

Sermon Series on Hebrews

By John Atkinson (May 2000)

Sermon 1.

Sermon One - The Majesty of the Christ (Heb 1:5-3:6).

- I. Introduction (1:1-4)
- II. The Majesty of the Christ (1:5-3:6)
 - A. Superior to Angels (1:5-14)
 - B. Author of "Such a Great Salvation" (2:1-9)
 - C. True Man (2:10-18)
 - D. Superior to Moses (3:1-6)

INTRODUCTION

HEBREWS Nineteenth book of the New Testament, calling for faithfulness to Jesus, the perfect fulfillment of Old Testament institutions and hope.

Authorship

Although Paul has traditionally been seen as the author of Hebrews, this is not a view commonly held by modern scholars. The style, vocabulary, form, content, and theology are unlike anything found in the letters of Paul.

The Form of Hebrews

Hebrews does not have the normal opening that the letters of Paul have although it does conclude like a normal letter. Many have speculated that Hebrews was originally a sermon preached to a church in Rome and later sent to a church outside of Rome, perhaps experiencing similar circumstances.

Heb 13:24 Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. **Those from Italy** greet you.

*Hebrews 2:5 For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which **we are speaking.***

notice the reference to "hearing" and "teaching" in Heb. 5:11

*Heb 5:11 Concerning him we **have much to say**, and it is hard to explain, since you have become **dull of hearing.***

*Heb 6:9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though **we are speaking in this way.***

*Heb 11:32 And **what more shall I say?** For **time will fail me** if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,*

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In this case, Hebrews 1-12 would represent the original sermon, and Hebrews 13 would represent the brief note (Heb. 13:22) attached for the second congregation.

Date

Many have pointed to the description of the Jewish sacrificial system in Hebrews 8-10 as evidence that Hebrews was written before the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. In actuality, the description of the sacrificial system describes the tabernacle--not the Temple--and comes from the pages of the Old Testament--not through observance of the Temple service. However it does seem strange that if the Temple had been destroyed by the time of writing that the author does not mention this.

Other evidence, however, does point to a time of writing before the destruction of the Temple. Hebrews 10:32-34 describes a time of persecution endured by the original recipients. The persecution seems to have only included the loss of property. These circumstances would fit the edict of Claudius in A.D. 49 banning Christians from the city of Rome. Many believers lost their property as a result. The author then warned of greater tests ahead, probably referring to the persecutions underway during the reign of Nero in A.D. 64. If this is true, the writing of Hebrews would be sometime during or just after A.D. 64.

The Historical Situation.

Early Believers were often the objects of persecution. In the beginning believers were persecuted by the Jewish religious authorities as can be seen in Acts 4:17-18; 5:27-42; 7:54-8:1a.

Herod Agrippa I executed James and had Peter imprisoned about A.D. 44 (Acts 12:1-5).

Such persecution often resulted in the spread of the gospel (Acts 8:4-25; 11:19-26).

The book of Revelation, 1 Peter, and possibly the Gospel of Mark were written in times of such persecution.

The recipients of Hebrews faced the possibility of persecution when the book was written. As was often true when Christians faced persecution, the temptation was to deny being Christians so as to avoid persecution. Some biblical scholars think the recipients of

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Hebrews were Messianic Jews (Jews who believed in Jesus as their Messiah) and were tempted to return to their Jewish faith and the relative safety from persecution that being Jewish brought.

Thus, the writer of Hebrews went to great length to demonstrate to the recipients that Jesus and the New Covenant were superior to the Old Covenant.

Hebrews 1:1 - 3:6

Hebrews 1:1-4

Heb 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

Heb 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Heb 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Heb 1:4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

The clear teaching of these opening verses is that Jesus is incomparably better than all that went before Him. Hebrews actually uses the term superior twelve times throughout the letter when referring to Jesus. This is the key message of Hebrews. Jesus is superior, He is greater than anyone or anything to which He might be compared.

The Muslim call “*Allah hu abar*”, which Christians usually assume means God is great, is more subtle than that. It actually means God is Greater. If you ask a Muslim, “greater than what?” the answer given is “greater than anything you care to name. This claim made for Allah by Muslims is in fact only true for Jesus.

He is superior to the angels. (1:3-14) By Jesus time the Jewish People had a sophisticated theology of angels who served as mediators between the transcendent God in heaven and His people below.

Now we know that there is only one mediator between people and God

1 Tim 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

When you have Jesus Christ as your mediator who needs angels?

*Heb 1:4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited **a more excellent name** than they.*

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Why is Jesus mediation better? Because His name is superior. This refers to His authority. In Philippians we see that God gave Jesus a special name.

*Phil 2:9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him **the name which is above every name,***

*Phil 2:10 so that **at the name of Jesus** every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

Phil 2:11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There is no higher authority – there is no greater name.

Therefore, we dare not ignore 2:1-5a

Angels are important in Hebrews because they were important to the recipients of this sermon contained in this book. Some Jewish groups believed that angels were responsible for bringing God's Word to Israel.

Deu 33:2 He said, "The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.

*Deu 33:3 "Indeed, He loves the people; All Your holy ones are in Your hand, And they followed in Your steps; *Everyone* receives of Your words.*

Holy ones is translated "angels" in the Septuagint (the greek version of the Old Testament. Jewish People believed that there were two distinct ages – the present age administered by angelic beings led by the archangel Michael, and that in the age to come the administration by angels would be even greater.

Hebrews acknowledges that in this age people are a little lower than angels (quoting from Psalm 8)

Psa 8:4 What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?

Psa 8:5 Yet You have made him a little lower than God (the angels), And You crown him with glory and majesty!

Hebrews insists that in the world (age) to come, when the purposes of God have been fulfilled, it will be Jesus alone who has authority.

Jesus superior to Moses. 3:1-6

In the first two chapters the focus was on Jesus superiority over angels who played such a vital role in Jewish belief and the previously held theology of Jewish believers.

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Now the emphasis shifts to Jesus' superiority over Moses. Moses was the greatest prophet in the Old Testament. All prophets were measured against him – and usually found wanting. Moses was the founding prophet of Torah faith. Numbers 12:6-7 shows God's high regard for Moses.

Num 12:6 He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream.

*Num 12:7 "Not so, with My servant Moses, **He is faithful in all My household;***

The Jewish community then and now would struggle to imagine anyone getting closer to God than Moses. Moses is the archetypal Jew in every sense. He is the one all Jewish People are called to emulate.

Moses was only as servant in God's house.

*Josh 1:2 "Moses **My servant** is dead;..."*

There is no dishonour in being called God's servant, quite the contrary. However it does not compare with being the Son of God.

Jesus is the only Son of God. He has a position in the household of God which is very different from that of a servant.

Jesus is called an Apostle (one who is sent out and entrusted with responsibility) To reject an Apostle is to reject the one who sent him.

Jesus shares His sonship with us in that we are made fellow heirs with Him as the children of God.

*Rom 8:17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and **fellow heirs** with Christ,*

No wonder we are called to fix our attention on Him.

Heb 3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, **fix your thoughts on Jesus**, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

Here is One greater than the angels who brought the word, greater than Moses who received the word from their hands. Here is the One who is the Author of the Word – the One who is greater than all.