

Hebrews
Chapter 1:1-3
“The Outshining of God”

All scripture references are from the NASU unless otherwise noted

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Hebrews is a unique book in many ways ... for one thing ... there are questions about its **authorship**.

It's been ascribed, by various scholars, to Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, Silas, Clement and to Aquila and Priscilla. And that can make for an intriguing debate ... but, in the end, what matters most is that no matter who the human author was ... they were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. So, God is the author of the **book of Hebrews** ... even though we're not 100% certain what human agent He used to write it down.

The target **audience** seems to be a group of Christian Jews who'd assembled together and were living in Italy around 66AD when this book was written.

As to the **reason** for the book ... as we'll see in the body of the text, this group was enduring some degree of persecution, but a much greater degree of persecution was being threatened. And that seems to be the impetus for the book.

Because some within the body had already abandoned the faith in that face of this persecution and others were in danger of doing so ... most of them returning to the Judaism they'd come out of.

And that brings us to the **theme** of the **book** ... the superiority of Christ!

For these Christian Jews ... breaking away from the legalism and rituals of Judaism was like ripping off an arm. To not circumcise their sons ... to go for a hike on the Sabbath ... to eat a ham sandwich or skip daily temple worship ... these things were very difficult for them.

Tradition, as the writer points out ... is a demanding task master and it's one that we're all susceptible to. We submit to it unwillingly in many cases ... unwittingly in others, but we are all susceptible to it. Yet Christ is superior to all traditions.

So, that's the theme and the background to it. The superiority of Christ over anything and everything.

Here's how **the book's** laid out:

Chapters 1 and 2: The superiority of Christ over the angles.

Chapter 3: The superiority of Christ over Moses.

Chapter 4: The superiority of Christ over Joshua.

Chapters 5 - 10: The superiority of Christ over the priesthood.

And then **chapters 11 - 13** deal with a short laundry list of remaining topics.

But ... having said that ... I don't think we're actually going to get into any of those topics this morning. But, jump in with me anyway at ...

Verses 1-2: The book opens with two assumptions:

1. That God exists ... and ...
2. That God has communicated with man ...

But really ... that's true of all the books of the Bible. The Bible never really seeks to prove the existence of God ... because it's just too obvious to bother addressing. Not only do we see Him in His creation, but here we sit ... reading the Book He wrote.

So, it would be like me asking for proof of your existence while we're carrying on a conversation.

Now in and through the Old Testament era ... God spoke to His people and revealed Himself at various times and in many ways:

1. He revealed Himself to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden ... as Creator, Father, Provider and ultimately, as Judge.
2. He revealed Himself in the **book of Genesis** through His angels.
3. In **Exodus** ... through His priests and through the Urim and the Thummim (which we'll be talking about later in **this book**).
4. He revealed Himself through Noah and through Abraham and then through Moses.
5. Not to mention ... through the Columns of Fire and Smoke in the Sinai Desert and through the burning bush.
6. He revealed Himself through the judges and the kings and through the prophets ... but then came the so called, "Four Hundred Silent Years" ... the 400 years between the Old and the New Testaments.

Now it's not like God was actually silent during those 400 years, but it wasn't like before ... nor was it like what was to come.

Ultimately, the 400 years of relative silence were broken with a roar at the incarnation of the Son of God. The God-man through whom all that exists was created and the heir of all things.

Now just as a point of clarification ... **“these last days”** in **verse 2** describes the period of time from His first appearing as a human baby (**Isaiah 7:14, John 8:56, 19:17-21:25, Hebrews 5:7**) to His Second Appearing when He'll return to earth, restore order and usher in the 1,000 years of peace (**Zechariah 14:4, Acts 1:12, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, Hebrews 9:28, Revelation 1:7, 19:1-21**).

So, today is obviously included in that.

And that's important because the primary reason for this passage ... in these last days ... when all else is said and done ... is that God has spoken to us through Jesus and there will be no other. He's the end of the line.

