

THE LETTER TO THE --- HEBREWS

DAVID J. MACLEOD



Developed as a study course by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.

The Letter to the Hebrews

David J. MacLeod

Published by:

Emmaus Correspondence School

(A division of ECS Ministries)

PO Box 1028

Dubuque, IA 52004-1028

phone: (563) 585-2070

email: ecsorders@ecsministries.org

website: www.ecsministries.org

First Printed 1998 (AK '98), 2 UNITS

Revised 2003 / 2005 (AK '03 / '05), 3 UNITS

Reprinted 2007 (AK '03 / '05), 3 UNITS

Revised 2011 (AK '11), 3 UNITS

ISBN 978-0-940293-74-8

Code: HEB

Copyright © 1998, 2003, 2011 ECS Ministries

All rights in this course are reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any manner, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system including the Internet without written permission from the publisher. Permission is not needed for brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

For My Beloved Parents,
Elwin and Elizabeth MacLeod

STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS

You have chosen to study *The Letter to the Hebrews*. It is a good choice. This letter exalts the person of our Lord Jesus Christ in a special way. The letter insists on His full deity, His true humanity, and the complete sufficiency of His work on the Cross. Unlike any other New Testament book, Hebrews refers to the priestly work of our Lord. It is important for a proper understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Stress is laid on endurance in the Christian life as well as the doctrine and practice of faith.

Lessons You Will Study

Abbreviations	7
An Outline of Hebrews	9
Introduction	17
1. Hebrews Chapter One	31
2. Hebrews Chapter Two	41
3. Hebrews Chapter Three and Four	53
4. Hebrews Chapter Five	67
5. Hebrews Chapter Six	79
6. Hebrews Chapter Seven	93
7. Hebrews Chapter Eight	107
8. Hebrews Chapter Nine	119
9. Hebrews Chapter Ten	133
10. Hebrews Chapter Eleven	149
11. Hebrews Chapter Twelve	161
12. Hebrews Chapter Thirteen	173
Bibliography	187

Course Components

This course has two parts: this study course and the exam booklet.

How To Study

This study has twelve chapters, and each chapter has its own exam. Begin by asking God to help you understand the material. Read the chapter through at least twice, once to get a general idea of its contents and then again, slowly, looking up any Bible references given.

Begin studying immediately, or if you are in a group, as soon as the group begins. We suggest that you keep a regular schedule by trying to complete at least one chapter per week.

Exams

In the exam booklet there is one exam for each chapter (exam 1 covers chapter 1 of the course). Do not answer the questions by what you think or have always believed. The questions are designed to find out if you understand the material given in the course.

After you have completed each chapter, review the related exam and see how well you know the answers. If you find that you are having difficulty answering the questions, review the material until you think you can answer the questions. It is important that you read the Bible passages referenced as some questions may be based on the Bible text.

How Your Exams Are Graded

Your instructor will mark any incorrectly answered questions. You will be referred back to the place in the course where the correct answer is to be found. After finishing this course with a passing average, you will be awarded a certificate.

If you enrolled in a class, submit your exam papers to the leader or secretary of the class who will send them for the entire group to the Correspondence School.

See the back of the exam booklet for more information on returning the exams for grading.

ABBREVIATIONS

AV	The Authorized Version of the Bible (King James Version)
i.e.	that is
LXX	The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament
ms.	manuscript
mss.	manuscripts
NASB	Holy Bible: <i>The New American Standard Bible</i>
NEB	Holy Bible: <i>The New English Bible</i>
NIV	Holy Bible: <i>The New International Version</i>
NKJV	Holy Bible: <i>The New King James Version</i>
N. T.	New Testament
O. T.	Old Testament
J. B. Phillips	<i>The New Testament in Modern English</i>
RSV	Holy Bible: <i>The Revised Standard Version</i>
v.	verse
viz.	namely
vv.	verses

An Outline of Hebrews

I. CHRIST AS HIGH PRIEST: SUPERIOR IN HIS PERSON

(1:1–7:28)

A. Superior to the Prophets (1:1-3)

1. The Superiority of His Revelation (1:1-2a)
 - a. *Different in Method*
 - b. *Different in Time*
 - c. *Different in Agents*
2. The Superiority of His Person and Work (1:2b-3)
 - a. *His Appointment as Heir*
 - b. *His Lordship over History*
 - c. *His Manifestation of the Divine Attributes*
 - d. *His Embodiment of the Divine Essence*
 - e. *His Government of the Universe*
 - f. *His Provision of Purification of Sins*
 - g. *His Exaltation in Glory*

B. Superior to the Angels (1:4–2:18)

1. Christ Bears the Messianic Title “Son” and Receives Angelic Worship (1:5-6)
 - a. *Christ Is the Messianic Son*
 - b. *Christ Will Receive Angelic Worship*
2. Christ Is the Divine King and Receives Angelic Obedience (1:7-9)
 - a. *Angels Do the Divine Will*
 - b. *Christ Is the Divine King*
3. Christ Is the Eternal Creator, but Angels Are Mutable Creatures, (1:10-12)
 - a. *Christ Is the Eternal Creator*
 - b. *Angels Are Mutable Creatures*
4. Christ Is the Exalted Sovereign, but Angels Are Commissioned Servants (1:13-14)
 - a. *Christ Is the Exalted Sovereign*
 - b. *The Angels Are Commissioned Servants*

5. Warning #1: Christ Is Superior Because of the Message He Gave (A Warning Against Drifting) (2:1-4)
 - a. *The Basis of the Appeal* (v. 1a)
 - b. *The Substance of the Appeal* (v. 1b)
 - c. *The Seriousness of the Appeal* (v. 1c)
 - d. *The Reason for the Appeal* (vv. 2-4)
6. Christ is Superior Because of His Destiny (2:5-9)
 - a. *The Divine Intention for Man (i.e., the human race)* (vv. 5-8a)
 - b. *The Divine Frustration over Man* (v. 8b)
 - c. *The Divine Realization in Man, i.e., in Christ* (v. 9)
7. Christ is Superior Because of His Suffering (2:10-18)
 - a. *He Became Man and Suffered to Bring Many Sons to Glory* (vv. 10-13)
 - b. *He Became Man and Suffered to Bear the Judgment of Sin, viz., death* (vv. 9, 14)
 - c. *He Became Man and Suffered to Make the Devil Powerless* (vv. 14-16)
 - d. *He Became Man and Suffered to Be Our High Priest* (vv. 17-18)

C. Superior to Moses (3:1–4:16)

1. Because Christ is a Son, but Moses was a Servant (3:1-6)
 - a. *The Description of the Readers* (v. 1a)
 - b. *The Designation of the Son* (v. 1b)
 - c. *The Faithfulness of the Son* (v. 2)
 - d. *The Superiority of the Son* (vv. 3-6)
 - e. *The Lesson for the Readers*
2. Warning #2: Christ is Superior Because Rejection of Him is More Serious Than Rejection of Moses (A Warning Against Unbelief) (3:7-19)
 - a. *The Quotation of a Psalm* (vv. 7-11)
 - b. *The Application of the Psalm* (vv. 12-15)
 - 1.) *The need for self examination*, v. 12
 - 2.) *The need for mutual exhortation*, v. 13
 - 3.) *The need for steadfast endurance*, v. 14
 - 4.) *The need for immediate application*, v. 15
 - c. *The Lesson of the Psalm* (vv. 16-19)

3. Because Rest is Attained Exclusively Through Him (4:1-13)
 - a. *It Is a Rest of Faith* (vv. 1-3a)
 - b. *It Is the Rest of God* (vv. 3b-8)
 - c. *It Is a Rest from Works* (vv. 9-10)
 - d. *It Is a Rest after Endurance* (vv. 11-13)
4. Because He Has Better Resources Than Moses (4:14-16)
 - a. *The Dignity of Our High Priest* (v. 14)
 - b. *The Sympathy of Our High Priest* (v. 15)
 - c. *The Sufficiency of Our High Priest* (v. 16)

