



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

HEBREWS

Lesson 1

Welcome to our 13-week study of Hebrews. I know this is going to be an exciting and challenging adventure! This is such a rich book, full of doctrine, exhortations, and application that is relevant for today. Although there is a lot of controversy and unanswered questions about the author, the recipient, and the time frame in which it was written, there is one thing on which all scholars agree: The theme that runs through the entire book is the supremacy and finality of Christ. Jesus Christ is God's final Word. No other letter focuses as fully on the present greatness of Christ as Hebrews, except for the book of Revelation. Ray Stedman wrote, "Passages in Paul, notably in Ephesians and Colossians, briefly extol His exaltation 'far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come' (Ephesians 1:21), but only in Hebrews is this developed to contrast with the great human leaders of the past (Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Joshua) as well as angelic authorities, leaving Jesus as alone, occupying the place of ultimate authority in the universe. He shares the very throne of God by right and conquest."

Before we begin reading, we'll take a brief look at some of the facts (and suggestions) about a few of the topics that are open to debate. Before you begin, really pray and ask God to give you the wisdom and understanding to take it all in, to think through, digest, and apply all He shows you. This book is rich; this book is deep. The truths in this book can change your life. Is Jesus Christ, God the Son, higher than any angel? Is He the Creator of all? Do you trust in His death on the cross and His resurrection as the full and complete grounds for our salvation, or do you still believe it's about some ritual or good work? Is your life consistent with the new life you have in Christ? Are you taking up your cross daily? Are you looking forward to the return of Jesus as King over all the earth, allowing that to change your perspective on everything? Do you see God's hand in everything that happens around you, including trials and suffering? Are you displaying His

character as you live your life? These are some of the questions we will be discussing and wrestling through. I pray that in the next 13 weeks our faith will be stronger, deeper, and more solid. And may we obey the exhortation given by the author in 10:22 which says, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith ..."

First and Second Day

We're going to begin today by looking at some ideas of the authorship and the possible recipients of this book. There are many possibilities that have been thrown out over the years, such as Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, and Luke, to name a few. For many years the "church" has traditionally assigned the letter to Paul, but there is very little evidence to support that. The best thing we can do is agree with the third century theologian and scholar by the name of Origen who said, "Who it was that really wrote the Epistle, God only knows." Although "we" don't know who wrote it, it's not really anonymous, because the author was known by the recipients, according to Hebrews 13:18-24.

Who was the author writing to? Most scholars believe that although the author was definitely knowledgeable in Greek, it was specifically written to Hebrews, or Jews, who had been converted to the Christian faith. We'll point out some of the reasons for this belief as we go through the book, but basically, there are many references to the Old Testament writings, the sacrificial system and rituals, and the Jewish view of a covenant. There are also a great deal of comparisons between Judaism and Christianity, as well as no references to Gentile or pagan practices and philosophies. Where did these Jewish people live? That is also up for debate. Although many believe that the author is writing to believers in Jerusalem, more scholars believe it was written to a particular group of believers in Rome (13:24).

What do we know about this book? All scholars agree that the Jewish believers it was written to were in trouble. They were mostly second-generation Christians, and their first leaders had already passed away (13:7). They had professed Christ for a good amount of time (5:12) and had once shown the evidence of a solid faith (10:32-34). But at the time of writing, the readers were dealing with discouragement, lethargy, and fear. Some had given up meeting with other believers (10:25), finding much opposition from their families and friends of the Jewish faith. They were also facing

hostility and anger from the Gentile people as well. Their conversion from Judaism to Christianity set them up for persecution, loss of property and privilege, abandonment from families, and possibly the loss of their lives.

The author refers to the price they paid when they made a commitment to Christ, in 10:32-34; and although no one had been killed yet, martyred may soon come, according to Hebrews 12:4. The author feared that these believers would turn from their faith and deny Christ (6:6, 10:29), turning back to Judaism. This letter is full of warnings about it. The author almost pleads with them to stay faithful to the Gospel and not drift away. The consequences of falling away are horrible. He says in 10:31, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God."

