

JESUS



HIGH PRIEST OF THE NEW COVENANT

GREG MILLS

Jesus High Priest of the New Covenant

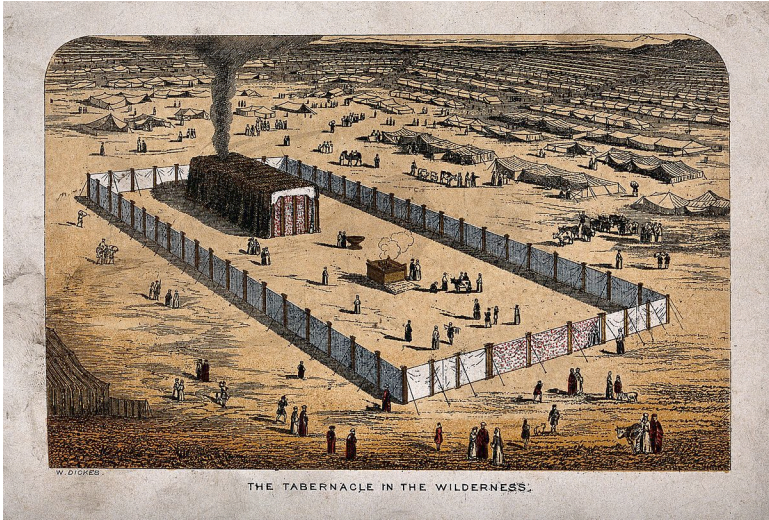


The Letter the Hebrews, verse by verse

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THE PROPHET JEREMIAH 31:31-32 626-586 BC

BEHOLD, DAYS COME, SAITH JEHOVAH, THAT I WILL MAKE A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH: 32 NOT ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT THAT I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS, IN THE DAY OF MY TAKING THEM BY THE HAND, TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; WHICH MY COVENANT THEY BROKE, ALTHOUGH I WAS A HUSBAND UNTO THEM, SAITH JEHOVAH.

Background and historical context

The Apostle Paul warned the Church at Philippi:
they should all understand their claim to salvation,

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,
Philippians 2:12b

This book is to help Christians understand God's plan for salvation. We carefully examine the letter to the Hebrews, verse by verse. For those who question our faith, we should have a ready answer. We can't explain it to others until we fully understand it ourselves. First some background information that help us understand Hebrews.

As is true of human institutions, over time they change and become much different from what they were in the beginning. The Jewish Temple also changed. For example, from the first High Priest until the Babylonian exile the office was a lifetime appointment. The spiritual aspect of seeking God was paramount, but ritual was still observed.

Between the Babylonian exile until the Roman destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, High Priest's office became highly political and, eventually, an appointment by Gentile Roman authorities. The spiritual effectiveness of the Temple became an afterthought by Jesus' day. Few people were seeking a personal relationship with God, as He intended.

The Sadducees, who came to power, didn't even believe in an afterlife, spirits, or angels. Ritualism and empty tradition failed to inspire the nation to seek God. Graft had penetrated Temple administration. John the Baptist and Jesus

began to turn the people's hearts towards God, and were killed for challenging the Temple status quo.

Jewish leadership engineered Jesus' trial and death. After Jesus was resurrected from the dead, the Holy Spirit began to perform various Temple miracles to force the priesthood to accept Jesus as Messiah. They resisted God, and in 70 AD, the Romans broke through the northern wall of Jerusalem after a five-month siege and utterly destroyed the Second Temple.

Sacrifices for sin stopped, without any Scriptural foundation, the Jewish leadership substituted repentance and charity for redemption from sin. The Jewish nation has not offered a blood sacrifice for their sins for 2000 years. Most Jews have ignored the long-awaited Messiah to this day.

In the last chapter, I discuss various interesting miracles God performed, teaching the Levitical priesthood is over. Had Hebrews been written after the destruction of the Temple, the author would likely have argued these miracles documented in the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud offer further proof the Old Covenant is over.

There is movement in Israel to build a third Temple. In as much as God shut down the Old Covenant, and Jesus is now High Priest of the New Covenant, one questions whether God will inhabit a third Temple. Predicted in Scripture, the Third Temple will happen; how that all works out is to be seen.

Between the resurrection of Jesus and August, 70 AD, someone, likely Paul, wrote a magnificent letter to the Hebrews to point out the Old Covenant had been replaced

by a New Covenant which was predicted by the Prophets but missed by the Priesthood.

Hebrews points out that the Levitical Priesthood is over, and Jesus is the eternal High Priest. Everything is new. With this context, the entire Letter to the Hebrews is in *Italics*, with discussion following each segment.

