acceptable now that Christ has appeared in the flesh to deal once and for all with sin. Our mediator is Jesus Christ he is superior to angels in every way. He is able to save us completely.

Colossians 2:16 – 19

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Christ has brought us a Superior Salvation

*Read Genesis chapter 6;
Exodus chapters 1 to 15*

In comparing Christ with angels the writer to the Hebrews introduces the fact that the salvation brought by Jesus is superior to that brought by any angel. An overview of the Bible provides many examples of salvation. Individuals are saved from all kinds of trials and dangers. Israel is saved from all kinds of enemies. Angels administered the Law to teach the people how to avoid incurring God's wrath. No salvation compares with that brought to us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. The writer to the Hebrews uses a warning from his seafaring experience. He tells them to be careful not to *drift away* from what they have learned in Christ. The thought is of drifting along in a boat paying no attention to what is going on and gradually getting far away from where one should be!

Adam's rebellious sin brought about the death of animals in order to provide him and Eve with

The Letter to the Hebrews

skins for covering. This continued among the faithful (like Abel) as a means of covering or “atonement” because of sin. So we see the theme running through the Bible that a human being is not acceptable in God’s presence. It is essential that he be covered or clothed. The spiritual meaning of this is seen in the many Scriptures that talk about being “clothed in righteousness”, wearing “garments of praise”, or “putting on” the Lord Jesus Christ – or similar.

The many animals that were sacrificed to “propitiate” God were just a picture of the real clothing of the Spirit that Jesus would bring. Similarly the garments of the High Priest were only a picture of the spiritual covering the believer in Jesus receives. Sadly, these symbols and pictures became mere rituals and the lesson was lost in religious activity. In the pagan world the same truth about needing atonement and propitiation can be seen hidden in the sacrifices and idolatrous practices.

In Hebrews chapter Two we are shown that Jesus can make sinners holy and that he has destroyed the power of death. No angel could deal with these two great enemies of creation. Sin and

The Letter to the Hebrews

Death reigned (see Romans chapter 5) from Adam's sin onwards. Christ has dealt with both. Jesus Christ is able to make us alive and make us acceptable to God.

It is important to see the full nature of our salvation. Initially we are saved from God's wrath and the *punishment* our sins deserve. This equates with Noah's Ark being a vehicle for rescue from God's punishment. We can also see a parallel in Israel being brought out of Egypt.

The purpose of salvation is that we live saved lives. God wants us to live in the power of Christ's Holy Spirit and be overcoming the *power* of sin on a day to day basis. There are parallels to this in the Old Testament. An important one is in the meaning of circumcision (i.e. the flesh rolled away). Much of the New Testament is about our putting off the flesh and putting on Christ. We are commanded to live in the Spirit and no longer make provision for the fleshly life.

The outcome of salvation is that we will be with the Lord forever. We look forward to the day when we will be saved from sin's *presence*. This wonderful hope is pictured in the reigns of David

The Letter to the Hebrews

and Solomon and in the prophetic words concerning the future glorious kingdom of the Messiah.

Christ is a Superior Saviour

Read Hebrews chapter 3 to 5

In these chapters the Lord Jesus is compared with Moses, Aaron and Joshua. The comparison begins with the exhortation to “*fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.*” Again we are shown that merely looking at the Old Testament is not enough – we must have our view governed by the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not look at Moses as the greatest of Jewish heroes but as a forerunner and shadow of Christ.

Moses did a great work as Deliverer (saviour) of Israel and is described as “the meekest man in all the earth”. However, he was merely a servant in God’s House. Moses was faithful to his mission, as was Jesus. Here the comparison ends because Jesus

The Letter to the Hebrews

is the builder of the house and the Son who presides over it.

As we look through Genesis we see a principle at work – that of building a house. Perhaps I should point out that the idea here is not so much of a building but of a community, a congregation, a nation. The Lord begins with Abram and challenges him to a journey of faith. In Abram, God starts his family, his household. God changed Abram’s name to Abraham (father of many nations) and made specific promises concerning Isaac’s descendants as the household of promise. We see this making progress until a whole nation of Hebrews is living in Egypt. This household is brought under slavery to the Egyptians and then brought out of slavery by Moses.

