

The Letter to the Hebrews

Lesson 1

Anyone reading this letter will quickly notice within the first few sentences that the author is clearly addressing Jewish Christians. For those who have studied the letters of Paul to the Romans and the Galatians, this document can be considered a supplement to those letters. Looking back to the Old Testament, we see that Hebrews is also an excellent commentary on the book of Leviticus. Early Gentile Christians would have found it difficult to relate to this letter because of its extreme emphasis on the Mosaic Law, the Levitical priesthood, the former Jewish fathers, and the Judaic system of faith. However, the focus of this book is not to support those old systems, but to show how the gospel of Jesus Christ has uniquely superseded each of them. The Mosaic Law came to an end with the fulfillment of the gospel. The Levitical priesthood, with all its sacrificial necessities, is fulfilled and abolished with the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The gospel lays the foundation for a new way of living without all the trappings of the old Judaic life. Jewish Christians must live in the freedom and liberty of Christ rather than the restrictive disciplines of their former faith.

In the first ten chapters, the author deals with the body of teachings held as truth in the Christian belief system. From Hebrews 10:19 through the end of the book, the author presents practical advice for Christian living.

Who is the author of the letter to the Hebrews? We do not know because there is no salutation at the beginning of this letter. The first full sentence seen in Hebrews 1:1-4 closely matches the structure of Luke 1:1-4, Romans 1:1-7, and 1 John 1:1-4. Luke's Gospel is the record of Paul's eyewitness account of the life and passion of the Lord; therefore, the structure of Luke's introduction can most likely be attributed to Paul. The letter to the Romans is definitely Paul's, but First John definitely belongs to the Apostle John who also penned the gospel by his name and the Revelation as well as three other small letters. Therefore, we cannot be absolutely sure of the author, but internal evidence heavily points toward Paul as the author.

The opening of this letter declares that the Son of God is in all points equal with God. Watch how the author justifies his theological position.

Hebrews 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ²in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. ³And 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; ⁴having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. ⁵For to which of the angels did He ever say, "THOU ART MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"?

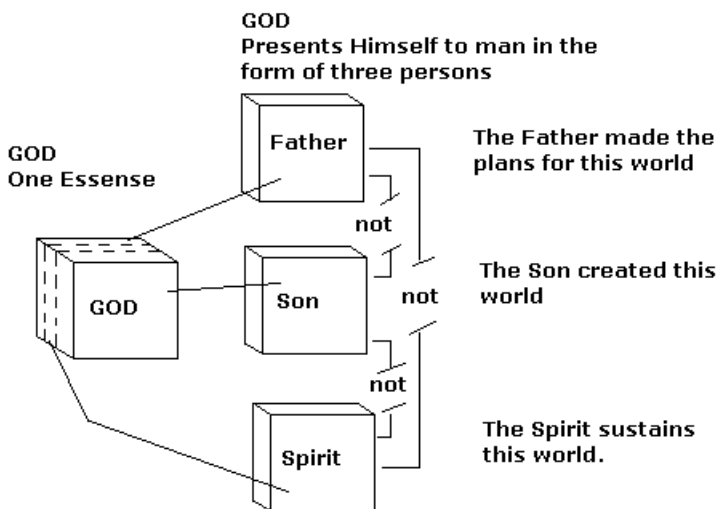
God did not present His whole message all at one time to one generation; rather, He delivered His message in small portions over hundreds of years as the people grew in knowledge and could grasp a greater understanding.

From Adam in 4179 BC until Malachi in 404 BC, He delivered all that He wanted recorded in what we call the Old Testament, each new portion built on the foundation of knowledge that had previously been presented. After four-hundred years of silence, from 404 BC until 4 BC, God once again spoke to man, proclaiming the coming of His Son. Once born, Jesus grew into manhood and began confirming God's message that was recorded in the Old Testament.

Concerning God's Son, four important points are made at the beginning of this letter. First, God the Father had given everything to God the Son because His Son was the creator of all things in the world. Second, Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the exact representation of His Father. He is the same in nature and He controls His creation by simply speaking His words. Third, at the time of this writing, the Son had completed His work on earth and returned to heaven to take His place at the right hand of His Father's throne. Finally, the author declares that the Son is far greater than any created being. In Psalm 2, the Son comes from God, but not as His creation. He was not born as an offspring of God, but He proceeds from the essence of God.

Psalm 2:7 "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee.

In God's plan He would show Himself to His creatures in the form of one essence and three persons. The essence of God presents Himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God portrayed in three distinct persons. The Father is part of God, the Son is part of God, and the Holy Spirit is part of God, and they are all totally God. According to Roman's 8:28-29 and 1 Peter 1:20, it was God's plan that the Son would leave His place in Heaven, be born of the flesh like all mankind, and then give His life as a ransom so He could be the Savior of all that He created.



