

**A LOOK AT THE BOOK  
HEBREWS  
JESUS IS THE BEST!**

Ralph Porter

*Have you ever been pressured to give in or compromise, to ease the pressure of taking a stand for Christ?*

Hebrews is a book that deals with the pressure we all face occasionally, to compromise our convictions, lest we stand out in a crowd and make a fool of ourselves, or maybe even have to pay a price for our faith.

***The way of the godly has never been easy!***

2 Tim. 3:12: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted!"

In some parts of the world today, public identification with Christ through baptism *still* brings the same kind of persecution it brought on Jewish believers in the first century.

Our beliefs are under attack today too.

*In our lifetime it may result in actual physical persecution!*

## **AUTHOR AND DATE**

***Who wrote the letter?***

The author of Hebrews is a mystery today, though it certainly was no mystery to the early readers of the letter.

Debate has continued from the tradition of the early church to the present day.

The main discussion focuses around whether Paul was the author.

Differences of style, although not conclusive, seem to argue against Pauline authorship.

If Paul was not the author, it's not clear who was.

Other candidates include Barnabas, Luke, Apollos, and Clement of Rome.

None of these offers definitive evidence.

*Since God didn't choose to identify him, it's probably not that important to know!*

***When did he write it?***

The book depicts a time of severe persecution for the sake of the gospel, which would place it near the time of James or 1 Peter.

References to the continuing sacrifices in the temple indicate that it had not yet been destroyed (10:11; 13:11-13).

Thus the letter must have been written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

It appears that the date would be near A.D. 65.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

***To whom did he write it?***

Hebrews was apparently written to (1) scattered Christian Jews who were (3) suffering persecution because they were (2) identified with Christ.

He assumes they were believers--at least that's their profession.

They are under seige--at war

Satan was unleashing all his forces against them.

To escape from the persecution, many have returned to Judaism.

Many who have not yet returned are (4) considering turning back.

The author writes

to help them consider the implications of such a move  
and to urge them not to turn back.

## PURPOSE AND THEME

*Why did he write to them?*

13:22--a "letter of exhortation" --What is he exhorting them about?

The author's purpose is **to exhort them . . .**

**to endure the persecution.**

[ Rather than turn back, he wants them . . . ]

**to continue growing in their faith.**

*Negatively* he speaks of **the danger of returning to Judaism.**

To go back will not solve their problem.

Judaism has nothing to offer.

It is a bankrupt system.

If they reject the truth, they will be subject to God's judgment which is about to bring destruction to Israel.

*Positively*, he demonstrates that **Christ is better than Judaism.**

He is better because He offers them better access, without restriction to God's presence.

*Therefore*, we should keep on striving and trust God to care for us.

He has obtained the means of entering into the presence of God.

*Therefore*, we should enter with confidence into His presence.

*So why do WE need this message today? Why should WE study Hebrews?*

We're not Hebrew Christians. We're not suffering persecution.

### THREE REASONS:

1. **Doctrinal**--contains extensive teaching over some of our most important beliefs.

If we want to grow to maturity, we must understand certain things about Jesus.

2. **Problem passages**--Some of the most significant problem passages are found here. Unless we understand what the writer is saying, we are easy prey to some who use these passages to contradict *the essence* of the gospel.
3. **Practical application**--Time of testing is coming!  
We need to look occasionally at passages that deal with how God wants us to live in the midst of affliction so we'll be prepared when it does come.  
Hebrews was written to help people live victoriously by faith.

## ORGANIZATION

The book divides into two main sections.

The greater part of the book is doctrinal (1-10:18), while the conclusion is practical in nature (10:19-13:25).

In the **doctrinal** section, the author speaks of **the superiority of Christ over Judaism**.

He is superior in His Person (1-8:5) because He is the best revelation of the Father (1-4:13) and because He is the best High Priest (4:14-8:5).

He is also superior in His work (8:6-10:18).

If Christ is superior to Judaism, then the **proper response** is to **trust Him and endure the persecution** which God allows them to experience.

This is the essence of the **practical** section (10:19-13:25).

### DOCTRINAL TEACHING OF CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO JUDAISM 1-10:18

Our High Priest has obtained for us the means of entering into the presence of God.

To turn back now is useless.

*What would it accomplish?*

Basic conclusions are drawn from comparison of Christ with Judaism.

### SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S PERSON 1-7

The doctrinal teaching first demonstrates the superiority of Christ's Person to the significant persons of Israel's development.

### BEST REVELATION OF THE FATHER 1-4:13

Jesus is a superior Person because He is the best revelation of the Father.

