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## PARALLEL GUIDE 31 The Letter to the Hebrews

### Summary

The Letter to the Hebrews is a strong statement of faith which proclaims Jesus Christ, yesterday, today, and forever. It emphasizes the divine and human natures of Christ. Written in classical Greek prose, its authorship, origin, destination, and date are not known; it is probably not a letter; and it contains much which is of lasting value to the church.

### Learning Objectives

- Read the [Letter to the Hebrews](#)
- Learn the general form and outline of the Letter to the Hebrews
- Understand the key messages and metaphors of the Letter to the Hebrews
- Discover the link between the Letter to the Hebrews and the literature of the Old Testament as well as other Semitic literature of the era
- Understand the christology of the Letter to the Hebrews

### Assignment to Deepen Your Understanding

1. Select a passage from the Letter to the Hebrews for reflection and read it several times. Allow whatever ideas that surface to come forth. You may wish to keep these in a notebook.
2. The EfM text suggests that the message in the Letter to the Hebrews deserves to be better known. Is this something you believe? What would be the best way to make its message known to others?
3. Examine the christology of the Letter to the Hebrews, that is, what it tells us about Christ. What ideas about the nature and work of Jesus Christ are sparked for you as you examine this letter?

### Preparing for Your Seminar

Focus on the meaning of the mixed metaphor, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses . . . let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us . . . (12:1). Be ready to talk about what it means to be part of the “cloud of witnesses.” What is the race that is set before us? Or, better put, what is your personal race, or what is the race in which your EfM seminar is engaged?

### Additional Sources

Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

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James Moffatt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1924).

Samuel Sandmel, *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

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## **Chapter 31**

### **THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS**

The Letter to the Hebrews is less well known than most of the other major books of the New Testament. It deserves to be better known, for it is a carefully and thoughtfully written work. It deals with the central Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement, and exhibits a clear pastoral concern for those to whom it is addressed. It makes extensive use of the Old Testament, illustrating that the promises God has made there have now been fulfilled in Christ.

The first thing that must be said about it, however, is that the traditional title given to it, “The Letter to the Hebrews,” is not correct. Hebrews is not a letter. As a comparison with any of St. Paul’s letters will show, Hebrews lacks major elements of the letter form. There is no address to a person or church and no thanksgiving for the recipients. It does have some of the elements of a letter in the closing chapter, including the grace at the end, but it has only a very brief mention of the circumstances of the author (13:18-25).

If it is not a letter, then what sort of document is it? The clearest clue comes in verse 13:22 where the author bids the recipients to “bear with my word of exhortation.” The phrase “word of exhortation” also occurs in Acts 13:15 to describe the sermon Paul preached in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. Hebrews resembles a sermon in a number of ways. It contains a sustained theological argument, but it also expresses pastoral concern for the hearers. Theological argument and exhortation alternate throughout. Like many preachers, the author generally uses the first person plural (“we”), occasionally changing to direct address (“you”) for emphasis (e.g., 3:1; 12:3-8). There are several references to speaking (2:5; 5:11; 6:9), and like all good preachers, the author seems to know and speak to the circumstances of the audience (10:32-35; 12:3-13).

It is clear that Hebrews is a sermon or is based on sermonic material. This is not necessarily to claim that it was delivered orally. Like much in the NT, Hebrews retains the character of spoken address and debate rather than of literature.

3The Letter to the Hebrews contains one of the longest sustained theological arguments in the NT. As the following outline makes clear, two things stand out: (1) Christ is superior to all the major figures in the OT and fulfills the promises God made through them; (2) the theological argument is interspersed with warnings and exhortations to remain loyal and faithful to the Christian confession.

