

# HEBREWS

## HEBREWS — INTRODUCTION

In the case of Hebrews there is uncertainty as to the authorship. It may have been written by Paul, or Apollos, or some one else, we can not tell absolutely. There is also uncertainty as to the church. While Jewish Christians are in mind, yet there is no positive knowledge as to where they were located, whether at Jerusalem, Alexandria, or Rome.

But while uncertainty exists as to these particulars, there can be none as to the reason for writing the epistle. No one can read it carefully without perceiving a twofold object, viz: to comfort the Christians under persecution, and to restrain them from apostasy on account of it. The persecution must have been severe, judging by the nature of the temptation to which it gave rise. For the apostasy contemplated was not like that of the Galatians, the supplementing of faith by the works of the law, but the renunciation of that faith altogether and the return to Judaism. It is the assumption that the temple was still standing with its glorious history and magnificent priesthood, and that the followers of Moses were allowed to pursue their religion in peace. All this was different from the outward meanness and poverty, and tribulation of those seeking to follow the Nazarene.

### THEME

There were many lines of argument open to Paul (for convenience, we assume he is the writer), by which to counteract this tendency towards apostasy, but he chooses only one: Christianity is superior to Judaism as seen in its Founder, Christ. The tempter is represented as urging that Judaism was introduced by "the godly fellowship of the prophets." "Christ is superior to the prophets!" Judaism was ministered to Israel through angels. "Christ is superior to the angels!" Judaism owes its position to Moses. "But Christ is superior to Moses!" Judaism is associated with the divinely instituted priesthood of Aaron. "Christ is superior to Aaron!"

These are the main points, but the whole revolves around the single argument already indicated.

And yet the apostle does not go straight on with his argument. He makes a digression, sometimes at the close of a division of his theme, and sometimes in the middle of it, warning his hearers, comforting or exhorting them to steadfastness in the faith. This we shall see as we proceed.

### GENERAL OUTLINE

The general outline of the epistle is something like this:

1. Christ is Shown to be Superior to the Prophets (1:1-3);
2. Superior to the Angels (1:4, 2:18);
3. Superior to Moses (3:1-19);
4. Superior to Joshua (4:1-16);
5. superior to Aaron (5:1, 10:18).

These divisions with the parenthetic warnings and exhortations make up the book.

### QUESTIONS

1. What two uncertainties exist as to this epistle?
2. What was the two-fold occasion for its writing?
3. What was the nature of the temptations in this case?
4. What is the single theme of the epistle?
5. Of what does it consist beside argument?
6. Give the general outline.

## HEBREWS 1-2 — CHRIST AND THE ANGELS

While in these chapters, the comparison is chiefly between Christ and the angels, yet they open with an important contrast between him and the prophets (1:1-3), in which His superiority is seen in seven particulars:

1. He is God's Son.
2. He is Heir of all things.

3. He made the worlds.
4. He is the Express Image of God.
5. He Himself purged our sins.
6. He upholds all things.
7. He is seated at the right hand of God.

The "express image" of God is equivalent to "God." Our comment on <sup><small>SOUS</sup>Colossians 1:15 will aid here, or compare this same epistle 10:1, where "image" is used for the very substance of that which is referred to, though in the Greek it is not so strong a word as that in the lesson.

Christ however is superior to the angels in five particulars:

- (1) they have the name of angels, He the Name of Son (1:4-5);
- (2) they are worshippers, He is the Worshipped (v. 6 RV);
- (3) they are creatures, He the Creator (vv. 7-12);
- (4) they are the ministers of salvation, He is its Author (vv. 13-14); and
- (5) they are subjects in the age to come, He is its Ruler (2:5-9).

The amplification of the last thought is majestic, bringing out the four steps in the work of the Redeemer from His incarnation until His ultimate triumph over every foe. For a little while was he lower than the angels, i.e., during His earthly humiliation; now He is crowned with glory and honor; during the millenium will He be set over the works of God's hands, and finally in the age that follows will all things be put under His feet (vv. 6-9). For all this His suffering was necessary, not for His own sake but our sake (v. 10). We have become sons of God through faith in Him, in which sense He that sanctifieth and we who are sanctified "are all of one," i.e., our origin is from God. This explains the verses that follow to the end of the chapter.

In this lesson we meet with the digressions spoken of, one occurring in the middle of the argument (2:1-4), and another at its close (2:9-18). The first is warning, the second comfort. If the earlier dispensation, that of Judaism, punished every transgression and disobedience, how shall we escape if we neglect this greater light, the heavenly origin of which was demonstrated by witnesses confirming and being themselves confirmed? On the other hand, think of your privileges! Your exaltation to the position of brethren,

and your claim upon the Lord of glory as your true High priest, faithful, merciful, capable and sympathetic.

