

The Pharisees were religious sticklers for a very good reason. They wanted to make sure they qualified for eternal life. They thought they knew the Scriptures, but what they really needed was not more knowledge, but a Rosetta Stone.

The Rosetta Stone was found in Egypt in 1799 AD. It had three versions of a decree that issued two thousand years earlier. The decree was in Ancient Greek and two different versions of Egyptian hieroglyphic script. It was this stone that allowed scholars to finally interpret Egyptian hieroglyphics which had been only gibberish to them before.

Let me back up. The book of *Hebrews*, though no one knows who wrote it, is an excellent example of what Paul and I used to do. We would first go to the Jews and try to convince them to become Christians by using the Scriptures in the Old Testament. The Jews held the Scriptures to be sacred, so all we had to do was use the Scriptures to prove what we told them about Jesus was true. *Hebrews* gives you a very good idea of how we would do that.

Since you know we used that method, it may seem obvious to you. But it was not obvious back when we did it. Let me remind you of a little incident that John describes in his *Gospel of John*. The Jewish leaders were trying to kill Jesus because he said God was his father, which made him equal with God.¹ Jesus told them that they search the Scriptures because they thought the Scriptures could bring them eternal life.²

That was true. All of us Jews thought we could achieve eternal life if we could just follow God's laws well enough. So, we searched the Scriptures daily to make sure we didn't miss even one little word which could cause us to be disqualified. The Pharisees were fixated on this.

But the Pharisees needed a Rosetta Stone that would allow them to interpret Scripture correctly. And Jesus gave it to them, even though they refused to listen to him. Jesus told them, "The Scriptures testify of me."

So simple, yet a hidden mystery since the beginning of time. The Scriptures testify of Jesus. With that key, we Christian leaders were able to use the Scriptures that the Jews intimately knew to show them what the Scriptures really meant. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we

¹ John 5:18

² John 5:39

changed their world. We were able to prove to them that the Scriptures have the power to make you wise to salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ.³

The ancient Jews were intimately familiar with every detail of Abraham's life, since he was the beginning of the Hebrew nation. They knew that Abraham rescued Lot after he had been kidnapped by four kings.⁴ On Abraham's return, he stopped to be blessed by Melchizedek, the king of Salem who was also a priest of God. Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.

That is the only mention of the mysterious Melchizedek in the Old Testament... except in David's Psalm 110, which was partly used by Jesus in another context. Psalm 110:4 says, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." With the Rosetta Stone of scripture interpretation, you can easily see that David was talking about Jesus being a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, which preceded the priesthood through Aaron.

So, Jesus is superior to Abraham. Jesus is superior to Aaron. Jesus is superior to Melchizedek. Jesus is holy, blameless, pure. He sacrificed for the sins of all sinners once for all when he offered himself. He has been made perfect forever.

Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant than the first covenant. The first covenant had intricate religious observations with the priests and Temple. Its sacrifices had to be continually repeated.

Jesus is the guarantee of the new covenant, which makes the old one obsolete. However, Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people, and will appear a second time to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

This was incredibly good news to the Jews. Once and for all! No more daily and annual sacrifices. No more feeling guilty every moment of every day. Jesus took care of sins for his people once and for all! With that good news, it was easy for us to call on them to persevere and hold onto the hope we profess. It was easy to encourage people to spur each other on toward love and good deeds. To urge them to encourage each other.

Which brings me to one of the most famous chapters in all of the Bible. Hebrews 11 is known as the Faith Chapter, or the Faith In Action Chapter. It is one of the most encouraging chapters in the Bible.

The first verse of Hebrews 11 has surely been quoted billions of times. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

³ 2 Timothy 3:15

⁴ Genesis 14

Chapter 11 is a recitation of the faith of Old Testament heroes and how they put that faith into action. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham...on and on. Each of them had faith and put their faith into action.

Want an example of faith in action? Abraham had so much faith that he reasoned God could raise the dead, so he was willing to sacrifice his only son since God would raise him from the dead. Incredible! Nobody had ever been raised from the dead, but Abraham had so much faith that he reasoned God could and would do it. Reasoned, remarkable.

With that in mind, let's back up to verse 3 of Chapter 11. By faith, we understand that the whole universe was formed when God commanded it, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. Using Abraham as an example, by faith we can reason, we can understand, that the whole universe was formed at God's command. We don't have to understand when he did it, why he did it, or how he did it. But, we can reason that God did it.

Stay with that type of thinking and move to verse 6 of chapter 11 to see one of my personal favorites in the book of *Hebrews*. The first part of the verse says that it is impossible to please God without faith. Then the verse goes on to explain why that it true with the word *because*. *Because why?* Anyone who comes to God must believe two things: that God exists, and that God rewards those who diligently seek him.

Talk about getting back to basics, I can't come to God unless I believe that he exists. So, if I don't believe God exists, I can't come to him. My assumptions and my beliefs dictate the outcome.

Yet, as remarkable as all of these heroes were, God has something far better in mind for those who believe in Jesus, who keep their eyes fixed on him. How do we know we are seriously committed? We are told to throw off everything that weighs us down, every sin that torments or entangles us. Then we can run the race that is set before us.

When I first heard that verse read, I envisioned an Olympic runner. The runner has a heavy weight on his back, feet chained together. He can barely struggle into the arena. With a mighty effort, the runner throws off the weight, and escapes the chains that entangle him. He is now free to run the race unencumbered.

What can we do with this kind of faith? Everyone should be able to endure persecution. Everyone should be able to endure the discipline that God provides for those who are his children. Discipline that produces an abundance of righteousness.

The author of *Hebrews* concludes with many simple encouragements:

Be thankful.

Worship God acceptably, with reverence and awe.

Keep loving each other as family members

Don't forget to entertain strangers...they might be angels in disguise!

Be pure in your marriage, and keep away from adultery.

Keep free from the love of money and be content with what you have.

Don't be carried away with strange teachings.

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.

All these things are simple and obvious to agree with but not easy to do. The author of Hebrews, though no one knows for sure who wrote it, ends with a request that his audience pray for "us" and send greetings from those in Italy. Wouldn't it be fun to know who "us" is? It's a Rosetta Stone, because then, you would know who wrote the important book of *Hebrews*.