

HEBREWS

INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

Hebrews is a remarkable book. Far more than any other book it shows the relationship between the Old Testament system and the New Testament system. It also contains some very important instructions for Christian living.

There are several indications in the New Testament that it took a good while for the Jewish converts to understand the changes that accompanied the institution of the church and the Christian system. We see this in Acts 15 when the Jerusalem church leaders wrestled with the question of whether or not circumcision should be required of Gentile converts. As late as Acts 21 we see the leaders of the Jerusalem church—presumably the best informed men in the whole church—still very much in error regarding the relationship between the old and new laws.

As we get into the book of Hebrews we see that the writer deals with a number of misunderstandings prevalent in his day. There was the question of who was more important, Moses or Jesus. There were questions about the role and relative importance of angels. Many were unclear concerning priesthood—the Old Testament system and the New Testament system.

When one gains a clear understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament system and the New Testament system—the elaborate and detailed comparisons—he is amazed at how ingenious the relationships are. It becomes abundantly clear that only God could have devised such a plan.

As one studies the New Testament he realizes how few people had the type of understanding required to write the book of Hebrews—at least insofar as we are acquainted with characters in the New Testament. Paul seems to be the obvious person so qualified. Many think Paul is the author, although the writer does not identify himself. If it was not Paul it was most likely an associate of his—who had learned a great deal from him.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

This introduction to the Old Testament system is provided in order to acquaint the student with basic information necessary for understanding a number of points made in Hebrews.

Jacob and his family moved to Egypt while Joseph was a ruler there. Over hundreds of years Jacob's descendants (the Israelites) were enslaved and mistreated by the Egyptians. They cried out to God, who sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and into the wilderness as they headed for Canaan, the land God promised to give them.

Exodus 20 records the giving of the 10 Commandments on Mt. Sinai. In addition to these basic 10 rules, there were numerous other laws, rules, and regulations. Included among those were instructions for construction of the tabernacle (a portable place of worship) as well as for various items to be placed inside the tabernacle (See illustration).

There were also instructions concerning the priests and their responsibilities. It is important to understand these in order to understand the counterparts in Hebrews. All Old Testament priests had to be from the tribe of Levi (one of Jacob's sons). This included the High Priest as well as regular priests. The following items are key pieces of information which a student of Hebrews needs to be aware of:

1. The tabernacle was divided into 2 parts: The Holy Place, and the smaller Most Holy Place (for details and dimensions see Exodus 26).
2. Regular priests were to perform functions daily in the Holy Place.
3. The Most Holy Place was to be entered only ONCE PER YEAR and ONLY by the High Priest. He took blood to be offered for the sins of the people.
4. The following items were to be placed in the tabernacle:
 - MOST HOLY PLACE....The Ark of the Covenant--a box-like structure overlaid with gold.
On each side of the top was attached a cherub. The wings of each extended forward over the top of the ark. (See Ex. 25:10-22).
 - HOLY PLACE....A...Table and utensils. Special bread was regularly placed on the table.
(See Ex. 25:23-30)
 - B. Lampstand (See Ex. 25:31-40)
 - C. Altar for burning incense (Ex. 30:1-10)
5. The tabernacle was surrounded by a courtyard, ringed by posts and curtains (Ex. 27:9-19)
6. Inside the courtyard were:
 - A. A bronze altar for offering sacrifices (Ex. 27:1-8)
 - B. A basin for washing—to be used by priests before entering Holy Place (30:17-22)

In our study of Hebrews we will see how the structure of the Christian system has so many counterparts in the old Jewish system. Hebrews 10:1 expresses it this way, "The law (old system) is only a *shadow* of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves".

CHAPTER 1

1. It should be noted that a major theme—especially early in the book—of Hebrews is the supremacy and superiority of Christ. Chapter one deals with the superiority of Christ over angels—for those who may have been confused about that matter.

2. Fill in the following:

Jesus was appointed _____ of all things. He is the radiance of _____
_____. He sustains all things by his _____
_____. He provided _____ for sins and sat at the _____
of the _____ of _____.