## QUESTIONS

1. Name the seven particulars in which Christ is superior to the prophets.
2. What is the equivalent of the words, "Express Image of God"?
3. Name the five particulars in which Christ is superior to the angels.
4. Bring out the four steps in the work of the Redeemer.
5. What is the meaning of the phrase "All of one"?
6. What two "digressions" are found in this lesson?

## HEBREWS 3-4 — COMPARED WITH MOSES AND JOSHUA

The superiority of Christ to Moses is shown in chapter 3, the comparison in which case runs in two parallel lines of two members each:

1. Moses a servant over God's house (3:5).
2. Christ a Son over His own house (3:6).

That is an interesting phrase, "Whose house are we" (v. 6), suggesting a plan for a sermon. In what sense are believers Christ's house?

He built them: "without him was not anything made that was made."

He bought them: "Ye are not for your own, for ye are bought with a price." He occupies them: "Ye in me and I in you."

As in the preceding instances we have a digression at this point in the nature of warning (vv. 7-19). In the first reading omit the parenthesis after "wherefore" (3:7) down to the close of verse 11, which will simplify the thought. The idea is that because of the greater importance of the New Testament revelation over that of the Old Testament as evidenced in the superiority of the messenger, we should take heed lest through unbelief we fall away from God, as did Israel in the wilderness. They tempted God, and as a result, the males over twenty years of age were not permitted to enter into the rest of Canaan (vv. 16-18). The Holy Ghost used that sad episode

in their early history as a warning to them at a later time, i.e., in David's day (compare vs. 7 ff., with ~~ORR~~ Psalm 95:8-11), and it was just as applicable now to these Hebrew Christians. Therefore, they should exhort one another against "the deceitfulness of sin" and to steadfastness in the faith.

The allusion to the rest of Canaan naturally leads to a comparison of Christ with Joshua in chapter 4, which may be outlined thus:

- (1) Israel failed of God's rest through unbelief (3:16-19);
- (2) We Christians may fail of God's rest through unbelief (4:1-2);
- (3) This rest is not Canaan however (vv. 3-9); but
- (4) the rest of faith in God through Christ (v. 10); and
- (5) it is to be diligently sought (vv. 11-13).

The proof that this rest is not Canaan is twofold: it was spoken of long before Canaan was revealed, even at the creation of the world (vv. 3-5); and it was spoken of long after Israel had entered Canaan as something still to be had. This last thought is brought out clearer in the Revised Version where "Jesus" of verse 8 is translated "Joshua," which has the same meaning.

It is important to understand what this rest is. In the first place, it is God's rest and not our rest. And God's rest does not mean cessation from work on His part, but rather his joy and delight in that work as good and perfect. In this sense He rested from creation on the seventh day, a rest which was marred by sin, but now the new rest of which he speaks is that of redemption, typified by Israel's deliverance from Egypt and entrance into Canaan. As a matter of fact God rests in Christ as the Redeemer and Restorer of fallen man, and where He rests there only can we rest. It is not death that can be rest to us, but only Christ, and this because the secret of our unrest is sin and He only can take away sin in every aspect of it. Of course, the perfect enjoyment of this rest is still future. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." It is not a rest of inactivity, but of peace and harmony with all that is within and around us. Glory to God for this expectation! The sense in which we are diligently to seek it (v. 11), is not that of self-righteous works on our part, but a carefulness not to fall into unbelief. The relation of the words that follow in this chapter (vv. 12-16)

with those preceding, seems in general terms to be this: the Christian is to rest in faith, and labor to enter into the rest that remaineth, but this means that he must be guided and instructed by the Word of God, and upheld and encouraged by the sympathy and intercession of His Great High priest.

## QUESTIONS

1. State the two parallel lines of comparison between Christ and Moses.
2. In what sense may it be said that we are Christ's house?
3. Explain the warnings in verses 7-19.
4. Give an outline of chapter 4.
5. What two facts prove that "rest" other than Canaan is intended?
6. How would you explain the rest?
7. When will this rest be perfectly entered upon by the Christian?
8. In what sense are we to seek it?
9. What relation do the concluding verses of chapter 4 bear to the preceding?

