

# Introduction to the Book of Hebrews

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## The Importance of the Book of Hebrews

1. The book of Hebrews holds an important and unique place in the New Testament as it deals chiefly with the work of Christ as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary after His glorious ascension;
2. Without this book, Christians today would know but little of Christ's work in heaven and His current position at the present time;
3. Without this book, the last full glimpse we would have of Jesus would be His ascension, and the next full glimpse, His glorious second coming;
4. Without the book of Hebrews,
  - a. Christ's work of intercession at the present time would be completely obscured from our view;
  - b. Prophetic references in the Old testament about the cleansing of the sanctuary (**Lev 16:30; Dan 8:14**) would not have New Testament affirmation;
  - c. The Mosaic sanctuary and the Aaronic priesthood would constitute a discarded relic of the past, mere museum items, instead of living illustrations of the redemptive work of Christ in the sanctuary in heaven at the present time;
5. Deprived of this book, the Seventh-day Adventist church could not defend and maintain its most central distinguishing doctrine of the sanctuary; in fact, there would be no SDA church without the book of Hebrews; O. R. L. Crosier heavily used Hebrews to establish his idea of the dual-phased ministration in the heavenly sanctuary;
6. We have long neglected the study of the book of Hebrews; there is a tendency among Seventh-day Adventists today to marginalize the only book in the New Testament that systematically discusses the high priestly work of Christ;

## The Place of Hebrews in the New Testament Canon

7. The books of the New Testament, excluding the book of Hebrews form a connected and relatively complete narrative of the life and teachings of Christ.
  - a. **The 4 Gospels**—the life and teachings of Jesus
  - b. **The book of Acts**—the establishment and growth of the Christian church after Christ's departure
  - c. **The Epistles** (Romans, I and II Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, etc.)—the great Christian doctrines
  - d. **The book of Revelation**—depicts the struggles and final victory of the Church in its conflict with evil, the return of Christ and the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth
8. But in this comprehensive account, one important phase is missing: we are told almost nothing of Christ after He disappeared from view at His ascension, nothing of His mediatorial work at the right

hand of the Father after He had purged our sins and sat down at the right hand of the Father (**Heb 1:3**); and yet this was presumably the very subject to which he had reference to when He said:

- a. "Many things I want to tell you, but you cannot bear them now"
- b. "None of you asketh me, 'Whither thou goest?'"

9. The book of Hebrews fills in what is missing in the New Testament canon--which is the High Priestly mediatorial work of Christ at the present time in the heavenly sanctuary;
10. The book of Hebrews is in line with the typical sanctuary service in the Old Testament; it presents Christ as high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, having entered there to engage in the second phase of redemptive work, which consists of continuously ministering His atoning blood to obtain rich benefits for believers, such as justification, forgiveness and sanctification (**Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34; Acts 5:31; Col 2:10; Rom 5:1, etc.**)
  - a. **PHASE 1: Shed blood**—The death of Christ on Calvary fulfilled the typical sanctuary service where a lamb had to be slain to provide the blood of the atonement;
  - b. **PHASE 2: Sprinkled blood**—But the slaying of the animal did not of itself make atonement for the forgiveness of sin; a priest was needed to minister the spilled blood in the sanctuary before atonement could be made in behalf of the sinner for the remission of sin; this was true of the type and confirmed in the Antitype (**Lev 4:27-31; Heb 9:22-24; Heb 12:24**);

**Atonement = spilled blood (sacrifice) + sprinkling of the blood (priestly ministrations)**

## The Theme of the Book of Hebrews

11. The central theme of the book of Hebrews is the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the full and final Revealer and Mediator of the New Covenant; it presents Christ as the supreme and ultimate communicator of God's saving grace, far surpassing anything revealed and mediated in the Old Covenant which was but preliminary and shadowy;
12. The superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant and everything it signifies; hence Christ is presented as
  - a. better than the **angels** (**Hebrews 1 and 2**)--the Old Covenant was ordained through the hand of angels (**Gal 3:19**);
  - b. better than **Moses** (**Hebrews 3**)—Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant ( **Exo 34:27-28**);
  - c. better than **Aaron** and his descendants of human priests (**Hebrews 5, 7**)--covenant blessings were dispensed by priests through their work presenting gifts and sacrifices for sin (**Heb 5:1; Heb 8:3-4**);
  - d. better than **animal sacrifices** (**Hebrews 10**)--covenant blessings were guaranteed only through the shedding of atoning blood (**Heb 9:22**)
13. The book of Hebrews could be called the book of better things since the two Greek words "better" and "superior" are found 15 times in the book;
  - a. "more excellent" used two times to apply to Christ

