

## *Walking Out the Word:* **The Epistle to the Hebrews:**

### **Important Background to Hebrews:**

- The epistle to the Hebrews shows Jesus Christ as superior and preeminent over everyone and everything. It was difficult for the Jewish audience to embrace the idea of a “New Covenant” as better than the “Old Covenant” that they so highly esteemed. Jews had the desire to hold to the customs and practices that they had known since childhood. They were challenged to put their confidence fully in the person of Jesus Christ who was the mediator of a better covenant and their Great High Priest.
- The mystery of the author of Hebrews will remain a mystery until eternity. There is no unanimity of tradition concerning the authorship of this great epistle. Paul, Barnabus, Apollos, Peter, Luke, Aquilla and Priscilla have been suggested as potential authors by a variety of scholars over the centuries. The book of Hebrews was written prior to the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. It was written to a group of Jewish Christians who had been established in the faith for many years and had suffered persecution and were in danger of drifting from the Christian Faith. They were tempted to turn back to Judaism. The writer of Hebrews charges them to “hold fast” (3:6), to endure (10:36), and to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (10:23) lest they turn from Christ and lose the benefit of His sacrifice.
- The writer of Hebrews compares and contrasts the preeminent majesty of Jesus Christ with the Old Testament priesthood and sacrificial system. The superiority of Christ is that he is better than the prophets, better than angels, better than Moses, Joshua and Aaron. Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant and has made a new and a living way to enter boldly into the presence of God.
- Although Hebrews was written to Jewish believers, its doctrinal admonitions are relevant to Gentile believers as well. The writer strives to keep the church from turning to apostasy by showing the significance and fulfillment of Jesus’ sacrifice once and for all. Hebrews encourages today’s believers to stay faithful to the faithful One.

### **Things to talk about in Walking Out the Word:**

- *Opening:* Talk about the following concepts from 1:1-4: Jesus is the pre-appointed heir of all things; Jesus is the creator; Jesus is the image of or the exact representation of God’s character. How does this introduction to the book of Hebrews expand your understanding of the preeminence of Jesus?
- *Hebrews 1,2,3 and 4:* What does it mean the Jesus is the “firstborn into the world” (1:6) “Captain of Salvation”(2:10) and “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” (3:1). Discuss each of these titles. What is the authors concern in 2:1-4, that the believers would “drift away” (Hint: Greek *pararvein*). What are the twin sins that kept Israel from entering into the promise land (3:18,19). What comparison does the writer make of the Israelites (3:7-19) and Christians (4:1-13. See also Ex 3:17; Num. 14:7-9) How is the word of God “living and powerful” (4:11-13).
- *Hebrews 5,6, and 7:* Why is it important for the writer to emphasize the full humanity of Jesus in 4:14-5:10? Describe the role of the Jewish High priest? Who was Aaron (Exod. 28:1-3)? Who was Melchizedek (Gen 14:18-20)? Why was Jesus a high priest in the line of Melchizedek (Heb 7)? As the writer talks about the spiritual immaturity and the need to progress (5:12-6:12), does the church today walk in maturity? What is the hope that anchors us (6:9-20)
- *Closing:* Are you presently patient in hope, or have you become sluggish (6:12)? Close in prayer.

## *Walking Out the Word:*

# The Epistle to the Hebrews

### Important Background to the Epistle to the Hebrews (continued):

- Hebrews is addressed to Jewish Christians who had knowledge of the earthly tabernacle and the priestly ministry. In Hebrews, Jesus is shown to be our Great High Priest who has given us a *better covenant*, a *better sanctuary* and a *better sacrifice*. In Hebrews, the Old Covenant is fulfilled in the New Covenant.
- A New Testament View of the Tabernacle is one in which God dwells among His people. The Old Testament furniture of the Tabernacle has a fuller meaning and picture of the Heavenly Sanctuary.
  - **The Ark of the Covenant** (Exodus 25:10-22) now represents covenant and community. A covenant with God and one another represents the presence and the power in the midst of His people.
  - **The bronze laver** (Exodus 30:17-21) represents confession and cleansing.
  - **The altar of burnt offering** (Exodus 27:1-8) represents sacrificial service. Romans 12:1-2 tells us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice.
  - **The gold lamp stand** (Exodus 25:31-40) represents light and life of the Holy Spirit who brings revelation to God's people.
  - **The table of showbread** (Exodus 25:23-30) represents feeding and fellowship with the 12 loves of bread representing the 12 tribes of Israel and God's care for them.
  - **The altar of incense** (Exodus 30:1-10) represents whole-hearted fully integrated lives of worship.
- The Old Testament Sacrifices all prefigure Jesus Christ. Jesus is our High Priest of the New Covenant.
  - **The Burnt offering** (Leviticus 1) sacrifice prefigures Christ. In Christ, our sin is paid in full.
  - **The Grain offering** (Leviticus 2) prefigures giving our lives in daily thanksgiving and worship.
  - **The Peace offering** (Leviticus 3) foreshadows the NT communion.
  - **The Sin offering** (Leviticus 4:1-5:13) foreshadows the confession of sin that says, "I did it!" We must confess our sin and be cleansed of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).
  - **The Guilt offering** (Leviticus 5:14-6:7) was a trespass offering having to do with an action of restitution. In the New Covenant we are still called to make restitution when we have done harm.
- Jesus' ministry of the New Covenant of God's grace is wrought within the *minds* and *hearts* of believers by the power of the Holy Spirit. God established His new personal covenant relationship with His people, based not on a compelling force from *without* but an impelling power from *within*. In contrast to Israel's limited and impersonal revelation, under the New Covenant there will be *complete* knowledge of God.

### Things to talk about in Walking Out the Word:

- *Opening*: Discuss why Jesus is superior. Compare and contrast the Old Testament covenant and sacrifice to the New Testament covenant and sacrifice. How is Jesus the Perfect Mediator? Why was a new covenant necessary?
- *Hebrews 8 & 9*: Compare and contrast the Old Testament priestly ministry and the priestly ministry of Jesus. What type of cleansing did the Old Covenant provide versus the New Covenant? What makes Christ's sacrifice effective?
- *Hebrews 10 & 11*: What is our confidence to enter into the Most Holy Place founded on? What is the confession of our hope based on? What is your faith anchored to? Of the heroes of faith, who do you personally most relate to? Talk about how faith does not automatically guarantee us exemption from difficult trials. The same faith in Hebrews 11 helped some to overcome trial and others to endure persecution even to the death.
- *Hebrews 12, 13 & Closing*: The author of Hebrews calls us as Christians to run the race, and gives three specific actions in 12:1-29 introduced by the command "let us..." What are these three things that we can do in this race of faith? What personal qualities are we to possess according to 13:1-6? What is significant about the changeless character of Christ? Close by praying for the character of Christ to be made manifest in each life.