

LIII. Traveling Route 66: The Bible in Biblical Perspective
The Journey with Christ, the Promised One
“Hebrews—The Book of Covenants”
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September 8, 2013 – Evening Sermon

We are in the book of Hebrews and I'd like to start at the last chapter, Hebrews 13. We will look at some selected readings throughout it. We are in our study called Travelling Route 66 with the Journey to Christ in the first 39 books of the Bible, the Old Testament and now we're in the Journey with Christ which includes the 27 books of the New Testament. We are in the book of Hebrews for this study. We will start by looking at the concluding statement of this book.

Hebrews 13:20-25 says [20] *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, [21] equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. [22] I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. [23] You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. [24] Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. [25] Grace be with all of you.*

We have arrived at this book and one of the great things I love about this book is that it settles one of the great discussions, and as a pastoral counselor I have to deal with this regularly, that happens in the morning between a husband and a wife. That is who makes the coffee? The answer is “He brews.” I love this book! I have been challenged by it. I've taught it in a Bible study. I have never preached through it as of yet. I would love to preach through it. I want to give you a couple of handles on it that I think you will find helpful as you read and make your way through it. We use questions to work our way through each book and we know that the Holy Spirit is The Author of every book of the Bible but the Holy Spirit works through prophets in the Old Testament and the Apostles in the New Testament.

So who is the author of Hebrews? It's a great question. I don't have the slightest idea who the writer of Hebrews is other than the Holy Spirit used somebody who wrote this brief word of exhortation. There are five possibilities of who wrote this book. One possibility is, because there are so many “Pauline-isms” and there is so much “Pauline” style – the doctrine then application style – that Paul wrote this book and the Jewish Christians did not put his name on it because the thrust of his ministry had been to the Gentiles. So his name was purposefully left off the book. That argument has not convinced me for a couple of reasons. One is that there is a lot in the book of Hebrews that is not Pauline. In fact there are some things in it that doesn't mesh with the way Paul dealt with things when he wrote, preached and did his pastoral work. So I have never been convinced that Paul wrote it, but there is so much in it that points to Paul that it does seem highly likely that whoever the Lord chose to write this book, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had been greatly influenced by Paul.

That brings me to three other possibilities. A second possibility is a man by the name of Apollos. Apollos has his cheerleaders who believed that because of Paul's influence in his life, showing up in his writings, yet his own distinctiveness, he was kind

of his own person in many ways from what we know about him that it might have been Apollos who wrote Hebrews, showing the influence of Paul's mentorship in his life.

A third possibility is Clement. Some believe that Hebrews is Paul's influence on Clement. The reason that many say this is because Clement would have been alive at a time when this could have been written. Secondly, Clement was greatly influenced by Paul. Thirdly, Clement wrote two letters that aren't in the canon but they are of some value as extra Biblical writing. His first letter is called Clement 1 or I Clement and is either quoting or repeating what is found in the book of Hebrews.

A fourth possibility, which is where I cast my lot, is that Luke wrote the book of Hebrews. Luke obviously was influenced by the Apostle Paul. Luke would have been with Paul while he was in prison in Rome and in Hebrews the person writing it is bringing greetings from people who have been in Italy which is where Rome is and so Luke would have been connected there with Paul. He certainly would have picked up on a lot of Pauline statements. Whoever the writer is, is a contemporary with Timothy who has just been released from his own imprisonment. I just read about Timothy's release in Hebrews 13:23, and likely from some imprisonment, perhaps in Rome itself. So Luke would have been a companion of Timothy even after the death of Paul. So I kind of cast my lot with Luke.

So you say who is the fifth possibility? The fifth possibility is that I don't have the slightest idea. The author is absolutely anonymous. God chose to make him anonymous and he will stay anonymous. So that tackles the question of who wrote the book of Hebrews.

Now, to whom is the book written to? One might initially say he is writing this to Hebrews but the only problem is that the title at the top was applied by the church later as to their evaluation as to whom he was writing for it wasn't in the original manuscript. In the original manuscripts it never says specifically to whom it is being written but I do believe we can make an educated guess as to who was on the heart of author and whom the Holy Spirit was giving this author particular focus to.

You'll notice that in the book of Hebrews there is the expectation that to whomever they are writing they are familiar with Old Covenant, Old Testament people, ceremonies, offerings, baptisms and all of those things. That's why the early church felt they were writing it to Jewish Christians. I would say that whoever wrote this that, that seems to be their burden. To be more precise, they are not just writing to Jewish Christians, I think this would also include Gentiles that would become proselytes to Judaism and later converted to Christ. So whether it is Jewish people who came to Christ or Gentiles who had been proselytized into the Jewish religion who are now converted and were also partakers in these sacrifices, offerings and ceremonies, that it is to them that they are writing but let's be even more precise.