1:1-4—Introduction: Christ is the eternal Son of God, superior to the angels  
1:5-2:4—Christ and the angels  
1:5-14—The scriptural proof that Christ is superior to the angels is given

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## Outline

2:1-4—We must pay attention to his words even above the Law, which was given through the angels  
2:5-18—The humanity of Christ  
2:5-9—Psalm 8 reveals God’s promise that in the end all things will be subject to human beings and not angels  
2:10-18—Christ is fully human and can act for us as a faithful high priest  
3:1-4:14—Christ’s superiority to Moses and Joshua  
3:1-6—Christ, the Son of God, is superior to Moses, the servant of 3 God  
3:7-4:14—We must hold fast our hope and remain faithful so that we can enter the true rest of God’s people in heaven  
4:15-5:14—Christ the High Priest, after the order of Melchizedek  
4:15-5:4—Like all priests he is truly human  
5:5-14—God appoints him a priest after the order of Melchizedek  
6:1-20—Warning and encouragement  
6:1-8—We must remain faithful, for there is no second chance  
6:9-20—An expression of confidence in the recipients’ perseverance in good works and the assurance of God’s promise  
7:1-8:13—Christ’s priesthood after the order of Melchizedek and its superiority to the Old Testament Levitical priesthood  
7:1-14—Melchizedek foreshadows Christ and was greater than Abraham, for Abraham was blessed by him and paid him tithes (cf. Gen. 14:17-20)  
7:15-28—Psalm 110 (a messianic psalm) says that God appointed Christ an eternal priest after the order of Melchizedek, a greater priesthood than Levi’s  
8:1-13—Christ, our High Priest, inaugurates the new covenant promised by the prophet Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 31:31-34)  
9:1-10:18—The superiority of Christ’s sacrifice  
9:1-12—It is made not in an earthly temple but in heaven itself  
9:12-22—He offers not the blood of animals but his own blood  
9:23-10:4—Christ’s sacrifice was made only once and was completely effective  
10:5-18—Christ’s sacrifice fulfills the promise of Psalm 40  
10:19-12:29—An exhortation to faithfulness and examples of faithful witnesses to God  
10:19-39—In view of Jesus’ sacrifice we are called to have confidence and to remain faithful and are warned of the punishment for falling away  
11:1-39—The great exemplars of faith and hope in the Old Testament who suffered but remained steadfast are noted  
12:1-29—We hear a stern warning of the consequences of falling away from Christ even if the temptation to do so is great  
13:1-25—Conclusion: A call to love and obedience

The outline is intended as a guide as you read the Letter to the Hebrews. It omits many of the details and subtleties of the author’s argument.

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The introduction (1:1-4) is very important. It contains all the major themes of the work. (It is, by the way, only one sentence in Greek, an excellent example of Greek literary style.) The author begins by referring to God's revelation in various forms through the prophets of the Old Testament. The word "prophets" includes people like Moses, Samuel, and David as well as those whom we call prophets. There is now, in these final days, a new revelation through God's Son. This revelation includes not only what Christ says but also his "making purification for [our] sins" (v. 3), that is, his work as the great eschatological High Priest. He is greater than the angels, the messengers of God, and mediators of the old covenant, because he has the more excellent name of Son.

The outline makes clear the importance of the Scriptures for the author. The basis of his theological arguments show that Jesus fulfills the promises made by God in the OT. The author uses quotations from many books but relies most on the Psalms which provide the support for the basic points the author wishes to make. Psalm 2 (a messianic psalm) is quoted in verse 1:5 as proof that Christ is the Son of God. Psalm 8 (Heb. 2:5-9) is used to show that in the age to come, human beings will again have dominion over creation as Adam and Eve did before the Fall. The psalm provides a map of the story of salvation and of Jesus as the "new Adam." He was made temporarily lower than the angels (he became human), he was crowned with glory and honor (the Resurrection and Ascension), and finally all things will be subject to him. Psalm 95 (Heb. 3:7-4:10), which refers to the period when Israel was in the wilderness, provides the basis for the Letter to the Hebrews' warning of the danger of falling away from God. It also provides assurance that the opportunity to enter into God's rest (heaven) is still available. Psalm 110 (a messianic psalm) is used in Hebrews 5:5-6 as the basis for the argument that Christ is the great High Priest. Psalm 40 is the letter's support for Christ's sacrificial offering of himself (Heb. 10:5-7). The only major theological claim that the Letter to the Hebrews does not base on the Psalms is the assertion that Christ establishes a new covenant (8:8-13), which has its scriptural support in Jeremiah 31.

The outline shows how closely the author interweaves theology and exhortation. He is not simply setting forth an interpretation of Christ. He is anxious that the hearers or readers understand the implications this theology has for the way they live as members of the Christian community. The great theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are all included in the book. Hope receives particular emphasis in the Letter to the Hebrews. In verse 6:19 it is described as "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul."