D. Superior to Aaron (5:1–7:28)

1. The Qualifications of the High Priest (5:1-10)
 - a. *The requirements of the office* (vv. 1-4)
 - b. *The qualifications of Christ* (vv. 5-10)
2. Warning #3: The Consequences of Spiritual Immaturity (5:11–6:20)
 - a. *The Presentation of the Problem* (v. 11)
 - b. *The Evidence of the Problem* (vv. 12-13)
 - c. *The Remedy for the Problem* (v. 14)
 - d. *The Need for Progress in the Christian Life* (6:1-3)
 - e. *The Danger of Apostasy in the Christian Life* (vv. 4-8)
 - f. *The Encouragement to Persevere in the Christian Life* (vv. 9-12)
 - g. *The Promise of God and the Christian Life* (vv. 13-20)
3. The Order of the Priesthood of the Son of God (7:1-28)
 - a. *The Characteristics of the Melchizedekian Priesthood* (vv. 1-3)
 - b. *The Greatness of the Melchizedekian Priesthood* (vv. 4-10)
 - 1.) *Greater than Abraham*, vv. 4-7
 - 2.) *Greater than Levi*, vv. 8-10
 - c. *The Significance of the Melchizedekian Priesthood* (vv. 11-19)
 - 1.) *The failure of the Aaronic priesthood*, vv. 11-14
 - 2.) *The success of the Melchizedekian priesthood*, vv. 15-19
 - d. *The Superiority of the Melchizedekian Priesthood* (vv. 20-27)
 - 1.) *Superior because of a divine oath*, vv. 20-22
 - 2.) *Superior because of a permanent priest*, vv. 23-25
 - 3.) *Superior because of a sinless priest*, vv. 26-27a
 - 4.) *Superior because of an effective sacrifice*, v. 27b
 - e. *The Perfection of the Melchizedekian Priesthood* (v. 28)

II. CHRIST AS HIGH PRIEST: SUPERIOR IN HIS FUNCTIONS (8:1–10:18)

A. He Serves a Better Sanctuary (8:1-6)

1. The Centrality of the High Priesthood of Christ (8:1-2)
2. The Function of the High Priesthood of Christ (8:3)
3. The Scene of the High Priesthood of Christ (8:4-6)

B. He Mediated a Better Covenant (8:7-13)

1. The Terminology of the New Covenant
2. The Institution of the New Covenant
3. The Mediator of the New Covenant
4. The Need of the New Covenant (8:7-8)
5. The Provisions of the New Covenant (8:9-12)
6. The Finality of the New Covenant (8:13)

C. He Performed a Better Ministry (9:1-28)

1. The Earthly Sanctuary of the Old Covenant (9:1-5)
2. The Temporary Rituals of the Old Covenant (9:6-10)
3. The Superior Ministry of the New Covenant (9:11-4)
 - a. *Because of a Better Priesthood* (v. 11a)
 - b. *Because of a Better Sanctuary* (v. 11b)
 - c. *Because of a Better Sacrifice* (v. 12a-b)
 - d. *Because of an Eternal Redemption* (vv. 12c-14)
4. The Perfect Mediator of the New Covenant (9:15-22)
5. The Better Ministry of the New Covenant (9:23-28)
 - a. *Better Because Christ Appears in Heaven for Us* (vv. 23-24)

- b. *Better Because Christ Appeared to Put Away Sin by His Once-for-all Sacrifice* (vv. 25-26)
- c. *Better Because Christ Will Appear to Deliver His People from Judgment* (vv. 27-28)

D. He Offered a Better Sacrifice (10:1-18)

1. Better Because It was the Accomplishment of God's Will Regarding Sacrifice (10:1-10)
 - a. *The Inadequacies of the Old Testament Sacrifices* (vv. 1-4)
 - b. *The Superiority of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ* (vv. 5-10)
2. Better Because Christ is Now a Seated Priest (10:11-14)
 - a. *An Unrepeatable Sacrifice* (vv. 11-13)
 - b. *An Effective Sacrifice* (v. 14)
3. Better Because the Inauguration of a New Covenant Proves that Sin Has Been Put Away (10:15-18)
 - a. *The Testimony of the Holy Spirit* (v. 15)
 - b. *The Substance of His Testimony* (vv. 16-17)
 - c. *The Implications of His Testimony* (v. 18)

III. CHRIST AS HIGH PRIEST: SUPERIOR IN HIS RESOURCES (10:19–13:25)

A. A Call to Steadfastness: Based on a New Access (10:19-39)

1. The Privileges and Duties of Christians (10:19-25)
 - a. *Two Great Privileges* (vv. 19-21)
 - 1.) *We have free access*, vv. 19-20
 - 2.) *We have a great priest*, v. 21
 - b. *Three Solemn Duties* (vv. 22-25)
 - 1.) *Genuine worship and communion*, v. 22a
 - 2.) *Unwavering perseverance*, v. 23
 - 3.) *Mutual encouragement*, vv. 24-25
2. Warning # 4: The Peril of Rejecting Christ (10:26-31)
 - a. *The Danger of Forsaking the Son of God* (vv. 26-27)
 - b. *The Nature of Forsaking the Son of God* (vv. 28-29)
 - c. *The Penalty for Forsaking the Son of God* (vv. 27, 29-31)
3. The Need for Endurance and the Promise of Reward (10:32-39)

- a. *The Evidence of past Endurance* (vv. 32-34)
- b. *The Need for Present Endurance* (vv. 35-36)
- c. *The Incentives to Future Endurance* (vv. 37-39)

B. A Call to Faith: Based on Historical Illustrations (11:1-40)

1. The Nature of Faith (11:1-3)
2. Faith in the Antediluvian (Pre-Flood) Era (11:4-7)
 - a. *The Faith of Abel* (v. 4)
 - b. *The Faith of Enoch* (vv. 5-6)
 - c. *The Faith of Noah* (v. 7)
3. Faith in the Patriarchal Era (11:8-22)
 - a. *The Faith of Abraham* (vv. 8-19)
 - b. *The Faith of Isaac* (v. 20)
 - c. *The Faith of Jacob* (v. 21)
 - d. *The Faith of Joseph* (v. 22)
4. Faith in the Era of the Exodus (11:23-29)
 - a. *The Faith of Amram and Jochebed* (v. 23)
 - b. *The Faith of Moses* (vv. 24-28)
 - c. *The Faith of the People of Israel* (v. 29)
5. Faith in the Era of the Conquest (11:30-31)
 - a. *The Faith of the People of Israel* (v. 30)
 - b. *The Faith of Rahab* (v. 31)
6. Faith in the Era of the Judges, the Kings, and the Exile (11:32-35a)
 - a. *Representative Heroes* (v. 32)
 - b. *Characteristic Achievements* (vv. 33-35a)
7. Other Miscellaneous Illustrations (11:35b-38)
8. The Culmination of Faith (11:39-40)

C. A Call to Hope: Based on Christ's Endurance (12:1-29)

1. Endurance in the Christian Life (12:1-2)
2. Chastening in the Christian Life (12:3-11)

3. Perseverance in the Christian Life (12:12-17)
 - a. *The Overcoming of Discouragement and Spiritual Depression* (vv. 12-13)
 - b. *The Pursuit of Peace and Sanctification* (v. 14)
 - c. *The Need of Pastoral Vigilance* (vv. 15-17)
4. Warning # 5: Departure From the Christian Life (12:18-29)
 - a. *The Privileges Awaiting the Pilgrims* (vv. 18-24)
 - b. *The Peril Facing the Pilgrims* (vv. 25-29)
 - 1.) *The danger of unbelief*, v. 25
 - 2.) *The certainty of judgment*, vv. 26-27
 - 3.) *The motives for endurance*, vv. 28-29

D. A Call to Love: Based on God's Grace (13:1-25)

1. Ethical Imperatives for Christian Pilgrims (13:1-6)
 - a. *The Imperative of Brotherly Love* (vv. 1-3)
 - b. *The Imperative of Sexual Purity* (v. 4)
 - c. *The Imperative of Financial Contentment* (vv. 5-6)
2. Congregational Imperatives for Christian Pilgrims (13:7-17)
 - a. *Remembering Our Godly Heritage* (v. 7)
 - b. *Considering Our Unchanging Lord* (vv. 8-9)
 - 1.) *The doctrinal standard*, v. 8
 - 2.) *The doctrinal error*, v. 9
 - c. *Responding to Correct Doctrine* (vv. 10-16)
 - d. *Obedying Our Present Leaders* (v. 17)
3. Closing Words for Christian Pilgrims (13:18-25)
 - a. *A Request for Prayer* (vv. 18-19)
 - b. *A Prayer for Blessing* (vv. 20-21)
 - 1.) *God's work for us*, v. 20
 - 2.) *God's work in us*, v. 21
 - c. *Some Final Comments* (vv. 22-25)
 - 1.) *An appeal for receptivity*, v. 22
 - 2.) *An announcement of Timothy's arrival*, v. 23
 - 3.) *A greeting to the church*, v. 24
 - 4.) *A closing blessing*, v. 25

INTRODUCTION

You have chosen to study the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is a good choice. With the Book of Romans, Hebrews stands out as one of the two greatest epistles (letters) in the New Testament. One well known Bible teacher (W. G. Moorehead) called Hebrews “the profoundest epistle of the New Testament.” Another (P. E. Hughes) described it as the most fully developed doctrinal writing in the whole of the New Testament. However we respond to remarks like these we must agree with the Jewish Christian, Adolph Saphir, who called it a “grand and massive book.”