Hebrew Christians, Jewish Christians, Gentiles who proselytize to the Jewish faith now converted to Christ but these are people who clearly for whatever reason are being drawn back into the practices of the Old Covenant. Someone is teaching them that they have come to Christ but to know Christ you must go back to the Old Covenant practices. The writer is trying to tell them that not only do you not go back but those old practices have been abolished because they have fulfilled their purpose. You have arrived at their fulfillment. The writer is showing great concern as to why would you go back to something that can't save you for it was pointing to the One who would save them. The

blood of bulls and goats cannot save you but the Lamb of God has come, who was the fulfillment of what that pointed to.

When was Hebrews written? I think I can get it within forty five years for you. Here is why. Clement writes his letter in 96 AD before the century was out. He either is quoting or replicating this letter in his letter. So that would mean that this was written before 96 AD. Secondly, this letter is imploring those who have come from the Jewish faith to Christ don't attempt to take Christ back there and don't you go back there. You are in the New Covenant, a better covenant, with greater blessings, so press on. The problem would be that you have to have the temple and the priesthood to have those sacrifices. The priesthood and the temple were all destroyed in 70 AD. So it would seem to me that this would have to have been written not only before 96 AD but it would have even had to have been written before 70 AD. After 70 AD when all was destroyed there are no sacrifices, rituals and ceremonies to go back to. So it at least has to be before 96 AD. I would suggest that this was written sometime after Paul's death which happened in 64 to 65 AD and then up to 69 AD.

Why is this book written? It is written for this reason. The New Covenant with its superior provisions and blessings has now arrived and it has abolished the Old Covenant, through the supremacy of Christ as the Mediator, our Prophet, Priest and King. That is the summation of the book of Hebrews. The New Covenant has come. The unfolding of the Old Covenant, the four hundred years of no direct revelation (400 years of silence between the Old and New Testament), now the coming of Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant, now Christ the Final Prophet, Priest and King has now brought the New Covenant. There is One God and One Mediator between God and man. The Old Covenant was unfolded through Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David has now come to the fulfillment in Jesus Christ and the New Covenant is the presentation of the eternal covenant that was established in the counsels of the Trinity and now affirmed by the blood of Christ. That is the burden of this writer. So why would I go back when all that was back there was pointing to this One who has brought this eternal covenant that we now embrace in what the Bible calls the New Covenant and what the writer of Hebrews says is the better covenant.

I would like to give you an outline of Hebrews and then go through some things with you but before I give you the outline I would like to work through this supremacy issue with you a little bit. Hebrews 1:1-4 says *[1] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets (old covenant), [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. [3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, [4] having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

The writer is saying this Christ has come and the Incarnation has brought in the flesh the exact imprint, the exact representation of the glorious Triune God that the Second Person of the Trinity as revealed in the flesh His attributes. Now He laid aside the privileges of His attributes but He didn't quit being God as He came, this is the Son of God having come in the flesh. He is the radiance of the glory of God. Notice, who is this Jesus? He made all things by the Word of His power. He saved us from our sins by

the purification of sins and now He has ascended and is interceding for us – creation, redemption and providence. This Savior who has come in the flesh is the One by whom you were created, saved and sustained. He has wrapped that very glorious statement up but would you be fascinated by those beings who were made greater than you? Christ is greater than them. It is Christ who is supreme over the angels.

Hebrews 1:5-14 says [5] *For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”?* Or again, *“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”?* [6] *And again, when he brings the firstborn (Christ) into the world, he says, “Let all God's angels worship him.”* [7] *Of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.”* (These angels are His ministering angels but they are the ones who He says worship His Son) [8] *But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.* [9] *You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”* [10] *And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; [11] they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, [12] like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”* [13] *And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?* [14] *Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?*

Jewish Christians and Gentile proselytes would have had an enormous respect for the created angels who by creation are made higher than us and those who did not fall into sin stand as His ministering, obedient, sinless servants, yet they pale in insignificance in comparison with the majesty Christ. This is the glorious Savior who is beyond the angels, who are ever around the throne serving the living God, but look to the earth.

To the Jewish person you might ask them “Who is numero uno in our history?” They would probably give you one of three names – Abraham, Moses or David. Someone might argue for Elijah but that would be their argument. It wouldn't be hard for someone who is gifted in this matter of mediatorial work to argue for the supremacy of Moses over David, Elijah and Abraham. Moses as a king led the people. As a priest although Moses wasn't of the priesthood he interceded for the people and as a prophet Moses is the first author of the Scriptures. In the Old Testament Moses is the closest to marrying all three of the offices of prophet, priest and king together so the writer of Hebrews takes this on. For this let's look at Hebrews 3.