33The form of the argument in the Letter to the Hebrews is one that we have seen before: qal va-chomer, "light and heavy." If such and such is the case in this small matter, how much more is it the case in this greater one? The qal va-chomer argument obviously depends on establishing both similarity and dissimilarity between the things compared. In the Letter to the Hebrews the similarity is that God spoke before and continues to speak now. The dissimilarity is the means of speaking. In the past God spoke through prophets, such as Moses, and through angels, the Torah, and the cult; now God has spoken through Christ. The important step in the argument

is to establish at every point that Jesus is greater than "what is becoming obsolete and growing old" (8:13). The writer is careful to do this on the basis of the Torah and the Scriptures.

The Letter to the Hebrews offers no clear indication of its origin or of the original recipients. The date of the writing is a matter of dispute. Many scholars date it before 70 CE. They point to the writer's obvious concern with the Temple and the sacrificial cult. The letter appears to assume that the sacrifices are still being offered in the Temple (e.g., 9:6-7; note the use of the present tense). Scholars also note that there is no mention of the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70. Surely, if the document were written after 70, it would refer to these events, especially since they would support the author's argument that

Christ's sacrifice has brought an end to the old cult. This dating may be correct, but it is not as certain as it seems at first.

The problem is that the Letter to the Hebrews does not discuss the real Temple in Jerusalem at all. It discusses the tabernacle in the wilderness described in the Torah (cf. Exod. 25:10-40). As Raymond Brown (who leans toward a date in the 80s) points out, Josephus, who most certainly wrote after the destruction of the Temple, also speaks of the offering of the sacrifices in the present tense. Furthermore, the letter's emphasis on the replacement of the institutions of Judaism fits better in the later period. Some scholars think that Hebrews 10:32-34 refers to the Neronian persecution in Rome in 64 CE. A date in the 80s seems to account best for all the evidence, but it is not certain. The only thing that is certain is that the Letter to the Hebrews must have been in circulation by 95 CE, since it is quoted by Clement of Rome who wrote a letter to the church in Corinth at about that time. Clement, however, gives no hint as to the origin or authorship of the Hebrews Letter.

The document is addressed to Christians who are not recent converts (5:11-6:3). Apparently the author fears that they are in danger of falling from the faith. Several times the text speaks of apostasy and the terrible fate that awaits those who are guilty of such a crime (6:4-8 and 10:26-31). We gain the impression that the writer knows the recipients, or at least knows a good deal about them (5:11-6:2; 6:10; 10:32-34). He certainly expects to be heard as one who has authority. Several times the work describes suffering that the readers have experienced. This includes public "abuse and affliction" (10:33) and the "plundering of their possessions" (10:34), although they have not yet suffered to the point of bloodshed (12:4).

From the summary given so far it is easy to see reasons for assuming that the recipients are Jewish Christians, since it is an important part of the author's argument that the Jewish Scriptures are being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. There are more references to the Old Testament in this work than in any other book of the New Testament except Revelation. The author also makes use of several methods of interpreting the Scriptures that were developed by Jewish scholars and widely used in the Jewish community. The author goes to great pains to emphasize the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice and priesthood to the Levitical (9:23-10:18). This suggests that the readers are Jews who, if they renounce their faith in Jesus, would be likely to return to non-

Christian Judaism. The traditional title of the work, "To the Hebrews" (admittedly much later than the document itself) presumably reflects this interpretation. Scholars have questioned whether the title is correct. They argue that the document was addressed to Gentile Christians (e.g., Moffatt 1924, xvi; Sandmel 1956, 233). Part of their argument is that the author always quotes from the LXX, even where that version differs from the Hebrew text. That does not prove that either the author or the recipients were Gentiles, since the Jews outside of Palestine also used the LXX as their Bible. Others have raised questions about the author's insistence on Christ's superiority to angels. Jews believed in angels, but they believed, as does the author of Hebrews, that they were "spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation" (1:14). If he is addressing Jews, why does the writer feel a need to emphasize so vigorously the superiority of Christ to the angels? In the Jewish tradition of the first century, angels were understood to be the mediators of the Law, the Torah revealed by God. Paul makes this point in Galatians 3:19. He too argues that, although the Law is good and from God, the new revelation in Christ surpasses it. That is exactly the Hebrews letter's point, too, and accounts for its concern for the superiority of Christ to the angels. Another argument is that the Jewish Messiah was not ordinarily expected to be a priest. (The Dead Sea community is an exception.) Why then does the letter, if it is addressed to Jews, put such emphasis on Jesus as the great High Priest, while neglecting to deal with other aspects of messiahship that were more important to Jews?

