

PREPARATION FOR THE ENDTIMES

THE HOPE
Of
PERFECTION

UNVEILING THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

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All references in brackets with only numerals throughout the book designate a chapter and verse(s) found in Hebrews. Where other translations are quoted, they are identified along with the numerals referencing chapter and verse(s). The underlining of text in a biblical quote is not in the original.

Where the initials O.T. and N.T. appear, they stand for the Old Testament and New Testament, respectively.

Any mention of ‘the author’ refers to the writer (whoever that may be) who penned this ‘letter’ to the Hebrews.

(By way of explanation: this book is not a commentary but an exposition where prominent themes in Hebrews are taken as topics for the chapters, not always in sequence with the letter).

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PREFACE

More than 50 years ago, I began to read, then study, and finally teach the Bible, and through those years the 'Letter to the Hebrews' has fascinated me; an interest I gained after reading Andrew Murray's exposition, 'The Holiest of All'. Yet, after reading his book and the commentaries I was left with the nagging feeling they had missed something. After drawing entirely valid themes and topics out of this 'letter', its central message had been overlooked; highlighted truths did not capture the reason for the author's *exhortation* (13.22).

Now, because it meant facing up to a topic I had long regarded as 'taboo', it was only in recent years I found the courage to study this book of the N.T. in depth. To do it justice, meant grappling with the controversial topic of 'perfection' and its association with heresy in the past. Wrestling not only with the notion of full maturity for believers but the \$64,000 question, 'Can this perfection be reached in the present age'? And by this I mean the moral perfection most would say is unattainable on this side of heaven, with many regarding it as heresy to say otherwise. I beg to differ. So, if you hold to the conventional view, I hope what is presented in this book will go some way to changing your mind.

Incidentally, what I present rests on the premise the book of Hebrews is of eschatological (study of last things) significance. Why? Because it addresses important issues concerning the 'perilous times' ahead, especially concerning the painful trials soon to test the household of God and their aiding believers in reaching this moral maturity. In reading what I have written, my appeal is simple; please be open to fresh truth, yet at the same time, carefully evaluate the arguments I put forth to show Hebrews indeed has the hope of reaching perfection in this age.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the series ‘Explore the Book’ (a survey of the Bible), the Bible teacher J. Sidlow Baxter likens Hebrews to Mt. Blanc, the ‘king’ of the French Alps. It certainly towers over the other general Epistles of the N.T. and to scale its heights and transverse the difficult terrain is a worthy challenge for any student of the Bible. Those who do so will discover a wondrous vista not seen if viewing it from afar.

PLACEMENT

Hebrews is the introduction to a series of canonical books concluding the N.T., all related (along with 1/2 Thessalonians) to eschatological matters. In the main, by highlighting the challenges the final generation will face, yet at the same time, offering the help believers need to remain faithful in the endtimes. Most notably, in the answers they give to coping with two severe trials all believers will face at the end—persecution and a powerful deception. All, then, have sober warnings about what lies ahead. However, with other N.T. books, they also reveal a wonderful expectation for believers in the last of the last days, the hope of reaching ‘perfection’ and being clothed with divine ‘glory’. (For more on this latter topic, read my eBook ‘Prepare for Glory’—you can request a free copy from me.)

With its focus on reaching perfection, Hebrews, then, offers ‘*strong consolation*’ (6.18) for what lies ahead in a time the Bible defines as a ‘*day of trouble*’ (Nah 1.7). By showing how this hope of perfection can keep a believer on course throughout the severe trials, even remain in good cheer, suggests a careful study of this ‘letter’ is in order. Both to obtain an ‘*understanding of the times*’ (1Chron 12.32) and prepare for them; the same understanding spelled out in the

‘Olivet Discourse’ (Matt 24) where Jesus warned not only of the dire events believers would face in the first century but their repeat at the end of the age. For example, the judgment suffered by Jewry at the hands of the Romans in AD70 will be repeated at the end of the age, only on a much greater scale, visited on a world also in stubborn rebellion.

