

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Although this book is called “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews” in the King James Version, it was written anonymously, and its authorship has therefore long been in question. Some scholars reject Paul’s authorship entirely, others attribute this letter directly to his hand, while still others agree that if not written by Paul it is nevertheless Pauline in spirit and content. It is dated earlier than the destruction of Jerusalem, probably about 62–64 A.D. The Greek manuscripts generally have the name of Paul affixed to them. The author was known to the churches (Heb. 13:18,19), he called Timothy his brother (Heb. 13:23), his salutation from Italian Christians indicated he was still in Italy (Heb. 13:24), and his benediction of “grace be with you” followed the form used only by Paul (Heb. 13:25). By the second century A.D. authorship was attributed to Paul and in 419 the Fifth Council of Carthage formally included Hebrews among his fourteen Epistles.

Addressed to Hebrew Christians, its design is clear: to urge those who had embraced Christ’s gospel to turn from Judaism and its ceremonial worship. The Jew found it difficult to perceive that the Mosaic forms were only types, “a figure for the time then present,” that the old dispensation of the Law had come to an end, and that the Advent of Jesus Christ had inaugurated the new dispensation of grace. In this epistle the Hebrew Christian was assured that his new-found religion was not divorced from Mosaism but was Mosaism’s perfect fulfillment. Whereas the Law was only “a shadow of good things to come,” Christ is the substance. Hebrews is a remarkable legal brief in defense of Christianity—an inspired analytical presentation of the superiority of the new covenant over the old.

This epistle claims for Jesus, in a way no other book of the New Testament does, his rightful office of great high priest.

Jesus as Priest is the burden of the book. . . . The author uses the method of contrast to prove his great contention. He measures Jesus against every point of glory in the Old Testament Dispensation.¹

As the Son, he stands superior to the prophets, to the angels, to Moses, and to the Aaronic priesthood. He serves in a heavenly sanctuary; he offers a better sacrifice. Through his humanity as well as his divinity he is seen as the perfect mediator of the new covenant. By rending the veil of the flesh he provided all men free access to God. His one sacrifice of himself was sufficient to cleanse men from sin and enable them to enter "into the holiest . . . by a new and living way."

Hebrews holds an important place in the structure of the New Testament. In the Gospels the Savior is seen primarily in his Messianic office of Prophet; in Hebrews in his Messianic office of High Priest; and in Revelation in his Messianic office of King.

The abridgment of Hebrews that follows shows the counterpoint between the Old and New Covenants. Text should be read in sequence whether it appears in left or right column.

OLD COVENANT

God hath spoken unto the fathers by the prophets

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, (1:1)

NEW COVENANT

God hath spoken unto us by His Son

Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person [RV the very image of his substance], and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; (1:2,3)

Christ's pre-eminence over the angels

Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. . . .

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. . . .

But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? (1:4–9,13)

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The world in subjection to Christ Jesus

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. . . . How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him. . . .

For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. . . . Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. . . . But now we see not yet all things put under him. (2:1,3,5,8)

The incarnate Son tastes of death for the salvation of all

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. . . .

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (2:9,14–18)

Christ Jesus more worthy than Moses

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. (3:1–3)

Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; (3:5)

But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. (3:6)

OLD COVENANT

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*A warning against unbelief—faith
assures entrance into God's rest*

Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness. . . . So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. . . . For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. (3:7,8,11–15)

For some, when they had heard, did provoke. . . . But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned. . . . And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. (3:16–19)

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest. . . .

For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. . . .

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. . . . Let us . . . come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (4:1–3,10–16)

*High priest of the
Levitical order*

Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion

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on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. . . . And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. (5:1,2,4)

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? (7:11)

For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. (7:18)

For the law made nothing perfect, (7:19)

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Christ, high priest after the more excellent order of Melchisedec

So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec [Ps. 110:4]. . . . Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec. (5:5,6,8–10)

(In Chapter 5:11–6:20 the author reproves his readers for spiritual immaturity and urges them not to fall away to apostasy.)

For this Melchisedec . . . priest of the most high God . . . To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually. (7:1–3)

For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. . . . For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning the priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. (7:12,14–17)

but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God. And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (7:19,20)

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(For those priests were made without an oath [7:21])

They truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death. (7:23)

For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; (7:28)

seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle. . . . (8:4,5)

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house

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but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. (7:21,22)

But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; 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. (7:24–27)

but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore. (7:28)

Christ the mediator of a new and better covenant

Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. (8:1,2)

For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, (8:3,4)

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. (8:6)

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of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant. . . . (8:7–9)

In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away. (8:13)

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For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more [cf. Jer. 31:33,34]. (8:10–12)

*The earthly sanctuary
and its sacrifices*

Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.