When dealing with the Letter to the Hebrews, it is very difficult to reach clear and definite answers. It seems that the preponderance of evidence suggests that the recipients were mainly Jewish Christians who were in

danger of abandoning their faith in Christ. Hebrews 10:25 suggests that some people have already separated themselves from the community. It is possible that some of the recipients were Gentile Christians who may have been encouraged to abandon their Christian faith in favor of Judaism. We must remember that Judaism had great appeal to many Gentiles because of its monotheism, its ethical standards, and its antiquity. It also enjoyed some protection from the government that Christianity did not have.

## **The Author**

Who is the author of the Letter to the Hebrews? Like the questions about the date and the recipients of the letter or sermon, the question of who wrote it is also very difficult to answer. One thing is clear. The traditional answer, represented by the heading in the KJV, is wrong. The letter was not written by Paul. That can be stated with certainty and is supported by the fact that the style and content of the work are very different from Paul's letters. All authors have a style of writing, and this work does not reflect Paul. It is also impossible that Paul could have said that the gospel of salvation was "declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him" (2:3). These words indicate that the author is one of those who did not hear the gospel directly from Christ. Paul insists that he was called to be an apostle by the Lord himself. There was no intermediary (Gal. 1:12). Furthermore, the early Church in the western part of the Mediterranean did not ascribe the work to Paul although the Eastern Church for the most part did. Even there scholars such

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as Origen did not accept Paul as the author. Fortunately the mistaken view prevailed! Otherwise the Hebrews document would not be part of the New Testament canon.

If Paul did not write the text of the Letter to the Hebrews, who did? It is impossible to say. We do know from the work itself some things about the author who was by culture a Hellenist. The letter has a Greek style that is considerably more elegant than that of most NT writers. The opening (1:1-4) is an excellent example of the writer's ability to compose Greek prose. The writer knows the Greek Bible well and always uses it. He quotes from the LXX even when it differs from the Hebrew Bible. Some examples are the quotations from Psalm 40:6-8 in Hebrews 10:5-7 and from Psalm 102:25-27 in Hebrews 1:10-12. The LXX, unlike the Hebrew text, allows the words from Psalm 102 to be understood as uttered by God to the messianic king, which is the way the author relays them.

The influence of Hellenistic culture on the author is evident in several ways. In the opening verses (1:1-4), although the Greek words *sophia* (wisdom) and *logos* (word) are not used, Christ is identified with the divine *Sophia/Logos* portrayed in the Hellenistic-Jewish tradition. Jesus is the *apaugasma* ("reflection" or "radiance" or "effulgence") of God's glory (NRSV: "the reflection of God's glory"). *Apaugasma* is the very word that the Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom of Solomon uses to describe the divine Wisdom (Wisd. 7:26). Jesus is the character (RSV: "very stamp"; NRSV: "exact imprint") of God's hypostasis (RSV: "nature"; NRSV: "very being"). Philo also referred to "the eternal Word" as the "stamp" (character) of God (Noah's Planting 18).

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews knew something about Philo. He also shows a working acquaintance with Platonic dualism. For example, in verse 8:5 the writer says that Moses was told to make everything for the first sanctuary "according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain," so that the earthly sanctuary is a "sketch and shadow" of the heavenly one. Clearly there is a relationship here with Platonic idealism; but it is also clear that the message of the Hebrews letter is very different from the philosophies of Plato and Philo. The difference is that Hebrews letter's thought is primarily eschatological. For Plato earthly things are shadows of eternal realities. Earthly forms of justice are pale imitations of the ideal of perfect justice. For the author of Hebrews the word "shadow" often means "foreshadowing." The rest in the Promised Land into which Joshua led the people was a "foreshadowing" of the true temple in heaven where

at the right time Christ would make the final and perfect sacrifice. In other words, the connection between the earthly and the heavenly is not merely that of type to archetype, but also, more importantly, that of promise to fulfillment. Hebrews 9:23-28 provides a good example.