In referring to this endtime scenario, the apostle Paul warns of *‘perilous times’* (2Tim 3.1) while other N.T. texts show it to be a time eliciting fear strong enough to trigger ‘heart failure’ (Lk 21.26). All this is true even in the period known as the *‘beginning of sorrows (labor pains)’* (Matt 24.8) before the age climaxes in the ‘Great Tribulation’, a time of far more intense suffering and divine judgment. Yet a time of severe trial believers (who qualify) have the divine promise of escaping. , Not in a silent ‘rapture’ as many expect but via an ‘escape route’ connected to a secret appearance of Christ (before the very public one). (For more on this, email me for a free copy of my e-book ‘Understanding the Endtimes’.)

However, both sinner and saint cannot escape the trials and deprivations in the lead-up period of ‘much tribulation’ (not mega tribulation), and why Jesus warned His followers would need to *‘endure unto the end’* (Matt 24.13). Now, I trust this understanding of believers enduring the early time of tribulation but not the time of ‘Great Tribulation’ goes some way to reconciling the different positions held on the suffering the church must undergo at the end of this age.

Some may find what I have outlined as the expected scenario for the endtimes hard to swallow, yet we find much confirmation for it in this book of Hebrews; where it makes clear severe trials are mandatory to realize the divine purpose for believers to reach perfection. (More on this later.) Hence, even if it is only increased stress from natural threats— famines, pestilence, violent storms, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc.—the endtimes will demand much of everyone

and a major key to remaining faithful in them is understanding why Heaven allows these trials, an issue Hebrews addresses.

Thankfully, these books closing the N.T. canon also provide the ‘survival kit’ for these ‘fiery *trials*’ (1Pet 4.12), and this includes a ‘theology of suffering’ relevant for pampered Christendom today. When even this earlier time of persecution and tribulation will leave many believers confused and dismayed, it is indeed wisdom to immerse ourselves in this ‘letter’ penned to help Jewish believers survive their trials.

STYLE AND AUTHOR

The KJV (King James Version) title, ‘*The epistle of Paul the apostle to the Hebrews*’ is misleading in two ways; first, the book has no opening salutation or other identifying marks meeting the first-century writings the term ‘epistle’ (letter) describes—only the closing remarks in the last chapter approach it. (Cf. Galatians) The author calls it a ‘*word of exhortation*’ (13.22), but like the book of Romans, it is best seen as a treatise. More correctly, a carefully argued thesis based on quotes from the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version of the O.T. to highlight the ‘better things’ of the new covenant—what the church enjoys to reach moral perfection.

Second, the KJV title (possibly) misleads as to authorship. It is a disputed issue with most modern scholars removing Paul’s name, but others disagree and maintain he is the only likely candidate for authorship. Suffice it to say, it undoubtedly did not have Paul’s name attached in the beginning, and the writing style differs from his other letters. His name was probably added later to help it find acceptance in the Western Church. Yet the author’s thoughts and theology are eminently Pauline and scholars also see certain stylistic indicators peculiar to him; one is the phrase ‘*the just shall live by faith*’ (Hab 2.4) quoted in two other letters of his (Romans and Galatians). Authors are chosen, therefore, usually from among

his associates such as Timothy or Barnabas, or one of these is seen as Paul's amanuensis (composer), a common occurrence. (See 1Pet 5.12) But as the early church father Origen said, "Who wrote the epistle, God only knows".

PURPOSE AND OCCASION

Whoever the author was, he wrote it (probably not long before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70) to address an alarming problem among the Jewish believers suffering persecution and economic deprivation. Many had reluctantly left the faith of their fathers (Judaism) to become despised followers of 'the way', so with the increased suffering it was becoming far less hazardous to return to their former religious traditions. The price they were paying was seen as too high by many, especially when fellow Jews regarded them as traitors to the nation and its heritage. Add to this the pain of being deprived of rights, ostracized, and thrown in prison with possessions confiscated and the outcome was flagging zeal for their newfound faith (10.32). Recovering the lost acceptance and prestige was becoming an attractive option, and for some, this meant recanting their faith in Christ.

