

# HEBREWS (Lesson 1)

## INTRODUCTION

### The Author

Although the writer is nowhere identified in the epistle, it is widely believed that the book was written by the apostle Paul. Paul is the author of most of the New Testament. (Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus and Philemon).

I and II Peter were written to saved Jews who were scattered abroad. And II Peter 3:15 says Paul also had written unto them. There is no other record of Paul writing to saved Jews and it is supposed that this must be a reference to Hebrews.

You will notice that the heading to the book says, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews. However, you should be aware that the titles found at the beginning of each book are not divinely inspired. They were inserted there most likely by the copiers of the book. That does provide some evidence as to who they thought wrote the book. And yet, you should always be aware that this is not a part of divinely inspired Scripture.

### The Addressees

Usually in the Epistles there is a statement in the opening verses which identifies a named addressee.

Romans 1:7	–	To all who be in Rome.
I Corinthians 1:2	–	Unto the church of God which is at Corinth
Galatians 1:2	–	Unto the churches of Galatia
Epesians 1:1	–	To the saints which are at Ephesus
Philippians 1:1	–	To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi
Colossians 1:2	–	To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse

Now identifying the addressees of any book helps us to interpret the book. But we should be careful not to adopt the position that the contents of any of these books does not apply to us. All Scripture is given by inspiration

of God and is profitable . . .

Some say the Old Testament is not applicable today because it was written to the Jews of the Old Covenant. Yes, and it is interpreted in that light. But, it is profitable Scripture and instructive and relevant in all times.

The book of Hebrews is written first and foremost to Jewish Christians who made up a large portion of the Church at Jerusalem and who were scattered throughout Judea and Asia minor and were members of the various churches.

Verse one gives us a clue that this is a special address to Jewish Christians.

*God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.*

This tells us how God spoke to the Jews in the past. The fathers of course were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve sons of Jacob.

*Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.*

The whole character of the book is Jewish in tone. And it is encouraging the Jewish Christians not to return to the old Jewish rites and ceremonies but to hold on to Christ.

### The Purpose of the book

The book of Hebrews was written to instruct Jewish believers that Judaism had been superceded by Christianity.

A large proportion of the early church was made up of Jewish converts to Christ. And these Jewish Christians continued to labor under the old Jewish rites and ceremonies. It was hard to wean them away from a system of religion that they were born into and which they were taught from the earliest age.

And yet, once Christ came as the fulfillment of the law and the sum and substance of all these old types, it was now appropriate to break away from the old covenant terms and cling only to Christ.

Hebrews is a systematic argument which compares Christ to all of these Old Covenant rites and ceremonies and concludes that Christ is far better.

Many of the Jews were able to accept the fact that Gentiles would

now be allowed into the community of believers. But, they supposed that the Gentiles would have to adopt Judaism and all the rites and ceremonies. No says the book of Hebrews. Christ is all in all. He is the sum and substance of the Jewish religion and the significance of the old ceremonies pales into insignificance compared to the glory of Christ.

So Hebrews is a systematic comparison of Christianity to Judaism. It reveals the Old Covenant as being merely the type of which Christ is the substance.

### The Theme of Hebrews

The theme of Hebrews is the superabounding excellence of Christianity over Judaism. Since the sum and substance of Christianity is Christ and Christ alone, Hebrews seeks to show that Christ is immeasurably superior to all that had gone on before.

He is superior to all the prophets. (1:1-3)

He is superior to the angels. (1:4-2:18)

He is superior to Moses. (3:1-19)

He is superior to Joshua. (4:1-13)

He is superior to Aaron. (5:14-7:18)

He is superior to the whole ritual of Judaism. (7:19-10:39)

He is superior to each and every Old Testament saint. (11:1-12:3)

Note how many times the word better is used in Hebrews:

4:1 – better than angels

7:19 – a better hope

7:22 – a better testament

8:6 – better promises

9:23 – better sacrifices

10:34 – better substance

11:16 – a better country

11:35 – a better resurrection

11:40 – a better thing

Note the word great in the book of Hebrews:

2:3 – a great salvation. There was a certain earthly salvation for the Jewish nation under the Old Covenant. They would be saved from their enemies

and from pestilence and from diseases. But the salvation that is found in Christ is a much greater salvation.

4:14 – The great High Priest.

9:11 – The great tabernacle.

13:20 – The great Shepherd of the Sheep

The underlying theme of the book of Hebrews is that the old rites and ceremonies should be given up in favor of what they had gained in Christ. The centerpiece of Judaism was the temple and the priesthood and the sacrifices. But all of these should now be relinquished and abolished in favor of Christ who is the real temple of God and the real priest and the real sacrifice for sins.