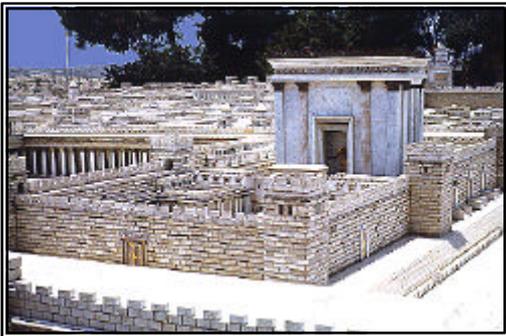


Introduction to the Epistle To The Hebrews

We don't know who wrote Hebrews, but with mounting archaeological data we can now say *why* it was written with more certainty than has ever been known. What you learn from this study of the *Epistle To The Hebrews* may startle you. It may challenge some previously held concepts you have had concerning this epistle. It is perhaps one of the most important documents we have regarding the pressure which First Century Jewish Christians found themselves under.



Too few scholars have grasped the intense pressure which First Century Christians faced to return to Judaism. They were harassed, jibed, persecuted, martyred, and ostracised for abandoning Judaism and following Jesus of Nazareth. Many Jewish Christians succumbed to this increasing pressure and simply found it easier to return to Judaism with its physical Temple, sacrifices, priesthood and holy city, which were all tangible evidences of God's supposedly *eternal* covenant with Israel. After all, if God had really done away with the Old Covenant, then why was He still working through the Temple, the sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood, and the holy city of Jerusalem? These essential elements of Judaism

and the Old Covenant still remained after Christ, so obviously He was not the Messiah, and therefore Christianity was not the true way to God, argued the First Century Jewish authorities.

But the writer to the Hebrews argues the case for Christ and Christianity in the face of this attack. He shows that Christ is superior to Old Covenant. He is greater than mere angels; greater than Moses; greater than the High Priest; greater than sacrifices; greater than the temple; greater than the Old Covenant itself; and deserves our utmost devotion!



The Time of Christ

1. Note Christ's heart toward His fellow countrymen, the Jews, as recorded in Matthew 23:37. How does He feel at this point?

2. Based on this same verse, why was He so saddened?

3. Christ came to establish the Kingdom of God. He told His disciples to preach that the Kingdom of God "was near" (Luke 10:11). But when Pilate introduced Him as King of the Jews, how did the Jewish authorities respond? (note John 19:14 – 15)

4. In effect when the Jews made the statement of Matthew 27:25, what were they saying?
- (a) We acknowledge Christ as our Lord
 - (b) We and our children accept responsibility for Christ's unjust death and punishment
 - (c) We want Christ released and for Barabbas to be justly put to death instead.

The Jewish leaders prided themselves in their Temple. It was a grand structure. Pictured below is a surviving wall from the surrounding walls of the Temple which existed during the time of Christ. It is known as the "Wailing Wall".



When the disciples were with Jesus in the Temple area, they pointed out to Christ the grandness of the buildings. Christ's immediate response caught them off guard.

Introduction

5. What was Christ's response in Matthew 24:2 to His disciples pointing out the Temple buildings?

The thought that the temple would be destroyed again must have sounded like the time the Temple was destroyed in 586 BC when God used the Babylonians to execute His judgment on Israel (2Chronicles 36:14 – 19).

6. Based on this passage, what did God do to avert His judgment on Israel, and why did this actually make His judgment all the more severe?

If God judged Old Testament Israel because they rejected and killed His prophets how much more would God judge New Testament Israel for rejecting and killing His Son?

7. How did Christ foretell God's imminent judgment on Israel? (Note Matthew 11:21 – 24)

The Bible uses the expression "Day of the Lord" to refer to any time when God intervenes into our world to judge. God used the nation of Babylon to judge His people when they went into rebellion. But then the Babylonians didn't repent or submit to God either. This was foretold by Isaiah. In Isaiah 13:6 the prophet predicts that Babylon will experience *the day of the Lord*. Note the judgment language in Isaiah 13. This is called *apocalyptic* language. It is often *hyperbolic* which means it uses exaggerated language to make a point.

Note the following –

Apocalyptic Description	Interpretation
<p>(Isa 13:3 NIV) <i>I have commanded my <u>holy ones</u>; I have summoned my warriors to carry out my wrath-- those who rejoice in my triumph.</i></p>	<p>God's judgment is executed by angelic beings ("holy ones") who guide human instruments.</p>
<p>(Isa 13:5 NIV) <i>They come from faraway lands, from the ends of the heavens-- the LORD and the weapons of his wrath-- to destroy the whole country.</i></p>	<p>Note Deut. 4:32; 30:4, "the ends of heaven" often refers to "faraway lands" which describes people coming from long distances.</p>
<p>(Isa 13:10 NIV) <i>The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.</i></p>	<p>The expression <i>sun, moon and stars</i> frequently refers to Israel (Note Gen. 37:9), when it describes them being <i>darkened</i> it often indicates that Israel was no longer shining for the Lord, that is, they had rebelled and were about to be judged. This was the case when God used Babylon to judge Israel</p>
<p>(Isa 13:11 NIV) <i>I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless.</i></p>	<p>"The world" often refers to a specific territory of earth. For example, in Luke 2:1 the <i>whole world</i> was to participate in the Roman Census but this obviously only included the Roman Empire.</p>

Isaiah 13 gives some remarkable insights into the apocalyptic language used in the Bible. Although Hebrews is not written in apocalyptic language, it does employ it. One such example is its use of the word "fire" which apocalyptically refers to God's judgment (see Hebrews 10:27).

Introduction

The writer of Hebrews seems to suggest the Israel was about to experience another *day of the Lord* where they would experience His judgment (Hebrews 10:27, 30). He also said that the Old Covenant was *about to disappear* (Hebrews 8:13). He described the appearing of Christ to put away sin as marking the *end of the ages* (Hebrews 9:26). Something was therefore about to happen within the lifetime of the recipients of this epistle which would have been around 68AD. Based on this he encourages Jewish Christians to maintain their faith in Christ.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Hebrews 10:39



An artist's impression of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD

8. The Book of Hebrews deals with the Old Covenant system of animal sacrifices. But according to Hebrews 13:15 – 16 what kind of sacrifices are required under the New Covenant?

Amen.