

## FOREWORD

This book has been written with the hope that it may help the general reader to grasp the arguments of the Epistle and *to feel their force*.

This last important end is not very well served by the type of treatise that scholars write for scholars. These are indeed valuable for aiding those who teach others. For such the minute examination of verses, phrases, words, parts of speech is helpful. I have myself profited by it. But the plain reader is embarrassed by technical disquisitions and the elaborate weighing of all possible or impossible meanings, and is left barren by quotations from ancient writers in dead languages.

For the readers here in view it has seemed more useful to give usually conclusions reached as to the meaning of the Writer rather than the processes and grounds of the conclusions. But exception has been made where anything fresh or unusual is advanced. Then something at least is offered in support by way of fuller discussion of words or sentences. Readers able to profit by the full discussions of the learned will naturally turn to such works as those by Alford, Delitzsch, Govett, William Kelly, or Westcott.

For the same reason Greek words are printed in ordinary type; a practice I now dislike, only I remember the hindrance and annoyance I found in the Greek characters in the years when I could not read them.

On the same grounds certain much-discussed questions are here left almost untouched, as for example:

1. Who was Melchizedek? In my early years a pamphlet came to me which sought to establish, what I now know to have been a very ancient notion, that Melchizedek was Shem. The writer proceeded to argue the wholly useless idea that Shem was the architect of the Great Pyramid!

Much wiser and far more spiritual are these words of the learned Dr. Adolf Saphir in his *Lectures on the Hebrews*, ch. vii.

"But the Scripture purposely does not mention who he was. Genesis abounds in genealogies, and in full and minute genealogies; but the genealogy of this man is not given. If we knew who he was, should we not counter-act thereby the meaning of the Holy Ghost in this instructive omission? If he was Shem, then we know who his father was, and when he lived, and how old he was; and this is just the very point the Holy Ghost does not wish us to know. . . all we are told is, Melchizedek was one of those still left on earth, who retained the primeval knowledge of God, who worshipped Him, and who ruled in righteousness. With regard to all other circumstances, our *ignorance* is

*knowledge*. The negative element is a positive element. Let no man attempt to supply that which the Holy Ghost has purposely left out: for, in the first place, he must be unsuccessful; in the second place, if he were successful, it would only militate against the purpose and the word of God, and only hinder us from learning those lessons which the Scripture intends us to derive . . . ."

"Instead of indulging in morbid and fanciful speculations about the historical individual, let us look at the important spiritual realities which in the inspired commentary are given us in this parable or type. Let us learn also from this instance and the other New Testament comments on Old Testament types that the typical meaning is always deduced from what *the Scripture itself says concerning them*."

2. A second question, much disputed and laboured, is *Who* was the Writer of *Hebrews*? For me the question is idle, for we have no *data* by which to *determine* it, but only inference and conjecture, which can lead only to mere *opinion*. The above remarks of Saphir apply here also. Hence in this treatise the question is almost unnoticed.
3. But a third matter requires attention, namely, the title of the Epistle. Of course, the titles of the books of the Bible are human additions and of no authority, unless a book contains its own proof as to the writer, or of the person or church to whom it was addressed, as is the case with *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and some others.

The giving to this Epistle the title "To the Hebrews" is merely a matter of tradition and is without warrant. It has formed one support for the misleading theory that certain parts of the New Testament are "Jewish," for "Jewish Christians," not Gentile believers. No such class of Christians is known to the New Testament. The theory is contrary to Eph. 2:11-18, and to the fundamental position of the Word of God that, in this age, in Christ Jesus, "there *cannot* be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision . . . but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3: 11).

The title as it stands is plainly misleading, for it does not even suggest that the readers were Christian at all. It implies simply that they were Hebrews, not Hebrew Christians, which is plainly wrong.

The fact that the Writer had a deep and extensive acquaintance with the Old Testament and that he presumed on a similar knowledge in his readers, is no proof that he and they were Jews. Perhaps the present treatise may show that its writer has some real acquaintance with the Old Testament and that he presumes on such in his readers, but it were a false inference that he and they are Jews.

The believers at Rome and in Galatia were at least mainly Gentiles, yet Paul presumed on much knowledge of Old Testament Scriptures and their histories: See Rom. 4 on Abraham and David: chs. 9 to 11 on the problem of Israel's lapse, where the argument dealt with Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Pharaoh, and freely quoted psalms and prophets. And see especially in Gal. 4 the treatment of Sarah and Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael, Sinai and Zion as containing an allegory. The apostles were careful to illuminate their Gentile converts as to the contents and meaning of the Old Testament.

Therefore in this treatise we dismiss the title and regard the Epistle as addressed to Christians as such, both its comforts and its warnings. They who reject its warnings as not for believers ought to be consistent and refuse its comforts, such as that of the new covenant and the priestly ministry of Christ.

4. As regards the warning passages, special attention has been given to these. They can be treated in three ways.

- (1) As addressed to true believers, children of God by the new birth, and as teaching that such may so apostatize as to lose their salvation entirely and eternally. We accept the former part of the proposition, but reject the latter as being contrary to many other passages which declare that eternal life is the free gift of God and is unforfeitable. This is discussed in *Note A* at the end of ch. xiii, p. 196.

- (2) Others say that the passages are to warn those who profess to be Christians, falsely or by being deceived, but who have never been born of God. We reject this also as being contrary to the plain terms and clear arguments used.

- (3) The alternative is to take the warnings as applying to the really regenerate and to show how their solemn terms can find fulfillment without challenging the final and eternal bliss of the saved. This is the line here taken and which the reader is earnestly invited to ponder with candour and prayer.

In Scripture quotations and references the Revised Version is used, except where a stricter rendering seemed needful and helpful.

Words in square brackets [ ] are mine.

If the God of all grace shall use this book to enlighten hearts, establish faith, and kindle devotion to Christ His Son, to Him shall be all the glory for ever.

G. H. Lang  
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