- i. more excellent name than angels (**Heb 1:4**)
  - ii. more excellent ministry than human priests (**Heb 8:6**)
14. Because the Old Covenant had been superseded by the New Covenant of which Christ is the Mediator (**Heb 8:6, 13**), the audience of Hebrews are told that **they must only look of Jesus** whose atoning death and high priestly ministrations in the heavenly after His resurrection and ascension to heaven is the only source of grace and sufficiency, not the temple in Jerusalem (**Heb 4:14-16**);
15. Because the Old Covenant had been superseded by the New Covenant, **there can be no turning back** and continuing in the old Jewish dispensation, with its human priests and animal sacrifices; doing so meant--
- a. Neglecting that “so great salvation” which was first spoken by the Lord Himself and not being able to escape the consequences of such neglect (**Heb 2:3**)
  - b. Failing to enter God’s rest because of unbelief (**Heb 3:18-19**)
  - c. crucifying Christ afresh (**Heb 6:4-6**);
  - d. casting away their confidence which has great recompense of reward and drawing back unto perdition (**Heb 10:35-39**)
  - e. falling into the sin that easily besets us and quitting the race that is set before us (**Heb 12:1**)
  - f. sharing the same fate as Esau who lost his birthright by exchanging it with something of temporal value (**Heb 12:16**)

## Emphasis on Sanctuary Type-Antitype Relationship in Hebrews

16. The book of Hebrews reviews the sanctuary service in the time of Aaron and makes constant references to the service going on in the sanctuary above, hence tying the two dispensations together in a type\antitype relationship:
- a. **Heb 9:9**—the sanctuary service which consists of offering gifts and sacrifices, is called a figure for the time then present
  - b. **Heb 9:24**—the typical sanctuary is labeled as figures of the holy places in heaven (heavenly sanctuary)
  - c. **Heb 8:5**—the priests in the earthly sanctuary served unto the example and shadow of heavenly things
  - d. **Heb 10:1**—the law of offerings and sacrifices called shadow of good things to come
  - e. compares and contrasts the priests on earth with the greater and more superior priesthood of Jesus Christ;
17. This type\antitype relationship between the earthly sanctuary and its services with the heavenly sanctuary lays the ground work for obtaining an adequate knowledge of Christ’s work in heaven at the present time;
18. **Heb 9:8**—this passage places the Holy Spirit’s seal of approval upon that which might otherwise be considered a discarded Jewish ritual
- a. The Holy Spirit’s endorsement of the book of Hebrews lifts the sanctuary service above the level of a mere Jewish ritual, and invests it with universal value
19. The Holy Spirit now endorses the book of Hebrews and calls our attention to it;

For more than half a century the different points of present truth have been questioned and opposed. New theories have been advanced as truth, which were not truth, and the Spirit of God revealed their error. As the great pillars of our faith have been presented, the Holy Spirit has borne witness to them, and especially is this so regarding the truths of the sanctuary question. Over and over again the Holy Spirit has in a marked manner endorsed the preaching of this doctrine. But today, as in the past, some will be led to form new theories and to deny the truths upon which the Spirit of God has placed His approval. **Ev 224.**

## The Author of the Book of Hebrews

20. There is some disagreement among scholars as to who authored the book of Hebrews; some think Paul wrote it while others think Barnabas, Apollos, Clement and others might have written it, but not Paul;
21. The date of the composition of the book is also a matter of dispute; some think it was written after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD, while others, before;
22. From an Adventist standpoint, the book of Hebrews is a crucial book because it undergirds its theology of the sanctuary; therefore, it is imperative that the book's authorship be clearly established; also, if Paul did not write the book of Hebrews, then the inspiration of Ellen White is seriously in question, because she wrote that Paul authored the book of Hebrews (G 413, MH 167)
23. Here's a few reasons why some think the book of Hebrews was not written by Paul
  - a. The writing style uncharacteristic of Paul; the Greek grammar of the book of Hebrews is too polished to be that of Paul; it must be remembered however, that Paul wrote Hebrews in prison where he had plenty of time to polish his epistle; his other epistles were written while he traveled and did not have time to write and therefore not as polished
  - b. The Name of Paul is not affixed at the beginning of the book, like his other epistles; the fact that Paul did not affix his name in his book to the Hebrews can be explained by the following:

Since his conversion, Paul's visits to Jerusalem had always been attended with anxiety, and with a feeling of remorse as he gazed upon scenes that recalled his former life. There was the school of Gamaliel, where he had received his education, the synagogue in which he worshiped, the house where the high priest had given him his commission to Damascus, the spot where the blood of Stephen had witnessed for Christ. As the apostle gazed upon the place for martyrdom, the scene in all its vividness rose up before him. Was he going forward to a similar fate? Never had he trod the streets of Jerusalem with so sad a heart as now. He knew that he would find few friends and many enemies. **In the crowds around him were thousands whom the very mention of his name would excite to madness.** He was in the city which had been the murderer of the prophets, which had rejected and slain the Son of God, and over which now hung the threatenings of divine wrath. Remembering how bitter had been his own prejudice against the followers of Christ, he felt the deepest pity for his deluded countrymen. And yet how little hope could he feel that he would be able to benefit them! The same blind wrath which had once burned in his own heart, was now with untold power kindling the hearts of a whole nation against him. **LP 206-207.**

