

The book of Hebrews is a very unique book in Scripture. It is one of the only books in the New Testament of which we can say we don't know the author. Whoever they were, they had certainly been influenced by the Apostle Paul. The Greek is not Paul's style, but the theology is certainly Pauline. The author was steeped in Jewish culture. (For a more full discussion on the possible authors see my class, Introduction to Hebrews.) The focus of the book is the greatness of Jesus who provides us rest from the works of striving to please God, and ushers us into a covenant of grace. Jesus, as our great high priest, is our access to God.

The book has **three natural divisions**. Chapters one through ten show Jesus to be the founder of a better covenant than the one delivered to Moses on Sinai. Chapter eleven shows us this covenant is based on faith and not works. Chapters twelve and thirteen are admonitions on how to live out this covenant on a daily basis.

We can ascertain some facts about the recipients by the content. It was written sometime between A.D. 64 – 68 to second-generation believers (2:3). Not new in the faith, the author wrote that they should have been mature (5:12). They were encouraged to look back for inspiration (10:32, 13:7). Their leadership had died for the faith, but they personally had not yet suffered bloodshed (12:4). However, they were persecuted, losing goods (10:34). The first Roman persecution was by Nero and began in A.D. 64 followed by that of Domitian in A.D. 85.

The letter first appeared in Alexandria and may be the church to whom it was written. There was a very large Jewish population in Alexandria. This church must have been made up of those Jews of Alexandria who became believers in Jesus as the Messiah, possibly from the return of those who attended the Pentecost which started the church. It was a long established church at the time the letter was written (5:12). It had days of great leaders (13:7), but was not directly founded by apostles (2:3). It was a generous congregation (6:10). The letter was meant to encourage them to refrain from considering avoiding persecution by moving back into Judaism, as Judaism was merely the shadow of which Christ is the reality.

Occasionally, as we go through the books of the Bible, we come to a passage that is so profoundly significant, that I encourage you to memorize it. The first three verses of Hebrews is one of those passages. ¹ *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,* ² *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.* ³ *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,* Hebrews 1:1-3 (ESV)

Commented [PW1]: Hebrews 2:3 (ESV)

³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,

Commented [PW2]: Hebrews 5:12 (ESV)

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,

Commented [PW3]: Hebrews 10:32 (ESV)

³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,

Commented [PW4]: Hebrews 13:7 (ESV)

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Commented [PW5]: Hebrews 12:4 (ESV)

⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Commented [PW6]: Hebrews 10:34 (ESV)

³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Commented [PW7]: Hebrews 6:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

Every single phrase of these verses is filled with significance, so let's take it one phrase at a time. ¹ *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets*, The first prophet in Scripture was Enoch. Enoch is quoted in the letter from Jude (Jude 1:14-15). He lived a very long time ago, around 5000 years ago.¹⁴

He was followed by a series of prophets Noah, Abraham, Moses, and then all the prophets in the days of the kings, beginning with Samuel and ending with Malachi. The final prophet before Christ was John the Baptist, the messenger who prepared the way for Jesus (Malachi 3:1). By the time the letter to the Hebrews was written, that included three thousand years of prophets. Jesus said that the Law and the prophets were until John the Baptist. Since John, the kingdom of God is preached and everyone forces his way into it (Luke 16:16).

For the Jewish people, the Law and the prophets were the two most important portions of their Scriptures. Jesus was saying that was completed. We don't write down prophecies today and add them to the Bible. A great change took place. Because Jesus was about to open our access to God, we no longer needed someone to speak for God. **The indwelling Holy Spirit (John 16:14), along with the recorded Word of God, point us to Jesus, the final reality to which all prophecy points (Luke 24:44).**

This first verse of Hebrews reminds us that these prophets had various means of conveying their message. Sometimes it was clear and direct speech. Sometimes it was written down and delivered. At other times it was acted out. There were also actions that spoke as parables, like Ezekiel digging under the wall of the city and taking out his baggage to show the people they were destined to be exiles (Ezekiel 12:5). The prophet Nathan used a fictitious story to convict David of His sin (2 Samuel 12:1). We can see that God spoke to our fathers of the faith throughout the ages in many different ways. That was then. Now there is a final great revelation, the incarnate Word (John 1:14).

