

Better Things



A Study of Hebrews

By David Dann

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Title of the Book

Hebrews is designated as, "The Epistle to the Hebrews." The title of the book designates it as an inspired letter addressed to followers of Christ who are of Jewish heritage, according to the flesh. The letter appears to have been sent to a Palestinian church in or near Jerusalem, which would be made up of Hebrew Christians, rather than a combination of those from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. These Hebrew Christians endured persecution in their earlier days (Heb. 10:32-34; cf. Acts 8:1-3), and were well-acquainted with the Jewish temple and priesthood located in Jerusalem (Heb. 7:1-10:18; 13:10-13).

Writer of the Book

Hebrews makes no mention of the name of its author. "As early as Origen, the Alexandrian church father who died about A.D. 255, no one knew for sure who wrote the Epistle to Hebrews" (Mark Bailey and Tom Constable, *Nelson's New Testament Survey*, 503). Various candidates have been suggested regarding the authorship of the book, including the apostle Paul, Luke, Barnabas, and Apollos (Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament*, 407). What may be known of the writer from the book itself is that he was not one of the original twelve apostles (Heb. 2:3-4), was associated with Timothy (13:23) and with the saints of Italy (13:24), was very well-known to the original recipients of the letter (13:18-19, 22-25), and was well-versed in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Date of the Book

Hebrews describes the religious rituals and priesthood of Judaism as being in present operation (Heb. 8:4; 9:9; 10:1), the Old Covenant as being "ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13; cf. 12:27), and the recipients of the letter as having already been Christians for a long time (5:12-14; 10:32-35). Therefore, it appears most likely that the letter to the Hebrews was written at some point during the time-frame between A.D. 64 and 69, shortly before Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by Rome in A.D. 70 (Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the New Testament*, 254).

Theme of the Book

Hebrews is focused on encouraging Jewish Christians, who are tempted to forsake Christ and return to the Old Covenant (Heb. 12:3-11; 13:7-13), to persevere in the faith (3:12-13; 4:1; 10:35-39). The letter exhorts these believers to continue in the gospel of Christ by emphasizing that Christ and the Gospel are better than Moses and the Law (3:1-6; 9:11-15), and by demonstrating that the Old Testament prophets foretold a definite transition from the Old Covenant to a new and better covenant (8:7-13; 10:5-10).

Hebrews

- **Recipients:** Jewish Christians.
- **Writer:** Unknown.
- **Date:** A.D. 64 to 69.
- **Theme:** The Gospel of Christ is better than the Law of Moses.

Outline of Hebrews

- I. *Christ is Better than the Angels (1:1-2:18).*
 - A. The final revelation of God is through His Son (1:1-4).
 - B. The Son is superior to the angels (1:5-14).
 - C. The danger of drifting away from Christ (2:1-4).
 - D. The humiliation and glory of the Son (2:5-9).
 - E. The Son is the Savior and High Priest of His people (2:10-18).

- II. *Christ is Better than Moses and Joshua (3:1-4:13).*
 - A. The Son is worthy of more glory than Moses (3:1-6).
 - B. The danger of unbelief (3:7-19).
 - C. The Son offers a better hope of rest for His people (4:1-13).

- III. *Christ is Better than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-7:28).*
 - A. The Son is a great High Priest (4:14-16).
 - B. The qualifications of the High Priest (5:1-4).
 - C. The qualifications of Christ as High Priest (5:5-10).
 - D. The danger of immaturity (5:12-6:8).
 - E. The exhortation to persevere (6:9-12).
 - F. The hope of Christ is the anchor of the soul (6:13-20).
 - G. The Son is High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (7:1-19).
 - H. The priesthood of the Son is superior to the Levitical priesthood (7:20-28).

- IV. *Christ is Better than the Old Covenant (8:1-10:18).*
 - A. The Son is the Mediator of a better covenant (8:1-6).
 - B. The New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant (8:7-13).
 - C. The tabernacle of Christ is superior to the tabernacle of the Old Covenant (9:1-22).
 - D. The sacrifice of Christ is superior to the sacrifices of the Old Covenant (9:23-10:18).

- V. *Christ Demands Faithfulness (10:19-12:29).*
 - A. The Son provides access to God through His blood (10:19-25).
 - B. The danger of willful sinning (10:26-31)
 - C. The need for endurance (10:32-39).
 - D. The examples of those who lived by faith (11:1-40).
 - E. The example of Christ, the author and finisher of our faith (12:1-3).
 - F. The need to endure chastening (12:4-11).
 - G. The warning against falling short (12:12-29).

- VI. *The Conclusion of the Letter (13:1-25).*
 - A. The exhortation to godly conduct (13:1-17).
 - B. The request for prayer (13:18-19).
 - C. The prayer for the Hebrews (13:20-21).
 - D. The closing instructions (13:22-23).
 - E. The closing salutations (13:24-25).

Questions

1. What may be known of the Hebrew Christians to whom the letter is addressed, based on the content of the book (Heb. 5:12; 10:32-34)?

2. What may be known of the writer of the book, based on the following passages?
 - a. Heb. 2:3-4. _____
 - b. Heb. 13:18-19, 22-25. _____
 - c. Heb. 13:23. _____
 - d. Heb. 13:24. _____

3. How does the evidence within Hebrews suggest a definite time-frame for the writing of the letter (Heb. 8:4; 10:1; 8:13)?

4. Why were the Hebrews in need of encouragement (Heb. 3:12-13; 5:11-14; 6:11-12)?

5. Why is there a sense of urgency in the instruction the writer gives to these Hebrew Christians (Heb. 2:1; 10:35-38; 13:7-13)?

6. Why does Hebrews emphasize that Jesus is superior to Moses (Heb. 3:1-6)?

7. Why would it be foolish for the Hebrew saints to turn back to the Old Covenant, according to the following passages?
 - a. Heb. 8:6-13. _____
 - b. Heb. 9:16-17. _____
 - c. Heb. 10:1-4. _____

8. Why does the writer quote from the Old Testament prophets concerning a “new covenant” (Heb. 8:7-13; 10:15-18)?

9. How does the writer describe the condition of Christians who choose to sin willfully instead of remaining faithful (Heb. 10:26-31)?

10. How does the message of Hebrews apply to Christians today?

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Jesus is the Final Spokesman for God (Heb. 1:1-4)

Hebrews opens with the thought that, though God has clearly communicated His will to mankind throughout the centuries in ages past through various means and through various prophets, the time has arrived in which all communication from heaven must proceed through the Son of God (v. 2). He is the Heir of all things, the One through whom all things were made, the very image of the invisible God, One who is infinitely powerful, the One who has provided a way for man's sins to be removed, and the One who is majestically seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven (vv. 2-3). God's final messenger is not a mere human, nor is He merely an angel, but is, in fact, better than the angels (v. 4). Jesus, the Son of God, is the Creator of all things, the glory of the Father, the Savior of mankind, and the great King who reigns over all.

Jesus is Superior to the Angels (Heb. 1:5-14)

Hebrews demonstrates that Jesus is better than the angels by pointing out that He is called the, "Son of God," while no angel has ever been given that title (v. 5), and is to worshiped by the angels, while the angels themselves are merely spiritual servants in carrying out God's purposes (vv. 5-7). Unlike any of the angels, Jesus is One who is God, who reigns forever, who has existed from eternity (vv. 8-12), and is seated at the right hand of the Father, reigning in heaven (vv. 13-14). As powerful and impressive as angels may be, Jesus the Son of God, the one who is the Everlasting King, is not just an angel and is, in fact, infinitely superior to the angels.

