

THE BIG READ (18)

Jesus in Hebrews

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. The New Testament contains a number of epistles or letters sent to individual Christians or churches.

These letters address specific situations in the lives of believers and through them we are taught how to live as God’s people.

Thirteen of these letters were written by the apostle Paul. The remaining nine letters were written by other church leaders, including the letter of Hebrews.

B. Who wrote Hebrews?

1. We cannot know with any certainty who wrote this letter.

Jerome – Paul.

Augustine – Paul.

Tertullian – Barnabas.

Luther – Apollos.

Calvin – Clement of Rome or Luke.

John Owen – Paul.

2. It is better to agree with Origen (c.185-254) who famously remarked: “*Who wrote the letter is known to God alone.*”

Although we do not know who wrote this letter, almost certainly the first readers of the letter did.

3. What can we know?

He was not an apostle or eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry.

“This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.” (Hebrews 2:3)

He was a Hellenistic Jewish Christian – Greek was his first language; he knew the Old Testament well, quoting from the Greek translation of it.

He knew some of Paul’s co-workers.

"I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you." (Hebrews 13:23)

He wrote the letter some time after AD60 and before AD70, probably between AD64-68, at the time of the persecution in Rome.

C. Who was Hebrews written to?

1. A group of Jewish Christian.

The writer assumes that they knew the Old Testament well.

2. They were living in Italy, probably Rome.

"Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings." (Hebrews 13:24)

3. They were being persecuted.

"Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathised with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions." (Hebrews 10:32-34)

4. They were thinking of giving up following Jesus.

"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." (Hebrews 2:1)

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." (Hebrews 6:11-12)

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:23-25)

"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." (Hebrews 10:35-36)

D. Why was Hebrews written?

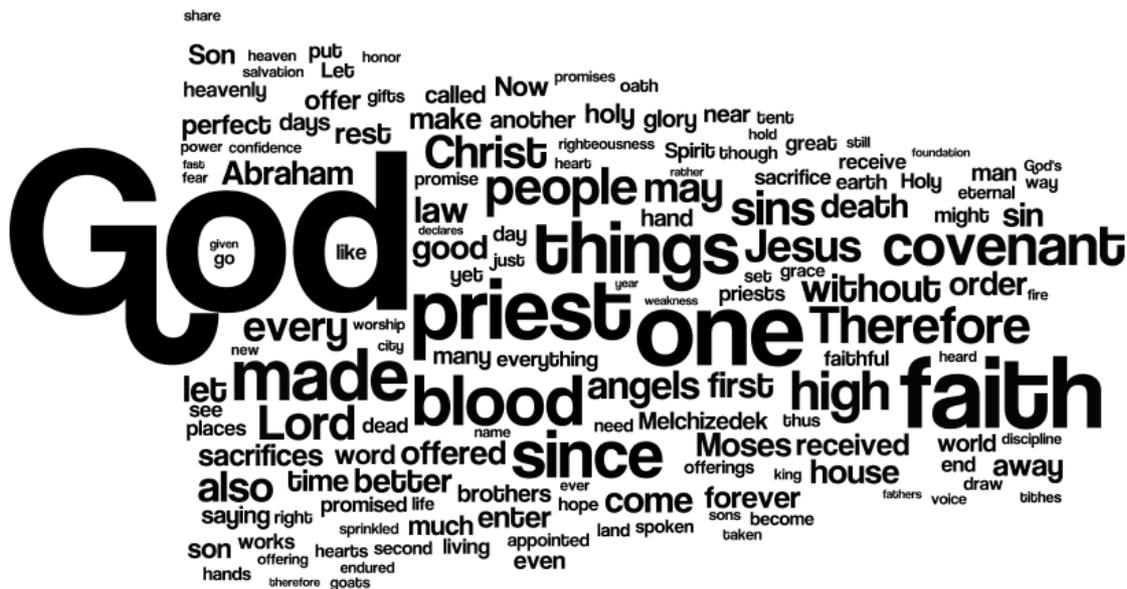
1. These Jewish Christians were being persecuted for their faith and were tempted to give up following Jesus and go back to being normal Jews.

2. The writer of Hebrews writes to encourage them to keep trusting in Jesus to the end, and to not give up because He is superior to everything that came before.

"We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first." (Hebrews 3:14)

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess." (Hebrews 4:14)

E. The Story of Hebrews (or rather The Story of Jesus in Hebrews)



1. The letter of Hebrews is a long argument.

The writer moves back and forth between teaching and exhortation.

The teaching gives the basis and motivation for the exhortation.

2. There are two main sections to the letter.

Chapters 1:1-10:18: Teaching – Christ is better!

Chapters 10:19-13:25: Exhortation – Don't drift from Him!

3. In Hebrews 1:1-10:18 the writer wants to convince these Jewish Christians that Christ is better than everything that has gone before.

Christ is better than the prophets (1:1-3).

"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." (Hebrews 1:1-3)

Christ is better than the angels (1:4-2:18).

"To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:13-14)

Christ is better than Moses (3:1-19).

"Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honour than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house." (Hebrews 3:3-6)

Christ is better than Joshua (4:1-13).

"For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God's rest also rests

from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no-one will fall by following their example of disobedience." (Hebrews 4:8-11)

Christ is better than Aaron (4:14-10:18) – He is a better priest and offers a better sacrifice.

"If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come – one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?" (Hebrews 7:11)

"Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." (Hebrews 7:23-25)

"Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." (Hebrews 7:27)

"And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10)

4. Then in Hebrews 10:19-13:25 he exhorts them to not drift away from Him and miss out on the saving work of Christ.

Keep going by meeting with other believers.

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25)

Keep going by remembering those who persevered in the faith (Hebrews 11).

Keep going by throwing off everything that might hinder us.

"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." (Hebrews 12:1)

Keep going when God sends things into our lives to test our faith.

"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ... but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness." (Hebrews 12:7, 10)

Keep going by fixing our eyes on Jesus.

"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 throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:2-3)

D. Jesus in Hebrews

1. Jesus is the ultimate priest.

He is sympathetic.

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:15-16)

He is royal.

"He has become a high priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek. This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High." (Hebrews 6:20-7:1)

"If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come – one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?" (Hebrews 7:11)

He is perfect.

"Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people." (Hebrews 7:26-27)

He is eternal.

"Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood." (Hebrews 7:23-24)

He is able.

"Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." (Hebrews 7:25)

"Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God." (Hebrews 10:11-12)

2. Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice.

He offered a permanent sacrifice.

"because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Hebrews 10:4)

"because by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy." (Hebrews 10:14)

"He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." (Hebrews 7:27)

He offered an effective sacrifice.

"It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Hebrews 8:9-12)

"The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our conscience from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:13-14)

"And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10)

3. Jesus is the ultimate Saviour.

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:19-22)

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” (Hebrews 12:2)