

2. Questions for Reflection (Borchert, pp 51-52)

- a. How would you summarize the main message of Hebrews?
- b. When have you struggled to proclaim this message?
- c. How seriously do you take the writer's affirmations of the superiority of Christ? What does that message of Christ's superiority mean in a world obsessed with struggles for power and wealth?
- d. For people today, how can you communicate in a meaningful manner the Preacher's thinking concerning Jewish ritual, covenant, and sacrifice?
- e. In your understanding, how do you handle the severe warnings of Hebrews?

Homework

1. Read Luke at least once and in one-sitting, if possible.
2. Read Borchert chapter 4, pp 55-62.
3. Think about your response to the *Questions for Reflection* on p 62.
 - a. How do Luke's unique stories carry powerful messages concerning our responsibility for those who are among the marginalized of our society?
 - b. How comfortable is your church with communicating this Lucan portrait of Jesus?
 - c. How can we better impact our faith communities with a holistic presentation of the gospel? What might be the cost? What might be the possible results—both positive and negative?
 - d. What does Jerusalem mean to you as a communicator of the gospel? How ready are you to commit to such a symbolic place as Jesus did?

Portraits of Jesus

A Portrait of Jesus in Hebrews

A. Hebrews Overview

1. Author

- a. There is no named author within the document. Timothy, assuming this is Paul's Timothy, is mentioned in the closing (13:23) and may point to Paul as the author. At least Timothy was known to the author and his audience. We have no historical context for the imprisonment of Timothy in this verse or if this is Paul's Timothy.
- b. In the 2nd century AD "Clement of Alexandria cites his teacher 'the blessed presbyter' (Pantaneus) as maintaining the Pauline authorship of this letter" (Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews* in Tyndale new Testament Commentaries, vol. 15, p 17).
- c. While the eastern church has accepted Paul as this epistle's author, the western church has proposed many possible authors: Paul, Luke, Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Apollos, Priscilla, Philip, Peter, Silas, Aristion, Jude.
- d. "It was generally believed that Hebrews reflects an apostolic authority, even though no specific name can be attached to it" (Guthrie, 19).
- e. Pauline authorship is questioned for several reasons:
 - 1) Paul's letters are in rough Greek with many Hebraisms. The Greek of Hebrews is classical and polished.
 - 2) The author of Hebrews stays on tract and does not go off on tangents as does Paul.
 - 3) Characteristic themes of Paul's letters (e.g., Davidic messiah) are missing and others are present only here (e.g., high priest).
 - 4) Method of citing OT is different: Paul-"It is written..."; Hebrews-"God says..."
 - 5) The writer of Hebrews did not receive his knowledge directly from Jesus (Heb 2:3).

2. Audience

- a. "To Hebrews" – This title was most likely added to the book later based on its content and themes.
- b. It could refer to Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem or Rome (Heb 13:24 – "Those from Italy send you their greetings") or many other locations proposed by scholars based on the assumed author.
- c. The audience has or still is undergoing persecution for their faith and has reacted well so far (Heb 10:33-34). However, there is some concern that they may not remain faithful.
- d. Some scholars propose former Jewish priests who are considering a return to Judaism. Many priests were converted to Christianity according to Acts 6:7.
- e. Some scholars propose a house church, perhaps consisting mainly of Jews, who is breaking away from the larger church in their city.

3. Date

- a. The date of the writing also varies widely due to proposed authors and dates.
- b. "There have been three major views relative to the dating of Hebrews: pre-AD 64, AD 67-69, or toward the end of the reign of Domitian, who died in AD 96" (David L. Allen, *Hebrews* in New American Commentary, vol 35, p 74).
- c. In regard to author, audience, and date, we may have to agree with the early Bible scholar Eusebius. "Who it was that really wrote the epistle, only God knows."
- d. However, the purpose of the book can be more clearly discerned as it reveals important information about who Jesus is and the importance of remaining faithful to him.

4. Purpose

- a. How would you summarize the main message of Hebrews?
- b. “Historically, the most common purpose advocated suggests the author is attempting to dissuade his Jewish Christian readers from a relapse into Judaism brought on by increasing persecution and a desire for the stability of the old faith” (Allen, 79).
- c. In your understanding, how do you handle the severe warnings of Hebrews?
 - 1) “See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (3:12).
 - 2) “It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace” (6:4-6).
 - 3) “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? (10:26ff)

B. The Portrait of Jesus in Hebrews

1. Images of Jesus (Borchert, pp 43-51)

a. Jesus is the Son of God.

- 1) He is identified as God’s Son in 1:2.
 - a) He is called the “Son” in chapter 1 but is not named as “Jesus” until 2:9.
 - b) “God has communicated ultimately to them through a Son who reflects the authentic glory and character of God” (Borchert, 45).
- 2) Writer reveals at least 16 elements of the Son’s character/nature (**Read 1:1-14**).
 - a) “heir (Gk., *klronomon panton*) of all things” (2)
 - b) “radiance of God’s glory (Gk., *doksos*)” (3)
 - c) “exact representation (Gk., *charakter*) of God’s being (Gk., *hupostaseos*)” (3)
 - d) “sustaining all things by his powerful word (Gk., *ramati*)” (3)
 - e) “provided purification (Gk., *katharismos*) for sins” (3)
 - f) “sat down at the right hand (Gk., *deksia*) of the Majesty in heaven” (3)
 - g) “superior (Gk., *kreitton*) to the angels” (4)
 - h) “firstborn (Gk., *prototokon*)” (6)
 - i) eternally enthroned (8a), just (8b), righteous (9a), filled with joy (9b)
 - j) creator (2,10), unchanging (11), everlasting (12), victor (13)
- 3) Jesus is not only Son of God but also was fully human for a time (2:5-18).
 - a) “. . . we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (2:9).
 - b. Jesus was “fully human in every way” (2:17) and “suffered when he was tempted” (2:18).
 - c. Jesus is a brother to humanity and those who trust in him are his “brothers and sisters” and the “children God has given” to him (2:12-13).
 - d. This section is somewhat parallel to the description of Christ in Phil 2:6-11.