MESSAGE AND THEME

The author penned this thesis, therefore, to show why apostasy was not the answer; even if it meant escaping persecution, they would lose far more than any gain it brought. It certainly would be at the expense of missing out on the '*far better things*' Christ offered. The word 'better' is found twelve times in the book—to show a better covenant, a better priesthood, a better sacrifice for sin, a better Sabbath, and a better temple—and as the 'apostle' of the new covenant, Christ is shown to be 'better' than any figure revered in Judaism. Greater even than Moses and Joshua, for unlike them, He can

bring them into everything God promised, including completing the work of salvation in their lives.

The author takes pains, therefore, to contrast the old Mosaic dispensation with the new having a 'better' covenant and superior hope. (See 3.6, 6.11,18, 7.19, 10.23) Notably, to highlight how the new dispensation has the expectation of reaching the goal God has always had for His children, that of perfection (moral maturity). A hope the author reinforces by using the keywords of '*perfection*', '*perfect*', and '*mature*' (fifteen times); all come from the root greek word ('*τεάλεάιοάς*' Str 5046) to verify the theme of Hebrews is indeed this 'Hope of Perfection'. Hence, the author argues returning to Judaism is to go back to a covenant Heaven has discarded precisely because it could never realize this goal of full maturity. Only the '*great salvation*' (2.3) in Christ can do this, and any thought of apostasy thwarts, even despises, Heaven's purpose for humanity.

If they are not to lose heart and waver in faith, these Jewish believers must '*look unto Jesus*' (12.2), He who endured much greater opposition. They also are not to despise their trials but to see them as the '*chastening (training or education) of the Lord*' (12.7), working in them the maturity Heaven wants. Not that their trials are dismissed as trivial, only that there is grace to remain faithful in them. Yet, his words of encouragement come with the dire warning of judgment if they won't remedy this '*hardening of attitudes*' about deserting Christ. It should, then, surprise no one to find Hebrews has some of the direst warnings about apostasy and the judgment it incurs. A salutary warning for Christendom today when allegiance to Christ is waning fast. Indeed, with so many opting already for the comfort and pleasures of this world in a time of relative peace, one wonders if future persecution and deprivation will see a swathe of Christendom desert the faith.

CHAPTER 2

A BETTER HOPE

*Where there is no vision the people
perish (dwell carelessly)*
Prov 29.18.

Hope is an indispensable ingredient of life, not only on this side of the grave but in eternity—along with faith and love (1Cor 13.13). The need for hope never ceases, for without it, we are missing the incentive to pursue the future with confidence. By contrast, the right hope spurs on to reach our full potential rather than settle for mediocrity and the less demanding. In other words, when lacking it is much easier to ‘lose it’ or ‘give up’ when real difficulties arise, only to see habits like self-sacrifice, persistence, and faithfulness lose out to carnal, baser instincts. As the text heading indicates, without a future hope or vision, we ‘dwell carelessly’, even ‘perish’.

Not having a *‘living hope’* (1Pet 1.3) in the heart may not prove too costly when all is going well, but can be disastrous with a change in good fortune. For trials and suffering, like nothing else, see weeds of apathy and indifference spring up to choke out enthusiasm for the things of God. If this is not to become the norm, a robust hope with the determination to overcome every obstacle is mandatory. As it did for the boy about to give up on tasting the apples in the tree on the other side of the high wall. No matter how many times he ran and launched himself to reach the top of the wall, he couldn’t. He realized there was only one thing to do if he was to taste those apples, and though reluctant, he threw over the wall his prized baseball cap. With fresh incentive and determination, his next leap reached the top of the wall and those delicious apples.

