

# Jesus is Better: Hebrews Introduction

Because Jesus stand before and above all else, we should stand with Jesus at any any cost.

*Hebrews*

## ILLUSTRATION

Usually when you receive an anonymous letter, you want to throw it away. Here are a few anonymous letters that people have found on their doors:

- **[image]** Hey, Did you guys move? Your wi-fi isn't working anymore. I hope its (your) ok.
- **[image]** Please do not drop your cigarette butts on the ground. The cat crawls out at night to smoke them and we are trying to get him to quit.
- **[image]** Please, do not feed the Pigeons. They do things.
- **[image]** Your bass speakers are AMAZING. Dear neighbor, your car's sound system is amazing. It's so loud and the bass is so rockin' that it actually shakes all of the apartment buildings in the complex. Awesome! This is exceptionally rad when you pull up at 3:30 in the morning and wake up the entire community. Wicked awesome! We are all very impressed with your super cool sound system. Don't even think about turning it down when you pull up to the buildings you share with hundreds of other people. -Your envious neighbors

Well, among the anonymous works that are actually positive, there is one the outweighs them all in power, truth, and depth: The book of Hebrews.

## INTRODUCTION

Apart from being the one book in the Bible that orders men to **make the coffee in the morning (after all, it's not called Shebrews (#HeBrews))**, the book of Hebrews is one of the most unique books in the entire New Testament in that it deals with subject matter that is less frequented in other books.

## BIBLE VERSE

Hebrews 10:7 (NKJV) Then I said, 'Behold, I have come— In the volume of the book it is written of Me— To do Your will, O God.' ”

Quoting Psalm 40:7

## AUTHORSHIP

So who is this author who dives into the depths of scripture and theology to make this case for Christ? Well, no one knows for sure! That is no one knows the human author. The more important truth is that we know the book's divine author, for it was God the Holy Spirit who inspired the words of this book.

- Unlike the other letters to the church in the NT, Hebrews lacks a common introduction by the author. It's not certain if it was lost over time, or if the author preferred to publish this as an “anonymous theological essay” of sorts.

Most scholars attribute the letter to Paul due to its theological depth and consistency of content.

- *It has the same style of closing greeting as Paul's other letters,*
- *Not to mention that hundreds of years of church tradition attribute the letter to Paul*

It's interesting that we read in Acts 17:

## BIBLE VERSE

**Act 17:1 NKJV – Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”**

## AUTHORSHIP CONTINUED

Why mention this pattern of Paul's? Paul, though called as an apostle to the Gentiles, had a clear heart to see the Jews understand the Messiahship of Christ from the OT scriptures. And this happens to be the pattern that is followed in Hebrews.

- **Hebrews links back to the OT (mostly Genesis – Deuteronomy), comparing and contrasting the Old Covenant with Jesus and His New Covenant, showing Jesus to be the clear fulfillment of all of God's promises and pictures.**

So there is strong evidence of Pauline authorship, but some believe that it was one of Paul's associates like Barnabas or Timothy. Some have suggested Apollos, some have said James or Peter. Some have even made the case that it was a sermon Paul preached and it was later transcribed by an associate like Luke... but the evidence is lacking there as well.

**REGARDLESS of who wrote it**, it certainly aligns with the content of the NT, fits within the theological borders of the apostle's doctrine, and is a scriptural feast.

- *Much like the book of Romans that establishes the firm doctrinal foundation of justification by faith, Hebrews establishes the firm doctrinal foundation of the superiority of Jesus Christ as the bedrock of our salvation.*

## AUDIENCE

The audience of the letter is also important to understand. There are things we will read in this that won't be immediately clear to us as 20th-century gentiles, because it was written to an audience of 1st-century believers who came out of a strict system of Judaism.

Biblical scholar William lane, after examining the text concludes:

## QUOTE

*The social and religious roots of this community are almost certainly to be traced to the Jewish quarters and to participation in the life of a hellenistic synagogue.*

William Lane, Commentary on Hebrews

## AUDIENCE (CONT.)

Most scholars agree that it is likely Hebrews was written to believers in Jerusalem, the capitol of Judaism.

- It's clear by the content, that the author established that his audience was already well versed, and had a strong working knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures and practices.
- There are some things that he writes that he doesn't qualify because he knows the Jewish mind would already understand.
- For us, we have to dig a bit deeper for context lest we misunderstand some of what is being written.

## ILLUSTRATION

It reminds me of this letter a millennial wrote his wife from work:

Hey Bae,

Work. the struggle is real... My boss kept phubbing me. For some reason he seemed upset even though I was giving Hundo P. Regarding my boss's attitude, I can't even! Well, the day wasn't without its feels. I played a great practical joke on my coworker. Sorry, not sorry. He actually deserved it since he dipset the meeting I was holding. He missed out, I was really on fleek. Anyway, I'm V excited to get home. TBH, I'm ready for this day to be over.

