

Hebrews 1:1-4

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¹ In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² 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. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁴ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

The Opening Sentence Hebrews 1:1-4 in the original language is one sentence. This means there is one main verb that indicates the emphasis of the book of Hebrews. That verb in v.3 is “sat”. This surprise shows how much Psalm 110 affects Hebrews, and reveals how much the epistle is aimed at the priestly work of Jesus.

The finality of revelation It is not that the Son is just the One through whom the Father *is speaking*. He is the One through whom the Father *has spoken*. The verb tense indicates a note of finality and closes off the prospect of a continuing revelation apart from what God has spoken in the Son. Those who teach that there is a continuing gift of prophecy (i.e., with prophets giving new revelations) must reckon with this feature of the uniqueness of Christ. Those apostles who completed the New Testament canon, and thus spoke for him, were authorized as eyewitnesses of his resurrection, and as appointed by him, to speak with his authority (John 14:15-21; 25,26, plus John 16:12-15). We reply to Muslims, who claim Mohammed as a later prophet than Jesus, that God HAS spoken in his Son. It would be wise for Christians not to stand in opposition to this truth. Christ is THE prophet who was to come (Deuteronomy 18:17-20; Acts 3:22,23). How contradictory for someone to say, “Yeah, but I am a later prophet than he; you need what I now add to his Word.”

Hebrews is a book of contrasts. It compares Christ with angels and Moses, his offering with animal sacrifices; other priests with his priesthood, the old covenant with the new, etc. In this context, we ought to see a contrast in revelation. Just as it is wrong to revert to animal sacrifices, it is wrong as well to accept prophecies from those who claim such a role when they are not apostles of Christ. The movement of the Bible is from lower to higher, as in the Passover to the Lord’s Supper. To claim continuing revelation, is to move from God’s “has spoken in his Son” to a lower class of revelation.

Continuing Revelation It is a serious error to add to the priestly work of Christ by any kind of imagined additional atonement for sins. Hebrews opens by telling us that Christ has made purification. We do not go back to the many offerings of other priests, whose ministry is now obsolete. Likewise, God has spoken in his Son, so we do not go back to the ministrations of lesser prophets to give additional revelations, which imply that God has not spoken sufficiently in his Son. In other words, the role of Christ as priest and prophet are supreme. If we consider the other office of Christ, we point out that we have in the law of God his will for us. This law Christ as a king and prophet has endorsed, interpreted, and applied in New Testament revelation from the Sermon on the Mount to the writings of his apostles. For men to add further laws, or further obligation, or further truth, is to diminish the ruling role of Christ as King over us. The Roman Catholic Church fell into this kind of triple error. It has added to Jesus’ work the sacrifice of the mass, purgatory to purge remaining sins, and penance. It has the Pope speaking *ex cathedra* to announce new doctrines supposedly binding on us to believe and obey. In one stroke this is a violation of the rule of Christ as King and Head of the church and as the Son through whom the Father has spoken. That is why we needed and had the Reformation.

The Place of Psalm 110 in Hebrews: The first main verb in the book of Hebrews is “sat.” This came from Psalm 110:1. In that psalm Jesus is called a priest, so Hebrews joins Psalm 110:1 & 4. He is the king-priest told to sit, an idea that dominates Hebrews. This use in 1:3 of this key word will later be expanded. Matthew 22:41-46 speaks of the Messiah as the Lord God, an argument for the deity of Christ not repeated in Hebrews. Hebrews points to his being seated, a priest of a higher order (Melchizedek’s), that he was appointed with an oath, and that his priesthood is forever. To understand Hebrews, one must be familiar with Psalm 110.

Five Descriptions of the Deity of the Son

Hebrews 1 gives much to show that Christ is God. There are five descriptions of Christ. He is: 1) heir of all things, 2) One through whom God made the universe, 3) the radiance of God's glory, 4) the exact representation of his being, and 5) One who sustains all things by his powerful word. The assumption of Hebrews is that since he is THE Son, he is all that the Father is. From that comes this multiple description that can only fit the Lord God himself. There is nothing that the Father is that the Son is not, except that the Son is not the Father. We must not confuse that creatures (both angels and men) are spoken of as sons. This simply means that God gave us existence; we are his offspring (Acts 17:28, Luke 3:38). The Son of God is the Son because he is what the Father is (John 5:17-29). These two ways of using the same word must not be confused.

1:2 Appointed heir of all things It is just as true that Christ is heir of all things, and that statement is not weakened by the addition that he was appointed as such. It mystifies our minds that the relation of Father and Son is so intermingled that everything Christ is and does is related to and comes from the Father. It is impossible to separate them as Persons, (and necessary not to confuse them). This fact extends to the very life and activity of the Son. For the Father to appoint Christ as Heir of all things is completely in keeping with how the Father and Son relate. It is not contradictory to say that everything is the inheritance of the Son (Hebrews 1) and that the Son will hand over the kingdom to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24) and that even the Son will be subject to the Father who put all things under the Son (1 Corinthians 15:28). Only God can have all authority in heaven and on earth! (Matthew 28:18). Yet this authority was *given* to Christ, by the Father who is his head and equal (1 Corinthians 11:3). Hebrews will later add that those who are called and receive his promise, are also heirs (6:17; 9:15; 11:8,9).

1:2 One through whom God made the universe Christ is never presented in Scripture as an independent Creator. Again the bond of Father-Son affects creation. It is not that the Father created and so did Jesus. It is that the Father created and all things were made

by him (and even for him) – Colossians 1:15,16

through him, in fact, without him nothing was made – John 1:3

and, “through whom [Christ] he [God the Father] made the universe” – Hebrews 1:2

Note that these three books begin with the deity of Christ! To provide a more complete picture, the role of the Holy Spirit in the execution of all that God does must be added. *“In the beginning God [the Trinity] created the heavens and the earth... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters...”* (Genesis 1:1,2). All three Persons are God the Creator, and the roles of each Person remain in doing all he does, and all They do. Great is the mystery of godliness! (1 Timothy 3:16). Since Christ participates in the creation of all that was ever created, he cannot be a created being. He is the eternal, pre-existent Son.

1:3 The Radiance of God’s Glory and

1:3 The Exact Representation of His Being

These words are less common. We have more in Scripture about inheritance and creation. The idea of Christ being the radiance of another’s glory is a fresh way to describe Christ. We must be careful that we not fall into thinking of Christ as merely a reflection of God’s glory the way the moon, with no light of its own, reflects to us the light of the sun. John 1:14 speaks of Jesus’ glory as his glory. In Mark 9:2, when he was transfigured showing his majesty, honor and glory (2 Peter 1:16-18), he was not a mere mirror. Further, a cloud appeared and overshadowed them (Mark 9:7), a replication of the shekinah glory of the Old Testament, indicating the Presence of the Lord with Israel.

To see the Son is to see the Father (John 14:9-11). We have not seen God directly, but God the only Begotten has made him known to us, (John 1:18). The One whom the Father has placed between us and himself is the Son, who is the exact and complete representation of himself. In the past God, spoke in other ways; in sending Christ, he has sent God to show us God. Hebrews has again combined the glory of Christ and the image of God, (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). Does Christ reflect the glory of another? Yes, and he does it by being the glory of God that he is (Colossians 1:15).

1:3 The Son Sustains all Things by His Powerful Word Of the five descriptions, Hebrews links the first four to the Father. There is no other way to understand Christ. This is the only one of the five where it is not expressly stated as a Father-Son connection. It could have been, since the Son does not speak his word on his own (John 12:49; 14:10; 14:24). Creation is complete. Since then something continues, (present tense). Thus Jesus carries the whole world. (The Greek verb for “sustains” is the ordinary word for “carry.”) Jesus the Son sustains all things by his powerful word. Just as God, speaking *let there be*, called all things into existence by his Word, (11:3) the Son continues to speak and his will is done as he rules all creation. The winds and the waves obey him! (Luke 8:25; Psalm 148:8). In him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17).

Why so much attention in Hebrews to the rank of the Son? First, the writer will soon turn to show that the Son is not an angel and cannot be compared to them as if one of them! Hebrews 1 beats the life out of a certain error, therefore that error must have had some appeal to those he wrote to. Second, he wants to show Christ as a priest of a different order. To be a priest he must be human; but this priest is absolutely unique because the One God sent to represent men before him, is himself God the Son. He is not merely a mediator between God and men. He is the Mediator who is both God and Man.

Hebrews will emphasize that Jesus is our Great High Priest, but before doing so it lays a foundation as to who this Jesus is who became a priest. He was always the Son, but he was not always a priest. To be a priest he must become human, but first things first. Hebrews will begin at the beginning: Jesus Christ is God. That is clear in the opening sentence, but in chapter 1 the writer will give two Old Testament quotations that address him as God and Lord. One other quotation tells angels to worship him. It is not enough for Hebrews to show what roles Jesus has as a man. We must begin with who this Person is who became a man.

Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King: 1:1,2 opens with God speaking through his Son, thus Christ was a Prophet. As heir of all things (v.2) and sustaining all things (v.3), he is King at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (v.13). He is Priest because it is the role of a priest to make purification for sins, (v.3). This simple mention of a priestly activity is the earliest introduction of the major theme of the entire book, Christ as our Priest. Of his three offices as Messiah, Hebrews will emphasize two (priesthood and kingship) yet it opened with his role as a Prophet. Christ served on earth as a Priest by his offering (and in heaven by intercession). He was raised from the dead on earth, and is now seated as King over all in heaven. Both the cross and the resurrection are historical events on earth in which God has spoken in his Son.

Christ Superior to Angels

1:4 Angels We make very important things clear by stating them from opposite angles. For example: “You must be home by midnight, and that means you must not arrive home after midnight!” The opening sentence has made the deity of Christ clear, therefore he cannot be a created angel. He is seated on the throne of God. But now we see the other angle – an explicit contrast with angels. He is not only spoken of in terms of God, he has been given a name superior to angels. Note Philippians 2:9-11 which shows Christ too, is the LORD God of Israel. The Father has seated the Son (Ephesians 1:20-22) at his right hand (Psalm 16:11), thereby making Christ’s place to be above the angels. His Name shows he is the LORD; the throne shows he is God.

Two great contrasts occur in the opening sentence. First as revelation, God’s speaking in Christ is superior to and better than all other occasions and persons of revelation, such as prophets and angels (see 2:2). Second, Christ is shown to have a higher rank than angels. The Hebrews sermon begins with giving strong reason for its readers to pay attention to Christ.

Two themes are introduced that will be emphasized in the epistle: 1.) Seated at the right hand shows he is the exalted Son. 2.) Since he made purification for sins he is the priest. The themes are related, for he will later be shown to be the priest who made a sacrifice on earth, but who ascended to the Father as our Priest. There the Father seated him. Hebrews begins with Jesus as the King Priest.

Hebrews 1:5-14

The rest of Hebrews 1 is devoted to clarifying the distinction between the Son and angels. In doing so it makes the deity of Christ even clearer. All seven quotations are support for the assertion in 1:4 that Christ is superior to the angels. The amount of space Hebrews gives to this and now the seven quotations to support it, show how extremely important the doctrine is in the mind of the writer. What he gives here is not needed to advance the argument in the rest of the book; it simply supports what has already been said. Further, it shows how he reasons; he derives his position from Scripture. Five quotations come from the Book of Psalms, which were used in Christian worship. Thus the writer argues from what was undoubtedly very familiar to them. [And I would argue from this that what we sing should be of very sound doctrinal quality. Whenever we sing the psalms, we can be sure we have met this standard.]

The Seven Quotations

It is essential in these quotations to pay careful attention to note who is being addressed, and then what the reply would be to a rhetorical question.

1: For to which of the angels did God ever say, "*You are my Son; today I have become your Father*"?

2: Or again, "*I will be his Father, and he will be my Son*"?

1:5 The Psalm 2:7 quotation is a declaration about the Son, yet it is rephrased here as a question whether the Father had ever said such a thing to an angel. The reply is obvious. He never said those words to any angel but to the Son alone. For the first time in Hebrews, Jesus is called "My Son." Here the Oriental mind senses the reality: to honor that Son will register well with God; to reject him will incite dreadful wrath. This is precisely the situation, as 10:28-31 makes clear.

The Psalm and Hebrews use the word "begotten." Since it does not refer to a man literally begetting a son [men beget and women bear], some translators go for the meaning that God is making a declaration that this is his Son by using 'became'. But if Jesus "*became*" the Son, many will assume that there was a time when he was not. The solution is to see how the Bible treats this verse. Acts 13:32,33 quotes Psalm 2:7 as fulfilled in the resurrection. Romans 1:4 also teaches that the act of God in raising Jesus was a kind of declaration of Jesus' true Sonship. He was the Son of God before his resurrection, as in Matthew 16:16, but that was not yet clear to all; the Resurrection made it clear. The Son who is heir to all things and who sits with his Father on the Throne, is the Son the Father identifies as such with all the rights his title entails. The strong language of "beget" implies that the Father and Son are the same essence. The moment of becoming is a matter of declaration, not the beginning of something previously not so. We must not go beyond and suppose this verse implies that there was a moment when Jesus was not the Son and then a moment when he became the Son. (If a difficult Scripture is not clear to us, we rely on clearer ones that we do understand.) An ancient king would say of the one son he designated to reign with him, "You are my son, today I have begotten you." This meant that such a son was the son chosen to reign and to be recognized as the father's equal in a way the other literally begotten sons were not. To reject Jesus as God's Son is to reject the Father (John 5:23). Psalm 2:6 says God has installed his King, and then in v.7, he decrees that the One installed is his Son, the Son who eternally proceeds from the Father.

1:5 The second quotation 1 Chronicles 17:13 also speaks of the Father-Son relationship. God promised David that he would always have a son born of his body who would reign over Israel (2 Samuel 7). The ultimate Son of David is Christ and Hebrews looks to David's Son as the unique and ultimate Son, the One anointed by God, one greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:42; see also John 7:42 & 2 Timothy 2:8). Remember no ceremony occurred and no official on earth declared Jesus the reigning Son of David. His anointing as King was done by the Father. Likewise, Jesus never entered the Most Holy Place in the Temple as one of a number of priests; rather he entered the real Holy Place – the very Presence of God. In Hebrews we are forced to move from types of Christ to Christ himself. A succession of priests has been replaced by our Great High Priest. Likewise, there was a succession of David's sons, some utterly unfit to be called such. All the other sons from David were stained by sin. Only Christ is THE Son of David. Jeremiah 21:11- 23:6 shows the line of David was corrupt; the gospel is that in that line one righteous king would come (23:5,6) and that Son of David is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11).

3: And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "*Let all God's angels worship him.*"

1:6 This quotation from Deuteronomy 32:43 is legitimately part of the Deuteronomy text according to the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The point is, if angels are to worship Christ (the Firstborn), then he is God and they are not. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 to a fallen angel (Satan) during his temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). Worship must always distinguish the Lord God from his creatures. In Revelation 19:10,11, an angel refused John's worship when John was overawed with his majesty. The angel, in very sound theology, instructed John, "Worship God!"

Firstborn does not mean the first one created or the first one born. It is the language of preeminence; the first one born in a family is "the number one son." In the law his inheritance involved a double portion (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Christ is the firstborn over creation because all things were made by him and for him (Colossians 1:15-17, a Scripture remarkably like the opening sentence of Hebrews!).

