

LESSON # 37

**JESUS CHRIST: “THE AUTHOR AND
FINISHER OF OUR FAITH”**

[HEBREWS]

INTRODUCTION: The letter to the Hebrews was written from Rome while Paul was in captivity there. It was delivered at about the same time as Philemon, Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians. Even though the Jerusalem conference had decided before 50 AD that Gentile converts did not have to obey certain requirements of the Law of Moses to become Christians, in 60 AD there were still Jewish members who were “zealous of the law” (Acts 21:20). This letter is Paul’s effort to convince Jewish members that significant aspects of the Law of Moses had been fulfilled in Christ, and that the higher law of the gospel had replaced the old law (see Pauline Epistles; Hebrews, on page 746 in the Bible Dictionary).

A visitor traveling through rural Utah many years ago brought his car to a halt near a large orchard surrounded by a beautiful white fence. He stared in disbelief at the scene beyond the fence. A farmer in overalls and a straw hat stood under an apple tree with a 200-pound sow in his arms. He carried the animal from branch to branch, allowing her to feast on the fruit within reach. The sweat rolled off of him but the pig seemed insatiable and so the meal continued for nearly a quarter of an hour. Finally the stranger could restrain himself no longer. Driven by curiosity he climbed the fence and approached the man. “What in the world are you doing?” he asked the gasping and perspiring worker.

“I’m feeding this pig,” the man replied, moving within reach of a new branch.

“Isn’t that an awfully time-consuming way to feed a pig?”

“Aw, shucks.” the fellow responded. “What’s time to a pig?” The fact is that there are better ways to feed pigs than by carrying them around in your arms looking for low-hanging apples.

The Book of Hebrews is also Paul’s testimony that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a better way than the Law of Moses. For those laboring under the burden of the

specifications of this law, and determined to require Gentile Christians to obey it, Paul offers the purity and fulness of the Gospel of Christ as a better way. In fact, it is possible to study, outline, and teach Hebrews simply by identifying and expounding on the various ways in which the word “better” is used in the book. The word is used in the book of Hebrews in ways that teach us great lessons about the Gospel in the following verses:

1. [Heb. 1:4] “Being made so much better than the angels . . .”
2. [Heb. 6:9] “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation . . .”
3. {Heb. 7:7} “Without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.”
4. [Heb. 7:19] “For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope *did*.”
5. [Heb. 7:22] “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.”
6. [Heb. 8:6] “He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.”
7. [Heb. 9:23] “*It was* therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.”
8. [Heb. 10:34] “knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”
9. [Heb. 11:16] “But now they desire a better *country*, that is, an heavenly . . .”
10. [Heb. 11:35] “Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection . . .”
11. [Heb. 11:40] “God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

I. CHRIST IS “BETTER” THAN THE ANGELS (Hebrews 1-4)

Being made so much *better than the angels*, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (Heb 1:4, emphasis added)

To most Jews angels were exalted beings who deserved special reverence because they were involved in giving the Law at Sinai—which law was for the Jews the supreme revelation. (Deuteronomy 33:2 suggests that angels were a part of the presentation of the law given from Mt. Sinai. This thought is repeated in Psalm 68:17; Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19, JST). In Hebrews 2:2-4, Paul elaborates:

For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? (Heb 2:2-4)

The context suggests that at least some of the recipients of Hebrews thought that angels were higher than the Messiah. Review Hebrews 1-2 and discover the ways mentioned by Paul in which Christ was above the angels. One of those ways, mentioned in 1:4 is that he had “a more excellent name than they.” That name was *Son* (1:5, ff), a name no angel could claim. A partial list follows:

- T 1:2—God spoke to us by his Son
- T 1:2—The Son is heir of all things
- T 1:2—The Son made the worlds
- T 1:3—The son is in the express image of his Father
- T 1:3—He upholds all things through his power (see D&C 88:41,42)
- T 1:3—He purged our sins
- T 1:3—He sits on the right hand of God
- T 1:5—He was begotten by the Father
- T 1:6—The angels of God worship him
- T 1:8—His throne is forever and ever
- T 1:9—God anointed him above his fellows

- T 1:10—He laid the foundation of the earth
- T 1:10—The heavens are the word of his hands
- T 2:7—He was crowned with glory and honor
- T 2:7—He was made a little lower than the angels (note the Hebrew footnote for *angels* in this verse)
- T 2:7—God set him over the works of his hands
- T 2:8—All things are in subjection to him
- T 2:9—He tasted death for all
- T 2:10—He is the captain of our salvation
- T 2:11—He is not ashamed to call us brethren
- T 2:14—Through his death he would destroy the power of the devil
- T 2:16 (JST)—“He took not upon him the likeness of angels, but . . . the seed of Abraham”

There are a great many such descriptions of Christ in the book of Hebrews. They are worth watching for and marking in your scriptures. But the final two verses in Hebrews 2 are probably worth a special note here.