The author easily uses the categories and language of Greek culture and philosophy, but he is clearly a Christian. He uses the Hellenistic-Jewish language of Sophia/Logos, but he does not understand this as a divine attribute in the sense in which Philo or even the Book of Wisdom does. The writer is talking about Jesus, who had lived and died not so very long ago. He speaks very clearly of the distinctively Christian experience, both of reconciliation through Jesus (“when he had made purification for

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sins”) and of the exaltation of Jesus (“he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”) (1:1-4). This is the Davidic Messiah who has the privilege of sitting in the divine presence (1:3; 8:1; cf. Ps. 110:1; 2 Sam. 7:18; Ezek. 44:3). It is also the exalted Son of Man (cf. Dan. 7:13-14).

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews is acquainted with the LXX and also with the already forming tradition of specifically Christian scriptural interpretation. C. H. Dodd showed in *According to the Scriptures* that NT writers in general tended to quarry their quotations from certain preferred parts of the OT. The writer of the Hebrews letter shows familiarity with this pattern of interpretation, as is evident from his choice of scriptural passages that are used elsewhere in the NT. Psalm 2, Psalm 8, Psalm 110, and Jeremiah 31:31-34, which are vital to the Hebrews letter, are included by Dodd in his list of primary sources for the NT as a whole. The Hebrews letter also makes use of other passages from the OT that are used elsewhere in the NT, for example:

Genesis 22:16-17 at 6:13-14; 11:12 (cf., e.g., Luke 1:73)

Exodus 24:8 at 9:20; 10:29 (cf., e.g., Mark 14:24)

Habakkuk 2:3-4 at 10:37-38 (cf., e.g., Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11)

The author of the Hebrews letter is in touch with the tradition of the wider Christian community. He is a scriptural scholar and can use the tools of interpretation. His use of the Old Testament is a creative one. He alone among the NT writers explores the theme of priesthood after the order of Melchizedek in Psalm 110, although other writers make use of the psalm for a different purpose.

Some suggest that the Hebrews letter was influenced by the Essene community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls. The War Rule (1QM 17) states that on the appointed day God will overthrow the kingdom of evil and “will send eternal succor to the company of His redeemed by the might of the princely angel of the kingdom of Michael.” That may account, at least in part, for the letter’s emphasis on the superiority of Christ to the angels, although the author’s major concern is with angels as the mediators of the old covenant.

3Another apparent point of similarity is that the Qumran community expected not one but two messiahs, a royal messiah and a priestly messiah. The priestly messiah would be the greater of the two. It is possible that the author of the Hebrews letter knew about this idea and was influenced by it. Some scholars have claimed that the letter was written to people who had been members of the Qumran community who had become Christians and were now being drawn back to their earlier allegiance. We must be very cautious here. The author’s understanding of the priesthood of Christ is very different from the ideas we know from the community at Qumran. They believed in a messianic Aaronic priest who would restore the pure sacrificial system in the Temple, a system that, in the view of those at Qumran, had become hopelessly corrupt. That is very different from the Hebrews letter. It is also true that the Qumran group was very interested in the rules of ritual purity. It is hard to imagine that they could have been attracted to Jesus, who did not emphasize the issue of ritual purity.

## Conclusions About the Author

Is it possible to say anything further about the author? We are looking for a Hellenistic Jew, steeped in the LXX, skilled in teaching, eloquent in rhetoric, and able to adapt an argument to the understanding and assumptions of an audience. At least two candidates stand out as possibilities. The first is Apollos, whose description in the Book of Acts sounds almost like a job description for the writer of Hebrews (Acts 18:24-28). Apollos was first suggested as the author by Martin Luther. The second possibility is Paul's coworker Priscilla, who instructed Apollos (Acts 18:26). Either is a possibility; but, since we have no document written by either of them with which to compare the Hebrews letter, it is impossible to reach any conclusion. It is best to fall back on the answer given by Origen in the third century: "As to who wrote Hebrews, God alone knows."

