

CHAPTER 10

The Priesthood of Jesus Christ

(Hebrews)

The book of Hebrews is the third longest letter in the New Testament. Only the books of Romans and 1 Corinthians are longer than the letter to the Hebrews. Its thirteen chapters are filled with rich truths that believers everywhere need to understand.

Who Wrote This Book?

We are not certain who wrote the book of Hebrews. This is unusual, for we are sure who wrote the Gospel of Matthew and who wrote the book of Romans. We are certain that Luke wrote the book of Acts. We know who wrote 26 of the New Testament Books. Also, in the Old Testament there are several books whose authorship is unknown. For example, we do not know for sure who wrote the books of Kings and Chronicles.

Many believe the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Hebrews. In fact, in the King James Version, the title of the letter is given as follows: "THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE HEBREWS." And yet, in all of Paul's other letters, he gives his name at the very beginning (see Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; etc.), but in the letter to the Hebrews, no name is given. This makes it difficult to know for sure that Paul was the author. Others have thought that Barnabas or Apollos or Silas may have written this book. Perhaps the safest thing to say is what Origen said in the third century (about 200 years after the book of Hebrews was written): "who it was that really wrote the Epistle (to the Hebrews), God only knows."

There are some things that we do know about the *human* writer. He was someone who knew T _____ very well (Hebrews 13:23). He was probably a Jew and one who knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well. He had also spent some time in prison ("bonds"—Hebrew 10:34). Of course, all of these things would fit the Apostle Paul, though they could fit someone else as well.

Usually the name of the writer or author is given at the very beginning of the letter. The very first word tells you who the author is. For example, who wrote the book of 1 Timothy? What is the first word in 1 Timothy 1:1? _____ Who wrote the book of James (James 1:1)? _____ Who wrote the book of 1 Peter (1 Peter 1:1)? _____ What is the first word in Jude's short letter? _____ Who wrote the book of Hebrews? What is the first word of this letter? _____ **God hath spoken!** God is the author of this book! Even though we may not know who the human writer was, we know that the book of Hebrews is God's Word.

As we read the book of Hebrews, our attention is not on the human writer, but on that which is written! Even the human writer, when quoting from the Old Testament Scriptures, always emphasized that God was the Author. He pointed to God rather than to the human author. See Hebrews 3:7; 9:8; 10:15 where the writer reminds us that the Holy Spirit is the true Author of the Bible.

Who Were the Readers of This Book?

This letter was sent to the "Hebrews." This means that the people who received this letter were Jews (probably living in Italy). But not only were they Jews, they were Jewish people who had accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah and as their Saviour. For the most part they were true believers in Christ (Hebrews 3:1), though as in any church group there were some who merely **professed Christ** but who did not actually **possess Christ**.

Is it possible for a person to **say** that he is a Christian, but not really **be** a Christian? See the following verses:

Titus 1:16
 1 John 2:4
 1 John 2:9
 1 John 4:20
 James 2:14,18

These Jewish Christians were going through some very difficult times. They were suffering through great affliction and persecution (Heb. 10:32-33). Some of them had lost many of their earthly possessions (Heb. 10:34). They were discovering that the Christian life is not always a bed of roses (this was the same truth that the Thessalonians had to learn—see **Chapter 8**).

Because of these difficulties and trials, some of these Jewish people were wavering in their faith. Some were even in danger of turning away from Christ and from Christianity and going back to the religion of Judaism.

The Lord once told a parable about a sower. Some seed fell among rocky soil (see Luke 8:6). According to Luke 8:13, the seed which fell on rocky soil represented people who have heard God's Word and believe it for a time, but in time of **temptation** (testing and difficulty), what do they do? F_____ A_____ According to Jesus, the problem with such people as that they had no R_____ (Luke 8:13).

Think of two trees. One has small and shallow roots; the other has massive, deep roots that go way down into the earth. When the hurricane comes along, which tree is going to be able to remain standing? Which tree is going to fall?

The book of Hebrews was written so that these Jewish Christians might get their roots to go deep down into the Lord Jesus Christ! The writer does everything he can to get these people to be **rooted and built up** in Christ Jesus! The letter to the Hebrews was sent to strengthen their wavering faith, so that they would be able to survive the greatest hurricanes that the world, the flesh or the devil might ever send!

When Was This Letter Sent?

History tells us that in the year 70 A.D. the Roman army came and destroyed the Jewish temple in the city of Jerusalem. Since then the Jews have never had a temple.

The book of Hebrews must have been written before this great destruction took place, because in Hebrews 10:11 we learn that the temple was still standing, the Jewish priests were still ministering, and animals were still being sacrificed. None of this would have been true after 70 A.D. So the letter must have been sent between 64 and 68 A.D., prior to the fall of Jerusalem.

