

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

CHRIST IS BETTER

HEBREWS

Strictly from a critical standpoint, the book of Hebrews would win the award for being the most unusual and most difficult-to-understand book of the New Testament.

However, from a Christological standpoint, the book of Hebrews would win the award for being the most explanatory, and Christ-centered book of the New Testament.

It has been said the book of Hebrews is the book that begins like an essay, continues like a sermon, and concludes like a letter. Much like the book of Romans does in explaining the purpose of the moral law and how its demands were fulfilled by Christ, Hebrews explains the ceremonial law and how those demands were met by Christ.

That's why this book is both confusing and compelling. It's confusing because we are so far removed from the ceremonial law of the Old Testament, that many people find themselves lost in the terminology and explanations. But once you take the key of the Old Testament and run over to Hebrews, the book opens up for you and now you're looking at a compelling book with an ability to draw you closer to Jesus than you have ever been.

You may also have heard about the mystery surrounding this book in terms of its authorship. Every few years another swirling debate surfaces about the origin of this book, who wrote it, and to whom it was written.

Some say Paul wrote this book. Others say it was Barnabas or Appolos, and there is another prominent group of individuals who claim that Luke was the writer of this work. And while there are some good points for the different opinions (particularly for the view of Lukan authorship), that's all they are— opinions.

The true value of this letter rests not in the human author, but in its divine author— the Holy Spirit, and you won't want to miss out on one of the most theologically rich and soul-satisfying books in the New Testament. It answers so many questions about our faith, encourages us to keep growing in Christian maturity, and most important of all, teaches how our Savior is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews takes us from looking at a shadow to seeing the substance that produces the shadow.

How to Think About Hebrews

You can view this book as having three main divisions:

Christ is Superior in Position (Hebrews 1:1- Hebrews 8:5)— What you will discover in this section is the writer comparing Jesus to both heavenly beings and prominent earthly figures alike, and then explaining how Christ is in a Superior position.

Christ Has A Better Majesty (Hebrews Chapter 1— Hebrews 2:18): He has the power, He has the position, He has the authority, and really, the author completely shuts down any comparison with Christ right up front in chapter 1. By explaining that God had a final Word to give to mankind, and that Word was Christ, who is the express image of the Person of God the Father because Jesus is God. You can't get any more majesty than this!

Christ Has A Better Ministry (Hebrews Chapter 3— Hebrews 8:5): In this section, we see the work and accomplishments Jesus provided are the very work and accomplishments that allow us the gift of prayer, forgiveness, and sanctification we receive at this very moment. No one else could have accomplished in their ministry what Jesus was able to accomplish in His.

Christ is Superior in Provision (Hebrews 8:6- Hebrews 10:39)— This is when much of the Old Testament ceremony is mentioned and how all of it was merely a foreshadowing of the Person of God the Son.

Christ is the Better Security (Hebrews 8:6- 13): We are more secure in the New Covenant with Jesus Christ because He completed all the work for us that could not be accomplished in the Old Covenant.

Christ is the Better Sanctuary (Hebrews 9:1- 28): Christ, through His work, created a way for us to experience the sanctifying benefits of the Tabernacle by providing us with a tabernacle not made by hands. We don't have to go into a tent anymore to meet with God. God, because of Christ, lives in us, and we can meet with Him always.

Christ is the Better Sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1- 39): The Old Law could never bring about the fullness of maturity in our lives. But in Christ, as He sacrificed Himself, He provided a way to be cleansed and grow in complete Christian maturity. We have the greater blessing here; not those of the Old Testament. Some may have seen the sea part, and armies defeated, but we have the Holy Spirit living in us because of Christ's better sacrifice!

Christ is Superior in Principle (Hebrews 11- Hebrews 13)— Jesus amplifies everything. He gives a greater and ultimate purpose to all that we do in the Christian life.