Whenever we begin a study of a book of the Bible we should ask and answer certain questions: Who wrote the book? When did he write it? To whom did he write it? Why did he write it? When we ask these questions we learn why one writer (E. F. Scott) has called Hebrews “the riddle of the New Testament,” for these questions are difficult to answer. Godly Bible teachers have differed in their answers. This should not disturb us, however, because it is possible to understand the epistle as a whole without reaching conclusions on these introductory matters.

WHY SHOULD WE STUDY HEBREWS?

We can begin with a question that is easy to answer: Why should we study Hebrews? Let me suggest a number of doctrinal reasons. First, this epistle exalts the person of our Lord Jesus Christ in a special way. Hebrews, says one well known writer (David Gooding), is ablaze with His glory. The epistle insists on His full deity, His true humanity and the complete sufficiency of His work on the Cross. Unlike any other New Testament book, Hebrews refers to the priestly work of our Lord (no other New Testament writer calls Jesus a priest or high priest). Second, Hebrews is important for an understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Third, the epistle lays great stress on the need for endurance in the Christian life. And, finally, it focuses on the doctrine of faith and the life of faith.

The writer of Hebrews never separates doctrine from practical Christian living, so there are practical reasons for studying his epistle, especially in our day and age. First, this is an age of materialism and secularism. It is a day when the people of God need to be reminded that they are pilgrims on their way to the heavenly city (Hebrews 11:10; 13:14). Second, ours is also a day of “*various and strange doctrines*” (13:9) which are answered by the epistle’s portrait of the eternal Christ (13:8). Many false teachers in modern times are presenting heresies that are derogatory to the person of Christ, heresies that are refuted by the clear teaching of Hebrews. Third, it is a time when many Christian believers are drifting from the biblical teaching on the Christian life as set forth in Hebrews. They are drifting toward an unbiblical emphasis on religious rituals and ceremonies. Fourth, it is a day of uncertainty and soul sickness (as proven by the large number of Christian counselors and psychologists). Thus, believers need to be reminded of the free access and family welcome that is theirs at God’s throne of grace (4:14-16). Finally, it is a day of “electronic Christianity,” when many believers have replaced church attendance with religious programs on TV, radio and tape recorders. In such a time the message of Hebrews is a vital one. The epistle teaches that the Christian life is a life of mutual encouragement and fellowship with other believers in submission to local leaders (10:24-25; 13:1, 7, 17).

WHO WROTE HEBREWS?

SOME SAY PAUL

Some of our Bible translations give as a title for Hebrews “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.” The view that Paul wrote Hebrews is a very old one. As early as A.D. 200 there were Christians who believed that Paul had written the epistle. This is not surprising in that there is a clear Pauline spirit about the book. Yet most scholars today have concluded that Paul did not write Hebrews.

There are a number of reasons for rejecting Pauline authorship: First, although some translations have Paul’s name in the title this is not true of the Greek manuscripts. Second, from earliest times there have been Christians who have denied that Paul wrote the book. Third, the epistle is anonymous; that is, the author does not give his name, while Paul identifies himself in all of his thirteen epistles [2 Thessalonians 3:17]. Fourth, unlike Paul’s epistles, Hebrews lacks a salutation (a greeting) and does not name the group that received the epistle. Fifth, the plan of

Hebrews differs from Paul's epistles. Paul, as a rule, structures his epistles with a doctrinal section followed by a section on practical Christian living. Hebrews, however, is arranged in such a way that the doctrinal discussions and practical applications are interwoven. Sixth, the style of Hebrews is different from Paul's writings. Hebrews is a polished, literary work, but Paul's letters have a rugged quality. Seventh, the author of Hebrews says something in Hebrews 2:3 that Paul would never have said. He says that he did not receive the gospel from the Lord Himself, but from His disciples. Paul, on the other hand, strongly asserts that he received the truth from no man but from the Lord Himself [Galatians 1:12].

There are also differences in doctrinal emphasis between this author and Paul: (1) Paul tends to emphasize the resurrection; Hebrews does not [Hebrews 13:20]. (2) Paul never once refers to Christ as priest, while the priesthood of Christ is the theme of Hebrews. (3) Paul speaks of Christ's work in terms of justification and reconciliation, while the emphasis of Hebrews is on cleansing, sanctification, and perfection. (4) To Paul "faith" refers to the sinner's trust in Christ; in Hebrews "faith" has more to do with persevering faithfulness. (5) Paul lays great stress on the Holy Spirit's work in the life of the Christian; Hebrews has very little to say about the Holy Spirit. (6) Paul's doctrine of Christ as head of the church composed of Jews and Gentiles joined in one body is absent from Hebrews. (7) The author of Hebrews never uses Paul's distinctive expression "in Christ."

Some have argued that a denial of Pauline authorship is a rationalistic attack upon the inspiration of Hebrews. This is an unfair criticism for two reasons: First, the epistle nowhere claims to be Paul's. Second, the denial of Pauline authorship goes back to the early church. Men who are universally acknowledged to be godly teachers of the Word of God have denied in their writings that Paul wrote Hebrews. Others have argued that Hebrews is by Paul in that it quotes Habakkuk 2:4. The only other New Testament quotations of that passage are in Paul's letters (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11). The fact that two New Testament books both cite the same Old Testament passage, however, is no proof that both were written by the same person (compare Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34).

Still others defend Pauline authorship by an argument based on 2 Peter 3:15-16. They compare 2 Peter 3:1 ("I now write to you this second epistle") with 1 Peter 1:1 ("to the pilgrims of the Dispersion"). Assuming that both 1 Peter and 2 Peter were written to the same group,

they conclude that in 2 Peter the Apostle Peter was writing to Jewish Christians. In 2 Peter 3:15 Peter says that Paul had earlier written to the same group, that is, he had written an epistle to Jewish Christians, or “Hebrews.” There are two problems with this view: (1) It assumes that the “first” letter spoken of in 2 Peter 3:1 is 1 Peter. However, Peter’s description of his earlier letter in 2 Peter 3:1-3 does not fit 1 Peter. It seems more likely that the “first” letter of 2 Peter 3:1 is one of the many letters of the apostles lost to posterity (see 1 Corinthians 5:9 and Colossians 4:16). It is very possible that the letter of Paul spoken of in 2 Peter 3:15-16 is the Epistle to the Romans. Compare the reference to God’s patience concerning Christ’s second coming in 2 Peter 3:9, 15 and Romans 2:4. (2) Even if 2 Peter was written to a group of Jewish Christians to whom Paul had also written, this does not prove that the letter Paul wrote was Hebrews. It is possible that the letter of Paul to which Peter refers was also lost.

Other students of Hebrews in the early church believed that Paul wrote the epistle in Hebrew and Luke had translated it into Greek. Most have rejected this view for three reasons: (1) Luke was a Gentile Christian (compare Colossians 4:11 and 4:14), while the author of Hebrews was most likely a born Jew. (2) There is no evidence that any other letter of the New Testament originated in this way. (3) As noted above there are pronounced differences between Paul’s thought and that of Hebrews.

