

## **An intro to the book of Hebrews**

Remember when Mohamed Ali proudly declared, "I AM THE GREATEST" ? The writer to the Hebrews declares boldly, "JESUS IS THE GREATEST!" This is the theme! Jesus and nothing, just Jesus, only Jesus, and all Jesus! An old saying says, " God has a secret stairway into every heart". In the New Testament we can find four of them: (1) Paul's concept of living in Christ and Christ living in him, (2) James and Peter saw a standard for life and power to reach that standard, (3) John in the first chapter of his account gives the greatest attempt in the world to state religion in a way that really satisfies the mind. Seek until you are at rest in God. Believe and be saved. And last (4) we see the author of Hebrews describing access to God and living in His presence. His mind was dominated with this thought. Hebrews 10:19-23. To put the thought in one sentence, "Let us draw near". As we go through this study let us also raise this call to our heart and mind, as each chapter of this study passes "Let us draw near". Do you tend toward one of these ways of relating to God or are you a combination of them?

The author obviously has a Greek and Hebrew background. To the Greek who thought in terms of Plato's idea of the world being a shadow of reality, the writer presents Jesus as a way to step from the shadow into reality. To the Hebrew who had a reverential fear of approaching a just God, the writer gives a way to draw near. Exodus 33:20 God tells Moses, "Man shall not see God and live." Genesis 32:30 Jacob is shocked that at seeing God he had not died. And remember the rope on the High Priest ankle, just in case he was struck dead in God's presence on the Day of Atonement? The two cultures certainly had differing views of God.

The Hebrews had grown accustomed to the endless cycle of sacrifice. Sin required sacrifice, after sacrifice sin was committed, man could then not be accepted by God, sacrifice was required, and on and on in a never-ending cycle. One sacrifice was only good for past sins, and the priest also had to be sanctified. What was needed was the perfect priest with the perfect sacrifice, and Christ was both. He was the perfect priest because He was at the same time perfectly man and perfectly God. In His manhood He could take man to God and in his Godhead He could take God to man. The perfect sacrifice is so perfect it need never be repeated. It met the demands of a just God in full, past, present, and future.

The Hebrews to whom the letter was written were about to experience a more intense persecution. They could get out of it by returning to the ritual of Judaism, but Paul is taking the devise out of the enemies tool box by showing how far they had come in Christ, from shadows to reality, pictures to the real, Old Covenant of endless cycles to the New Covenant of FULL SONSHIP!

The letter has three natural divisions:

1. 1:1 - 8:6 Christ, founder of the new covenant, far superior to founders of old under God. Superior to the prophets 1:1-3, angels 1:4 - 2:18, Moses 3:1-6, Joshua 3:7- 4:13, Aaron 4:14 - 8:6. In 8:7 - 10:39 He proves it again by comparing the value of the covenants 8:7 -13, the new was prophesied to be better 9:1-15, the first was just a type

of the New (second) 9:16- 10:39 made with better blood.

2. 11:1 - 12:2 Faith (not works) is the way of salvation.

3. 12:3 - 13:25 Admonitions

Hebrews was not included in the Canon of the New Testament Scripture until mid fourth century. The style of Greek is exceptional. The early Greek church accepted it early on but the Latin church took much longer. The author was never known for sure, and to be canon it had to be by someone who knew Christ or the apostles. Even Luther was not sure if this letter should be included in canon. Matthew Henry commentary gives a great argument why this letter is by Paul. Clement of Alexandria thought Paul wrote it in Hebrew and Luke translated it, accounting for the excellent Greek. (I favor this view.) There are many phrases and ideas that are consistent with Paul's letters. But Augustan, Luther, Calvin didn't believe it was Paul's work. Tertullian thought Barnabas wrote it. Barnabas was from Cyprus, known for excellent Greek. He was Levite and so familiar with the priestly sacrificial system. He is called 'son of encouragement' and Hebrews calls itself a word of encouragement. But in this age when a name gave validity why didn't his name stay connected with it?

Luther thought Apollos, born in Alexandria, an eloquent man, mighty in scriptures. It was from a scholar to scholars in training to keep them on track. Harnack the German scholar thought Aquilla and Priscilla as a team wrote it and as women were not allowed to teach, the authors' names were dropped. Only God knows, but He allowed it to be included in our Bible. Personally, I'd guess Paul and Luke collaborated on it and therefore neither took credit. Like most of the New Testament it was included because the church as a whole accepted and used it as sacred scripture.

Facts ascertained by the content: It was written 64 - 80 AD to second-generation believers, 2:3. Not new in the faith they should have been mature 5:12 . Encouraged to look back 10:32, 13:7 for inspiration. Leadership had died for the faith. They, personally had not suffered bloodshed yet. 12:4 But were persecuted, losing goods 10:32. First persecution of Nero 64 AD and Domitian 85 AD

The letter first appeared in Alexandria and may be to whom it was written. One old church letter mentions this letter. It was a long established church 5:12 It had days of great leaders 13:7, but was not directly founded by apostles 2:3. They were generous 6:10.

Homework: As you read chapter one, pay close attention to any points the Holy Spirit is impressing on your heart.