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1. Human Sacrifice is abhorrent to us in the modern era. Horrible ritual sacrifice of babies and adults have been known as far back in antiquity as we can determine. Archeologists have found evidence of human sacrifice in every inhabited continent and nearly every ancient society around the world.

These days, human sacrifice is relatively uncommon since all the various cultures, religions, and political authorities uniformly consider it merely murder under the color of superstition. The Jewish/Christian Ten Commandments confirm that murder is wrong. So, how does His Father's sacrifice of Jesus operate as an acceptable method of restoring humanity to Himself?

Many faithless individuals mock Christianity as a relic of bloody ancient human sacrifices. They bring up the sacrificial death of Christ as the "coup de grâce," or blow of mercy, intellectually putting away Christianity as mythical nonsense. They can think they can safely dismiss the Holy Spirit's conviction for their sins since being born again, and the afterlife is a sad delu-

sion of those less intellectually gifted. The Scripture fully anticipated this argument.

For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us that are saved it is God's power. 19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and set aside the understanding of the understanding ones.

1 Corinthians 1:18-19

Self-sacrifice is heroic, not murder, in some instances. If a fireman were to run into a burning building to save a child someone thought was inside, that certainly wouldn't be murder or suicide. A soldier in the heat of battle, who gives up his life by falling to cover a hand grenade with his body to save his buddies, is a hero. You can say in both cases these people sacrificed themselves to save others.

The case of Jesus was capital punishment to the Romans. As far as they were concerned, Jesus arguably represented a strong challenge to the authority of Rome. Capital punishment by crucifixion was common in the Roman Empire.

From the Jewish leaders thinking, they used the Romans to get rid of someone they feared was competing with them for moral authority. They pushed the notion Jesus was causing political instability in Israel. The high priest said, *"It is better that one man die than the nation perish."*

Joseph Caiaphas, the High Priest that year, appears to have had selfish evil motives, but Scripture tells us those words were inspired prophecy. The Holy Spirit caused him to say that since the statement was correct in a different sense, than he intended. The priests certainly had good reason to believe Jesus' claim to be the long-awaited Messiah.

From His standpoint, Jesus' death was heroic self-sacrifice. It was an act of obedience, worthy of great praise and glory from His Father. Jesus' death was indeed sacrificing one man to save

the nation. Scripture teaches us it was His self-sacrifice that saves millions of us, all who trust Him.

The Father didn't spring self-sacrifice on Jesus at the last minute. Sent by the Father to die for all humanity, Jesus gladly did it since He loved us so much. Who are we to accuse God of anything but loving us enough to allow Jesus' death to make us holy?

looking steadfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith: who, in view of the joy lying before him, endured [the] cross, having despised [the] shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

Capital punishment is considered murder by the state, only among those seeking to end it. There is Scripture to support capital punishment, at least for first-degree murder.

So, the death of Jesus has different motivational aspects, depending on who you are and what part you played in His death. Since He died to pay the death penalty for your sins, *you are also personally responsible!* What will you do with that information? How do you feel about it?

2. The Jewish people greatly revered the Torah. That is what they called the written Word of God. The sacred scrolls of the "Law and the Prophets" were well respected and commonly vast amounts of Scripture memorized. Predictions made in Scripture were thought certain to come to pass.

However, there was much argument as to the actual meaning of specific prophetic passages then, as there is today. Is something written in the Torah to be taken as absolutely literally or as a teaching metaphor? Passionate debates were argued in Synagogues and gatherings of the scribes and Pharisees.

Guests who attended Synagogue on the Sabbath could read passages or recite from the Scrolls and teach the congregation. Jesus utilized the "open microphone" custom and galvanized the

gathering with His words of divine wisdom that astounded the assembly. The author of Hebrews used that culturally accepted opening to introduce Jesus, the High Priest of the New Covenant. His letter to Jewish elders most likely was read and discussed widely.

3. Hebrews is thought to be the most challenging book of the Bible to understand. We must carefully examine Hebrews one verse at a time to hope to understand it. In the light of the context of similar verses found in other books, a careful examination of Old Testament Scripture often clarifies what the author of Hebrews was arguing.

When decoded by finding supporting Scripture, the letter to the Hebrews is not difficult to understand. I am not claiming an easy, private interpretation, just the opposite. The author wrote the letter to the Hebrews to aid their understanding of perplexing Old Testament Scripture, mostly those that speak of Jesus.