THESE JEWISH BELIEVERS

The hope these first-century Christians already had was not robust enough to keep them faithful in a ‘race’ turning out to be much longer than first imagined—more of a marathon rather than a quick dash. Any ‘hope of gain’ they had from it was not sufficient to take them through the ‘pain barrier’; a much better hope was needed to overcome their wavering in faith. Hence, this letter by the author details the one hope able to boost their flagging spirits, focus their energies, settle their confused hearts, calm any fears, and supply them with fresh fortitude. A hope referred to five times and each time so these disconsolate believers would see it as the ‘*anchor for the soul*’ (6.19). The author is adamant: all those who ‘*lay hold on*’ (6.18) the ‘better hope’ of the new covenant can finish the race.

EXAMPLES OF HOPE

To see the danger in not having a ‘living hope’, all these Hebrew believers had to do was look at how their forebears (Israel) failed to grasp hold of the hope they had. Most obvious in the times they asked Moses, ‘*why have you brought us into this wilderness to die?*’ (Ex 14.11, 17.3; Num 14.3, 21.5). With the past as their reference point, and faced with the hardships of the wilderness, God’s power in delivering them from Egypt meant nothing. The miracles of the ‘exodus’ could not stop them from murmuring, rebelling, and hankering after the ‘*leeks, onions and garlic*’ (Num 11.5) of Egypt—the ‘spices’ making life there bearable. The wilderness and this glaring lack of foresight had Israel wanting to turn back.

But in delivering the nation from Egypt, Heaven had a goal, the possession of a Promised Land; yet, instead of looking forward to this glorious inheritance, they looked back to a life of slavery. So rather than the hardships of the wilderness working divine purposes in them, their hearts became

embittered, followed soon after by unbelief and then stubborn rebellion against what God was saying.

By way of contrast, we have a ‘hall of fame’ in chapter eleven listing Israel’s heroes of faith, those who refused to ‘*cast away their confidence*’ (10.35) when faced with hardships and opposition because of the God-given hope each had. This hope saw Noah ‘*prepare an ark*’ (11.7), Abraham hoped to see ‘*a city whose builder and maker was God*’ (11.10), and Moses hoped for an ‘*eternal reward*’ (11.26) rather than the ‘*fleeting pleasures of sin*’. Even when not realized in their lifetime, these heroes persevered despite severe deprivation and temptation because of the hope they had. As it did for Jesus who ‘*the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame*’ (12.2). No doubt a hope about ‘joy’ due to the glorious bride His death on the Cross purchased; a hope robust enough to allow Christ to resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem to face the agony of an ignominious death and separation from His Father. Hope enabled Jesus to overcome; the right hope can get you through too.

A TESTIMONY

Not long after my conversion to Christ, I had these words, ‘*without a vision the people perish*’ (Prov 29.18) impressed with unusual force on my mind over several months. In effect, I was being shown the need to have the right hope to survive the testing years ahead. Praise God, the hope shown has kept me faithful for over 60 years, enabling me to leave secure employment as a pharmacist to enter full-time Christian ministry and to emigrate with my wife and family from the land of my birth to serve the body of Christ in Australia. A ‘living hope’ I discovered only after being led to believers with deep insight into what the Scriptures reveal about the endtimes. Their passion was to understand the ‘*blessed hope*’ (Tit 2.13); I trust you too will catch the glory of this hope.

THE RIGHT HOPE

Many believers are facing the future with the wrong hope, one leading to despair when proven false. Sad really, as the wrong hope can be worse than not having a hope. Now, the ungodly embrace many false hopes to buoy their flagging spirit. But many believers are also holding onto baseless expectations about the endtimes, with the most widespread of these being the hope of escaping suffering and tribulation in a ‘silent Rapture’. It will prove devastating to all who hold it. While the idea of escaping the ‘Great Tribulation’ is a valid biblical truth, this hope is for those *‘found worthy’* (Lk 21.36), and its fulfillment doesn’t require a ‘pre-tribulation rapture’.

