

HEBREWS CHAPTER 1

This morning we're beginning a brand new study. We'll be looking at the Book of Hebrews and we will be in it for the next several months. My goal is to cover about a chapter a week. Some of the chapters may take longer. I've entitled the study "Jesus Christ: Above All Else." Philippians 2 tells us that God has highly exalted Jesus and given Him a name that is above every name. And that really is the main theme of this book.

Hebrews is a difficult book to understand because it was written to a Jewish audience. That's where the book gets its name – Hebrew being another name for a Jew. The original audience being Jewish would have had an understanding of the O.T. and of Jewish practices. We 21st C Gentiles don't have that same understanding so many of the things that are talked about in Hebrews will need to be explained further. I will do my best. After our study of Hebrews we will be able to see how the O.T. and N.T. tie together and the significance of the O.T. to us N.T. believers. The question was raised a couple of weeks ago, why do we even need to study the O.T. if it's been replaced by the new covenant in Christ? It doesn't seem to be relevant to us. The answer to that question will become evident as we make our way thru Hebrews.

Whenever you study a book of the Bible it's important to know who the original audience was, who the writer was and what was their purpose for writing that book. In the case of Hebrews the answer to the first two – audience and writer – is that we don't know for sure. Most scholars believe that the intended audience was persecuted Jewish Christians in Rome. Perhaps. But the fact is that Christians were being persecuted across the entire Roman Empire so the intended audience could have been anywhere. Many theologians believe Paul was the writer of Hebrews but just as many do not believe Paul wrote Hebrews. Both sides present compelling arguments to support their view. [Ray Steadman's theory] But since the author never identifies himself or herself, we don't know for sure. I believe

that whoever the human author was, they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. And to me that's all that really matters.

What was the purpose of the book of Hebrews? Having read Hebrews I believe the purpose to be threefold: (1) PRIMARILY to encourage persecuted believers (Jewish background who had come to Christ thru the teaching of the apostles) who were having a crisis of faith, had begun to have doubts about their faith in Jesus Christ. So the writer tells them to stay the course and gives them reasons why they should hold to their faith; (2) to warn Jewish non-Christians who were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah but had never committed themselves to follow Him; (3) to present the Gospel to Jews who have not believed in Jesus. You need to recognize that within any church group you're going to have both believers and unbelievers. That is the case with this group whoever they were.

I personally think that the complex theological argument presented throughout the Book of Hebrews is similar to the way Jesus might have interpreted the O.T. scriptures and applied them to Himself when talking to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). I think also it could have been the way Paul reasoned with the Jews from the O.T. whenever he went into a new town and preached in the synagogues (such as in Iconium in Acts 14). [no narrative records exactly what they said but they used the O.T. to point to Jesus as the Messiah much as the writer of Hebrews does] QUESTIONS? THOUGHTS?

The writer of Hebrews offers no greeting like you see in the other N.T. letters but instead jumps right into teaching.

READ Hebrews 1:1-2

"Long ago" (in the O.T. times) God spoke by the prophets. Amos 3:7 says that "the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets." [name some] God revealed Himself, His plans, His purposes, His promises, His judgments throughout the O.T. by what we call "progressive revelation." In Gen 3:15 God promises Adam & Eve in the

garden to send a Messiah, "the seed of the woman." Then throughout the O.T. different details are revealed over time about this Messiah. John MacArthur says this: "To Noah was revealed the [part] of the world from which Messiah would come. To Abraham, the nation of Messiah. To Jacob, the tribe of Messiah. To David and Isaiah, the family of Messiah. To Micah, the town where He'd be born. To Daniel, the time when He'd be born. To Malachi, the forerunner who would come before him." [various pictures pointing to the coming savior – sacrifices for sin, priesthood, offerings, Jonah in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights pointed to the resurrection of Jesus. The psalmist talks about His death, Isaiah His suffering and death, and so forth] MacArthur concludes saying, "Every one of those pieces and bits come together. But in Jesus Christ, everything was whole and total, and the revelation was full and complete."

V 1 says that God revealed Himself and His truth to men in many ways – visions, parables, poetry, tablets of stone, donkeys, angelic beings, still small voice, thunder and lightning, burning bush. Most of the time it was thru His human servants the prophets.

Second Peter 1:21 says that "no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Second Timothy 3:16 tells us that all scripture was breathed out (inspired) by God..." What is interesting is that the prophets, the writers of the O.T. did not always fully comprehend what the Holy Spirit was inspiring them to write. First Peter 1:10 talks about how they searched and inquired carefully regarding the amazing truths they were being shown.