So Jesus and Moses are compared as “apostles” of God – his “sent ones”. Moses brought into being the nation of Israel. Jesus has brought into being a nation of priests, from every nation, ethnic group and language, called the “Church”. The word “church” is used where the Greek EKKLESIA (EKKLESIA– called out ones) is used in the New Testament. EKKLESIA is also translated as “congregation” or “assembly”. Israel was God’s

The Letter to the Hebrews

congregation in the wilderness. He dwelt among them through the mediatorship of Moses and the Tabernacle. Now God has a congregation whose citizenship or nationality is in heaven with Christ. God dwells among this congregation directly by his Spirit. The Church is God's sanctuary and he dwells in her as he did in Christ – as though we were his body! In fact the Church is described by the apostle Paul as “the Body of Christ”.

We might note here that the apostles of Jesus also built houses in the sense that they established local churches – local congregations where Christ's Body is evident through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

***Read Genesis chapter 14;
Psalm 110; Exodus chapter 29***

The next comparison is between Jesus and the priests of God. Ultimately this will bring comparison with the most mysterious priest of all, Melchizedek (in Hebrews ch.10). Here Jesus is compared with priesthood in general and with Aaron in particular. Although Moses was a mediator between God and the people and administered sacrifices in ordaining the priests, he was never a

The Letter to the Hebrews

priest. Aaron was chosen because he had been among the people, suffering with the people. Moses knew nothing of slavery or of the whip on his back. Aaron did – so he was able to sympathise with the people and be a gentle force for discipline and correction. He could also be a genuine representative of the people before God. Jesus is our Great High Priest. He is superior to Aaron – able to do so much more for us. Jesus was able to offer himself as a sacrifice once and for all for our sins. Aaron could only keep offering dead animals to atone and propitiate. However, like Aaron, Jesus is a sympathetic representative of his people. Jesus suffered when he was tempted.

Read Matthew chapter 4.1 – 11; Leviticus chapter 23

Now, does this mean that Jesus had inner temptations like us? Did he suffer from the consequences of sin like us? The writer to the Hebrews makes it absolutely clear that the temptations of Jesus were “apart from sin” (Hebrews 4.15). The burden of the comparison with Aaron is one of fellow or companion in suffering. Jesus understands and we can be sure that we will find a

The Letter to the Hebrews

gracious hearing at his throne. Jesus was tempted to sin, not from inner disobedience but directly from Satan. Jesus suffered the consequences of sin, not for his own sins but for ours. Jesus suffered deeply in a world under the power of sin and death not from any fault of his own but from the sins of all around him. He wept, he groaned, he sweat great drops of blood because of sin. He was viciously accused and beaten, he was mocked and tortured, he was crucified because of sin.

In Hebrews 5 verses 7 – 10 we read some very profound things about the humanity of Jesus. The writer brings us into the holy place of awe about the Son of God. Here is one who did not have to grasp after equality with God. Here is one who humbled himself, who in the likeness of sinful flesh dealt with sin in his own body. We must stop and think about this. He committed no sin yet he suffered for sin. Think how his holy and pure life was assaulted by sin all around him. Think how much worse was his grief and suffering when he had to suffer as though he was a sinner! Jesus battled against sin and vanquished it. In the Garden of Gethsemane a dreadful battle went on where he sweat great drops of blood. He prayed for strength to survive the ordeal and was heard. Amazing love that he would

The Letter to the Hebrews

pray to survive the agony of the Garden only to suffer the agony of the Cross. Jesus earned the right of priesthood even though he, according to human thinking was a descendent of Judah.

Jesus is described as both submitting to God and suffering. He “learned obedience” through these things. Please note that this is not the same as learning *how* to obey. We sinful humans have to be trained to obey and even then are more likely to be disobedient and resentful. Jesus was placed in situations of extreme difficulty yet he submitted willingly and continued to do everything to please his Father. So the perfect Son of God learned or experienced obedience. Only in this way could he be perfected (matured, made ready) to be our great High Priest and therefore be “*the source of eternal salvation*” for true believers.