Bye Felecia!

Translation: Dear sweetheart,

Today was a rough day at work. My boss kept trying to talk to me while he was texting. For some reason, he seemed upset even though I was giving 100 percent. Regarding my boss's attitude, it was bad! The day wasn't all bad. I played a great practical joke on my coworker. I'm not sorry, but I pretended to be. He actually deserved it since he didn't show up to the meeting I was holding. He missed out, I was really on point. Anyway, I'm very excited to get home. To be honest, I'm ready for this day to be over.

See you later

***So we will be digging into Old Testament imagery and context a lot over the next few months!***

**AUDIENCE: PERSECUTION**

Another important contextual nugget to understand is the height of persecution against the church at the time this letter was written. Christians, especially in highly populated Jewish areas, were under great persecution. **(IMAGE – Three areas of persecution)**

- The Jewish establishment had it out for them because they claimed that the Messiah had come and that the Jews had killed Him. Jesus as the Messiah was considered the highest form of blasphemy to the Jewish leaders. We saw a perfect example of this in Saul, before He was Paul, persecuting and imprisoning the church.

As one author observes:

*“At the time Hebrews was written, the Temple was standing, sacrifices were offered, feast days were observed – the religion of Judaism was at its zenith.”*

Jews who received Jesus were being ostracized from their families and communities. They would have been jeered at, *“Who would ever leave the security blanket of Judaism to follow a Galilean country preacher who was crucified by the Romans?”*

- Between about 49-80 AD, the Romans had really ramped up their oppression of the church as well.
- On top of that, there were attacks from the inside of the church coming from false teachers, Jews in disguise (Judaizers), who were constantly tempting Jewish believers to abandon the notion that salvation could be obtained by grace through faith in Christ and that they had to interweave Judaism with their newfound faith in order for it to be truly accepted by God.

**THE TEMPTATION THAT HEBREWS ADDRESSES: Come back to what is safe, to what you know, to what has already been established. Forget this new fad called Jesus, get back to your Jewish roots. Don't risk the persecution, it's not worth it.**

But the end message of God in the book of Hebrews is still clear, *“Jesus is better, and always worth it.”*

- But Hebrews is more than a passionate opinion column, it is a biblical, well thought through, logical, and theological, argument for the superiority of Christ to the Old Covenant and the Jewish religious practices.

- Hebrews compares and contrast the Old covenant under the mosaic law and Levitical priesthood to Jesus Christ and the New Covenant He mediates. He systematically shows, from the scriptures and logic that Jesus is superior in every aspect to everything.

## THE DIVISIONS OF THE TEXT

Hebrews is divided into 2 main portions, and many sub-categories under that.

**The first 10 chapters are theological**

**The last 3 chapters are practical**

*(Another typical Pauline style)*

*The first 10 chapters communicate **“WHY JESUS IS BETTER, AND WHAT HE IS BETTER THAN”***

*The last 3 chapters communicate, **“BECAUSE JESUS IS BETTER, WE BETTER STICK WITH HIM!”***

## COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Like I said, the first ten chapters break down something like this:

Jesus is better...

- **Than the prophets – chapter 1**
- **Than the angels – chapter 1**
- **Than the devil – chapter 2**
- **Than Moses – chapter 3**
- **Than the Sabbath – chapter 4**
- **Than the Levitical Priesthood – chapters 5-8**
- **Than Abraham – chapter 7**
- **Than Melchizedek – chapter 7**
- **Than the Old Covenant – chapters 8-9**
- **Than animal sacrifices – chapters 9-10**

## QUOTE

## *God took the foundations of Judaism and replaced them with faith in Jesus.*

### APPLICATION

Now to us Gentiles, these things might seem distant and irrelevant, but to the audience of the Jewish believers that the author was writing to, it was everything; and when we look carefully, we realize that for us, it is everything.

Hebrews declares to us that Jesus overcame the impossible demands of religion. He fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law that we could not. He made a way to God the Father for human beings where no person, no religious system, and no sacrifice could have ever made one.

Let me suggest to you that even though the majority of us, if not all of us, are not being tempted to convert back to Judaism (as was the case with the audience of this letter), **the core temptations and persecutions that believers were experiencing then are still around today... they just wear different costumes.**

- The book of Hebrews is confronting three areas of temptation that the Jewish believers were facing; **temptations that were designed to make them question the validity of their faith in Christ and whether or not their commitment to Him was really worth it.** If I could break down those three areas it would sound like this:

**1.) There is something OTHER than Jesus**

**2.) There is something BETTER than Jesus**

**3.) There is something EASIER than Jesus**

Let us not be fooled into thinking that the enemy is done tempting a Christian to move away from their unwavering commitment to Christ. He is still shouting at us through our culture, through our idols, through the world, and even through religion: ***“There ARE WAYS OTHER than Jesus. There is a way BETTER than Jesus. There is a way EASIER than Jesus.”*** Let’s look at those three things a little more in-depth:

## 1

# There is something OTHER than Jesus

## APPLICATION

Hebrews deals with the arguments of the Jews who were persecuting the Christians. Some of their criticism came in the form of, “Why do we need Jesus anyway?”

