

Hebrews

1. **Who was the writer? Who was the audience? What was the occasion for writing?**

Although the King James Version ascribes the authorship of this letter to the apostle Paul, there is no certainty as to the actual writer. Hebrews 2:2-4 actually establishes that the apostle Paul could not be the writer of this book. Whoever wrote the book of Hebrews puts himself in the category of “those who heard” this message secondhand. Throughout the Pauline letters, the apostle Paul continually asserts that he received his message directly through revelation from the Lord. A few possibilities are that maybe Luke or Barnabas or Apollos could have written this book. The audience is historically accepted to be Hebrew Christians (those with Jewish origin). This book was clearly written before the Roman destruction of the Temple in AD 70 – see Hebrews 13:10-11. With the emphasis upon shifting the mindset from the Old Covenant system to the New, it seems that the purpose of this letter was to prepare Jewish Christians for the oncoming destruction of Jerusalem.

2. **What is the main theme of the book of Hebrews?** There is no doubt that the theme of the book of Hebrews is about the superiority of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant over the messengers of old and the Old Testament. Here are some of the points brought forth under that theme:

- Superiority of Jesus over the angels (for connection between angels and the Law from Sinai, see Hebrews 2:2, Galatians 3:19) -- 1:4-14
- Superiority of Jesus over Moses -- 3:3-6
- Superiority of our High Priest Jesus over Aaron -- 5:1-10, 7:28
- Superior Ministry of Christ -- 8:6
- Superior Covenant -- 8:7-13
- Superior Tabernacle -- 9:11
- Superior Sacrifice -- 9:13-14, 26
- Superior Offering -- 10:10-14
- Superiority of Christians over O.T faithful -- 11:39-40
- Superior Mountain (Zion over Sinai) and Kingdom (Spiritual Israel over Physical Israel) -- 12:18-29
- Superior Altar -- 13:10

3. **When did the New Testament take effect?** Our Bible is separated into the Old and New Testaments, split between Malachi and Matthew. This certainly is a reasonable division, seeing that the bulk of Jesus’ teachings have a New Covenant perspective. However, due in part to this placement of the gospel accounts in the New Testament, many casual readers are confused as to the actual meaning of a New Covenant. Hebrews 9:15-17 bring clarity to this subject. Here are some key points from this short passage:

- Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant
- A covenant is synonymous with testament or will – compare KJV, NASB, and NIV

- For a covenant (will) to take effect, there must be the death of the one who made it

Since Jesus is the mediator of the New Testament, it is clear that the new covenant did not come into effect until Jesus' death on the cross.

4. There is one major function of Jesus Christ that is hinted at in other places, but is fully brought out only in the book of Hebrews. What is it, and what do we learn about it in this book? Apart from the book of Hebrews, we would only be able to surmise the role of Jesus as High Priest. Thankfully, this book brings out many aspects of the High Priesthood of Christ. Here are some of the high points:

- Jesus is both a merciful and faithful High Priest -- 2:17
- Our High Priest has passed through the heavens -- 4:14, 9:11, 9:24
- Jesus as High Priest sympathizes with our weaknesses -- 4:15
- Jesus did not glorify Himself, but God glorified Him to that position -- 5:5
- Jesus is High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek -- 5:10, 6:20
- Jesus is High Priest according to Melchizedek because of the power of an indestructible life -- 7:17
- Jesus holds this Priesthood permanently (and He is the only High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek) -- 7:23-24
- Jesus as High Priest is the source of our salvation -- 5:9, 7:25
- Our High Priest always lives to make intercession for us -- 7:25
- Our High Priest is holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens -- 7:26
- Our High Priest offered the perfect sacrifice (Himself) -- 7:27, 9:12, 9:24-26
- The High Priest is the Perfect Son -- 7:28

5. What do we learn about "falling away" in this book? Many people falsely teach "once saved, always saved." The book of Hebrews is filled with admonition to the Christian warning about the dangers of not holding fast to the word. Here are some of those warnings:

- How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? -- 2:3
- We must take care, lest anyone have an evil, unbelieving heart in falling away from the living God -- 3:12
- We are told to encourage each other, lest anyone be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin -- 3:13
- Christians must hold fast the beginning of assurance firm until the end -- 3:14
- We should fear, lest anyone comes short of entering God's rest -- 4:1
- We must be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall -- 4:11
- For those who fall away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance -- 6:6
- Christians must be diligent to realize the full assurance of hope until the end -- 6:11
- We need to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering -- 10:23

- If we go on sinning willfully, there is only certain judgment -- 10:26-27
- Christians must hold onto our confidence so that we don't shrink back to destruction, but rather preserve our souls -- 10:35-39
- We must consider Christ so that we don't grow weary and lose heart -- 12:3
- We must strengthen our limbs and make straight paths so that we may be healed - - 12:12-13
- We are to see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God -- 12:15
- Christians can't despise their birthright, or, like Esau, there will be no place for repentance -- 12:16-17
- We must not refuse Him who is speaking, for there is no escape for those who turn away from Him who warns from heaven -- 12:25
- We must obey our Godly leaders and submit to them, or it will be unprofitable for us -- 13:17

6. What is the consummation of the ages, according to Hebrews? Many people assume that the apex of history was the crucifixion of Jesus. However, Hebrews 9:24-26 establishes that the consummation of the ages is when Jesus, as High Priest, offered His own blood in the true Holy of Holies, that is Heaven. The entire book of Hebrews confirms that Jesus appearance as High Priest really is the hinge of history -- e.g., see 8:1-2. Two other New Testament passages also communicate this point. Both Romans 5:9-10 and Romans 8:34 relay that we are saved through the work of the glorified Christ. Let's all lift up our minds and emphasize in our thoughts and teaching that which is emphasized in the holy writ.

7. In Hebrews chapter 11, what is noticeably absent from the discussion of each person mentioned in this "Hall of Faith"? There is point that we don't want to forget that is made in the ninth chapter of Hebrews that is then driven home in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Hebrews 9:15 establishes that Jesus' death was sufficient to redeem the Old Testament faithful of their transgressions. A read through the eleventh chapter confirms this. In this discussion of these Old Testament greats, there is no mention of their sin. Notice a few examples:

- In the discussion of faithful Abraham, there is no mention of his ungodly shortcut with Hagar
- Sarah's laugh about the coming birth of Isaac is noticeably absent
- Jacob's deception of his father isn't mentioned
- Moses is spoken of as "not fearing the wrath of the king" -- isn't something missing there?
- What about Gideon's initial fear, or Barak's dependence on Deborah, or Samson's immorality and stupidity, or David's adultery and murder?

Why aren't these sins spoken of in this chapter? Because they are gone! They no longer exist for Christ has taken them away forever. What does God's eternal record say about you?

8. What does Hebrews teach us about the discipline of the Lord? Hebrews chapter 12 has some important points about the discipline of the Lord. Here they are:

- Don't regard lightly the discipline of the Lord -- 12:5
- Those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines -- 12:6
- God deals with us as sons in His discipline of us -- 12:7
- If you are without discipline, then you are an illegitimate son -- 12:8
- If we are subject to the Father of spirits, we will live -- 12:9
- God disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness -- 12:10
- Although discipline doesn't seem to be joyful in the moment, its result is the peaceful fruit of righteousness -- 12:11

9. How is a clean conscience defined in this book? The book of Hebrews has a number of things to say about a clean conscience. Chapter 9, verse 14 tells us that Christ's blood cleanses our conscience and Hebrews 13:18 tells us that we are sure that we have a good conscience. However, a wonderful definition of a clean conscience is brought forth in chapter 10, verses 1-4. In contrast to the continual remembrance of sin under the Old Testament sacrificial system, the New Testament truly gives us a clean conscience because of the perfect sacrifice of Christ. Verse 2 truly defines a clean conscience as "no longer have ... consciousness of sins." Just as God remembers our iniquities no more under the New Covenant, so He desires us to forget all of our past sins because they have been forever removed.