

Hebrews

Introduction

September 14, 2008

I. Introduction to the Book of Hebrews

A. Relevant questions for our consideration:

1. To whom was this letter written?
2. Who was the author?
3. Are there any special characteristics to this letter?
4. What was the purpose of writing this letter?

B. The Readers:

1. To the best of our knowledge and according to Church history, this letter was written to Christians of Jewish background – in other words, Jews who had converted from Judaism to Christianity.
2. What we do know is that:
 - a. The readers were acquainted enough with the Old Testament that the author includes many quotes from the OT (1:1, 5, 7, 8, 10; 2:6, 12; 3:2, 17; 4:14, 15; 5:1-4, 7; 7:11; 9:1-10).
 - b. They had received the Gospel from the Apostles – from those who had seen and heard the Lord (2:1-4; 3:1, 14; 4:1-2).
 - c. They had been witnesses of miracles and of the wonderful gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit (2:4).
 - d. They had been Christians long enough for God
 - (1) to tell them that by now they should be teachers of others (5:12);
 - (2) to tell them to call to mind the former days (10:32);
 - (3) to remind them of their original teachers who by now had either moved on or passed away (13:7).
 - e. They had in time past ministered to the saints, and still were ministering in this way (6:10).
 - f. They had publicly identified with other Christians and in so doing had endured “a great conflict of suffering,” including loss of property by many and imprisonment for some (10:32-34).
 - g. They were in danger of drifting from the faith back into Judaism or at least away from the kind of faith in Christ expected of a Christian (2:1; 3:6, 14; 4:1, 11; 5:11-12; 6:1-8, 11-12; 10:23, 36-39; 13:9).

C. The Author

1. Over the years many Bible scholars have spent hours trying to discover who wrote this Epistle. In spite of all this effort, the one thing we can say with confidence is that we don't know.
2. The names which have been suggested are Paul, Silas, Titus, Mark, Clement, Luke, Aquila, Priscilla, Barnabas, and Apollos.
 - a. Of these ten, Paul is considered to be the author by the majority of those who feel the need to identify an author.
 - b. However, among the most educated Bible scholars, Paul is considered the least likely author of Hebrews.
 - c. The important point for us today in relation to this matter of who God used as the human instrument to write Hebrews is that only God knows for certain. We don't and it is best to leave it at that.

D. Characteristics of the Epistle

1. Compare Hebrews 1:1-4 with John 1:1-14
 - a. **Hebrews 1:1-4** . . . God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, [2] in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. [3] And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, [4] having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.
 - b. **John 1:1-14** . . . In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. [4] In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. [5] The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. [6] There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. [7] He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. [8] He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. [9] There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. [10] He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. [11]

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. [12] But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. [14] And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

2. Hebrews has some rich imagery. For example:
 - a. The Word of God is likened to a sword (4:12).
 - b. Hope is likened to an anchor (6:19).
 - c. The figure of an amphitheatre is used to picture the saints in heaven watching us run the race here on earth (12:1).
3. It is interesting that all the quotes from the OT – with the exception of 10:30 (Deut. 32:35) – are taken from the Greek version of the OT – even when the Greek version differs from the original Hebrew version.
 - a. Each of the quotations are introduced by such expressions as "He said," "the Holy Spirit said," "while it is said," "He spake," "He that said" (1:5-14; 3:7,15; 4:3-4; 5:14; 6:14, 21; 7:17, 21; etc.);
 - b. Only once is a human author named (4:7 – David).
4. Two words show up a number of times in Hebrews – **eternal** and **better**.
 - a. **Eternal** shows up as eternal salvation (5:9), eternal judgment (6:2), eternal redemption (9:12), eternal Spirit (9:14), eternal inheritance (9:15), and eternal covenant (13:20). In addition, the words **for ever** occurs twelve times.
 - b. The word **better** appears more often in Hebrews than in all the rest of the NT – a total of thirteen times. We have better than the angels (1:4), persuaded of better things (6:9), a better hope (7:19), a better covenant (7:22, 8:6), better promises (8:6), better sacrifices (9:23), a better possession in heaven (10:34), a better country (11:16), a better resurrection (11:35), God provided better things for us (11:40), and the blood of sprinkling which speaks better things than that of Abel (12:24).