Jesus is the One Who Must Be Obeyed (Heb. 2:1-4)

Hebrews points out that, since Jesus is the majestic Son of God, is the final spokesman of God, and is superior to the angels as the King of kings, His word must be obeyed (v. 1). Those who violated the Law of Moses, which was communicated by God to man through angels, were punished (v. 2). Therefore, those who reject Christ, the ultimate Spokesman for God, and return to the Law of Moses will face an even more severe punishment (vv. 2-4). The Son of God is the One to whom all must give heed in the matter of eternal salvation.

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 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"
(Hebrews 1:1-2).

Questions

1. How did God communicate with man in past ages, and how does His communication in these last days differ from those methods (Heb. 1:1-2)?
2. Why is Jesus perfectly situated to serve as God's final Spokesman in these last days (Heb. 1:1-4)?
3. Why is it significant that the angels are commanded by God to worship Jesus (Heb. 1:6)?
4. How is Jesus addressed in Scripture, and why are these titles important (Heb. 1:8-12)?
5. In what way does the work of angels differ from the work of Jesus in God's plan to redeem man from sin (Heb. 1:13-14)?
6. Which important truths are set forth concerning Jesus Christ in the following passages?
 - a. Heb. 1:5. _____
 - b. Heb. 1:10. _____
 - c. Heb. 1:11-12. _____
7. How does Hebrews describe the Law of Moses, and how does this description differ from its description of the Gospel of Christ (Heb. 2:2-3)?
8. Why is it necessary for the writer to demonstrate that Jesus is superior to the angels as God's Spokesman (Heb. 2:1-4)?
9. What connection does the writer make between those who transgressed the Law of Moses and those who neglect the Gospel of Christ (Heb. 2:2-3)?
10. Why did God employ the use of miraculous signs and wonders in connection with the Gospel of Christ (Heb. 2:3-4)?

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Jesus Suffered and Died for All of Mankind (Heb. 2:5-9)

Hebrews points out that, rather than placing angels in charge of His kingdom, God placed a Son of Man over His kingdom in fulfillment of His plan to save mankind from sin (vv. 5-8). In order for Jesus, One who is infinitely majestic, holy, and eternal to serve as the Savior of man, He had to be “made a little lower than the angels” (v. 9). In other words, the Son of God had to become a Son of Man so that He could suffer a death that would benefit all of mankind and enter into glory as the One who reigns over all of mankind (v. 9). Jesus became the Son of Man, rather than an angel, in order to fulfill the Father’s plan.

Jesus Was Made Like His Brethren (Heb. 2:10-18)

Hebrews demonstrates that, in the plan of God for the salvation of man, it was necessary for the “author” or “captain” of man’s salvation to suffer in order to save mankind from sin (v. 10). Even though Christ is eternal, great, and powerful, He identified Himself with man so that He could save man, and as a result, those who come to God through Him are just as much His “brethren” as they are His servants (vv. 11-13). By coming in the flesh and dying in the flesh, Jesus won a decisive victory over the devil by providing a way for man to overcome one of the great limitations of the flesh, that is, physical death (vv. 14-15). Because of the death of Jesus, man does not need to fear death (v. 15). The plan which Jesus fulfilled was not for the salvation of angels, but for the help of the “seed of Abraham” (v. 16). In order to come to the aid of mankind, Jesus had to become like mankind in the sense that He humbled Himself and came in a body of flesh so that he could offer Himself for the sins of mankind (v. 17). As a result, His people can look upon Him as One who has shared a common experience with them. The Son of God has experienced what man experiences, and can understand the trials that we face (v. 18). Jesus never ceased to be the Son of God, but in order to save mankind, He became the Son of Man.

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9).

Questions

1. What is “the world to come,” and why has it not been put in subjection to angels (Heb. 2:5)?
2. Why are all things not in subjection under man even though God created man with the intent that all things be in subjection to him (Heb. 2:6-8)?
3. In what way was Jesus “made a little lower than the angels,” and why was it necessary for Him to be made lower than the angels? (Heb. 2:9)?
4. In what sense did Jesus “taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9)?
5. Why is Jesus not ashamed to call His followers “brethren” (Heb. 2:10-11)?
6. Why did the Son of God have to become a partaker of flesh and blood in order to save man from sin (Heb. 2:14)?
7. In what sense did Jesus destroy the devil through His own death (Heb. 2:14-15)?
8. How is man subject to bondage through the fear of death, and how has Jesus released man from this fear and bondage (Heb. 2:14-15)?
9. To whom does Jesus give aid, and why is this important (Heb. 2:16)?
10. In what ways was Jesus “made like His brethren” (Heb. 2:17-18)?

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Jesus is a Son Over His Own House (Heb. 3:1-6)

Hebrews describes Jesus Christ as “the Apostle and High Priest” of God’s people under the New Covenant (v. 1). As the One who has been sent to serve as the final Spokesman of God, He is uniquely situated to serve as the spiritual leader of His people (v. 1). While Moses is held up and admired as the great spiritual leader of the Old Covenant, it is important to see that Jesus is superior in every way even to Moses (vv. 2-4). Moses was faithful in playing a vital role in carrying out God’s plan for His people (v. 5). But Jesus is the very embodiment of God’s plan for His people, and is Himself at the center of fulfilling the eternal plan of God (v. 6). As great as Moses was, the Son of God is infinitely superior to him.

Jesus Demands That His Followers Be Faithful (Heb. 3:7-19)

Hebrews provides a reminder that those who followed Moses out of Egypt and on to the Promised Land did not enter the land as a result of the fact that they often rebelled against God and His appointed leader (vv. 7-11). But even more significant than the perishing of those who at first set out to follow Moses and then turned back is the case of those who at first set out to follow Jesus and then turn back (vv. 12-15). If God severely punished those who turned back toward Egypt instead of following Moses, then what will become of those who turn back to the Old Covenant instead of continuing to follow Christ? The example of the disobedient Israelites stands as a monument to the truth that those who refuse to hear and obey God’s appointed leader will be cut off from His people (vv. 16-19). While it was vitally important that the Israelites follow Moses, a mere man whom God appointed to lead His people, it is so much more significant that God’s people under the New Covenant are to follow an appointed Leader of His people who is not merely a man, but is in fact, the Son of God.

“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house” (Hebrews 3:1-3).

Questions

1. Why does the writer refer to Jesus as “the Apostle” of our confession (Heb. 3:1)?
2. How are Moses and Christ similar to one another in the roles they have carried out in connection with the people of God (Heb. 3:1-2)?
3. Why is Christ superior to Moses, even though Moses faithfully carried out his responsibilities toward God (Heb. 3:3-6)?
4. Who are the members of the “house” of God, and in what way is membership in God’s house conditional (Heb. 3:6)?
5. Why was God angry with the Israelites who were led by Moses in the wilderness (Heb. 3:7-11)?
6. Why is the warning given to the Hebrew Christians so significant (Heb. 3:12)?
7. How can Christians become hardened against the will of God, and what is the solution to this problem (Heb. 3:12-13)?
8. What is the significance of the writer’s statement concerning those who truly become “partakers of Christ” (Heb. 3:14-15)?
9. Why are the Israelites who died in the wilderness such a fitting example for the writer to use in exhorting his readers (Heb. 3:16-19)?
10. What connection does the writer make between obedience and faith, and why is this connection important (Heb. 3:18-19)?