- 4) Are the rest of the characteristics in Hebrews 1-2 consistent with other NT writers?
 - a. Is there anything new in this list?
 - b. Perhaps the son's superiority, especially his superiority to angels (cf., angelolatry was one of the hallmarks of Gnosticism that Hebrews may have been written in part to combat.
- b. **Jesus is the Superior One.**
 - 1) How seriously do you take the writer's affirmations of the superiority of Christ?
 - 2) "This Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is portrayed in Hebrews as 'superior' to every aspect of Judaism" (Borchert, 45).
 - 3) To whom or to what specifically is Christ superior?
 - a) **Angels:** "So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs" (1:4).
 - b) **Enemies:** God makes his enemies "a footstool" for his feet (1:10).
 - c) **Moses:** "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses . . ." (3:3).
 - d) **Believers:** "Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house . . ." (3:6).
 - e) **Joshua:** Jesus brings a Sabbath rest to God's people that Joshua could not provide (4:8).
 - f) **High Priests:** "For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever (7:28) . . . in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises." (8:6)
 - g) **Old/First Covenant:** "For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. . . . By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear." (8:7,13) ". . . Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant." (9:11-12)
 - h) **Earthly Tabernacle:** ". . . when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption" (9:15)
 - j) **Animal Sacrifice:** "Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (10:11-14).
 - 3) What does the message of Christ's superiority mean in a world obsessed with struggles for power and wealth?

c. **Jesus is High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.**

- 1) “. . . the portrait of Jesus in Hebrews—as a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5;6; 7:1-3)” (Borchert, 44).
- 2) For people today, how can you communicate in a meaningful manner the Preacher’s thinking concerning Jewish ritual, covenant, and sacrifice?
- 3) Who was Melchizedek (i.e., “King of Righteousness)?
 - a) **Read Gen 14:18-20.**
 - b) He was called the King of Salem (i.e., Jerusalem). Salem means “Peace.” Just like Jesus, he was King of Peace.
 - c) Melchizedek was not a Jew, but he was a priest of El Shaddai (i.e., “God Most High”).
 - d) “This Melchizedek offered Abram/Abraham ‘bread and wine’ and ‘blessed him’ (cf. Heb 7:6). The typological significance of this statement, with its connection to the “Supper of the Lord,” could hardly be missed by a Christian thinker like the Preacher” (Borchert, 47).
- 3) Why is Jesus named as a priest in his order?
 - a) The priests were chosen from the tribe of Levi, and Jesus was of the tribe of Judah.
 - b) “The problem was thus resolved by establishing another viable priesthood appointed by God” (Borchert, 47).
- 4) What was perhaps the most important role of the high priest in the OT system?
 - a) Offering sacrifices, in particular the sacrifice for sin on the Day of Atonement
 - b) **Read Lev 16:3-22.**
 - c) **Read Heb 9:11-22.**
 - d) How is Jesus’ priesthood similar to and different than Aaron’s priesthood?
 - 1) Jesus did not go through the earthly tabernacle/temple but the perfect heavenly one (11).
 - 2) Jesus did not enter the tabernacle by the blood of animals, since he was sinless and needed no atoning sacrifice. (12)
 - 3) He entered and offered himself not an animal as the sacrifice for sin. (14)
 - 4) His sacrifice was once for all and does not need to be repeated. (12)
 - 5) His sacrifice instituted a new covenant and is not under the old covenant. (15)
 - 6) Shedding of blood is required for the forgiveness of sin. (22)

d. **Jesus brings the New Covenant.**

- 1) Hebrews, like Matthew, heavily utilizes the Old Testament. There are approximately 38 quotations, maybe as many as 55 allusions and echoes of Old Testament passages. Eleven quotations come from the Pentateuch, one from history books, one from Proverbs, seven from prophetic books, and eighteen from the Psalms (Allen, 84).
- 2) Jeremiah’s new covenant passage (Jer 31:31-34) is cited three times. Its use in Heb 8:8b-12 is the longest single quotation of the OT in the NT.
 - a) **Read Heb 8:8b-12.**
 - b) Of course, the new covenant is written in Christ’s blood.
 - i. “Then [Jesus] took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Mt 26:27-28).
 - ii. “[Jesus] did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood . . . For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant . . .” (Heb 9:12,15).

- c) How is the New Covenant superior to the Old Covenant?
 - i. Law will be in the hearts and minds of God's people (8:10).
 - ii. People will have direct knowledge of God without need of priest/mediator (8:11).
 - iii. Forgiveness of sins will be complete and everlasting.
 - Sacrifices had to offered again and again for repeating sins (Heb 10:11).
 - There was no forgiveness of intentional sin: "When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands . . . (Lev 4:2; Heb 9:15).

2. **Questions for Reflection** (Borchert, pp 51-52)

- a. We have covered the questions in our discussion.
- b. What other final observations or conclusions do you have about Hebrews?

C. Homework

- 1. Read Luke at least once and in one-sitting, if possible.
- 2. Read Borchert chapter 4, pp 55-62.
- 3. Think about your response to the *Questions for Reflection* on p 62.