Perhaps these things about the humanity of Jesus are difficult to grasp. Hebrews 5.11 – 13 suggests that our immaturity and unwillingness to get to grips with these things will hold us back from truly knowing Christ and the power of the Gospel. Let me encourage you to do all you can to gain a better understanding and knowledge of the Lord

The Letter to the Hebrews

Jesus Christ. Let it be your aim to know him better day by day.

In our overview of Scripture we will find many who suffer for their people in some way or other. We can read of Judges who represented the people and were a means of deliverance for them. We read of prophets who suffered because of the word they had to bring – like Jeremiah. In particular we read of Joseph who was abandoned by his brothers, falsely accused and imprisoned, finally he was vindicated and became the “Saviour of the World”. Joseph became a man of understanding, one who could understand and forgive his brothers – even though he committed no sin against them. Here we have a glimpse of our wonderful Saviour Jesus. Similarly we have a glimpse of Jesus in Aaron who could sympathise with the people. Aaron was a “saviour” in that he brought individuals to God for forgiveness through offering sacrifices on their behalf. He also represented the people at the annual Day of Atonement. This called for him to go in to the Holy of Holies, the very Presence of God, in the Tabernacle. If he went in unworthily then he would die and Israel would be rejected. He had to go in wearing the correct garments and having completed the correct rituals and sacrifices. So each time he

The Letter to the Hebrews

was Israel's "redeemer" in that he found favour with God. Jesus is far superior to Aaron in this and as our Redeemer has found full favour and acceptance with God. He is able to bring us into God's Holy Presence too – on the basis of his Blood given as the full redemption and ransom price.

The aspect of salvation described by redemption is seen throughout the Old Testament. The main examples are those found in the Law of sacrifices. There is another aspect in the "kinsman redeemer" law. This can be understood through a reading of the Book of Ruth.

Read Joshua chapters 1 -5

Jesus is also compared as a saviour with his namesake Joshua. Both names are rendered in Aramaic, *Jehoshua* (= Jehovah the Saviour). Joshua saved the people in the sense that he brought them into their inheritance and led them in victory over their enemies. Here we see how Jesus is the Captain of our Salvation and has overcome the world. Ultimately we will live under his leadership utterly free from all enemies. We will enter into his rest. This is a Sabbath picture – a time when no servile work is done, a time when the sweat of the brow is

The Letter to the Hebrews

not seen, a time when the curse has no hold. The people of Israel missed out on this “rest” because they had hard hearts. They did not believe and therefore did not receive. The warning remains for all:

*"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts."*

A particular aspect of Joshua's leadership is the renewal of circumcision at Gilgal. This rolling away the flesh is symbolic of being a spiritual people freed from sin and made fit to be in God's Presence. It is important to see the development of the truth about circumcision because, even in the Old Testament, it was understood that it was the heart that needs cutting away (or circumcising). It is notable that in this context of circumcision we read:

Hebrews 4.12,13

*For the word of God is living and active.
Sharper than any double-edged sword, it
penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit,
joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and
attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation*

The Letter to the Hebrews

is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

So the writer describes the Word of God as a cutting knife suitable for cutting between the most delicate membranes – even to divide the indivisible – the soul and spirit. He goes on to point out that God's Word uncovers our motives and attitudes and lays us open to judgement.

Christ brings a Superior Promise and Hope

Read Hebrews chapters 6 and 7

The writer to the Hebrews now introduces the principle of covenant, of oath or promise. First he brings very serious warnings to religious people about having a familiarity with the things of Christ yet never knowing Christ as Saviour. He warns

The Letter to the Hebrews

people who claim to be believers that they must not stay as babies, content with a milky diet. The true Christian will press on into Christ – to know him and the power of his resurrection. The false will fall away at the first hurdle of difficulty.

This hard speaking is quickly moderated in an appeal to avoid laziness and to move in the covenant of God as Abraham did. So we need to take an overview of God's covenant relationship with his people. For Hebrews the greatest covenant is the one God made with Abraham. The Covenant associated with the Law is set within the greater and less conditional promise made to Abraham.