I ask, then, is the hope you have able to keep you faithful during the intense pressure (stress) of the ‘last of the last days’? No one can be sure how far off these are, but with the recent threats from terrorism, breakdown in law and order, and the GFC and ‘pandemics’ (e.g. Ebola, Covid-19), every indication is they are imminent. With any future international conflict bound to be ‘dirty’—employing chemical, biological, or even atomic weapons—we fool ourselves, therefore, in thinking tribulation and suffering will not be a feature of our time.

Add to this the prospect of ‘man’s inhumanity to humanity’ escalating so acts of genocide greater than in Bosnia and Rwanda are perpetrated and it all indicates the need to prepare for an increase in the corruption of human decency Jesus warned of in saying the days of Noah and Lot are to be repeated. (See Luk 17.26-30) Genesis records the depths, *‘degenerate, debased and vicious’* (Gen 6.12 AMB) humans sank to in those days. As people become more like wild beasts than human beings, it portends similar if not worse behavior. Yet, despite this dire prospect, Hebrews with its ‘hope of perfection’ lays out a glorious future for the endtimes, an expectation giving the courage to remain faithful to the Lord in what will be the ‘worst of times’.

CHAPTER 3

THE HOPE OF PERFECTION

‘For the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope’.

Heb 7.19

Three books (Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews) in the N.T. provide commentary on an important O.T. text, *‘the just shall live by faith’* (Hab 2.4). And while all use it to establish salvation through faith in Christ, Romans and Galatians focus on initial salvation (being justified in God’s sight) and its *‘elementary doctrines’* (6.1-2). In Hebrews, this focus changes to the ultimate goal of redemption in the New Covenant, and in laying out the divine intention for the church, Hebrews reveals a stunning hope for those *‘who believe to the saving of the soul’* (10.39). No less than the hope of experiencing to the full the *‘great salvation’* (2.3) Christ purchased on the Cross of Calvary. A salvation, in both scope and magnitude, most are unaware of, for it not only takes a believer *‘out of’* bondage to sin, it guarantees their entrance *‘into’* a ‘land’ of spiritual abundance and glory akin to *‘heaven on earth’* (Deut 11.21). In other words, Christ purchased far more than an ‘exodus’ so we can escape the devil (Pharaoh) of this world (Egypt).

A BETTER HOPE

The atonement secured by Christ on the Cross of Calvary is, in fact, the guarantee Heaven’s intention (cf. Gen 1.26) for humanity is to be fully realized. Yes, sin continues to thwart the divine plan, but in the end, it cannot stop it. In fact, the recovery from ‘the fall’ so humanity reaches perfection began immediately with the sacrifice of an animal to atone for the sin of Adam and Eve (and skins for their nakedness). And though this provisional remedy of blood sacrifices for sin continued

under the Mosaic Law, this finished when Christ's death secured total freedom from sin's dominion as believers are destined to enjoy. Yes, this far better sacrifice (the death of the Son of God no less) is the guarantee the Godhead's intention to deliver us not only from the penalty of sin but also its power—the hymnist's 'double cure'—will be realized. Heaven paid for both outcomes, not just the one, thus promising the future of a believer—in this age—will be complete freedom from the curse of sin (10.14). We can, in '*full assurance of faith*' (10.22) rest in the knowledge this age will not end without this full emancipation being realized.

Reaching moral perfection, then, is not a fanciful dream; every soul who accepts the offer of forgiveness, repents of rebellion, and bows to the Lordship of Christ has the hope of enjoying the recovery of everything lost in 'the fall'. Including the restoration of the divine '*image*' (Col 3.10), an outcome not possible with the Mosaic covenant. By contrast, the new covenant has this '*better hope*' (7.19) of reaching perfection.

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE HOPE OF PERFECTION?