OTHER NAMES HAVE BEEN SUGGESTED

Other Christians in the early church felt that the author of Hebrews was Barnabas, the Cyprian fellow worker of Paul (Acts 4:36; 13:1). As a Hellenist, that is, a Greek speaking Jew of the Dispersion, Barnabas may have had the literary qualifications for writing this epistle. His fellow Christians knew Barnabas as “*Son of Encouragement*” (Acts 4:36) which suggests that he could have written Hebrews, called by its author “*a word of exhortation*” (Hebrews 13:22). Acts 4:36 translates the same Greek word “*encouragement*” that is translated “*exhortation*” in Hebrews 13:22.

The only other writer with early traditional support is Clement of Rome, a church leader at the end of the first century A.D., who wrote an epistle to the Corinthian Christians. We may explain the similarities that some have noted between the letter of this church leader and Hebrews by the fact that he quoted Hebrews when writing to the Corinthians.

At the time of the Protestant Reformation Martin Luther (A.D. 1483-1546) suggested that Apollos (see Acts 18:24-25) was the author of Hebrews. This proposal has been accepted by a great number of people up to the present time. Apollos, it is argued, had many of the same characteristics as the author of Hebrews. He was a Jew, an eloquent man, “*mighty in the Scriptures*” and an accurate teacher. There is no early tradition in favor of this view, nor is there any known writing of Apollos with which to compare Hebrews.

Other names that have been suggested include Silas, the Apostle Peter, Philip the evangelist and Epaphras. Two twentieth century suggestions are Priscilla and Mary, the mother of our Lord. Interesting arguments for and against these theories favoring a woman author have been presented. The most telling objection against the view is the fact that the author uses a masculine participle when referring to himself in Hebrews 11:32 (“*time would fail me*”).

Most modern scholars have come to agree with the ancient Christian writer who said, “But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows.” That we do not know the human author of Hebrews is probably as it should be. The author of Hebrews had little interest in the human writers of Scripture he quotes throughout his letter. What was of utmost importance to him was that God had spoken, and this is what is of utmost importance in the Epistle to the Hebrews itself. What we can say with assurance is that the author was a Christian who had heard the gospel from the apostles (Hebrews 2:3-4). He was a man (that is, a male) who was well-versed in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, which he regularly quotes. His writing style, vocabulary and means of expression combined to produce a letter that is written in some of the best Greek in the New Testament. He was a Hellenist (Greek-speaking Jew of the Dispersion) who was part of the circle of Paul (see Hebrews 13:23).

TO WHOM WAS HEBREWS WRITTEN?

The first thing we can say about the original readers of Hebrews is that they were Christians. This is clear from the terms the author of Hebrews uses to describe them. He calls his addressees “*beloved*” (6:9), “*holy brethren*” (Hebrews 3:1), “*partakers of the heavenly calling*” (3:1) and “*partakers of Christ*” (3:14). Furthermore, he says in 6:18 that they have “*fled for refuge*” to the Christian hope. Also, in 10:19-25 he exhorts them not as if he feels they need to be converted, but as if they need to

enjoy privileges that are already theirs. In addition, in 12:1 he encourages them not to enter the Christian race, but to run a race they have already entered. Finally, in 13:18, he asks for their prayers. This is a request he would not make of unbelievers. In short, the readers were, for the most part, at least, Christians.

We can be even more specific about the make-up of the original readers of Hebrews. Although a number of scholars have argued that the original audience of the epistle was Gentile, the majority have always held that Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish Christians. There are several reasons for this conclusion: First, the title “to the Hebrews” appears in the oldest New Testament manuscript containing Hebrews, namely P⁴⁶ [A.D. 200]. There is no evidence that the epistle ever bore any other title. Second, there is evidence that the epistle was called “Hebrews” by early Christian writers. Third, the content of the epistle suggests that the original readers were Jewish. The following elements stand out: (1) The author seems to assume that the Old Testament is authoritative to his readers, which would make sense if they were Jewish. (2) The overall argument of the epistle stresses that the Levitical priesthood and offerings have been replaced by the work of Christ. This would be more meaningful to Jews than to readers with a background in pagan religions. (3) The author of Hebrews argues that Jesus’ priesthood has taken the place of Aaron’s, which argument would be meaningless to Gentiles. (4) He also concludes that Jesus is superior to Moses, the Jewish lawgiver. (5) He insists that the old covenant given to the Jews is now replaced by a new covenant, which fact would also be irrelevant to a Gentile audience. (6) He refers to believers as “*the seed of Abraham*” (2:16). He refers to “*the fathers*” of the Jewish race (1:1; 3:9). And he uses Jewish examples (for the most part) when illustrating the life of faith (chapter 11). The evidence seems to support the conclusion that the readers were Jewish Christians.

WHERE DID THE ORIGINAL READERS LIVE?

SOME SAY ROME

Opinions about the epistle’s original destination have included Corinth, Antioch in Syria, Cyprus, Galatia, Cyrene in North Africa and Spain. The majority of scholars, however, argue for either Rome or Palestine. Those who argue that the epistle was written to Christians in Rome present their case as follows: (1) The earliest quotations of Hebrews are found in a letter by Clement, the Roman church leader [A.D. 95]. (2) In

his conclusion the author writes, “*Those from Italy greet you*” [Hebrews 13:24]. Those favoring Rome understand this to mean that believers from Italy are with the author in another part of the empire and are sending greetings home. The phrase could just as easily refer to believers in Italy sending greetings elsewhere. (3) Timothy, well known to the readers [13:23], was well known to the Roman Christians [Colossians 1:1]. (4) The allusion to the generosity of the readers in 6:10-12 and 10:32-34 agrees with the known history of the Roman church. (5) The reference to meats in 13:9 suggests a problem similar to that in Romans 14. (6) The plundering of property in 10:34 could be explained by the persecution of the Roman believers under Claudius [A.D. 49] or Nero [A.D. 64].

The arguments against a Roman destination are strong. First, the author’s comments in 2:3-4 do not fit Rome. It is unlikely that the Romans were evangelized by eyewitnesses of Christ performing signs and wonders. Second, the Roman church became known for its able exposition and defense of the faith, but the readers of Hebrews were spiritually weak and dull. Third, the persecution of the Roman Christians by Nero does not fit the Hebrews, for the author said to them, “*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed*” (Hebrews 12:4). Fourth, there is an early tradition (found in a notice added to some early manuscripts that says that Hebrews was written from Rome or Italy) that the epistle originated in Italy.

OTHERS SAY PALESTINE

A long line of commentators has held to the traditional view that Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem or, more likely, some sister church in Palestine. The arguments in favor of this view are still compelling: (1) The epistle gives the impression that its readers lived near the temple. The fact that the author speaks of the tabernacle and not the temple does not weaken this argument. He does so in that he is dealing not just with the Judaism of his day but with the laws and rituals in back of the Levitical system as a whole. (2) Early Christian writers state that the Jerusalem church was made up entirely of “Hebrews” and was called “the church of the Hebrews.” (3) The epistle implies that a crisis is about to take place [1:2; 3:13; 10:25; 12:27], and we might understand this as the approaching siege of Jerusalem. (4) The sufferings the readers have formerly endured [10:32; 12:4] may be explained by the Jewish persecution of Christians in Jerusalem. (5) No other church [Rome, Alexandria, Ephesus] has ever claimed the epistle. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem and dispersed [or scattered] nearby Christians in A.D. 70, just two or three years after Hebrews was written.

This would explain why that city made no claim to it.

Some have lodged a number of objections against the Palestine theory. First, it is unlikely that Jerusalem Christians would have heard the gospel second hand as Hebrews 2:3 suggests was true of the readers of the epistle. This objection is invalid, however, if the epistle was written not to the Jerusalem assembly but to some nearby sister church in Palestine. Second, the criticism of the readers in Hebrews 5:12 would not apply to the mother church. This objection is also invalid, however, if the epistle was written to one of the sister assemblies in Palestine. Third, the group to which Hebrews was written had not suffered any martyrdom (12:4), yet the church in Jerusalem was where Christian martyrdom began (Acts 7:54-8:3). Again, however, this objection is not valid if the epistle was written to a Palestinian church outside Jerusalem. Fourth, a number of passages in Hebrews (Hebrews 6:10; 10:34; 13:2, 5, 16) suggest that the readers were a generous group, yet the Jerusalem church was poor. In response, we would only observe that poverty has never prevented Christians from being generous. Fifth, the author wrote in Greek, while Aramaic was the language of Palestine; and he quoted from the Septuagint and not the Hebrew Bible. This objection is not a strong one in that the author was most likely a Hellenist (Greek speaking Jew). Furthermore, quoting from the Septuagint was an accepted practice by Palestinians, as the writings of Paul (Jerusalem trained) and Josephus (Palestine born historian) show. I find no compelling reason to abandon the traditional view that Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish Christians living in Palestine.