4: In speaking of the angels he says, "*He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.*"

1:7 This statement from Psalm 104:4 makes sense when we read it in its context. The theme of that psalm is the greatness of God over his creation. Creation includes the physical heavens with clouds as God's chariot. The winds are his messengers, and the flames are his servants. Earth, mountains, and waters obey his will; so do the winds who are his messengers. In the LXX in v.4 the word for winds and spirits are the same; the word for messengers is the word for angels. Angels are part of creation, servants of God in it. Hebrews asserted the Son as Creator in its opening sentence. The writer will repeat that in quotation 6 below. In the previous quotation, the angels worship Christ. Now in this last one they are servants. In 3:5,6 the servant/Son difference will be repeated.

5. But about the Son he says, "*Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.*"

1:8,9 In this quotation of Psalm 45:6,7, the Son is addressed as God. In 1:3, Christ sat at the right hand of the Majesty. In this verse he has the throne of God. Jesus is exalted as God among those companions who have the privilege to be in his presence.

1:9 This verse connects Jesus' right to rule with his character. Both throne and scepter indicate his role as King, a position not given to his companions. Only Christ is anointed King above the others. Loving righteousness and hating wickedness are characteristics of Jesus to qualify him.

Psalm 89 – Only Christ Qualifies as the Righteous Son of David: The Holy One of Israel (v.18) has a throne of righteousness and justice (vv.14-16). The human king of Israel under the Lord must have a kingdom and a rule of the same quality. If David's sons forsake God's law, God will punish their sin (vv.30-32). Many of David's sons were wicked, leading to the Babylonian captivity (Habakkuk 1:2-6; Jeremiah 22:24 – 23:6; Ezekiel 34; see notes on 1:5 above). The way God kept his covenant with David was to send Christ to be the Son of David (Luke 1:32,33). No man, including David or Solomon, qualified to rule over Israel. Their righteousness was defective, so the words of Hebrews 1:9 can apply only to Christ. By sending Christ, God can keep the covenant promise to David (1 Chronicles 17:4-14) and maintain his holiness, since there will be no sin in that Son of David requiring the sanctions of the covenant. Similarly, Christ fulfills Psalm 132:11,12.

This quotation and the one to follow mention eternity. His throne is forever, and he is forever. Later it will be emphasized in relation to his priesthood that it too is forever (7:16,17; 23-25). The other priests die and must be replaced. An eternal throne and an eternal priesthood is a powerful combination.

How does the New Testament speak of Christ as God? It is worth noting that not many New Testament passages use the word “God,” for Christ as here in 1:8. (See John 1:1; Titus 2:13; Romans 9:5.) Greater emphasis is made of his being the *Son of Man* according to Daniel 7:13, and that he is the Son with God as his Father. In both John 5:16-30 and Matthew 26:63-66, his claim of Son was directly tied to the charge that he was a blasphemer. The Jews understood clearly his words as a claim of deity. The common NT assertion of Jesus’ deity is simply that he is Lord, as in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; Romans 10:9. Following a listing of “Lord” in the NT epistles makes clear that this is the chief way his deity was expressed. When we see a number of OT texts that refer to YHVH the LORD applied to Jesus Christ in the NT, we have no doubt what the NT writers meant when they called him “Lord” (Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Peter 3:14,15). Jesus also used the “I Am” Name of God for himself in John 8:58.

6: He also says, *“In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.”¹¹ They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment.¹² You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”*

1:10-12 (Psalm 102:25-27) Hebrews has already asserted Christ’s role as Creator above. Why yet another one? Christ is the One who laid the foundations of the earth. What is the Creator called in this Psalm? Psalm 102 is not quoted exactly here. In v.25, Hebrews adds the word “Lord!” Psalm 102:25 says, *“In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth ...”* Why insert the Name Lord? Note it is not the title “God” but the *Name* “LORD.” The word “God” is not God’s Name! The answer is that the “you” addressed in v.25 is the LORD, according to Psalm 102:18. Hebrews simply takes the Name from one verse and inserts it deliberately and properly into the quotation, an action justified by the context of the Psalm. In this way, the Name of YHVH has been applied to the Son. No Jew back then would miss the significance of that. As Hebrews progresses, the writer’s preference for calling Jesus “the Son,” will resume, but he will call him “Lord” again, as in 2:3; 7:14 & 13:20.

7: To which of the angels did God ever say, *“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”* ?

1:13 (Psalm 110:1) In our literature we are not familiar with this little literary device, called an *inclusio*, which writers with a Hebrew mind often employed. The writer would show what a section is, by the inclusio, i.e., by repeating some key phrase at the beginning and the end. Here it is: “to which of the angels” in v.5 is repeated in v.13. That shows that the seven quotations were intended to stand together as support of the claim in v.4 that Christ has inherited a name superior to the angels.

No angel sits at the Father’s right hand, only the Son. Later we will see why Jesus deserves such an honor when the aspect of his finished work is added to who he is as the Son. The Son eternally sat at the Father’s right hand; yet his right to such honor is enhanced as a result of his obedient work in human history as the Priest who did the will of his Father (10:5-10). He deserves the personal sit-here-beside-Me acclamation, and the reward that his enemies should become his footstool. Psalm 110 makes clear that this language is only for the One who is David’s Lord and thus David’s God. There was no one in Jerusalem King David called “Lord!”

That Hebrews would use this much quotation reveals the high priority the doctrine has in the writer’s mind; it shows his theological method, and it is a clue that a danger he was addressing among his readers was error concerning angels. Such error, if believed, would undermine the true place of Christ. That makes the writer of Hebrews draw his sword and battle vigorously.

1:14: Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

The seven supporting quotations have ended. The goal of Hebrews 1:5-14 is not to belittle angels. They are part of a creation that glorifies God. They are his servants, 1:7; many of them God elected to eternal life (1 Timothy 5:21). His holy angels stand in his presence, humbled that they should be allowed a right no one has, except those to whom God has given it. (See Luke 1:19 and Isaiah 6.) They do his will, unlike us, with immediate and absolute obedience, as in Ezekiel chapters 1-3. But they also serve us (Matthew 18:10). Creatures higher than us (2:7) are commanded to stoop to our service. Often God has the strong serving the weak.

A Possible Scenario of the Original Rebellion: Since God makes known his plans to his “servants the prophets” (Jeremiah 29:19 & Amos 3:7), he may have revealed his plans to his servants the angels (1:7). This does include God assigning them to be servants of us lower creatures as heirs of salvation, a grace not shown to angels. When they learned this assignment is conjecture except that 1:14 refers to us as future heirs. All angels have fellow angels who are now eternally damned and not forgiven. At one time all were sinless spirits. All rebellious angels are condemned with no hope! Yet God would surprise his angels with forgiveness for man. He would seek us out (Luke 19:10) and wait patiently for us with longsuffering. To angels who suffered immediate justice, this must have been an unbelievable discovery. The grace of God has always stirred a negative reaction in those who disagree with God’s sovereign decisions! This may have been the issue that caused some angels to rebel, especially the one anointed as the guardian cherub (Ezekiel 28:14). If so, certain angels declined to serve. Pride is a horrible thing – the devil’s downfall (1 Timothy 3:6). Some angels opted out of the service of God; they preferred a different leader, and they got the devil. One third is a staggering proportion of angels to be lost (Revelation 12:1-9).

There is another exalted Person God called upon to serve redeemed sinners, and that was the Son! God prepared a body for him so that he could offer it for our salvation (10:5-10). The Son would suffer greatly as a man, with strong crying and tears (5:7-10). He would be despised and rejected and even go to the cross, but for the joy ahead he would endure it all (12:2,3). And when his work was done the Father would give to him the highest honor, “Sit here at my right hand,” words never spoken to any angel. Satan wanted that throne. He had no right to it, but the one who did have the right emptied himself and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-11). The angel who coveted God’s place has his own place prepared for him (Matthew 25:41). The One who deserves to be seated at the Father’s side, already has it as his throne forever (1:8). His enemies will be his footstool.

Hebrews 2:1-4

The First Warning This is the first of six warnings. Some warnings will focus on conduct; this one is addressed to the mind. The cognitive side of the Christian life is a very important emphasis in Hebrews. We act according to what we think. A later appeal will urge the readers to consider Christ, (3:1). The command to love the Lord our God includes the mind in Mark 12:28-31. This warning is to ‘pay attention’. To ignore the message of Christ is to bring God’s judgment, from which there can be no escape. If we are convinced, we will listen. They had already received numerous reasons to convince their minds. In chapter 1 they had the OT statements God had spoken of the Son. Chapter 2 reminds them of the message spoken by Christ himself and confirmed by those who had heard him in the beginning. That witness to Christ was corroborated by the unusual activity of the Holy Spirit – miraculous things men can observe. God had done enough to convince; the issue then, was for them to pay serious attention lest they drift away.

2:1,2 Paying attention to what was heard is the proper response to God and his revelation. The readers of Hebrews had had exposure to the message of Christ. The danger was that they would drift away by ignoring it. Hebrews does not picture the message as the thing drifting, but people drifting from the message. The analogy of a boat getting off course illustrates imperceptible change. One may not notice quiet drifting, yet it can lead to disaster.

What had they *already heard*? They had heard “the message spoken”. God has spoken in his Son (1:2), and that was a superior revelation to all that had preceded. Since Christ is greater than angels, greater attention ought to go to him and his message. In chapter 1 they had quotations of Scripture familiar to them. God was making truth about Christ clear. More than mere hearing is needed: they must pay attention. Later the writer will emphasize that they must believe (3:19 – 4:2). Faith is preceded by hearing (Romans 10:17).

Two major revelations from God are compared. God had used angels in some way when he communicated his law (Deuteronomy 33:2-5; Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19). Violating that law spoken by angels brought God’s punishment. When those angels spoke, that was one of God’s “various ways” of speaking in the past, (1:1). Now he has spoken by a greater means (His Son) of a greater message (salvation). What will happen to those who

ignore the Son-message? Christ as the Word (John 1:1) is himself the message. Further, the Scriptures quoted in chapter 1 were God speaking of him. Others (v.3) had heard Christ directly and had relayed that message. To all this, God added supernatural support (v.4). The problem cannot be whether the message had been given; the question is whether God's communication was being ignored.

The Importance of Doctrine: That such a warning comes after the highly doctrinal material of Hebrews 1, is an example of exhortation based on teaching. In this case the point is that we must have a clear understanding of who Christ is. If we do not, we will lack good reason to maintain a grip on whatever his ministry is. A failure to grasp that he is The Son would make it easier to slip back to ways of a closed approach to God (7:19) under priests God has replaced (7:12) in an old covenant that did not change hearts (8:6-13), in sacrifices that cannot take away sin (10:4), by rejecting the only priestly intervention that can save (7:23-25). The first antidote against this is to believe in Christ as God the Son. To be without Christ, because he has been rejected in favor of priests who were merely forerunners of the real thing, is to face God without a saving sacrifice! It is vital that we have the doctrine of who Christ is and how salvation comes only through him. The later warning of Hebrews 10:26 begins by speaking of "the knowledge of the truth." Ignorance of Christ is the garden in which false doctrine and immorality grow. Faith must have something to believe; when ignorant of Christian doctrine, faith lacks knowledge of what and whom to trust.

2:3 In the case of the various ways of speaking (1:1), no one escaped if he refused attention to God's word. (See Jeremiah 7:21-29; Isaiah 34:1,2; 48:18,19). Salvation is a greater message than the law, so rejecting the greater message brings greater punishment. Two passages in Hebrews compare rejecting and refusing the old message of the law with rejecting the Lord Jesus. In both of these passages, Hebrews warns of greater punishment (10:28,29 & 12:25).

This paragraph has been comparing God's former and his recent speaking. Now it refers simply to the final revelation as "salvation." The Bible knows only two prospects for man: punishment or salvation. To ignore Christ is to lose all the benefit that comes only in him and is available nowhere else. Hebrews reviews how much has come to them to gain their attention. Salvation was first announced by the Lord. (This does not mean there was no previous announcement of salvation. The Old Testament held out sufficient truth for the saving faith of God's people.) The action of God in these last days is a message of salvation first announced by the Lord Jesus.

The Lord himself declaring the message of salvation: "*This salvation was first announced by the Lord.*" In the four Gospels, the Lord Jesus repeatedly promised in detail multiple benefits of salvation, such as eternal life in himself (John 6:35), the resurrection of the body (John 11:25,26), fellowship with God (John 14:21-23), treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20), and many more.

He further laid out the foundation of these benefits in the event of his death and resurrection. In some places he declared the gospel as his death and resurrection (John 2:18-22; Matthew 16:21; 17:9,12; 20:18,19; Luke 12:50; John 18:31,32).

He included a number of declarations to indicate the saving purpose of his death. He said he would give his life as a ransom (Mark 10:45); that the prophesies of Isaiah 52,53 were written about him and were being fulfilled in him (Luke 22:37; cf. Matthew 26:56). He declared that his blood was poured out for his disciples (Luke 22:20), for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28), and that eternal life comes from eating his flesh and drinking his blood, since he would give himself for the life of the world, (John 6:51-59). He would lay down his life for his sheep (John 10:14-18) and drink the cup the Father had given him (John 18:11). By being lifted up on the cross, he said he would draw all men to himself (John 12:32). All these things are from the lips of Jesus himself before apostolic preaching of the cross even began.

Example of "those who heard him" i.e., others who proclaimed the same salvation, are given in the Book of Acts. They were not giving a new message; the gospel of Christ was confirmed as the genuine message by those who heard him. It was not a story being changed by repetition from one person to another. The careful research to give an accurate record of Christ and his message is seen in the introduction to Luke, (Luke 1:1-4). Thus the readers of Hebrews had received reliable reports, ones confirmed by those who personally heard the Lord.

Did the Apostle Paul write Hebrews? The fact that the writer in v.3 apparently places himself as one who had received the news from others, rather than directly from Christ (Galatians 1:11,12), makes many scholars conclude that Paul did not write Hebrews. I personally am not fully convinced of that conclusion, since writers sometimes speak of themselves as if in the situation of their hearers. The style of arguing, and the emphasis on similar texts makes one wonder if this was not the hand of Paul. To this we must add the way of ending his letter including the personal reference to Paul's associate Timothy in 13:22-25. Most scholars committed to Hebrews as God's Word do not agree with this suggestion. They have a strong argument in that the early church did not ascribe this epistle to the same author. There has been no consensus. My purpose is to deal with the message of Hebrews, rather than related things from outside the text.

2:4 In these last days God has spoken in his Son, the big event of all history. Any action that fails to have its intended result is not an act of God. For our salvation, there must be the Priest who will make purification for sin (1:3). Then there must be an awareness that God has indeed acted. In the past, at certain critical moments of history, such as the Exodus from Egypt, the Lord showed by visible signs as well as words that he was at work. Miracles are not reported in Scripture as uniform occurrences. The salvation first announced by Christ and repeated by those who heard him was such a moment of time. In support of this, God "testified" aggressively in addition to words by signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Spirit. That God did this must have been common knowledge to the readers. The supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit adds greatly to the appeal to pay attention. It is as if he said to them, "You all know this, so pay attention." This is the opposite of telling people the news for the first time. Hebrews is written to people who had confessed Christ, but were in danger of drifting from their earlier commitment.

Signs, Wonders, Miracles & Gifts of the Spirit: Miracles and signs are not presented in v.4 as the central event. Except for the Resurrection, which is much more than a sign, miracles are not the central thing. Miracles pointed to and supported the message of salvation. A road sign with an arrow "to Paris" makes no pretense that the sign is itself the real thing; it is not Paris but points to it. It is the Word of God, the message itself, that continues in every generation until Christ returns, whether supported by other observable activity or not. When Hebrews was written, this reference to signs and wonders in 2:4 was referring to something in the past. This text is not saying signs and wonders are something God does whenever his message is proclaimed. Some have this backwards – they emphasize miracles and slight the message. Support for such a suggestion is not in this paragraph.