² *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son*, Now God speaks to us by His Son. When Peter stood up to preach at Pentecost, he announced that the promise of the prophet Joel had come to pass. That promise declared that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit on all (Acts 2:16-18). That had just taken place. So the "last days" refers to the time from the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost to this day. In these last days God has given us the fullest revelation. He didn't inspire another prophet to be His voice to mankind, though Jesus did give us prophetic teaching. God had His very Word incarnated in the womb of Mary. Jesus' words and actions are the greatest revelation we can have. The One who is one with the Father has spoken. We have His words in the gospels. We have the eyewitness accounts of what He said and did. He is our perfect example in all things. He revealed the Father's heart to us.

While the gift of prophecy is one of the gifts given to believers, the present day exercise of that gift is described in 1 Corinthians 14:3 as speaking to *people for their upbuilding*

Commented [PW8]: Jude 1:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

Commented [PW9]: According to the Jewish calendar Enoch was born 5,154 years ago.

Commented [PW10]: Malachi 3:1 (ESV)

¹ "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

Commented [PW11]: Luke 16:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

Commented [PW12]: John 16:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Commented [PW13]: Luke 24:44 (ESV)

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Commented [PW14]: Ezekiel 12:5 (ESV)

⁵ In their sight dig through the wall, and bring your baggage out through it.

Commented [PW15]: 2 Samuel 12:1 (ESV)

¹ And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor.

Commented [PW16]: John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Commented [PW17]: Acts 2:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ "'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

Commented [PW18]: 1 Corinthians 14:3 (ESV)

³ On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

and encouragement and consolation. This description is not about new revelation. The revelation we needed was complete in Jesus. He is the great revelation of God to man. He is God revealed to man. Thankfully, He is still speaking to our hearts through the Holy Spirit and through those with the gift of prophecy to build us up, to encourage us, and to console us in times of loss and pain that comes with following Him. His sheep hear His voice and they follow Him (John 10:3).

Jesus has spoken! He said He is the Light of the world. He declared that no man can come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). He said that He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). He said that if we have seen Him we have seen the Father (John 14:7) and declared that He and the Father are one (John 10:30). He told us that we must be born again (John 3:3). He said that He came to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). We can receive this final and full revelation or we can reject it.

I have always been impressed that **Jesus made radical claims that no other sane human would dare to make.** But He backed His declarations with convincing proofs. When He could see that the people doubted that He had the right to forgive sins, He asked if it was easier to have a paralytic rise and walk or declare his sins are forgiven. Well, since both are impossible with man, no one answered. Jesus response was, "So that you may know that the Son of man has the power to forgive sins, I say to this man, rise and walk." (Matthew 9:6) How do we know He is really the resurrection and life? A short time after making the claim, He called Lazarus out his tomb (John 11:43-44). He conquered death and walked out of His own tomb (Hebrews 2:14).

Jesus has not only spoken, He has verified His claims with visible actions that proved His words were true. Everyone must decide what they will do with the words Jesus has spoken. He is the greatest fraud the world has ever known, or exactly who He claimed to be.

The next part of verse 2 referring to Jesus, *whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.* Jesus is the heir of all things. Every created thing He has inherited from the Father. His incarnation and obedience unto death to redeem us gave Him the right to inherit it all. Adam was given authority over the created things, but he soon yielded that right to Satan. Jesus, as a man, took that right back. Now all authority in heaven and earth belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). He always had the authority in heaven. The authority over the earth was lost by Adam, but Jesus, as a man, regained what we had lost.

The wonderful thing about this truth is that as the redeemed, we are being, and will be, conformed into His image (Romans 8:29), and we are co-heirs with Him (Romans 8:17). In Christ, all things are ours (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

It is only right, after all, for Jesus is the instrument of creation. All things were made through Him. God spoke and it was. Jesus is the Word of God. John 1:3 tells us that all

Commented [PW19]: John 10:3 (ESV)

³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Commented [PW20]: John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Commented [PW21]: John 11:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

Commented [PW22]: John 14:7 (ESV)

⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Commented [PW23]: John 10:30 (ESV)

³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Commented [PW24]: John 3:3 (ESV)

³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Commented [PW25]: Matthew 20:28 (ESV)

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Commented [PW26]: Matthew 20:28 (ESV)

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Commented [PW27]: John 11:43-44 (ESV)

⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."

⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Commented [PW28]: Hebrews 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

Commented [PW29]: Matthew 28:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Commented [PW30]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Commented [PW31]: Romans 8:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Commented [PW32]: 1 Corinthians 3:21-23 (ESV)

²¹ So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world ... [1]

Commented [PW33]: John 1:3 (ESV)

³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made. Paul wrote of Jesus in Colossians 1:15-17, ¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* ¹⁶ *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.* ¹⁷ *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* Jesus not only made the visible realm but the invisible realm, every power and every authority. It was not only created through Him, but it was all created for Him.

Some people may think we are overly obsessed with Jesus. That's not possible. If anything, we think too little of Him. He made us. He made everything we see. He made it all for Himself. That is a good thing, because He is love. (1John 4:8) He didn't come to condemn us, but to save us (John 3:17). He loves you like no one else ever can or will. How could you think too much of Him? He is perfect in every way. O come let us adore Him! The author of Hebrews certainly adored Jesus, as we will see.

³ *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,* This phrase needs some explanation as it uses terms we are not familiar with in every day conversation. Radiance is the out shining of something. The radiance of a star is its light and radiation. Jesus is the out shining of the glory of God. God's glory is what is honorable and praiseworthy of Him. Every attribute He possesses, He possesses in perfection. His love is perfect. His joy is complete. His justice is without compromise. His righteousness is entirely intact. His peace is incomparable. And if you are aware of your own sins, you know how patient He is. We see His kindness in all of creation. Jesus is the outshining, or visible manifestation, of every glorious attribute of God!

When you read the gospels and you see how Jesus addresses issues and responds to situations, you are seeing the radiance of God's glory. He told the disciples that He doesn't do anything on His own but only speaks what the Father has taught Him (John 8:28). He claimed to only do the Father's will (John 5:30). Anyone else who would dare to make those claims would just be considered a prideful fool. He can say those things because they were consistently demonstrated by His words and actions, showing that He really is the radiance of God's glory. As you read the gospels, each time you come to the words or actions of Jesus consider that you are looking at the radiance of the glorious heart of God, your Creator. "The exact imprint of His nature" is a way to describe the imprint of a seal. Many places still use a seal, a metal or wooden image raised from its base so that it can be used as a stamp to convey that image in ink or on wax. Jesus is the exact imprint of God.

he upholds the universe by the word of his power. The physical world around us came into being by the spoken word of God. It continues by the word of His power. There are

Commented [PW34]: 1 John 4:8 (ESV)

⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Commented [PW35]: John 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Commented [PW36]: John 8:28 (ESV)

²⁸ So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.

Commented [PW37]: John 5:30 (ESV)

³⁰ "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

physical objects and laws by which they function because God had determined for the time being that it should be. He knows where every atom of every star in our enormous universe is at any given moment. It is where it is because He wills it to be so. It is incomprehensible to me, but that is the declaration of God's Word. I haven't seen a better explanation. Man tries to write God out of the equation but keeps coming up with dead ends and odds of probability that are, pardon the pun, astronomical.

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, Our Creator and sustainer who is the radiance of God's glory provided Himself to be our substitutionary sacrifice that we might be purified of our sins. If you aren't stunned by that incredible contrast, you don't understand what the author has described. The Son of God is so exalted and glorious, yet He humbled Himself to the lowest condition so that you and I might be purified of our sins that we might spend eternity with Him.

Paul describes this in Philippians 2. *⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,* Philippians 2:7-9 (ESV) The right hand of God is the place of authority and power. Jesus knew this would be the outcome of His loving sacrifice for us. He told the Sanhedrin that before they condemned Him to death. *⁶⁹ But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.*" Luke 22:69 (ESV) The majestic Son of God, in the form of man, bound, beaten, standing before men who thought they were judging Him, declared that He was going to the helm of the universe. And there was nothing they could do to stop Him. In fact, doing their worst to Him, they actually played the role God had assigned them in making Jesus' victory final and complete. These first verses of the letter to the Hebrews is an attempt to put into words just how glorious and gracious is the majestic Son of God.

Questions

- 1 What makes Hebrews unique?
- 2 What are the sections of Hebrews?
- 3 What do we know of the recipients?
- 4 How did God communicate with our fathers?
- 5 How has God spoken since?
- 6 What is the source of all things?
- 7 What does radiance of God's glory mean?
- 8 Who is in control of all we see?
- 9 What did Jesus do for us?
- 10 Where is Jesus now?
- 11 Describe the impotence of mankind.

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 (ESV)

²¹ So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours,

²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,

²³ and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.