

# HEBREWS

## 1. Introduction

December 7, 2014

Although the Book of Hebrews is one of the longest and most important letters in the NT, many Christians would rather stick with studying the 4 Gospels and the Books of Acts, Romans, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Corinthians. I can see why they are kinda gun-shy about this Book. It is somewhat mysterious, deep, relatively difficult to understand. It demands our serious time and effort to dig deeper.

It contains a lot of Jewish history, events from the OT, and sacrificial systems that we are not familiar with. You cannot study the Book of Leviticus without referring to the Book of Hebrews and vice versa.

But I promise to you that if you invest your time and energy in learning this Book, your return-on-spiritual investment will be extremely rich and rewarding.

### A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

No one really knows who wrote the Book of Hebrews. Whoever the author was, he certainly knew the recipients of this letter, the Jewish people. Many biblical scholars proposed that the author could be Clement of Rome, Barnabas, or the Apostle Paul. Others later suggested Luke the Evangelist, Apollos, and Priscilla as possible authors. Though no author is named, the original King James Version of the Bible titled the work "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews".

Listen, for whatever the reason is, the Lord chose not to reveal the author of this Book. I have an advice for those who insist that they know who the author is. Leave it alone. If the Lord chose to keep it covered, step away and don't try to dig it up. If you insist, you only prove that you are hard of hearing and not smart.

Many guesstimate that the Book was authored around 60-70 A.D.

### B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

The theme of the Book is the absolute superiority of Jesus Christ over anything and everyone. At the same time, the Book warned the first century Christians in Israel to cling to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and not fall away from the faith in Him.

The key verse comes from chapter 4:

*Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*

### C. THE STRUCTURE

The style of this Book is like a well-crafted sermon. It is scholarly, not simple; eloquent, not elementary. It is the type of writing that would appeal to the intelligent Jew steeped in the OT in all of their lives.

This Book can be divided into three sections:

#### 1) **Jesus Christ: Superior in His Person** – c1-c4

The Lord Jesus is superior to all the OT prophets including Moses. He also is superior to angels in heaven. The Jewish priests and the Sabbath rituals were inferior to the Lord Jesus.

## **2) Jesus Christ: Superior as our Priest – c5-c10**

The Lord Jesus as our High Priest is better than earthly priesthood, the Mosaic system, animal sacrifices, and daily offerings. To us, these are not big issues. But to the first century people who were drenched in the Jewish religious DOs and DON'Ts all of their lives, they were hard to overcome.

## **3) Jesus Christ: Superior for life – c11-c13**

The superiority of the Lord Jesus gives us faith to believe in Him; hope to endure trials; and love to encourage others.

The Book of Hebrews is one of the most systematic and doctrinal Books in the NT along with Romans. It paints a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ as our High Priest and God. For the Hebrew people, this Book builds the bridge between the OT and NT.

Yes, it has 13 chapters, but you can read the entire Book in under 45 minutes. I timed it. It is less than a one hour TV show. You can handle it, besides it is far better than watching one of those dumb shows.

## **D. A FEW INTERESTING FACTS**

### **1) The recipients were the persecuted Jewish Christians in the first century in Israel.**

These Hebrew people were practically homeless people. Since they became Christians, they were excommunicated from their synagogues, ostracized from their trade group, and isolated from their family relationship, even got kicked out of their homes.

### **2) These Hebrew recipients were facing a serious temptation to forsake the faith and revert back to Judaism.**

*Hebrews 10:32-33 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: 33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated*

The author of this Book was pleading with the Hebrew people that they should remain in Christ instead of going back to the bondage of the endless religious rituals of the OT that were made by their religious rulers, mainly the Pharisees and Sadducees.

As I am learning more in God's Word, the Bible, I am completely convinced that we need to identify with scenes and backgrounds in Scripture if we're going to glean the lessons the Lord has for us.

When this Book was written, it was a low-tide time for the first century Christians in Israel as well as all around the Roman regions, because that crazy maniac Nero was on the throne.

In A.D. 64 a great fire broke out in Rome, which destroyed a large part of the city. Nero was suspected of having deliberately set it in order to make room for his new Golden House, a splendid palace which he built on the hill. In order to divert the blame from himself, the Christians were accused of having caused the disaster. Many of them were brought to trial and tortured to death. Tradition says apostles

Peter and Paul were killed under the persecution of Nero. During this persecution, many scholars believe that this Book of Hebrews was written.

