

## New Testament Survey:

### Hebrews

The letter to the Hebrews was written sometime in the 60's A.D. to Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Uncertainties about the letter:

**Date.** The use of present tense references to Temple sacrifices help date the letter prior to 70 A.D., when Titus destroyed the Temple and ended the sacrifices.

**Authorship.** The author of this letter used polished, eloquent Greek to address his audience, indicating someone with a great deal of education. Although some have suggested Luke (unlikely because Luke was a Gentile) and Apollos (certainly an eloquent man, cf. Acts 18:24), early Church writers Eusebius and Origen are quoted as saying, "God only knows" who wrote the book. We know the book received widespread acceptance in the Church because of its portrayal of the supremacy of Christ.

**Audience.** The initial audience of the book was undergoing persecution for its faith (10:32-39; 11:1-40; 12:4-12). 11:35- 38 probably refer to Maccabean martyrs. The readers should be faithful because they had received the promise for which the saints in chapter 11 died in anticipation.

The initial audience was attracted to Judaism (13:9-14, esp. v. 13) in order to avoid persecution. Christianity was beginning, at this time, to differentiate from Judaism. Romans often persecuted new religions coming from the East on grounds that their practice would corrupt Roman life. The Jewish Christians faced the temptation to re-join Judaism and worship Jesus as another Jewish angel.

#### Outline

- I. The superiority of Christ to every aspect of the Old Covenant demands faithfulness from Christians (ch's 1-10). **Key word: therefore.**
  - A. Christ is superior to the prophets (1:1-2)
  - B. Christ is superior to the angels (1:3-2:18). Christ has inherited the title Lord (1:10) and the name God (1:8). Angels worship Jesus.
    - a. 2:1: We have heard the gospel and must "pay much closer attention" to it.
    - b. The angels were present at the presentation of the Mosaic Law (2:2)
  - C. Christ is superior to Moses (3:2-4:13). Moses was a servant in God's house; Jesus is the Builder (3:5-6).
    - a. 3:7-4:13: cf. Psalm 95:7-11. Author exegetes Psalm 95 to encourage his readers to faithfulness. 3:7, Psalm 95:7: "today:" eschatological reference to the day in which Hebrews was written.
    - b. 4:1: cf. Psalm 95:11, Hebrews 3:11: the final day of God's promises fulfilled.
    - c. Psalm 95:11, Hebrews 3:11, 4:4-11: join God in His eschatological rest, the rest at the end of the age (cf. Proverbs 14:13). We are invited to enter God's rest.
    - d. Hebrews 4:12-13: God's word is not arcane and irrelevant; it is "living and active." A Psalm written centuries before had relevance to the original audience of Hebrews and to us today.
  - D. 4. Christ is superior to the high priests (4:14-10:39)
    - a. Jesus is human, yet perfect. He can identify with us (4:14-5:10). Jesus did not call on any supernatural attributes to overcome sin.
    - b. Jesus is of the order of Melchizedek, not of the order of Levi (5:6, 6:20-7:22). We know nothing of Melchizedek's lineage (or birth or death); it is an eternal priesthood to whom Abraham paid tithes of all he had. Abraham recognized Melchizedek's superior priesthood.

- c. Jesus' priesthood is eternal according to God's own oath (7:14-28). Jesus was made a priest by a Godly oath (7:20-22), making Him a better priest. Oath: cf. 6:13-20. Levitical priests were born, not sworn in with an oath. God chose Christ as High Priest and swore Him with an oath.
- d. Jesus is the High Priest of a new and better covenant (8:1-13). New covenant corresponds to a fulfillment of a prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (8:8-12). Therefore, there is no need to revert to the old, obsolete covenant.
- e. Jesus officiates in a better tabernacle (9:1-10). Author talks of the tabernacle, not the temple in Jerusalem. The heavenly tabernacle is eternal.
- f. Christ officiates over a better sacrifice (9:11-10:18): His blood, not the blood of animals; and performed once, not repeatedly. Therefore, people should be faithful (10:19-25).

II. Example of past servants of God demands faithfulness from present servants (ch.'s 11-13)

- A. Pilgrimage toward heavenly city (ch. 11)
- B. Hardship encountered on the pilgrimage (ch. 12)
- C. Character of the pilgrim (ch. 13)