WHEN WAS HEBREWS WRITTEN?

Although a few writers have dated Hebrews in the A.D. 50s, and a few more have dated it in the 80s, most have dated it in the 60s. Their reasoning is as follows: First, the date of the epistle has to be late enough to allow for the readers to be converted and become mature in the faith (5:11-14). Second, it had to have been written late enough to allow the first generation of leaders to pass away (13:7). Third, the date must allow for a time of persecution a considerable number of years before the author wrote his epistle (10:32). Fourth, Paul's name is omitted in chapter 13. This suggests that the Apostle had died before the epistle was written. Paul's death occurred sometime between A.D. 62 and 68.

While the author must have written his epistle no earlier than the mid to late 60s, he could not have written it later than A.D. 70. The reasons are as follows: First, the author speaks of the sacrificial rituals using the present

tense (7:8; 8:3-5; 9:6-7, 9, 13; 10:2-3; 13:10). We know that the Levitical sacrifices ceased in A.D. 70 when the Romans conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. The use of the present tense, therefore, suggests a pre-A.D. 70 date. Second, there is no mention of the fall of Jerusalem in Hebrews. This would be very surprising if the epistle was written after A.D. 70. The whole point of the author in Hebrews 5–10 is that the Levitical priesthood and ritual have been replaced by the priesthood and offering of Christ. Had Jerusalem been destroyed before the epistle was written the author would surely have pointed to that fact as his clinching argument. Third, the author's statement in 8:13 that the old regime is "*growing old and ready to vanish away*" may imply that he anticipates the fall of the temple shortly. Fourth, the author refers (see Hebrews 3:7-9) to the forty years of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. He may be implying that the day of Israel's grace was nearly over. Almost forty years had passed since Christ was crucified. Fifth, the exhortation to "*go forth to Him*" (13:13) would have particular force if the doom of Jerusalem was soon. A date in the late 60s (A.D. 67-68), then, is likely.

WHAT WAS THE OCCASION OF HEBREWS?

THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF THE READERS

Spiritual Degeneration

As we read the Book of Hebrews we begin to learn what it was that prompted the author to write the epistle. He says in 5:11 that he would like to teach his readers about Melchizedek, but it is hard to explain. The problem, he says, lies with the readers and not with the subject. They "*have become dull of hearing*." The verb "*have become*" suggests that they were not always this way. The expression "*dull of hearing*" suggests that they are not now receptive to some of the more important teachings of the Christian faith. He gives the symptoms in 5:12-14. They cannot explain their faith to others. They are spiritual babies who only want "*milk*" and not "*solid food*". They have no interest in the more profound teachings of Christianity such as Christ's sacrifice, ascension and high priestly work. And they have no skill in applying the Bible to the practical issues of life ("*unskilled in the word of righteousness*," v. 13).

Elementary Knowledge

The readers do know the basics of the faith such as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in Christ ("*elementary principles of Christ*,"

6:1-2). Beyond that, says the author, they have made little progress in the Christian life. He says that he wants to lead them on to maturity (“*perfection*,” 6:1), that is, a doctrinal and practical understanding of the high priesthood of Christ.

Intellectual Questions

As we study and seek to understand Hebrews we must make every effort to put ourselves in the shoes of these early readers. They lived in a time of transition or change. On the one hand, they had become Christians. On the other hand, the outward forms of the old religion (altar, sacrifices, priesthood) remained, and the Jewish Christians were in a state of confusion over how the old and new related. As we read the Book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament we find Christian Jews who still worship in the temple (Acts 3:1). They still offer animal sacrifices (21:17-26), and they still belong to the Sanhedrin (22:3). Some in the church (the party of the circumcision) attempt to force all Gentile Christians to become Jews as well (15:1).

For many years Jewish Christians could argue that their participation in the temple rituals and offerings was only a traditional and cultural thing. It in no way interfered with their trust in Christ as Savior. The author of Hebrews has noticed, however, that they do not want to progress beyond the elementary doctrines that were Jewish as well as Christian (Hebrews 6:1-2). With the passing of time God gave clear revelation concerning these things to the Apostle Paul and others (such as the author of Hebrews). It became clear that devotion to the temple rituals was no longer an innocent thing. They must now break with Judaism and go to Christ “*outside the camp*” (13:13). God has now taken away the first covenant to establish the second (10:9). The readers must not be deceived by Jewish arguments (13:9) that there is saving power in the sacrifices and meat laws of the Jews. Christians have another altar, namely, the Cross of Christ (or Christ Himself) which is the source of saving grace.

We might summarize the intellectual stumbling blocks of the Hebrews as follows: (1) The relation of Judaism to Christianity. (2) The humiliation and sufferings of Jesus. Why, if He was Messiah, did He have to suffer? (3) The absence of a visible priesthood and sacrifices. Christianity, or so they thought, had no priesthood. (4) The delay of Jesus’ return. If Jesus was now exalted to glory and honor, what was the purpose of His long absence?

Willful Apostasy

During his letter, the author warns his readers five times (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:18-29) of the danger of making a complete break with Christianity and falling back into Judaism. His concern is that they might “*drift away*” (2:1) from the truth and “*fall away*” (3:12) from the living God. Such a desertion of the Son of God would merit terrifying judgment (10:27, 31).

Every student of Hebrews must face the difficult question as to the precise spiritual condition of the readers. Some have argued that the readers are truly saved people who are in danger of losing their salvation. Others have concluded that the readers are not truly saved; that is, although they have professed to believe in Christ they have never been truly born of God. This course shall adopt a third view. We shall proceed on the assumption that the author is confident that his readers are for the most part true believers (see Hebrews 6:9; 10:39). This does not exclude the possibility that some of the group are rebellious in heart and on the road to apostasy. In other words, he is sure that his readers are true, although backslidden believers, yet there is an element of doubt in his conviction. It is possible that a few of his readers have never come to saving faith in Christ. They have professed to believe in Christ, but that faith was not genuine.

THE HISTORICAL SITUATION OF THE READERS

A Threat of National Disaster

Because of its date (around A.D. 67-68) and destination (Palestine) we must read Hebrews in view of the Jewish war (A.D. 66-70). The Romans began the war in September, A.D. 66, and the epistle was probably written as the war was going on. Throughout the epistle there is a sense of crisis. There is a “*day approaching*” (10:25). The “*today*” of opportunity is coming to an end (3:13). The temple rituals and sacrifices of the old covenant are “*ready to vanish*” (8:13). No doubt there would be solemn cursing of the Christians in the synagogues, and pressure upon the Jewish readers of the epistle to rally around the national cause and forsake Christ.

An Expectation of Increased Suffering

The readers have suffered in the past (10:32-34), and there is the expectation of more to come (12:4). The author implies that the readers’ powers of resistance are weakening (12:12).

A Loss of Church Loyalty

Some of the readers are beginning to neglect the weekly meetings (“*the assembling of ourselves together*,” 10:25) of the church. The word “*for-saking*” (10:25) suggests that they were leaving it exposed to danger. The author implies that there is a growing selfishness among them. They are neglecting hospitality (13:2), failing to care for imprisoned believers (13:3) and showing a love of material possessions (13:5).

A Suggestion of Moral Danger

Some in the group, the author suggests, have become bitter and rebellious (12:15). There is a danger that such a person or persons will defile others. The author also mentions sexual immorality (12:16; 13:4) as a danger to which some might be exposed.

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF HEBREWS?