Read Genesis chapters 8, 9, 15, 17, 28; Exodus chapters 19 and 23

These chapters will give you some insight to the nature of God's covenants and how they all relate to God bringing his purposes to fulfilment through a nation who would serve him and out of whom would come the Messiah. The writer shows that we, like Abraham, must live by faith – expecting and waiting patiently for the fulfilment of the Promise.

The Letter to the Hebrews

Now the writer gives more reasons why Jesus is greater than the earthly high priest. We learn that God has made a covenant with Jesus about his priesthood and that the promise was sealed with a kind of double-oath. So we are encouraged to hope positively that God will not change his mind about saving wretched sinners like you and me! Here the writer uses another seafaring term – “an anchor for the soul”. Please do not think of a big metal object! “Anchor” describes a person – a brave man in a storm-wrecked boat, who would take the life-line to land and secure it there, thus providing a way for all to come to land safely.

Read Psalm 110

The covenant that God has sealed in Jesus Christ is superior to all other covenants and renders them all obsolete. In Jesus we have the guarantee of eternal salvation. Because the promise is superior so is the hope we have in him superior. His priesthood is eternal and unchanging so all that he has achieved will always be on offer. Jesus is able to save to the utmost all that come to him by faith. The Jewish priesthood changed and the sacrifices had to be renewed. The Priesthood of Melchizedek is different and speaks of Christ’s eternal, unchanging

The Letter to the Hebrews

ministry. We are also shown that because Abraham worshipped Melchizedek then all the Levitical priesthood did too! This demonstrates the superiority of a priesthood of Melchizedek's order rather than Aaron's.

Who was Melchizedek? Well, some say he was an angelic being. However, he is described as king of Salem (later Jerusalem). His title means "King of Righteousness". I am inclined to believe that this priest could have been Noah's son, Shem.

Christ is High Priest of a Superior System

Read Hebrews chapters 8 to 10

This section continues to show that in Christ we have a better covenant but does this through a comparison with the way in which Old and New Covenants operated. So Jesus is compared with the Tabernacle or Temple. Also the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Old Covenant are compared with the single sacrifice Jesus made once, for all, forever!

The Letter to the Hebrews

Read Exodus chapters 25 to 40

The Tabernacle was based on a heavenly pattern. It showed invisible truth in visible ways. The priestly service and sacrifices were provided as a picture of eternal things. We can learn from reading about these things. We need to always keep in mind the question, “How does this reveal Jesus Christ to me?” For example, it does not take long to see that God is interested in minute detail concerning the Tabernacle, priestly garments and offerings. This tells us that we must not have shallow or generalised ideas about the Person of Jesus. We must recognise that he is the source and pattern for these things and therefore is greater and even more complex than they! So, every nail, every lace, every measurement can reveal to us something of the glories of Christ.

The system provided for the people of Israel was based on a covenant that required the people to fulfil certain conditions. These conditions proved to be way beyond them! They ceased to be faithful to their word. God intervenes with a promise concerning a new system under a new covenant. They would have new hearts and new minds that were able to obey God and honour him and keep

The Letter to the Hebrews

their word. They would be made fit to serve God in holiness. So the new covenant makes the old covenant obsolete.

The writer to the Hebrews shows that all the physical ceremonies of setting things out correctly, lighting lamps, burning incense, sprinkling blood and preparing sacrifices is finished. Now we have a “new and living way” that approaches God through Jesus. We must serve in the shadows no longer - the reality is here!

Now, we see a very serious warning given. The Hebrews are told that they must not keep on sinning because they have no sacrifices left. To refuse their Messiah meant refusing the only acceptable sacrifice for sin. It was unthinkable that they should return to sacrificing animals in order to gain forgiveness. There is a dreadful judgement ready for those who abuse the truth of Christ's death. How horrible to trample on the Cross of Christ and dismiss its value. How disgraceful to insult the Holy Spirit of Grace!

This warning applies to all that demean the work of Christ and the shedding of his blood for our justification through faith. This can too easily happen where religion and systems take the place of the Holy Spirit in the leading and upholding of

The Letter to the Hebrews

church life. The apostle Paul writes of “a different gospel” and “another Jesus” (2 Corinthians 11.4; Galatians 1.6). The Gentile (non-Jewish) world never had a system of access to God or a covenant to be faithful in. This has not stopped them creating all kinds of systems for containing the doctrines of Christ and making access a matter of rules and ceremonies and “mysteries”.