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.
(Heb 2:17)

1st Nephi calls this willingness to become like us *condescension* (see 1 Nephi 11:16,26) This willingness of his to become like us, Paul says, enables him to be a merciful and a faithful high priest. This is a clear restatement of the doctrine in Alma 7:11-13.

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the

sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance . . .

Hebrews 2:18 reflects not only the sense but the language of Alma 7:11-13.

For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Hebrews 4:15, 16 is one of the most beautiful passages in the New Testament. It reflects this same awareness of the willingness of Christ to help us and the ability of Christ to understand us.

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15,16)

II. JESUS, THROUGH THE HIGHER PRIESTHOOD, OFFERS US A BETTER TESTAMENT (Hebrews 5-7)

And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec: By so much was Jesus made a surety of *a better testament*. (Hebrews 7:21,22, emphasis added)

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? (Hebrews 7:11)

Jesus offers to us a better testament (covenant) than the one given to Israel by Moses following her rebellion at Mt. Sinai. This covenant can bring us to perfection. It is a covenant administered under the direction of the Melchizedek Priesthood, rather than the Aaronic. Hebrews 5-7 is an exposition of the superiority of the Melchizedek over the Aaronic. And while it is true that Christ is our High

Priest, the “high priest of our profession” (Heb. 3:1) and that “We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens . . .” (Heb. 8:1), it is also true that those of us who have been honored by the receipt of this priesthood have a divine duty to act as our heavenly high priest would act in our relationships with the children of our Father in Heaven. Thus Paul instructs us:

For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

High priests are to serve men in the things of God, and to strive to overcome sin. They are to be filled with compassion for those who are “out of the way”—that is, *straying* and *wandering* (see footnote 2b), since they know from their own weaknesses how easy it is to stray.

High Priests are to teach the pure and undiluted doctrines of the gospel.

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb. 5:12-14)

Verse 14 is a favorite description of what a High Priest ought to be: a man who partakes of *strong meat* and has learned to do so by means of sufficient experience in the doctrines and practices of the Church. He must be a man with a clear vision of the difference between good things and evil things.

Continuing on into the next chapter, Paul adds this:

Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal

judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. (Heb. 6:1-3)

III. CHRIST IS THE MEDIATOR OF A BETTER COVENANT . . . ESTABLISHED UPON BETTER PROMISES (Hebrews 8-13)

6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also *he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.*

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

9 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a peopl: (Heb. 8:6-10, emphasis added).

Christ was able to establish this covenant by the sacrifice which he offered, a sacrifice by the shedding of blood in the manner of all high priests from ancient Israel's service at the tabernacle and the temple.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:13,14)

The law cannot make you perfect, Paul explains (10:1), because you cannot live the law perfectly. And “the blood of bulls and of goats” cannot “take away sins.” (10:4) But Christ can take away sins, for “we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Thus the covenant he offers us is better, “Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God . . . (Heb. 10:11,12)

Of this covenant, the scriptures say, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them . . .” (Heb. 10:16)

IV. IF WE HAVE FAITH IN CHRIST AND FOLLOW HIM, HE WILL GIVE US A “BETTER COUNTRY, THAT IS A HEAVENLY . . .” (Heb. 11:16)

Hebrews 11 is Paul’s exposition on faith. He tells us that Abel offered a “more excellent” (better) sacrifice than Cain because of his faith (11:4); Enoch was translated by faith (11:5); Noah prepared an ark by faith (11:7); Abraham moved to a new country because of his faith (11:8), and offered up Isaac (11:17); by faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau with regard to things to come (11:20), and Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph (11:21); Moses was hidden three months by his mother (11:23), and “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter” (11:24), and forsook Egypt (11:27), and kept the passover (11:28), and passed through the sea on dry ground (11:29).

By faith the walls of Jericho came down (11:30) and Rahab was saved from death (11:31). Others through their faith, “subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of [cruel] mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment” (11:35-36).

Why were so many willing to do so much, even to suffer so much? Because God had provided a “better thing” for them (11:40)

Joseph Smith said that faith was equal to power. “ Who cannot see, that if God framed the worlds by faith, that it is by faith that he exercises power over them, and that faith is the principle of power? And if the principle of power, it must be so in man as well as in the Deity? This is the testimony of all the sacred writers, and the lesson which they have been endeavouring to teach to man.” (Lectures on Faith, Lecture 1, p.9) Thus the best way to evaluate the faith of any man was to evaluate the power he possesses.

Moroni told us that the Lord had said, “If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me.” (Moroni 7:33) This includes power not only to move mountains, but to move our families; not only to raise the dead but to raise the hopes of the downtrodden; not only to preach repentance, but to repent.

CONCLUSION:

If our faith enables us to endure chastening (12:6-8) and to submit to the Father of our spirits (12:9), then we will be blessed with the blessings of heaven—a better place.

“For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” (Heb 12:10,11)

“For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of

the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant . . .” (Hebrews 12:18-24)

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