Nor does this paragraph make any statement to confine God's miraculous activity to the past. The sovereign choice of God to act "according to his will" is God's. We, however, are to submit to his commanded means of service and evangelism, the proclamation of the Word. Those who think God has given us weak weapons need to believe what God has said about his power, his Word, his Spirit and his determination to accomplish his will as he wishes. Mighty Babylon was a broken hammer (Jeremiah 50:23), while the Word of the Lord in the mouth of his weak servant Jeremiah, was God's real hammer to break the rock into pieces (Jeremiah 23:29). God worked through his Word; Jeremiah had supernatural revelation of the Word, but beyond that performed no miracles.

With Daniel, who lived at the same time as Jeremiah, it was quite different. The Lord was determined in Daniel's setting to show his control in the context of Gentile power. He added signs and wonders to the ministry of Daniel. The Lord worked through the powerful preaching of John the Baptist, though John performed no miracles (John 10:41). John's ministry shook the nation and brought fear into the heart of Herod. In our Lord's ministry, God worked one miracle after another, not one of which by itself moved one sinner to repent unless he had been born from above by the Spirit! (John 3:3; Matthew 11:20-24). The power of the Word and miracles continued in the ministry of the apostles. Thereby God showed that the same Jesus his enemies thought they were rid of was continuing to work in his apostles. So Jesus' activity was multiplied! As the Book of Acts proceeds, it is the Word that prevails as the regular tool of evangelism. All authority in heaven and on earth is Christ's and he is with his servants in their ministry, he will never fail in his assigned task to save and thus not lose even one of those the Father has given to him (John 6:39). How God works is his prerogative. How we work is settled for us by his instruction to us.

Anyone who has received the level of exposure to the message of salvation, referred to in 2:1-4, and then by careless neglect allows himself to wander away from it, is in a very serious situation. This kind of warning is part of the message and motive of Hebrews. Later warnings will only intensify the issue. Let us pay attention lest we drift from the only Savior.

Hebrews 2:5-9

As happens often in Hebrews, there is a change from exhortation to exposition. In preaching his sermon, the writer returns again to teaching. He will draw his teaching from one Scripture after another – in this section from Psalms and Isaiah. This is an example in the Bible of good preaching! It is from God's Word.

In chapter 1, the position of the Son above the angels is stressed. In chapter 2, angels are again in view, but this time in contrast to man. In the coming age, will the world be the realm of angels or man? It will be man's world, but man is under the curse of God for his sin and has lost his exalted position. It can be restored to him only through Christ. In order to restore man to his former glory, the Lord Jesus must become one of us. He must undergo the curse of death on sin to bring man honor and glory again.

When men do not understand the ways and grace of God, they cannot imagine that the great "Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8) from heaven would submit to humiliation. No one else would ever do such a thing. The cross is "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Hebrews 2 addresses this objection. It shows the purpose of our Lord's humanity and death. As God he could not die, but as man he could and did. God cannot forgive unless his justice has been satisfied. In Christ it was. The wages of sin is always death; either he would pay the penalty for us or we must pay it ourselves. "*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*" (9:22).

Just as a parent will change the dirty diaper of his or her baby, so Jesus will take on the indignity of the cross for his family. He would take on the testing and trial of life, the sacrifice of death, and the task of restoring lost glory to the sinners he saves. The Father will reward his obedience. In the end, he will lead us in praising the Father he worships. Thus the cross is not an embarrassment to us. It is the opposite, for the gospel reveals the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). None of this glorious good news is possible apart from the humanity and humiliation of Jesus. Hebrews 2 teaches that to bring his family to glory, *it was fitting that God ... should make the Author of their salvation perfect through suffering* (v.10). His undeserved shame has brought glory to us who deserve only shame, and has given glory to many that was deserved only by One Man, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ was glorified in his humiliation and shame (12:5; John 12:23,24). It is our encouragement and not an obstacle to our faith, because by his suffering our High Priest has become the source of eternal salvation (5:7-9).

2:5 Angels and the future world The writer of Hebrews did not need to teach that a future day was coming when everything will be set right in God's world. That truth was the common understanding of all reading Hebrews. But the distorted view of the place of angels is again evident. (See below Appendix A:

A Possible Explanation of the Error Hebrews was Written to Correct.) The world cannot be subjected to angels because it has already been subjected to Christ who is enthroned at the Father's right hand (1:13). God never said to any angel, "*Sit at my right hand ...*" The warning of 2:1-4 was a digression. Chapter 1 corrected error concerning angels, and this now continues in chapter 2.

The age to come is an important theme in Hebrews. See 6:5 and also 12:28 for "*we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.*" (Note that 12:28 indicates that it is redeemed mankind – not angels – receiving that kingdom.) Then there is *the city to come* in 13:14. It is dangerous to be satisfied with this present evil world (Galatians 1:4) or to love it (1 John 2:15-17). In Hebrews, faith is shown by looking for what was to come, *a city whose builder and maker is God* (11:10). They were longing for a better country (11:16), and because of this preference for a world in fellowship with God, he is not ashamed to be called their God.

2:6 “*Someone has testified*” Though Psalm 8 was written by David, Hebrews does not identify the human author. The writer’s emphasis is that what it says is the Word of God.

2:6-8 The quotation of Psalm 8 Like the false notion mentioned in v.5, ideas spread. People imagine what the future world will be like. The Bible does not satisfy curiosity. Instead it teaches what we need, and gives all that God has decided to reveal and no more.¹ Understanding comes from God’s Word, not our conjecture.

Hebrews 2:5-9 gives one perspective on the future we should not miss: in some ways the future will be like God’s original creation – one he pronounced “very good” (Genesis 1:31). In some ways it is different. Adam and Eve were to have children, but in the future world we will not marry. (In that respect we will be like the angels Matthew 22:30). Psalm 8 shows God’s design to have man reign over the physical creation, not angels. If someone reasons that angels are higher than us and therefore they must have a higher position in the future world, that argument runs contrary to what God had established in the original creation. God had glory and honor for man. This is what he intends to restore through Christ. Already one man in history has been glorified, Jesus. All who are his brothers will be as well.

It may help to see what Psalm 8 does not say! It does not argue, as we might expect, that man was made lower than the angels, so his place in the physical creation is lower than angels. 1:14 has already indicated that angels serve beings lower than themselves. Psalm 8 teaches that man is lower than angels, yet God decided that everything would be under man’s feet. 2:8 adds that God did not omit anything in his decision. The past world was and the future world will be subject to man. Psalms 8 and 144:3 are amazed that God has ordained glory and honor for man. What was God’s purpose for us continues to be.

Two expressions in Psalm 8 make us wonder if an allusion to Christ is intended.

- 1). “*son of man*” This the Lord often used as a title for himself. (Ezekiel also uses it for himself.) It is used in a dramatic way of Christ in Daniel 7:13. Except for Psalm 80:17, all other uses of it in the OT refer to men who are only men. Jesus as the Son of David is the ultimate “Son of Man” in Psalm 80:17.
- 2). “*under his feet*” The previous OT text quoted, Psalm 110:1, asserts that Jesus’ enemies will be under Christ’s feet as his footstool. Then the next quotation speaks of everything under man’s feet. It then points out that not all is presently under man’s feet, but since Jesus is crowned with glory and honor, all things are under his feet. This sequence of thought is deliberate:
 - a. man’s original position of glory, vv.7,8
 - b. man’s place lost, v.8
 - c. Christ lower than the angels, v.9
 - d. Christ’s exaltation to glory, v.9
 - e. Christ bringing sons to honor and glory again, v.10.

Psalm 8 is not an explicit prediction of Christ, but only through him will what is written here ever be fulfilled. If man had not sinned, he could have retained his glory without the intervention of a mediator. With no Savior, the psalm would only show us what we have lost and can never regain.

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We find allusions to Psalm 8 in other Scriptures. Ephesians 1:19-23 speaks of “*all things under his feet*” (i.e., Christ’s feet) coupled with the words of Psalm 110:1 “*seated him at his right hand*”. This reveals the thinking of NT writers that Psalm 8 has its fulfillment in Christ. See also 1 Corinthians 15:25-27.

<sup>1</sup> When we say we believe in *verbal inspiration*, we mean that each word, and even each letter (Matthew 5:17,18), in the original languages is correct and is what God decided to give us. This he has done through holy men, enabled by the Holy Spirit to write accurately. When we say *plenary inspiration*, we mean not just that the words used are accurate and without error, but that what God has chosen to tell us is complete. He may say much of one thing and little of another. He has spoken little of Melchizedek and much about Moses. He said little about the creation of the stars and very much about how sacrifices were to be offered. He has denied us all knowledge of the calendar time Christ will return and the names of almost all of his angels. We must bow our minds to believe his truth and to accept his right to reveal or withhold from us according to his will.

**Everything** under man's feet in Psalm 8 does not conflict with Christ being appointed heir of **all things** (1:2). It has always been God's intention to unite elect humans to Christ with redeemed men becoming co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:16,17).

**2:8 Not everything is subject to man.** Man has sinned so we experience death, the opposite of glory and honor (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). We do not see everything subject to man. The reality of life matches the explanation of Scripture. Man may only dream of improving the world, but the Bible tells why it is as it is; what it will be, and how.

God made man to have glory and honor. When man lost it, it certainly appeared that the purpose of God for man had been frustrated by Satan. When the angels sinned, only some joined in that rebellion. When man sinned, the entire human race came under Satan's power. If it stayed that way, God would be the loser. He would never have any man as he meant for man to be.

**2:9** Man cannot defeat death. He may attempt it, but he only runs into a divine decision that sin brings death. He cannot regain glory. When man glories in himself, he only displays his corruption even more and grows farther from the first man who humbly walked with God. The gospel is centered in a different man, one from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:47-49). "*But we see Jesus...*" – the first use of the Name Jesus in Hebrews. He was here in human flesh. He could be seen and touched (1 John 1:1).

**2:9** Was Christ made a *little* lower than the angels, or was he for *a little while* made lower than the angels? Both are possible translations. I think it is "for a little while." The real sensitivity is how the Son exalted far above angels (1:4-14) could ever be lower. In becoming man, he was made lower; that is clear. But Hebrews wants to move from the temporary nature of his brief humiliation to the rapid exaltation of Christ, already crowned with glory and honor. We should not forget that Christ was raised on the third day, not the third year.

**Two now's** Man does not have now the glory he lost, but Jesus has now the ultimate glory – he is seated at his Father's right hand. We see man in a condition of continuing humiliation, not yet with honor and glory, and we see Jesus with no humiliation at all. (A crucifix preserves the humiliation and omits the glory.) Our hope is that he will bring us into the glory of a resurrected eternal life where man and God will walk together again in the New Jerusalem.

**2:9 The Humiliation of Christ** For the Lord of Glory to enter human life is a great step down. To live as men do, breathing because dependent on air, eating because dependent on food, etc., is so very different from the transcendent life of God. He needs nothing. But for him to enter the experience of sinful man and enter a cursed world, to live in poverty, to face temptation and trials – this is humiliation. He entered a condition he himself imposed on man for sin, and then endured its suffering himself. That is a great wonder, but the height of Jesus' humiliation was death. (Philippians 2:8 makes the point that he did not just die; he was crucified!) Hebrews will not mention the shame of the cross until chapter 12. Scripture teaches that the reward for Jesus' obedience was resurrection life, glory and splendor. The suffering was assigned to him and he took it with purpose. The high and holy Lord God would not only enter a cursed human life of suffering, he would die for sin he never committed. The One who deserved life died and as a result was given his high, seated position with the gratitude of the Father, and the loving worship of his people. Those who do not have a high esteem for Jesus' humiliation do not know the love and grace of God, nor how unyielding is his holy justice. If it were not necessary for our salvation, it would be a horror that the Just One should die unjustly. But 2:9 indicates that his death for others was the result of God's grace. It was not to feed a blood-thirst in God, as evil men say. He tasted (i.e. experienced) death for man. The Godward aspect of his death comes later in chapter 2; in v.9 we learn that the beneficiaries are humans.

**2:9** Since Hebrews deliberately employs even minute expressions from the OT, we should note that the Greek words for *glory and splendor* were used to describe the clothing of priests (Exodus 28:2,40). In that culture, to assume the clothing was to take the position. Jesus too, has glory and splendor, which signals that he became a Priest. This fits with the mention of his death, since it is the priestly offering he made. Now in glory, he is crowned with glory and honor.

**2:9 Death for everyone** We always need a context to discern who is referred to when it says “everyone” or “all.” In the immediate context following v.9, it is sons that Jesus is bringing to glory, and he is the Author of their salvation. When he makes men holy in v.11, we know Jesus does not make all men holy. 9:15 says Jesus died as a ransom to set free those who are called. This indicates that his ransom had a specific goal, the redemption of those called. It is those called who will be saved (Romans 8:28-30).

Sometimes the “all” in one verse can have two different groups of people in mind. For example, “*For as in Adam all* [i.e., the entire race who are in Adam] die, *so in Christ all* [i.e., the full number of those who are in Christ] will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

## Appendix 2A

### A Possible Explanation of the Error Hebrews was Written to Correct

One Jewish sect had separated itself from much of the Jewish community. Its members were waiting for God to vindicate them as the true covenant-keeping people of God. They avoided living in Jerusalem because the religious leadership there was corrupt, and it was. They modeled their lives on the order of the children of Israel in the wilderness under Moses and Aaron. They were waiting to return to the city of God in which there would be proper religious practice and devotion.

They looked for the legitimate Zadokite priesthood, since King Herod had placed priests in office contrary to the law of God. Ezekiel 48:10,11 predicted a sacred portion of land reserved for them, containing the sanctuary of the Lord. “*This will be for the consecrated priests, the Zadokites, who were faithful in serving me and did not go astray as the Levites did when the Israelites went astray.*”

Their hope was that there would be two Messianic figures, not one. One would be a kingly figure, the other a priest, with the priest being the greater of the two. Yet both of these human Messiahs would be subordinate to Michael the archangel (mentioned in Daniel 10:13,21 & 12:1). Thus the world to come (2:5) would be subject to an angel! They also expected another prophet to appear in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:18. So their hope for the future anticipated three persons: a king, a priest and a prophet. And all would serve under an angel.

Though these ideas were concentrated in a community that had withdrawn from Jerusalem, the views they held were current, not limited to one location. Probably some Jewish believers professing Christ were influenced by and attracted to the views of this group. If they adopted such views, they could benefit in certain ways: 1) they would encounter less persecution, because members of this sect were considered real Israelites by other Jews; 2) this sect was markedly different from Christians who admitted Gentiles as full members without circumcision, and 3) the Christians viewed the entire priestly system of Israel obsolete, never to be restored. To many Jews, Christians would appear to be against the Old Testament and the heritage of Israel.

This situation explains why Hebrews pays so much attention to angels, and why 2:5 directly contradicts the notion that the future world would be ruled by an angel. Hebrews presents Christ as the ultimate Word of God, since God has spoken in his Son. There will be no other prophet to succeed him. Hebrews spends much effort to present Christ as a king priest, a king as the Son of David, and like Melchizedek, a king who is also a priest. For such a doctrine, the writer of Hebrews needed only to show that this was what the Jewish Scriptures taught. In each of his three offices (prophet/priest/king) Jesus is a man, not an angel.

