

LESSON EIGHT

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

A. THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS:

This epistle along with James was written to Christian Jews. The epistle of James was written to the Christian Jews scattered abroad while the epistle to the Hebrews was written to the Christian Jews at Jerusalem.

It was written before Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD and while the Jewish temple was still standing with magnificent splendor. The rituals and sacrifices were still being carried on. The probable date of the writing was between 62 AD and 68 AD.

This epistle is written in eloquent style and occupies a very important place in the Scriptures. It is a commentary on the Book of Leviticus and explains the significance of the Jewish rituals. In this epistle we are taught that we have passed from the realm of shadows into that of reality. It shows that Christianity is not a religion merely of anticipation, but of participation.

B. AUTHORSHIP:

The epistle to the Hebrews is anonymous and we cannot be certain regarding the identity of the author. It has been suggested that Luke, Barnabas or Apollos might have written it. However, there are some strong reasons for concluding that the Apostle Paul wrote this epistle.

1. The writer was associated with Timothy (Hebrews 13:23).
2. The writer was in bonds (Hebrews 10:34; 13:19).
3. The writer was writing from Italy (Hebrews 13:24).
4. The writer was a Jew who was very familiar with the Jewish history and religion.
5. The teachings are the same and the presentation of these doctrines is similar to those found in the other Pauline Epistles.

It is safe to conclude that Paul was the author. Some have claimed that Paul wrote this epistle in Hebrew and then another, possibly Luke, translated it into Greek. This would explain the difference, if any, in the style of Greek used. This assumption is quite acceptable.

C. THE THEME OF THE EPISTLE:

The theme of this epistle is two-fold:

1. To exalt Jesus Christ as the full revelation of God and to hold Jesus up so that He might occupy our whole attention.
2. To warn the Hebrew Christians against apostasy. Because of the persecutions the church suffered and because the ancient religion of the Jews was right before their eyes in Jerusalem, there was the continual temptation to return to Judaism.

D. KEY WORDS:

We might consider five key words:

1. Better. This is the main key word of the epistle. The epistle is a series of contrasts between the good things of Judaism and the better things of Christ. Jesus Christ is better than

angels are (Hebrews 1:4). We also read of a better covenant, a better sacrifice and a better resurrection.

2. Perfection. This word with its corresponding verb and adjective occurs eleven times (Hebrews 6:1).
3. Eternal. This word also is found several times (Hebrews 5:9; 6:2; 9:12; 13:20).
4. Heaven or Heavens. Attention is directed to the fact that the realities of the Christian faith are not earthly.
5. Partakers. The epistle teaches that the realities of the Christian faith are matters of actual experience.

E. EXHORTATIONS AND WARNINGS:

1. WARNINGS:

There are several warning passages in this epistle such as:

- a. Hebrews 2:1-4, Not to be neither careless nor negligent,
- b. Hebrews 3:7-4:13, Not to be unbelieving,
- c. Hebrews 5:11-6:20, Not to degenerate,
- d. Hebrews 10:26-31, Not to despise,
- e. Hebrews 12:15-29, Not to depart.

2. EXHORTATIONS:

There are several exhortations addressed to "us." These are an excellent series of Bible studies and "we" should consider them seriously.

- a. Hebrews 4:1, "*Let us therefore fear ...* "
- b. Hebrews 4:11, "*Let us labour ...* "
- c. Hebrews 4:16, "*Let us therefore come boldly ...* "
- d. Hebrews 6:1, "*Let us go on unto perfection ...* "
- e. Hebrews 10:22, "*Let us draw near ...* "
- f. Hebrews 10:23, "*Let us hold fast ...* "
- g. Hebrews 10:24, "*Let us consider one another ...* "
- h. Hebrews 12:1, "*Let us lay aside every weight ...* "
- i. Hebrews 12:1, "*Let us run with patience ...* "
- j. Hebrews 13:13, "*Let us go forth ...* "
- k. Hebrews 13:15, "*Let us offer the sacrifice of praise ...* "

F. THE FULL REVELATION OF GOD: (Hebrews 1:1-3).

The opening sentence is one of the most beautiful passages in the entire Bible. Here the deity of Jesus Christ is set forth. Here it is stated that Jesus is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of God's nature or substance. In Jesus Christ we have the expression of the essential nature of God. The invisible God was made known by the visible Son.

All that God is we find in Jesus Christ. Jesus is set forth as the effulgence (shining light) in whom and by whom the glory of God is manifested. Jesus told Philip, "*He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father*" (John 14:9).

The "express image of His person" may be translated "exact impress of the substance of Him." The "impress" comes from the Greek word "character" which denotes the instrument used in engraving. The substance of God is Spirit and the exact expression is the man, Christ Jesus.

Since the world began, God has been speaking to man at different times and in different ways. Beginning with Adam and ending with Malachi, a period of more than 3,500 years, God spoke to man by the prophets. From Malachi until Christ, there were 400 silent years. Now God has spoken by a full revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ.

In this opening statement of Hebrews, there are given definite proofs of the deity of Jesus.

1. He is called the "Son of God" (Hebrews 1:2, 8).
2. He is called "God" (Hebrews 1:8).
3. He is called "Lord" (Hebrews 1:10).
4. He created the worlds, the universe (Hebrews 1:2, 10).
5. He sustains all things (Hebrews 1:3).
6. He is the Savior of sinners (Hebrews 1:3).
7. He is the express image of God (Hebrews 1:3).
8. He is heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2).
9. He is seated in the place of power (Hebrews 1:3).
10. He is greater than angels are (Hebrews 1:4-8).

G. BETTER THAN ANGELS: (Hebrews 1:4-14).

Angels occupy a very prominent place in the Bible and are held in high esteem. We find here a comparison between angels and Jesus Christ. This is not to take away any honor or respect for the angels but rather by the comparison emphasize the greatness of Jesus Christ.

The superiority of Jesus over the angels is shown in five ways:

1. The angels are ministers or servants; Jesus is the begotten Son (Hebrews 1:5, 7, 14).
2. The angels are commanded to worship Him; Jesus is the worshipped One (Hebrews 1:6).
3. Angels are creatures; He is the Creator (Hebrews 1:7-12).
4. They are ministers of salvation; Jesus is the Author of salvation (Hebrews 1:13, 14).
5. Jesus is the Ruler of the age to come; angels are subjects (Hebrews 2:5).

The role of angels is given in verse 14. They are ministers to their heirs of salvation. They are servants of God. The angels have a message that is real but yet limited. They are inferior both to Jesus Christ and the heirs of salvation.

Angels are glorious and powerful but Jesus Christ is more glorious and more powerful. He is so much better than the angels are (Hebrews 1:4).

LESSON EIGHT

SELF HELP TEST

A. Why do we believe Paul wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews?

B. What is the main theme of this epistle?

C. How is "better" used as a key word in this epistle?

D. Write out FIVE warnings given in this epistle.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. 5 _____

F. Write a paragraph showing how the deity of Jesus is taught in Chapter One.