## HEBREWS 5-7 — CHRIST AND MELCHISEDEC

It has already become evident to the careful reader that the author of this epistle is particularly desirous to bring out the comparison between the priesthood of Christ and that of Aaron. He approached it at the close of chapter 2 (vv. 17-18), and was on the point of making the comparison (3:1) when he was led into the digression about Moses (vv. 2-6), and then Joshua (4:4-11). But he returns to it again at the close of chapter 4 (see vv. 14-16), and at the beginning of chapter 5 clears the way for its discussion by the dictum that Christ was a priest. This is necessary to be proven before he can advance, and he proves it in two ways. Christ was a priest in that he possessed our human nature with its capacity for sympathy (vv. 1-3), and in that He received the divine appointment to that office as Aaron did (vv. 4-10). His appointment however, was after another order than Aaron — that of Melchisedec (vv. 6, 10), of whom he will speak later after a digression of warning and encouragement.

## TEACHING ABOUT APOSTASY

This digression covers 5:12-6:29, and consists of an explanation as to why they should be so seriously tempted to apostatize (v. 11-14). Paul's readers had become "dull of hearing," spiritually deaf to the appeals of the Gospel. They had been in the faith long enough to become teachers of others, and yet they themselves needed teaching again, even in the A-B-C of the Scripture. They were still babes in Christ, as indicated by their lack of experience in the word. The offset to this, or the remedy for their situation, was to grow in grace and divine knowledge (6:1-3). To leave "the principles of the doctrine of Christ" does not mean to discard the foundation of the Gospel but rather to build upon it. "Perfection" refers not to sinlessness but to full growth in the knowledge of Christ. "Repentance for dead works" means those not wrought for God's glory. "Faith towards God" was so primary that once experienced it was inconsistent to think of its being "laid" again. "The doctrine of baptisms" may mean "washings," "ablutions," after the purifying of the Jews. "Laying on of hands" was a symbolic act among the Jews connected with prayer and invoking the divine benedictions. Note that "the resurrection of the dead" with "eternal judgment," which some Christians in these days affect to doubt, was considered a primary doctrine of the New Testament church. The six particulars here named were fundamental, and yet as Dr. Saphir says, they did not set before these Hebrew Christians with sufficient fullness the truth of which they stood in need to keep them from apostasy, and to strengthen them in their sore temptation.

The peril of their situation is set forth in verses 4-8. Some think these "present the case of a Jewish professed believer who turns back from Christ after advancing to the very threshold of salvation," but who never experienced real faith. But we differ, and hold the opinion that a true believer is meant. It is not said however, that such an one will be lost, indeed the opposite is shown to be the case (v. 9), but this warning is given to keep him from being lost.

Their encouragement in the premises follows (vv. 9-20). They were bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit, let them thus continue in well-doing (vv. 10-12). Their salvation was secured by the divine promise confirmed by the divine oath (vv. 12-18). Nay more, they had laid hold upon the hope, which as an anchor of the soul had entered into that which is within

the veil. Jesus Himself was their hope, and He had entered there "an high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec."

### MELCHISEDEC A TYPE

We are now brought back again to Melchisedec, who is described and compared with Christ (7:1-3). For his historical record see <sup><0147></sup>Genesis 14:17-20. He is a type of Christ in his office as a king-priest (see <sup><862></sup>Zechariah 6:12-13); in his name, "king of righteousness" (<sup><23106></sup>Isaiah 11:5); and in his location, "king of Salem," i.e., peace (<sup><23106></sup>Isaiah 11:6-9). Also in the fact that he had "neither beginning of days nor end of life." This last does not mean that it was literally so in his case, but that so far as the record went it appeared so. (Compare here <sup><800></sup>John 1:1; <sup><8109></sup>Romans 6:9; and <sup><8173></sup>Hebrews 7:23-25.) After this description and comparison the inspired writer shows the superiority of his order to that of Aaron in seven particulars (vv. 4-24): Abraham gave him tithes (vv. 4-6), he blessed Abraham (vv. 6-7); he was an undying priest, i.e., so far as the record goes he did not see death (v. 8); the unborn Levi (or Levitical priesthood) paid him tithes in the person of Abraham (vv. 9-10); the permanence of his priesthood, continued by Christ, implied the abrogation of the whole Levitical law (vv. 11-19); His priesthood was founded on an oath (vv. 20-22); it was intransmissible, not being vacated by death (vv. 23-24). The whole argument is summed up in verses 25-28.

### QUESTIONS

1. What seems to be the chief purpose of the author?
2. Indicate his approaches to it.
3. In what two ways is Christ shown to be a priest?
4. Name four main divisions of the digression in this case.
5. What is the meaning of these words or phrases: "perfection," "repentance for dead works," "the doctrine of baptisms"?
6. What is the object of the warning in 6:4-6?
7. In what ways is Melchisedec a type of Christ?
8. Name the seven particulars in which his order shows superiority to that of Aaron.