Further, if this hypothesis is correct, it shows why chapter 3 would refer to the unbelief of Israel, especially in the wilderness, and why attention is given to contrast Jesus with Moses (3:1-6) and the priesthood of Aaron (5:1-4 & chapters 7,9,10). This sect of Jews wanted a reformation of Jewish religious life without Christ. They wanted a continuance of obsolete offerings, ineffective to remove sin. Rather than a continuation of animal sacrifices, the gospel is that Christ as our Great High Priest came to make the final and effective offering. His offering has power to cleanse the conscience; this offering would be made once only, and has been made by Jesus. That offering of Christ and by Christ would make the ones who believe in him perfect (i.e. accepted) in the sight of God. Any other view than this is a rejection of the One God sent.

## Hebrews 2:10 – 18

This section dwells heavily on the humanity of Christ. To be the priest with ability to do all that is necessary for our salvation the Mediator must be God – who else could bear the load of sin and endure fully in time the eternal punishment sin deserves? Only the Infinite Eternal God could bear this burden. But priests must represent people before God as one of them, in order to be their representative. **Thus the Mediator must be man.** Since sin's reward is death, our Mediator must die. God cannot die! But, to our great surprise, God could take on a nature he did not have; he could become man. Jesus Christ is one Person with two natures, divine and human. With the Incarnation of Christ, we now have a situation in which a Person who is fully God can die since he is also human. He is the Man from heaven, (1 Corinthians 15:47-49).

Christ is presented as a Deliverer who steps into the fight and delivers his people from a powerful enemy by destroying the devil. Christ is also presented here as a Priest. This role for Jesus is the major emphasis of the book. But in both cases, as the Fighter who defeats the devil, and also as our high priest, he must die for his people to accomplish his saving purpose. As both hero and priest he represents and takes the place of his people. To do this he had to become a man and specifically one of the covenant people, so he took on the seed of Abraham. The language to describe his death is not vague; this death is a propitiation. In both roles – Destroyer of Satan and Priest of his people – Jesus the Savior acts alone, he acts as an individual for us. He does for us, his people, what we cannot do for ourselves. He delivers us from our slavery (to the devil) and from our sin by his sacrifice. In all of this, there is great glory for Christ and glory brought to his children; however, in his case and ours, the glory is preceded by suffering.

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**2:5-9** The previous passage spoke of man's rule over creation and his loss of glory, but Jesus brings many sons to their former glory. He suffered for them and has been crowned with glory and honor ahead of them. (See in the notes of chapter 9, Appendix 9: For Whom Did Christ Die?)

**2:10** The question is about what is appropriate to accomplish this. God had threatened death for sin; man disobeyed, so death is appropriate for man. Since this is so, it is also fitting that the Savior of man, in taking the sinner's place, should die for them. He cannot be the perfect Author of salvation who represents them fully if the Father's assignment to him avoids the suffering brought on them by sin.

**Substitution** This doctrine cannot be denied without destroying the gospel. It was fitting that God should make the Substitute suffer (2:9). Christ has identified with us in lost glory in his humiliation. Bringing sons to glory was not done by avoiding suffering but by enduring it with no half measures. Jesus did not merely notice what sin did to others; he experienced what their sin brought on him.

To be a perfect Savior required that Jesus become human. This involved more than assuming our biology; he took on our flesh and blood (2:14); he also suffered temptation, (2:18). As the Lord, he did not need to be made perfect in holiness, but as a man, God made him perfect in the comprehensive experience of human life, learning obedience by what he suffered (5:8). God cannot be tempted (James 1:13), but the Holy Spirit led Jesus as a man into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Mark 1:12). God was perfecting him into the obedient Man who could represent us. In his tested righteousness, he qualified as the ultimate Priest to represent his people. Hebrews 2 emphasizes the reality of his temptation and suffering; later Hebrews will insist that in temptation, Jesus did not sin (4:15).

**2:10** “*... For whom and through whom everything exists*” Like Romans 11:36, these words claim sovereign glory for God. Man was made for God's glory; when he sinned he gave occasion for the grace of God to be glorified as the Lord forgave the enemies (Romans 5:10; Ephesians 1:6,12; 3:10,11) he called (9:15). God's glory is complete when he restores man in the world to come (2:5). Because of Christ, Satan cannot rob God of his beautiful creation. God's glory shows when he responds to sin, therefore in his justice multitudes have gone to hell without forgiveness. For his children, the Author of salvation must be made perfect through a life of suffering related to human sin. Had there been no sin by man, there would be no suffering by Christ. The suffering of Christ was fitting, since he came to represent sons under God's curse for sin.

**The Sovereign Freedom of God** “*for whom and through whom everything exists*” In bringing sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom all things exist, should perfect Jesus through suffering. In passing over those he never took in as sons, it was also fitting that God for whom all things exist, should not provide for them the salvation that comes through Christ. God is glorified in both salvation and judgment. This should humble us before God’s majesty and send a chill into us that sinners he has saved had no claim on his grace. Apart from his love for his chosen ones, he could have saved others and left us to die in our sins.

2:11 Salvation is expressed in terms of its ultimate goal: holiness. The identification of Christ with man is stated from two angles: he shares humanity and he produces holiness. Jesus and his family have human life in common. The Greek does not say we are one “family”, but some word is needed here. It means we are of *one* stock or source. The text does use the word “one”.

We are also very different. He is the Man who sanctifies; we are the ones being made holy. Just as we have not yet come to glory (2:10), we have not come to complete holiness, yet it is never absent (12:14) in his children. As family, he calls us “brothers”. Jesus can call us brothers and himself as our God without shame (11:16 and Luke 9:26) because he produces holiness in us (12:10,11).

**Can a Christian Live in Sin?** “*those who are made holy*” When Christ makes men holy, it does not mean he makes holy those who are not his. It does mean he makes holy each and every person who is his. There is no room for the notion of a “carnal Christian,” i.e., a person who is supposedly saved but lives in sin without sanctification. If a person is in Christ, the power of sin in his life has been broken (Romans 6:22); he is led by the Spirit (Romans 8:9-11), and has become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17); he has been perfected in one sense (10:14) and is being made holy in another (10:14; see notes related to Hebrews 10). He does not live in sin (1 John 3:6), but has been born of God (Ephesians 2:1; 1 John 3:9) and loves his neighbor (1 John 3:14). The question is not whether a Christian can sin, but can he sin as he once did when not in Christ? For his sin the believer has godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:8-11). In Hebrews 2:11, Christians are described as those who are being made holy. If such a description has no relation to some person, that person is not a believer in Christ, because his people are “those who are made holy”. *No one who continues to sin, has either seen him or known him!* (1 John 3:6). By describing Christ as the One who makes God’s people holy, it implies his deity, since the Lord says “*I, the LORD, sanctify you*” (Exodus 31:13; Leviticus 20:7,8).

Jesus calls us *brothers*; there is no example in Scripture of us calling him “Brother”. When he speaks this way of us, he refers to our humanity. We must not speak of Christ, even though he became one of us, as if he were our peer. He is always our Lord.

Translators differ on “the *author* of their salvation”. The word is unusual in the NT, found only in Acts 3:15 (Author of life), Acts 5:31 (Prince), Hebrews 2:10 & 12:2. In 12:2 it may have the idea of Founder or the One who begins, as in Acts 3:15. The remainder of Hebrews 2 (vv.14,15,16) carries the idea of a champion/deliverer who comes to rescue those captive to a powerful enemy. Hebrews’ chief theme is of Christ as a priest, but chapter 2 shows that that is not the only way this book presents him.

## 2:12,13 The Three Quotations:

1. The first (Psalm 22) has Christ leading his brothers in worship as one standing among them. He calls them “brothers,” which fits the theme of the 2:5-18 of a shared humanity. This choice of Psalm 22 is resurrection speech with Christ vindicated in glory after his suffering and death. His prayer “My God, My God Why have you forsaken me, why are you so far from helping me?” has the Father’s answer in v.22 with Christ alive and leading his brothers in worship. It was fitting that Christ, who was obedient in suffering, should have life for himself and his brothers.
2. From Isaiah 8:17 Jesus again speaks as one of us. As a man he too trusts the Lord. The humanity of Christ is not partial; it is so complete that the way men should worship and obey God is the way he did. The readers of Hebrews have Christ as a model in his life of trust in adversity (12:3-13; 1 Peter 2: 21). His sequence of suffering and glory is common to all (1 Peter 1:11).

3. From Isaiah 8:18 – Isaiah was caring for his children in a time of apostasy, a situation much like those receiving this letter. Isaiah was part of a small remnant in dark days. This is language the Holy Spirit uses of Christ caring for his persecuted family.

**2:14,15** The children Christ will help, are flesh and blood. He too shared in our humanity. The past tense refers to the event when the Son became a man. The “so that” is important. The Lord Jesus did not share our humanity so that he could just be one of us. Some make the incarnation itself to be all that is needed for man’s salvation. 2:14 shows that he shared our humanity so that he might die as a man. Our salvation depends on what Christ did in our humanity. God cannot die; only by becoming a man is God able as a Human Person to die. Even then though Jesus is one Person and not two, it was only in his human nature that he died.

The purpose of Jesus’ death was to destroy the devil as promised in Genesis 3:15. That word was not given as a promise to man, though I think the man was there to hear it. That word was to the devil, a declaration that Satan would not win, and his success in capturing man by sin will not prevail. The oldest gospel promise in the Bible is about the destruction of the devil.

**The Destruction of Satan** Satan wanted Jesus dead. He entered into Judas, (John 13:27) but he had no hold on Christ (John 14:30). The Son would do the will of his Father by drinking the cup of wrath (Isaiah 51:22, Luke 22:41,42). He would lay down his life and take it up again (John 10:17,18); the devil did not take it from him. Christ would go to the cross as it was determined by God (Luke 22:22; Acts 4:28), not as decided by Satan. The Lord used the devil and others to accomplish his purpose. The devil wounded Jesus’ heel (Genesis 3:15) but death could not hold the Son of God (Acts 2:24). Jesus rose victorious over all that Satan could do to him. Neither Satan nor Death can hold any person Christ sets free. Jesus has assured us that because he lives, we too will live (John 14:19).

It is not Satan but Christ who has the keys (i.e., with the power and authority to use them) of death and hell (Revelation 1:17,18). Satan has the power of death and the fear that goes with it only by turning us from the Lord in whom is life. Satan gives nothing; he only destroys. He is a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). When man is in sin and believes Satan’s word; he is in bondage to a terrible master, the evil prince ruling this world (John 14:30; Ephesians 2:1,2; 1 John 5:19). The Lord Jesus is the Author of Life (Acts 3:15). Anyone coming under his power has been set free from the devil by believing the gospel (2 Timothy 1:8-10). The eventual imprisonment of Satan is in the lake of fire forever (Revelation 20:10). At the cross, Christ crushed Satan’s head (Genesis 3:15). He overpowered “the strong man” (Luke 11:21,22) and destroyed him by his own death! The Lord went to war with the oppressor (Isaiah 49:24-26). For all the devil’s fury, he cannot hold one soul from Christ, cannot fulfill his dream of domination of either heaven or earth. He knows already that he has lost. Daily the kingdom of Christ spreads to all nations.

**2:16** The interest in angels continues to affect this chapter. The world to come is not subject to them; it is not their world. Angels sinned and God helped not one of them. There are no forgiven angels and no humans in heaven but those who have been forgiven. They marvel at our salvation (1 Peter 1:12). Instead of saying it is man, it says *Abraham’s descendants*. This is a powerful indication that God’s salvation is not a worldwide intervention, but one God has channeled by covenant through one man, Abraham the father of all who believe (Romans 4:16-18). The promise is guaranteed to Abraham’s descendants. Christ as the Seed of Abraham, (Galatians 3:16-20) is the only door of entry into that flock, the covenant people of God (John 10:7-16). All who believe in Christ are Abraham’s children and heirs (9:15) to the promise made to him (Galatians 3:29).

**2:17,18** If Jesus is going to help (i.e., save) us, he cannot do so as an outsider. What we need is a man to go to God as our priest. A priest must come from the people he represents (5:1). To speak for us concerning our sin, our Priest must be without sin, but not immune to its impact on us. He did not commit sin but he had to suffer the results of ours. So, *he had to be made like his brothers in every way*. Simply sharing our physical life is not enough; he did more than eat and sleep as other men. In human weakness (2 Corinthians 13:4; Romans 8:3), Jesus had in his soul in the full range of temptation from the world and Satan himself. All of this was so that he might become our Priest. In that role he was faithful to God; having lived in our circumstances, he is merciful to us.

This Priest must go to face the Lord for us. Our sin is our problem. No relationship with God is possible if we have sin. On the cross as a Man, Jesus experienced completely all that our sins deserve, all that the justice of

God required, and all that the grace of God provided. His service as Priest was for us but it was a service *to God*. (See notes re 9:14, “The God-ward Aspect of the Death of Christ”.)

**Propitiation** Jesus was the Priest whose awesome task was to represent his people before the Lord God whose holy anger (or wrath) was against us. He had to provide the reason for God’s favor to be shown to sinners. Guilty man is helpless to win a favorable decision from God. The penalty of death was announced prior to the first human sin. We had no argument we could make for ourselves, and Jesus our Advocate (1 John 2:2) never denied the reality of our sin. Instead he took our guilt on himself, thus it would be necessary for him to receive sin’s penalty. He would need to die for us to bring about reconciliation with God. The removal of sin is not all there is in Jesus’ priestly work. There remains the weighty matter of the wrath of God. Many think that when sin was removed the wrath of God had somehow vanished without ever coming upon anyone.

The wrath of God against us was absorbed by Christ. God’s eternal wrath is what fuels hell, and Jesus was the ultimate burnt offering! Punishment for sin is never the function of an impersonal karma, (i.e., evil things somehow bring evil consequences). Sin is personal rebellion, and wrath for sin is personally delivered by God himself (Ezekiel 14:7,8). In Hebrews 10:27 the raging fire that will consume the enemies of God is from the Lord (12:29). He avenges himself (10:30) when sinners fall into his hands (10:31), a description that could not be more direct and personal. Revenge for sin is never ours; it is always God’s (Romans 12:19).

The OT refers to the wrath of God more than 500 times. The NT teaches that God’s wrath is personally deserved by the sinner (Romans 1:32) and personally handed out by the Lord (Romans 2:5-11) to him. Into such retribution Jesus entered as our Priest to make propitiation, (2:17). (See this term also in Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2; 4:10).<sup>2</sup> In Matthew 26:39-42 the Lord Jesus drank the cup of wrath; this should be viewed in light of what the cup means in Isaiah 51:17-23, Jeremiah 25:15-29, and Habakkuk 2:16. Christ did not merely cancel sin; he turned the wrath against our sin away from us by absorbing it himself. It is true that the wrath of God is against sin (Romans 1:18); it is also against the sinner. God does not punish murder by punishing a concept; he sends murderers to hell. The sinner-sin connection is unbreakable in his judgment. So when Christ “*became sin for us*” (2 Corinthians 5:21), he personally endured the wrath our sins deserved. Thereby God was true to himself; he had actively responded with the holy repugnance our sin provoked. In God’s grace that holy reaction to sin fell on our Substitute who, as God’s wise Servant (Isaiah 52:13), knew exactly what to do for our justification (Isaiah 53:11). So did the Father when he gave the Son the cup of wrath. He crushed Jesus when our Lord as a sin offering bore the sin of many (Isaiah 53:10-12).

