



Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

Eighth Series: "The Right Edge" New Testament: Epistles

Lesson 27: Hebrews

I. Introduction

- A. Hebrews is unlike any other book in the New Testament. There is no introductory salutation.

"It is not easy to see who wrote it, to whom it was written, or why. It lacks an epistolary opening but has an epistolary conclusion. Difficulties abound, but the profundity of its thought gives it a significant place in the NT." (Expositor's Commentary #12, p. 3)
- B. It is "the most difficult book in the New Testament. It was written by a scholar for a group of little scholars. But I believe that there is no book in NT which is more worth the effort to understand." (The Letter to the Hebrews, p. ix)
- C. Hebrews gives us a unique and glorious picture of Jesus Christ. We see both the "splendor of his manhood and the majesty of His deity."
- D. This book gives us "glimpses of the Christian attitudes" regarding the Jewish churches of the 1st century. (see Acts 15:1-29, 21:17-26)

II. Author

- A. E.F. Scott wrote: "The *Epistle to the Hebrews* is in many respects the riddle of the New Testament." When we ask when it was written, to whom it was written, and who wrote it, we can only guess and grope.
- B. "The search for the author of Hebrews has been going on for centuries, and is no nearer solution than when it began. There is no scarcity of candidates, but conclusive evidence for any one candidate is lacking, and problems exist no matter who is suggested. No name is attached to the epistle." (Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 13)
- C. Some have suggested Barnabas.
 - 1. Tertullian first made the suggestion (150-222 AD)
 - 2. There is a play on words: compare Acts 4:36 and Hebrews 13:22
 - 3. Barnabas was a mediator between Jewish Christian and Paul in Acts 9.
- D. Some have suggested Apollos
 - 1. Suggested by Martin Luther
 - 2. A close association with Paul and Timothy

3. Thoroughly versed in Old Testament
- E. Some have suggested Paul
 1. Earliest reference to Paul as author (Clement of Alexandria, 150-215 AD)
 2. Internal evidence
 - a. Similar closing (see 13:25 and 2 Thes. 3:17-18)
 - b. Strong association with Timothy
 - c. Certain distinctives similar to other letters
 - d. Peter seems to infer his authorship in 2 Peter 3:15-16 and 1 Peter 1:1.
 3. Certain problems

Style of writing differs from Paul's

III. Audience

- A. "The identity of the original readers is lost as completely as that of the author. Neither their nationality nor their geographic location is agreed upon by scholars." (Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 22)
- B. Jewish Christians (see 2:3, 3:1, 5:12, 10:32-34)

"Most conservatives would agree that the Hebrew-Christian character of Hebrews is self-evident, although the precise geographic location of the readers may not yet be settled." (Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 23)
- C. Likely a Roman congregation (see Hebrews 13:24)

IV. Purpose

"Many Jewish believers, having stepped out of Judaism into Christianity, want to reverse their course in order to escape persecution by their countrymen. The writer of Hebrews exhorts them to 'go on to perfection.' (6:1)" (Talk thru the Bible, p. 454)

V. Date

- A. Quoted by Clement of Rome in 96 AD
- B. Does not mention destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD
- C. Timothy was still alive (13:23)
- D. Roman persecution was mounting
- E. Likely written between 64-68 AD

VI. Special Notes

- A. It reads more like an essay than a letter. The exception is 13:18-25.
- B. It has a very scholarly style.
- C. It has a plethora of Old Testament questions and allusions.

- D. It makes many doctrinal contributions to the New Testament.
 - 1. Notice the theme of the supremacy of Christ.
 - a. Over the OT prophets (1:1-3)
 - b. Greater than the Angels (1:4-2:18)
 - c. Superior to Moses (3:1-6)
 - 2. Notice that His redemptive work is superior to:
 - a. The OT priesthood (4:14-7:28)
 - b. Melchizedek (7:9-10)
 - c. The old covenant (8:6-13)
- E. It highlights the “priestly ministry of Christ on behalf of the believers.”
- F. It shows how Christ fulfills all the types found in the Levitical sacrificial system.
- G. The book carries 5 specific warnings showing the perils of turning away from Christ. See 2:1-4, 3:7- 4:13, 5:11-6:20, 10:19-39 and 12:25-29.

VII. Suggested Outline (adapted from Talk thru the Bible)

- I. Superiority of Christ’s Person (1:1 – 4:13)
- II. Superiority of Christ’s Work (4:14-10:18)
 - a. Priesthood
 - b. Covenant
 - c. Sacrifice
- III. Superiority of the Christians walk (10:19-13:25)
 - a. Full assurance of faith (10:19-11:40)
 - b. Endurance of faith (12:1-12:29)
 - c. Exhortation to love (13:1-13:25)

VIII. So what?

- A. Consider carefully the words of Hebrews 10:19-23: Let us draw near

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Discuss how Gentile believers and Jewish believers were different in the 1st century.
- 2. How does the book of Hebrews relate to the Old Testament? What are types?
- 3. Write out Hebrews 11:1 in your own words.
- 4. What is the personal message of Hebrews 12:1-3? How does it apply to you?