

HEBREWS In Preterist Perspective

The great treatise of Hebrews was God's final appeal to his fleshly chosen people, Israel. At the same time, it was written to prepare Hebrew disciples for the "day approaching" of the Lord's return in vengeance against his rejecting people. About forty years earlier, Jesus had told disciples that their generation would not pass until the destruction of their capital city, Jerusalem (Matt. 24:34). That fulfillment was close at hand.

Incidents of rebellion against Rome (falling away) among the Jews were already bringing persecution of the Jews and Jewish disciples when Hebrews was written sometime about 61-63 A.D. This was about the time James was killed in Jerusalem. God's inspired messengers knew the finality of the "last days" was near.

"In these last days he has spoken to us by a Son," the message begins (Heb. 1:2). This was in fulfillment of what Isaiah had written, that the word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem in the latter days (Isa. 2:1f). After Jesus' ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension, he enabled inspired men to declare his gospel message on Pentecost. This was in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of what would transpire in the last days (Acts 2:15-21). God was speaking to "us" – that is, Judah and Jerusalem, Hebrew people (Isa. 2:1f).

In this effort, no commentary will be made of the arguments the writer lays out in favor of their listening to and adhering to Christ instead of Moses. Our aim is to note how the message relates to the consummation of the age. I will only highlight connecting points hoping that interested students will read the entire context in the Hebrews text.

In Chapter 1, attention is called to Christ's throne which "is for ever and ever." That could not refer to an everlasting earthly rule. Using symbolic language common among the Hebrews, the writer indicates that their present system would be changed, but Christ would still reign. This would refer to his spiritual kingdom – "the world to come (2:5) -- inaugurated on Pentecost. One more enemy would be destroyed before the perfection of his reign would be seen. That enemy was death. Even though Jesus had been raised in victory over death, God's people had not been raised before atonement was taken into the Holy Place. At his imminent return, righteous Israel would be released (Ch. 2).

The spiritual house of God is cautioned against such rebellion as brought the fleshly house into disfavor (Ch.3-5). Here the writer draws a parallel between the forty years in the wilderness while the nation was forming to a similar period of maturing, or perfecting, of the spiritual nation with a kingly high priest in their "last days" situation.

To turn back to Judaism would be to choose destruction with the rebellious fleshly nation who "bears thorns and thistles" and "is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned" (6:1-8). "And we desire each one of you to show the same

earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end” (6:11). The old system had a passing priesthood which would soon be dispersed, but Jesus would be a priest forever (Ch. 7). The perfecting of the new, spiritual arrangement was near because the old system was obsolete and ready to vanish away (Ch. 8).

The new would soon replace the old. Jesus had gone into the Holy Place in preparing a new and spiritual way. “By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened as long as the outer tent is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age).” The tent (old system) was still standing, but “the time of reformation” was at hand when Christ would return to do away with the vestiges of the old system (9:1-10). In the meantime, Christ had gone into the holy of holies “now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.” “Our” in this passage specifically refers to Israel “since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant” (Ch. 9). This appearance was “at the end of the age.” He had taken their appointment with death and judgment so that at his soon return he could save those eagerly waiting for him (v. 26-28).

The first system which was “nigh unto vanishing away” could not perfect. So, “He abolishes the first in order to establish the second” which establishment had not been fully accomplished. “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet.” Not until he raised righteous Israel had this enemy, death, been fully conquered. The resurrection was “the hope of Israel” (See Free To Change, Chapter 30). “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” Death has been conquered so that those who are sanctified will never die. This being true, they should serve together in building each other up, “and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” That would be the great and dreadful Day for any who turned back, for “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” whose punishment would be administered by the Roman army on Jerusalem. So they should endure the present afflictions in confidence, “For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry” (Ch. 10). Less than a decade more to endure!

The heroes of faith paraded in Chapter 11 looked for a city whose builder and maker is God which was coming into view in Hebrews. “And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (11:39f). The disciples who died in those latter days were raised with those heroes when he returned (See 2 Thes. 1:5-12). Those who were alive and remained would be “caught up” to be with them as “the trumpet of God” sounded for each of them (1 Thes. 4:13-18).

With their ancient heroes cheering them on as spectators in the stadium, as it were, they should press on with joy even though there were persecutions. Those persecutions were to be counted as discipline of the Lord who disciplines his sons, especially his son, Israel, at that time. They were anticipating seeing the Lord (12:14).

The last half of Chapter 12 presents an awesome scene of the consummation of the age. Those called out of Egypt had been summoned to God's Presence at a fiery, quaking Mount Horeb to hear his voice and receive his covenant of law. At the time of the writing, those called out by Jesus were summoned, as it were, "to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to the judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (12:18-24).

This was the mountain foreseen by Isaiah (Isa. 2:1-4). (See Freedom's Ring - #55, "Viewing the Holy City.) It was the new Jerusalem related to the new heavens and new earth of Isaiah 65:17-15. It was the last days upheaval predicted by Joel as beginning on Pentecost (Acts 2:15-21). It was the new heavens and earth resulting from the cataclysm described by Peter (2 Peter 3). It was the holy city, the new Jerusalem that John saw coming down out of heaven at the appearance of the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-4). This was the fulfilling of the words of the prophets, the completion and perfecting of God's plans. Moses had spoken from the mountain; Jesus had spoken from heaven.

"His voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.' This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire" (12:26-29). This all was soon to be accomplished when Jesus would return in vengeance upon Israel and fulfill all that had been prophesied in the events transpiring in or about 70 A.D.

From that time of change from the literal kingdom of Israel to the spiritual kingdom, throughout the succeeding ages, all disciples will be in that kingdom which cannot be shaken. It will never pass away for our High Priest and King lives eternally. We have eternal life in restored fellowship with Him who is eternal. Eventually, for each of us, the earthly, fleshly state will give way to our spiritual and eternal identity in the Eternal One, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Since the initiation of that spiritual kingdom under Christ, the King, we can take joy in reading, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" (Rev. 14:13).

No longer do we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus!" but we sing, "Joy to the world; the Lord has come!"

To look for a restoration of the nation of Israel would be expectation of a reversal of the very things Jesus returned to earth to accomplish. Please study the Hebrews

discourse with these considerations in mind. No claim is being made here of having all the dogmatic answers. []

(Cecil Hook; 1-16-2001)