It was not the custom of early Christian teachers to avoid dealing with practical problems and doctrinal error. The author of Hebrews does not open a “dialogue” with his readers hoping to arrive at a compromise solution. No, he deals decisively with their erroneous views by presenting the correct one. A careful reading of the epistle suggests a fourfold purpose:

1. TO ESTABLISH THE SUPREMACY OF CHRISTIANITY

The author explains the relationship of Christianity to Judaism and demonstrates from the Old Testament the superiority of Christianity. The revelation through the Son of God is superior to the revelation found in the Old Testament. In His person and authority Christ is superior to the custodians of the old covenant (Moses and Aaron). His priesthood is superior to Aaron’s in the covenant He has established and the sacrifice He has offered.

2. TO EXHORT A BREAK WITH JUDAISM

The work of Jesus Christ has put an end to the Law with its covenant, priesthood and offerings (see Hebrews 7:11-12; 8:6-7). The author wants his readers to make a complete break with the Levitical altar and go “*outside the camp*” of Judaism (13:9-13).

3. TO ENCOURAGE THE RENEWAL OF EFFORT

The author intends to “*press on to maturity*” (6:1, NASB) taking his readers with him. He wants them to again hear the living God through the Scriptures and move forward in their Christian walk. He reminds them that God’s people have always been “*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (11:13). Their pilgrimage or journey will not be a disappointing one in that they shall one day inherit “*the land of promise*” (11:9) and enjoy citizenship in “*the heavenly Jerusalem*” (12:22).

They must not allow reproaches and persecutions to discourage them (see Hebrews 10:32-33; 13:13). They need endurance (10:36), for the Christian life is a hard race (12:1). The sufferings and tribulations they face are not accidents outside the plan of God. They are the *chastening* (12:5-11, “discipline,” NASB) of a father, and proof of their true sonship. The author reminds them of the example of the Old Testament heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11). And he sets before them the example of the Son of God Himself (12:2, 7-10).

4. TO EMPHASIZE THE DANGER OF APOSTASY

The readers must not deceive themselves into thinking that by returning to Judaism they are lining up with the faithful of Old Testament times. If they desert Christ and Christianity, they will not desert *to* the faithful but *from* the faithful (10:39–12:1). Such apostasy (apostasy means “falling away”) will not be *back to* but *away from* the living God (3:12). Such apostasy is the rejection of the Son of God (see Hebrews 6:6; 10:29) whose sacrifice is the only source of spiritual cleansing and access to God (10:1-22).

WHAT IS THE THEME OF HEBREWS?

Although there has been some difference of opinion, most scholars and Bible teachers have agreed that the central theme of Hebrews is the doctrine of the high priesthood of Christ. This is the “master idea” or “keystone” in the thinking of the author. One writer (C. F. D. Moule) has said that the whole burden of the epistle is wrapped up in two uses of the verb “we have”: “*we have a high priest*” (Hebrews 8:1) and “*we have an altar*” (13:10). Sanctuary and sacrifice are ours.

The following observations suggest that the high priesthood of Christ is the author’s theme or central category. (1) The author says so in 8:1. “*Now*

this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.” The epistle centers, then, in the thought of a seated priest. Understand all that this means, and you will grasp its message. (2) This theme draws together and influences all the other teachings of the epistle. For example, God the Father dwells in the sanctuary [8:1-2]. The author describes God’s Son with priestly terminology. He describes the angels as “*ministering spirits*” [1:14, lit. “Liturgic spirits”]. He writes of Christ’s work in the language of priestly sacrifice [for example Hebrews 9:12; 10:12]. He speaks of the application of Christ’s work as forgiveness through blood [9:22]. He describes God’s people as those who in priestly fashion enter the holy of holies [10:19] and offer sacrifices of praise [13:15]. The author’s prophetic views are colored by the fact that he understands the king of “*the world to come*” [2:5] to be a priest-king [see Hebrews 7:1-2].

THE OUTLINE OF HEBREWS

I. CHRIST AS HIGH PRIEST: SUPERIOR IN HIS PERSON

(1:1-7:28)

- A. Superior to the Prophets** (1:1-3)
- B. Superior to the Angels** (1:4–2:18)
- C. Superior to Moses** (3:1–4:16)
- D. Superior to Aaron** (5:1–7:28)

II. CHRIST AS HIGH PRIEST: SUPERIOR IN HIS FUNCTIONS

(8:1-10:18)

- A. He Serves a Better Sanctuary** (8:1-6)
- B. He Mediated a Better Covenant** (8:7-13)
- C. He Performed a Better Ministry** (9:1-28)
- D. He Offered a Better Sacrifice** (10:1-18)

III. CHRIST AS HIGH PRIEST: SUPERIOR IN HIS RESOURCES

(10:19-13:25)

- A. A Call to Steadfastness: Based on a New Access** (10:19-39)
- B. A Call to Faith: Based on Historical Illustrations** (11:1-40)
- C. A Call to Hope: Based on Christ’s Endurance** (12:1-29)
- D. A Call to Love: Based on God’s Grace** (13:1-25)

LESSON ONE

HEBREWS CHAPTER ONE

The author's argument is that Christ in His person and work is better than or superior to the Levitical religion of the Old Testament. At the heart of this argument is the author's contention that Jesus Christ is a high priest. His one sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 10:12) has obtained eternal redemption (9:12) and has opened the way of free, unhindered access to God (7:19; 10:21-22). The Old Testament religion, on the other hand, failed to cleanse the conscience of sinners and establish intimate relations between God and man. Instead it kept people at a distance, the veil of the sanctuary symbolizing this defect (9:7-8). The priestly sacrifice of Christ, however, has removed the veil, and there is now no inaccessible holy of holies (10:19-20).

Although the priestly work of Christ is the author's central theme (8:1), he does not immediately launch into it. Instead he lays the necessary foundation of establishing the superiority of the new revelation over the old. The comparison of old and new, therefore, has at its starting point the agents of revelation, and from there the author goes on to the agents of redemption. The author first deals with the personal superiority of Christ over these agents (1:1–7:28) and then develops His functional superiority over them (8:1–10:18).

Superior to the Prophets (1:1-3)

Hebrews does not begin like other New Testament epistles. It does not have a greeting for the readers, and the author does not give his name. In fact, Hebrews does not begin to read like a letter until chapter 13. This has led most modern students of the epistle to conclude that Hebrews was originally a sermon. The author could not be with the readers in person, so he prepared this sermon for them. He then asked someone else to read it to them for him. He attached his personal greetings at the end (chapter 13).

In chapter one the author argues that the Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest possible agent of revelation, because He is the Son of God. He is greater than the prophets of the Old Testament, and He is greater than the angels.

The Superiority of His Revelation (1:1-2a)

Different in Method

Jesus Christ is God's final word to mankind. God did speak to His people in Old Testament times, but the revelation given in His Son is superior. We can see the superiority of the new revelation over the old in their differences. First, the new revelation is different in method. The old revelation was partial and fragmentary; it came "*at various times and in different ways.*" The expression "*at various times*" suggests that God's revelation through the prophets came over a long time (hundreds of years). The "*various times*" include the periods of Old Testament history including the period of the patriarchs, the period of Moses, the period of the judges, the period of the kingdom, etc.

The old revelation came "*in different ways.*" God used different methods to communicate revelation. For example, He used symbols, such as the tabernacle (Exodus 25-30). He used visions (Isaiah 6:1-3). He used dreams (Daniel 2:1-3). He used angels (Daniel 8:15-17). He used direct, spoken communication (Numbers 12:6-8), etc. In these "*different ways*" God's revelation was given bit by bit. Each inspired man had only a fragment of the truth.

During all that time (the Old Testament era) "Jesus Christ had stood in the wings of history" (Roy Hession). When He appeared all the threads of Old Testament prophecy met in Him.

Different in Time

The revelation of the Old Testament came "*in time past*" ("long ago," NASB). But now God has spoken "*in these last days.*" In the LXX the phrase "*last days*" refers to the times of the Messiah (Numbers 24:14; Jeremiah 23:20). The Old Testament prophets looked ahead to Christ's coming. We, says the author, live in the time of fulfillment.

Different in Agents

In Old Testament times God spoke "*by the prophets.*" The author does not belittle that revelation—it was God who spoke through those men. But the revelation of the New Testament era is superior because God has "*spoken to us by His Son.*" The original text says that God has "spoken to us *in Son.*" The author words his phrase to fix our attention on the nature of the

revelation. We have been given a son-type of revelation as opposed to a prophet type of revelation. The readers of the epistle would highly regard a prophet. They must regard the Son of God even more highly.