Basically, Hebrews is an exhortation to keep running! Don't give up or give in! Don't drift away (2:1)! Go on to maturity (6:1)! Be diligent to the very end (6:11)! The writer uses various methods to reach his readers: appeals, teaching, and exhortation (warnings)! Twelve times in Hebrews the phrase "let us" is used, followed by an exhortation. In fact, 13:22 tells us the letter was designed as an exhortation. So the author's purpose, then, is to "present a series of arguments for the superiority of Jesus over all rival claims to allegiance which his readers were feeling and hearing. The author examines these authorities and reveals their inadequacies. None were, in themselves, a false voice. Each was ordained by God and proper in their intended place. But now the final word, the ultimate revelation from God, toward which all other voices had pointed, had come. To this supreme voice the author directs his reader's attention, and ours, by contrasting this final word with past utterances." (Ray Stedman) He keeps pointing to the supremacy and primacy of Jesus Christ, God's final Word!

This letter is divided into two parts. Andrew Murray wrote, "In the first part, the doctrinal half (1:1-10-10:18), we have the glory of the person and work of Christ set forth. In the second part, or practical half (10:19-13:25), the life that the knowledge of Christ and His salvation will enable us to live is described."

To sum it up, I like the paragraph written in the introduction to Hebrews in my Bible. It says, "The writer of Hebrews exhorts them to 'go on to perfection' (6:1). His appeal is based on the superiority of Christ over the Judaic system. Christ is better than the angels, for they worship Him. He is better than Moses, for He created him. He is better than the Aaronic priesthood, for His sacrifice was once for all time. He is better than the

Law, for He mediates a better covenant. In short, there is more to be gained in Christ than to be lost in Judaism. Pressing on in Christ produces tested faith, self-discipline, and a visible love seen in good works." Bottom line -- Christ is BETTER!

1. For your "assignment" today and tomorrow, read through the Book of Hebrews, all 13 chapters. As you read, try to mark the twelve times the phrase "let us" is found and write what exhortation it is connected with. Also, if you can, try to come up with the "theme" or the "main point" of each chapter. (It's okay if you don't understand it all, just pick out some key phrases.)

*** This is the spot to note the phrase "let us" and the exhortation it introduces each time.

Write the main point of each chapter:

Chapter 1:

Chapter 2:

Chapter 3:

Chapter 4:

Chapter 5:

Chapter 6:

Chapter 7:

Chapter 8:

Chapter 9:

Chapter 10:

Chapter 11:

Chapter 12:

Chapter 13:

Memory Verse for the Week: "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son ..." Hebrews 1:1-2a

Third Day

Work on your memory verse.

1. Read Hebrews 1:1-13. Give this chapter a title that reflects the main point. List any repeated words, phrases, or thoughts.

The main idea of this entire letter is that Jesus alone brings men the full revelation of God and that He alone enables us to enter into His very presence.

2. In light of the above statement, read verses 1-3, and in your own words, explain why the psalmist is discussing the "prophets" of old.

The point the author is making is simply this: Prophets were able to speak for God, but the Son was able to speak as God!

3. Who is Jesus Christ, according to these verses? List all the descriptions, characteristics, and facts about Him you find.

God spoke in various ways, with various means, over the years. Although there was great diversity in how He spoke in the Old Testament, it was always fragmented. It was God's Word, relevant and fitting for the people and the time, but fragmented just the same. Kent Hughes writes, "God utilized great devices to instruct His prophets. God spoke to Moses at Sinai in thunder and lightening and with the voice of a trumpet. He whispered to Elijah at Horeb in 'a still small voice' (1 Kings 19:12). Ezekiel was informed by visions and Daniel through dreams. God appeared to Abram in human form and to Jacob as an angel. God declared Himself by Law, by warning, by exhortation, by type, by parable. And when God's seers prophesied, they utilized nearly every method to communicate their message. Amos gave direct oracles from God. Malachi used questions and answers. Ezekiel performed bizarre symbolic acts. Haggai preached sermons. And Zechariah employed mysterious signs. These all dramatically demonstrated God's loving desire to communicate with His people. It was never hackneyed, never boring, never inscrutable, never irrelevant. It was always adequate for the time. It was always progressive, revealing more of God and His ways. It was always in continuity with the previous words of

God. But in all of this, God's eloquence was never complete. As grand as it was, it was nevertheless fragmentary and lacking. But no more! For in Christ came the ultimate speech of God (2a). Jesus is God's final Word!"

