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“So Great a Salvation”

Lesson 1, for Sunday February 18, 2001

Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας
τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν
τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son,...” Hebrews 1:1-2, NAS

“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.” Hebrews 2:1, NAS

Hebrews is quite unlike any other New Testament book. Rather than being a conventional letter, it is an *apologetic*, a reasoned defense of our faith. The subject matter is the superiority and sufficiency of Jesus as our High Priest and Sacrifice.

Author: No one knows for sure who wrote the book of Hebrews. The tone is energetic, and the Greek used is that of a very articulate and highly educated person. The author quotes exclusively from the Septuagint, rather than the Hebrew bible, which indicates that the author was raised speaking Greek, somewhere away from Palestine. Dr. Martin Luther proposed that the author might have been Apollos.

Recipients: The intended recipients of the letter are unknown. From the content it would appear that they were converts from Judaism to Christianity, and that under persecution they were backing away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ (an illegal religion in the Roman Empire) and heading back to Judaism (which was officially tolerated, at least some of the time).

Date: Hebrews was written sometime before 96 A.D., when Clement of Rome quoted from it. Furthermore, it presupposes that the Temple worship in Jerusalem was continuing, which would indicate that it was written before August of 70 A.D. when the Temple was totally demolished by the Romans.

Outline of Hebrews

(from Bruce, p. lxiii)

A. The Finality of Christianity (1:1 - 2:18)

1. God's final revelation in His Son (1:1-4).
2. Christ better than the angels (1:5-14).
3. First admonition: Gospel vs. Law (2:1-4).
4. Humiliation and glory of the Son of Man (2:5-9).
5. The Son of Man the Savior and High Priest of His people (2:10-18).

B. The True Home of the People of God (3:1 - 4:13)

1. Jesus greater than Moses (3:1-6).
2. Second Admonition: The rejection of Jesus more serious than the rejection of Moses (3:7-19).
3. The true rest of God may be forfeited (4:1-10).
4. Exhortation to attain God's rest (4:11-13).

C. The High Priesthood of Christ (4:14-6:20)

1. Christ's High Priesthood an encouragement to His people (4:14-16).
2. Qualifications for High Priesthood (5:1-4).
3. Christ's qualifications for High Priesthood (5:5-10).
4. Third Admonition: Spiritual Immaturity (5:11-14).
5. No second beginning possible (6:1-8).
6. Encouragement to persevere (6:9-12).
7. The steadfastness of God's promise (6:13-20).

D. The Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)

1. Melchizedek the Priest-King (7:1-3).
2. The greatness of Melchizedek (7:4-10).
3. Imperfection of the Aaronic priesthood (7:11-14).
4. Superiority of the new priesthood (7:15-19).
5. Superior because of Divine Oath (7:20-22).
6. Superior because of its permanence (7:23-25).
7. Superior because of the Character of Jesus (7:26-28).

E. Covenant, Sanctuary, and Sacrifice (8:1-10:18)

1. Priesthood and promise (8:1-7).
2. The old covenant superseded (8:8-13).
3. The sanctuary under the old covenant (9:1-5).

4. A temporary ritual (9:6-10).
5. Christ's eternal redemption (9:11-14).
6. The Mediator of the new covenant (9:15-22).
7. The Perfect Sacrifice (9:23-28).
8. The old order a shadow of reality (10:1-4).
9. The new order *is* the reality (10:5-10).
10. The enthroned High Priest (10:11-18).

F. Call to Worship, Faith, Perseverance (10:19-12:29)

1. Access to God through the Sacrifice of Christ (10:19-25).
2. Fourth Admonition: The Willful Sin of Apostasy (10:26-31).
3. Call to perseverance (10:32-39).
4. The faith of the elders (11:1-40).
 - a. Prologue: The nature of faith (11:1-3).
 - b. The faith of the Antediluvians (11:4-7).
 - c. The faith of Abraham and Sarah (11:8-12).
 - d. The City of God and homeland of the faithful (11:13-16).
 - e. More about the faith of the patriarchs (11:17-22).
 - f. The faith of Moses (11:23-28).
 - g. Faith at the exodus and settlement (11:29-31).
 - h. Further examples of faith (11:32-38).
 - i. Epilogue: Faith's vindication comes with Christ (11:39-40).
5. Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith (12:1-3).
6. Discipline is for legitimate children (12:4-11).
7. Let us then be up and doing (12:12-17).
8. The earthly Sinai and the heavenly Zion (12:18-24).
9. Pay heed to the Voice of God! (12:25-29).

G. Concluding Exhortation and Prayer (13:1-21)

1. Ethical injunctions (13:1-6).
2. Examples to follow (13:7-8).
3. The true Christian sacrifices (13:9-16).
4. Submission to leaders (13:17).
5. Request for prayer (13:18-19).
6. Prayer and doxology (13:20-21).

H. Postscript (13:22-25)

1. Personal notes (13:22-23).
2. Final greetings and benedictions (13:24-25).