1. The Letter to the Hebrews and to Us (1Q 2022—In These Last Days: The Message of Hebrews)

**Biblical Material:** Heb. 2:3, 4; 1 Pet. 4:14, 16; Heb. 13:1–9, 13; 1 Kings 19:1–18; Heb. 3:12–14; Numbers 13; Heb. 10:36.

**Quotes**
- The book of Hebrews is “a delight for the person who enjoys puzzles.” *William Lane*
- The book of Hebrews contains at least 29-35 direct quotations and 53 clear allusions to various passages in the Old Testament. Nearly all these quotations and allusions come from the Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX), a Greek translation of the Old Testament different from the Hebrew Masoretic translation used for our modern day Bible. *Anon.*
- The Epistle to the Hebrews, one of the most important books of the New Testament in that it contains some of the chief doctrines of the Christian faith, is, as well, a book of infinite logic and great beauty. *E. Schuler English*
- The Book of Hebrews begins with no mention of the author, only of *God*. *David Guzik*
- Hebrews helps us unfold the mystery of seeing Jesus Christ throughout the Old Testament. *Matthew Z. Capps*
- “Better” is a key word that occurs thirteen times in this book, emphasizing the central thesis of Hebrews that the way of Jesus Christ is so much better! *Robert Dodson*

**Questions**
How do we make a letter to people with a very different background and culture relevant to us today, especially when the concepts and symbols are so foreign to us? How are we blessed when we’re insulted for Christ? In what way are the concepts of God here in Hebrews “better” than the Old Testament? How does this fit into the great controversy perspective?

**Bible summary**
- Heb. 2:3, 4 warns us about neglecting the Lord’s great salvation? 1 Pet. 4:14, 16 tells us we are blessed when we are insulted and made to suffer. Heb. 13:1–9 is a mix of instructions to Christians, including love for one another. 1 Kings 19:1–18 is Elijah’s experience of God after he ran away from Jezebel. In Heb. 3:12–14 we are called to encourage one another and not to give up on God. Numbers 13 is the story of the spies sent to explore Canaan. “You need to be patient so that having done what God wants, you’ll receive what he has promised.” Heb. 10:36 FBV.

**Comment**
The matter of authorship should be briefly considered. However it is important to note the relatively recent debate over who wrote Hebrews—for the language and imagery is very different from the other books associated with Paul. Unlike all the other letters of Paul, he does not give his name to Hebrews. But this should not disturb us overmuch, for others were used by Paul to write out his letters—note for example Romans 16:22 in which Tertius, the letter writer, adds his greetings. In Hebrews the many quotations are from the Greek Septuagint, not the Hebrew Scriptures that Paul always quoted from. So it seems that the concepts are from Paul (he even mentions his convert Timothy in Heb. 13:23), and that someone else wrote it all out, in more literary Greek. The early church fathers believed this explanation (see Clement and
Origen). Perhaps the best place to leave the debate is that Luke (he was an accomplished writer in Greek) or another scribe had greater leeway to write out Paul’s ideas in the book of Hebrews. Note that since the subject material—written to Jewish believers to help them understand the transition to Christianity—is so different, it is not surprising that the vocabulary is also very different.

The book of Hebrews was written to help Jewish people understand how Christ fulfilled the sanctuary and its systems, using language they would comprehend. It was to lead them from Judaism to Christianity, and not the other way around. The coming of Christ ended the need for the old systems, because now God had been revealed in person. The essential point is to understand the whole system in a way that does not revert to legalistic observance. It can be very helpful to read Hebrews in a modern version. For example, using J.B. Phillips’ translation of Hebrews 3 is a great help since he uses the concept of “not giving up trust” instead of the term “unbelief.” This points to the centrality of trusting God in the whole of Hebrews, and gives a greater insight—since we can perhaps more readily understand the importance of trust, while unbelief can be seen simply as a refusal to operate according to statements of belief or dogma.

Hebrews was written to use the old imagery and make it relevant and applicable to the message of Jesus. The theme is that the old methods were not wrong, just misunderstood and now superseded. Even the sacrificial system did not achieve what God had intended, because it was so often seen as some routine ritual by which the problem of sin was taken care of. That is why God through the later prophets actually speaks against the system, because it had become meaningless. This is a vital aspect of Hebrews, and which is still applicable today: our worship systems must make an impact, must make us think. If there is no thought, then worship becomes just a form, a ceremony, with no real content. Paul is actually saying through Hebrews that the old ways really didn’t work, and only make sense in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus—and since Jesus is God then we have direct access to God himself—the priesthood as a system is also gone.

Even though we do not share the same background and understanding as Paul’s audience, there is still much to learn from Hebrews. It points to the centrality of Jesus, and encourages us to trust in him to the end, seeing in him our gracious and loving God who not only saves us but restores his whole Creation.

Ellen White comments

Study carefully the first chapter of Hebrews. Become interested in the Scriptures. Read and study them diligently. “In them ye think ye have eternal life,” Christ said, “and they are they which testify of Me.” It means everything to us to have an experimental and individual knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ, “whom He hath sent.” {FE 404.1}

Those who think they can obtain a knowledge of God aside from His Representative, whom the Word declares is “the express image of his person” (Hebrews 1:3), will need to become fools in their own estimation before they can be wise. It is impossible to gain a perfect knowledge of God from nature alone; for nature itself is imperfect. In its imperfection it cannot represent God, it cannot reveal the character of God in its moral perfection. But Christ came as a personal Saviour to the world. He represented a personal God… He is the express image of the Father’s person. “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col.2:9). {1SM 295.2}

Christ alone was able to represent the Deity. He who had been in the presence of the Father from the beginning, He who was the express image of the invisible God, was alone sufficient to accomplish this work… He lived out the character of God through the human body which God had prepared for Him. (RH June 25, 1895). {7BC 924.6}