

58 – Hebrews: Old Testament Foreshadows Revealed – Jesus!

- The book of **Hebrews** may be one of the important books in scripture, for many reasons. It helps us truly understand the person and work of Jesus, our Messiah, the One who fulfills all the words of the Old Testament. Here's just a few things that others have said of this book:

“From Adam to Moses, through 2500 years, and from Moses to Malachi, through 1100 years, the prophets were speaking for God to man. But at the end of the 3600 years their revelation of God was only partial. Then after a silence of 400 years, when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, and in that Son the revelation of God is perfect.” (Dr. William Pettingill, “Into the Holiest: Simple Studies in Hebrews”)



The Epistle to the Hebrews, one of the most important books of the New Testament in that it contains some of the chief doctrines of the Christian faith, is, as well, a book of infinite logic and great beauty. To read it is to breathe the atmosphere of heaven itself. To study it is to partake of strong spiritual meat. To abide in its teachings is to be led from immaturity to maturity in the knowledge of Christian truth and of Christ Himself. It is to “go on unto perfection.” (E. Shuyler English, “Studies in The Epistle to the Hebrews”)

- The western church did not accept the book of Hebrews for a long time, because **it very clearly establishes Israel as prime importance to God**, and has not been cast aside in favor of the “church.” This is the lie of “replacement theology” which many current churches embrace. The book of Hebrews denounces this strongly, as do the chapters of Romans, 8, 9 and 10.
- People still **argue over who is the author of this book**. He does not mention his name anywhere. Many believe that the apostle Paul wrote this book, and there is good evidence and support for this. However, many still debate the authorship. This is an irrelevant point. It doesn't matter who wrote it. It is the inspired Word of God, and the Holy Spirit can be considered the author. Most believe Paul was the tool God used to write this book, probably about a decade before the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.
- Some also debate whether this book is really an epistle (a letter). There is no typical address or sign-off in this book. It is more likely a work about doctrine, whose chief audience was Jewish believers (Hebrews). Again, just like the question of authorship, the type of work doesn't matter. It is one of the most important works included in the New Testament, one which **establishes Jesus as the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies and the types (High Priest) etc. Jesus is established here as superior to everything and everyone.**
- It is very difficult to study or understand Hebrews without a thorough understanding of the Old Testament, which is referenced throughout the book. The modern church unfortunately does not teach or encourage much study of the Old Testament, so Hebrews is difficult for them. It becomes much easier and clearer when one approaches it with a knowledge of the Old Testament.
- This book is obviously **written to believers, not unbelievers**. The author assumes the reader has a knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures. Yet even though they are believers, and know the scriptures, they can stand some maturity in their faith walk. Sounds like all of us!
- This book is **avoided more than almost any other book in the New Testament, except possibly Revelation**. It is often seen as mysterious and difficult to understand. This would be true for people who did not have a good understanding of the Old Testament before taking on a study of this book. Like no other book, it connects the Old Testament to the New Testament. There are over 70 direct references, allusions or quotes from the Old Testament. The Old Testament foreshadowed the new, and the writer of Hebrews makes this very clear point, discussing how the shadows of the old things are fulfilled in Jesus. This book is full of allusions to the blood of Jesus, blood covenants, and our being sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the shedding of His blood. Blood is not a popular subject these days in the Church, so many avoid this book for that reason. **Hebrews has also been called “The Leviticus of the New Testament.”** Leviticus is the book most people avoid in the OT, because it is full of laws and sacrifices and what appears to be tedium and non-important things to us. However, that book (like Hebrews) points to the complete fulfillment of the sacrificial system through Jesus Christ.