## Appendix 2B: The Issue of Persecution

The first hint of persecution appears in Hebrews 2. Something brought great pressure on the readers of Hebrews. There was a danger they might shrink back (10:38,39) or “turn away” (3:12) or fail to confess (3:1) or fail to hold firmly to the High Priest they had at one time confessed (4:14). This is a double problem. On one side it is doctrinal and Hebrews meets that directly; on the other something dangerous tempts them to drift (2:1) conveniently from their early profession, one that provoked insults (10:33) from their own people. Some might not enter into what God has promised his people because of the unbelief (3:18,19) that makes disobedience (4:6) and apostasy (6:4-6) inevitable. Unbelief will repudiate Christ (6:6; 10:29), and that is eternally fatal (10:39). It is a horrible thing to fall into the hands of the Living God who is a consuming fire (10:30,31; 12:29).

The answer of Hebrews to their need:

1.) It provides a vigorous detailed defense of OT teaching of Christ. This includes very careful exposition that a replacement Priest and a replacement covenant are predicted. It shows the law and its required offerings could never take away sin, but God in the Psalms had spoken of another Priest, his Son (5:5,6), who is now seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly sanctuary. Hebrews is very doctrinal.

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately the NIV never translates these four texts using the word *propitiation*. The KJV does for all except Hebrews 2:17. The ESV and the NKJV both use propitiation in all four.

2.) It does not ignore their suffering and temptation (10:32-39). Faith must be based on truth. People also need encouragement. This abounds in Hebrews with examples of faith in Hebrews 6 (Abraham) and the many in Hebrews 11, plus persons they know (13:7). These were people like them; they had promises yet still waited for the full enjoyment of all God promised. There are six sober warnings, but not all the exhortation was warning. There is prodding to continue in the good works that are evidence of salvation (6:9-12). Hebrews connects their temptation with the personal temptation of Christ (2:18; 4:15,16). It informs of Jesus' growth in obedience through suffering throughout his life (5:7-10) culminating in the cross (12:2,3). His experience is compared with their struggles against sin (12:4). There is even an explanation of the benefits of chastening (12:5-11) and of their need for fellowship with each other (3:13; 6:10,11; 10:23-25; 13:17). It turns their hearts to the Second Coming of Christ (9:28; 11:39,40; 13:14), a constant encouragement to those who are persecuted. It shows the present calling they have in Christ, and the unshakeable kingdom of which they are part (12:22-24) provided they really do believe. All this blessing is because of the High Priest "we have" (8:1). Simple trust is encouraged (13:6) in our Savior Shepherd along with purity of life (13:1-6) and faithful confession (13:15). All blessing comes only through the blood of Christ.

Thus it is most clear that this very doctrinal book is very pastoral; it addresses their needs, vulnerabilities and the current threat to their faith. It is impossible to detach exposition from the multiple words of encouragement based on every strand of truth it gives. The beginning of such combining happens in chapter 2. Chapter 1 gives a storehouse of truth about Christ; chapter 2 begins to apply it. After it warns, chapter 2 links salvation and suffering. This is the fitting way Christ would enter our trouble. Man has been deprived of glory; even in salvation we have not yet come fully into glory. Hebrews never gives comfort by denying reality. It loves to present the Scriptures. The three texts quoted in 2:12,13 come from the sufferings of Christ and Isaiah; in these examples others were associated with them. In all three the family context is of the relevance of personal faith during adversity. That Christ has defeated our Enemy Satan is a comfort only those with an easy life could miss. It speaks of that unique suffering in which we do NOT participate – Christ propitiating God by himself. Then it affirms that Christ who has suffered helps those who are tempted. In Chapter 2 Hebrews just begins to present Christ as One who has not forsaken his persecuted people. We can suffer many things if we have a clear sense that we are not alone. Hebrews 2 shows us that we have his help (2:18).

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## Hebrews 3:1-6

Jesus has been introduced as a merciful and faithful high priest in 2:17. In 3:1-6, his faithfulness is emphasized. The rest of chapter 3 will dwell on the danger of unfaithfulness in his people. OT statements about a faithful priest to come and the Son of David as the builder of God's house are combined. They show Christ as a royal priest, a theme later in Hebrews related to Melchizedek, the king priest.

Moses was the greatest man in the OT since he had an access to God above all others. More Scripture was written under Moses than any other man, "the five Books of Moses". No prophet in Israel's past was greater, yet in the last days God has spoken in his greatest revelation of all -- his Son. Israel was baptized into Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2); he was their leader. He brought the law down from Mount Sinai to the people and interceded for them when they broke it. Though Aaron was the high priest, Moses too, is called a priest in Psalm 99:6. The glory of this man Moses is what the Lord spoke of him:

*"When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"*

Numbers 12:6-8

In Chapter 1, Christ the Son is greater than the angels. Now in chapter 3 Jesus is compared with "My servant Moses". Of Jesus the Father said, "This is my Son," (Luke 3:22).<sup>3</sup> The Jews never considered Jesus of Nazareth their leader, or a priest

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<sup>3</sup> In Luke 9:28-36, the Father affirmed that Jesus is his Son during the transfiguration when Moses appeared with Elijah on the mountain of transfiguration in the presence of Jesus. There Moses, Elijah and the three disciples saw the glory of Jesus the Son of God. Moses spoke of Jesus' priestly work that he would soon accomplish in Jerusalem. In making that offering, Jesus is the priest greater than Moses.

in any sense, nor the true son of David, or the promised prophet greater than Moses, (Acts 3:17-23). It would be very difficult for most of them to imagine Jesus as greater than great Moses. After Moses, no prophet appeared like him. Note the description in Deuteronomy 34:10-12. They would have to learn that Jesus is the Lord (Romans 10:9), the same Lord who spoke face to face with Moses.

If any do not see clearly that Christ is greater than Moses, then they do not know him as the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess, (3:1). To view him as less than Moses, is to think of Him as less than he is. Such a view of Christ is unbelief; it is rejection. Hebrews has the urgent task to make the Person and Work of Christ clear. These brothers have confessed Christ as the Apostle God sent and the High Priest who alone has turned the wrath of God away from his people. They must realize what they were confessing.

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**3:1** The word in 2:1 was “we must”. Here in v.1 when it commands “*Fix your thoughts on Jesus,*” it is a stronger exhortation. In saying “holy” it has reference to Jesus making men holy, (2:11). In saying “brothers,” the writer continues the family language of chapter 2, where Jesus speaks of his own as “brothers” (2:11,12). The writer speaks to his readers the same way. We naturally and properly assume that others of the same confession of Christ are believers, yet Hebrews raises the sober reality (as in 3:6,12,14 & later) that perhaps not each one who has made such a confession is a genuine brother. The Bible speaks to the corporate group as brothers; this is not a declaration that each individual who is part of the church is a true believer.

Jesus is bringing many sons to glory (2:10), so they share a *heavenly calling*. This implies that sinners are made presentable (Colossians 1:12) to be in the presence of the Lord (John 17:24). This heavenly calling includes current access to God in prayer through Christ (4:16). The heavenly Jerusalem is the assured possession to which all in Christ have come (12:22-29), even before we arrive.

Only here in the New Testament is Christ called an Apostle, One sent from God. His apostles are ones he appointed and sent. Jesus is the One the Father sent (John 20:21). This truth is usually communicated by using verbs, as in John 8:26, “the One who sent me.” A concise way to confess Christ as the One God sent is to say, “*He has come in the flesh,*” (1 John 4:1-3). We confess Christ as the unique Apostle commissioned for his work as our Priest. No one should be recognized as a professing Christian until that person has a basic confession of Jesus Christ in both his person and work. We are united in a variety of ways, and the most visible is a common confession. For our confession to be rational and sincere, we must fix our thoughts on Jesus so we will know what we are confessing.

**3:2** To confess Christ as our high priest and the superior revelation of God (1:2) is to place him above Moses. It is essential that we do this even though the high praise of faithful Moses was spoken by God himself! (See Number 12:7 above).

In 2:17, Jesus is a faithful high priest. In the dark days of Eli and his wicked sons, the Lord chose Samuel to be priest and proclaimed, “*I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his house, and he will minister before my anointed one always,*” (1 Samuel 2:35). Only the sinless Christ fully fulfills this promise. In Jeremiah’s day, priests were godless (Jeremiah 23:11). In Matthew 26 the high priest, a descendent of Aaron, was a leading conspirator in the murder of Jesus. Only Christ is the priest completely faithful to the One who appointed him. Hebrews will later emphasize Jesus’ moral purity (4:15; 5:7-10) as essential to fulfilling his priestly work.

Only Christ is the faithful Son of David:

*I declare to you that the LORD will build a house for you: When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever.*

1 Chronicles 17:10-14

The sons of David were not faithful. Solomon allowed the idols of his wives into Jerusalem (1 Kings 11). In Jeremiah 13 later kings in the line of David were extremely corrupt. In those days, God's prophets spoke of the faithful Son of David to come, the Lord Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 33; Ezekiel 34 & 37).

In the LXX the words, "*I will set him over my house*" are rendered, "*I will make him faithful in my house.*" In their language, 'to make faithful' also means 'to appoint'.<sup>4</sup> The texts the writer has in mind are not obvious to us when we read Hebrews 3:1-6. 1 Samuel and 1 Chronicles combine to present Christ as the faithful priest and as the royal Son of David who would build a house for the Lord. He is the One appointed and faithful over God's house. There is no doubt that Christ is the Son of David over God's kingdom with his throne established forever. These OT affirmations go far beyond what was ever said of Moses.

Jesus is the royal priest. Moses is not the Son of David, nor could he be the faithful priest that 1 Samuel referred to, because Moses had died years before both predictions. After Moses, they were still waiting in faith for the promised Person to fulfill these predictions.

**3:2,5,6 Son vs. Servant** Moses was faithful *in* God's house according to Numbers 12, but Jesus was faithful as the Son *over* God's house according to 1 Chronicles 17. As the Builder of the House, he must be *over* it. The difference between Moses and Christ is clarified even more in the distinction between *son* and *servant*. Numbers 12 spoke of Moses as a servant, and 1 Chronicles spoke of Jesus as God's Son. (See also 1:5). Thus our confession of Christ must include that he is a Person greater than Moses. In this text, believing comes from fixing our thoughts on Jesus. But it is not possible to fix our thoughts on him unless we know who he is, the One greater than angels and Moses.

**3:3,4 God's House** Moses was a servant in and Jesus is a Son over God's house. Both Numbers 12:7 and 1 Chronicles 17:14 mention God's *house*. The house of David is a dynasty of kings. In Moses' time "house" could refer to the building or the people.<sup>5</sup> "House," meaning people, is the meaning that best fits this paragraph. Jesus is "*a great priest over the house of God,*" (10:21). The house Jesus is over cannot be the Temple in Jerusalem. He was not a priest from Levi so he never ever entered the sanctuary of that Temple. The house Jesus would build (1 Chronicles 17:12) was not a physical building but his church (Matthew 16:18), the people of God. His church is now his temple on earth (Ephesians 2:21), and his people are his house (3:6).

**3:3-5 The Builder's Honor** Two aspects are argued here: **1)** Christ is a Son over God's house and **2)** the builder has greater honor than the thing he has built. The comparison in this paragraph is limited to Christ and Moses.<sup>6</sup> So Christ is the Builder and Moses is part of the house being built. The ultimate proof of Christ being superior to Moses is that "*God is the builder of everything.*" This refers to Christ, so *Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself.* Jesus' role as God the Creator, and thus Builder, was affirmed in 1:2.

**3:5** Moses testified "*to what would be said in the future*". Since Moses testified to what would be said after his time, it is clear that Moses is not the final word from God. V.5 does not speak of what will *happen* in the future, but what would be *said* in the future. When the Father sent Christ, that act was what God spoke (1:1,2) through all that Christ said and did, (Acts 1:1). Jesus said of Moses' testimony, "*If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe*

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<sup>4</sup> When the verb is active voice, it means to make faithful or "to appoint." *I will set him over my house* in 1 Chronicles 17 is a prediction not merely of Christ having a position, but that he will function faithfully in it. Thus "*faithful to the One who appointed Him,*" is a play on words, an example of using both ideas faithful and appointed at once. Thus *establishes = made faithful*. That is probably why the NT (under the influence of the OT) will use language such as *establish* in Romans 16:25 to mean God making his own to be faithful.

<sup>5</sup> In Exodus 34:26 *house* means building. In Exodus 40:38 *house* refers to the people in a verse that mentions the tabernacle, and *house* does not refer to the tabernacle but the people.

<sup>6</sup> That Moses was the builder of the tabernacle, as reported in Exodus 40 and Hebrews 8:5, is left out of the discussion in Hebrews 3.

*what I say?"* (John 5:46,47). When Moses testified<sup>7</sup> he was referring to Christ as the One through whom God would speak. The way to take Moses seriously is to look for the One he wrote about, Jesus Christ. Even Moses looked forward to the day when God would speak in his Son.<sup>8</sup>

**3:6** Hebrews 3 has skillfully moved the subject from the faithfulness of Christ over God's house to the faithful house that Christ has. Note that Christians may be defined by their status, i.e., they are justified and adopted. But Christians may also be defined by their lives: i.e., they are those who obey (5:9) and those who love God (Romans 8:28), and they are led by the Spirit (Romans 8:9,14), and wait for his coming (9:28). Yet no one is justified by his loving, waiting or by being led. The changed life is never a condition of justification; it is always the result. Those who hold their confession of Christ the Apostle and High Priest are God's house and those who do not never were. [See the Appendix C: The Two "Ifs" of Hebrews 3 in 3:7-19]

**3:6 Confidence and Hope** Christ is the One Sent and the Priest who has offered, so he is all we need to approach God, because he has already approached God for us. He settled all that is a barrier to God accepting us (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Our confidence is not presumptuous; it is not a confidence in ourselves at all. It is a settled conviction that Christ is God's provision, so God cannot reject the Priest he sent. Jesus' intercession and advocacy for us is effective; we need no more than Christ to approach the throne of our holy God. This theme of access will be enlarged as the sermon continues, (4:16). Confidence is never based on how we are doing, or in our faithfulness. That would be pride, not saving faith. Confidence is based on the One whose life and ministry has pleased God so much that he is the author of eternal salvation for all who obey him (5:9). Holding on to our courage is not maintaining a state of feeling, but having confidence in Christ.

## Hebrews 3:7 – 19

**The Second Warning** This warning draws its sober lesson from the history of Israel. Sometimes the Lord Jesus compared those he addressed to their rebellious fathers of previous generations (Luke 6:22-26; Matthew 23:29-32); this passage does the same. The unbelief of Israel is the problem Psalm 95 deals with according to 3:12 & 19, though the Psalm does not mention unbelief, only its dreadful result. (Psalm 106:24 does say they had no faith in his promise.) Psalm 95 identifies the root cause of going astray as the kind of hearts they had. The people of Israel were redeemed from Egypt but never attained the goal of their redemption. This kind of good beginning and terrible ending can happen again. Those receiving this letter might also turn away from the living God the way their fathers did. The danger of eternal loss and the prospect of eternal life remains (4:6). Unbelief and hardness of heart are not dangers limited to the past.

Psalm 95 was not written in the time of the Israelites to whom it refers. The lesson was spoken in David's day by the Holy Spirit 400 years after the wilderness wandering. It was still being spoken by the Spirit when Hebrews was written 1000 years after David. The Spirit continues to speak the same warning now 2000 years later, as long as God still calls our moment in history "Today". Psalm 95 is not just warning, it includes the mention of a promised rest, not the rest of entering the land of Canaan, but into God's rest – a theme developed in chapter 4.