- **“After all, we have the angels, we have the prophets, we have Moses and Abraham, we have the law and our traditions! Why on earth would we need Jesus? Why should we listen to only Him when we have so many OTHER wonderful things.”**
- Jesus said He was the ONLY way, truth, and life, but why would you want to give up all other ways?
- **The answer?** Well, unlike those other things, Jesus is the zenith; the crowning point of all time and eternity. Why don't we need the other things when we've found Jesus? Simply because Jesus is better than the other things... far better.

## ILLUSTRATION

It's kinda what happens when you get an **apple product**.

- Years of Samsung, Lenovo, trying to run complicated and buggy versions of Windows, then you buy an apple product. All the sudden it's like, “I don't need the others.” OK, not the best analogy!
- Or think of it like this. A foster child goes through the system, from house to house, from guardian to guardian. Then, one day they are adopted into a family. All of the sudden they don't need that previous system anymore because the better thing has come. They don't need other guardians any more because now they have a **mom** and **dad**.

That's how it is with Christ.

- The law was only a tutor to lead us to Jesus (**Galatians 3:24**). We don't need any others, because Jesus is the “end-all be-all” of life itself.
- **He is the treasure at the end of the X. He is the destination at the end of the map. He is the main attraction at the end of the line.**



## APPLICATION

And yet, we still live in a world that tempts the Christian, “You don’t need to surrender and submit to Jesus, there are other ways!:

- How can you be part of that narrow-minded, uneducated, unenlightened society that says, “We only need Jesus.”
- Jesus is an antiquated belief system. Get with evolution folks, we’ve come far beyond that irrelevant form of religious radicalism and barbaric thinking.
- Jesus was an ok guy, but he was an old-school thinker. **2000 years have gone by and we know more about humanity now.**
- ***For crying out loud we have The View, CNN, Taylor Swift, and Bill Nye the Science Guy.*** We have philosophy! We have science! We have an education! We have the internet and really smart people. We can build a city of humanity that reaches up to the heavens, and we can do it all without God!
- And here you Christians still are, ***“Jesus is the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Him.”*** Give me a break!

What happens is the believer starts to think, ***“Yeah, why would I believe only in Jesus? I mean Jesus does seem pretty narrow in our tolerant and inclusive society. I mean, what does it hurt if Jesus is just a nice piece of my broader smorgasbord of thinking?”***

## CUSTOM BLOCK

For me, I am not trying to hold onto any antiquated religious system. For me, having done some searching of my own throughout my life, have not found anything or anyone that comes close to Jesus. I look at the world and the direction its headed and what it promises and what it delivers and think, ***“Really, there’s nothing there.”***

- After seeing and knowing Jesus through the lens of being born again, I’m thoroughly convinced that there is nothing better than Him and no one truer than Him.
- For me, from now until the day I die, it will be **Jesus and only Jesus**. He has revealed Himself to me in undeniable ways. He has demonstrated that He has risen from the dead and is alive forevermore. He has changed my life, opened my mind, and divinely carried me through every season of life.

I have had in-depth conversations with Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Mormons, Jehovahs Witnesses, Atheists, Agnostics, Wiccans, spiritualists, and some I couldn't categorize. And every time I've gone away broken-hearted because all the things they were so desperately seeking I had already found in Jesus. It seems like in some form or another, all people are seeking the same things:

- Peace with God – Jesus gave it to me
- Forgiveness and freedom from the shame and guilt of sin – Jesus gave it to me
- Understanding of my purpose for living – Jesus gave it to me
- A sure and steady moral compass – Jesus gave it to me
- Contentment in this life – Jesus gave it to me.
- Peace in uncertainty – Jesus gave it to me.
- Courage and rest in the midst of fearful circumstances – Jesus gave it to me.

And still, the age-old lie of the devil... **there is something other than Jesus.**

## 2

## There is something BETTER than Jesus

### APPLICATION

Human beings rarely find contentment in this life:

- When we get something new, pretty soon we want the upgraded version of it.
- Do you think it's somehow a fluke that Amazon.com is the 4th most visited website in the world, falling only to Google, Youtube, and Facebook? People want new stuff.
- It's a statistical fact that over 50% of people start at one church will want a new church within 3-5 years.
- A CNN article I read this week stated that over 50% of Americans have changed religions in their lifetime.