God is not, and has never been, silent. I love what Jeff Snell wrote in his book, Strength For The Journey. He said, "The opening words of Hebrews shatter both ancient and contemporary notions of a God who is silent. The very first phrase of this letter contrasts God with lifeless idols of ancient paganism and modern perceptions of His muteness. Although the first four verses of Hebrews are a single sentence in the original language of the New Testament, the core of this initial statement is **GOD HAS SPOKEN!** The theme of a God-who-speaks brackets the entire Bible. Genesis 1:3 records God creating with a word, and a dominant refrain in the first chapter is, 'And God said.' The second-to-last verse of the Bible contains the risen Christ saying, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Between these bookends are numerous references to the self-revealing activity of God through His Words. The Old Testament Scriptures contain 3,808 occurrences of the phrases 'The Lord said,' 'The Lord spoke,' and 'The Word of the Lord came. Even this substantial figure barely scratches the surface of God's communication to people in the Old Testament."

"The writer of Hebrews, however, makes it immediately clear that God's instruments of self-revelation are not equal in significance or impact. The text does so by establishing an immediate contrast between the multitude of ways God has revealed Himself in the past and the one ultimate means through which He has made Himself known."

4. The author establishes some contrasts in these first few verses. First, how does he contrast the matter of **WHEN**?
5. How does he contrast the issue of **TO WHOM**?
6. How does he contrast the question of **THROUGH WHOM**?
7. Finally, how does he compare the matter of **HOW MANY WAYS**?

8. List the phrases used from this chapter that describe Jesus as:

- a. Inheritor:
- b. Creator:
- c. Sustainer:
- d. Radiator:
- e. Representer:
- f. Purifier:
- g. Ruler:

9. Which one of the terms above especially ministers to you right now?

Why?

The prophets were God's spokesmen, living out their allotted time span, fulfilling their calling. But Jesus is the eternal Son, both the Creator of all things and Heir of all things. Jesus is standing at the end of the future and the beginning of the past. He was not a fragment of the truth; He was, and is, the whole truth.

The phrase "the brightness of His glory" can also be translated the "radiance of His glory." This means the light "which shines forth." We can see Jesus as the radiant light coming from the Father as sunlight emanates from the sun. "Jesus' radiance is derived from the Father, even though He Himself is the light (John 8:12). The Son causes the radiance of the Father to shine forth. John 1:14 says that "We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The Son's radiance, therefore, is an extension of God's glory." (Simon Kistemaker)

The "express image of His person" is another amazing statement. That phrase translates as "exact representation." It can be used to describe minted coins that bear the image of a president. It is a precise reproduction of the original. "The Son, then, is completely the same as the stamp that makes the impression; both exist separately. The Son, who bears the "very stamp" of God's nature, is not the Father but proceeds from the Father and has a separate existence." (Kistmekaer) When you look at Jesus, you see exactly what God is like. Christ shares the Father's divine nature, yet They exist separately.

10. Why is this whole section significant? What does it mean to you?

11. God still speaks to us today through His Word. He is not silent. He wants to reveal Himself. Have you listened to Him today?

We'll end here for today. May you be encouraged that Jesus upholds all things by the "Word of His power"! That's surely a "**Reason to Rejoice**"!

Fourth Day

Meditate on your verse. Hide it in your heart today.

1. Read Hebrews 1:1-14. Focus on verses 4-14. Who is superior, Jesus or the angels? How does Philippians 3:9-11 support this?

In the first section, the author painted us a picture of God revealing Himself through Jesus Christ. Now, in this section, the author "paints a majestic portrait of the One through whom God has revealed Himself." (Snell) C.S. Lewis says that "The one barometer of spiritual growth is a deepening awareness of the majesty of Christ."

Most scholars think that at the time Hebrews was written, the belief that the angels were intermediaries between God and man was on the rise. Many believed that angels bridged the gulf between God and man. Some were trying to reduce Jesus to the status of angels, while others had even begun to worship angels (Colossians 2:18). They had been encouraged to elevate angles to a position that rivaled Christ Himself! Hebrews 2:2 tells us that the people thought angels were "speaking to them" as well. The writer of Hebrews is desperate to show us that Jesus is the superior mediator, and because He is fully God, He is therefore fully able to represent God when functioning as our High Priest!