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Jesus Offers Eternal Rest to the People of God (Heb. 4:1-13)

Hebrews points out that, while the Israelites who escaped from Egypt under the leadership of Moses failed to enter into God's promised rest in Canaan because of their own rebellion and disobedience, an even greater promise of entering into God's rest is available to those who come to Him through Christ (v. 1). Those who would consider turning away from Jesus would do well to consider the example of those Israelites who lacked the faith needed to receive what God promised (vv. 2-3). There is actually a greater rest for God's people than what the Israelites could have received in Canaan. The better promise of rest is the promise of eternal rest in heaven which has been indicated as a hope for man ever since God rested from His work of creation on the seventh day (vv. 4-5). Even after the second generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt entered Canaan, and even after the Israelites had rested on the seventh day of the week for generations, the Scripture still indicated that a future rest would be available to the people of God (vv. 6-7). Joshua, the great conqueror and leader of God's people who led them in conquest of the Promised Land, did not provide a permanent rest for the people of God when he brought them into Canaan (v. 8). But Jesus the Son of God is superior to Joshua, and as the Leader and Commander of the people of God, He can and will provide a permanent and eternal rest for the faithful in heaven (vv. 9-10). God's people must remain faithful and focused on entering into the eternal rest instead of following the unfaithful and rebellious example of the disobedient Israelites (v. 11). The word of God, which exposed the true spiritual condition of the unfaithful Israelites of the Old Covenant, is entirely capable of exposing the true spiritual condition of God's people under the New Covenant so that there is no escape from accountability before God (vv. 12-13). Only those who wholeheartedly follow the Son of God have the hope of eternal rest in heaven.

“Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience. 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”
(Hebrews 4:11-12).

Jesus is Our Sinless Example (Heb. 4:14-16)

Hebrews offers as the motivation needed in order to persevere to the end in Christ the understanding that our Leader, our High Priest, the One whom we follow, is in heaven at the right hand of God (v. 14). Though we are warned against rebelling against Him, it should be understood that He is not a cold and hard-hearted tyrant, but rather is a sympathetic High Priest who has experienced the trials of the flesh just as we do, and who Himself was tempted in the flesh just as we are (v. 15). However, unlike every other leader who came before Him and all who have come on the scene since His time, Jesus is the only one who never sinned (v. 15). You can have confidence in following and drawing near to Jesus the Son of God, the perfect, merciful, faithful, sinless High Priest. Other leaders have failed and will fail. The Son of God never fails.

Questions

1. What is the significance of the warning given by the writer concerning the possibility of coming short of God's promised rest (Heb. 4:1)?
2. Why did the rebellious Israelites fail to profit from the word of God which they heard (Heb. 4:2)?
3. What is the connection between the original Sabbath rest of God and His promise of rest for His people (Heb. 4:3-5)?
4. How does the quotation from David demonstrate that God's promise of rest for the Israelites in Canaan was not the ultimate promise of rest for His people (Heb. 4:6-8)?
5. Why was the "rest" provided by Joshua inferior to the rest that is promised through Christ (Heb. 4:8)?
6. How does the writer describe the rest that is available to the people of God (Heb. 4:9-10)?
7. In what way was the example of the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness a source of danger for the Hebrew Christians (Heb. 4:11)?
8. How does the writer describe the word of God, and why is this description important (Heb. 4:12)?
9. How should the reminder that Jesus is our High Priest help Christians to persevere in faithfulness (Heb. 4:14)?
10. Why should Christians view Jesus as a sympathetic High Priest (Heb. 4:15-16)?

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The Levitical Priests Were Sinful Men (Heb. 5:1-4)

Hebrews discusses the high priests who served among God's people under the Old Covenant, who were men of the tribe of Levi and family of Aaron. These men were chosen from among men to serve, acted as mediators in acting for men in things pertaining to God, and offered sacrifices for sins (v. 1). They could have compassion on others, because they were weak and sinful men, just as were those for whom they mediated (v. 3). Furthermore, the high priests of the Old Covenant had to acknowledge their own sinfulness in that they were required to offer sacrifices for their own sins just as much as they were required to offer sacrifices for the sins of others (v. 3). These men were appointed by God to serve, and yet they were merely sinful men just like the rest (v. 4).

Jesus is the Perfect Son of God (Heb. 5:5-14)

Hebrews points out that, just like the men who were chosen to serve as high priests of God's people, Jesus was chosen by God to serve as High Priest (vv. 5-6). But, at the same time, Jesus is uniquely qualified as a superior High Priest in contrast to the Levitical priests. Jesus demonstrated His superiority as One qualified to serve as God's High Priest by coming in the flesh, humbly praying to the Father while in the flesh, faithfully experiencing submissive obedience to the Father's will, and being perfected through His suffering to the point where He could bring salvation to all who obey Him (vv. 7-9). It is this perfected Son of God who has been called by God to serve as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," rather than according to the order of Aaron (vv. 10-11). The high priests of the Old Covenant were sinful men, but the great High Priest of the New Covenant is the perfect and sinless Son of God. In order to fully grasp the superiority of the High Priesthood of Christ compared to the high priesthood of the Old Covenant, serious study,

deep commitment, and spiritual growth and maturity must be involved (vv. 11-14). One of the problems facing the Hebrew Christians was that they had not applied themselves like they should have and had not grown and progressed spiritually like they should have and, as a result, were still on the "milk" of the word instead of the "meat" of the word (vv. 12-14).

"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'" (Hebrews 5:5-6).

Questions

1. How does Hebrews describe the responsibilities of one who serves as high priest (Heb. 5:1)?
2. Why were the high priests of the Old Covenant well-suited to have compassion on the other worshipers (Heb. 5:2-3)?
3. How is the High Priesthood of Christ under the New Covenant similar to the Levitical high priesthood of the Old Covenant (Heb. 5:1-5)?
4. In what ways is the High Priesthood of Christ under the New Covenant different from the Levitical high priesthood of the Old Covenant (Heb. 5:1-6)?
5. How was the faithfulness of Jesus as the Son of God manifested “in the days of His flesh” (Heb. 5:7-8)?
6. In what sense could it be true that the all-knowing Son of God “learned obedience by the things that He suffered” (Heb. 5:8)?
7. What is the connection between the salvation offered through Christ and obedience on the part of man, and why is this connection so important (Heb. 5:9)?
8. Why was it difficult for the Hebrew Christians to understand the High Priesthood of Jesus and its relationship to the priesthood of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:9-11)?
9. Why are the principles of the Gospel described in terms of “milk” and “solid food” (Heb. 5:12-14)?
10. Why does the writer rebuke the Hebrews Christians (Heb. 5:12-14)?