No one should miss that this sermon is not just the preacher talking. He relies on what God has already spoken in Scripture, the ultimate source of authority. He speaks what was familiar to them; many knew Psalm 95 as a call to worship, "Come let us bow down and worship..." He simply continued on to more of what that psalm said. Then he taught and warned, as all pastors must do – with a good understanding of the text.

**3:7** It would be true to say that Psalm 95 is what the Holy Spirit *said*. The word of God is not written to one generation only; this psalm is what he is still *saying*. The warnings apply, and the hope of rest is still available.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of material about Christ reported in the five Books of Moses are: Deuteronomy 18:14-20; Genesis 3:15; 49:10, and Numbers 24:15-19. To these we should add references to Christ through types; for example, all the blood sacrifices. Jesus is the ultimate Passover Lamb whose blood turns from us the avenging wrath of God.

<sup>8</sup> In a startling word about Moses and Christ, note what the Jewish leaders said of each in John 9:28,29, "*Then they hurled insults at him [Christ] and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow [Christ], we don't even know where he comes from."*" When they spoke that way, they were ignorant of Christ, God's final Word to them. We can see here the reason the writer of Hebrews takes so seriously how people might compare Moses and Christ. To think of Christ as they did in John 9 would be a rejection of the real Lord God of Moses.

According to 4:7, it was David who wrote Psalm 95, yet what he wrote here is what the Spirit *says*. Likewise in Acts 2:16,17, it is the prophet Joel who wrote, yet it is still “*God says*”. Whatever any prophet said was because they “*spoke from God as they were carried by the Holy Spirit*,” (2 Peter 1:21)

**3:7** The Trinitarian Voice: The Father is the speaker in chapter 1, the Son in chapter 2, and now the Holy Spirit. Sometimes a previous word is referred to by using a past tense, but in all three chapters it also uses some form of the present tense: 1:6 the Father speaks; 2:12 the Son speaks; 3:7 the Holy Spirit speaks.

**Numbers 13 & 14 as the background of Psalm 95** The spies went into Canaan and twelve returned with a good report of the land, but ten of them added a discouraging report from their hearts. The two men who believed God said, “The Lord is with us”. For rebellion and refusal to enter, the Lord declared and swore that the rebels would not enter the Promised Land, **Numbers 14:20-23: 26-35**. It is essential to understanding Hebrews to note that this disobedience was the result of unbelief. “*How long will they refuse to believe in me*,” said the Lord (Numbers 14:11). They had turned from the living God. To turn from Christ would be to repeat the same kind of rebellion and receive the same kind of reaction from God.

Hebrews speaks very much like Jude 5: “*Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe*.”

**3:7** What is “Today”?

- a.) The time we are in prior to the Second Coming of Christ; note 10:35-39.
- b.) The time a sinner has prior to death (after death comes judgment 9:27)
- c.) The time a professing believer has, hearing a sermon such as Hebrews, prior to apostatizing.

**3:8** When it says, “do not harden your hearts,” it addresses the responsibility of all who might do so. But in 3:13, it is sin doing the hardening. Both are true: sinners sin by choice, and sinners come under sin’s control, (Romans 6:15-23; 8:5-8; James 1:14,15).

**3:8** Psalm 95 refers to the locations Meribah and Massah. The reference is to a time recorded in Exodus 17:1-7 & Numbers 20:2-13. Those place names mean quarreling and testing.<sup>9</sup> Hebrews uses Psalm 95, but has in mind what occurred in Numbers 14.

**3:9** They saw! Hebrews 2:4 reminds us of signs and wonders. The Israelites also saw wonders: the plagues on Egypt, the dividing of the Red Sea, and the destruction of Pharaoh’s army (Numbers 14:22). What more would they need to believe? Miracles by themselves do not bring faith (Matthew 11:20-24). In the desert, the bulk of God’s covenant people hardened their hearts into unbelief, a fact of history stated in Psalm 95. The spiritual condition of the Israelites shows the great need of a better covenant in which God will give a new heart, (8:6-13). “*When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea*,” Psalm 106:7

**3:10** Their *always going astray* reveals that there was a pattern of testing the Lord. (See Numbers 14:22 for “ten times!”) The severe judgment of our merciful God did not come after one occasion, but many. Their sin was typical of them; it was not the exception.

**3:10 The Lord’s anger and their sin described in Numbers 14** The Israelites, as a wicked community (v.27), banded together against the Lord, (v.35) in contempt for him (vv.11 & 23), with unfaithfulness to their covenant pledge (v.33), with grumbling (v.27), and refusal to believe (v.11). All this was said of a people who had seen God’s glory and miraculous signs (v.22). For this, the Lord swore that no adult unbelievers would enjoy rest in the land he had promised Abraham on oath. The promise of God would be kept, but only for those who believed him. He said, “... *you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you*,” (v.34). That is precisely the way it is today. What God was like in Numbers 14, is what he was like in Hebrews 10:28-31 & 12:29, and he is the same today (13:8).

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 3 follows the LXX and refers to the rebellious situation rather than naming the locations. It is like saying, “He met his Waterloo.” When we do so, we refer to a situation rather than a location.

**3:10** They have not known my ways. In our time, many think that spiritual life rests only on warm devotion and commitment. They slight the cognitive aspect of our relationship with the Lord. A major factor in not trusting God was that they did not truly know Him (Hosea 4:6). Knowing, in the wide meaning of the word, also means to embrace or choose (Amos 3:2). The word in the Hebrew language (affecting the NT as well) is that knowledge is relational as well as cognitive, as in Genesis 4:1. We should not choose one feature of knowing and omit others. See Daniel 11:32. Ignorance encourages sin. The knowledge of God must be the proper response to the Lord who makes himself and his ways known to us (2 Peter 3:18; Psalm 103:7). He has not revealed himself in order to be ignored! In Jeremiah 31:34, the appeal to know the Lord is a form of evangelism!

When Scripture says unbelievers have not known God's ways, this matches that the Lord never knew them (Matthew 7:23). They never were partakers of Christ.

### **3:11 The three oaths in Hebrews.**

When the Lord uses an oath, he adopts a way of communicating. It is not that he has different levels of truthfulness, (2 Corinthians 1:18-22). The Lord used oaths rarely, and then for great emphasis.

- God swore in his wrath that the disobedient would not enter the land (3:11).
- He swore by himself to bless Abraham (6:13-18).
- The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind that Christ is a priest forever (7:20-22).

**Preaching the Word: An Exposition of Psalm 95** The text is not just a point to begin a sermon. In this model of good preaching, he refers to things in the psalm repeatedly and quotes his text four times. After the initial quotation of Psalm 95, he draws reference to: 1) Today, 2) Hearing his voice, 3) Hardening hearts, 4) Rebellion 5) Forty years, 6) God being angry, 7) Hearts going astray, 7) An oath, 9) Entering & 10) Rest. [See the chart *An Exposition of Psalm 95*]

**3:12<sup>10</sup>** The preacher turns from speaking of the unbelief of Israelites mentioned in Psalm 95, to “any of you,” i.e., his readers in Hebrews. The danger is not just one faced by *them* long ago, but also by *us* now! The chief danger is a heart that does not believe and thus that the unbelieving heart will inevitably turn away. The turning from the Word of the Lord becomes a conscious, hard, and settled decision. They turned away in the desert because they did not believe, and that is the same danger in every age. (The Greek word for ‘turning away’ is from the verb to *apostatize*.) Sin hidden in the heart, came out in time as open repudiation of the Lord. “*But you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God. You did not trust him or obey him,*” (Deuteronomy 9:23).

If the human heart can so easily turn from the living God, and so easily turn to dead gods, this ought to serve as sober warning that our hearts are very dangerous things (Matthew 15:18,19) not to be followed. We need hearts brought to obedience by the Lord in the new covenant (8:10). In order for us to be eternally lost, all that sinners need is for God to leave us alone and let us go the way of our naturally wicked hearts.

**3:13** In the desert Caleb and Joshua pleaded with their people, “*Do not rebel against the Lord ... the Lord is with us*” (Numbers 14:9). Hebrews calls for this same kind of mutual exhortation and encouragement. Sin’s deceitfulness lulls the heart to carelessness. The entire book of Hebrews is a call to sobriety and a warning against drifting. But this verse urges members of the church to care for one another enough to warn and provide frequent encouragement. When it says “daily,” we wonder if they were people who lived close together and met in a house church. At least as often as we are together, we are to look out for each other. The Western culture of all having very private lives, and each one minding his own business, makes it easier to stray from the Lord. Apostasy functions in straying from other believers, as well as from the Lord. Note: 10:24,25.

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<sup>10</sup> 3:12-19 These verses are a unit, signaled by two inclusios. The words “see/unbelief” appear in v.12 and reappear in v.19.

For "Today," see above. "Today" implies that we face a constant situation of a peril to alarm and a promise to trust. Since it is still Today, we are in a time when both danger and promise are current. However, when Christ comes, all danger is over for the church; only true believers will remain as professing believers. There will no longer be any remnant, for all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest, (8:11). There will be no unfulfilled promise, for the Lord will bring the promised perfection into the experience of all at the same time, (11:40). We will have entered God's rest (3:18 and Hebrews 4). Meanwhile, the sin in us may fool us, and we need each other to point out our danger and to encourage our faith in Christ firm to the end.

**3:14** For this section see Appendix 3 below, "The Two Ifs of Hebrews 3"

**3:15** We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold to our confession of him, and so we must not harden our hearts. We must be consistent with our confession. We are to take Psalm 95 seriously. It is Christ in v.6 and Christ in v.14 who is the One from whom we dare not stray. Whatever may attract us in any other direction, whether false doctrine or immoral living, is a danger that poses eternal loss. Do not harden your hearts! The saints will persevere, but if we do not persevere, we are not saints, and never have been (1 John 2:19).

**3:16 – 18 Who were they?** In Numbers 14 a generation was prevented by God's oath from entering the land he promised them. Who are they? They were the people of God! After they left Egypt, God said:

*"This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."* **Exodus 19:3-6**

They were God's people, the ones God delivered from Egypt. They were ones who heard the Word of God and yet rebelled (v.16), ones with whom God had reason to be angry. Their unbelief resulted in terrible disobedience. (Note the words used: *heard, rebelled, sinned, disobeyed & unbelief*.)

Hebrews gives Jewish Christians an example from their Scriptures, from the history of their own people. It is not just an illustration a preacher imagined. This really happened; God was angry and swore that he would never let them see what he had promised. It has happened before, it can happen again.

**3:19** "*So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.*" Hebrews is following Numbers 14 closely. In the desert rebellion: 1) The spies entered the land of Canaan, and 2) returned with their report. 3) The people believed a lie and refused to enter. 4) The Lord swore that they could not enter, but 5) then they tried to and were driven back. God's oath that they could not enter (Numbers 14:21-23) was followed by their rebellious attempt to do so (Numbers 14:39-45). Those who tried fell by the sword. There is a horror story here. The rejection of the Lord in unbelief had a false "repentance" when they heard God's Word that they would never enter. Their failed attempt to go in on their own was another example of unbelief. Hebrews 6:4 speaks of the impossibility of a later repentance when there is apostasy. Hebrews 12:15-17 reports that Esau, after making his decision, sought with tears to inherit the blessing he had rejected earlier. He found no chance to repent; his rejection of his inheritance was final; he could not get it back.

In light of this teaching in Hebrews, I think we should understand 3:19 in the same way. There is such a thing as God closing the door, such a thing as no more "Today." *They were not able to enter.* There will be a lot of regret in hell when the "as long as it is Today" appeal (3:13) is over. Christ-rejecters will find that God's oath applied to them is resolute and nothing can make him change his mind. God cannot be appeased by our sorrow. Only one sacrifice carries any weight with God. If we defy the gospel, we reject the only sacrifice that has turned God's wrath from his people, (10:26), and there is nothing left between a holy God and us. When the Mediator has been repudiated by the sinner; he must face God in his sin (John 8:21-23) without a priest.

**Not all Israelites are true Israel:** This passage and others like it, should make clear that one can be a member of the covenant people by birth, heritage, and privilege, yet not believe. This will always be the case if one has never been born from above by the Spirit of God (John 3:7) and given a new heart. The Israelites were God's people, yet those of the Israelites who did not believe and obey were not God's people (Hosea 1:8-11; 2:23). Persons can be in the covenant in one sense, (God calls them to be his people and he promises to be their God). When there is no response of the heart (which says in faith and repentance "You are my God and I am one of your people"), then we have a covenant relationship rejected and the Lord rejected. This is what apostasy is. Outside the covenant of marriage, one can commit fornication but not adultery – there is no marriage bond to break! The most wicked man on earth cannot be an apostate unless he was at one time in the circle of those committed to the Lord in some way. One cannot break a covenant he is not in. The apostate person of 10:26-31 repudiated the covenant that had sanctified him! The language of 10:30 that the Lord will judge his people includes God judging apostates who were once identified as his people. They were his by his right and claim, but not his by the regenerating power of God. Thus with no change of heart, they did not believe and rejected their God and the priest he sent. "*Not all descended from Israel belong to Israel,*" Romans 9:6.

### Appendix 3: The Two ifs of Hebrews 3

- 3:6: ... *we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.*
- 3:14: *We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the confidence we had at first.*

These two statements force us to ask who is really a Christian:

- Can a person be a member of the house of God if he does not hold to the hope he once boasted? The answer: No, he is not a true member of Christ's house if he does not hold to his confession.
- Does a person truly belong to Christ if he does not hold firmly to the end the confidence he at one time professed in Christ? The answer: No, such a person does not belong to Christ, and never did.

#### **Two challenges:**

**A.** It is very easy to change the question, which is often done. Some think the question is more like this: Can a person who at one time belonged to Christ, belong to him any longer if he fails to hold his confidence in Christ? The assumption is that a person at one time had salvation and then lost it. Then the conclusion becomes the same as the assumption! Many think we can genuinely have salvation and then lose it, because keeping it is what secures it. This viewpoint has been held for many years, an old problem. It teaches that our security in Christ is insecure.

Many, myself included, reject this view. Since it is reasonable to wonder if the text might teach that, we should not avoid it. Further, the two "if" statements are not a tangent unrelated to the central message of Hebrews. The question of who is really a Christian is a primary motive the book was written! The theme of apostasy is often repeated in this sermon/epistle in some form.

**B.** In a different challenge, one relatively recent, some teach that once a person believes in Christ, he belongs to Christ no matter what he does or how he lives. The assumption is that a true believer may live in sin without repentance, and such a person is truly saved and heaven is secure, because at one time he believed. Some claim to be "carnal Christians".

I suspect that in the long history of the church, that error has not had much of a following. In our day, in a generation dedicated to its own way, it has found a following. This error is corrected immediately by these two texts, with no possibility of reconciling that error with the words of 3:6 and 3:14 or later statements in Hebrews. It is not possible to be in Christ, indwelt by his Spirit, and then to live in sin. "... *No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him,*" (1 John 3:6). The Holy Spirit actively and effectively opposes our sin (Galatians 5:16) and produces his fruit in us in a life of repentance.