There are two main points argued in the letter; Jesus is the High Priest of the eternal New Covenant, and the Old Covenant Temple system is no longer in force. The author cites many Scriptural references and speaks divine words of wisdom and prophecy to tie his arguments neatly. The power of the Holy Spirit is quite evident throughout the letter.

The author boldly pitched controversial notions found in this letter. The New Covenant replacing the older Mosaic* Covenant was very hard for many Jews to accept, then and now. Most of the Jewish leaders of that day rejected these revolutionary concepts. The main underlying message is; Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, whom they crucified.

*Note: “Mosaic” means related to the ancient scrolls of the Law written by Moses. In our Bibles the ancient books of Moses are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers.

The letter was addressed first to those who could read. Later

on, the letter was read out loud to the churches. We know some of the Pharisees came to believe since this was mentioned in the book of Acts. Apparently, some Jewish priests and leaders personally read the letter to the Hebrews, and the Holy Spirit helped them believe.

Some argued Gentile Christians ought to keep the Jewish law still. This letter and the teachings of Paul were effective in discussing the proposition; the New Covenant supersedes the Old Covenant. Paul was called the “Apostle of Faith” since he was so skillful and persuasive in his arguments in Romans and his other letters. He was no doubt a skilled orator in person.

And some of those who were of the sect of the Pharisees, who believed, rose up from among [them], saying that they ought to circumcise them and enjoin them to keep the law of Moses. Acts 15:5

4. Jeremiah’s bold prophecy of a coming New Covenant between the Lord and humanity must have provoked many passionate discussions in the Jewish community. His own people killed Jeremiah after Egypt conquered the Jewish nation. Historically, it is thought the Jews stoned him because of his unpopular prophecy. Speaking for the Lord when the Holy Spirit gives you something to say, not politically correct can be hazardous to your life!

Ultimately, many of Jeremiah’s prophecies came to pass in those days. His prophecy was then included in the books of the major prophets. His text eventually became a part of the Old Testament Bible we have today.

5. Genesis set up God’s planned redemption of humanity. The Jewish faith revolved around fulfilling the first Covenant between God and Abraham, called the Mosaic Law. We would call it the Old Covenant.

First mention of God’s plan for humanity’s redemption, and

the restoration of our holiness, is found in Genesis 3. This early hint of redemption came during God's pronouncement of the curse of death due to the "original sin" of Adam and Eve. As God cursed Satan, who was in the form of a serpent, an interesting turn of words occurs in the 15th verse.

And Jehovah Elohim said to the serpent, Because thou hast done this, be thou cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field. On thy belly shalt thou go, and eat dust all the days of thy life. 15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; he shall crush thy head, and thou shalt crush his heel. Genesis 3:14-15

Women have eggs; they don't have "seed" or sperm. Sperm is the contribution of men in conception. So, the seed of the woman is an interesting exception to the usual biological rule. The woman's seed has to be male in this prophetic passage since the Lord is male. He will crush the head of the serpent, but the serpent will crush His heel.

The prophetic mention of crushing the head of the serpent is very significant. This act symbolized ending the death penalty for sin, which occurred triumphantly when God raised Jesus from the grave.

Jesus was the first to be raised from the dead. The promise of resurrection is extended to all who believe in Him. So the death penalty for sin has been put aside due to the sacrificial efforts of Jesus Christ.

6. It is also a prophetic point that Satan crushed His heel. Despite so many who suffered the horrible death on the cross during the Roman Empire's long reign, little was written about how they did it. It was likely assumed, everyone knew all about it since Rome's form of applying the death penalty was commonly seen around the known world in those years. Just about any crime was a capital offense. Scourging was known as the half

death since so many died afterward from blood loss and infection.

Most in modern Christianity visualize crucifixion based upon Catholic mid-evil art. Large spikes were set, one in each palm. One spike went down vertically through the top of the two feet, one over the other. There is commonly a block of wood for the condemned to stand on. That is not likely an accurate depiction.

Archeology paints a more brutal image of Roman crucifixion. A Jewish man's skeleton was found during excavation of a burial tomb near Jerusalem. Buried in an ornate funeral box, the bones belonging to someone named Yehohnan.

Buried with him, curiously, were remnants of a block of wood. Securely held between his feet, evidence the wooden timber was once attached to the side of both feet. Two spikes were driven horizontally through the sides of his feet at the heel. In this case they became badly stuck in a hard knot in the rough timber. So, they were unable to pull the valuable spikes out after he died.

Typically spikes were recycled for future crucifixions. But to bury him, they had to cut off and waste part of the cross's upright portion and two spikes. So, they cut the timber above and below the feet and buried the entire wood block with him. Though the wood decayed over two thousand years, the placement of the spikes through the skeletal remains, *indicates a spike in each foot*, not one down through both feet.