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Those Who Reject Jesus Are Without Hope (Heb. 6:1-12)

Hebrews emphasizes that there is a need to address deeper and weightier matters related to Jesus, rather than spending time once again going over basic biblical concepts that should have already been firmly grasped and understood by the Hebrew Christians (vv. 1-3). The pressing problem under consideration is that some of these brethren may have already reached the point where they have turned back from following Jesus in favor of returning to the Law of Moses, and may be so hardened in their decision that there is no possibility of turning them back to Christ (vv. 4-6). If they are determined to reject Christ and to figuratively “crucify again” the Son of God, then there is no hope for them (v. 6). They have rejected Jesus by returning to their former religion, and as a result, they have placed themselves in the position of being rejected by God for eternity (vv. 7-8). But the writer also affirms his belief that these Christians of a Jewish background will not be so hardened as to reject Christ and return to the Law of Moses due to the fact that they have already demonstrated their faithfulness in the past, which proves that they can press on in faithfulness in the future (vv. 9-12). Rejecting Jesus is not the solution to their problems. Instead, the solution is found in imitating the examples of those who have faithfully trusted the promises of God in the past (v. 12).

Jesus Offers True Hope to the Faithful (Heb. 6:13-20)

Hebrews points out that those who have faithfully committed themselves to trusting in the word of God and in the promises of God have always been blessed by God. For example, God made certain promises to Abraham concerning His intention to bless Abraham and to make his family into a great nation of people (vv. 13-14). Even though it took many years for Abraham to see that God was actively fulfilling that promise, he patiently endured and did live to see the birth of his own promised son, and then lived even beyond the birth of his grandchildren (v. 15). In order to emphasize the truth and binding nature of their promises men will often add an oath to their promises to reinforce them (v. 16). God, who cannot lie, made a promise to Abraham and reinforced it with an oath so that there would be every reason to have complete and total confidence in what was promised (vv. 17-18). Just as Abraham had complete confidence in receiving what God had promised, the hope of receiving what God has promised under the New Covenant gives the followers of Jesus a hope which is “an anchor of the soul” reaching into the very presence of God, where Jesus, our great High Priest forever, is seated at the right hand of the Father (vv. 19-20). There is no hope for the soul outside of a relationship with Jesus.

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”
(Hebrews 6:19-20).

Questions

1. Which principles should already have been clearly understood by the Hebrew Christians, and why are they considered “elementary” (Heb. 6:1-3)?

2. How is the prior state of those who are in danger of falling away described, and why is this description so important (Heb. 6:4-6)?

3. Why would it be impossible to renew these unfaithful Christians to repentance (Heb. 6:4-6)?

4. What is the point of the writer’s illustration of the earth bearing either herbs or thorns (Heb. 6:7-8)?

5. Why is the writer confident that the Hebrew Christians will maintain their faith in Christ until the end (Heb. 6:9-10)?

6. What spiritual danger did the Hebrew Christians face, and how does the writer advise them to counteract this danger (Heb. 6:11-12)?

7. Why was God’s promise to Abraham so important in relation to God’s plan to save man through Jesus (Heb. 6:13-15; cf. Gen. 22:15-18)?

8. Why is Abraham set forth as an example to imitate when it comes to trusting the promises of God, and how does his example relate to the spiritual danger the Hebrew Christians were facing (Heb. 6:13-18)?

9. In what sense is the hope of the Christian “an anchor of the soul” (Heb. 6:19)?

10. Why is Jesus referred to as the “forerunner” (Heb. 6:19-20)?

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A Study of Hebrews

By David Dann

Melchizedek Foreshadowed Jesus (Heb. 7:1-10)

Hebrews is written to those of a Jewish background who knew the Old Testament Scriptures, and therefore, the writer briefly relates the Old Testament story of Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek, the king and priest from the city of Salem (v. 1). After leading a successful raid against those who had captured his nephew, Lot, Abraham was met by Melchizedek (v. 1; cf. Gen. 14:18-20). Melchizedek's priesthood was not inherited from someone else, nor would it be passed on to another after his death, and in fact, the Scriptures provide no record of his birth, genealogy, or death (Heb. 7:2-3). Melchizedek and his priesthood were so great that even Abraham, the great patriarch of the faithful, gave him a tithe (a tenth) of what he had recovered from the battle (v. 4). The Levitical priests of the Old Covenant received tithes from the people according to the Law of Moses, but Melchizedek's priesthood was so superior that he received tithes from the father of the Levites himself and blessed him, thereby demonstrating that Melchizedek was in a sense superior to Abraham and to the Levitical priests, who were Abraham's descendants (vv. 5-10). Before there was a Levitical priesthood there was the superior Melchizedek priesthood which pointed to the high priesthood of Jesus Christ. In other words, Jesus, as a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," has a priesthood that is far superior to the Levitical priesthood.

The Law and the Priesthood Had to be Changed in order to Accommodate Jesus (Heb. 7:11-19)

Hebrews points out that the Levitical priesthood was the basis for the Law of Moses, which was given to Israel at Mt. Sinai, as is clearly seen in the fact that much of what is written in the Law of Moses concerns the responsibilities and duties of the priests (v. 11). But the Levitical priesthood did not represent the completion of God's plan for man (v. 11). The completion of God's plan would require the arrival of a perfect High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (v. 11). However, in order for Jesus to be the great High Priest of God's people, the law had to be completely changed, since the Law of Moses appointed men from the tribe of Levi as priests, and Jesus was born into an entirely different tribe—the tribe of Judah (vv. 12-14). The Old Covenant had to be completely fulfilled and replaced with the New Covenant so that Jesus could take His place as the High Priest of God's people forever (vv. 15-17). Therefore, the Law of Moses was removed and replaced with a "better hope," the gospel of Christ, "through which we draw near to God" (vv. 18-19). No one can draw near to God by returning to the Law of Moses. The only way to draw near to God is through the perfect and everlasting High Priest—Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Perfect High Priest (Heb. 7:20-28)

Hebrews makes the point that, while the Levitical priesthood of the Old Covenant was not established with an oath from God, the everlasting priesthood of Christ, which is found in the New Covenant, was established with an oath from God, according to prophecy (vv. 20-22; cf. Psa. 110:4). Therefore, the priesthood of Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood because it was established by God's declaration that Jesus would be a priest forever, while no such oath was ever attached to the Levitical priesthood. In fact, the Levitical priests could not continue to be priests forever, because they were mere men who would live their lives, die, and leave the priesthood to someone else (Heb. 7:23). But Jesus rose from the dead and, therefore, lives and continues in His priesthood forever (v. 24). Jesus is the perfect High Priest because He is always there to serve and to save man from sin, and because He is not a sinner Himself, but is the perfectly sinless Son of God who only had to make one offering for sin when He gave His life for the sins of the world on the cross (vv. 25-28). Jesus is the perfect High Priest because He is perfect; He has no weaknesses. It would be futile for Christians to return to the Law of Moses and to try to serve God through weak, imperfect, and sinful priests when God has provided His Son as our perfect High Priest.

Questions

1. How does Hebrews describe Melchizedek, and in what ways did he foreshadow Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:1-3)?

2. Based on the story of Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek, why would Melchizedek be considered superior to Abraham (Heb. 7:4-7; cf. Gen. 14:18-20)?

3. How does the story of Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek demonstrate that Melchizedek's priesthood was superior to the Levitical priesthood, and why is this important (Heb. 7:4-10)?

4. What is the connection between the Levitical priesthood and the Law of Moses, and why was there a need for a priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:11)?