V2, "In these last days." To the Jews the last days always referred to the coming of the Messiah. That's when all the promises would be fulfilled. The writer of Hebrews says here that in the last days God has spoken to us. Present tense. It's happened already! The Messiah has in fact come! And by Him, by His Son Jesus, God has spoken to us in a completely different way than He ever did before. Now, had the nation of Israel accepted Jesus as their Messiah all the promises would have been fulfilled.

But they rejected Him which ushered in the church age that we are now living in. I call it the "age of grace." But despite Israel's rejection, Jesus did fulfill many of the promises and He fulfilled the Law. Jesus Himself said in Matt 5:17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." The rest of the promises will be fulfilled when Jesus returns (His second coming).

To understand the Jewish mindset regarding the last days and the Messiah, listen to the exchange between Jesus and the woman at the well (a Samaritan practicing O.T. Judaism in some form) in John Ch 4.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."

Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." (John 4:21-26)

Notice how the writer of Hebrews presents Jesus in v 2-3 – this is magnificent!

READ Hebrews 1:2-3

These are sometimes referred to as the seven excellencies of Christ.

V 2 Jesus is the "heir of all things." READ Colossians 1:16, Ps 2:8 and Revelation 11:15

V 2 Jesus is the Creator of the world. READ John 1:1-3

John goes on to say that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Word, of course, is Jesus. So both John and the writer of Hebrews say

that Jesus is the Creator of the world. The Greek word used for world is *ionis* – the ages, time, space, force, matter and action, the universe as we know it with all bounds of existence.

V 3 Jesus is “the radiance of the glory of God.” Frequently in the O.T. God the Father manifests Himself in the form of light and we see the brightness of His glory. In Malachi 4:2 the Messiah is described as the “sun of righteousness.” READ John 8:12

V 3 Jesus is the “exact imprint” of God’s nature, of His Person. In Jesus we see God. READ Colossians 1:15, 19 and 2:9. Then there is that famous exchange between Jesus and one of His disciples, Philip. READ John 14:8-9.

V 3 Jesus “upholds the universe by the word of His power.” In the Genesis account of creation how did God make the world? He spoke it into existence by His word. “And God said... let there be light... and so forth. And He sustains it the same way, by His word. A truly amazing statement.

V 3 “After making purification for sins...” Jesus’ work on the cross made purification for sins. Jesus dealt with the sin issue. He paid the penalty for our sins, a sacrifice once for all. From the cross Jesus cried, “It is finished!” READ 1 John 1:7.

V 3 Jesus has an exalted position. After His mission was complete Jesus according to Mark 16:19 was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father. READ Philippians 2:9-11

Beginning in v 4 and running thru the rest of the chapter (for 11 verses) the writer drives home one point – that Jesus is superior to the angels. Remember we have a Jewish audience. The Jews had a very high regard for angels. They were a higher created order than humans. They were holy, powerful, wise and emotional. They often would appear in human form (to Abraham, Jacob, Balaam, Daniel, the women at the tomb, etc). They were ministering spirits, God’s servants and sometimes His messengers. They ministered to men on God’s behalf. Myriads of them

were created way back before the world was created in order to worship and serve God.

READ Hebrews 1:4-6

Here the writer of Hebrews quotes from the O.T. V 5 is a quote out of a messianic psalm, Psalm 2 v 7. Then he quotes 2 Sam 7:14 part of the Davidic covenant. V 6 quotes another messianic psalm, Ps 97:7. Did these references apply to the angels? No. They were referring to the Messiah, who we know now to be Jesus. "Firstborn" in v 6 refers to Jesus' position of prominence, not that He was literally born first. Jesus reigns supreme above all others including the angels who worship Him.

The remaining verses of this chapter emphasize this idea even further. READ Hebrews 1:7-9.

V 7 quotes Psalm 104:4. V 8-9 quotes from Psalm 45:6-7 and from Isaiah 61. Again the writer is contrasting the angels with the Messiah, with Jesus.

READ Hebrews 1:10-12

V 10-12 are a quote from Psalm 102:25-27. The psalmist speaks of the eternal God and the writer of Hebrews under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit applies it to Jesus who is eternal. Jesus is the Creator while angels are the created.

READ Hebrews 1:13-14

V 13 is a quote from Psalm 110:1, a reference to Messiah. Jesus is to be the ruler of the universe as we read earlier in Phil Ch 2. When will that take place? When our Messiah, King Jesus returns. READ Revelation 19:11-16. By contrast v 14 says that the angels will serve forever ministering to whom? "For the sake of those who are to inherit salvation" – believers in Jesus. Angels follow God's command to help believers. Chew on that thought. That is big!

Jesus is higher than the angels because Jesus is God. Therefore this demands a response on the part of the audience to whom the writer of Hebrews is writing. Application... READ Hebrews 2:1 "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love" – that certainly applied to the audience that the Book of Hebrews was written to, and it applies to us.

We will pick it up there next week.