- Paul spoke in **other letters about the need for believers to mature**, to grow up and eat “meat” instead of just milk, as babies. This book is definitely “meat.” It contains things that are deeper and meatier than subjects found in other New Testament books. Hebrews exalts the truths of Jesus (to a higher plain than most other scriptures) and at the same time exposes us as weaker and spiritually immature.
- Hebrews **combines two literary approach types**: 1) *exposition*, where the author expounds on the person and the work of Jesus, and 2) *exhortation*, where he encourages and motivates the readers to a positive response. The author switches between these two methods, which makes it more powerful, but also more difficult to trace the arguments. In most of the other epistles exposition is presented in one part and exhortation in another. Here, they are intertwined throughout.

Chapter Highlights

1	God has spoken to mankind through His Son, who took away our sins, and has returned to the right hand of the Almighty; He is higher than the angels; references to Old Testament scriptures regarding the preeminence of the Messiah.
2	Because this is true, we cannot neglect our salvation and drift away from God. We cannot escape judgment without the covering provided for us. Son of Man made a little lower than the angels so that as a man He could “taste death for everyone.” He had to be made like us so that He could release us from bondage. He is our merciful and faithful High Priest, making propitiation (reconciliation with God) for our sins. He was tempted as a man, so He can help us, who are also tempted.
3	Jesus is the “Apostle and High Priest of our confession;” He is counted higher than Moses (“ <i>He who built the house has more honor than the house</i> ” v. 3). Don’t harden your hearts to Him, warning not to have an evil heart of unbelief. We are partakers of Jesus if we remain steadfast. Reminder of the unbelief and rebellion of the Israelites in the desert, who all died there (could not enter Promised Land due to unbelief).
4	The promise of His rest should keep us alert in our own faith, realizing that those who hear His voice yet harden their hearts will not enter into that rest. The example again of the wilderness wanderings and lack of rest in the Promised Land due to disobedience. “ <i>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.</i> ” (v. 12) Nothing is hidden from His sight, all things are naked and open to Him. Everyone must give account. Our High Priest does sympathize with our weakness, and will grant mercy if we boldly approach His throne of grace.
5	Human High Priest’s character, compassion because he is one of us, must offer sacrifices on our behalf. This is a position only God can bestow, God calls the High Priest, as He did Aaron. Jesus is a Priest forever... “ <i>to the order of Melchizedek.</i> ” (v. 6) Jesus is the “ <i>author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him</i> ” (v.9) Admonition that they have become “dull of hearing” (v. 11) They should be teachers by now, but still need “milk and not solid food.” (v. 13) Solid food (the deeper aspects of the Word of God) is for those who “ <i>Have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.</i> ” (v. 14)
6	Time to leave the “elementary principles” of the Messiah and go on to maturity and “perfection.” Admonition about “falling away;” (<i>see comment below</i>) compared to earth that bears useful herbs vs. thorns and briars. Confident of things “that accompany salvation...” from his readers. Don’t become sluggish, imitate the faithful with patience, to inherit the promises. In His promise to Abraham God swore “by Himself” (<i>there was no one greater than Him</i>), God cannot lie, we have hope in His promises. Our forerunner, Jesus has entered “behind the veil” for us, as our High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.
7	About Melchizedek (a mystery, “ <i>without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually</i> ” v. 3) Greatness of Melchizedek, received tithes, (<i>even Levi, not born at the time, but in the “loins of his father” when Abraham met Melchizedek, paid him tithes</i>) Perfection was not achieved through Aaronic priesthood, needed a new High Priest of the order of Melchizedek (both priest and king). Lord from tribe of Judah (tribe of the kings) but He is also a High Priest. The Law made nothing perfect, but our High Priest makes us perfect. Jesus is the sign of a better covenant. He makes intercession for us, does not need to offer daily sacrifices like the Aaronic priests, He offered up Himself as the ultimate sacrifice. The Law appoints human priests who have weaknesses, but God appoints the Son who is perfect forever.
8	Continuing about Jesus the High Priest, “ <i>seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord erected, and not man.</i> ” (v. 1-2) Earthly laws a “copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (v. 5) Moses constructed the tabernacle “according to the pattern” God gave him. Jesus has a “ <i>more excellent ministry,...Mediator of a better covenant...established on better promises.</i> ” (v. 6) Old covenant (broken by Israelites) replaced with new covenant (kept by Jesus for us) and God will not remember our sins anymore. The old covenant is now “ <i>obsolete, and growing old...ready to vanish away.</i> ” (v. 13)

