

HE'S THE GREATEST!

Hebrews 1:1-3

Have you ever been tempted to give in or compromise, to ease the pressure of taking a stand for Christ?

That temptation may take many forms.

- * Some people are tempted to give up a biblical stand on creation,
to escape being ridiculed for their beliefs.
- * Others give in to social drinking, rather than be laughed at for abstaining.
- * Others stay in a church that teaches false doctrine,
rather than face the social consequences of taking a stand for the truth.

1st century believers, to whom Hebrews was written, faced tremendous temptation to cave in under pressure of their peers.

Similarly, Christians today are pressured to give in to popular thinking about issues like personal ethics, divorce, homosexuality, abortion, and even God's role in the world.

How are we to face the pressure to give in?

The way of the godly has never been easy.

"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." **2 Tim 3:12**

In some parts of the world, public identification with Christ through baptism still brings the same kind of persecution Jewish believers faced in the first century.

Although we do not face the same *physical* attacks, our beliefs are under attack daily in our culture too.

Hebrews' exhortations to faith and perseverance are as relevant to us today as they were in the first century.

AUTHOR AND DATE *Who wrote the letter?*

The author is a mystery today, though it was no mystery to early readers.

The main discussion focuses around whether Paul was the author.

Differences of style, though inconclusive, argue against Pauline authorship.

If Paul was not the author, it is not clear who was.

Other candidates include Barnabas, Luke, Apollos, and Clement of Rome.

Since God didn't choose to identify Him, it's probably not that important to know!

When did he write it?

Depicts time of persecution for the gospel, which places it near time of James or 1 Peter.

References to sacrifices indicate temple hasn't been destroyed 10:11; 13:11-13

—shortly before destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Local circumstances fit ± A.D. 65.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To Whom did he write?

Hebrews was apparently written to scattered Christian Jews, suffering persecution because of their identification with Christ.

The author seems to consider them genuine believers.

That's at least their profession; he gives no reason to question it.

To the contrary, he addresses them based on that assumption throughout the letter.

They are identified with Christ.

They're under siege. They're at war!

Satan is unleashing his forces against them, trying to get them to renounce their faith.

If they'd just "hang 'em up" they'd be out from under the pressure.

The pressure is hitting where it hurts most—home and family are under threat!

Many have lost their jobs for no other reason than their faith in Christ.

They aren't sure where the next meal will come from.

Their children are hungry and scared.

Their lives, and those of their children, are threatened.

When they meet at the house around the corner, someone's standing outside, taking note of who's going there; who dares associate with these people.

They had to ask: "*What risks are we exposing our families to?*"

They're "hanging on by their finger nails," while torrent is swirling around them.

How much longer can they hang on?

To escape persecution, **many have returned to Judaism.**

Many who have not yet returned are considering that alternative.

At least if they stop meeting with the others, they'll lessen the suspicion!

PURPOSE AND THEME

Writer's answer is not to run; but rather, *"the best defense is a good offense."*

They need to know what they believe and cling to the truth.

They need to keep meeting together and encourage one another.

They need to come boldly to the throne room and meet their Father there.

Only by "hanging in there" will they be able to triumph in the end.

The author's **purpose** is to **exhort them to endure the persecution.**

Rather than turn back, he wants them **to continue growing in their faith.**

To accomplish this purpose, he writes a **letter of exhortation (13:22).**

He speaks **negatively** of the dangers of returning to Judaism.

To go back won't solve their problem.

Judaism has nothing to offer them. It's a bankrupt system.

If they reject the truth, they will be subject to God's judgment which is about to bring destruction to Israel.

Positively, he demonstrates that **Christ is better than Judaism**.

He's better because He offers better access, without restriction, to God's presence.

Therefore, they should keep on striving and trust God to care for them.

He has obtained the means of entering into the presence of God.

Therefore, we should enter with confidence into His presence.

So why do WE need to study this letter today?

THREE REASONS I CHOSE HEBREWS:

- 1. Doctrine**—contains extensive teaching over some of our most important beliefs.

If you want to grow to maturity, you must understand certain things about Jesus.

We want to consider these important truths about Him.

- 2. Problem passages**—Some of most significant problem passages are in this book.

Unless we understand what the author was saying, we are easy prey to some who use these passages to contradict the essence of the Gospel.

3. Practical application. I have been convinced for a number of years that a time of testing is coming for God's people. I'm not sure when it will come.

For some of you, as I talk to you in my office, that time has already come.

You face opposition from family and friends.

When faced with opposition, and even persecution, we need to know how God wants us to face it.

