

Front Page - June 2023

Rethinking Christ in Hebrews

Introduction

It needs to be acknowledged that no paper of fifteen hundred words could ever convey any single aspect of our Lord as found in the Hebrew Epistle. The ancient apostle John wrote, “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen” (Jn. 21:25). At times our hearts are moved as we sing of His love:

Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade.
To write the love of God above, would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

I am sure all would agree that when consideration is given to the glorification and permanent excellencies of the Lord, few books can equal Hebrews. From the opening verse to the closing comments, He is exalted and extolled in language which is far beyond full appreciation or understanding. I am reminded of Ezekiel who stood by the river and the man came and measured out one thousand cubits and the waters were to his ankles (Ezek. 47:3). Another thousand cubits were measured and the waters were to his knees. Another thousand cubits were measured and this time the water was to his loins (Ezek. 47:4). Yet another thousand cubits were measured and the waters were deep enough to swim in. As I ponder the fullness of the truths of the teachings of Hebrews, I am very aware that the waters of the word of God have scarcely touched my toes.

- a) In Chapters 1:1-10:21; 12:1-3; 13:20-21; three major themes are constantly interwoven with exhortations and warnings. They are the pre-eminence, permanence, and perfections of the person, priesthood and passion of the Lord. The book begins with the richness of His Person, then develops into the glory of His priesthood, and then with the permanency of His priesthood and the eternal efficacy of His passion.
- b) The priesthood of the Lord is spoken of in six different expressions, “Merciful and faithful High Priest” (ch. 2:17); “Apostle and High Priest of our profession” (ch. 3:1); “great High Priest” (ch. 4:14); “High Priest” (ch. 4:15); “a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec” (ch. 5:6); a High Priest after the order of Melchisedec” (ch. 5:10).

The Text

In the first major clause after the declaration of God being the speaker, there is a contrast between the prophets and the Lord. This sets the tone of the book, for the entire treatise is a series of contrasts. Some of those contrasts are: the contrast between the prophets and the Lord (ch. 1:1-2); the priesthoods of Aaron and Melchisedec (ch. 5:1-6; 7:1-8:1); the holy place into which the priest entered and where Christ ministers (ch. 9:1-28); the temporary efficacy of the animal sacrifices and the eternal efficacy of the sacrifice of the Lord (ch. 10:1-22). These are very broad divisions.

It will be observed in the following quotation that the verses are not written in verse form but rather in such a way as to give emphasis and development of truth.

- a) “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,
Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son,
 - a) whom he hath appointed heir of all things,
 - b) by whom also he made the worlds;
 - c) who being the brightness of his glory,
 - i) and the express image of his person,
 - ii) and upholding all things by the word of his power,
 - d) when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;”

Front Page - June 2023

Rethinking Christ in Hebrews

Christ's Superiority to Prophets

The first observation in reading Hebrews is there is no greeting or salutation. Forcibly the individual is pointed to the relationship between the Old Testament and the New, between Christ and the prophets, which emphasized the truth of Christ's superiority to the prophets. This truth begs the question, "In what ways is Christ superior?" The response is there are many aspects in which the Lord was distinct and superior:

- a) The prophets were sinful, He was holy.
- b) The prophets were plural, He is singular.
- c) The prophets were servants, He was the Son.
- d) The things they wrote were not always understood by them, the Lord always knew in fullness that which He spoke (1 Pet. 1:12).
- e) The prophets spoke fragmentarily, He spoke in completeness. He alone could say, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (Jn. 17:4).
- f) He indicates His fullness against their partiality but this truth is not drawn to its conclusion for the main focus is the singularity of the Lord. God spoke "by" (Gk. en "in") the prophets and in the Son. The prophets were the channels through which God spoke, but how superior were His communications through the One who is His Image and Son? Being unreservedly holy the Lord not only heard the voice of God distinctly, but delighted in listening to God which, according to the prophecy, He did morning by morning (Isa. 50:4) and communicating in perfection that which He had received from the Father (Jn. 3:32-34).

Christ's Superiority to All Other Sons and Heirs

The next truth is the combination of Sonship and Heirship. It may have been the writer had the parable the Lord spoke of the Father who sent the Son and Heir (Matt. 21:37, 38), or perhaps the servant who spoke to Rachel's family informing them of the only son of Abraham who was the heir of all the father had (Gen. 21:10; 24:35-36). What depths of wonder in the words, "Whom He hath appointed Heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2). Several truths are seen, God has determined and appointed the Lord to be the Heir, and consequently, no satanic energy and no human distortions can prevent that from happening.

He is the "Heir of all things". What are some of the truths that expression means?

- a) Solomon was the appointed heir of the kingdom, Christ is the appointed Heir of all regal administrations of all places.
- b) Issac was the heir of all the father's possessions, Christ is the Heir to all which belongs to God geographically and materially.
- c) The judges were all divinely appointed, so with Christ for all judgment and execution of judgment has been given into His hands (Jn. 5:22, 27).

Christ the Great High Priest

The superiority to the Melchizedek Priesthood of our Lord is far beyond anything that the Aaronic priesthood ever was, or could be. The Melchizedek Priesthood of Christ can never change for He is a Priest forever (Psa. 110:4); can never be interrupted for He abideth a priest continually (Heb. 7:3). In contrast to Aaron and the Aaronic priesthood, He never had to offer a sacrifice for His own sins (Heb. 7:27); the Lord was not a priest when He offered a sacrifice for sins (Heb. 8:4) (His priesthood began when He ascended); the priest did not and could not offer Himself to be the sacrifice (Heb. 9:14).

Christ is the leader of experiences for no matter what experience the child of God can have on our homeward wilderness journey, He has known it more deeply. He is our "Captain" our File Leader (Heb. 2:10). In parts of the world where there are high grasses, the people walk in single file. The file leader gets more drenched with the falling dew from the tops of the grasses and is the first to approach a sleeping snake. Those who follow get less of the falling dew etc. So the Lord has experienced the sorrows, hurts, and rejections in life than a child of God more severely than we will ever know. He knew what it was to:

Front Page - June 2023

Rethinking Christ in Hebrews

- a) Be forsaken by those who professed to follow him and be His disciples (Matt. 26:56).
- b) Be belittled and considered He was being foolish and getting beyond himself, thinking himself to be the Messiah (Mk. 3:21). (Compare Acts 26:24 with Paul)
- c) Be weary in the work but not the work of the Lord, in the boat asleep (Matt. 8:24).
- d) Know the necessity of daily communion with the Father (Isa. 50:4).
- e) Know what it is to weep bitter tears over a people who had and were about to reject Him and His message (Lk. 19:41).
- f) Know what it is to trust God when events were very dark and about to go into dreadful situations (Matt. 26:39, 42, 44).
- g) Knew what it was to have the evil one trying to shake His faith and awareness of who He was (Matt. 4:1-3, 6).
- h) Be accused of being uncaring (Mk. 4:38).
- i) Be wrongfully insulted when the soldier smote Him (Jn. 18:23).
- j) Be punished for what He had not done, on the cross (Isa. 53:5; 1 Pet. 3:18).
- k) Be looked down on, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth" (Jn. 1:46).

Such is the wonder of the Lord that every saint of God repeats the following words in deepest amazement.

Can it be true, the things they say of You?
You walked this earth, sharing with friends You knew
All that they had, the work, the joy, the pain
That we might find the way to heaven again.

Can it be true, the things they did to You?
The death, the shame, and were Your friends so few?
Yet You returned alive and free
Can it be true, my Lord? It had to be.

. . . . *Rowan Jennings*