Hebrews 3:1-6 says [1] *Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, [2] who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. [3] For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. [4] (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) [5] Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, [6] but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.*

Here he speaks of the supremacy of Christ. Yes Moses was a wonderful servant in the house of the Lord and he says two things about Jesus. Jesus is the Builder of the

house. He is the Inheritor of the house and you are the house. He is the Builder, He saved you. He is the Owner, the Inheritor, He has bought you. Moses is a glorious servant. We need not deny his glorious ministry by grace. Christ is the Fountain of grace that purchased Moses, put him in the house, made the house, and brought the house into existence. Here is the supremacy of Christ overall.

Here is an outline of the book of Hebrews. There is the supremacy of Christ over the angels (Hebrews 1:5-2:18), the supremacy of Christ through the Mosaic administration of the Old Covenant (Hebrews 3:1-10:18), the call to trust and obey beginning in Hebrews 10:19 to Hebrews 12:29 and then there is summation in Hebrews 13 which is the call to worship and perseverance.

I want to show you a couple of things in the book and the first is the supremacy of Christ, not only over the angels, but over all things that Christ is supreme. When you read your way through the first ten chapters the writer is arguing why would you go back to the baptisms according to Christ or why would you go back to the lambs, bulls and the guilt offerings for they were there to point you to Christ. Why would you go back to the things of the Old Covenant? You now have the fulfillment and the guarantee in Christ. Why go back and long for prophets for prophets were point to The Prophet, Christ. Why go back and long for priests for He is The Priest. Why go back and long for kings for He is The King. Now that you are in Christ you're all prophets for you speak forth God's Word. You are all priests for you have direct access to God and His throne. In Christ you are all kings. We are a royal nation of joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Why would you not lay hold of the supremacy of Christ and live in confidence that you have. It's not the type or the shadow or the promise or the prophecy but you have the fulfillment of all that it is pointing to in Jesus Christ.

I'm going to be a little controversial here. While I don't see a drive among Christians to walk back to the Old Covenant today I do see this fascination with the Old Testament. I think Paul and the writers of Hebrews would absolutely be astounded that we are wanting to reclaim the Passover, the festivals, this and that. He would say "That is done! If that was so great we would still be back there. You have come to a great covenant, a better covenant. Why would you be fascinated with all of that? You have come to the majesty and glory of Christ. That's where you stay. That's where you rejoice for it is in the supremacy of Christ and His sufficiency."

That brings me to the second thing. Christ is the Prophet, the Priest and the King. From Hebrews 1, God spoke long ago by the prophets and He spoke in various ways, through visions, dreams, dictated and all kinds of ways that He gave His Word to the prophets. Now He has spoken in His Son. Hebrews 2:1-4 says *[1] Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. [2] For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, [3] how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? (The prophets pointed to Christ and now the fullness of the Gospel message has come with clarity and not the progressive unfolding of the message through the Old Testament but now it has come in its fullness – how did it get to us?) It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard (apostles), [4] while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

In other words, God has finally spoken in His Son. There isn't any new revelation. The canon of the Bible has been closed. He gave the Word and then inspired the Apostles to flesh out the canon with our New Testament. Christ gave the Apostles credentials by the work of signs, wonders and miracles. When the last one dies the last book says "don't add or subtract to this" so God's revealed Word has been given – inerrant, infallible and sufficient. That does not mean that God is not moving powerfully in impression and illumination in the lives of God's people but God's Word has been given.

When Jesus came as the final Priest, He was the Priest that brought the offering and He was the offering so do we need any more priests after Jesus? No. Do we need any more sacrifices? No. If you believe in the sufficiency of Christ as Priest then you have to believe in sufficiency of Christ as Prophet. I don't need another word from God. I have His Word. I need to know it. The Holy Spirit who gave it to us by the Apostles through the Prophets with Christ being The Prophet, I praise God I have that same Holy Spirit who will illuminate it for me, powerfully, insightfully, but I have His Word. I not only have the Prophet, I have the Priest.

In the Old Testament who would have been the greatest prophet they would have looked at? It would have been Moses. Elijah comes in as a close second but it would have been Moses. Who would be the priest in the Old Testament? Most of us would automatically say Aaron but it would be Melchizedek.

