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## Article 58: Hebrews at a Glance

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## HEBREWS AT A GLANCE

This book overviews the superiority of Jesus over both men and angels (as the Son of God), and His high priestly superiority over Aaron, concluding with a challenge for modern day pilgrims to live the victorious life of faith as did those Old Testament heroes such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc.

### **BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION**

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO JESUS? IS HE STILL ALIVE? WHERE IS HE AND WHAT IS HE DOING?

He is indeed alive and well. At this very moment he sits at God's right hand to serve as our great High Priest. This, in essence, is what the book of Hebrews is all about. Let us imagine a conversation between a Hindu and a Christian. The Hindu listens intently as the Christian briefly summarizes the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. At the conclusion of the message, four basic questions might quickly come to his mind.

*Question:* Why did Jesus have to be born?

*Answer:* "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (Jn. 1:18).

*Question:* Why did Jesus have to die?

*Answer:* "Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal. 1:4).

*Question:* Why did Jesus have to be resurrected?

*Answer:* "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15:14).

*Question:* Why did Jesus have to ascend?

*Answer:* The book of Hebrews.

### **FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK**

1. Who? These three names have been suggested by various Bible students as the author of Hebrews (Paul? Apollos? Luke?)
2. What? The book of Hebrews.
3. When and where? 67 A.D. from (?) Jerusalem.
4. Why? To explain the priesthood of Christ.
5. To whom? Jewish Christians.

## KEY EVENTS

1. Christ is superior to the angels
2. Christ's ministry in creating, redeeming, and interceding
3. Christ is superior to Moses; warning against unbelief
4. The believer's perfect rest
5. Christ is superior to Aaron; the tragedy of spiritual immaturity
6. The appeal for spiritual maturity
7. Christ's priesthood is equated with that of Melchizedek
8. The superiority of the New Covenant
9. Contrasting the earthly sanctuary with the heavenly sanctuary
10. Contrasting earthly lambs with the heavenly Lamb
11. Facts regarding faith
12. How to successfully run the faith race (part one)
13. How to successfully run the faith race (part two)

## KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **Aaron**, Israel's first High Priest, contrasted here in Hebrews with the superior priesthood of Jesus
2. **Melchizedek**, King and Priest of Salem (Jerusalem) to whom Abraham once paid tithes (Gen. 14:18-20), whose priesthood served as a pattern of Jesus' priesthood
3. **Abel**, who by faith offered up the proper blood sacrifice
4. **Cain**, brother of Abel who murdered him after God had refused his (Cain's) bloodless sacrifice
5. **Enoch**, who by faith pleased God and was removed from earth without dying
6. **Noah**, who by faith built the ark and saved his family during the universal flood
7. **Abraham**, who by faith moved to Canaan, offered up Isaac, and looked for a heavenly city
8. **Sarah**, who by faith conceived a son in her old age
9. **Isaac**, who by faith predicted the future for Jacob
10. **Jacob**, who by faith blessed his 12 sons on his deathbed
11. **Joseph**, who by faith commanded that his bones be carried back to the Promised Land
12. **Moses' parents**, who by faith protected their infant son three months from Pharaoh's wrath
13. **Moses**, who by faith chose to identify with his people, observed the Passover, and led Israel out of Egypt, and parted the waters of the Red Sea
14. **Rahab**, who by faith hid two Israelite spies and survived the destruction of Jericho
15. **Esau**, godless twin brother of Jacob who sold his birthright for a single meal
16. **Joshua**, who by faith parted the Jordan River and led Israel into the Promised Land
17. **Gideon**, who by faith defeated a huge enemy army with but 300 men
18. **Barak**, who by faith defeated an enemy army who possessed 900 chariots of iron
19. **Samson**, who by faith slew 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass
20. **Jephthah**, who by faith (after making a rash vow) defeated the Ammonites
21. **David**, who by faith became Israel's greatest king

22. **Levi**, who by faith provided Israel with their line of priests
23. **Timothy**, who by faith became one of the apostle Paul's greatest associates

### KEY PLACES

1. **God's physical land of rest and victory:** for Old Testament Israel (the land of Canaan)
2. **God's spiritual land of rest and victory:** for New Testament believers (the overcoming life)
3. **City of Salem:** a reference to Jerusalem, where Abraham met Melchizedek, king of Salem and paid tithes to him (Gen. 14)
4. **Right hand of God:** a place of highest honor and the present location of the ascended Christ
5. **Mt. Zion:** an important hill in Jerusalem used in Hebrews as a name for the heavenly city New Jerusalem