How to Understand the Book of Hebrews

As already mentioned, this book was written to Jewish people, and the Jews were very familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures (the 39 books of the Old Testament). It is difficult to understand the book of Hebrews unless you have an understanding of the Old Testament, especially the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis through Deuteronomy).

For example, in the book of Hebrews we read about priests, the wilderness wanderings, the Sabbath rest, Melchisedec, the tribes of Judah and Levi, the law of Moses, the tabernacle, the table of shewbread, the veil, the mercy seat, the most holy place, the sacrificial animals, the ashes of an heifer, Esau selling his birthright, etc. The Jewish people were familiar with all of these things, just as you are probably very familiar with Christ's birth in Bethlehem, the shepherds and the wise men! But if a person is not familiar with the Old Testament, he will not understand many of the things he reads about in this book.

Consider also Hebrews chapter 11. Does an understanding of the Old Testament help a person with this chapter?

The Superiority of Christ and Christianity

Some of these Jewish people were in danger of turning from Christ and going back to the religion of Judaism (back to animal sacrifices, back to the law of Moses, back to human priests, etc.). The book of Hebrews shows how foolish this would be. This book shows how superior Christ is and thus how superior Christianity is. Only a fool would turn away from something better in order to grab onto something that is worse!

According to Hebrews 10:1, the things written in the law (such as the animal sacrifices, the tabernacle, etc.) were merely a **shadow** of things to come. Which is superior, the **shadow** or the **substance** (the real thing)? Would you rather have the shadow of an ice cream cone or a real ice cream cone? Would you rather have the shadow of a \$5.00 bill or the real thing? The book of Hebrews teaches us that **Christ is the real thing**, and all of these Old Testament things were only pictures and shadows which pointed to the Christ who should come.

The following chart helps us to see how superior Christ is:

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND JUDAISM	CHRIST AND CHRISTIANITY
Animal sacrifices that could never put away sin (Heb.10:4)	The once for all sacrifice of Christ that put away sin forever (Heb. 10:10,12,17)
Human priests, the sons of Aaron, who were sinful, frail and imperfect (Heb. 7:23, 27,28)	The perfect Priest, after the order of Melchisedec, who is sinless, perfect and lives forever (Heb. 7:15,16,24,25)
The Old Covenant (Heb. 8:9)	The New Covenant (Heb. 8:8,10,12; 10:16-17)
Shadow (Heb. 10:1)	Substance—the real thing!
Earthly Tabernacle made with hands (Heb. 9:1-2)	Heavenly Tabernacle made without hands (Heb. 8:2)

A **key word** is found in the book of Hebrews which shows the superiority of Christianity. It is the word "**BETTER**"! What God has done in Christ is far **BETTER**! Please MATCH:

1) _____ <i>better</i> promises	A. Heb. 1:4
2) _____ <i>better</i> resurrection	B. Heb. 7:7
3) _____ <i>better</i> hope	C. Heb. 7:19
4) _____ <i>better</i> sacrifices	D. Heb. 7:22
5) _____ <i>better</i> country	E. Heb. 8:6
6) _____ <i>better</i> testament	F. Heb. 8:6
7) _____ <i>better</i> covenant	G. Heb. 9:23
8) _____ Christ is <i>better</i> than angels	H. Heb. 10:34
9) _____ Abraham (the lesser) is blessed by the <i>better</i> (Melchisedec)	I. Heb. 11:16
10) _____ <i>better</i> substance (possessions)	J. Heb. 11:35

Warnings and Encouragements

This book was written to get people to the living God. Christ is presented as the **great High Priest** (Heb. 3:1; 4:15; 6:20; 8:1; 9:11, 24) who died, rose again, passed into the heavens and lives forever so that **He might bring us to God**. These Hebrew Christians are told to GO ON and GROW UP and get their roots deeper and deeper into Christ.

As you read through the book of Hebrews you will find two messages repeated again and again:

- 1) You will find **ENCOURAGEMENTS** given to these Jewish people so that they might draw near and come to God;
- 2) You will find **WARNINGS** given to these same people so that they might not depart from the living God.

Hebrews 2:3--**WARNING**--Don't N_____ God's so great salvation.

Hebrews 2:10--**ENCOURAGEMENT**-- God is bringing you to Himself!

Hebrews 3:1--**ENCOURAGEMENT**-- Get your eyes on Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 3:8--**WARNING**--Do not H_____ your heart.

Hebrews 3:12--**WARNING**--DO not D_____ from the living God.

Hebrews 4:16--**ENCOURAGEMENT**-- C_____ boldly unto the throne of grace.

Hebrews 5:11--**WARNING**--Pay attention to what God says!

Hebrews 6:1--**ENCOURAGEMENT**--Go on and grow up!

Hebrews 6:6--**WARNING**--Do not F_____ A_____

Hebrews 10:19--**ENCOURAGEMENT**--Enter the most holy place (where God is!)