5. Why was it necessary for the Law of Moses to be replaced in order for Jesus to serve as High Priest (Heb. 7:12-14)?

6. How does the New Covenant, including the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ, compare to the Old Covenant with its Levitical Priesthood (Heb. 7:18-19)?

7. In what way was the manner in which Jesus was made a Priest superior to the manner in which the Levites were made priests (Heb. 7:20-21)?

8. Why were there "many priests" under the Law of Moses, and how is the High Priesthood of Christ superior to the Levitical priesthood in this regard (Heb. 7:23-25)?

9. Which qualities of Jesus Christ make Him a fitting and superior High Priest in contrast to the priests of the Old Covenant (Heb. 7:26, 28)?

10. How has Jesus demonstrated the superiority of His Priesthood to that of the Levitical priests in the matter of offering sacrifices (Heb. 7:27)?

Better Things

A study of Hebrews

By David Dann

The Heavenly High Priest Established a Better Covenant (Heb. 8:1-6)

Hebrews summarizes that which has already been established concerning Jesus to this point in the epistle as consisting mainly in the fact that Jesus is our great High Priest who is now reigning in heaven at the right hand of the Father (v. 1). As our heavenly High Priest, Jesus performs His priestly duties in the heavenly sanctuary (v. 2). Since priests are responsible for offering gifts and sacrifices, it logically follows that our heavenly High Priest should make an offering as well (v. 3). However, His offering would have to be completed in heaven, since He could not serve as a priest during His time on earth due to the fact that He was not qualified according to the Law of Moses, not having been born into the tribe of Levi (v. 4). The earthly priests from the tribe of Levi were only serving in a sanctuary that was a mere shadow of the true heavenly sanctuary when they offered their sacrifices and gifts in the tabernacle which God instructed Moses to build (v. 5). Jesus, on the other hand, never served as a priest in the earthly tabernacle, but instead has a more excellent priesthood than the earthly priests had, since He is the "Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises" (v. 6). His priesthood is better than the one possessed by those who serve in the earthly tabernacle and His covenant is better than the one under which they served. Everything about Jesus is vastly superior to even the very best of what is contained in the Law of Moses.

"But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises"
(Hebrews 8:6).

The New Covenant is Superior to the Old Covenant (Heb. 8:7-13)

Hebrews presents as an inescapable conclusion, based on all that has been written in the epistle to this point, the thought that if the covenant established by Christ is a "better covenant," then something must be wrong with the Old Covenant which was established by Moses (v. 7). God's people under the Old Covenant were always at fault and guilty before God, and so it was always His plan that a New Covenant would be established that would eliminate this problem (v. 8). The writer quotes the prophecy of Jeremiah in order to show that God never planned for the covenant established by Moses to continue forever (vv. 8-12; cf. Jer. 31:31-34). Instead the intention was that a New Covenant would be established to replace the one given at Sinai which Israel constantly violated (Heb. 8:8-9). This New Covenant would be different from the Old in that the laws would need to be written on the hearts of its members, instead of on tablets of stone (v. 10), in that it would be for those who enter into a relationship with God through a spiritual birth, rather than by mere physical birth (v. 11), and in that it would involve complete and full forgiveness of sins instead of ongoing offerings (v. 12). The very fact that God declared beforehand that there would be a "New Covenant" automatically made the first covenant into the "Old Covenant" (v. 13). Therefore, the Old Covenant is rendered obsolete, since it has been replaced by a New Covenant (v. 13). No follower of Christ should ever consider looking to the Old Covenant for a relationship with God when everything about the New Covenant, from its Priest to its provisions, is completely superior to the old.

Questions

1. How does the writer describe Jesus at the beginning of the chapter, and why is this description considered the “main point” of this portion of the book (Heb. 8:1-2)?
2. Why was it necessary for Jesus to make an offering (Heb. 8:3)?
3. Why would Jesus not be allowed to serve as a priest in the earthly tabernacle, and how does the writer describe the earthly tabernacle (Heb. 8:4-5)?
4. What is the significance of the manner in which Moses was instructed to make the earthly tabernacle (Heb. 8:5)?
5. What is a “Mediator,” and in what sense is Jesus the “Mediator of a better covenant” (Heb. 8:6)?
6. What is suggested concerning the Old Covenant by the fact that God planned to enact a New Covenant (Heb. 8:7)?
7. When and where was the first covenant established, and why did God find fault concerning the first covenant (Heb. 8:8-9)?
8. How does the writer indicate that the New Covenant is not a continuation of the Old Covenant, and why is this important (Heb. 8:8-9)?
9. According to the following passages, how is the New Covenant better than the Old Covenant?
 - a. Heb. 8:10. _____
 - b. Heb. 8:11. _____
 - c. Heb. 8:12. _____
10. What has become of the Old Covenant since the New Covenant has been established, and why is this important (Heb. 8:13)?

Better Things

A study of Hebrews

By David Dann

The Tabernacle of the Old Covenant Was Temporary and Symbolic (Heb. 9:1-10)

Hebrews reviews the Old Covenant worship in which the priests labored in the earthly tabernacle in their service to God in order to demonstrate more clearly how superior the New Covenant is to the Old (v. 1). The tabernacle, which God instructed Moses to construct, was divided into two compartments which were separated by a veil. The first compartment of the tabernacle was the Holy Place which involved such items as the lampstand and the table of the showbread (v. 2). The second compartment was the Most Holy Place, involving such items as the golden altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant which contained a pot of manna, Aaron's rod, and the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone, and on top of which sat the lid of the ark where the golden cherubim formed the mercy seat (vv. 3-5). While the Levitical priests were constantly working at the tabernacle and would constantly enter and exit the Holy Place in their service, only the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place behind the veil, and only once a year on the Day of Atonement when he was to offer the blood of the sacrifice to atone for the people's sins (vv. 6-7). But even though this worship was divinely appointed, these men did not actually have direct access to God (v. 8). Instead, the entire tabernacle worship of the priests was symbolic service for that period of time (v. 9). The rituals of the tabernacle worship could not, in and of themselves, cleanse the consciences of the worshipers, and the entire system was only intended to last until the arrival of Christ and His New Covenant (v. 10).

The Tabernacle of Christ is Permanent and Real (Heb. 9:11-15)

Hebrews describes the Old Covenant priests as working in a temporary, humanly constructed tent and offering animal sacrifices which could not bring about eternal redemption for man. On the other hand, Jesus, the heavenly High Priest, offered His own blood in the true heavenly sanctuary in order to redeem man from sin (vv. 11-12). The Levitical priests offered the blood of bulls and goats at the earthly tabernacle, but the heavenly High Priest has offered His own blood in the heavenly sanctuary in order to truly cleanse man of his sins (vv. 13-14). Jesus became the Mediator of the New Covenant through His own death on the cross which enabled Him to fulfill God's plan to truly redeem sinners and to provide them with an eternal inheritance (v. 15). The death of Jesus and the work of Jesus as High Priest accomplished the very things which the Levitical priests could never have accomplished at the earthly tabernacle.