Some of you have come to Christ from another religious system.

As your family has found out, pressure, sometimes outright persecution, has come to try to convince you to turn back.

Some of you are about to throw in the towel. It might be easier not to fight it.

After all, "I can just go on privately in my personal faith, while going through the motions of the old system. No one but God will know the difference. He's the only One who really matters anyway. He'll understand."

We're going to look at the insight this letter gives us to this response.

I want to look occasionally at passages that deal with how God wants us to live in the midst of affliction. So we'll be prepared to face it when it does come.

Hebrews helps us learn how to remain faithful in the midst of adversity.

We need encouragement to “*fight the good fight of faith*,” to manifest patient endurance in trials, to live in light of the hope set before us, rather than present circumstances.

Hebrews was written to help people live victoriously by faith.

The exhortations to patiently endure and his warnings against moving backward in our spiritual experience still apply.

ORGANIZATION Divides in **TWO MAIN SECTIONS**.

The greater part of the book is **DOCTRINAL** (1-10:18), while the conclusion is **PRACTICAL** in nature (10:19-13:25).

DOCTRINAL section speaks of **the superiority of Christ over Judaism**.

He is superior **in His Person** (1-8:5) because *He is the best revelation of the Father* (1-4:13) and because *He is the best High Priest* (4:14-8:5).

He is also superior **in His work** (8:6-10:18).

If Christ is superior to Judaism, then the **proper response** is to **trust Him and endure the persecution** which God allows us to experience
=> **PRACTICAL** (10:19-13:25).

DOCTRINAL TEACHING OF CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO JUDAISM 1-10:18

Our High Priest has obtained for us the means of entering into God's presence.

To turn back is useless. *What would it accomplish?*

Superiority of Christ's person 1-7

—to significant persons of Israel's development.

JESUS IS THE BEST REVELATION OF THE FATHER 1-4:13

The most important message of the book is the first message of the book.

When the storm is raging all around us, one thing we need to know for sure.

It's found in the first sentence:

Subject is found in the first line: *GOD* {Mark that in your Bible!}

Main verb is found in verse two: *HAS SPOKEN* [Mark that!]

When the going gets tough, and we wonder if we'll ever be able to hang on in the midst of the storm, we need to hear that message:

GOD HAS SPOKEN!

Our role is to find out what He has said!

The clever advertising jingle says: "When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen!"

Swindoll: "In biblical times, when God's prophets talked, God's people listened.

The reason was simple. When a prophet spoke, people knew they were hearing God's voice

For centuries, no messages were considered more powerful or more urgent than those of the prophets.

Warnings and rebukes left their lips like bullets spinning from a smoking barrel.

And when they hit their target—the heart—the impact was shattering. . . .

The prophet was God's mouthpiece—His divine voice box, so to speak.

When the Lord had something to communicate, He dropped the mail in their bag.

They had one responsibility: to deliver the message, without adding to or analyzing it.

As a result, prophets became the most feared people in the community. For it was through them that God spoke."

Author refers to main ones who revealed the Father—God's spokesmen:

The prophets The angels Moses
Christ is better than any of these because He is
BOTH God AND Man!

Implication: if He provides a better revelation,
then we had better ***PAY ATTENTION!***

If God has spoken, we had better LISTEN!

GOD SPEAKS

WE BETTER PAY ATTENTION!

1:1-2

2:2-3

<=

2:1 ff

3:5

=>

3:7-8 ff.

4:1-2

4:8

=>

4:11-13

[He begins with prophets. . .]

JESUS IS BETTER THAN THE PROPHETS 1:1-3

In the past God spoke to their ancestors in various ways and at various times, through the prophets, His messengers to proclaim His Word.
But now, in these last days, God is doing something far better!

He has spoken to US through A SON.

The focus isn't on identifying Jesus as THE Son, but rather on the kind of revelation this is.

Focuses on method God used to speak.

He has spoken to us "*by Son!*"

Jesus isn't just another prophet. He's a SON!
Since God's final revelation is "Son-revelation," emphasis is placed not so much on what the Son has said, but rather, on **Who He is**.

SEVEN REASONS HIS REVELATION IS BETTER

—seven observations about *Who Jesus is*:

1) He is the Heir of everything. He inherits it all!

The prophets were just messengers; He is the Heir.

In Scripture, being Heir involves more than just receiving the inheritance.

It's a position of authority.

The Heir of everything has authority over everything.

2) He is the Creator of it all.

Since He Himself is Creator, He is able to reveal God.

The One who made it all has the rights of ownership.