Hebrews 10:22--**ENCOURAGEMENT**--D_____ N_____ to God.

Hebrews 10:23--**ENCOURAGEMENT**--H_____ F_____ to God's promises and to God's Son.

Hebrews 10:25--**WARNING**--Do not F_____ the assembling of yourselves together.

Hebrews 10:26--**WARNING**--Do not reject the truth you have R_____

Hebrews 10:38--**WARNING**--Do not D_____ B_____ from God.

Hebrews 11:6--**ENCOURAGEMENT**--Come to G_____ by faith.

Hebrews 12:2--**ENCOURAGEMENT**--Get your eyes on Jesus Christ,

L_____ unto Him!

The Great Faith Chapter

One of the greatest encouragements in the book of Hebrews is the great FAITH chapter (Hebrews chapter 11). These verses would have been especially meaningful to Jewish people as they were reminded of the faith of their fathers. They knew their Old Testament Bible very well and thus they were very familiar with the lives of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and all the others mentioned in this chapter. If these men and women could trust God under very difficult circumstances, then so can we today! Sometimes Hebrews 11 is called the "HALL OF FAITH" (just as we have the Baseball or Basketball "HALL OF FAME" dedicated to the memory of the great athletes of the past). Hebrews 11 is dedicated to the memory of the great believers of the past.

No Turning Back!

Faith in Christ is not something that we do for two or three months (on a trial basis) and then decide if we should continue! When a person is saved, he is saying, "I am going to trust the Lord Jesus Christ now, tomorrow and forever!" There is a well known song that reminds us of this: "I have decided to follow Jesus, **no turning back, no turning back!**"

Some of the Jewish people who read the book of Hebrews were in danger of turning back. Their roots were not deep and they were wavering in their faith. They were going through great difficulties and they were wondering if they should continue to trust Christ. This book was sent to them to warn them not to turn back and to encourage them to hang on to Christ (by faith) and never let Him go!

Have you ever known someone who seemed to be a believer, attended church, showed an interest in the Bible and spiritual things, prayed, etc., but later seemed to change? This same person stopped attending church, seemed to lose interest in the things of God and started living, acting and thinking like the world. What happened?

How can we tell if a person is a true member of Christ's church? In Hebrews 3:6, the Bible says that we are Christ's house **if** we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the _____. If a person does not continue unto the end, then this shows us that this person was never really a true part of Christ's house or Christ's body.

Here's an illustration. Often when a building is erected, a scaffold structure is also erected to give the workmen a platform to stand upon.

Is the scaffold is part of the true building? How can a person tell which structures really belong to the true building? This is very easy: just wait and let some time pass and see which parts of the building **REMAIN!** It will not be long before the scaffold will **FALL AWAY** from the building or be taken away from the building and you will not see it again! The scaffold was never a part of the true building. It was only a **TEMPORARY ATTACHMENT**.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. Some people are **temporary attachments** to the church. Time is needed to see if they will really continue! John speaks of these temporary attachments in 1 John 2:19--"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have _____ with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." The Lord Jesus spoke of the same thing in Luke 8:13. They believed, but was their faith lasting or only temporary? _____ . See also Colossians 1:23 and John 8:31. The book of Hebrews is a great encouragement to **continue on** in the faith, developing roots that go so deep into Christ that no one will ever be able to move us off of that solid foundation! We need to continue *to the very end* (Heb. 3:6; 3:14; 10:39).

Eternal Security

Is the true believer safe and secure in Christ forever? Some people think the book of Hebrews teaches that a saved person can be lost. They misunderstand some of the warning passages that we have been learning about. However, the book of Hebrews presents the safety and security of believers in a very strong way. Find the verses that go with each of the following statements:

1. Salvation is forever (eternal salvation). Hebrews 5: _____
2. God is able to save completely (to the uttermost). Hebrews 7: _____
3. Christ never stops interceding for His own. Hebrews 7: _____
4. Our redemption is forever (eternal redemption). Hebrews 9: _____
5. Our inheritance is forever (eternal inheritance). Hebrews 9: _____
6. Christ appears in God's presence for us. Hebrews 9: _____
7. Christ has perfected forever His saints. Hebrews 10: _____
8. God will never again remember our sins. Hebrews 10: _____
9. God chastens (*not* condemns) His children. Hebrews 12: _____
10. Christ will *never ever* leave us, no, He will *never, ever* forsake us, *no not ever!* Hebrews 13: _____

Based on the above passages, is the true child of God safe and secure in Christ forever?
 _____ For a more detailed study, see our study on **Eternal Security**.

DIVINE COMPASSION

"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.

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as we are, yet without sin.

"LET US THEREFORE

COME BOLDLY TO THE GRACE

THAT WE MAY OBTAIN
MERCY, AND FIND GRACE
TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED."

— HEB. 4:14-16

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