### UNIQUE FEATURES

1. The book of Hebrews presents the only full discussion in the New Testament of Christ as the believer's High Priest. It answers the question, "Whatever happened to Jesus?"
2. The book of Hebrews has been called the fifth gospel. The first four describe what Christ once did on earth; while Hebrews describes what he is now doing in heaven.
3. Heb. 10:11 reveals that the book was written before the destruction of the temple by Titus in A.D. 70.
4. It thus may have been the last New Testament book to have been written prior to this destruction.
5. Hebrews is the only one of the 27 New Testament books whose author is unknown.
  - "Who wrote the epistle in truth God alone knows." (Origen)
  - "The epistle, not unlike Melchizedek, we know not whence it came or whether it goeth." (Franz Delitzsch)
6. There are (at least) three suggested authors:
 

Paul

  - Because the early church believed he was the author
  - Because of the characteristic closing of the epistle (13:25; cf. 2 Thess. 3:17-18)
  - Because of the expression "the just shall live by faith"—This expression is an Old Testament quote (Hab. 2:4) which is used three times in the New Testament (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). The argument here is that inasmuch as Paul used the expression the first two times, he probably also used it on the third occasion here in Hebrews.
  - Because of Peter's statement in 2 Pet. 3:15-16—Here Peter states that Paul had written to the same people he was addressing, the Jews of the dispersion (1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 3:1). Peter then refers to Paul's letter as scripture. The book of Hebrews is the only New Testament book which fits this description.
  - Because it was written from Italy (13:24) by a friend of Timothy (13:23) who was in prison at the time (10:34). This would tie in with Paul's imprisonment as recorded in Acts 28.

## Barnabas

- Because he was a Levite, and the book of Hebrews seems to have been written by a Levite
- Because of the comparison between Acts 4:36 and Heb. 13:22

## Apollos

- Because of the eloquent Greek style of Hebrews
  - Because the Old Testament quotes in Hebrews are taken from the Septuagint, while Paul usually quoted from the Hebrew Old Testament
7. The book provides the most extended biblical record of those conversations between the Father and the Son
    - First conversation: Concerning the superiority of Christ over angels (1:5-13)
    - Second conversation: Concerning Christ's relationship to his people (2:12-13)
    - Third conversation: Concerning the obedience of Christ (10:5-9). Note: These are the first recorded words of Jesus in regard to his earthly mission, apparently uttered as he entered the womb of Mary
  8. It is the only New Testament book to explain the purpose of the Old Testament tabernacle (7-10)
  9. It is the first of the two New Testament books which refer to the heavenly tabernacle (6:10, 20; 8:1-5; 9:11-12, 23-24). (For the other book, see Rev. 11:19; 5:5).
  10. This book records the final (of three) New Testament references to that Old Testament quotation, "The just shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4). (They are: Gal. 3:11; Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38.)
  11. It lists the second (of three) statements concerning the shepherding ministry of Christ.
    - Jesus said he was the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11).
    - Hebrews says he is the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20).
    - Peter says Christ is the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4).
  12. In the first century A.D., the practice of Judaism was sanctioned and protected by Roman law. Christianity, on the other hand, was not. Jewish Christians faced the dilemma of whether they should continue professing Christianity and risk danger of even death, or return to the safety and security of Judaism. This letter warned Christians against returning in any way to Judaism and encouraged them to go on to maturity in Christ. Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin nailed to the masthead of their movement three great principles from Hebrews:
    - No sacrifice but Calvary
    - No priest but Christ
    - No confessional but the throne of grace
  13. Hebrews offers scripture's greatest analogy between the Old Testament pilgrim and the New Testament pilgrim (3:7-4:16).
  14. This epistle also has one of the most controversial passages in the entire Word of God. (See 6:4-6.)
  15. It includes the most extended passage on the subject of divine discipline. (See 12:1-15.)
  16. Heb. 4:12 is probably the Bible's most concise description of itself.
  17. It records the third and final instance of the Savior's tears.
    - Jn. 11:35 (in Bethany)
    - Lk. 19:41 (near Jerusalem)

