

Sermon: The Ultimate Algorithm

Text: An Introduction to Hebrews

Introduction:

An algorithm is “a process or set of rules to be followed in calculations or other problem-solving operations. It involves systematic procedures that produces—in a finite number of steps—the answer to a question or the solution of a problem.” As we will see in our study of Hebrews, the Book in many ways gives us the “key” to properly understanding the hundreds of prophecies (clues) in the Old Testament that point to the Messiah (Jesus!).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews remains a mystery. Even early in the church’s history, a prominent early church historian named Origen (early third century) had to admit his ignorance of the true author of Hebrews. Several theories regarding the author’s identity have been proposed over the years. Most of the churches in the eastern part of the Roman Empire believed Paul to have authored the book, leading to its early acceptance into the Canon (the 66 books of the Bible) by the churches in those areas. Authors such as Luke, Barnabas, and Apollos, have been considered as possibilities. The unknown authorship of this book should not shake our confidence in its authority. Hebrews is extremely important in to our understanding of who Jesus is—and what He accomplished for us.

The strongly Jewish character of the letter to the Hebrews helps to narrow down its date of composition, most likely AD 64–69. Significantly, the book makes no reference to the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem in AD 70, and the author wrote as if the sacrificial system were still in existence (Hebrews 10:1–2, 11). With its many references to Hebrew customs and the Old Testament, the book was likely sent to a Jewish Christian community, possibly in Rome.

Hebrews clearly describes how Jesus is both the divine Son of God—as well as being completely human. His role as our high priest makes it possible for human beings to approach the Father in heaven through prayer. The priesthood of Jesus is superior to the Old Testament priesthood of Aaron, because only through Jesus do we receive eternal salvation (5:1–9). Furthermore, Jesus became the permanent and perfect High Priest, going beyond all other priests by offering Himself as a sinless sacrifice on behalf of the sins of human beings (7:24–26; 9:28).

Throughout its pages, Hebrews makes clear that Jesus Christ is greater than all other people, pursuits, objects, or hopes to which human beings offer allegiance. Hebrews pictures Jesus as better than the angels, as bringing better lives to humanity through salvation, as offering a better hope than the Mosaic Law could promise, as a better sacrifice for our sins than a bull or a goat, and as providing a better inheritance in heaven for those who place their faith in Him (Hebrews 1:4; 6:9; 7:19; 9:23; 10:34). Jesus is indeed superior to all others. This message of the superiority of Jesus would have been particularly important to Jewish Christians in Rome, who were struggling under Nero’s persecution and were considering moving back toward the Mosaic Law.

The writer to the Hebrews showed these Jewish Christian believers that, though they were faced with suffering, they were indeed following a better way . . . and they should persevere.

The ancients created idols made out of wood and stone. Modern society has set aside that type of idol in favor of new idols—idols of fancy gadgets, material wealth, a comfortable lifestyle, and even certain relationships. Human beings have seen and experienced the limitless bounty of idolatry, where we place some created object or person in the place of the one true God.

The letter to the Hebrews makes clear that only one Person deserves to hold the primary place in our lives. While we are busy idolizing our move up the corporate ladder or placing all our hopes in other people—Jesus offers us a better life, a better salvation, a better priest, a better covenant, a better hope, and a better sacrifice. In other words—Jesus is greater!

Only when we give Jesus His rightful place in our lives will everything else in life fall into its rightful place.

Examination:

Read each of the Key Passages from the Book of Hebrews, and discuss why these verses are so important—and what we need to learn, remember, and apply to our lives...

Hebrews 1:1-2: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."

Hebrews 2:3: "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation..."

Hebrews 4:14-16: "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Hebrews 12:1-2: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Application:

Give some thought to what idols you hold dear in your life. Why do you continue to hold on to these idols? As Jesus to help you set these idols aside in your life, and fix your eyes on Him.