9	The earthly tabernacle (<i>v 1-5 describe this earthly tabernacle, including furnishings, etc.</i>). Discussion of the priests' duties daily, and once a year to atone for his and people's sins. Symbolic for the "present time." Contrasted now by the Messiah as High Priest of " <i>good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.</i> " (v. 11) Jesus entered the Holy of Holies not with blood of goats and calves, but "with His own blood" (v. 12). He is Mediator of the new covenant, having redeemed the sins under the first (old) covenant (Mosaic Covenant, the Law), so we receive eternal inheritance. Testament requires death of testator to be in effect, " <i>without shedding of blood there is no remission.</i> " Jesus now appears in the presence of God FOR us. " <i>It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,</i> " (v. 27) therefore Jesus died once for the sins of many. To those who "eagerly wait for Him" He will come a second time, for salvation.
10	The Law was a shadow of the "good things to come" and the blood of animals cannot take away sins. God's temporary provision and object lesson of what would take away their sins – Jesus' body offered once and for all. With His one offering, " <i>He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.</i> " (v. 14) We have " <i>boldness to enter the Holiest (the Holy of Holies where God dwelled) by the blood of Jesus</i> " (v. 19),... " <i>Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.</i> " (v. 22-23) Stir up love and good works with one another, don't forsake the meeting together, encourage one another, even more as we see "the Day approaching." Don't "trample the Son of God underfoot" by thinking His sacrifice is a "common thing." This is an insult to the Spirit of grace. God will repay. " <i>It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.</i> " (v. 31) We need endurance to continue doing the will of God, and then receive the promise. " <i>The just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.</i> " (v. 38, quote of Habakkuk 2:3-4) (<i>Psalms, Jeremiah, Deuteronomy also quoted in this chapter</i>)
11	The definition of faith: " <i>Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.</i> " (v.1) " <i>By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.</i> " (v. 3) The "Hall of Faith" presented the "elders" who showed remarkable faith: Abel, Enoch, (" <i>without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is...</i> ", v. 6); Noah, Abraham, Sarah. These all died without seeing the promises, but were assured of them. Abraham and Isaac, Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau, Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph, Joseph when dying mentioned the eventual departure of the Israelites from Egypt (<i>all of these concerning the future, all by faith</i>). Moses' life, walls of Jericho, Rahab's faith, author says he has no time to talk about the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, just mentions them by name. None of these faithful received the promises at that time. God had something better in store, for more people to come.
12	Since we are " <i>surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses</i> " (<i>referencing previous chapter</i>), we should also lay aside all burdens and sin, and " <i>run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.</i> " (v. 1-2, finishes thoughts of chapter 11). Think of what Jesus endured if you get weary. Remember God disciplines those He loves. " <i>Endure His chastening.</i> " Strengthen yourselves, be at peace with everyone, don't let any bitterness arise (between each other, or between you and God). We don't approach that frightening Mt. Sinai where God met with Moses, we come to " <i>Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirit of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant ...</i> " (v. 22-24a) Listen for His voice, don't turn away. The earth will be "shaken" but we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken. " <i>Serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.</i> " (v. 28b)
13	Concluding instructions on behavior. Entertain strangers, they could be angels. Remember the persecuted. Marriage is honorable, keep the bed undefiled, God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Don't covet, be content with what you have. Jesus said He would never leave us or forsake us. Don't fear man, he can't harm us (ultimately). Remember those of faith over you. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (v. 8) Don't get carried away by false teaching. Live by grace not by the Law of dead animals. Jesus suffered "outside the gate" so we should go to Him "outside the camp." We don't have a "continuing city" here on earth, we look for the one to come. Continually offer the sacrifice of praise, giving thanks to God. Do good and share. God is pleased with these sacrifices. Obey those over you in the faith, as they must give account for you. Don't bring them grief. Author requests prayer, so he can be restored to them. Benediction, final encouragements, farewell.