Meaning that God's not going to speak to us through a revelation other than Christ. That means that we can emphatically say He's not going to speak to us through the Prophet Mohamed or Joseph Smith or the Watchtower Society or any other modern day prophet who brings a different gospel.

God's final word came through Jesus Christ ... period.

Verse 3: One of the purposes of the incarnation was the revelation of the Father. Jesus came that we might see God the Father ... that we might know Him and experience Him. He came as an exact and perfect representation of Him.

“The radiance of His glory”. **“Radiance”** being the word apaugasma (ap-ow'-gas-mah) in the original language ... it means a beaming forth. Or an outshining or shining forth of the brilliant radiance of God. Jesus came to this earth as an extension of the Father.

Picture God reaching out to earth ... that's essentially what this passage is describing. God reaching out with one all powerful and brilliantly radiant arm to a very dark world.

And it says He did that with an exact representation of Himself ... using the same phrase that was used by kings and rulers when they pressed their signet ring into soft wax to claim ownership of whatever the wax was attached to. It means to stamp or impress ... and that's so fitting!

Because God ... in His timeless, Heavenly existence ... reached out His mighty right arm and left a stamp of Himself ... an indelible manifestation of Himself on this world more than 2,000 years ago and then withdrew His arm back into the Heavenly realm.

Then it says that, not only did He create all things, but He also upholds all things.

First ... He spoke all things into existence in **Genesis**. The Hebrew word for God-created is bara' (baw-raw') ... and it means to dispatch. God said let there be light and there was light ... He dispatched the light and it existed at His command.

Imagine that! He spoke it all into existence! That's power!

But, not only did He create it ... He upholds it and holds it all together and, to me, that's an even more tangible manifestation of His power.

Colossians 1:17 says ...

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

He holds it all up and holds it all together. And because it's the Word of God, we know that it's not an exaggeration! He's the One who holds the whole thing together. Implying, of course, that it needs to be held together.

And that ... takes us to a brief review of 8th grade science to talk about the structure of matter.

ALL matter, gas, liquid or solid, is made up of atoms. In fact, everything in the physical universe is composed of tiny little structural units called atoms.

And each of those atoms is composed of a center, known as the nucleus and even smaller particles that spin around it, called electrons. Again ... ALL matter is composed of these same building blocks (the building we're sitting in, the person sitting next to you, the coffee you're drinking and the air you're breathing).

And there's a law, that you may not remember the name of, but we're all familiar with the principle it states ... it's called Coulomb's Law of Electricity.

And it simply tells us that objects with the same electrical charges (both positive or both negative), will repel one another and objects with opposite electrical charges (one positive and one negative), will attract one another.

Q. We know this to be true from playing with magnets, don't we?

And this behavior of charged particles is the basis of, both electricity and nuclear energy; electricity being generated by the power with which opposite charges attract and nuclear energy, being generated by the power with which like charges repel.

Now let's go back and look again at the structure of the atom, because we need to know something about the electrical charges of the atom with Coulomb's Law in mind.

First, we need to know that the center nucleus has a positive charge because it's made up of several positively charged particles known as protons with some neutral particles called neutrons thrown in for good measure.

And you've got these tiny little particles that spin around the nucleus called electrons. And they carry a negative charge. And ALL matter is composed of atoms like this.

Now the real mystery comes in ... when you look more closely at this centerpiece ... the nucleus. Because it totally violates the Law.

Q. How is it that these positively charged Protons remain so tightly pressed together when they're supposed to repel one another? Well if you ask that question of the scientists who are supposed to know these things, they'll tell you that they're held together by "atomic glue" or what they call "gluon". But, if you ask them what "gluon" is ... they'll tell you they don't really know.

In fact, here's an excerpt from their explanation of gluon ...