The position I am advocating is this: 3:6 means holding one's hope in Christ is evidence that a person is part of that house. Failing to hold to Christ is evidence that a person never was part of his house. Our hope for a wonderful future and the resurrection of our bodies looks only to Christ who shall return (9:28) to bring us all he promised. Like Abraham, we too look for a city whose builder and maker is God (11:10). Trust for all we want rests in our Great High Priest. He is the One in which the first readers of Hebrews all said they had their hope. Holding confidence firmly in Christ to the very end shows we have come to share in Christ, for this is what every Christian will do. (See Romans 8:9-11). If one does not persevere, he not only does not share in Christ, he never did (Matthew 7:23). If anyone has shared in Christ, he will hold firmly to the end confidence in Christ. Our security is objective, based on the obedience of Christ. Our assurance is subjective, affected by our obedience.

What Hebrews is saying is sometimes distorted. It never suggests that the way a person comes to share in Christ is by allegiance to Christ. No person is capable of allegiance to Christ until he shares in Christ, but if a person does share in Christ, he will surely trust him and hold firmly to him. The response reveals whether salvation has occurred. Authentic salvation will result in allegiance. We do not become Christians by persevering, but Christians will persevere. We do not have the power to persevere on our own; if we have been saved by the grace of God, we will be kept by the power and grace of God. The Holy Spirit applies to us the benefits of the intercession of our Great High Priest, (Luke 22:32). Jesus prayed in John 17 for all those the Father had given him to be kept. This is an effectual prayer. God answers the prayer of our Great High Priest that we be kept and not lost.

A baby lives by breathing; if a baby does not breathe, it is not a living baby. But a baby does not become a baby by breathing. Breathing is part of the essence of its life, but never the cause of it. No one can become a Christian by being one! We are never joined to Christ by our obedience, confession, holding firm to the end, or any other virtue. But once we have been joined to Christ by faith, these virtues occur. In order to receive justification, faith offers to God no virtue as the reason for God to justify, to unite to Christ, to give the Holy Spirit, or to adopt as God's child. Faith has its good works always, but faith does not work or produce good works or offer anything in order to be justified; instead, faith receives and rests on Christ.

It would be wrong to say, "If we do not hold fast our assurance, then even though we were once partakers of Christ, nevertheless now we lose our part in Christ." That is the opposite of what this verse says. It says, we *have become* partakers of Christ, if we hold fast our assurance to the end; and if we do *not* hold fast to our assurance to the end, then we *have not become* a partaker of Christ. Not holding fast to our assurance does not make us lose our salvation; it shows that we were not truly saved.

[© John Piper re 3:14 in a sermon on Hebrews 3, August 11, 1996, located at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org).]

## Hebrews 4:1-14

Hebrews 4:1-11 continues to deal with themes raised by Psalm 95. Now warning and promise are joined. The issue of unbelief reported in Numbers 14 and Psalm 95 continues, and thus the writer speaks of danger again. But now in chapter 4, hope is derived from this same psalm.

Until we arrive in God's city, (13:14) we must live in fear of our sin and the possibility of apostasy in us and among us. The man who does not trust his heart is a wise man (Psalm 26:2; 51:10; Jeremiah 17:9,10). The man careless of spiritual danger suffers from it already. No man who has been saved by God will apostatize. We only know we are genuine believers if we obey, (1 John 3:4-10). If we live in disobedience we are not Christians, we have only fooled ourselves.

Chapter 3 focused on the warning and the oath of God that unbelieving rebels would never enter his rest. Chapter 4 will speak of his promised rest and appeal for diligence to enter it while the opportunity remains. The discussion of rest in this chapter is one of the complicated teachings of Hebrews and will require extra attention.

**Concerning Structure:** Most commentaries and editions of the Bible make a break at the end of v.13 and place v.14 in a new paragraph. Vv. 14 & 15 both mention Christ as a high priest, so the Bible editors quite naturally join those verses in the same paragraph. However, the literary clues in the text reveal the author's intended beginning and climax. 3:1 opens with an appeal concerning the faithful high priest we confess. Earlier in 2:17, Christ as high priest is both merciful and faithful. Only after dealing with Christ's *faithfulness*, and the need for ours, does Hebrews switch at 4:15,16 to a *merciful* high priest. V.14, like the appeal of 3:1, finishes with an exhortation to hold faithfully to our confession of Jesus as our Great High Priest. As the climax of what was said before, v.14 belongs to what precedes it.

V.14: “*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.*” Rather than opening up further discussion of the priesthood of Jesus, which comes in v.15, v.14 actually finishes what precedes it. Here is the structure.<sup>11</sup>

This pattern, common to Hebrew writing, appears throughout the book:

- A. some theme
- B. a different theme
- B. the theme of B. continued
- A. a return to the theme in A.

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- A. merciful and (2:17)
  - B. faithful high priest (2:17)
  - B. faithful high priest and the requirement of a faithful people (3:1-4:14)
  - A. merciful high priest (4:15,16).

**4:1** The part of Psalm 95 that Hebrews quotes, does not state a promise of rest,<sup>12</sup> yet Hebrews 4 is certain that God was making a promise in that psalm. The warning comes in such a way that it implies an invitation. I suggest these reasons:

- The opening of Psalm 95 is a call to worship, a call to come to the Lord. The warnings in the rest of the psalm cannot contradict such an invitation. The warnings are not a pronouncement of no hope but instead urge us to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying.
- The oath against unbelievers in Numbers 14 was against unbelievers only. The oath did not include Caleb and Joshua. It was against adult rebels, but their children living at the time of the oath eventually entered the land under Joshua.
- The appeal to hear (3:7) and the warning not to harden their hearts (3:8), was a way to call on them to believe with their hearts so they would escape God's wrath.

**4:1 An exhortation to fear** Fear may be a healthy, joyful delight in God as in Psalm 103, but that is not the idea in 4:1. The NIV blunders by translating “Let us fear” as “let us be careful”. That translation softens the message when Hebrews warns sternly that our God is a consuming fire (12:29), and apart from Christ there is no sacrifice for sins. A person without Christ as his high priest is left with raging fire, severe punishment, and a dreadful falling into the hands of the living God (10:26-31). Moses' trembling with fear was proper (12:21). The fear of facing death without forgiveness is a great bondage from which believers are delivered. That we might forsake Christ and renounce our confession of him is something we ought to fear. If we cringe at the thought of unbelief/disobedience, and cry out to the Lord to preserve us, this is consistent with holding firmly the faith in Christ we profess we have (4:14).

<sup>11</sup> The purpose of these notes is to deal with the message and meaning of Hebrews. For my preparation I have benefited greatly from the writing of scholars who have researched the technical structure of Hebrews. I shall not take much space to point out this kind of feature in Hebrews, except where it is quite obvious in the text. William Lane's commentary is very helpful in maintaining attention to various “inclusios”.

<sup>12</sup> This is an example of how Scripture may be handled. We accept what it says; we should also deduce whatever it implies, and collect all such truths together to establish doctrine. This is what theology is.

The writer of Hebrews included himself in his, “Let us fear.” The night Jesus was betrayed none of the other disciples knew that Judas was the betrayer! Their sober sorrow made them say to the Lord one after another, “Is it I?” (Mark 14:19). Judas was one of the Twelve but never a believer (John 6:70).

**4:1** The idea in 3:12 reappears that there might be one person in the church who falls short and does not enter. I wonder if this may be why Hebrews does not reveal its author. It could be an article for repeated use when church leaders (spoken of with approval in 13:7,17) find individuals wandering after false teaching (13:9). Yet the letter is clearly a sermon speaking to believers in a group setting, whom the author considers genuine in faith (6:9-12). Yet in 6:11, he reveals again his burden for each individual. I wonder if Hebrews was also designed to be a piece of apologetic material for pastors to use as the need would arise, whether the author was known or not.

**Ministry to one** The ministry of Christ, predicted in Jeremiah 23:5,6, is connected to a prediction that not one of God's flock will be missing (Jeremiah 23:4). That reveals an important aspect of pastoral work. The Lord's assignment from the Father was that not one of his would be lost (John 6:39). It is common these days to think of attracting crowds while neglecting troubled souls who might take too much time. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for all his sheep (John 10:15); he would leave the ninety-nine and search for one lost sheep. There is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7). After that parable the Lord gave two more in Luke 15 about one lost coin and one lost son. When a person renounces Christ we have little recourse but sorrow. Hebrews 6:4-6 tells us such a person cannot be brought to repentance again. But when we find a “brother” wavering, we seek to restore him. Teaching is a vital part of Christian nurture, and so is the encouragement that flows from one person to another (3:12,13).

## **4:1 What is the rest promised?** The word rest is used in three ways:

- 1. The rest of entering the land of Canaan.** After living in tents and traveling in the desert, Israel entered the land God gave them and had rest (Deuteronomy 12:10).
- 2. The rest God has had since creation.** His creating work ended in six days. God then looked on his work and pronounced it all very good and ceased from creating anything more. His rest was not a rest prompted by weariness, but from finishing his work.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done, (*Genesis 2:1-3*).

God's rest is a continuing rest. Unlike days one to six in Genesis 1, on the seventh day there is no evening, so it has been for God a day that does not end. The Sabbath is presented in Scripture as a gift for man (Mark 2:27). Before he sinned, Adam enjoyed God's rest in fellowship with him. After the fall, man enjoys a Sabbath only once a week, but it is not yet a rest in the holy city. We humans cannot escape toil in work or pain in childbirth. Though our Sabbaths are patterned on God's, our weekly Sabbaths end, but God's does not.

- 3. The rest promised in the gospel.** God offers his kind of rest to his people. This is the ultimate salvation. It is rest where the hard labor man must do comes to an end (4:10). It is from all that wearies us: sin, strife, trials, temptations, tears and pain. Like God's rest, it is eternal bliss, yet its fullness awaits Christ bringing salvation rest to those waiting for him (9:28). We possess it now (4:3) by faith and already enjoy what we do not fully have (11:10). Meanwhile, since the devil seeks to devour us (1 Peter 5:8), we must shun a false rest where we are not on guard. Those who die in Christ rest from their labors (Revelation 14:13). Until then our pilgrimage is not one of coasting to heaven, but running a strenuous race, involving struggle, resistance, endurance, and opposition (12:1-4). In Philippians 3:12-14 Paul refers to our pilgrimage as straining and pressing on. Laziness rejects the privilege of bearing the cross (Philippians 1:29,30). It means we want for ourselves a life far easier than Jesus had (Hebrews 5:7-10). The eagerly desired rest is still ahead, yet possessed now and guaranteed (7:22) by our high priest. It is only for those who believe in him, and those are the ones who hold firmly to their confession.

The rest Hebrews 4 promotes is not life in the land of Canaan. Those who were the first to read Psalm 95 were already in the land. The Lord was pointing his people in the land to a better rest, one like his, and in the end a rest with him again. One of the Lord's most cherished promises is, "I will give you rest." His rest for the soul now is a foretaste of the complete rest to come (Matthew 11:28,29). Meanwhile, the wicked have neither rest nor peace (Isaiah 57:20,21).

The word "rest" is not the most common way to picture salvation in Scripture. In Hebrews it is found only in chapters 3 & 4. But the concept in different words is pervasive:

*... Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded [with his rest]. You need to persevere [prior to having his rest] so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive... [the rest] he has promised. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, [falling short of God's rest] but of those who believe and are saved, [and will enter God's rest]. (Hebrews 10:35-39).*

**4:2,3** They had the gospel preached to them. God had made his people a promise that he would take them into the land. But they needed to believe him. He would go in front of them and defeat their enemies, (Psalm 44:1-8). That promise was gospel. Likewise, for those who have had the gospel of Christ preached to them, God promises his rest. The Israelites did not believe and did not receive what was promised. They had disdain for God's promise, so he swore that they would never have the rest in Canaan that was preached to them. They had received a wonderful message. They did not combine what their ears heard with faith in the heart. Thus they became the great example not to follow (1 Corinthians 10:1-11).

**4:3 Different aspects of time** Just as believers have eternal life in the present (John 3:16), even before the resurrection, so people are *entering* God's rest now. V.3 has the present tense for 'enter'. 4:6 says it remains for some to enter who have not, so some may yet believe in the future, though God makes no promise beyond 'Today'. Then this passage looks upon believers as those who *have entered* when it uses a past tense in v.10.

I think Hebrews is saying we are *entering* now because the promise of rest has not closed. It is a present reality. New people enter every day. We invite the nations to enter in. God has not indicated the time this invitation will close. All who have believed *have already entered*. They enter only once, having received the promise in faith. When they believed, they received the gift of eternal rest immediately.

Perhaps it is odd to us to speak of entering rest and then we find that the support for that in v.3 is a quotation that speaks of people not entering. The writer was referring to the subject of entering. He knew the history; none of the rebellious entered but later others did. (See 4:1 above).

**4:3-5** God's work has been finished since creation long ago. His rest began then and has continued ever since, as Psalm 95 shows. His rest is open to those who do not harden their hearts. God still presents Christ to us as the Door (John 10:7-10) to enter his rest – one offered to all but entered only by believers.

**4:6-7** God has brought up this subject. This is a current gospel, repeated in Scripture long after the rebels in Numbers 14 disobeyed. Psalm 95 has not been revoked. The promise still stands. God even used the word 'Today' in Psalm 95 and that has not been revoked. When men die, they face the judgment (9:27); there is then no more 'Today' for unbelievers. Through the psalm David wrote, God warned them not to harden hearts. The alternative to hardening hearts is faith in his promise. 400 years after the rebellion in the desert, they could still enter God's rest – not the land of Canaan, but God's rest.

**4:8** The rest Psalm 95 refers to cannot mean the promised land, the land Israel entered under Joshua. Joshua had not given the rest Psalm 95 meant, because God spoke in that Psalm of a future rest to people already in the land of Canaan. The 'Today' of Psalm 95 was not the time of Joshua in the past. That certain time, called 'Today', was the time Psalm 95 was written. It has been repeated in the NT as *the day of salvation* in 2 Corinthians 6:2. Centuries later, in the longsuffering of God, that Today is still here.

**4:9-11** The Sabbath-rest in. v.9 is not one day in seven. V.9 refers to God's rest opened to his true people, those who believe. That rest remains even though it was spoken in Psalm 95 one thousand years before Hebrews was written, and it remains even though another 2000 years have passed since then.

**Who are the people of God?** The Sabbath-rest is for *the people of God*. Therefore those in Hebrews 4 who disobeyed and fell cannot be God's people. Yet 10:26-31 speaks of the Lord judging his people, and that a person could be sanctified by the blood of the covenant and still come under the wrath of God. In Leviticus 26:12,13 God's people were the ones who left Egypt, so all the Israelites in one sense were his people. Then God said of his people who left Egypt and who would not believe, that they would never enter his rest (Numbers 14:20-23). The Bible speaks of God's people both ways. Some are God's people by birthright, but like Jacob and Esau, some of them are saved and some are not. There is a true Israel – the believing remnant, (Isaiah 10:21; Romans 9:27; 11:5) – and there is an adulterous Israel (as in Jeremiah 3:6-10) who despised her covenant with the Lord. “... *Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel,*” (Romans 9:6). Some are his people in name only. They think they are his and say they are, but their hearts, like Simon's in Acts 8, are not right with God. Simon was baptized on his profession of faith and thought to be a Christian. His sin proved he never was one of God's true people.

**4:10** The future rest of believers is so much like God's rest, that God even calls it “My rest”. Since God rested from his work, so will we. This pilgrimage will end, and all the labor that occupies us now. Our rest will really be like his. The Jewish people used the Greek word for ‘Sabbath-rest’ to indicate Sabbath celebration and festivity, a time of joy and praise. Everyone senses how happy it is when a big task is completed, such as joy in harvest time when the work is done (Psalm 65:9-13; Psalm 67). That is the idea here. There is an eternal day of enjoyment of God ahead, and the curse of hard work will be over forever. God rested from all his work and so will we.