For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant. . . .

Now . . . the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God.

But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. . . . (9:1–4,6–9)

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For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: (9:13)

Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. . . . And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; (9:18,22,23)

*Sacrifices which
never take away sin*

For the law having a shadow of good things

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*Christ serves in a heavenly sanctuary
and offers a better sacrifice*

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. (9:11,12)

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. (9:14–17)

but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. (9:23,24)

Christ's one sacrifice put away sin forever

Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others . . . but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. . . . So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (9:25–28)

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to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. (10:1–4)

Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: (10:11)

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Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. . . . He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (10:5–7,9,10; compare Ps. 40:6–8)

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant . . . I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins . . . will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. (10:12–18)

Let us enter the holiest by this new and living way

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. (10:19–22)

*Warning against apostasy, and exhortation
to hold fast the faith and patience*

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;

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(for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . . but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: 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? . . . It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. . . .

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul. (10:23–31,35–39)

The operation of faith

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (11:1–3) [“Faith is that by which the invisible becomes real and the future becomes present.”²]

(The writer of Hebrews calls the glorious roll of Old Testament heroes, whose faith was the substance of their hope while as yet they knew only the promise.)

ABEL, by faith, “offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.”

ENOCH, by faith, “was translated that he should not see death.”

NOAH, by faith, “prepared an ark to the saving of his house.”

ABRAHAM, by faith, “when he was called to go out . . . obeyed.”

by faith, “sojourned in the land of promise.”

by faith, “looked for a city . . . whose builder and maker is God.”

SARA, by faith, “was delivered of a child when she was past age.” (11:4–11)

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country . . . an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (11:13–16)

ABRAHAM, by faith, "when he was tried, offered up Isaac."

ISAAC, by faith, "blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come."

JACOB, by faith, "when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph."

JOSEPH, by faith, "made mention of the departing of the children of Israel."

MOSES, by faith, "was hid three months of his parents."

by faith, "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."

by faith, "forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king."

by faith, "kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood."

ISRAEL, by faith, "passed through the Red sea as by dry land."

by faith, "the walls of Jericho fell down."

RAHAB, by faith, "perished not with them that believed not."

GEDEON, BARAK, SAMSON, JEPHTHAH, DAVID, SAMUEL, and the PROPHETS,

by faith, "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises."

by faith, "stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched . . . fire, escaped . . . the sword."

by faith, "out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight."

by faith, "turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

WOMEN, by faith, "received their dead raised to life again."

OTHERS, by faith, "were tortured, not accepting deliverance."

by faith, "had trial of cruel mockings . . . scourgings . . . imprisonment."

by faith, "were stoned . . . sawn asunder . . . slain with the sword."

by faith, "wandered about in sheepskins . . . destitute, afflicted."

by faith, "wandered in deserts . . . mountains . . . caves." (11:17-38)

These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. (11: 39,40)

*Exhortation to run the race unto perfection through
faith and through the grace that is in Jesus Christ*

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us . . ." (12:1)

Let US (by faith
and grace) "run with patience. . . . Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher
of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured
the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right
hand of the throne of God."

(by faith
and grace) "consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against
himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have
not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye
have forgotten the exhortation. . . . My son, despise not thou
the chastening of the Lord. . . . For whom the Lord loveth
he chasteneth . . . for our profit, that we might be
partakers of his holiness."

(by faith
and grace) "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;
And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be
turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed."

(by faith and grace)	“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”
(by faith and grace)	“[look] diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you.” (12:2–15)

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“Ye are come . . . unto the city of the living God”

Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; (12:18,19)

which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded. . . .) (12:19,20)

But ye are come unto mount Sion . . .
 —unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem
 —to an innumerable company of angels,
 —To the general assembly and church of the firstborn,
 which are written in heaven . . .
 —to God the Judge of all . . .
 —to the spirits of just men made perfect . . .
 —to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant . . .
 —to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things
 than that of Abel. (12:22–24)

Warning: refuse not obedience to the New Covenant

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:

Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire. (12:25–29; see Hag. 2:6)

(Further admonitions concerning Christian graces. Benediction. [13:1–25])