- Heb. 5:7 (in Gethsemane)
18. It is the only New Testament book referring to Melchizedek (see chapter 7). (Compare with Gen. 14:18-20.)
  19. It is the only New Testament book referring to the New Covenant (8:7-13; 10:16-17). (Compare with Jer. 31:31-32.)
  20. It mentions by name more Old Testament people than any other New Testament book, a total of 23 individuals.
  21. It includes at least eight warnings, writing against:
    - Carelessness (3:1-3)
    - Unbelief (3:12)
    - Immaturity (5:11-14)
    - Overt sin (6:4-6)
    - Inconsistency (10:25)
    - Fear (10:38)
    - Discouragement (12:3-5)
    - Bitterness (12:15)
  22. It contains the famous Hall of Fame chapter. Here we are given additional facts not recorded in the Old Testament in regards to the faith of several men:
    - Why Noah built the Ark (11:7)
    - Why Abraham left Ur (11:10), and why he was able to offer up Isaac (11:19)
    - Why Moses left Egypt (11:25, 26)
  23. There are six key words in this book. They are:
    - Perfect (used 14 times)
    - Eternal, forever (used 15 times)
    - Better (used 13 times)
    - Partakers (used nine times)
    - Heaven (used 17 times)
    - Priest, high priest (used 32 times)
  24. There are at least 86 direct references to the Old Testament in Hebrews, taken from 100 passages, second only to the book of Revelation.
  25. The book provides the first of three New Testament declarations presenting Jesus as the creator of all things (1:2, 3, 10; 2:10). See also John 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16, 17.
  26. It records the second of two New Testament passages which describe Jesus as singing (2:12). For the other, see Matt. 26:30.
  27. We read of scripture's most graphic summary account of the sufferings experienced by the Old Testament saints (11:36-38).
  28. In the opinion of many, Hebrews is the most eloquent New Testament book.
  29. Hebrews is second only in its references to the heavenly city, New Jerusalem (11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14). See also Rev. 21, 22.
  30. It is the only biblical book referring to the "heavenly church assembly" (12:23).
  31. Hebrews is the first of two New Testament epistles which has no opening salutation and/or naming of the author. First John is the second one.
  32. This book has much to say concerning:
    - Angels, referring to them 13 times
    - The right hand of God, 5 times (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). This phrase is found more times in Hebrews than any other New Testament book.

- Heaven, heavens, heavenly, heavenly things, 16 times.
  - High Priest, 16 times, more than any other New Testament book
  - Blood, 20 times, more than any other New Testament book
33. Hebrews is the final of four New Testament books where the author asks prayer for his readers (Heb. 13:18). (See also Col. 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1.)
34. Many of the key themes of Hebrews are reflected in its 13 "Let us" exhortations:
- *"Let us fear lest any of you ... come short of His rest"* (4:1, NKJV).
  - *"Let us do our best to enter that place of rest"* (4:11).
  - *"Let us cling to Jesus and never stop trusting him"* (4:14).
  - *"Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God"* (4:16).
  - *"Let us stop going over the basics of Christianity again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding"* (6:1)
  - *"Let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting him"* (10:22).
  - *"Without wavering, let us hold tightly to the hope we say we have"* (10:23).
  - *"Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works"* (10:24, NKJV).
  - *"Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress"* (12:1).
  - *"Let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us"* (12:1).
  - *"Let us be thankful and please God by worshipping him with holy fear and awe"* (12:28).
  - *"Let us go out to him outside the camp and bear the disgrace he bore"* (13:13).
  - *"Let us continually offer our sacrifice of praise to God"* (13:15).
35. Finally it explains just how and why believers should submit themselves in spiritual fashion to their Christian leaders (13:7, 17).
36. Heb. 11 is the greatest chapter on faith in all the Bible.

### COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

#### 1. **Numbers (13, 14), and Psalms (78:1-33; 106:7-32):**

These two Old Testament books record the sad account of Israel's failure to enter the Promised Land, as does Hebrews (3, 4).

#### 2. **First Corinthians (10:1-10) and Hebrews (3:7-4:11):**

The two New Testament books provide for us the spiritual truths to be found from Israel's failure.

#### 3. **Romans:**

- Romans reveals the *necessity* of the Christian faith.
- Hebrews reveals the *superiority* of the Christian faith.

## TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS

1. God's Son (1:2; 6:6)
2. His firstborn (1:6)
3. God (1:8)
4. Lord (1:10)
5. Jesus (2:9)
6. Captain of our salvation (2:10)
7. The seed of Abraham (2:16)
8. Merciful and faithful High Priest (2:17)
9. The apostle (3:1)
10. Christ Jesus (3:2)
11. Great High Priest (4:14a)
12. Jesus, the Son of God (4:14b)
13. A priest after the order of Melchizedek (6:20; 7:11, 15, 17, 21)
14. The forerunner (6:20)
15. Lord (7:14)
16. A holy, harmless, undefiled and separate High Priest (7:26)
17. Minister of the heavenly sanctuary (8:2)
18. Mediator of the New Covenant (8:6)
19. High Priest of good things to come (9:11)
20. Sin bearer (9:28)
21. The one seated on God's right hand (10:12)
22. The Alpha and Omega of our Father (12:2)
23. The judge of all (12:23)
24. A consuming fire (12:29)
25. Great shepherd of the flock (13:20)