When the storm is raging all around us, one thing we need to know for sure.

It's found in the first sentence.

Subject is found in the first line: *GOD* [Mark that in your Bible!]

Main verb is found in verse two: *HAS SPOKEN* [Mark that!]

When the going gets tough, and we wonder if we'll ever be able to hang on in the midst of the storm, we need to hear that message:

**GOD HAS SPOKEN!**

Our role is to find out what He has said!

Clever advertising jingle: "When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen!"

Swindoll: "In biblical times, when God's prophets talked, God's people listened.

The reason was simple. When a prophet spoke, people knew they were hearing the voice of God.

For centuries, no messages were more powerful or more urgent than those of the prophets.

Warnings and rebukes left their lips like bullets spinning from a smoking barrel.

When they hit their target—the heart—the impact was shattering. . . .

The prophet was God's mouthpiece—His divine voice box

When the Lord had something to communicate, He dropped the mail in their bag.

They had one responsibility: to deliver the message, without adding to or analyzing it.

As a result, prophets became the most feared people in the community.

For it was through them that God spoke."

Author refers to main ones who revealed the Father

—God's spokesmen:

The prophets            The angels            Moses

Christ is better than any of these because He alone is BOTH God AND Man!

Implication: if He provides a better revelation,

then we had better **PAY ATTENTION!**

If God has spoken, we had better LISTEN!

**GOD SPEAKS**

**WE BETTER PAY ATTENTION!**

1:1-2

2:2-3

3:5

4:8

<=

=>

=>

2:1 ff

3:7-8 ff.

4:1-2

4:11-13

*Implication: What are the implications of 1:1-3 for a post-modern society,*

*. . . where your personal beliefs are fine for you, but you shouldn't force them on anybody else?*

*. . . where evangelizing is a "hate crime"?*

He begins with prophets . . .

### **Jesus is better than the prophets 1:1-3**

In the past God spoke to their ancestors in various ways and at various times, through the prophets, His messengers to proclaim His Word.

But now, in these last days, God is doing something far better!

**He has spoken to US through A SON.**

The focus isn't on identifying Jesus as THE Son, but rather on kind of revelation this is.

Focuses on method God used to speak.

He has spoken to us "by Son!"

Jesus isn't just another prophet. He's a SON!

Since God's final revelation is "Son-revelation," emphasis is placed not so much on what the Son has said, but rather, on **Who He is.**

This passage tells us seven reasons why His revelation is better

– it tells us seven things about Jesus and Who He is:

- 1) He is the Heir of everything. He inherits it all!
- 2) He is the Creator of it all.
- 3) He is the reflection of God's glory. He reveals what God is like.
- 4) He is the exact reproduction of all that God is.
- 5) He holds everything together with His Own Word.
- 6) He completed the job of purifying us.
- 7) He sat down, indicating that His work is complete.  
There's nothing more to do. He finished the job!

He is able to give a better revelation because He alone is the Heir and Creator of all things.

He alone radiates the glory of God and is an exact representation of what God is like (cp. John 1:14, 18).

He alone keeps all creation under control.

Finally, He alone has provided purification from our sins.

These unique qualifications demonstrate how Christ is able to provide a superior revelation of God to any that the prophets could ever hope to give!

### **Better than the angels 1:4-2:18**

Jesus also gives a better revelation of the Father than the angels are able to give.

#### **Because He is God 1:4-2:4**

##### **Greater name 1:4-5**

Since He is God, He has a greater Name . . .

##### **Greater position 1:6-14**

. . . and occupies a higher position than the angels.

Since they recognize His superiority, they worship Him.

They are changeable servants but He is the unchangeable and eternal God.

##### **Greater warning 2:1-4**

Therefore, we had better be careful to listen and to obey the revelation which we have received from Him.

#### **Because He is man 2:5-18**

Jesus' revelation is superior to that of angels because He is God, but it is also superior to theirs because He is man.

### **Received man's promises 2:5-8**

God promised man dominion over the entire creation (Gen. 1:28).

Although man has not been able to use this authority, Jesus, the perfect man, has been given this authority.

It is an authority which has not been given to the angels.

### **Identified with man 2:9-18**

As man, Jesus is better able to reveal the Father to men than the angels because He has identified with man.

He became a man.

As a man He became a substitute for man by dying for him.

He is now able to help men and to function as high priest for men.

The angels could do none of these things.

### **Better than Moses 3:1-4:13**

Jesus' revelation of the Father is also superior to that of Moses.

