

Christ and the Church in Hebrews — the Son of God, the Firstborn, and the Church of the Firstborn

by James Fite

The introduction of the Epistle to the Hebrews asserts that God has “spoken to us in the Son” (1:2). Most Bible readers simply identify “the Son” here as “the only begotten Son” (John 1:18). Indeed, Hebrews unambiguously refers to “Jesus, the Son of God” (4:14; cf. 6:6). However, this Epistle also speaks of “the Firstborn” and of “the church of the firstborn” (1:6; 12:23). These varied references to the person of Christ are significant. Hebrews presents a broad scope of Christ in His work and especially in His person. Simultaneously, this Epistle provides a multifaceted description of the church in both her essence and practicality. In this contextual presentation of Christ and the church, New Testament readers should go further to see the process by which the only begotten Son became the Firstborn in God’s economy to produce the church of the firstborn.

The Person and Work of Christ Revealed in Hebrews

The writer of Hebrews—most likely Paul, given the intimate mention of Timothy in 13:23—deliberately avoids mentioning his name or the names of other writers of Scripture. He purposely remains unidentified lest the recipients be distracted from the central theme of this Epistle—the superiority of Christ and His new covenant to Judaism and its old covenant.¹ Commenting on Hebrews 12:24, Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies from the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* identifies this theme of superiority in the comparison of the blood of Jesus to the blood of the Levitical sacrifices.

The historical background and the analysis of the book show that the purpose of the writer is to prove that Jesus’ blood of the New Testament is better than and takes the place of the animal blood shed under the First Testament. Our exegesis of this verse [Heb. 12:24], therefore, is in line with the analysis of the letter. Again, the writer confronts his readers with the superiority of Jesus’ blood as over against that of the Levitical sacrifices. (228-229)

The Epistle’s repeated use of *better* (1:4; 6:9; 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24) emphasizes that the author is comparing alternatives. Witness Lee in his outline of Hebrews in the *Recovery Version of the Bible* extends this central thought of superiority to the entire scope of choices available to the Hebrew believers as they hesitated between leaving the old covenant behind and coming forward to the new testament way of Christ and the church. The Judaic religion comprises five notable and seemingly unassailable foundations: the real and true God, genuine angels, the faithful and God-serving Moses, the compassionate Aaronic priesthood, and the God-derived model of jurisprudence. The writer of Hebrews systematically compares these pillars of Judaism to Christ and His new covenant and demonstrates that the new testament is far better (cf. 1:4; 8:6; 9:23; 11:40; 12:24).

Hebrews identifies at least thirty outstanding and superior aspects of Christ.² The Son is none other than God Himself, the Creator of the universe (1:1, 10). As the Son, He