

And This Will We Do, If God Permits

An Expository Journey through the **Epistle to the Hebrews**

Chapter 1: Introduction

3: Introduction: Part 3

WAOY Wednesday 12/31/08

Welcome again, my beloved in Jesus Christ. We are continuing our journey through the **Epistle of Hebrews**, and I want to continue with some introductory information about this great **Epistle to the Hebrews**.

As I told you last time, **Hebrews** is the best commentary ever written on the Old Testament sacrifices, priesthood, covenant, and promises. It clearly shows the Lord Jesus Christ as fulfilling all these things and much more. The finished work of Christ is gloriously portrayed as the final High Priest offering... the final Sacrifice, on the final Altar, once and for all at Calvary.

This is the Book that invites us all to leave our sin and the weight of that sin at the foot of the Cross and to follow our Lord. This is a great Book of Christian Doctrine that will strengthen your heart, infuse your soul, enlighten your mind, illuminate your spirit, and cause you to grow strong in both Grace and Faith and also in the Knowledge of God.

The writer of **Hebrews** writes this Book to three groups of people. First of all, he wanted to encourage the first-century Jews, who had come to trust Jesus for Salvation, about the rock-solid nature of their faith in Christ. This faith is firmly based on God's Revelation and His fulfilling the Promises of the Old Testament. You see, before they were dispersed from Palestine, these Jews had believed the Gospel. And the writer encourages these saved people to continue on in their walk with God in spite of the hardships they face.

But the writer of **Hebrews** also writes part of this Epistle to those Jews who have *intellectually* agreed with the Gospel, but who have not yet actually been saved. He writes to encourage them to get off the fence and accept Christ by Faith, or face God's Judgment.

And then there is the third group that this author writes to. This group consists of Jews who are either friends or family of the other two groups. Group three is physically in attendance in this little Church located somewhere in what is modern-day Turkey, around the last half

of the first century. They are *in* the Church, all right, but they are not *of* the Church. They know *about* Jesus, but they are not saved. And this writer periodically provokes this third group through this Epistle to hurry to become saved or perish.

The writer wants all three groups to know that Salvation is by Grace alone, through Faith alone, in the finished work of Christ alone; He reminds them that their "Jewishness" and their false religion will not allow them entrance into Heaven.

And I also told you that we do not know for sure who wrote this Epistle, but we do know that the Holy Spirit authored it. We know that the **Epistle to the Hebrews** is inspired and therefore it is a trustworthy and reliable Book.

The use of the present tense in **Hebrews 5:1-4; 7:21, 23, 27, 28; 8:3-5,13; 9:6-9, 13, 25; 10:1, 3, 4, 8, 11; and 13:10, 11**, suggest that the Levitical Priesthood and animal sacrificial system was still in operation when this Book was written. Since the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by General Titus Vespasian in A.D. 70, and animal sacrifices ceased from that date, this would suggest that this Epistle must have been written prior to the destruction of the Temple. And the best date that scholars have come up with is that the **Epistle to the Hebrews** was written sometime between 67 and 69 A.D.

The writer goes to great lengths to tell these Jews who were still actively engaging in animal sacrifices that from the day that Christ rose from the dead, any attempt by anyone (including Jews) to try to earn Salvation by adherence to the Law, or to obtain forgiveness through animal sacrifices, were in fact *enemies* of the Cross. They must completely abandon Old Covenant practices, including the entire Levitical Priesthood, and come over to the final, full, and completed Revelation of God that is found only in Jesus the Christ.

Now, this **Epistle to the Hebrews** is best understood if you have at least a "working knowledge" of the **Book of Leviticus**, which just happens to be one of the hardest books for Gentiles who live in America in the 21st Century, and who have no idea about Jewish customs and ways to understand them.

Among the Jewish believers that this Book was written to were a number of Jews who found Salvation by faith in Christ alone to be interesting and intriguing. But they themselves had not yet repented and believed. And this group is mentioned several times in various

ways throughout this Book. But one thing is very clear in this Book; those Jews who had accepted Christ were heading in for some real and serious persecution that would tempt them to deny the very Lord who had saved them. This Book encourages them to stay faithful to the end.

Part of their temptation was to reduce Christ to being nothing more than an angel. This had already been done by many in the regions around Jerusalem at that time. Some in that community had even gone so far as to elevate Michael the Archangel as being higher in nature than the Christ. The **Epistle to the Hebrews** boldly declares that Christ is far superior to any angel and any man.

