

Route 66

Hebrews: Infinitely Superior

Part 58 - May 22, 2011



Last week we studied Philemon, Paul's last NT letter ... *maybe*. The writer of Hebrews made an unusual choice not to include their name. But even though *we* don't know who it is, it's obvious the recipients did.

Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings. - *Hebrews 13:24 NIV*

1. It's probably not Paul, because 2:3 says that salvation "was confirmed to *us* by those who heard him." Jesus spoke to Paul.
2. Some wonder if it was written by a woman (like Priscilla who worked with Paul). But, others point to a masculine participle in 11:32 which indicates a male writer.
3. The other two candidates are Apollos or Barnabas. Both were Jewish believers and ministers who are mentioned in the NT.

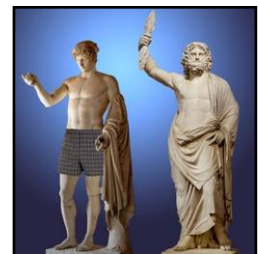
[Apollos] was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. - *Acts 18:24 NIV*

I [Paul] planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. - *1 Corinthians 3:6 NIV*



Barnabas is known more for assisting than teaching. Remember how the Lystrans (Timothy's hometown) hailed Paul *and* Barnabas as gods, when they ministered there?

Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes *because [Paul] was the chief speaker*. - *Acts 14:12 NIV*



So, I'm going with Apollos as the writer. But whoever it is, the better question is: *Why didn't he sign such an incredible work?! My guess is: persecution*. It was written about 68^{AD}. Abuse from traditional Jews had been ratcheting up for over 30 years.

And now Nero is coming after 'em! And a believer could make it all go away by renouncing Christianity and returning to their synagogue. Many Jewish believers were doing just that.

The writer had seen again and again that once they turned back they were gone for good.

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance ... - *Hebrews 6:4-6 NIV*

So, he sends this clandestine letter to the Christian Hebrews (an ancient term for the Jewish People) to warn them that the Old Covenant is obsolete and there's nothing to return to. And he begins by reminding them of the superiority of Christ.



Mount of Olives Jewish Cemetery

1. Christ is superior to the prophets.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers **through the prophets** at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us **by his Son**, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. - *Hebrews 1:1-2 NIV*

The prophets *relayed* God's revelation; Jesus *is* the revelation!

2. Christ is superior to the angels.

So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son ..."? - *Hebrews 1:4-5 NIV*

The angels *delivered* the Word of God;¹ Jesus *is* the Word of God!

3. Christ is superior to Moses.

Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses ... Moses was faithful as a **servant** ... But Christ is faithful as a **son** ... - *Hebrews 3:3a,5a,6a NIV*

Moses *served* in the presence of God;² Jesus *is* the presence of God!

4. Christ is superior to the high priests.

Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. - *Hebrews 7:27 NIV*

The high priest *offered* the sacrifice; Jesus *was* the sacrifice!

Jewish men offered a yearly Passover Lamb for their household; and the priest offered a yearly Atonement Lamb for the nation. But these annual sacrifices only served to increase their shame.

¹ Acts 7:38; 7:53

² Exodus 33:11

But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am — it is written about me in the scroll — I have come to do your will, O God.'" — *Hebrews 10:3b-7 NIV (quoting Psalm 40:6-8)*



The writer explains that God had already said He "did not desire" what the law required. And One would come "[to fulfill His will]". (10:8-9)

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. — *Hebrews 10:10 NIV*

There's an interesting progression from the first sacrificial lamb (that was offered by Abel), to the last, offered by Christ.

1. The lamb of Abel was offered for a man (*Genesis 4:4*)
2. The lamb of Passover was offered for a household (*Exodus 12*)
3. The lamb of Atonement was offered for a nation (*Leviticus 16*)
4. The Lamb of God was offered for the world (*John 1:29*)

Because of Christ, our shame is replaced with assurance!

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence ... — *Hebrews 4:15-16 NIV*

The writer reminds them that it's long been prophesied that the Messiah would be a permanent king and priest of a new covenant.

You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek [mel-KIZ-uh-dek]. — *Hebrews 5:6 NIV (quoting Psalm 110:4)*



Who is "Melchizedek"?! He only has three verses in the whole Bible describing him. (*Gen 14:18-20*) He was the king of Salem (*before it was Jeru-salem*) He was a priest of "the God Most High". And Melchizedek blessed Abraham (*the Father of Faith*). His name means "King of Righteousness; King of Peace". After he blessed Abraham, Abraham gave a joyful offering of ten percent to him. It's the first mention of tithing in the Bible. He predates Aaron (the first high priest) and the entire Levitical priesthood.

The writer asks ...

... why was there still need for another priest to come – one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. – *Hebrews 7:11b-12 NIV*

The writer makes brilliant points from OT scripture, of which I'm hacking to bits and barely scraping the surface of!

The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers ... – *Hebrews 8:8b-9a NIV (quoting Jeremiah 31:31-32)*

By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete ... – *Hebrews 8:13 NIV*

The Old Covenant has passed away. It's gone! If you reject Jesus and return to that which *used* to offer a certain level of satisfaction tinged with shame, it'll be hollow and hurtful.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. – *Hebrews 10:39 NIV*

Here's a verse that has troubled a lot of believers:

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. – *Hebrews 10:26-27 NIV*

In verse 29 the writer explains that the deliberate sin is the rejection of Christ and the blood of the New Covenant.

And when he writes: "no sacrifice for sins is left" he's being literal. You *can't* go back to the old, obsolete ways. And once you're tasted God's grace, why would you?



That "fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" came just months after this was written. And to this day there are no sacrifices ... and no Temple! In 70^{AD} the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple; and executed the priests.



Some of the original temple stones still lay where they were toppled to the street below. The Arch of Titus was constructed 12 years later (82^{AD}) to commemorate the indiscriminate crush and slaughter of over one *million* Jews. The walls depict the plundering of the temple.

There was only one group of Jews who survived in mass: those who had not shrunk back, but had continued to place their trust in Christ.



Only *they* heeded His prophetic warning (recorded by Luke). The writer of Hebrews had said:

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching. - *Hebrews 10:25 NIV*

What day? The fast approaching day of reckoning Jesus had prophesied.

When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. - *Luke 21:20-22 NIV*

The temple was burned August 10, 70^{AD}, the same day and month on which it had been burned by the king of Babylon. And even before then, Isaiah had warned Israel:

Your men will fall by the sword, your warriors in battle. The gates of Zion will lament and mourn; destitute, she will sit on the ground. - *Isaiah 3:25-26*



In 71^{AD}, the Romans used what they looted from the Temple to strike victory coins depicting Israel as a weeping woman sitting under a palm tree (the Jewish symbol of power) with a soldier behind her. The coin is inscribed "Judaea Capta" (defeated).



This is a recreation of a Roman siege engine from 70^{AD}, made to get soldiers over a wall. The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 135:14: "The Lord will judge his people." And then adds, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (10:30b-31)

This is what they would've seen rolling up to their city walls!

As [Jesus] approached Jerusalem [**for the last time**] and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." - *Luke 19:41-44 NIV*

Jesus wept because His deep desire was to save them from the consequences of their own sin. And He's the same with us.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. - *Hebrews 13:8 NIV*

Hebrews is all about encouraging believers of every generation to remain faithful, to wait patiently on the Lord, and to not turn back to certain destruction.