The Death of Christ Inaugurated the New Covenant (Heb. 9:16-22)

Hebrews points out that there should be no mistaking when the change of the covenants took place. The writer uses the concept of a last will and testament in order to demonstrate that the New Testament, or New Covenant, was brought into effect at the death of the One who made it (vv. 16-17). In other words, the New Covenant, the last will and testament of Jesus Christ, went into effect and replaced the Old Covenant when He died (vv. 16-17). Just as the shedding of blood was required at the inauguration of the Old Covenant, the blood of Christ was required to establish the New Covenant and to bring about the remission of man's sins (vv. 18-22).

The Heavenly High Priest Sacrificed Himself for Our Sins (Heb. 9:23-28)

Hebrews contrasts the earthly tabernacle and its worship under the Old Covenant, which required the offering of the blood of animal sacrifices, with the better and more perfect sacrifice which was needed in order to accomplish eternal redemption (v. 23). In contrast to the Levitical priests, who entered into an earthly tent in order to make their earthly offerings, Christ entered into heaven itself, into the very presence of God in order to make His heavenly offering for us (v. 24). The earthly high priests had to enter the most holy place every year to make their offerings, but the heavenly High Priest only had to sacrifice Himself one time for all time and make one offering that was so great and so powerful that it is able to cleanse any and all who come to God through Him for forgiveness of sins from the time of His death to the end of time (vv. 25-26). Our heavenly High Priest effectively dealt with the problem of forgiveness of sins one time for all time when He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins (vv. 27-28). When Jesus comes a second time, it will not be to make another offering of Himself for sin. Instead, He will come again to bring the faithful home to Himself. The Heavenly High Priest can do, and has done, what the Old Covenant priests would never have been able to accomplish.

Questions

1. How does Hebrews describe the earthly tabernacle and its contents (Heb. 9:1-5)?

2. How often did the high priest enter the Most Holy Place behind the second veil, and upon which day was he authorized to enter it (Heb. 9:6-7; cf. Lev. 16:1-19)?

3. In what sense was “the way into the Holiest of All” not yet manifest during the period of time when the earthly tabernacle was in use (Heb. 9:8)?

4. How does the writer describe the purpose and duration of the earthly tabernacle service, and why is this important (Heb. 9:9-10)?

5. How is the sanctuary into which Christ entered as High Priest different from the earthly sanctuary of the Levitical priests, and how was His offering different from theirs (Heb. 9:11-12)?

6. Upon what basis was God able to offer forgiveness of sins to those who were faithful under the Old Covenant (Heb. 9:13-15)?

7. How does the writer’s illustration involving a last will and testament help in clarifying the precise time at which the New Covenant went into effect (Heb. 9:16-17)?

8. Which feature did both covenants share in common with regard to their inauguration, and why is this so important (Heb. 9:18-22)?

9. In what ways is the offering made by Christ superior to the offerings made by the Levitical high priests (Heb. 9:23-26)?

10. Why was Christ offered, and how will His second appearance be different from the first (Heb. 9:27-28)?

Better Things

A study of Hebrews

By David Dann

Animal Sacrifices Could Not Take Away Sins (Heb. 10:1-4)

Hebrews describes the Old Covenant and its worship as a shadow of what was to come in the New Covenant of Christ (v. 1). One of the great limitations of the Old Covenant is that its animal sacrifices could never cleanse the sins of the worshipers (vv. 1-2). Instead of providing complete cleansing for the worshipers, the animal sacrifices, which had to continually be offered over and over again, simply served to remind the worshipers that they were not fully cleansed (v. 3). The blood of animals could never cleanse man of his sins and was never designed to do so (v. 4). It should be unthinkable that a Christian would forsake the New Covenant in favor of a system that could not provide him with complete and full forgiveness of sins.

The Sacrifice of Christ Can Take Away Sins (Heb. 10:5-18)

Hebrews makes reference to Psalm 40:6-8, applying the words of the psalm to the Christ speaking to the Father concerning His mission to redeem mankind from sin (vv. 5-7). The sacrifices and offerings of the Old Covenant were not going to accomplish the Father's will, but the Son of God coming into the world in a body of flesh, and offering Himself as a perfect sacrifice would accomplish the Father's will (vv. 5-7). In case the point has been missed, it is repeated once more that Jesus has taken away the first covenant and has established a second covenant (vv. 8-9). The offering of the body of Jesus was what was needed in order to accomplish God's will for the salvation of man (v. 10). What the Levitical priests could never accomplish through continually offering animal sacrifices, the heavenly High Priest accomplished when He offered Himself as a sacrifice one time for all time (vv. 11-14). Therefore, remission of sins is found in the New Covenant which He established (vv. 15-18).

Sinners Can Draw Near to God Through Christ (Heb. 10:19-25)

Hebrews summarizes all that has been discussed to this point as the writer encourages the Hebrew Christians who are wavering in their faith and thinking of returning to the Law of Moses to press on in the New Covenant. Based on the fact that sinners can have access to God through the blood of Jesus, the heavenly High Priest who offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sins, the writer offers three exhortations (vv. 19-20). First of all, there is a need for those who have been baptized into Christ and who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ to draw near to God with confidence (v. 22). Secondly, there is a need to remain steadfast in the faith without wavering (v. 23). And lastly, there is a need to encourage and to exhort one another instead of neglecting the responsibility to assemble together for worship (vv. 24-25). Instead of going backward into Judaism, the goal should be to press on in Christ.

Christ Will Not Save Those Who Continue in Sin (Heb. 10:26-39)

Hebrews presents a very forceful, pointed, and stern warning concerning the wavering commitment to Christ and His New Covenant that has been exhibited by the Hebrew Christians in order to impress upon their minds the importance of all that has been said. Those who forsake Christ are in sin and there is no other sacrifice available to them to cleanse them of their sins, since they have rejected God's one time for all time sacrifice (v. 26). Instead of receiving forgiveness, the Christian who persists in sinning can expect to face the wrath of God in judgment, which will be worse than the punishment of death without mercy which was inflicted on those who violated the Law of Moses (vv. 27-31). The writer reminds these Christians that, in the past, they demonstrated their commitment in suffering for Christ and in having compassion on others who suffered for Christ because they looked forward to the eternal reward of heaven (vv. 32-34). But now these same saints are on the verge of giving up all that they have worked for and of losing their reward (v. 35). What these brethren need is endurance (vv. 36-38). Therefore, the writer offers a word of encouragement in expressing his confidence that they will press on in Christ rather than turn back (v. 39).

Questions

1. Why was it necessary for animal sacrifices to be offered repeatedly each year under the Old Covenant, and what did these sacrifices accomplish with regard to sin (Heb. 10:1-4)?

2. Why was it necessary for a body to be prepared for the Christ when He came into the world (Heb. 10:5-7)?

3. What did Christ accomplish with regard to the two covenants when He came into the world in order to offer Himself (Heb. 10:8-10)?

4. In what ways were the offerings which were performed by the Levitical priests inferior to the offering made by Christ (Heb. 10:11-14)?

5. Why is there no need for any additional offerings for sins under the New Covenant (Heb. 10:15-18)?

6. What connection does the writer make between water and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, and why is this connection so important (Heb. 10:22; cf. Rom. 6:3-6)?

7. Why does the writer draw a contrast between considering one another and forsaking the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:24-25)?

8. In what sense is there no sacrifice for sins for those who choose to sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth (Heb. 10:26-27)?

9. Why would a worse punishment than the penalty for violating the Law of Moses await those who rebel against God under the New Covenant (Heb. 10:28-31)?