Again, since the Epistle to the Hebrews is based in the work of the Levitical Priesthood, the man who seeks to understand this **Epistle to the Hebrews** should have at least a “working knowledge” of the **Book of Leviticus**.

During the years when the Old Testament was being revealed by God the Holy Spirit to the Prophets and was being written down, Israel’s sin had interrupted God’s Fellowship with His Covenant people. So God established a system of sacrifices that outwardly symbolized the inner-heart repentance that God requires for forgiveness.

Over the centuries, hundreds of thousands of animals were sacrificed. Yet the Bible says that *not one sin was ever forgiven* through any of those offerings. To show you an example of the magnitude of this, in one single service recorded for us in **1 Kings 8**, the Bible says that 120,000 sheep and 22,000 oxen were slain. The priests were hip-deep in blood and yet not one sin was forgiven. And it is this very **Epistle to the Hebrews** that tells us that.

Please turn with me and read **Hebrews 10:1-4**.

1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

The Bible says that the only thing that was accomplished through all those hundreds of thousands of animal sacrifices was that the Wrath of God was *averted*... just until the next animal was slaughtered.

Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, hundreds of thousands of animals were sacrificed and their blood was shed to a holy God, by the provision that God Himself gave under the Law. And the fact that these sacrifices were repeated over and over proved beyond any doubt that they did not have the ability to forgive sin or to perfect sinners. Nothing decisive or once-and-for-all happened under the Law to deal with sin. Because if those things had perfected the people once and for all, the sacrifices would have stopped being offered.

So the point that the writer of **Hebrews** is making here is crystal clear:

~The prescribed repetition of animal sacrifices for sin in the Old Testament Law was a built-in testimony to their inadequacy.~

So it is clear, beloved, that not one animal sacrifice perfected anyone. In fact, the entire accumulation of the hundreds and hundreds of thousands of animal sacrifices *collectively* did not have the power or the ability to forgive *one single sin*. All they did was temporarily hold back God's Just Wrath against the people until the next sacrifice came along. All they did was give the people a reprieve against God's Wrath until Jesus could come. They did not perfect the people; they did not deal with sin decisively, finally, and once for all. And the fact that these animal sacrifices continued on and on and on proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that they were not getting the job done. That is what the writer is telling us here in verses one and two.

Then in **Hebrews 10:5-8**, the writer refers his Jewish readers to **Psalms 40** and shows that already in the Old Testament itself, it is plain that the sacrifices and offerings of animals were not God's main plan for dealing with sin... because, as **Hebrews 10:4** says:

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

You see, beloved, God knew all of this from the beginning when He commanded that bulls and goats be offered. Animal sacrifices were never supposed to be permanent and were only "**shadows**," as **Hebrews 10:1** says. God's main plan to deal with sin was *always* through Jesus the Christ. That is what all the "shadows" of the Old Covenant were pointing to. So at the end of **Hebrews 10:9**, the writer says:

9 He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

The first Will of God was that there be an age of shadows... a kind of two-thousand-year "lesson book" to prepare us to understand what Christ really did for us on the Cross. And so the great difference between what Christ did and what the Levitical priests did under the Old Covenant is summed up briefly in **Hebrews 10:11 and 12**:

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God;

Now notice here again the great contrasts between the "shadows" of the Old Covenant and the full, final, and completed Revelation of God through Jesus the Christ in the New:

- Many priests versus one Man, Jesus the Christ, as our one High Priest
- Many sacrifices versus the one Sacrifice of Jesus the Christ
- Repeated offerings versus one Offering for all time

That is a very slight glimpse into the purpose of why this Epistle was written: to teach the Jew, as well as us today, that the New Covenant is a Superior Covenant made on Superior Promises, and brought forth by a Superior High Priest offering, and the Superior Sacrifice Jesus the Christ.

The great need of all mankind is for a Perfect Priest who has no sin himself to give to God a Perfect Sacrifice that will not just *abate* sin. It will *pay* for sin, once and for all, and actually *remove* sin forever. And God's gracious provision of that Perfect Priest offering and that Perfect

Sacrifice, in and by and through Jesus Christ, is the central message of the Epistle to the **Hebrews**.

Therefore, the **Epistle to the Hebrews** is a study in the great contrast between the partial, incomplete, and imperfect provision given under the Old Covenant versus the perfect, entire, completed, and final Provision given by God to us in the New Covenant, through the Lord Jesus Christ. So this is going to be quite a study.

Well, I have to stop right here, but please join me on the next broadcast as we continue our journey through the Epistle of **Hebrews**. May God help us all.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. *Soli Deo Gloria*. For the Glory of God alone.