## HEBREWS 8-10:18 — PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST AND AARON

### CHRIST IS A PRIEST OF A BETTER COVENANT THAN AARON (CHAP. 8)

Better not morally, but efficaciously, i.e., established on better promises (v. 6), in the sense that they are written on the heart rather than tablets of stone (v. 10); that they are universal in their application and not limited to a single people (v. 11); and that they bring with them eternal forgiveness.

#### CHRIST IS A PRIEST OF A BETTER TABERNACLE (9:1-14)

- It is not a material but a spiritual structure (v. 11).
- It is hallowed not by the blood of beasts but by His own blood (v. 12).
- It stands not for temporary but eternal redemption (vv. 12-14).

#### CHRIST IS A PRIEST OF A BETTER SACRIFICE (9:15-10:18)

- Not a sacrifice of calves and goats (v. 19) but the sacrifice of Himself (9:23);
- Not a sacrifice repeated every year (v. 25) but offered only once (9:26);
- A sacrifice which does away with the covenant of the Old Testament and establishes that of the New (10:5-9).

The reference to the sacrifice offered but once is worked out richly: first, the fact is stated (9:24-26); secondly, an inference is drawn from it (10:1-3); third, the fact is emphasized anew (vv. 4-13), and finally its precious truth is applied (vv. 14-18).

### QUESTIONS

1. In what sense is the covenant of Christ's priesthood better than that of Aaron?
2. In what sense is it established on better promises?

3. In what sense is Christ a priest of a better tabernacle?
4. In what sense is He a priest of a better sacrifice?
5. Have you tried to work out in detail the exposition of 9:24-10:18?

## HEBREWS 10:19-12:29 — TRIUMPHS OF FAITH

This lesson covers one of the many digressions alluded to and is first, an exhortation (10:19-25); secondly, a warning (vv. 26-31), and thirdly, an expression of comfort (vv. 32-39). This last touches on the principle of faith and gives occasion for an exhibition of its triumph in the lives of the Old Testament saints that makes the 11th chapter rank with the most notable in the Bible.

The exhortation (10:19-25) keeps in mind that these Hebrew Christians were sorely tried by persecution and seriously tempted not merely to backslide, but to apostatize, i.e., give up Christianity altogether and return to Judaism again. The inspired writer is seeking to restrain them from so doing by the argument that Christianity is superior to Judaism as seen in its Founder, Christ. All that was symbolized in Aaronic priesthood is realized in Christ's priesthood. The Aaronic priest passed through the veil of the temple into the Holy Place, while Christ through His suffering passed for believers into glory. The Aaronic priests were purified from ceremonial defilement by being sprinkled with blood (<sup><1022></sup>Exodus 29:21, <sup><1023></sup>Leviticus 8:30), and washed in the laver of pure water, but the Christian believer's sins are so surely put away that as priests unto God they may draw near in fullness of assurance. Therefore they should hold fast the confession of their faith and provoke, urge, one another to love and to good works, the means of doing which was best found in the sacred assemblies which they were not to forsake.

The warning (vv. 26-31) does not call particularly for explanation.

The comfort (vv. 32-39) is notable for its reference to the reward to be realized by the believer at the second coming of Christ. Verse 37 might be rendered "for yet but a very very little while," showing that the Christians of that generation were expecting him in their own day, which should be true of every generation. Speaking of "faith" in verse 38, it is introduced with the writer's usual skill to prepare for the next great section of the epistle.

## WHAT FAITH DOES

Entering on that section the same author remarks that it would have been fatal to the peace of mind of Jewish converts, such as here addressed, to feel that there was a chasm between their Christian faith and the faith of their past life. Hence the inspired writer shows that there is no discontinuity of that kind. Their faith was identical with, though transcendentally more blessed than that which had sustained the patriarchs, prophets and martyrs of their nation. Verse 1 of chapter 11 defines faith rather in its effects than its essence; i.e., it tells what it does, bringing the assurance of things hoped and the proof of things not seen. In verses 2-40 we have the fruit of faith, or its effect, in detail. In 12:1-4 we have the testimony of faith, in verses 5-11 its comfort, in verses 12-17, its duty, in verses 18-24 its encouragement, and in verses 25-29 its warning.

It is noticeable that passing from particular to general illustrations of faith, we have in 11:32-34 those of active, and in verses 35-38, those of passive faith, most of which are gathered from the books of Joshua, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, though doubtless the time of the Maccabees is also in mind. Verses 39-40 may be paraphrased thus: these all had good witness borne to them through their faith, but still they did not see the fulfillment of the one great promise, which awaited the dispensation to follow.