Pushing up to support your body weight on spikes driven through the sides of your feet would have crushed sensitive nerves in the feet. That would have caused horrible pain required for taking each breath since hanging on your arms constricts inhalation.

What was so remarkable about the finding was that it is the only archeological evidence of Roman crucifixion that has ever been found. A spike went sideways through the side of each of the victim's feet so he straddled the upright timber. The iron

spikes acted much like the stirrups on a saddle. So, the feet were not nailed together in the front of the cross with one spike, as depicted in mid-evil art. Pounding spikes through the sides of the feet would more likely have bruised the heel than one driven from the top down through both feet.

The arms or wrists were tied to the cross first, and then both wrists spiked. This procedure prevented tearing out the flesh of the palms. The Romans had a lot of crucifixion experience since that was the standard execution method for non-Roman citizens. Since that form of execution was thought to be less dignified and indeed more merciful, Romans citizens were beheaded.

7. The Lord and Noah were parties to the Old Covenant. This Covenant is a promise made by God, mentioned in Genesis 6:18. God warned Noah of the coming flood and promised that Noah and his family would be spared. Noah built a giant ark. He constructed the ark precisely as God ordered.

We see that Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Everyone else was always thinking evil thoughts. Noah thought about righteousness and the Lord. God sees the hearts of all of us.

For I, behold, I bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy all flesh under the heavens in which is the breath of life: everything that is on the earth shall expire. 18 But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt go into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. Genesis 6:17-18

Noah did as God ordered, and the Lord flooded the earth, as He warned He would do. Some years later, an ancient man named Abram, living in Ur of the Chaldeans, was also known by the Lord to be righteous. Most of humanity had started worshipping idols in those days. Abram's father was Terah, who died at 205 years old.

Picking up the history of the First Covenant, we see that

Abram was a remarkable man. God spoke to Abram and told him to leave his father's house to move to a land God would give him. Further, if Abram went as the Lord directed, he would be the Father of a great nation, and his name would also be great.

He would be a great blessing to all the families of the earth. So, even beyond the nation Israel, all the nations of the earth have a great blessing coming through him. The promised Messiah of the Jews is that blessing.

Abraham made war with King Chedorlaomer of Elam. According to Genesis 14:14. Abram fought alongside the kings of and Gomorrah. Abraham won his nephew Lot's freedom since he had been captured earlier by Elam's army.

Salem's King Melchisedec brought out bread and wine for Abraham after winning the battle against Chedorlaomer. Eventually, Cherdorlaomer was killed.

Melchisedec was king of Salem and a high priest to God early in ancient history. The Scripture doesn't tell us very much about Melchisedec except that he was king of a town that became Jerusalem. There is much more about Melchisedec that is mysterious. That he was the high priest to Jehovah indicates others also followed the Lord in those ancient days, more than just Abraham.

Note: The name or title "Melchisedec" is sometimes spelled Melchisedek. The name is based upon the conjunction of two Hebrew words, "melek" meaning king and "zedek" meaning righteousness. So he was the King of Righteousness.

Melchisedec was mentioned in Genesis and in Psalm 110. That psalm of David was written about 1044 BC*. More was obviously known of this interesting character than made it into our canonized Scripture. The letter to the Hebrews tells us more about this ancient High Priest by far, than the Old Testament.

The dead sea scrolls and ancient books also tell details of interest.

I strongly recommend the recent book, the “Ancient Order of Melchisedec”. This reference is a scholarly book written by Ken Johnson, TH.D. His web site is:

www.BibleFacts.org See: [amazon.com/dp/B08KWP11G3](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08KWP11G3)

And Melchisedec, king of Salem brought out bread and wine. And he was a priest of the Most High God. 19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heavens and earth. 20 And blessed be the Most High God, who has delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him the tenth of all. Genesis 14:18-20

After being blessed by Melchisedec, Abraham refuses accept anything for himself or share the booty of the war he had recovered. However, he willingly gave Melchisedec a tenth share of the loot.

Abraham testifies to the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah; the Lord God Jehovah is the Most High possessor of heavens and earth. So, Abram testified to Sodom and Gomorrah’s evil kings about the one true God, a final warning to them before the Lord later destroyed those wicked cities with fire and brimstone.

And Jehovah rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven, 25 and overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew upon the ground. Genesis 19:24-25

Abraham was ninety-nine when God made a covenant declaring He would bless Abram. God promised if Abram walked righteously before Him and were perfect, the Lord would do some amazing things. God’s promise of a son for Abraham and

that he would be the father of many nations turned out to be conditioned upon Abraham's faith.