### **Superiority of Christ 3:1-6**

His revelation was superior because He was better than Moses.

Although both were faithful, Moses demonstrated his faithfulness as part of the house, but Christ was the One Who built the house.

Moses was a faithful servant in the house, but Christ was a faithful Son.

Thus their roles were different and Christ's superiority is clearly demonstrated.

### **Warning concerning Christ 3:7-4:13**

Since Jesus' revelation is superior, it is even more important that we hear and obey His message.

The warning from Israel's experience 3:7-19

Israel learned the hard way concerning the cost of disobedience.

They were not allowed to enter the land God had given them.

We had better learn the lesson from their experience.

The promise concerning God's rest 4:1-11

If they failed to believe and were denied entrance to their rest, it is even more important that we trust Him and obey.

Our revelation is superior and the consequences of unbelief will be more significant.

The conclusion concerning our obedience 4:12-13

The conclusion of this warning is that since God's Word is living and effective, we ought to listen to its message and respond in faith.

If we refuse to obey, God knows and is ready to judge His people today, just as He did in Moses' day.

### **BEST HIGH PRIEST 4:14-7:28**

Not only is Jesus superior to other leading people in Israel's history because He is the best revelation of the Father, but also because He is the best High Priest.

#### **His understanding of our weakness 4:14-16**

Jesus is able to serve as our High Priest because He understands our weakness.

He became a man and was tempted in every way as we are.

Thus He is able to help us.

Since we have this kind of High Priest, we can approach Him confidently.

#### **His qualifications as High Priest 5:1-10**

Jesus can function as our High Priest because He fulfills all the qualities a High Priest is required to fulfill.

#### **Function of the High Priest 5:1-4**

The High Priest was required to present offerings and sacrifices for sin, understand the weakness of man, and be appointed by God.

#### **Priesthood of Christ 5:5-10**

Jesus was able to present all these credentials.

He was commissioned by God 5-6

As a man He identified with our suffering 7

He learned by experience what obedience costs us as men 8

Having completed His work, He became the source of salvation and was designated High Priest by God. 9-10

Thus He became a better High Priest than Levi because He met all the prerequisites necessary but had no sin.

### **Their inability to understand 5:11-6:20**

At this point the author interrupts himself to point out the problem he is having trying to explain this doctrine to them because they are not yet able to understand.

#### **The problem 5:11-14**

The problem is that while they have believed long enough to be teachers, they have not used what they have learned.

We need exercise to get our spiritual muscles in shape.

#### **The exhortation 6:1-3**

He urges us to grow up.

We should leave behind the baby food and start developing our muscles, so we can move toward maturity.

#### **The explanation 6:4-8**

They should go on and not turn back to Judaism because of the public disgrace such an act would cause.

As in the case of Israel at Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 14:40-45), God's people could not repent; the damage had been done.

Those who returned from Christ to Judaism to escape persecution were identifying themselves again with the generation that was under the curse for rejection and crucifixion of their Messiah.

If they again identify with that generation, they were publicly voting for Christ's rejection and subjecting themselves to the coming judgment.

#### **His confidence in them 6:9-10**

Having given this warning, the author is confident that his readers will not fall into that trap.

They have been faithful in the past, and he is sure they will continue to demonstrate their faith into the future.

#### **His desire for them 6:11-20**

He urges us to continue to trust God and wait patiently.

God's promises are guaranteed.

Therefore, our hope will not be disappointed.

### **His superiority as High Priest 7:1-28**

Since part of the basis for their assurance is Christ's intercession on their behalf as a High Priest in the Father's presence, the author now returns to the theme of the superiority of Christ as High Priest.

The superiority of Christ is demonstrated by showing that His priesthood was of a superior order to that of Levi.

He was a priest in the order of Melchisedek.

### **Establishment of new order 7:1-3**

Prior to arguing for the superiority of Melchisedek over Levi, the author reminds us of some of the former's principal characteristics:

Abraham paid tithes to him.

He was king of righteousness and of peace.

His priesthood did not depend on his genealogy.

He is presented, in the story, as eternal.

No mention is ever made of his beginning or end.

This is the kind of priesthood in which Christ serves.

### **Inferiority of old order 7:4-28**

Having defined the Melchisedekan priesthood, five reasons are given to demonstrate the inferiority of the priesthood of Levi to this superior priesthood:

Because of tithes given 7:4-10

Abraham testified to the superiority of Melchisedek by paying tithes to him.

Since Levi is a descendant of Abraham, his inferiority is implied in Abraham's symbolic act.