2. Why is it so important to understand that the angels are NOT mediators between God and man? (Hebrews 8:6, 12:24, 1 Timothy 2:5)

3. The writer gives many reasons why Jesus is superior to the angels. What reason is given in verses 4-5?

The writer is quoting from Psalm 2, which is specifically applied to Jesus in Revelation 12:5 and 19:15 and to those who share His kingdom reign in Revelation 2:27. (Also, read Luke 1:32, Mark 1:11, and Luke 9:35)

Jesus is called the "firstborn" in verse 6. This doesn't mean He was the first one created. Because, as we already have seen, He is the Creator not the creation. "Firstborn" is a term of status that reflects Jesus' position as heir. F.F. Bruce said, "He is called 'firstborn' because He exists before all creation, and because all creation is His heritage." (Colossians 1:5)

4. What are the angels commanded to do in verse 6? What are they called in verse 7? Why is this so significant?

5. How are angels still worshipped, in a sense, today? Are you guilty of this in any way?

In verses 7-14, the author compares the nature of angels to the nature of the Son. He uses some great quotes, showing the authority of the Old Testament.

6. The author quotes Psalm 45 in verses 8-9. This psalm is referred to as a "royal" psalm. What "royal" words does the author use here in Hebrews 1:8-9? Why do you think this is significant?

Ray Stedman explains this well. He says, "Psalm 45 is a wedding song, originally describing a king of Israel, but later understood by rabbis as messianic. The contrast between a royal personage and his servant-

companions is the point of the quotation. The King is addressed twice as God; possesses a throne, a scepter and a kingdom; loves righteousness and hates wickedness; has a special anointing of joy; and continues as king forever and ever. No angel can claim these attributes. Here, by contrast, may be a hint of the moral defection of the host of angels who fell with satan. Angels could and did sin, but the Son's love of righteousness kept Him safe through the most severe temptations. Even those unfallen angels, who also, presumably, love righteousness, do so on the basis of choice, while the Son's love of righteousness is inherent in His very nature. For this reason God has set Him above His companions."

7. According to these verses, how long is Jesus' reign?
8. Read Hebrews 1:10-12. The author quotes Psalm 102:25-27. What do these verses mean? What are they saying about Christ and His reign? (The author mentions the same point in Hebrews 13:8)
9. Read Hebrews 1:13. The author quotes Psalm 110:1, which is the most frequently quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament. Also, read Colossians 2:15. What point is he making?
10. According to verse 14, what is one purpose of the angels?

Tomorrow we'll take a look at some other things angels do, but for now, the point that the author is making is that angels are servants, but the Son is sovereign! God bless you, ladies!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

In our chapter we saw what angels are not. Today, let's take a brief look at what they are and what they do. The Hebrew word for angel is

"malak" and means messenger. They are divine message-bearers. They have four specific functions. They continuously worship and praise God (Job 38:7, Psalm 103:20, Isaiah 6:1-3). Angels communicate God's message to man (Acts 7:38, 53, Daniel 10:10-15, Matthew 1:19-24). They minister to believers (Psalm 34:7; Psalm 91:11, 12; Acts 5:19; Luke 15:10; 1 Timothy 5:21), and they will be God's agents in the final earthly judgments and Second Coming (Matthew 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Revelation 19:17 through 20:3-10). They are quite awesome and powerful, but their "significance dwindles in the presence of Christ." (Hughes)

1. How does this chapter remind you of the greatness of God?
2. How should our awareness of the "majesty of Christ" change our lives?

I want to end with a paragraph I actually found in many books, but I will quote from Kent Hughes. He said, "C.S. Lewis memorably portrayed the growing Christian's experience of an ever-enlarging Christ in his *Chronicles of Narnia*. Lucy, caught up in her spiritual quest, saw the lion (Aslan ...) shining white and huge in the moonlight. She fell to his side, half-sitting and half-lying between his front paws. He bent forward and touched her nose with his tongue. His warm breath was all around her. She gazed up into the large, wise face.

'Welcome, child,' he said.
 'Aslan,' said Lucy, 'you're bigger.'
 'That is because you are older, little one,' answered he.
 'Not because you are?'
 'I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.'

"Expanding souls encounter an expanding Christ. Hebrews presents the greatness of Christ as no other New Testament writing does, and it repeatedly demands a response from the reader. Serious study of Hebrews will make us grow and find a bigger Christ."

3. Did Christ "get bigger" this week as you studied His Word?