## Historical Setting of the Book of Hebrews

24. The book of Hebrew was written for the Jewish converts to Christianity in Jerusalem; one could say that it was written to the Hebrew Christian church at Jerusalem which was primarily, if not

exclusively made up of Jewish converts (Messianic Jews); they might as well have been called the Seventh-day Adventist church in Jerusalem because they were sabbathkeepers and were waiting for the second coming of Jesus;

25. But why was the book of Hebrews written? Why did the church at Jerusalem need to understand clearly the work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary?
26. The answer is to look at the historical setting of the book.
27. **Acts 1:15; Acts 2:41**—there were about 120 believers at the time of Christ’s death, but this number increased greatly at Pentecost;
28. **Acts 6:7; Acts 15:5**—to this number was added a great company of priests and certain of the sect of the Pharisees;
29. Two issues with the believers that came from Judaism:
  - a. These Jewish believers continued worshipping in the temple at Jerusalem instead of establishing their own separate places of worship like the Gentile converts did in the regions evangelized by Paul (**Acts 2:44-46; Acts 12:12** cf. **Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15, Philem 1:2**), the Jewish converts in Jerusalem continued congregating in the temple where animal sacrifices were still being offered, and where rites and ceremonies were being conducted according to the Law of Moses (i. e., offering sacrifices, purification and washings, observing of ceremonial feast days, including circumcision (**Acts 15:1**);
  - b. These Jewish converts still adhered to the ceremonial laws like washings, circumcision, sacrificial offerings (**Acts 15:1, 5**)
30. **QUESTION:** The big question of course is, why did the Jewish converts in Jerusalem still observe these rituals after the death of Christ? Did they not know that the rending of the temple veil at the moment of Christ’s death in 31 AD, was the signal that the Jewish system established by Moses (the ceremonial laws) had no more value? Did they not know that adhering to the ceremonial laws was equivalent to denying the truth as it is in Jesus?

When Christ upon the cross cried out, “It is finished” (John 19:30), and the veil of the temple was rent in twain, the Holy Watcher declared that the Jewish people had rejected Him who was the antitype of all their types, the substance of all their shadows. Israel was divorced from God. Well might Caiaphas then rend his official robes, which signified that he claimed to be a representative of the great High Priest; for **no longer had they any meaning** for him or for the people. **DA 709.**

**31. REASON # 1: Jesus made no explicit command, before He died and after He rose again from the dead, that His followers should abandon the temple and disregard the law of Moses;**

- a. Before Jesus died, He gave no explicit command abolishing the Mosaic law; neither did He speak against the temple and its services while He was with them;
- b. He recognized the validity of the Law of Moses by admonishing the people to do whatever the Scribes and the Pharisees bade them to do (**Matt 23:2**)

- c. He told the leper who was cured to show himself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded (**Matt 8:4**)

**32. REASON #2: Though the death, ascension and ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary ushered in the New Covenant era, it would appear that God's intent was not to break away from the Jewish system at that precise time;**

- a. Although the Jews rejected Christ and crucified Him in 31 AD, mercy still lingered for them—at least until the 70 prophetic weeks were over (34 AD);
- b. Thousands of Jews were still being converted, including a great company of priests and of the sect of the Pharisees; this was evidently not the time for the church to take an antagonistic attitude towards the temple and its services; breaking away from the temple at this point would prejudice the Jews and hinder/oppose the gospel work at Jerusalem;

**33. REASON #3: The apostles probably did not see clearly how the truth of the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary necessarily changed their relation with the temple and its rites and ceremonies;**

- a. This lack of understanding partially explains why they still clung to the ceremonial law and the temple services even after Christ had ascended to heaven and began His priestly mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary;
- b. This lack of understanding also explains why Paul's work among the Gentiles did not meet the approval of the apostles who were proponents of the ceremonial law; this was because Paul did not require the Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses
  - i. **Acts 15:1-2**--Delegates from the Jewish Christian church at Jerusalem were infiltrating the churches Paul had established in Asia and demanding that the Gentile converts need to keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved;
  - ii. **Gal 2:12**—the apostles entertained prejudice against the uncircumcised Gentile believers; this shows that the apostles still adhered to the Law of Moses;

...Some in the church were still **striving to mold Christianity after the old customs and ceremonies that were to pass away at the death of Christ**. They felt that the work of preaching the gospel must be conducted according to their opinions. If Paul would labor in accordance with these ideas, they would acknowledge and sustain his work; otherwise they would discard it. **LP 211.**

34. This lack of understanding also resulted in the division of the church over the matter of the ceremonial law and its observance by Christians; the book of Hebrews was partially written to address this question:

- a. **Acts 15:1-5, 13-20, 25-29**--The decision made (by James) at the council of Jerusalem freed the Gentile Christians from its obligations to keep the ceremonial laws (circumcision, etc.), but created an unhealthy situation where the Jewish converts still clung to the rigorous lifestyle called for by the ceremonial laws, while the Gentile converts totally ignored it.