## Hebrews and the Church

Since the publication of the first *Book of Common Prayer* in 1549, Anglicans have heard the opening chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews as the epistle at the Eucharist on Christmas Day. It is an appropriate choice, for the Hebrews letter states clearly the central belief of the church that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who brings the final and definitive revelation of God. The Letter to the Hebrews presents a powerful affirmation of the centrality and irreplaceability of Jesus in Christian religious experience. At the basis of the writer's thinking lies the kerygma of the church (2:3-4; 6:1-6). This is for the writer the "basic teaching about Christ" from which we "go on toward perfection" (6:1): "Jesus Christ . . . the same yesterday and today and for ever" (13:8). This is the central theme of the Letter to the Hebrews. At Christmas, the letter reminds us that we are celebrating not simply the birth of a baby, but the coming among us of God's very self in the person of God's incarnate Son.

Christology in the Letter to the Hebrews is remarkably full. The text speaks of Christ's preexistence (1:2; 10:5), of his divine nature (1:3), his agency in creation (1:2), his sacrificial and atoning death (1:3b and in many other places), his Resurrection and exaltation (1:3b; 4:14; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2; 13:20), and his return as judge and savior (9:28). This letter clearly presents the divinity of Christ.

The letter no less clearly presents the equally important Christian truth that Jesus was fully human. The key passages that make this point deserve to be quoted, for it is Christ's human nature that enables him to be identified with us and to be our priest.

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things. (2:14) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. (4:15) In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death . . . . Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. (5:7-8)

The Letter to the Hebrews holds together the divinity and humanity of Christ, a feat that not everyone in the church has been able to do. Yet it is a vitally important truth of the Christian faith. As the letter points out so clearly, it is only because both things are true of Christ that he can be our faithful High Priest and carry out the work of our salvation.

The other days when the Hebrews letter has traditionally been read at the Eucharist are Passion Sunday (Lent V), the Wednesday of Holy Week, and Good Friday. The fact that this letter is read in Lent and Holy Week

shows that the atonement is another of the great themes of the work. Sacrificial terminology is foreign to most of us, but it preserves the important truth that it is costly for God to deal with human sin. Just as one of us cannot be reconciled to a person we have offended unless that person is willing to accept the pain of what we have done and also to accept our repentance and offer us forgiveness, so God must accept the pain of our sinful human rejection of divine sovereignty and offer us forgiveness. God's gift of the incarnate divine only Son as the sacrifice for our sins is central to our faith and is one of the central themes of the Letter to the Hebrews. Without the offering of the great High Priest, there is no salvation.

The Letter to the Hebrews was written at a time when Christians were scorned or even persecuted by others for their faith. The author's clear word to them was that they should remain faithful even in the midst of suffering. He presented his doctrinal teaching not as a matter of intellectual interest, although he was a person of great intellectual ability, but for pastoral reasons. The recipients needed it to help them understand, but even more to help them endure, to remain steadfast in the hope that God had given them through Christ. This letter reminds us that, although we are not likely to suffer for our faith, we do need to remain faithful in a world that seems to be increasingly uninterested in or even hostile to the Christian faith. Our call to be faithful is rooted in the faithfulness of God, who gave us a hope anchored in the victory of Jesus (6:19-20). Faithfulness means simple things, like hospitality to strangers (13:2), care for prisoners "as though . . . in prison with them" (those whom we pity are not really different from ourselves; 13:3), fidelity to our spouses (13:4), and sharing what we have (13:16). Faithfulness may also mean suffering (5:7-9; 12:3-5), but we can always be certain that, no matter what happens, we have a High Priest who sympathizes with our weakness (4:15) and who was himself made "perfect through sufferings" (2:10). We have not only Christ's example but also his grace and love to support us in our lives, and we are "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (12:1) who have shown us the way.

33The Letter to the Hebrews deserves to be better known than it is because it does what the church through preaching and teaching should always try to do. It brings together the eternal truths of the gospel and the actual lives of the people to whom it was addressed. The author asks those to whom he speaks to deepen their understanding of who Christ is and what he has done. He also asks them to live their lives in the light of the gospel and to remain faithful. Our situation is different from theirs in many ways, but the same call can be made to us. We too believe in Jesus Christ who is eternally the same and who is the assurance of the eternal love of God for us and for the whole creation.