6And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM."

Upon His birth, His Father called for all the angelic creatures to worship the Son. Only God is to be worshipped and this is a proof of the Son's divinity. He is to be worshiped as God even as the Father is worshiped.

7And of the angels He says, "WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE."**8**But of the Son He says, "THY THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. **9**"THOU HAST LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, THY GOD, HATH ANOINTED THEE WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE THY COMPANIONS."

Verses 7 and 8 show the difference between the Son of God and angels. Drawing from Psalm 104, angels are viewed as winds or spirits who perform the work directed by God, ministering as flames of fire. We see in Psalm 45 that the Son of God is portrayed on His throne with a scepter, a kingdom, and a throne.

Psalm 104:4 He makes the winds His messengers, Flaming fire His ministers.

Psalm 45:6-7 Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. **7**Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee With the oil of joy above Thy fellows.

10And, "THOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING DIDST LAY THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF THY HANDS; **11**THEY WILL PERISH, BUT THOU REMAINEST; AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD AS A GARMENT, **12**AND AS A MANTLE THOU WILT ROLL THEM UP; AS A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED. BUT THOU ART THE SAME, AND THY YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END."

This author associates Psalm 102 with the Son of God, continuing to bolster His divinity. He created the earth. He created the heavens. Both the earth and heavens will one day cease to be what they are now. Tattered, ragged, and worn like old clothing, they will be rolled up by the Son who will rework them into a new creation. However, the Son of God never changes and will never come to an end. He is God and He is eternal.

Psalm 102:25-27 "Of old Thou didst found the earth; And the heavens are the work of Thy hands. **26** "Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed. **27** "But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end.

13But to which of the angels has He ever said, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR THY FEET"?

God the Father never spoke to an angel the way He spoke to His Son. The author uses a psalm of David to justify His point. The psalm opens with an interesting phrase.

Psalm 110:1 A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet."

What does David mean when he says, "The Lord says to my Lord?" The context of the psalm is difficult to understand, but when the writer of this letter uses the rest of the verse, the phrase becomes clear; God the Father says to God the Son, "Sit at My right hand." God the Father is not making the enemies of angels their footstools; rather, God the Father is making the enemies of His Son a footstool for the Son's feet.

14Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

The author uses a question to proclaim the work of angels, and its context challenges the common beliefs of many. Think about this. Do we have guardian angels? According to this text, some people do and some people do not. Do angels protect everyone? According to this text, the answer is no. This author states that angels render service only to those who will inherit salvation. Does God choose who will inherit salvation? No, God allows each person to make his own decision about salvation. Does God know who will inherit salvation? Yes, God knows everything and He knows who will ultimately accept His Son as their Savior. Does God send His angels into the world to help everyone? No, in His omnipotence He sends His angels to help only those whom He knows will accept the salvation of His Son.

2:1For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

This writer is issuing a warning to all Christian Jews concerning their beliefs and ability to be swayed by false teaching. Drifting away from the truth of God is easy to do. Drifting is done a little at a time; it is never a drastic change in someone's position. It is a small theological change here and there that slowly moves us so far from the truth that we have difficulty recognizing our new theological position. It is easy to yank people back to reality when they have made a drastic change overnight. We show them the error of their ways, and most of the time, they will return quickly to the truth. But when a person drifts away a little at a time, the small changes are so ingrained and have been rehearsed over and over so that they are huge hurdles that must be jumped to return to the truth.

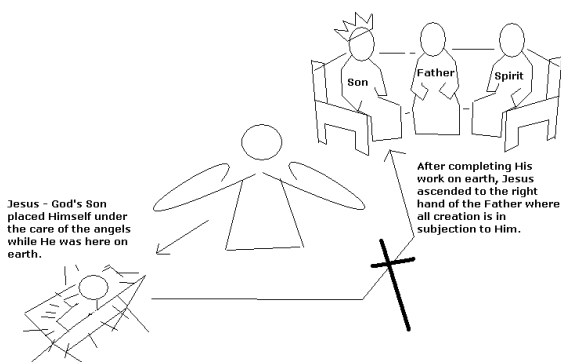
2For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, 3how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