He has authority over everything He made.

3) He is the radiance of God's glory.

He reveals what God is like.

Jesus' revelation of God's glory isn't like the moon that just reflects it.

All the prophets could do that.

What's unique about Jesus' revelation of God's glory: He *radiated* it. It generated within Him—like sun as opposed to moon: sun generates its own light.

He shines forth, with His own inherent glory, the glory of God Himself (cp. **John 1:14**—*The Word [who WAS God!] became flesh and dwelt among us, and **we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.***).

In O.T., God tells us clearly that He shares His glory with **NO ONE!** Jesus is God Himself who “*set up His tabernacle in our midst!*”

4) **He is the exact reproduction of all that God is.**

MacGyver, or Mission Impossible

—made an exact replica of a key by making an impression in a hard plastic substance.

The word was used in coinage.

It referred to the die from which coins were made.

Even if the die is thrown away, one can tell exactly what the die looked like by studying the coin.

It's the exact reproduction of the die.

So it is with Christ. He is the *exact reproduction of all that God is!*

A small boy was looking at a picture of Jesus. Noticing the boy's studious quietness, his father asked: “What are you doing, son?” “Looking at this picture of Jesus.” Then, with an

approving and decisive nod, the boy added, *“Hmm, best picture God ever had taken!”*

Jesus told His followers: *“He who has seen me, has seen the Father!”* (**John. 14:9**; cp. 1:18)

5) **He holds everything together with His Own Word.**

Not “Charles Atlas” concept of holding world on shoulders.

He holds it all together.

He “carries them along” in their determined course.

He keeps every part of the universe in its proper place.

He does this *“by the Word of His power.”*

How did God make world? By His Word.

Now He sustains it by that same Word: the Word of His power! *Jesus has it!*

How much power is it? It controls hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanos, tornados.

He has it all under His control.

He speaks, and all nature obeys His authority!

That’s the Word of God’s power. *Jesus has it!*

He’s the One who holds the environment together–NOT the environmentalists!

6) **He completed the job of purifying us.**

He takes the plan further than any of the prophets could.

He Himself is the One who purifies sinners.

Not only is He the One who deals with universe, but He also deals with our sin.

Remember the words of the Jewish leaders: *“Who can forgive sins but God alone?”*

They were right! He alone is God!

7) He sat down, indicating that His work is complete.

There's nothing more to do. He finished the job!

These unique qualifications demonstrate how Christ is able to provide a superior revelation of God to any the prophets could ever hope to give!

***The point is this:* If Jesus' revelation is that much better than all the former spokesmen, we had better pay attention to what He says.**

If Jesus is God's final revelation of Himself, then any understanding of God inconsistent with what God has told us about Him, in His Word, the Bible, is false.

Jesus Christ is not just another form of revelation about God.

He is the final revelation of God to His people.

No other revelation is needed.

The Heir of everything has come. The Creator of the universe has revealed Himself

The radiance of God's own glory has come. T h e e x a c t reproduction of all that God is ...

The One who holds everything together by His Own Word ...

The One who has purified us ...

The only One to sit down at the Father's right hand, because His work is finished.

There's nothing left! No more to be done. The final revelation has spoken!

We just need to cling to Him! And remain true to what He has said.

If He is better than all the religious systems the world has to offer, then we better hang with Him, and remain faithful.

If we escape anywhere else, we may escape rejection by humanity but lose our hope for eternity.

Sometimes pastors run the risk of being the greatest cynics of all. We see God do so much that at times it becomes almost routine. You begin to take God for granted.

Just about the time you think you have God all figured out, about the time you think you can tell God what to do. He throws you a curve.

He lets you know that He's in charge.

He doesn't figure the same way we do.

He's going to do things His way.

So He doesn't do what we think He should do.

At times like that, sometimes I have trouble believing God and hanging in there!

That may sound strange to you.

But sometimes, when things get rough I feel like throwing in the towel.

It's not the big affliction like these folks were going through. It's just the little afflictions of living for God in a pagan society.

But sometimes I feel like giving up—Like throwing in the towel.

Now, relax, I haven't had that feeling for at least 12 hours!

When the going gets tough, and we feel like throwing in the towel, we need to know what these people needed to know: ***GOD HAS SPOKEN!***

We need to know what God has said.

We need to hang in there—however great the storm raging around us may be!

However strong the enemy's attacks! ***HANG ON!***

The author tells us: "Don't give up!

He's the Greatest! Stick with Him whatever it may cost!

He's the only One who can provide access to God. Don't throw in the towel!"