The Constant Way of Faith

Read Hebrews chapter 11

In the midst of all the concentration on the New Way in Christ we have the writer making plain that faith has always been the way to please God. Many Old Testament heroes of faith are listed and there are insights into their lives.

We are left in no doubt that faith is an active belief that God has spoken and must be obeyed. We are not told about people who got God to change his mind through a kind of faith in what they believed

The Letter to the Hebrews

should happen. No, what we read is that men and women had faith in God's promises and were willing to trust God and live in anticipation of those promises. This kind of faith pleases God and is seen in faithful, obedient lives.

So, from Abel to the last prophets there has been the testimony of faith in God and obedience to him.

Christ is a Superior Mediator

Read Hebrews chapter 12

As the writer of this letter has provided an overview of Bible History he has shown that in every respect Jesus is Superior to all previous channels by which men approached God. In this chapter the writer shows that the mediating work of Jesus is superior to that of Moses and the Law. This is the most turbulent and difficult river the Jew had to cross to gain a pure faith in Christ. The giving of

The Letter to the Hebrews

the Law, the dramatic origin of the Jewish faith, the receiving of the Torah (way of life) and commandments has been rendered obsolete by the Lord Jesus Christ. We are given a comparison between the old way of access and the new:-

Hebrews 12.22 – 24

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

A mediator is someone who is able to bring opposing sides together in a treaty or covenant or purchase. The wonderful truth is that Jesus is able to do this for us and propitiate God so completely that he willingly accepts us – though we can pay nothing and owe everything!

The Letter to the Hebrews

So we are told that our total focus and attention must be on the Lord Jesus Christ. We must not allow the things of worldly life to hinder us or come between us. We must understand that much of our struggle and suffering is designed by our God and Father to discipline us and help us to be like his Son. This is evidence of his love. We are warned about being over-familiar or careless about our great salvation. This might occur because we are under Grace and are not in a system that terrifies us into submission. The Judgement of the Last Days will come and we ought to live with a suitable attitude of worship and awe of our God who will destroy his enemies with the fire of his word.

Christ brings a Superior Holiness

Read Hebrews chapter 13

This last chapter includes a number of practical teachings about brotherhood, fellowship, marriage and church life. These teachings are centred on the rejection of Jesus and the fact that he was taken

The Letter to the Hebrews

“outside the camp” and crucified. Jesus, as the sin offering, was killed outside the Israelite encampment. As far as the world is concerned that is where they want him and, so, in order to truly serve him we must go where he is. We suffer rejection and choose separation from the world.

The old way of holiness depended upon outward ceremonies and regulations that could not enter the spirit, soul and body and make them holy. These things were only shadows of Christ. Christ Jesus is able to make us holy and acceptable in God’s sight. It is right and proper that we should want to live holy lives in thankfulness to him who has made us holy and given us an eternal future in his holy presence. We want to identify with our Lord’s inheritance so we ought to identify with his death and resurrection.

Hebrews 13.20,21

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him,

The Letter to the Hebrews

through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Summing Up

Read 1 Timothy 3.16

The letter to the Hebrews has provided us with a framework in which to see that Christ is all in all and that the whole of the Bible is about him. He is superior to prophets and angels and great Deliverers like Moses. He is superior to any priest of God no matter how mysterious. He is superior to any Tabernacle or Temple or sacrifice. He is superior to any covenant or oath no matter who made it. The way he has opened up to God is superior to any other way of trying to reach God and has rendered them obsolete.

We have been able to see that God gradually unfolded his purposes so that we could all be led to the feet of his Son Jesus. Adam was created to be in the likeness of God. He failed but Jesus fulfilled this purpose and became the last Adam (lord of creation), and the second Man (to be in God's

The Letter to the Hebrews

likeness). We follow on in Christ with a future where we will be transformed into his likeness. Everything we read in the Bible can be set within this overall plan.

The Law, the Prophets, the Poetry and the History of the Bible all centre on the process of maturity from the old to the new creation. The apostle Paul describes this simply as being from the natural to the spiritual.