Angels are the messengers of God; however, they are not always delivering messages in the way we think. When an angel protects us from some danger, that protection represents a message from God. When we realize the grace of God in bringing us through the danger, we have received God's message facilitated by the angel. In the Old Testament, angels are sent as messengers of God to defend and deliver those who love the Lord and defeat or destroy those who hate the Lord. In a few passages we hear the angels, Gabriel and Michael, speaking to Daniel. Most of the angelic messages delivered to man in the Old Testament are heard from the Angel of the Lord, a direct reference to God the Son before He came to earth in the form of a baby. At the beginning of the New Testament, the angels brought the message of the soon coming baby Jesus. When He died, the angels once again spoke to the men and women at the tomb. In each case, the Lord Jesus had confirmed the truth of their messages while He was here on earth. He also had confirmed that He would deal with all sins harshly. Because of these confirmations, Jews must believe in the salvation provided by the Lord. To prove the power and truth behind the Lord's confirmation of these acts, He employed the Holy Spirit to perform signs, wonders, and miracles along with gifts to Jewish converts.

5For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. **6**But one has testified somewhere, saying, "WHAT IS MAN, THAT THOU REMEMBEREST HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT THOU ART CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? **7**"THOU HAST MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; THOU HAST CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAST APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF THY HANDS; **8**THOU HAST PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

Angels cannot partake in the salvation that the Lord brought to mankind; therefore, they are not subject to the demands of salvation to enter into the Lord's kingdom. Referring to Psalm 8, the writer reveals an interesting thought about the Lord. When the Lord came to earth

as a baby, He willingly placed Himself below the angels. He was still God and He would receive all the glory and honor and power and wisdom that He deserved, yet for a short time, He placed all that aside, living as a man, tempted as a man so He might die as a man and therefore become the Savior of man. Now that He has been resurrected from the grave and ascended to heaven, all things are subjected to Him, even though we can not see that total subjection from earth. Once we enter heaven, His power and authority will be fully grasped.



Psalm 8:4-6 What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? ⁵ Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, And dost crown him with glory and majesty! ⁶ Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet.

⁹**But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.**

The author most likely knew Jesus because of this sentence. Not only did he know Him, he also knew all about His life and death. Seldom do we think about Jesus' dying on the cross by the "grace of God." We think about the grace of God working in our lives, but not in the life of Christ. But it was by the grace of God that Jesus died for every one of us, as the ultimate sacrifice, once and for all.

¹⁰**For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.**

It is in this sentence that we gain an understanding about the plan of God for the person of Jesus Christ. All things were made by Him. All things come from Him. It is only through Him that people can come to salvation. Salvation is available because He died on the cross for all that He had created.

¹¹**For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,**
¹²**saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE."**

Notice that the word *Father* is in italics; meaning it is not in original manuscripts. It is added to help the English reader, yet it confuses the context of the passage. He who sanctifies is God. Those who are sanctified are done so by God. The single essence of God does all the sanctification; however, not to misunderstand, the united three persons of God are not ashamed of the Jewish brethren here on earth. The context of Psalm 22 focuses on the Messiah; therefore, it is the Messiah in view in verse 12. It is the Messiah who proclaims to the Jewish converts and it is the Messiah who sings in the midst of the congregation. We should look forward to hearing the voice of our Messiah singing in heaven.

Psalm 22:22 I will tell of Thy name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise Thee.

¹³**And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." ¹⁴Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; ¹⁵and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to**

slavery all their lives. **16**For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.

The writer uses two passages from Isaiah to support his position. Jesus became flesh and blood so He could die as all men die. It was part of God's plan for Jesus to die because in doing so, He would defeat the devil who has the power of death. In some strange way the Lord allowed Satan to have power in the realm of death. Fear of death entraps those who do not have the assurance of their eternity with the Lord. Satan cannot kill those who belong to the Lord for they are protected by guardian angels, but his intent is to inflict pain, desiring that the believer die. Those who fear death are slaves to the desires of Satan. Believers cannot be slaves to Satan in any way. We must trust in the Lord with all our hearts and realize that we belong to God and Satan has no power over us. God does not send anyone to help angels. They are at the throne of God and need no help. Rather, God sends angels to help the believers who are descendants of Abraham. He has made them a promise and He will keep His promise.

Isaiah 8:17-18 And I will wait for the LORD who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob; I will even look eagerly for Him. **18**Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.

Isaiah 41:8-9 "But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, Descendant of Abraham My friend, **9** You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its remotest parts, And said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.

17Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **18**For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

In order to keep the plan of God and the promises that were made to Israel, Jesus had to come to this world as a Jew so that He could satisfy the holy and pure sacrifice that was needed for truth and ultimate salvation. He was fully man and fully God at the same time.

We must always understand that the Son of God has been where we have been, seen what we have seen, suffered what we have suffered, and hurt where we have hurt. Because of His life and death, He is able to help us in our struggles. He is God, who came to earth as the Son in order that we might attain salvation through His death on the cross and His victory over the grave.