- Hebrews **speaks clearly about our relationship with Jesus through His shed blood.** This book also highlights the divinity of Jesus Christ, His position, and our position in Him. The Jews tended toward legalizing everything in the Law (God's and their own), and minimized the relationship with God.

- The book of Hebrews **emphasizes the authority of Scripture and its importance to believers every day.** The writer warns not to take it lightly, but to pay attention to all its warnings and exhortations. (1:1-3; 2:1-4; 4:11-13; 5:11-14).
- Hebrews is a book of encouragement, **but it is also full of serious warnings for those who disregard God's Word**, or do not enter into relationship with the Lord. (6:4-12). The writer **warns of complacency and neglect**, and encourages us to become mature believers who enter into the rest and fellowship of God through obedience. (4:11; 5: 11-13; 12:11-12). The book of Hebrews is all about how to do what John said in chapter 15, "abide in Christ."
- In chapters 5-7 the mysterious **"Melchizedek"** is mentioned and compared to Jesus as an eternal High Priest. Melchizedek is first mentioned in Genesis 14:18-19 - "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he [Abram] gave him a tithe of all." He is mentioned again in Psalm 110: (a Messianic Psalm, a song that speaks of the coming Savior) **"The LORD has sworn and will not relent, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."** We don't know where he came from. No genealogy is provided. He is both a priest and a king, which after the Law was given, was impossible. Priests were from the tribe of Levi, and kings from the tribe of Judah. We know Jesus is the Son of David, from the tribe of Judah. But here in Hebrews Jesus is both King and Priest, "in the order of Melchizedek." There is much speculation and controversy about Melchizedek. Some think he was a "Christophany," an actual appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament, in the flesh (which He did many times in other passages). Some think Melchizedek is a real man, but used as a type and foreshadowing of Jesus, the ultimate High Priest and King. We just don't know and it really doesn't matter. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of both High Priest and King. The writer of Hebrews uses Melchizedek as a comparison, and a forerunner.
- **GREAT CONTROVERSY: Can we lose our salvation?** *"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."* (V. 6:4-6) **These verses have created so much controversy, confusion and speculation that it would take volumes to try to unravel them.** We won't do that here. Some believe this states that Christians can lose their salvation. THAT IS NOT WHAT THESE VERSES SAY. There are plenty of verses in the rest of scripture that say just the opposite, including some at the end of this very chapter in Hebrews. Part of the problem exists in our limited understanding of the original Greek tenses of the words used. There are all kinds of explanations for these verses, but perhaps the simplest and best one we have found is by Warren Wiersbe:

"Then what is the writer trying to say to us? It is probable that he is describing a hypothetical case to prove his point that a true believer cannot lose his salvation. His statement in Hebrews 6:9 seems to support this interpretation: "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case" (NIV). His argument runs like this:

"Let's suppose that you do not go on to maturity. Does this mean that you will go back to condemnation, that you will lose your salvation? Impossible! If you *could* lose your salvation, it would be impossible to get it back again; and this would disgrace Jesus Christ. He would have to be crucified again for you, and this could never happen."

In Hebrews 6:4, the writer changed the pronouns from "we" and "us" to "those." This change also suggests that he had a hypothetical case in mind."

(Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament, Published by David C. Cook, 2007) There are many other commentators worthy of reading and studying on this subject. Some good ones include J. Vernon McGee, Dr. Chuck Missler, John Walvoord and many others.
- We may also be **held accountable for what happens to our struggling and straying brothers and sisters.** We are to encourage them to love and good works. (10:23-25)
- The writer also encourages **endurance and perseverance** especially during times of persecution. (10:32-36; 12:3-4). It challenges us to live by faith, and provides examples (ch. 11)