1 Corinthians 15.45 - 49

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being" ; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

The Letter to the Hebrews

The Old Testament becomes a prophecy about Jesus the Messiah instead of pages of “stuff” you might have found tedious or difficult or disconnected! Every page contains shadows, pictures, prophecies and examples that help us to recognise and honour the Lord Jesus. The Jews ought to have been able to recognise from the Scriptures who Jesus was (John 5.39).

The New Testament too maintains this whole view of God’s revelation. The Gospels, Acts, the Epistles and Revelation are not a mere collection of writings randomly stuck together. In fact they are the completion of the revelation of the purposes of God, which begins with Genesis chapter 1. Each Gospel fits beautifully into the patterns prepared by the Old Testament writers. The Book of Revelation seals the apocalyptic visions that began with Enoch. Each sign and wonder provides the seal to Old Testament prophecies. For example, Isaiah prophesied of blind eyes and deaf ears – the spiritual plight of the nation of Israel. Jesus physically healed the blind and deaf but he also opened the spiritual eyes and ears of many so that they might understand the truth and know him as their Saviour and Lord.

The Letter to the Hebrews

Read 2 Peter chapters 1 and 2; 1 Timothy 2.15

It is very important that we see this whole view of the Scriptures. We are warned about taking Scriptures out of their context or having personal opinions about what Scripture means. We live in a religious atmosphere where we are invited to think that many Scriptures are open to various interpretations. Yes, we all stick together on the “main things” but there are many doctrines that we are told are not obvious or clear. If it is true that we are not in agreement about the meaning of a particular Scripture we are not permitted to remain in disagreement but must pursue the truth in righteousness and love.

There are many Christian practices that have arisen out of this false idea that Scripture is open to various interpretations. These practices have decimated Christ’s people and created many types of Christian religious observance and denomination.

A careful overview of Scripture shows us that God allowed his people, on many occasions, to stray from the truth. The lesson to be learned is that we are prone to corruption and distortion. In the power

The Letter to the Hebrews

of a full salvation, where the old corrupt nature can be crucified and buried, we ought not to be repeating the faults of Israel and Judah.

One of the major threads of Scripture is purity of worship. We are shown how God's people strayed into thinking that it was all right to worship God through an idol or a Baal. We read that they introduced all kinds of false worship until the corruption was beyond correction! At this stage God used drastic means to restore true worship. It is notable that the times of signs and wonders coincide with declension and idolatry.

If you are wondering why things go pear-shaped or why God allows us to stray I can only remind you that we are sinners. This means that our every thought and inclination is to "evil" (Genesis 6.5). This word "evil" refers to rottenness like in an apple going bad. Another related idea is in the word "perish". Christ Jesus makes it possible for us not to perish, or go bad, or become "evil". This teaching is not palatable – even, it seems, to people who say they have repented of their sins and placed their trust in Jesus Christ!

The human touch is too often evident in what ought to be sacred and holy. We want to add our

The Letter to the Hebrews

ideas, our fallen, sinful attitudes and knowledge to the service of God. There is a lesson about this in the list of clean and unclean animals in Leviticus chapter 13. You will find that only animals that chewed grass and had cleft hooves were clean. Pigs have cleft hooves but eat rubbish! So pigs were unclean. Fruit gone bad was unclean! Serving God and handling his word must be out of a pure heart and a holy walk. The human touch is a bit like the pig – unclean and unacceptable to God.

This study is becoming long and entering into teaching that requires good spiritual teeth and a will to chew. Perhaps we ought to leave things fairly simple and milky for now! Perhaps I have posed more questions than I have answered? Good – you have some worthy questions for others and a desire for understanding – you have a hunger for the Truth.

Words alone will not enlighten you. There must be new spiritual life vibrant in you – life brought into being through faith in Jesus Christ and by the receiving of God's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth and glorifies Jesus the Son of God. The Holy Spirit responds to our hunger and thirst for righteousness with the Bread and Water of Life – Jesus. He does this through his

The Letter to the Hebrews

power witnessing and working effectively in us,
through our loving fellowship with one another and
through godly attention to the Scriptures.

David Chapman

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