The reason I bring this up is to identify that there are many people who will end up growing tired of Jesus and look for something better. Many people will see Jesus as a possible option to improve their lives, and if things don't go their way, they'll try to find something better than Jesus.

## APPLICATION

Oh, they might still go to church out of tradition or obligation, but how easy is it to be tempted that, ***“Jesus just doesn’t really do it for me like He use to.”***

- This leads people to pursue other things that they think will be better than what Jesus offers.

This is why a major theme in Hebrews is steadfastness, faithfulness, and endurance to Jesus until the very end. Consider just three verses:

**Heb 2:1 NKJV – Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.**

**Heb 3:14 NKJV – we are to... “hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end...”**

**Heb 6:11 NKJV – ...each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end...**

## ILLUSTRATION

The prodigal son was convinced that he would find something better away from His Father’s house and managing his own life. He learned the hard way that everything he ever could have dreamed of was already in His Father’s house, he just didn’t see it until he came to the end of himself.

I pray that no one here ever has to go through the tremendous pain of finally realizing that there isn’t anything out there better than Jesus.

## ILLUSTRATION

King Solomon wrote an entire book at the end of his life about his pursuits “under the sun.”

- His conclusion? Nothing is new in this life. It’s all cyclical and just keeps repeating itself. I’ve looked for pleasure and fulfillment in education, women, riches, delicacies of every kind. I’ve withheld nothing from myself that my heart desired. What did I learn at the end of my life?

**[Ecc 12:13 NKJV] 13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.**

**BIBLE VERSE**

## Psalms 63:3 (NIV)

<sup>3</sup> Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

**New International Version (NIV)**

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**3****There is something EASIER than Jesus****APPLICATION**

This is the point that actually comes with a deceptive partial truth: for in the short term, life apart from Jesus can appear easier, but it is a dangerous and deceptive ease. Life without Jesus might seem easy at the beginning, but prove much more difficult in the long run.

The Temptation for the Hebrew Christians:

- Returning to Judaism would be the easier route than sticking with Jesus.
- No persecution, no difficult personal sacrifices, no martyrdom. You can come back to what you know, what is safe, what you understand. You won't lose your family, won't lose your friends. You won't have to expand, grow, or change. You won't have to give up your own dreams and ambitions.
- **Why would you want to follow Jesus when you could do something so much less difficult?**

**QUOTE**

*Jesus never promised us that following Him would be the easiest path, only that it would be the right and best one.*

Josh, Quote

**BIBLE VERSE**

**Matthew 7:13-14** – “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

## ILLUSTRATION

When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, I see the core of those three temptations as trying to get Jesus to take the shortcut; the was way out.

- Why trust the Father to provide for you when you can just bypass God’s way and turn the stones into bread?
- Why trust the Father’s plan when you could just jump off the temple in front of everyone and show off your divine power?
- Why trust the Father’s timing when you could just compromise a little right now and receive ultimate power and Your kingdom early?

Comon Jesus, what is go your father doing for you now? Here you are stuck on this miserable planet, in this miserable desert... and for what? Oh, your father wants to kill you. that sounds hard, why not take the easy way.

And with every temptation, Jesus defaulted to His Father’s Words, to the truth He knew that in the end it would all be worth it. That’s why Hebrews 12 encourages us in this way:

## BIBLE VERSE

**Heb 12:1 NKJV** – Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

## QUOTE

*“The intended audience was experiencing a crisis of faith and a failure of nerve.”*

## APPLICATION

In other words, the Hebrew audience's response to the difficulty of following Jesus was to run, hide, avoid, conceal, and revert.

The call of the book of Hebrews is to rise up, face the challenge, have faith, don't turn back, don't back down; Engage, don't avoid. Fight, don't surrender, Impact, don't isolate.

## APPLICATION

Once when the teachings of Jesus started getting difficult and offensive to the audience, the people who were flocking to Jesus started abandoning him.

**[Jhn 6:66-68 NKJV] 66 From that [time] many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. 67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" 68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**

## QUOTE

*O, do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks! Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle. But you shall be a miracle. Every day you shall wonder at yourself, at the richness of life which has come to you by the grace of God.*

Phillips Brookes, Sermon

## CONCLUSION

I have a stronger sense than ever before that the Holy Spirit is about to move in a major way. Those who have their sails up and their ships ready are going to experience something incredibly powerful... but I believe it will also be incredibly difficult.

- It wouldn't surprise me if persecution increases and power increases.
- That temptation increases as victory increases

I think as the lines are divided in our nation, there will be a real challenge to those who call themselves Christians: Will they look for ***something other, something better, or something easier*** than Jesus? I pray that for you and I hear today, we will say with great confidence, "Jesus is better, and I'm never going to let go of Him."