The witnesses of 12:1 are not spectators of us on earth, but testifiers to us of what faith can do. In other words they are those of the preceding chapter from whose lives we are to learn. The rest of the verse is athletic in its figures of speech. The athlete lays aside every heavy or dragging article of dress, and so we should throw off "the clinging robe of familiar sin," "looking unto Jesus" not only as a higher example of faith than any previously named, but as "the author and finisher of our faith." From Him our faith comes, and by Him it is sustained to the end.

The reference to Esau verses 16-17 is ambiguous, and may mean that so far as his father Isaac was concerned, there was "no place of repentance," in the sense that Isaac had no power to change his mind and alter his promise. Or it may mean that Esau could not avert the earthly consequences of his folly, or regain what he had once flung away. And another says, "the text gives no ground for pronouncing on Esau's future fate, to which the inspired writer makes no allusion whatever."

Notice six particulars (some try to discover seven) in which Matthew Sinai and Matthew Zion are contrasted in verses 18-24.

## QUESTIONS

1. Divide the chapters of this lesson into four main parts.
2. Give in your own words the substance of the exhortation.
3. How does 11:1 define faith?
4. Give an outline analysis of chapters 11-12.
5. What books of the Bible furnish most of these examples of faith?
6. How would you explain 12:1?
7. How would you explain the reference to Esau?
8. Do you find six or seven particulars of comparison in verses 18-24?

## HEBREWS 13 — CONCLUDING EXHORTATIONS

Farrar thinks that the exhortations of this chapter being mostly of a general character, probably formed a characteristic feature in all the Christian correspondence of this epoch — interesting if true.

### BROTHERLY LOVE (VV. 1-3)

A virtue undreamed of until the time of Christianity, but peculiarly necessary among members of a persecuted sect like these Hebrew Christians. (See also <sup><520></sup>Romans 12:10; <sup><504></sup>1 Thessalonians 4:9; <sup><602></sup>1 Peter 1:22; <sup><614></sup>1 John 3:14-18).

Here it was expected to take a very practical turn, made necessary by the absence of places of public entertainment like our hotels and boarding houses (<sup><523></sup>Romans 12:13; <sup><508></sup>Titus 1:8; <sup><540></sup>1 Timothy 3:2; <sup><600></sup>1 Peter 4:9). For illustrations of the latter part of verse 2, see <sup><020></sup>Genesis 28:2-22; <sup><012></sup>Judges 13:2-14; also <sup><055></sup>Matthew 25:35-40. If Paul was the writer of this epistle, how particularly touching is the reference in verse 3? "Being yourselves also in the body" may be related to what he says to the Colossians (1:24; see comment).

**CHASTITY (V. 4)**

Light is thrown on the meaning here by the RV (see ~~445D~~ Acts 15:20; ~~5046~~ 1 Thessalonians 4:6). The Gospel of Christ introduced a wholly new conception of the sin of fornication which among the heathen was not regarded as a sin.

**CONTENTMENT (VV. 5-6)**

"Conversation" here means "your turn of mind": let it be "free from the love of money." The rest of the section gives good reason for such trustfulness.

**STEDFASTNESS AND HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS (VV. 7-16)**

Verse 7 is rendered in the past tense in the RV "them that had the rule over you," which is more consistent with the words "whose faith follow." "The end of their conversation" means "the outcome of their life and testimony." Their "faith" is expressed in the terms of verse 8, to which the readers are further exhorted in verse 9. The close of verse 9 points back again to the Jewish ceremonials they had left and to which some of them were being tempted to return again. Such sacrificial altars they did not require as they had a better one (v. 10). Christ Himself is the Christian's "altar" as well as that which is upon it. On Him the Christian feeds in a heavenly and spiritual sense. Verse 13 is another of the many exhortations for these Jewish Christians to separate themselves from their past at whatever cost for Jesus' sake, while verse 14 offers the encouragement for them to do it (refer to ~~518D~~ Philippians 3:20). The sacrifices we have to offer through Christ are not the bodies of beasts, but thanksgiving and good works (15:16).

**SPIRITUAL OBEDIENCE (V. 17)****PRAYER FOR THE WRITER (VV. 18-19)****BENEDICTION (VV. 20-21)****CONCLUSION (VV. 22, 25)**

**QUESTIONS**

- 1.** What is Farrar's idea about these exhortations?
- 2.** What two practical applications of brotherly love are indicated in the lesson?
- 3.** How are we to understand verse 4?
- 4.** Why may true Christians be content?
- 5.** What summing up of the Christian's faith is found in verse 8?
- 6.** How would you explain verses 9-10?
- 7.** What sacrifice has the Christian to offer?
- 8.** Memorize the benediction of verses 20-21.