The gluon is the means by which the particles—neutrons and protons—making up an atomic nucleus are supposedly held, or "glued," together. In physicists' parlance, gluons are the agents by which the strong nuclear force is transmitted among the quarks that theoretically make up the nuclear particles. (Researchers at the Deutsches Elektronen Synchrotron laboratory in Hamburg, West Germany 1997)

And a "quark", for the inquiring minds ... is

Any of a group of hypothetical elementary particles having electric charges of magnitude one-third or two-thirds that of the electron, regarded as constituents of all hadrons.]

Now, we don't need to fully understand that to take note of a few specific words like ... "supposedly" and "theoretically" and "hypothetical". Because anytime you see words like that all used in the same definition ... that's physicists' parlance for "we don't really know".

And this is no small wonder!

If you took one gram (or $1/28^{\text{th}}$ of an ounce) of Protons from something like uranium (a stack of protons too small to see with the naked eye), and you set it at the North Pole ...

... and you took another gram of Protons and set it at the South Pole ... just one gram of Protons at the North Pole and one gram of Protons, 8,000 miles away at the South Pole ...

... it would still require 50,000 pounds placed on top of each gram of protons to keep

them from pushing apart ...

... and remember, that's after these opposing electrical forces have passed through 8,000 miles of dirt and rock on their way through the earth.

Just imagine how much force would be required to actually press those Protons wall to wall like they are inside of the nucleus of every atom in the universe!

The bottom line is that there is not a scientific explanation for why a nucleus holds together ...

But if the nucleus doesn't hold together, then the atom doesn't hold together and

...

If the atom doesn't hold together, then matter doesn't hold together and ...

If matter doesn't hold together then the universe ceases to exist in the most cataclysmic event imaginable.

It can't be scientifically explained ... and yet ... here we are!

Q. How's that possible? -- Because [He] **upholds all things by the word of His power**

...

But the scripture warns us that a day is coming when the Lord will cease to uphold it all. Peter describes it in ...

2nd Peter 3:10 ... the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat ... KJV (language updated)

One day the Lord will simply pronounce that time, as we know it, has expired.

And what's even more telling is that when Peter says that "**the elements shall melt**", he uses the Greek word luo (loo'-o) which means, to be loosened. In other words, the "gluon" (or what we, as Christians, call "God Almighty"), will loosen His grip and this world and the Heavens above it will disappear in an instant.

That means that the evolutionary scientists have it backward. They say it all began with a Big Bang, but God says it all began when He spoke the universe into existence ... it will however, all end ... with a very Big Bang!

The people who know these things say that such an event would cause an explosion 20 billion light-years wide, but **2nd Peter 3:10** just calls that "**A great noise**".

But right now ... [He] **upholds all things by the word of His power** ...

Conclusion: As I said, the book of **Hebrews** is all about the superiority of Christ ...

He's superior to the angels ...
He superior to the Law of Moses and ...
The military prowess of Joshua.
He's superior to the Prophets ...
He's superior to priests and ...
He's superior to us ... not to mention, all the
baggage that comes with us.

He holds it all together. He does what the scientists say is impossible. He upholds the entire universe ... keeps it from flying apart.

And the mighty, mighty God who does that ... came to this earth as an outshining of His Father to leave His indelible imprint ... that it might always remind us of His superiority over all things.

Our universe consists of two things ... Creator and created. And it is the Creator who's taken full responsibility, not just for the creation of all things, but for the ongoing care of it.

Q. So if you fall into the “created” category ... what do you have to worry about?

Q. What problem do you have that He can't handle?

Q. What worry has He called you to bear?

It's important, that as we study **Hebrews** and as we read of Christ's superiority over the angels and the prophets and the Law and the Priesthood ... it's important that we not get bogged down in the didactics of it.

It's an intellectual book, but it's not meant to be an intellectual exercise ... it was sent to us as the practical truth that makes it possible for us to enjoy this life ... to walk in the truth of His easy yoke and light burden ... to possess the abundant, joyful life that He designed for us.

If He can hold this universe together ... He can certainly hold you together ... even when it feels like ... even when you're convinced ... that you're coming apart at the seams. So, invite Him, not only to hold you together, but to just hold you.