Christ Makes Faith Better (Hebrews 11): It's not faith in a coming Messiah as in the Old Testament, it's faith in a Messiah that has come and is coming again. And what we see is that if our brothers and sisters could hold out and see beyond themselves, knowing that God would do exactly what He said He would do, then we can absolutely do the same.

Christ Makes Hope Better (Hebrews 12): Having Jesus in your life gives you a goal, a focal point. The victory of Jesus brings God near, it gives stability to a confused heart, and it brings God near instead of causing us to stand far away. The victory of Christ is what we look forward to once this life is over! Hebrews 12:28, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:"

Christ Makes Love Better (Hebrews 13): Some people make it their mission to be hard to love. Let's face it— sometimes we make it our mission to be hard to love. But because of Jesus, you can love when you don't feel like it. You can give patience, you can help others, you can be satisfied, and, best of all, because of Jesus, you're always loved even when you don't deserve it. This is not just a one-sided endeavor. You need people who will love you even when it's hard, and in Christ, that's exactly what you have.

What to Look for in Hebrews

Key Words—

Better: This word is used ten times during this letter. It carries with it the idea of being more useful, more advantageous, or excellent. For instance, Christ is better than all. Or heaven is the better place to be. (Hebrews 1:4; 7:7; 7:19; 7:22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16; 11:35; 11:40)

Once: This is another prominent word that you'll find in the book of Hebrews. The word is used in two different ways. In one case the word means, "once and for all" and has the idea of a total completion and is used in this way a total of three times. For example, Hebrews 7:27 "Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself." (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:10)

The second use we see of this word occurs eight times, it is a once-for-all all type of understanding but the understanding here is a matter of conclusiveness. An example in this case would be Hebrews 6:4, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift..." (Hebrews 6:4; 9:7; 9:26; 9:27; 9:28; 10:2; 12:26; 12:27)

Perfect: You'll read this word seven times as you move through the book of Hebrews. It means to make complete or add to what is lacking to have the full thing. (Hebrews 2:10; 5:9; 7:19; 9:9; 10:1; 11:40; 12:23)

Heavenly: Our writer gives us this word a total of four times and points you to the life that is lived in a place called heaven. He is pointing you to what you will find there in the heavenly regions of the eternal. (Hebrews 3:1; 6:4; 11:16; 12:22)

Warning Passages— Look at each passage carefully and see if you would have needed any of the same kinds of warnings and encouragement to continue in your faith.

Don't Drift: Hebrews 2:1-4— "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." (2:1)

Don't Doubt: Hebrews 3:7— Hebrews 4:14— "Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:" (3:7-8)

Don't Disintegrate: Hebrews 5:11— Hebrews 6:20— "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing." (5:11)

Don't Despise: Hebrews 10:26-29— "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (10:29)

Don't Depart: Hebrews 12:14-19— "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;" (10:15)

What to Gain from Hebrews

Whatever You Do, Keep Growing— It's obvious from reading this letter that there was a tremendous amount of pressure on these Christians to change by watering down the person of Christ. If you mention God, you might make it in life without being criticized too much; but if you mention Jesus as God, then you are in for a world of hurt.

That's where these people were. It was no doubt causing extreme emotional pain to lose Jewish family members because of

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the stand that was made for Christ. Not only this, but the pressure from the public to do the same, and the pressure from the government was proving difficult as well. It just seemed easier to say that Jesus was just like an angel. It seemed easier to knock down his position a little so some of that pressure could be taken off.

But what the writer here is telling them, and telling us, is that abandoning who Jesus is is not the way.

This is the only letter in the New Testament that begins with the divine name, God. "God who at sundry times..." From the beginning, the author is telling us that what we do with Jesus is what we do with God Himself because they are One and the same.

Without Jesus, all we're left with is just a dead religion. That's the point of the key verse of this entire letter. Hebrews 6:1, "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection..."

Do you know what this means? It means that because Christ activates your faith and Christ makes everything better in your faith, whatever you do, keep growing in your faith.



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