3. What are 2 statements that God never made to angels?

4. Angels are said to be _____ sent to serve whom?
_____, To whom would this refer?

Chapter 2

1. Chapter 2 begins with a warning against _____.

2. In what sense was Jesus made a little lower than the angels?

3. Jesus became perfect through _____

4. Through his death Jesus destroyed the power of _____. Who holds the power of death? _____

5. In order to become a merciful and faithful high priest Jesus had to be made like whom?

6. How do Jesus' experiences make him better qualified to serve as our high priest?

CHAPTER 3

1. This chapter establishes that Jesus was far greater than Moses.

2. Moses was a _____ in God's house while Jesus is a _____

Over God's house.....and WE are that house.

3. Who is referred to in verses 7-11? _____, (This is important because the writer makes application to us.)
4. What is the purpose of daily encouraging other Christians? _____
5. The adult Israelites (except 2) who left Egypt never reached the Promised Land. The basic reason was _____

Chapter 4

1. Note the comparisons:
 - A. The Israelites were God's people.....WE are God's people today.
 - B. Their good news (gospel) was being delivered from the bondage of Egypt.....OUR good news (gospel) is being delivered from the bondage of sin.
 - C. Their goal was to reach their Promised Land (Canaan). OUR goal is to reach our promised land (heaven).
 - D. They had to travel through the wilderness to reach Canaan. WE have to travel through the wilderness of this earthly life to get to heaven.
 - E. They were required to be obedient to God on their journey. WE are required to be obedient to God on our journey through life.
 - F. Because of their repeated disobedience to God (due to their unbelief) they never got to the Promised Land.....The question is whether WE will be faithful to God until the end---or will we (through OUR unbelief) become disobedient and fail to enter the rest God has prepared for his people.

(There is a strange—but common—doctrine being taught today which insists that once a person has been saved he CANNOT be lost! But this passage from Hebrews teaches the exact opposite. Not only CAN a person be lost, but these verses warn us to BE CAREFUL so that we do not do so!)

2. What is the "rest" mentioned in verse 11? _____
3. Does verse 11 sound as if it is possible for one to fall? _____
4. How much can we hide from God? _____
5. The Old Testament high priest went once a year into the _____, but our high priest (who is _____) went where? _____
6. How did Jesus' time on earth help qualify him to be our high priest? _____
7. The writer stresses that we should approach the throne of grace (through prayer) with _____.

CHAPTER 5

1. What is the central duty of a high priest? _____
2. Only those chosen by _____ can be a high priest.
3. Read Genesis 14 and note the mention of Melchizedek and his relationship with Abraham (more about this later).
4. Notice (vs. 7-9) the points concerning Jesus' relationship with God during his days on the earth. Jesus offered up _____, showed reverent _____, and learned _____ from what he _____. Through these he was made _____.
5. In verses 11-14 the writer scolds his readers for their failure to continue to study and learn---a distinct warning to us. What do you see as the difference between "milk" and "solid food"? _____
6. The writer insists that after a reasonable period of time one should have learned enough to become a _____.
7. How do you evaluate yourself in the maturing process? _____

CHAPTER 6

1. What are 6 items that are included among "elementary teachings"? _____

2. Verses 4-8 have been the subject of some controversy. It is not clear exactly who is being referred to. But it is a clear warning against falling away. (Please note that it is not impossible for such a person to become saved....IF he repents. The problem is that the person's heart becomes so hardened that it is impossible to get his heart changed.)
3. What do you think the "land" refers to? _____
4. In what ways does the writer commend and encourage in vs. 9-12? _____

5. Verses 13-20 are about hope and assurance. Reference is made to promises made by God to _____. God made a _____ and it is impossible for God to _____. The point is that God's promises to us are just as reliable as his promises to Abraham.