10. Why does the writer express his confidence that the Hebrew Christians would remain faithful to Christ, and which qualities were needed on their part in order to receive what God promised (Heb. 10:32-39)?

Better Things

A study of Hebrews

By David Dann

The Nature of True Faith (Heb. 11:1-3)

Hebrews defines "faith" as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (v. 1). In other words, faith is that deep, trusting confidence in what God has said that stands under and supports the hope of receiving what God has promised. It is the "evidence of things not seen" in the sense that God's word provides us with confidence and absolute trust concerning matters which we have not seen with our physical eyes. The writer points out that this kind of faith is what has made the faithful men and women whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament such worthy examples to imitate (v. 2). A good illustration of true faith in God is the understanding possessed by believers that God created the physical universe out of nothing (v. 3). Though man was not present to witness those events taking place, we can have complete confidence that the worlds were created out of nothing because we place our trust in what His word says concerning the matter. Therefore, to live by faith is to operate based on total trust and confidence in the truth of what God has spoken in His word.

The Notable Examples of Faith (Heb. 11:4-29)

Hebrews demonstrates what it means to live by faith by examining the examples of the faithful men and women of the Old Testament who lived by faith, and were rewarded by God for doing so, as examples to follow. The writer begins by focusing on those who lived by faith from creation to the flood, including Abel, who offered his sacrifice by faith (v. 4), Enoch, who walked with God by faith (v. 5), and Noah, who prepared the ark by faith (v. 7). In the midst of this section is found the statement that one must possess true faith in order to please God (v. 6). Next, the faithful during the time of the patriarchs are discussed, including Abraham and Sarah, who obeyed God by faith and received His promises (vv. 8-12, 17-19), Isaac, who blessed Jacob and Esau based on faith in God's promises (v. 20), Jacob, who blessed each of his sons based on faith in God's promises (v. 21), and Joseph, who gave instructions at the time of his death that were based on faith in what God had promised (v. 22). In the midst of this section is included the thought that, though these faithful ones died before experiencing the ultimate fulfillment of what God had promised, they looked forward to its fulfillment by faith as they trusted that God would prepare a heavenly home for them (vv. 13-16). Next, Moses and those who were faithful in connection with his life are discussed, including his parents, who hid him when he was born instead of yielding to the unrighteous decree of the Pharaoh because of their faith in God (v. 23), Moses himself, who acted out of faith in the invisible God when he rejected the riches and sinful pleasures of the palace in Egypt in order to suffer with the people of God (vv. 24-27), and kept the Passover by faith in God's instructions so that the firstborn of Israel would not be destroyed in the plague (v. 28), along with the Israelites who, with Moses as their leader, passed through the parted waters of the Red Sea on dry land by faith in the One who parted the waters (v. 29). Each of these examples serves to explain what it means to live by faith and to possess the kind of faith that enables one to please God.

The Outcome of Living by Faith (Heb. 11:30-40)

Hebrews provides further examples of those who lived and acted by faith in God in order to show that obedient faith is rewarded. The Israelites were rewarded when they acted by faith in the conquest of Jericho (v. 30), Rahab was rewarded when she acted by faith in the true God in protecting the Israelite spies (v. 31), and others such as Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and various other prophets were likewise rewarded when they acted by faith in God (vv. 32-35). Furthermore, there were those who were faithful and persevered by faith even though they suffered for their faith and did not receive any reward in this life (vv. 36-38). The point is made that all of these examples serve to demonstrate how one may please God by living by faith (v. 39). But what is even more impressive is that these Old Testament believers lived faithfully even though they lived centuries before God's ultimate promise was realized in the coming of Jesus Christ (vv. 39-40). If the faithful men and women of the Old Testament could live by faith even though the Christ had not yet come, then so much the more should Christians under the New Covenant be able to live by faith now that God's promise has been fulfilled.

Questions

1. How does Hebrews define “faith,” and how does the example of believing that God created the universe out of nothing help to explain the nature of true faith (Heb. 11:1-3)?

2. Why is it impossible to please God without faith (Heb. 11:6)?

3. According to Hebrews, how did the following demonstrate that they were living by faith?
 - a. Abel (Heb. 11:4). _____
 - b. Enoch (Heb. 11:5). _____
 - c. Noah (Heb. 11:7). _____
 - d. Abraham & Sarah (Heb. 11:8-12, 17-19). _____

 - e. Isaac (Heb. 11:20). _____
 - f. Jacob (Heb. 11:21). _____
 - g. Moses’ parents (Heb. 11:23). _____
 - h. Moses (Heb. 11:24-28). _____
 - i. The Israelites (Heb. 11:29-30). _____
 - j. Rahab (Heb. 11:31). _____

4. Why were the patriarchs, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, able to persevere even though they did not see in their own lifetimes the ultimate fulfillment of what God had promised (Heb. 11:13-16)?

5. Why was God not ashamed to be called the God of those who were faithful in the Old Testament (Heb. 11:16)?

6. Why would the choice made by Moses be especially important with regard to the circumstances faced by the Hebrew Christians (Heb. 11:24-26)?

7. What does the writer say was received by the faithful of the Old Testament because of their faith, and what does this mean (Heb. 11:2, 39)?

8. How do the following examples demonstrate that to live “by faith” involves obedience to God’s terms?
 - a. The keeping of the Passover (Heb. 11:28). _____
 - b. The conquest of Jericho (Heb. 11:30). _____

9. Why were various Old Testament saints able to endure terrible suffering (Heb. 11:35-38)?

10. In what sense is it true that the people of God under the New Covenant have even greater motivation to faithfully endure than those of the Old Covenant had (Heb. 11:39-40)?

Better Things

A study of Hebrews

By David Dann

The Faithful Will Follow the Example of Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2)

Hebrews follows its presentation of the Old Testament examples of those who lived by faith by offering the personal application that if the faithful saints of the Old Testament finished their race by faith, then surely the faithful saints of the New Covenant need to do the same (v. 1). The Old Testament saints who lived by faith are pictured as being like a crowd of spectators who have already been victorious themselves, while the New Covenant saints are pictured as the ones currently running the race who can look to the faithful of old for inspiration and encouragement (v. 1). But in order to finish the race any hindrance has to be left behind, sin has to be rejected, and the runners need to run with endurance while focusing on Jesus, who is the “author and finisher of our faith” (vv. 1-2). While others have provided good examples of living by faith, Jesus set the perfect example of faithful endurance by focusing on the joy awaiting Him at the right hand of God while enduring the suffering and shame of the cross (v. 2). Instead of giving up or falling away, faithful Christians will persevere and live by faith by following the example set by Jesus.

The Faithful Will Endure Chastening (Heb. 12:3-11)

Hebrews points out that, while the Hebrew Christians may have thought they had suffered too much for following Christ and had given up too much already for following Him, the reality is that they need to think about what Jesus was willing to suffer in comparison as an encouragement to press on (v. 3). In addition to this, the Hebrew Christians would do well to recognize that they hadn’t really suffered as much as others had suffered, including those who died for their faith (v. 4). Instead of allowing persecution and trials to weaken and discourage them, these saints need to understand that God can use various trials to correct, train, and purify those who faithfully endure (vv. 5-10). It may not be pleasant to endure trials, but there is a need to keep in mind that positive results will follow for those who faithfully endure (v. 10). Part of living by faith is benefitting and growing from the trails we endure.