I want to tell you a story about this man. I was preaching on Melchizedek and I called the newspaper in Charlotte to tell them the title of my sermon. I told them the title was "Who is Melchizedek?" The reporter said to me "Say what?" I repeated what I said and she said "Who?" So being southern there are two things we do when people don't understand. We tend to speak slower and louder and we think those two things will overcome every language barrier. So I said to the reporter "Mel – chiz – e – dek." She said "Okay I got it." So that Sunday I opened the newspaper and read that Pastor Reeder was preaching on "Mel Kizzedek" and others must have thought "Who is that snake handler at that church over there?"

Melchizedek was the King of Salem and a priest of the Most High God. His very name means this. He was a Jebusite – Jerusalem. After God had allowed Abraham to rescue Lot, he came and had a covenant meal. He worshipped and he brought the tithe. Then Abraham worshipped and bowed before Melchizedek, the priest. There was no record of his father and mother so he becomes the type of an eternal priesthood. There is no record of his death which is another sign of an eternal priesthood. There is no record of his birth, an eternal priesthood. Abraham bows and when Abraham bows those that were in his loins bowed – Isaac, Jacob and the sons of Jacob, including Levi and the Aaronic priesthood. So here is a priesthood greater than the Levitical priesthood and when Christ comes, the Eternal Priest, He fulfills the Mechizedekian priesthood and establishes a priesthood that is forever. He makes us priests with Him.

He is the Prophet greater than Moses. He is the Priest greater than Melchizedek. He is the King greater than David for David spoke of Him, the One that he would worship. So here is the supremacy of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. Here is the New Covenant which is the better covenant. With greater blessings come greater responsibilities. We are in a better covenant so we have greater responsibilities before the Lord.

It is interesting how the chapters were done in Hebrews because there is one chapter that has the blessings and then the next chapter will show greater responsibility in light of the greater blessing. Then there is the discipline of the Lord. Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines. Please spend some time in Hebrews 12. Then there is that wonderful passage in Hebrews 12:1-2 which says *[1] Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* Be Thou my vision. Fix your eyes on Jesus. He was victorious over that cross that we might have life evermore.

I'd like to close by looking at more passage of Scripture on the New Covenant, the better covenant, prophesied in the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews makes much of two prophecies in the Old Testament. There are three wonderful prophecies of the New Covenant, not the only three, but three dominant prophecies. One is in Jeremiah 31:22 and the other is in Ezekiel 36 and in Joel 2. They are the predominate prophecies of the New Covenant and all of its blessings. The prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel are quoted by the writer of Hebrews so that the Jewish Christians that heard them could know that what was prophesied has now come to them. Not yet in its consummation but now it is here with you. Let's look in Hebrews 8.

Hebrews 8:1-7 says *[1] Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, [2] a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. [3] For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. (The Priest, Christ, brought Himself, offered Himself) [4] Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. [5] They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." [6] But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. [7] For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.*

If the Old Covenant had been so great then why would we have needed a new one? It wasn't designed to be great. It was to wet the appetite to point you to what was coming. It was there to make you understand that God was about to do something glorious in His Son. He was not a Moses, a David, an Abraham or a Melchizedek but One that was even greater.

Hebrews 8:8-13 says *[8] For he finds fault with them when he says: (quote from Jeremiah 31 and the reference from Ezekiel 36) "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, [9] not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. [10] For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their*

God, and they shall be my people. [11] And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. [12] For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." [13] In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Now Hebrews 10:15-18 says *[15] And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, [16] "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," [17] then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." [18] Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

The sin offering has been made. It has been made by Christ and the sin offering is Christ. In the New Covenant it wasn't a promise but a fulfillment. In Christ your sins are taken away. You are given a new record. In Christ that sinful heart is taken away. You are given a new heart with the law of God written upon it. In Christ you have a new life. He says I will put My Spirit within you and I will cause you to walk in My Statutes. Please don't close the book of Hebrews. It is gloriously powerful for it tells you the glory of the New Covenant now but not yet in its fulfillment for this Prophet, Priest and King shall come again and bring it to consummation and you with it for you are His house, His people. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. O God, our God this is a glorious book, declaring the profitability of the Old Covenant as Prophet, Priest and Kings – the prophets bringing us the Word that would be fulfilled in Christ, the priests bringing offering after offering after offering telling us a sacrifice has to be made but these sacrifices are made time and time again for they cannot redeem you but then comes the Lamb, who gives Himself for us, not a suicidal death, a vicarious death, not a homicidal death, an atoning death, not a martyr's death, a redeeming death – our Prophet, Priest and King. There is none like Him and we are in His eternal covenant sealed by His blood, praise His Name forever, Amen.