The Superiority of His Person and Work (1:2b-3)

We might ask why a son-type revelation is better. The author of Hebrews now presents seven facts to show that superiority. The Son's revelation is better because of:

His Appointment as Heir

The prophets were servants, but the Son is the heir. As elsewhere in the New Testament (see Matthew 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-12; Galatians 4:7; Romans 8:17) there is a link between sonship and heirship. Only members of a family may inherit. The Son's appointment took place before time in the eternal counsel of God. He has not yet entered into His inheritance (Hebrews 2:8). That awaits His second coming (9:28), when He will rule over "*the world to come*" (2:5).

His Lordship over History

The author goes on to say that God "*made the worlds*" through the Son. A more literal rendering would say "*ages*" instead of "*worlds*." The term refers to the periods or ages of history through which the purpose of God is unfolding. The prophets of old each appeared for a while in his own era. The Son of God, however, operates and manages the universe throughout all of its time periods. This implies that the Son is before all the ages of history. It implies the preexistence of Christ. He existed before the present created universe.

His Manifestation of the Divine Attributes

Not only does the author imply the Son's preexistence. He also goes on to assert His deity in verse 3, which many believe is an early Christian hymn. He speaks of the Son as "*being the brightness of His glory*." The Greek word here translated "*brightness*" has a passive ("reflection") and an active ("radiance") sense. Here the active sense is more likely. The correct comparison would be sunlight, not moonlight. The Son flashes forth the glory of God. Light includes both source and radiance. Deity includes both Father and Son. The Son was of one nature with the Father. He is, therefore, more fully qualified than any prophet to reveal God.

His Embodiment of the Divine Essence

The author goes on to say that the Son is “*the express image of [God’s] person.*” The term translated “*image*” here has the notion of absolute similarity. The term rendered “*person*” here means “substance” or “real essence.” The whole phrase stresses that the Son is a perfect copy of His Father in His divine nature. He personally and distinctly (that is, distinct from the Father) embodies the divine essence.

His Government of the Universe

There is another indication of the Son’s deity in the next phrase. He is “*upholding all things by the word of His power.*” The word translated “*upholding*” does not mean the passive and stationary support of a burden. It is an active term that means to bear along to a certain conclusion. The LXX uses the same word (Numbers 11:14) of Moses praying for the people. He says, “*I am not able to bear all these people alone [into the land].*” The Son of God, however, is able to guide the universe of space and time to its appointed goal. In verse 2 the author has said that the Son is the creator, the One who created the universe and fixed the boundaries of the ages through which the purposes of God would unfold. That looked primarily at His preexistent work. Now, however, in verse 3, he turns our attention to the present time and to the end time. At present he sustains the universe, i.e., He assures its continued existence (see Colossians 1:17). And He is guiding the universe along in the way He has appointed. He is bearing history along to its consummation. “History and life are not purposeless . . . He has programmed the universe and human history. All the pieces will come together when and as He has planned” (P. O. Wright).

His Provision of Purification of Sins

At this point the author briefly introduces the doctrinal center or main theme of the epistle. The Son of God, he says, “*by Himself purged our sins.*” The term “*purged*” is a priestly term and looks on to the discussion of Christ’s high priestly work later in the epistle. All people are sinners. They are stained with guilt that separates them from a holy God. Only a sacrifice for sins can cleanse away guilt. At the Cross Jesus Christ (as a priest) offered Himself (as a sacrifice) to remove the impurity of sins. He “*made purification of sins*” (NASB).

His Exaltation in Glory

Following His priestly work on the Cross, the Son of God “*sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*” This statement suggests two things: (1) The verb “*sat down*” implies that His work of purification was completed. This contrasts with the Old Testament priests who never sat down. Their work was never done. (2) The fact that He sat down at God’s right hand means that He has been installed in a place of glory and honor. The place of highest honor in the ancient world was the right hand of a king (see 1 Kings 2:19).

Superior to the Angels (1:4-2:18)

Hebrews 1:4 marks a transition in the author’s argument. It belongs to and concludes the first paragraph. In subject matter, however, it provides an introduction to the next paragraph. In this paragraph (Hebrews 1:5-14) the author affirms that the Son is superior to angels.

The original readers of the epistle were Jewish Christians. They shared the conviction of their fellow Jews that angels were the highest beings in God’s creation. The sacredness of the Old Testament Law, they believed, was partly because it had been spoken by angels (see Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19).

The readers were thinking of abandoning Christ and going back to Judaism and the old covenant. They argued that angels had a part in giving the old covenant, that is, the Law of Moses. They questioned if Christianity and the new covenant had anything to equal these messengers from God’s own presence. The author of Hebrews now proves that Christ is superior to angels. He does this by quoting seven passages from the Old Testament, the Jewish Bible. From these seven quotations he makes four points about Christ and angels:

Christ Bears the Messianic Title “Son” and Receives Angelic Worship (1:5-6)

Christ Is the Messianic Son

In verses 2-3 the author of Hebrews implies that Christ has always been the Son of God by nature. He goes on to say in verse 4 that He has inherited “*a more excellent name than*” the angels. He immediately says (Hebrews 1:5) that the name Christ has inherited is, oddly enough, “*Son*” again. Clearly the author of Hebrews uses the title *Son* in two dif-

ferent senses: In verse 2 it indicates what Christ is and has always been by divine nature (eternal Sonship). In verse 5 it is the Messianic title He receives in connection with His human nature (acquired or Messianic Sonship).

There are three reasons for making this distinction between eternal Sonship and Messianic Sonship: (1) The word “*being*” in verse 3 is timeless and suggests the eternal nature of the Son. The expression “*having become*” in verse 4, however, suggests that Sonship is something He attained. (2) The order of events in verses 3 and 4 suggests that Christ acquired Sonship after completing His work on earth. (3) In verse 5 the author quotes Psalm 2:7. Elsewhere (Acts 13:33) this psalm is associated with Jesus’ resurrection and human nature. This would indicate that the title *Son* was inherited after His earthly work.

God has made Jesus, not an angel, His Messianic Son. In verse 5 the author quotes from Psalm 2, a coronation psalm of the Davidic kings. An Old Testament king became God’s “son” the day he was crowned. The angel Gabriel promised Mary that her son Jesus would “*be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.*” The Old Testament kings were “*begotten*” (Psalm 2:7) as God’s sons at their inauguration. Jesus was “*begotten*” (Hebrews 1:5) as God’s Son at the time of His resurrection-ascension.

In verse 5 the author also quotes 2 Samuel 7:14 (“*I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son*”). In 2 Samuel 7 the Lord promised David that he would establish his son Solomon’s kingdom. He then looked beyond Solomon to a greater king whose throne would be established forever. That greater king is Jesus Christ. At the time of His ascension into heaven He was “appointed” as God’s Son and installed as the Messianic king. This Messianic dignity will continue forever. God has never exalted any angel to such a high office.

Christ Will Receive Angelic Worship

The superiority of the Son to angels will be openly seen at His second coming into the world. Then (“*when He again brings the first-born into the world*”) God will enthrone His Son as the Davidic king on earth. The title *First-born* suggests dignity and sovereignty. At His second advent He will be openly revealed as the Messianic heir and ruler. The author here quotes from the Old Testament (the LXX and Dead Sea Scrolls of Deuteronomy 32:43 or Psalm 97:7) which says of Christ’s

future coming: “*Let all the angels of God worship Him.*” In the New Testament the term *worship*, with one exception (Matthew 18:26), speaks of worship addressed to God or Jesus Christ. The term implies that the Messianic Son is in fact God the Son. The two senses of Sonship merge in verse 6.

Christ Is the Divine King and Receives Angelic Obedience (1:7-9)

Angels Do the Divine Will

The fourth Old Testament quotation (Psalm 104:4) is found in verse 7. There we learn that angels carry out the Lord’s will with the swiftness of wind (“*spirits*”) and the strength of “*fire*.” As great as they are, angels are servants (“*ministers*”) of God.