The Faithful Will Persevere to the End (Heb. 12:12-17)

Hebrews addresses the pressure the Hebrew Christians faced, which tempted them to forsake Christ and return to the Law of Moses, with an exhortation to move forward in faithfulness instead of committing a critical error that may have irreversible consequences. The point is made that these saints need to continue to run the race and to help and encourage those who are struggling in the process (vv. 12-13). At the same time, they need to pursue peace and holiness while remaining on guard against bitterness and a carnal mindset (vv. 14-15). After so many good Old Testament examples of faithfulness have been examined, the writer uses Esau, who chose the temporary and physical over the spiritual, as an example that should not be followed (vv. 16-17). Esau committed an error that he could not reverse, and the Hebrew Christians need to guard against doing the same thing by choosing the Law of Moses over Christ (v. 17). Living by faith involves making the right choices and persevering to the end.

The Faithful Will Demonstrate Proper Reverence Toward God (Heb. 12:18-29)

Hebrews presents a contrast between the two covenants, reminding the Hebrew Christians that when Israel came to Mt. Sinai to receive the Old Law they came to an ominous scene of fire, smoke, blackness, and a voice from heaven that terrified them, and even made Moses afraid (vv. 18-21). On the other hand, the people of God under the New Covenant, have arrived at a majestic and glorious scene in the church, described as “Mount Zion,” where Jesus, as the Mediator of the New Covenant cleanses His people through His own blood (vv. 22-24). The harsh reality of the situation is that those who turn back and reject Jesus will not escape the wrath of God in judgment (vv. 25-26). The Old Covenant has been removed by the decree of Almighty God, but the Lord’s kingdom which is entered into in the New Covenant cannot be shaken or removed (vv. 27-28). The unmistakable message is that leaving Christ and returning to the Law of Moses is not an acceptable option. Instead, God, who is “a consuming fire,” must be shown reverence in the kingdom of His Son (v. 29). Those who live by faith will continually show God the reverence and respect He deserves.

Questions

1. Why is a life of faithfulness compared to running a race, and how can one successfully complete the race (Heb. 12:1-2)?

2. Why does the writer refer to Jesus as “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2)?

3. How would the example set by Jesus serve as an encouragement for the Hebrew Christians to persevere (Heb. 12:3-4)?

4. How should Christians view trials and suffering, and how should trials benefit the faithful (Heb. 12:5-11)?

5. Why is Esau such a fitting example of the kinds of conduct and attitudes the Hebrew Christians should avoid (Heb. 12:16-17)?

6. How is the scene of Israel’s reception of the Old Covenant described in the following passages?
 - a. Heb. 12:18. _____
 - b. Heb. 12:19. _____
 - c. Heb. 12:20-21. _____

7. How is the scene of the reception of the New Covenant described in the following passages?
 - a. Heb. 12:22. _____
 - b. Heb. 12:23. _____
 - c. Heb. 12:24. _____

8. How is it true that the blood of Jesus “speaks better things” than the blood of the sacrifice offered by Abel (Heb. 12:24; cf. Gen. 4:4)?

9. How does the punishment of those who rebelled against God under the Old Covenant serve as a warning to those who rebel against Him under the New Covenant (Heb. 12:25-27)?

10. How must God’s people approach Him in the kingdom of Christ, and why (Heb. 12:28-29)?

Better Things

A study of Hebrews

By David Dann

Faithful Followers of Christ Conduct Themselves in Godliness (Heb. 13:1-6)

Hebrews, along with its focus on the need for the Hebrew Christians to press on in Christ rather than forsake Him and return to the Law of Moses, also stresses that godly conduct and attitudes are essential for those who follow Christ. There is a need show brotherly love to one another, to show hospitality to strangers, and to be mindful of those in prison (vv. 1-3). There is also the need to hold lawful marriage in its honorable place as decreed by God and to avoid the sins of fornication and adultery (v. 4). Covetousness needs to be replaced with contentment, recognizing that God will take care of His people (vv. 5-6). Those who live by faith live pure and godly lives.

Faithful Followers of Christ Imitate the Good Examples of Other Faithful Followers of Christ (Heb. 13:7-17)

Hebrews encourages the Hebrew Christians to look to those who taught them the word of God and who formerly served as elders overseeing the church as examples of faith worthy of imitation, just as they have been encouraged to look to the Old Testament faithful and to Jesus Himself as examples (v. 7). While times may have changed and these men who served the Lord and served as good examples may be gone from the scene, Jesus Christ does not change and the need to obey Him does not change (v. 8). With this thought in mind, once more the writer reminds these brethren of some vital points he has already discussed. He reminds them to guard against the false teaching of those who would persuade them to return to the practices of the Old Covenant, especially since they already have something far superior to what is possessed by those following the Law of Moses (vv. 9-10). He reminds them that Jesus has already offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice, suffering reproach and humiliation on the cross, and so His people need to be ready to suffer shame and humiliation as they faithfully follow Him (vv. 11-13). And, he reminds them to continue to focus on heaven while offering the sacrifices of praise and good works to God instead of the sacrifices of the Old Covenant (vv. 14-16). Instead of drifting away from the truth, these Christians are instructed to submissively obey the elders who watch over the congregation of which they are a part, as they continue to serve the Lord together (v. 17). Living by faith means living a morally upright and godly life.

“Jesus Christ is the
same yesterday, today,
and forever”
(Hebrews 13:8).

Faithful Followers of Christ Will Do the Will of God (Heb. 13:18-25)

Hebrews closes with the writer requesting the prayers of the Hebrew Christians on his behalf (vv. 18-19), and with his prayer on their behalf, which is centered on God aiding them in their perseverance in Christ and in their fulfillment of His will in their lives (vv. 20-21). As the epistle is brought to a close, the writer appeals to the readers to receive its instruction, informs them of Timothy's circumstances and of his own future plans, offers a greeting from the saints in Italy, and extends a closing salutation (vv. 22-25). The concluding thought of the book is that those who live by faith will carefully apply God's instruction to their lives and persevere in doing His will.

Questions

1. How should the following be treated by faithful Christians?
 - a. Brethren (Heb. 13:1). _____
 - b. Strangers (Heb. 13:2). _____
 - c. Prisoners (Heb. 13:3). _____
2. How should lawful marriage be viewed as opposed to sexual immorality (Heb. 13:4)?
3. Why should Christians be content, rather than covetous (Heb. 13:5-6)?
4. What is meant by the statement that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,” and why is this fact important (Heb. 13:8-9)?
5. What is the “altar” of the New Covenant, and why do those who serve the earthly tabernacle have no right to partake of it (Heb. 13:10)?
6. What is the significance of the fact that Jesus “suffered outside the gate,” and what impact should this have on the Hebrew Christians (Heb. 13:11-14)?
7. How are the sacrifices offered by the worshipers under the New Covenant different from those of the Old Covenant (Heb. 13:15-16)?
8. Who are those who “rule over” the members of the church, and why should the other members submit to them (Heb. 13:7, 17)?
9. What is emphasized in the writer’s prayer for the Hebrew Christians (Heb. 13:20-21)?
10. Why does the writer refer to this epistle as “the word of exhortation” (Heb. 13:22)?



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