- b. Is there also division in the SDA church today? Are not the issues similar and the solution the same?
35. This lack of understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary by those who were at the head of the work in Jerusalem also set up a situation where the church was unprepared for a crisis that was looming ahead--the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem in just a matter of 3-4 years from the writing of Hebrews;
36. In view of the fact that the temple of Jerusalem would be destroyed within a matter of few years, it was needful for the Jewish converts to have their faith anchored to something sure and steadfast; if their minds could be turned to the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus ministered with a better sacrifice than that of bulls and goats, they would not be dismayed when a mere earthly structure should pass away;
37. **REASON #4: There's another side of the story that might explain why the apostles refused to break away from the temple and the Mosaic law even though they have lost their significance and value after the cross—concession and compromise:**
- a. **Acts 8:1-2**—With the stoning of Stephen in 34 AD, a great persecution broke out in Jerusalem and all the Hebrew Christians (except the disciples) are scattered;
- b. **Acts 21:18-20**—twenty years later (54 AD), the Jewish Christian church based in Jerusalem is once again teeming with “thousands” of members and converts; persecution had apparently stopped as the Christian church at Jerusalem had apparently gained favor with the unbelieving Jews! What might explain this?
- i. **“thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law”**— conformity to the law of Moses (at the expense of denying truth as it is in Jesus) gave the church at Jerusalem legitimate status and acceptance in the eyes of the unbelieving Jews;

. . .By non-conformity to the ceremonial law, Christians would bring upon themselves the hatred of the unbelieving Jews, and expose themselves to severe persecution. **LP 212-213.**

The disciples themselves yet cherished a regard for the ceremonial law, and were too willing to make concessions, hoping by so doing to gain the confidence of their countrymen, **remove their prejudice,** and win them to faith in Christ as the world's Redeemer. **LP 213.**

38. This spirit of compromise brought weakness to the church at time of great peril;
- a. **2 Thess 2:7**--The mystery of iniquity is the spirit of compromise already at work in the heart of the work in Jerusalem.
39. Paul clearly understood the transitory nature of the ceremonial laws and realized that the time had come for their abrogation (**Col 2:16, 17; Heb 8:13**); the book of Hebrews helped stabilize the apostolic church in the hour of crisis;

40. The book of Hebrews was written at this hour of crisis; light on the heavenly sanctuary; Christ as High Priest making atonement with the blood that “speaks better things than that of Abel; light on the hope that is sure and steadfast and that “entereth within in the veil” (**Heb 6:19**)

## Conclusion

41. The church at Jerusalem did not have a clear understanding of Christ’s work in the heavenly sanctuary and in view of the imminent destruction of the temple and the city which the prophet Daniel had foretold (**Dan 9:26-27**) and Christ had foretold (**Matt 24:1-2**), it was necessary that the people be fully informed in regard to His high priestly work to prepare for that calamity; this is why the book of Hebrews was written;

42. Also, many Jewish believers, having stepped out of Judaism into Christianity, wanted to reverse their course in order to escape persecution from their countrymen; it was therefore important that they be informed in regard of the powerful ministration of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary so they will not draw back; this was another reason why the Hebrews was written;

43. A clear understanding of this work as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary would explain:

- a. **His long absence**—Jesus had promised to come again (**John 14:1**) and His disciples had hoped that His return would not be long delayed
- b. **Why the ceremonial law** and the temple services had to be abrogated
- c. **Give the Jewish converts impetus** to stay on course in spite of persecution; more would be gained in holding on to Christianity than lost in reverting back to Judaism;

44. The Seventh-day Adventist church needs to have a clear picture of the work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary just as in the time of the apostles, if she is to endure the tests and trials of the time of the end; this makes the book of Hebrews an extremely important topic of study for the church today;

45. There is a tendency in the church today to repeat the same sad mistake the church at Jerusalem made, that of failing to follow Jesus in His work of mediation in the heavenly sanctuary (See EW 54-56)

46. There is a tendency in the church today to compromise on the distinguishing features of the Adventist faith in order to gain acceptance among the Evangelicals. . .

47. A clear understanding of the work of Jesus as atoning sacrifice and all-powerful mediator is the only cure for spiritual lethargy, lukewarmness, lack of zeal, worldliness and the tendency to compromise the faith among many, in order to be popular, gain acceptability, or in order to gain temporal benefits;