CHAPTER 7

1. To understand this chapter one has to have some understanding of the priesthood. It will be remembered that the priests under the Law of Moses were all of the tribe

- of Levi, who was a descendant of Abraham. To the Jews, Abraham was the greatest person in their history---as well as being the father of their family.
2. The purpose of the writer is to show the superiority of Jesus' priesthood over the Levitical priesthood. Note the following points:
 - A. Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek (as opposed to the order of Levi).
 - B. Melchizedek was superior to Abraham. Proof: Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek---and the lesser always pays tithes to the greater.
 - C. Melchizedek is indeed a mystery person. We are not told about his origin---his family background---or about how he became a priest. The verses sound as though he had no parents and no death, but that surely is not what is meant. It is more likely that the reference is to the absence of any historical record of his genealogy. But there can be little doubt that his role was arranged by God as part of his grand over-all plan.
 3. It is important to remember that a great problem in the early church was trying to convince the Jews that the Law of Moses was no longer in force, but had been replaced by the law of Christ. Much of the argumentation in Hebrews is to clarify and convince readers of the superiority of the new system. The writer points out various weaknesses of the old system. This is clearly seen in verses 11-13.
 4. Note the logic in verses 11-13. (A) David had foretold that messiah would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek; (B) Since all priests under the Law had to be Levites---the messiah could *NOT* be a priest while that law was still in effect; (C) conclusion: that law had to be changed in order for a priest in the order of Melchizedek to operate. (Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, so he could not have been a priest under the Law of Moses.)
 5. Verse 23 points out another way in which Jesus' priesthood is superior: human priests die, but Jesus lives forever in a permanent priesthood---AND he is able to save.
 6. (Verses 26-28) What are some other ways in which Jesus' priesthood is superior?

CHAPTER 8

1. The counterpart of the sanctuary (Most Holy Place) of the O.T. tabernacle is _____
2. (A) What was offered as a gift by the O.T. High Priest? _____
 (B) What was offered by Jesus? _____
3. Another advantage of the ministry of Jesus (over the old system) is that it is based

on better _____ . What is one of the better promises? _____

3. The promise of a new covenant (agreement) was clearly spelled out in the O.T. Verses 8-12 is a quotation from what O.T. passage? _____
4. Important note: look at verse 11. Under the O.T. system all Jews were automatically—by birth—children of God (being one of the Israelites). This was true even if they were idolators, not knowing the true God.

But under the new covenant, foretold by Jeremiah, everyone in the family knows the Lord. Why? Because one CANNOT ENTER the family of God without knowing God—and submitting to him.

5. At various places in the writings of Paul he points out that the old law (Law of Moses) was taken away, “nailed to the cross”, and that it no longer had authority over people, having been replaced by the far superior new covenant introduced by Christ. The verses (7-12) in chapter 12 reinforce the fact that this had long been God’s plan.

CHAPTER 9

1. Verses 1-10 give details of the tabernacle which we noted earlier.
2. The biggest weakness of the old law was that it had no provision for forgiveness of sins. The blood of animals, required by the law, basically postponed the guilt. (It has been compared to owing a debt that one cannot pay, but by paying the interest regularly there is no final foreclosure.)
3. A big contrast is evident as one sees that the blood offered by our High Priest (Jesus) was HIS OWN---and was accepted by God as sufficient payment for our sins—as well as for those in the past who were faithful in keeping the old laws.
4. Study carefully the illustrations that show the many parallels seen when comparing the 2 systems—the old and the new (O.T. and N.T.)
5. Verses 11-14 contrast what the priests did under the Law of Moses with what Christ did...showing how much superior Christ’s sacrifice was. (Also the superiority of the Most Holy Place where Jesus took his blood---heaven).
6. Vs. 15 points out the superiority of the new covenant (agreement) with its better promises.
7. Vs. 16-28 discuss the relationship of shedding blood to forgiveness of sins---the inadequacy of animal blood and the adequacy of Jesus’ blood. The significance of Jesus’ blood became much more understandable to those who had a tradition of offering blood for sins. It was easy to see the superiority of blood from a perfect sacrifice.

8. Vs. 23-28 stress the once-for-all sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice—the providing of forgiveness and the eternal results for those who are faithful (eternal salvation).