To believe this 'hope of perfection' is the central message of Hebrews may be difficult, but I assure you it is. Other books in the N.T. confirm the same hope, but Hebrews most fully unveils what this means for believers. What the author does by using five English words all from the same root Greek word, '*teáloás*', (Str 5056)—meaning 'conclusion, result, or end'. (These words appear 19 times in Hebrews and 96 times in the N.T.) Now, most believers know Hebrews focuses on the 'better things' of the new covenant, a better sacrifice, better High Priest, better Sabbath, better temple; yet all these 'betters' are not an end in themselves but the means to reaching the goal of complete salvation for humanity.

In a nutshell, this divine plan is for humanity to exercise dominion as Christ's vice-regents over a new earth; a glorious

future only possible, however, if humans attain maturity or moral perfection. This is critical as it is certain an exalted role such as this in the cosmos (not to mention responsibility) is not for those King David refers to as the '*babes and nursing infants*' (Ps 8.2) of creation. Hence, the author quotes this seemingly insignificant psalm (Psalm 8) to argue how God (in Christ Jesus) has visited earth specifically so the '*son(s) of man(kind)*' can be elevated above their present lowly rank; raised to eventually be '*crowned...with glory and honor*' and '*set...over the works of Your (God's) hands*' (2.7). Though this is the guarantee Heaven's plans for humanity will be realized, it will not be unless those sharing Christ's throne, one founded on '*a scepter of righteousness* (1.8), exhibit the same righteousness. Both the Bridegroom and bride must be holy and glorious.

To better understand all this, some explanation about the greek word (*teáloás*) is in order (it gives us the english word 'teleological'); this root word with its cognates (related words) of —*perfect, perfection, mature, finisher, and uttermost*— underscores a central fact, namely humans attain perfection when they fulfill the purpose Heaven them created for. In other words, when the goal of redemption is realized, and as the N.T. reveals, this only happens if moral perfection (in this present age) is reached. With this as the starting point, it confirms the truth of full maturity or perfection and related outcomes being central to Heaven's purpose in creating a new species of beings known as humanity. For example, unless believers partake fully of the '*divine nature*' (2Pet 1.4), the Kingdom will not have its '*priests and kings*' (Rev 1.6), and this is not possible unless they enjoy full release from bondage to sin. In other words, the fallen nature and sin must not restrict them if we are to fulfill the '*perfect will of God*' (Rom 12.2). (Of course, most believers see this outcome as possible only in the next age or in heaven.)

Now, this goal will not be realized without an outpouring of the Holy Spirit bringing a deluge of grace; total freedom from sin and its corrupting influence on the body, soul, and spirit depends upon the divine life this grace will bring to quicken the human vessels of clay. Radically reviving them so every faculty can function as originally intended; the mind thinks and reasons perfectly, emotions perfectly express feelings, and total purity is the hallmark of every desire. This plus mature expressions of the ‘gifts and fruits’ of the Holy Spirit. (Cf. 1Cor 13.9,10) and the grace to experience communion with God and supernatural guidance each day, not occasionally.

REACHING PERFECTION IN THIS PRESENT AGE

Now, every believer expects to have perfection in the next age (in the millennium or heaven), yet very few see it attainable in this one. It is seen as a ‘bridge too far’, an unlikely dream when mortal bodies are not free from the bias to sin. While acknowledging Christ walked as a perfect man in a body of ‘clay’, they quickly point out He was not handicapped by a fallen nature. Very true, yet the mortal ‘envelope’ He inhabited was subject to the very weaknesses all humans suffer (e.g. hunger and tiredness), proving the mortal body per se is not the obstacle to reaching perfection. Most, therefore, will argue the ‘flesh’ (fallen nature) is the ‘fly in the ointment’ foiling such an outcome. A reasonable deduction, but does it have to mean the flesh must always influence desires, emotions, and mindsets? I say it doesn’t. That is, I part company with those who regard as a far-fetched notion the hope of full deliverance in this age from sin’s work of corrupting attitudes with self-interest, self-will, and self-glory.

Now, ultimate perfection—it is true—is only achieved with the resurrection of the body, but to say our best hope before then is a far lesser degree of maturity sells us short. Indeed, to find most believers only hope to reach a level of sanctification

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