5. Hebrews is characterized by contrasts which are both striking and significant. There are 12 contrasts and they are:
 - a. A contrast between the Son, Jesus Christ, and the Angels (1-2);
 - b. A contrast between the Son, Jesus Christ, and Moses (3:1-11);
 - c. A contrast between the “rest of Canaan (the Promised Land)” and the “rest of God” (3:12 - 4:13);
 - d. A contrast between Christ and Aaron (4:14 - 5:10);
 - e. contrast between babyhood (immaturity) and maturity (5:11-14);
 - f. A contrast between apostasy (rejecting required Christian beliefs) and faithfulness (6);
 - g. A contrast between the Melchizedek and Levitical (Aaron) priesthood (7);
 - h. A contrast between the Old Covenant and the New (8);
 - i. A contrast between the sacrificial offerings of the Law and the Offering of Christ (9-10:18);
 - j. A contrast between faith and sight (11);
 - k. A contrast between sons and those who aren’t sons but think they are (12:5-13);
 - l. A contrast between the earthly and the heavenly congregations and cities (12:18-29);
 - m. And a contrast between the old and new altars (13:10-15).

- E. It is helpful for our study of Hebrews to have some grasp of the historical implications of being a converted Jew.
 1. The Jewish Christians came from a people group who had a rich history of relationship to and interaction with God.
 2. They had a divinely given revelation – or what we call the OT scriptures.
 3. In addition, they had the Law, the Covenants, the Tabernacle, the Temple, the Sacrifices, and the Psalms. They had Abraham, and Moses, and Samuel, and David, along with a long line of prophets, priests, and even godly kings.
 4. Their knowledge of the OT would have made it much easier for them to see the “types of Christ” found in the OT writings.

F. The Purpose

1. To proclaim the superiority and finality of Christ and the way of life built on faith in Christ over the way of life taught in the OT Law and Religious requirements.
 - a. God makes it clear that angels, and Moses, and Joshua, and Aaron, and Melchisedek, and the Offerings, and the Covenants are all in Christ.
 - b. In fact, he is as much greater than they and them, as the substance is greater than the shadow.
 - c. And if it were not for Christ (the substance) there would be no shadow.
 - d. And if there were no final revelation (Christ) there would have been no former revelation.
2. To warn against falling away from the Christian way of life back into some form of religion that mixed Judaism and Christianity. Some in the church were teaching:
 - a. that the Moses, Aaron, the prophets, and the angels were superior to Jesus;
 - b. and that both the law moral law (behavior) and the sacramental law (religious practices) had to be observed if one was to be a Christian;
3. To encourage spiritual growth unto Christian maturity and perfection

II. Final thoughts

- A. The three great offices in the OT were those of the prophet, the priest and the king. Christ fulfils them all. He is greater than the prophet Moses ; greater than the priest Aaron, and greater than the priest-king Melchisedek
- B. As our Divine Priest, Who is also the Offering for our sin and redemption, Christ is infinitely superior to Aaron and his offerings. Consider:
 1. Aaron had to offer for his own sins (9:7), but Christ did not.
 2. Aaron served in the earthly sanctuary, but Christ has entered into heaven itself (9:1, 24).
 3. Aaron carried the "blood of others (animals)," but Christ offered "His own blood" (9:25).

4. The OT sacrifices cleansed to the purifying of the flesh, but Christ's offering cleanses the conscience (**9:13-14**).
5. The Levitical Atonement (High Priest into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the lamb) was good for one year only, but Christ's atonement is eternal (**9:7, 25**).
6. The OT offerings could not take away sin, but Christ's Offering does take away sin (**10:1-4, 11, 14, 18**).
7. Aaron stood daily ministering, but when Christ had offered Himself to God, He sat down – signifying His work was done (**10:11-12**).

III. Conclusion