Abraham believed God; it was counted as righteousness. We know Abram trusted God and was even called the friend of God. Abram was renamed Abraham by God to commemorate the occasion of the Covenant. We see that God clarified that Abraham and his wife Sarah would have a son of the blessing to be named Isaac. The bloodline was to be through Sarah, rather than a servant woman.

And Abram was ninety-nine years old, when Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said to him, I [am] the Almighty God: walk before my face, and be perfect. 2 And I will set my covenant between me and thee, and will very greatly multiply thee. 3 And Abram fell on his face; and God talked with him, saying, 4 It is I: behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of a multitude of nations. 5 And thy name shall no more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of a multitude of nations have I made thee. 6 And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee. Genesis 17:1-7

The Covenant God made with Abraham was formalized later with a temple worship system and detailed process for offering sacrifices for sin.

God later tasked Moses to lead Israel's children. The Lord had just freed the Jews from 400 years captivity in Egypt through great miracles God performed to obtain freedom from the nation's slavery.

8. Hebrews was likely written before August 70 AD, the date

of the destruction of the second Temple. As the Romans conquered Jerusalem under Titus, a fire accidentally burned the Temple to the ground. Were the letter to the Hebrews written after the Temple's destruction, the author would certainly have mentioned sacrifices at the Temple could no longer be made. He certainly didn't raise that argument.

According to the Jewish Historian Flavius Josephus, Roman general Titus cleverly allowed Jewish pilgrims to swell Jerusalem's Passover population. Then he trapped them all within the walls city to deplete the available drinking water and food reserves more quickly.

Titus then tightly sealed the city overnight and held Jerusalem under siege for five months. Ultimately the Romans broke through the city wall, slaughtered many and crucified the rest. Only teenagers were spared and taken away as slaves.

I will refer to the author of the book of Hebrews as "the author" since we are not sure who wrote it. Paul, known as the "apostle of faith," has been widely thought to have written it, unsigned. Many authorities simply attribute Hebrews to Paul and ignore naysayers.

Having considered the writer's vocabulary and style, other scholars think it more likely someone else wrote Hebrews. It does seem that whoever wrote the book had at least been taught by Paul if he wasn't the actual author.

Translation of a manuscript from one language to another inadvertently changes the tone of the writing. That effect may have contributed to confusion about the Paul being the author. If Paul had written the letter in Hebrew and someone else later translated it into Greek, some tone and even some vocabulary might have changed. No matter who wrote Hebrews, it is very impressive, and the Holy Spirit uses it to help us understand why Jesus had to die.

9. The notion that faith alone makes us right with God was not widely taught in the early church until Paul came along. After his dramatic calling by the Lord on Damascus's road, Paul began teaching that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. After some time, he went to Jerusalem to compare notes with the Lord's other apostles. Paul concluded his teaching about grace concurred with the opinion of leaders in Jerusalem's church.

However, the tone of the book of James, for example, tries to put good works in a better light. Perhaps James was more in line with Jewish thought in the early church. Then as now, there are differing opinions on doctrine. That we can be saved by grace alone was certainly revolutionary to those raised in Judaism.

That Paul could have written Hebrews is not disputed. Paul was one of the most gifted of the Pharisees. The book of Hebrews was unsigned, which might have been due to a couple of reasons.

First, it was considered in those days to be arrogant, putting your name on your manuscript. Secondly, Paul's name on such a controversial manuscript, to be sent to the Pharisees, would have immediately motivated the scroll's destruction rather than reading it. So sending an anonymous document might have been wise.

According to the Sanhedrin elders, Paul was a Jewish turn-coat and blasphemer for teaching that Jesus is the Son of God. This letter eloquently teaches Jesus is High Priest of the New Covenant putting the Levitical priesthood out of a job. The author wanted to explain how the first Covenant with Abraham and the new Covenant perfectly fit Scripture.

The Holy Spirit was able to use the church's testimony and the book of Hebrews to the extent some of the Sanhedrin were eventually converted. One can only speculate Hebrews had its desired effect in helping the early church understand God's plan.

Were Hebrews a legal brief, the shrewd construction of the letter is classic. The author built a strong case argument by argument citing selected Scripture, and then he came to logical conclusions that defied those who denied that Jesus was High Priest of the New Covenant.

Having therefore a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast the confession. 15 For we have not a high priest not able to sympathize with our infirmities, but tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart. Hebrews 4:14-15

Jesus High Priest of the New Covenant