Now I want all of you to put yourself in the same situation as those first century Christians did in Israel under the persecution by Rome and the leaders of their land. All of sudden, the entire society of America is swinging their pendulum against you. You begin to lose your rights, personal property, church buildings, and freedoms; you can no longer attend your church service in public; you can no longer pray before your meal at the restaurant; you can no longer claim Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord in public unless you want to be arrested and killed. If that is not enough, you lose your job because you're a Christian; consequently you even lose your home, some of your family members get killed to martyrdom. Now pause long enough to imagine how difficult such a time would have been.

*Hebrews 11:32-38 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.*

I wonder how many of us would stay true to the Lord Jesus to the end in the face of intense persecution because of our faith. If we no longer had homes to live in or had scarcely enough clothes to wear or dumpster diving becomes a daily thing to find some foods, if we suddenly had our comfortable amenities taken from us, I wonder how many of us would defect to the other side. This is where we find the recipients of this letter were.

The current situation in America is a lot less than what these believers in Israel had to face everyday. Yes, as the followers of Christ, we get pushed around; were told to be quiet; get sued for exercising our religious freedom. But none of us got killed for what we believe in. It might come to that not far from now. May the Lord mercifully spare us from that experience. Or if it's His will to take us through that kind of intense testing, may the truths of these and other Scriptures hold us firm and keep us strong to the end.

### **E. THINGS TO PREPARE IN OUR HEARTS**

We have less than four weeks before the end of Year 2014. I remember that many people thought that human race was about to end with the coming of Year 2000 due to the Y2K computer glitch. Remember that? Someone made a lot of money out of it.

I don't have any fancy mind boggling prophecies from the Lord for you. But I do have a couple of things from Him for us to prepare in our hearts as we study this wonderful Book of Hebrews from this Sunday for several months.

As long as president Obama is in the office, the Christians in America will face more and more limitations because the truth of God from this Book reveals his and other liberal people's dark sins and they hate Jesus and Christianity. While we study this Book, you will be able to identify with those early Jewish Christians in the first century.

## 1) Encouragement

Encouragement is for others by nature of purpose. May I suggest that let giving encouragements to others be your New Year's resolution? You will be surprised how many friends you will have and how much they open themselves to you, because hope can be ignited by a spark of encouragement.

The seeming simplicity of encouragement sometimes fails to catch our attention. We tend to underestimate the power of this unfeigned tool of the tongue. Yet for those who have experienced the sweet taste of sincere affirmation, nothing could be more exhilarating. Near miracles often come to surface because of it.

*Proverbs 16:24 Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.*

A well-timed word has the power to urge a runner to finish the race; to rekindle hope when despair has set in; to spark a bit of warmth in an otherwise cold life; to trigger healthy self-evaluation in someone who doesn't think much about his shortcomings; and to renew confidence when problems have the upper hand.

All because of the effective use of approving words. Is there someone who has impacted your life in this way perhaps a parent, teacher, mentor, or loyal friend? Have you ever stopped to thank them with a letter or a phone call? Maybe this is your opportunity to encourage them.

But don't stop there. Think about the people who are around you on a regular basis. Your friends at work or in school. How about your spouse, or your children? Do you ever take the time to jot a note or meet with them privately to express how much you genuinely appreciate them and why? Think about it.

## 2) Persistence

The time might come when you feel like you want to throw up your hands in the air and say, "I quit." You've been doing everything you can and living the life that honors the Lord. Instead of your life getting better, you face more and more difficulties at home, at your job, and even the relationship with the Lord. You may feel like the Lord abandoned you and discarded you like a rag doll. While you are licking your spiritual wound, a thought comes to you out of nowhere, "What is the purpose of living for God? I am robbing myself of all the fun, money, and fame. He is not helping me. Why don't I go back to what I used to do? I did well without God." Of course, it is from the devil. Somehow you have selective amnesia that makes you forget the misery and emptiness.

*Philippians 3:14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

When trouble comes to our lives, we can do one of three things: buckle under it, escape it, or endure it. If we only buckle under our trials, then trials become our master, and we have a tendency to become hard and bitter. If we try to escape our trials, then we will probably miss the purposes God wants to achieve in our lives. But if we learn to endure our trials with our God's power, they will become our servants instead of our masters and work for us. Yes, God will work all things together for our good and His glory.