Because new established 7:11-22

Another evidence of the inferiority of the Levitical priesthood is the establishment of this new priesthood.

God's authentication of the new argues for the inadequacy of the old priesthood.

Because of death 7:23-25

The third evidence of inferiority is due to the fact that Levitical priests die and are replaced.

Christ as the eternal High Priest continues forever.

Because of sin 7:26-27a

The fourth evidence of inferiority is based on the priests' need to offer for themselves first.

They are sinners like those they serve.

Christ is a sinless High Priest.

He needs no offering for His own sin.

Because of repetition 7:27b-28

The final evidence of inferiority is that the Levitical priests had to offer sacrifices daily because of their weakness.

Christ offered one sacrifice forever, because His was a perfect sacrifice.

Since we have such a High Priest, we can approach Him in confidence.

### **SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S WORK 8-10:18**

The second major doctrinal basis for not returning to Judaism is the superiority of the ministry of our High Priest.

#### **SERVED BY BETTER HIGH PRIEST 8:1-5**

His ministry is better than others' because it has a better High Priest.

This preliminary argument concerning Christ's work serves as a summary of the preceding chapters and a transition into the discussion of Jesus' ministry.

#### **BASED ON BETTER COVENANT 8:6-13**

Christ's ministry is better because it is based on a new and better covenant.

##### **Deficiency of old covenant 8:6-9**

The replacement of the first covenant with a new covenant is a demonstration that the first was deficient.

The problem with the old covenant: they didn't remain faithful to it.

Thus they stood condemned by it.

##### **Solution through new covenant 8:10-12**

The new covenant solved the problem because God changed the heart.

It did not depend on them, but on God.

##### **Obsolescence of old covenant 8:13**

The institution of this new covenant with Israel made the old covenant obsolete.

## **OFFERED IN BETTER TABERNACLE 9:1-24**

Christ's ministry is also better in that He serves in a better tabernacle.

### **Deficiency of first tabernacle 9:1-10**

The first tabernacle was deficient because the people did not have direct access to God  
1-8

The sacrifices offered in it were only provisional.

They could not clear the conscience of the offender.

They looked forward to the real solution to the problem in the future 9-10

### **Superiority of new tabernacle 9:11-24**

Thus the new tabernacle is better.

Christ dwells in this new tabernacle.

Both it and its sacrifices are permanent.

## **OFFERED A BETTER SACRIFICE 9:25-10:18**

Finally, Christ's ministry is better because He offers a better sacrifice.

His sacrifice purifies the true temple.  
Levi's only purifies the figure, the earthly temple.

His sacrifice is presented before God Himself.  
The priests only entered a copy of God's temple.

The Levitical priests offered the blood of others.  
Christ offered His own blood.

Theirs was offered many times;  
His was offered only once.  
There is no need to offer more.

The offerings of the Levites couldn't make us perfect.  
His did.

Theirs made us remember sin.  
His caused us to forget it.

Their offerings could not take away sin.  
His removes sin forever.

In case the contrasts themselves aren't enough. Let me add a few additional reasons why Jesus' offering is superior to that of the priests:

Christ's offering was superior because He was obedient.

He has been seated at the right hand of the Father.  
His work is complete.  
He has even changed our hearts so that we are no longer obligated to sin.

Thus we see that in every way Christ has more to offer than Judaism.  
His Person and His work are superior to Judaism.  
Therefore, we should draw near to Him.

### **PRACTICAL RESPONSE TO CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO JUDAISM 10:19-13:25**

On the basis of the doctrine of Christ's superiority already established, the author presents the proper response for God's people.

#### **EXHORTATION TO FAITH 10:19-12:17**

The primary response he calls for is to trust God and remain faithful to Him.

#### **Basis for faith 10:19-21**

He reviews the message already proclaimed that we have a better High Priest whose ministry is better as a basis for their faith.

#### **Call to faith 10:22-25**

His exhortation to trust God and remain faithful contains three appeals, each of which is a call to trust and obedience.

He calls us to draw near to Christ by faith 10:22

Negatively, this is an appeal not to turn from Him.

Positively, it is an appeal to enter His presence with confidence.

He then urges us to hold firmly to our hope, without wavering because He is faithful and will not fail us. 10:23

Finally, we are not to give in to discouragement, but rather to encourage one another.  
10:24-25

#### **Warning concerning apostasy 10:26-31**

The author explains the reason they should trust God and remain faithful.

This is his most serious warning and the climactic appeal of the book.

He addresses directly the problem of believers who are on the verge of giving in under the weight of persecution and returning to Judaism.