CHAPTER 10

1. Vs. 1-10 repeat and reinforce earlier points: the old law could not bring “perfection” (forgiveness of sins) and was only a shadow of what was to come later. They refer to the *inadequacy* of animal sacrifices---and the *adequacy* of the sacrifice of Jesus.
2. As vs. 11 indicates, at the time of this writing there continued to be animal sacrifices and priestly duties being carried out in the temple by Jewish people. (This continued until 70 A.D. when Roman armies destroyed the temple, ending this phase of the Jewish religion.)
3. Verses 19-25 encourage us to be fully assured of our salvation and to take full advantage of our open access to God. Vs. 24-25 stress the importance of helping other Christians, especially in spending time in meeting together.
4. Vs. 26-31 provide a stern warning against giving ourselves over to sin. God has offered us wonderful blessings, including complete forgiveness of our sins if we gratefully submit ourselves to his will. But if we reject him---in effect trampling underfoot the Son of God---we can expect dreadful consequences.
5. Vs. 32-39 offer encouragement to persevere in the face of persecution. Many had already endured hardships because of their faith, and more could be expected. There is assurance that it will all be *more* than worthwhile---for those who do not shrink back (give up and surrender to sin).

CHAPTER 11

1. Chapter 11 is the great chapter on faith. Faith is defined as being _____ of what we hope for and _____ of what we do not see.
 2. Very briefly tell one thing each of the following did by faith:
 - A. Abel. _____
 - B. Enoch. _____
 - C. Noah. _____
 - D. Abraham. _____
 3. The Old Testament does not mention a specific promise of heaven. What indicates that Abraham must have been told something about heaven? _____
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HEBREWS 11 REFERENCES

Hebrews 11 has been referred to as a “Biblical Hall of Fame”, based on the great faith of many past heroes. For those who would like to take a closer look at the lives of these people, the following references can be used to look up the biblical record.

ABEL.....Genesis 4

ENOCH.....Genesis 5:21-24

NOAH....Genesis 6:1—9:29

ABRAHAM....Genesis 11:27—25:11

ISAAC....Genesis 21:1-35:29

JACOB.....Genesis 25:19—49:33

JOSEPH....Genesis 30:22—50:26

MOSES....Exodus 2:10—Deuteronomy 34:7

RAHAB....Joshua 2:1—6:25

GIDEON....Judges 6:11—8:32

BARAK....Judges 4:1—4:21

SAMSON....Judges 13:1—16:31

JEPHTHAH....Judges 11:1—12:7

DAVID....I Samuel 16:1—I Kings 2:10 (+)

SAMUEL....I Samuel 1:20—28:16

What indicates that others besides Abraham had similar information? _____

4. What did Abraham expect God to do regarding Isaac---whom he was to offer as a sacrifice? _____
5. Tell one thing each of the following did by faith:
 - A. Isaac-- _____
 - B. Jacob-- _____
 - C. Joseph-- _____
 - D. Moses-- _____
6. How is v. 26 puzzling? _____
7. How do you feel when you read vs. 32-38? _____

CHAPTER 12

1. Who are the witnesses? _____
2. The Christian life is compared to a race. What is the main thing that can slow down our race _____
3. It is suggested that it will help in running our race if we will keep our eyes on _____, especially thinking of what he did for us.
4. How is God's discipline good for us?

5. What do you think it means to be holy? _____

6. The writer urges us to live in _____ with all men, to be _____, nor to be _____.
7. Vs. 18-21 refer to Exodus 19:10-19, the occasion when God gave the 10 Commandments to the Israelites.
8. Vs. 22-24 contrasts this with our far happier and more joyous occasion as we are presented with blessings of OUR relationship with the Lord.
9. Vs. 25-29 repeats the earlier admonitions to take the Lord seriously---and NOT to turn away from him.
10. The "shaking" refers to what happened at Mt. Sinai, contrasting it with the REAL shaking---when the Lord returns to bring the world to an end!
11. We are to worship God with _____ and _____.

CHAPTER 13

1. A number of exhortations are given in this chapter, including the following:
 - A. Do not forget to entertain _____
 - B. Remember those in _____
 - C. God will judge the _____ and _____
 - D. Keep our lives free from the _____ of _____
 - E. Imitate whom? _____ . Consider the _____ of their _____ .
 - F. Be careful to avoid _____
 - G. We should be willing to bear the _____ that Jesus bore.
 - H. We should do _____ and _____ with others.
 - I. What reason is given for obeying our leaders?

 - J. The writer prayed that God would equip his readers with _____
_____ for _____. What might have been included? _____