Christ Is the Divine King

Quoting Psalm 45:6-8 the author describes the Son in different terms. Verses 8-9 contain one of the strongest affirmations of the deity of Christ in the New Testament. The psalm directly addresses Him as God: “*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.*” The scene is prophetic and will be fulfilled at the Second Coming of Christ to the earth. Righteousness will characterize the Son’s reign (“*A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom*”). The scene in verse 9 is millennial (see Revelation 20:4-6). The psalmist’s words describe a holy and lawful reign. It will also be a joyous time (“*oil of gladness*”) for Christ, shared with His “*companions*.” The word translated “*companions*” in verse 9 is translated “*partakers*” in Hebrews 3:14. It speaks of believers.

Christ Is the Eternal Creator, but Angels Are Mutable Creatures (1:10-12)

Christ Is the Eternal Creator

In verses 10-12 the author quotes Psalm 102:25-27. In that psalm the psalmist speaks of his own frailty and the possibility of death. He then meditates on the eternity and immutability (unchangeableness) of God. The author of Hebrews applies these words to the eternity and unchangeableness of Christ. He is the Creator of the universe (Hebrews 1:10). Just as most people outlive many suits of clothing in a lifetime, so Christ will live on when this universe grows old and perishes. The

planets and stars “*will all grow old like a garment,*” but He will stay the same. They will perish, but His “*years will not fail.*”

Angels Are Mutable Creatures

The author does not specifically mention angels in verses 10-12. In that he has been contrasting Christ to angels, however, we may conclude that he has them in mind in his quotation of Psalm 102. In contrast to Christ, who is the Creator, angels are part of the creation.

Christ Is the Exalted Sovereign, but Angels Are Commissioned Servants (1:13-14)

Christ Is the Exalted Sovereign

A question introduces the seventh quotation from the Old Testament (Psalm 110:1). The answer to the question is, “No.” God has never said to an angel, “*Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.*” He has, however, said this to His Son. At His ascension into heaven the Lord Jesus Christ was given the place of dignity and honor, namely, the place at God’s right hand. Later in the epistle (Hebrews 7:25) the author tells his readers that Jesus presently carries on a work of intercession. Meanwhile He waits for the defeat of His enemies. The devil and all that are hostile to God will be Christ’s “*footstool.*” This is a reference to the ancient custom of putting the feet on the necks of conquered enemies. Psalm 110, quoted here, looks on to the future kingdom of Christ, when He will reign over His kingdom.

The Angels Are Commissioned Servants

In contrast to the exalted position of Christ, angels are servants. They are called “ministering spirits.” The Greek word translated “*ministering*” is always used in the LXX of sacred service in the sanctuary of the tabernacle or temple. Angels are the servants of the One who sits in the heavenly tabernacle at God’s right hand (see Hebrews 8:1-2). The term “*spirits*” suggests three things: (1) They do not have material bodies. (2) They are beings whose essence is spiritual. (3) They belong to the heavenly realm, the realm of spirit. The term rendered “*sent*” carries the idea of a commission. They are under authority to discharge a service.

Their duty is to serve believers, called here “*those who will inherit salvation.*” The term “*salvation*” means “*deliverance.*” In the New

Testament “*salvation*” is sometimes a thing of the past (see Ephesians 2:8), that is, a deliverance from the penalty of sin. It has a similar negative sense in Hebrews 2:14-15. It can also refer to a present “deliverance.” In Hebrews 7:25, for example, the Lord is presently saving His people from all the evils that oppress them. In Hebrews 1:14, however, salvation is something future. It shall take place at the Second Coming of Christ (Hebrews 9:28). Then Christ shall deliver His people into the kingdom, the promised inheritance of the “*world to come*” (2:5).

SUMMARY

The Epistle to the Hebrews contrasts the old Mosaic covenant with the New Covenant instituted by God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter one the author has argued that Christ is superior to the prophets of the old covenant (vv. 1-3). He is also superior to the angels who were involved in bringing the old revelation (vv. 4-14).

The epistle does not deny that God spoke in Old Testament times. The old revelation was only partial and fragmentary. In the New Testament era, however, God has spoken through One who is greater than any prophet (vv. 1-4). His revelation is superior because He is God’s Son. He shares the nature of His Father; He does the works of His Father; He shares the privileges of His Father; and He is on intimate terms with His Father. In these opening verses the author provides a survey of the nature and work of the Son. The author touches on: (1) His preexistence, eternal being and divine essence, (2) His incarnation [His coming in human nature] and His saving work and (3) His ascension and exaltation.

Using a series of seven Old Testament quotations, the author then argues that the Son is superior to the angels (vv. 4-14). He makes four points: (1) Christ is the Messianic and Divine Son who receives angelic worship. (2) He is the Divine King whom angels obey. (3) He is the eternal Creator, and they are mere creatures. (4) He is the exalted Sovereign awaiting His kingdom, but they are servants doing His bidding.

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

EXAM BOOKLET AK '11 (3 UNITS) HEB

STUDENT NAME

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP

COURSE GRADE: _____

INSTRUCTOR



Exam developed by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.

A NOTE ON THE EXAMS

The exams are designed to check your knowledge of the course material and the Scriptures. After you have studied a chapter, review the exam questions for that lesson. If you have difficulty in answering the questions, re-read the material. If questions contain a Scripture reference, you may use your Bible to help you answer them. If your instructor has provided a single page Answer Sheet, record your answer on that sheet. This exam contains the following types of questions:

MULTIPLE CHOICE

You will be asked to write in the letter of the correct answer at the space on the right. Here is an example:

The color of grass is

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| A. blue | C. yellow |
| B. green | D. orange |

 B

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Questions headed this way are designed to help you express your ideas and feelings. You may freely state your own opinions in answer to such questions.

RETURNING THE EXAM

See the back of this exam booklet for instructions on returning your exam for grading.

DO NOT PHOTOCOPY THESE EXAM PAGES

First Printed 1998 (AK '98), 2 UNITS

Revised 2003 / 2005 (AK '03 / '05), 3 UNITS

Reprinted 2007 (AK '03 / '05), 3 UNITS

Revised 2011 (AK '11), 3 UNITS

ISBN 978-0-940293-74-8

Code: HEB

Copyright © 1998, 2003, 2011 ECS Ministries

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical.

Printed in the United States of America

LESSON 1 EXAM**EXAM GRADE**

Before starting this exam, write your name and address on the front of this Exam Booklet.

Directions: Read each question carefully and write the letter of the correct answer in the blank space on the right. Use the separate answer sheet if provided.

1. In form, Hebrews reads like
 - A. a sermon
 - B. other New Testament letters
 - C. a tract or magazine article
 - D. a greeting card_____
2. In Hebrews 1:1-3, Jesus Christ is superior to
 - A. Moses
 - B. Angels
 - C. Old Testament prophets
 - D. Old Testament priests_____
3. Hebrews chapter 1 views the Old Testament as
 - A. a false revelation
 - B. a Son-type revelation
 - C. a true revelation, but partial and fragmentary
 - D. a true and complete revelation of God's plan_____
4. Hebrews chapter 1 views Jesus Christ as
 - A. Lord of history
 - B. having the same divine essence as His Father
 - C. One who is preexistent
 - D. all of the above_____
5. Hebrews chapter 1 introduces the doctrinal center of the letter by the phrase
 - A. He is "the brightness of His glory"
 - B. He is "the express image of His Person"
 - C. He has "obtained a more excellent name"
 - D. He has "purged our sins"_____

6. The expression He “sat down” (v. 3) suggests that
- A. Christ’s work of purification was completed
 - B. Christ has been installed in a place of glory and honor
 - C. Christ’s work differed from that of the Old Testament high priest
 - D. all the above
7. The New Testament uses the title *Son of God* to speak of
- A. Christ’s essential deity
 - B. Christ’s Messianic title
 - C. Christ’s human nature
 - D. all of the above
8. Christ acquired His position as Messianic Son
- A. in eternity past
 - B. at His birth
 - C. at His baptism
 - D. at His resurrection-ascension
9. Hebrews chapter 1 describes Christians as
- A. prophets
 - B. angels
 - C. companions of Christ
 - D. sons of God
10. In Hebrews 1:14 the term “salvation” refers to
- A. deliverance from sin’s penalty
 - B. redemption from sin’s slavery
 - C. justification from sin’s guilt
 - D. deliverance into Christ’s kingdom

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Some cults describe Jesus as an angel or as a spiritual guru. In view of Hebrews chapter 1, how do you respond?