He exhorts them to endure by faith, for God is able to deliver them and Judaism is bankrupt.

Disobedience in the light of such clear revelation will solve nothing and bring severe judgment.

This voluntary sin parallels the deliberate sin of Israel for which there is no sacrifice and which results in physical death (cf. Num. 15:30-31).

Therefore they should keep on striving and watch God work on their behalf.

### **Expectation of faith 10:32-39**

Because of their previous faithfulness in the midst of persecution, the author is confident that they will trust God and remain faithful.

His purpose is to remind them, help them see God's perspective, and encourage them.

### **Examples of faith 11:1-12:1**

Examples from history of great men of God who have trusted Him in the face of adverse circumstances are used to encourage us to follow in their footsteps.

After presenting a working definition of faith (11:1-3), the author presents a long list of examples of people who risked their lives and were willing to pay a high price, if need be, because they trusted God (11:4-40).

Special emphasis is placed on the two greatest figures in Israel's history, Abraham and Moses, to demonstrate that from the beginning faith was the key characteristic of God's people.

The list of examples continued down through the prophets, the intertestamental period, and probably extended as far as some men of God they themselves had known (11:32-40).

The author uses these unnamed individuals to teach another lesson.

*All* these people gave testimony to the importance of faith.

*Some* of them were miraculously saved and God was glorified by their salvation (11:32-35a).

*Others* paid for their faith with their lives (11:35b-38). Yet God was still glorified!

God used each according to His purpose, and to further His program (11:39-40)

He wants to use us in the same way.

Therefore the author exhorts us to remove all obstacles and follow their example (12:1).

### **Supreme example of faith 12:2-3**

The supreme example of trust and faithfulness in the midst of persecution is Jesus.

He was willing to die on the cross, suffering at the hands of men over whom He had power to cause immediate death, to fulfill God's plan and make possible our salvation.

If He could pay that price for us, we ought to be able to suffer for Him, even if it means death.

### **Exhortation against discouragement 12:4-13**

The author exhorts us not to give in to discouragement.

### **Danger of rejection 12:14-17**

The danger of rejection is presented by the illustration of Esau.

Esau was willing to sell his inheritance for a meal.

As a result, he lost the physical blessings to which he was entitled and no amount of repentance or tears could restore them.

Likewise, these brethren ought not to surrender to the temptation to escape affliction by selling their stand for Christ or they will lose their blessing and be subject to the coming judgment.

### **Importance of decision 12:18-29**

The consequences of this decision are far greater than those of Israel's unbelief in the desert.

This is not just an issue of a brilliant and frightening revelation of the presence of God such as theirs at Sinai. This is far more significant.

We have a far superior revelation, a far superior High Priest, and a far superior priestly ministry.

They are faced with a decision affecting the One who is God Himself, the Judge of the Universe.

They had better make the right decision, their lives are at stake.

Those who trust Him can worship Him with all confidence, but also with reverence.

### **SPECIFIC EXHORTATIONS BASED ON FAITH 13:1-19**

Having concluded the main thesis of the book, the major exhortation is rightly accompanied by various specific exhortations which a person of faith should follow.

These specific applications demonstrate the reality of their faith.

**Love one another 13:1-3**

While so many are suffering, there is an extraordinary opportunity for God's people to demonstrate their love for one another.

Their brethren need help and support as never before.

**Maintain sexual purity 13:4**

Biblical morality in sexual matters is important.

**Be content with what you have 13:5-6**

This is not the time to pursue personal financial gain.

We ought to be content with what we have and trust God to provide what we need.

**Imitate the faith of your leaders 13:7-8**

We ought to imitate the faith of our leaders and together follow Christ's example.

**Follow sound doctrine 13:9-14**

We should observe sound doctrine and not submit to Jewish legalism.

We should be willing to be cut off from society, just as Christ was, in order to be identified with Him.

**Praise God and help one another 13:15-16**

Our sacrifices, as those cut off from the ceremonial sacrifices of Israel, should be those of praising God and helping one another.

**Submit to your leaders 13:17**

We ought to recognize the authority which God has placed in our leaders and submit to them.

As we work together, under the authority God has established, their task will be a joyful one, not a burden.

**Pray for us 13:18-19**

Finally, we should pray for one another, particularly for the writer, that we might live as we should and be free to continue our ministry to others.

**CONCLUDING PRAYER 13:20-21**

Following a concluding prayer that God will enable them to live as they should in their present circumstances, . . .

**CONCLUDING PERSONAL NOTES 13:22-25**

. . . he concludes with some personal matters.