**4:11** Such a rest and such a future day as this should be very motivating to us. But it will only be if we believe God's promise that such a rest is true. It should make us diligent in all the ways Hebrews emphasizes. It makes us patient in hope (13:6). We must not throw away our confidence (10:35); in a little while Christ will come (10:37). The OT saints did not receive all that God had promised them, but they lived and died in faith (11:39); the Lord will not disappoint them. Diligence to believe God's promises when we cannot see the results (11:1) is a definite theme in Hebrews. But the context of this text is the specific appeal to fix our thoughts on Jesus as our Great High Priest.

The writer has more to teach on this subject (5:11). His exhortation to diligence now encounters their laziness toward doctrine when he seeks to teach that Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek. (Note how 5:10 is followed by reproof!) Hebrews commands a diligence in doctrine too. We cannot enter rest apart from the work of our priest. Holding firmly to the faith we confess (v.14) is simply holding in heart and mind to Jesus and his priestly work. Whenever we make no effort to learn such things (5:11; Proverbs 2:1-6), we fail to sense our need of Christ, and careless drifting (2:1-4) has already begun. Making every effort to enter that rest involves grasping doctrine, believing promises, and living obediently in the face of temptation and persecution (2 Peter 1:3,4). It means running a race and enduring weariness as the Lord did (12:1-3). “*Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did,*” (1 John 2:6). At the end of this race is a rest as wonderful as God's.

Our salvation depends on a work we did not do; our High Priest did not offer our blood but his. Sometimes, as in Numbers 29:1,7,12, the people were to do no work. God does not accept us for our good works (Ephesians 2:8,9). Our works are never a factor in our justification (Romans 3:28). In fact faith is set in opposition to works for justification (Romans 4). This text is not teaching that justification comes by our effort; it is teaching the rigor of being a disciple already justified. It teaches that we exert ourselves to cast off sloth and hindrances of every kind, for soon our efforts will be over and the eternal Sabbath begun. If we really believe that, it will affect all we do.

Assurance of salvation rests on God's promise. But our certainty of salvation does not rest in some past decision, we must be aware of a transformed life produced by the Spirit (1 John 4:12). A text like 4:10-13 makes us examine ourselves, even test ourselves, something we need to do, (2 Corinthians 13:5) to find out if we are really God's elect (2 Peter 1:10-11).

**4:12-13 The Word of God** In 3:7-11 God's word was a word of warning. Those who did not believe doubted his word and tried to enter the land God swore they could not (Numbers 14:39-45). They quickly learned that he stood behind his word when they fell under the sword of the enemy. Numbers 14:43 uses the word “sword”, which could be the reason “sword” is used in 4:12. Like God himself, his word is powerful and living. Those who decline his promise, find his word of death inescapable. Whatever God says, he fulfills. No one can stop him or fool him. Just as a sword penetrates, so God's

Word penetrates into the hidden area of man's secret thought. It judges because God knows our motives. We may be able to hide from others but never from God.

**The Word of God** When God speaks his Word, it is more than God communicating; it is God in action. By his Word he created (11:3); by his word he sustains (1:3); by his Word he gives birth (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23); and by his Word he will judge (John 12:28). In 4:12,13 what began with reference to the judging ability of the Word in v.12 merges into the observing ability of God, v.13, because his word is so identified with him. God's word is the tool by which he acts.

God who speaks his Word, judges by it. He reads the response of the heart to his promise. If our response to the gospel is unbelief, such private sin cannot be kept from him. God is transcendent; nothing in creation is like him. Only God can read man's heart (Psalm 44:21). A man could say with his mouth that Christ is his priest. If he secretly turns from his confession, God knows. Hebrews emphasizes the believing or hardened heart (3:8); now it speaks of the heart open to the eyes of God. Jesus always knew that Judas did not believe (John 6:63,64), because he could read Judas' heart.

The Gentiles heard the message of the gospel; God knew that in their hearts they believed, and so he accepted them (Acts 15:6-11). God is the One to whom we must give account. In his judgment all secret unbelief will be exposed and the believing of his people revealed and rewarded (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10). He does not need to ask if we believe. Nothing is more assuring to the believer, or more terrifying to the unbeliever, than the truth that God guarantees his word.

**4:14** The appeal in 3:1 is repeated. Jesus, who became a man so he could be our priest (2:5-18), is God the Son. The apostles saw him go up to enter the sanctuary of God (9:11,24) in heaven (Acts 1:9-11). Our faith cannot be in a greater, higher or more effective priest. Faith in Christ is faith in the ultimate Priest. His work has won God's acceptance of his sinful people; it would be folly to turn from him. We have no other hope. The readers of Hebrews had made a public *confession* (3:1; 4:14) of Christ; now they and the writer too, are called on to hold to it. The persecution by others, the pain of the race and the enticement of false doctrine are not reasons to give up the Great Priest who alone has put away sin. Our Priest has entered the presence of God in heaven and remains there. We confessed at one time that we believe in him; now we must not give up our confidence in him.

## Hebrews 4:15 – 5:10

**The change of focus:** The earlier section had in it very sobering words, frightening words! It even exhorted us to fear lest with hard hearts we miss God's salvation. Now Hebrews makes a strong turn to the comforts we have with Christ as our Great high Priest, a Savior who knows our weaknesses and welcomes our coming to God's throne with our needs.

In the beginning of Hebrews the emphasis was that Jesus is God the Son. The subject of his priesthood was touched upon slightly in 1:3 but by the end of chapter 4 this role has become the central topic. He is the faithful priest (2:17); now shown after 4:15 as the merciful Priest (2:17). Since Jesus experienced real temptation, he has mercy for the weaknesses of his people. Since he is an effective Priest – because his offering has been accepted – he has brought to us access to God in prayer.

Chapter 5 shows what is required of all high priests, and then what is unique about Christ. Other priests offered sacrifices for their own sins – not so with Christ. Every priest must represent sinners before God, and must be appointed by God to do so. Jesus did not appoint himself.

His appointment was to be a King as well. Psalms 2 & 110 taught the King/Priest combination with "You are My Son" and "You are a priest". Jesus like Melchizedek is both king and priest. In v.10 Melchizedek's name appears for the first time in the New Testament. Aaron the first high priest of Israel appears in 5:4. His chief likeness to Jesus is that both he and our Lord were men appointed by God to serve as high priest. In most other aspects Jesus' ministry is a contrast to Aaron's.

This text stresses that Christ is sinless and adds a word on something the Bible hardly mentions, his development in obedience – obedience he learned by suffering. Then, when perfected by God, Jesus was qualified to be the effective Priest, the true source of eternal salvation. His priestly work entails his offering in the past and his current intercession for his people. Jesus did not need to make an offering for himself; he came to put away the sin of others.

This section begins the concentrated attention to the major theme of the Book of Hebrews. This doctrine requires attention and understanding, so laziness and no zeal to learn is a threat to a mature grasp of vital truth. This essential truth is the unique priesthood of Jesus, a truth that is foundational to understanding God and our salvation. That anyone could treat such matters lightly is deserving of rebuke. Thus a parenthesis of 5:11 – 6:12 interrupts the discussion of Jesus, the Priest in the Order of Melchizedek.

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**4:15** The preceding words cause us to examine our hearts. When we do so honestly, we will always have an awareness of sin in us, evidence of unbelief, and contradiction of the confession we make of Christ. Because our sin is real and brings God's condemnation, we need a priest to help us. God has provided us with such a Priest, and his offering was necessary to save us. Hebrews conveys the message that we have a Priest, and only one! Hebrews will emphasize: 1) we have a Priest, so let us come to God's throne, and 2) our Priest is from God, so we must not turn from him.

Hebrews now stresses how much Jesus' experience was like ours, and how different. Had he sinned – an impossibility! – he would need a priest to go to plead for him! He has not sinned, so he can plead for us. We should not look at the priestly ministry of Jesus as limited to his death on the cross in the past; he continues now to intercede for us before the Father. Christ is like a lawyer arguing for his client before the Judge! (1 John 2:1,2). Our sin is real, but so is his intervention and defense for us in heaven. This is an activity of Christ that would be totally unnecessary, if it were not true that we have sin.

**4:14,15 We have; we do not have.** In v.15 the denial, "we do not have," is related to his sympathy, we do not have a priest who cannot feel what we face, because we have One who does. No one can ever say of the Lord Jesus who resisted every sin he faced, that he does not know what our temptation is like. The one who keeps resisting sin knows more of its pressure than one who gives in to it. Temptation to sin and domination by it are both related to feeling sin's attraction, yet they are not the same. Feeling the attraction is not the sin; that is the temptation. It is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted. It is a sin to give in to the temptation, and that is what he did not do. See [Appendix D below, Could Jesus Sin?](#)

The Lord Jesus has sympathy for us, but the word *sympathy* in Greek is not limited to a feeling. It includes taking action, by helping the one for whom there is sympathy. Jesus' going to the cross for his people was more than feeling; it was action – full sympathy.

**The Love our Priest Has for Us** In ancient times some thought a priest would be a better priest if he had no feeling for the people. He would just do his job and make his offerings. Christ not only represents people, he cares for us in self-sacrificing action. He loves us, prays for us and died for us. "*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends,*" (John 15:13). "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep,*" (John 10:11). "*I pray for them,*" (John 17:9, also vv.15,20, and Luke 22:31,32). He did this for us while we were ungodly (Romans 5:6-8). The high priest of Israel was clothed with special robes and engraved stones with the names of the tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:9-21). That priest could never know every one of his people; our Shepherd knows us and calls us by name (John 10:3).

**4:16** Here is an encouragement to prayer and an assurance of God's kindness to his people. The element of approach to God's presence is unique. Throughout Scripture there is much prayer to and much blessing from God. What is a tremendous change since the cross is the matter of approach to God. In the OT only the high priest could enter God's Most Holy Place. "*Appoint Aaron and his sons to serve as priests; anyone else who approaches the sanctuary must be put to death,*" (Numbers 3:10). The people could enter his courts with praise, but never his sanctuary, (Psalm 100:4). Those praising the Lord inside the sanctuary were priests (Psalm 134), but they could not enter the section called the Most Holy Place, except for the high priest once a year (9:7).

We know Jesus is the Son of God who came from heaven and that he is sinless. It makes sense that he can approach his holy Father (Psalm 15 & 24:3-5). That is not a surprise when we know who Jesus is. He approaches God in his own righteousness; we do not. With us it is different; we have sin, so on our own we cannot approach the One whose "*eyes are too pure to look on evil*" and who "*cannot tolerate wrong*" (Habakkuk 1:13).

But now our Priest has gone ahead of us (6:20) into that holy Presence when he passed through the heavens (4:14). Christ “*entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption,*” (9:12). This means the offering he made (or in other words, the blood he presented to God for us), has been accepted. Eternal redemption has been obtained. Nothing more needs to be done to propitiate God (2:17). He has been satisfied by the blood presented to him. (See the later lesson on Hebrews 9). The condemnation that would have brought the wrath of God on sinners has been withdrawn from believers. The blood that secures justification (the removal of condemnation) has been offered and accepted. This means we come before God in Christ, not in our sins (John 8:21,24) but represented by Christ, covered with his blood. We do not come as condemned sinners, but as forgiven people, no longer accused of the sin removed from our record by the blood of Christ.

There remains an unfinished purification of us, his people. We come because we have sins and need cleansing, because we are weak and need his gracious help. We keep coming to the throne of grace for holiness and constant cleansing till the sanctifying process is completed at the Second Coming of Christ (1 John 3:2). This is the way we live and pray. Access to God has been purchased in blood; it is now open to us in Christ. Redemption has been accomplished for us; access is granted to us, but the application of redemption continues in us.

Christ “*has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself*” [This has been accomplished]. “*Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people;*” [finished!] “*And he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, [because that is completed] but to bring salvation* [i.e., to finish the uncompleted application of salvation] *to those who are waiting for him.* [So salvation is yet to be completed at the Second Coming.] (9:27,28).

Help comes to us in our time of need; this help is found as the people the Priest represented, pray. What we find is called *grace*. If it is grace, then it cannot be based on any worthiness in us (Romans 11:6). Help at God’s throne is graciously given while undeserved, not paid for by us, but by our Priest. Hebrews exhorts us to take such access to God to be heard and helped. We may come with confidence, since we have God’s sincere invitation, and because Christ has taken away our sin. “*Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God,*” (2 Corinthians 3:4). The throne of grace is a welcome place for us. The One seated at the right hand of the Majesty is the One who has shown the ultimate sympathy for us. No one can match his love for us. The Bible never says we approach God through the sympathy of Mary. The One who has us on his heart is the only Mediator (12:24; 1 Timothy 2:5) through whom we come. The welcome given us to pray is granted through the merits of the One at the Father’s right hand. And what does he do for us now? He makes intercession for us (Isaiah 53:12; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).

**5:1-3** What is common to all priests? Hebrews will dwell on many differences, but it begins by making a comparison of the priesthood of Aaron (5:4) and Christ. What do they have in common? (In 3:1-6, the writer began by giving the likeness of Moses and Jesus before any contrast.)

- Priests must be men. They must be what they represent. Jesus cannot represent angels because he never became one (2:16). Priests sacrifice on behalf of others. The principle of representation is very important. Without it one cannot understand the death of Christ, nor that his obedience is also imputed to his own. Christ represented us in his death and his life, and in his intercession continues to do so.
- Priests must be appointed. They must not assume such a position and proceed to work on their own. It was God who decided who his priests would be. He chose the tribe of Levi and then Aaron, and a succession of Aaron’s sons, to be high priest.
- Because we are in a section of likenesses of priests, compassion for the ones represented is a quality of a good priest. The reasons for compassion are not the same, but the divine standard that a priest should care for his people is apparent. Other high priests could have compassion because they experienced sin by sinning like their people. Christ experienced sin only by facing its temptation and penalty.

- Priests offer sacrifices for sin. Another difference is obvious: The old high priest had to offer for his own sin because he too was a sinner. The similarity is that a sacrifice required by God was made to God by a man appointed to do so.

We conclude that a priest is a man of compassion, called by God to represent people by sacrificing to God for them.

**5:4,5** Before Hebrews was written, King Herod, the same Herod who tried to kill Jesus as a baby (Matthew 2:1-12), decided for political reasons who would be high priest. Men could pay bribes to have that position, and Herod would choose. They were taking an honor on themselves and violating God's law where it stated the succession of the high priest (Leviticus 16:32).

No man could take the honor on himself to be a priest. Some could try, but only God decided who his priests will be, what they will offer, and for whom. God recognizes only his own appointment. Anything else is rejected. That truth is one that makes the rejection of Christ, and thus of his offering, the central issue of Hebrews. Hebrews will prove God's appointment of Jesus as priest by quoting his words, words written 1000 years before the birth of Jesus. Psalm 110 is not the declaration of Jesus speaking about himself, but the declaration of the Father concerning him.

**5:5,6 The double declaration** Here are the two words taken from Psalm 2 & 110: "You are My Son;" "You are a priest." This is the language of installing a person to office. The Greek in v.5 is not just Christ but "the" Christ, so the words of installation are of one man.

At this point in the development of Hebrews we come to its central thesis. The discussion moved from Jesus not appointing himself to God appointing him. The writer immediately turns to what it is that Jesus was appointed to, but this cannot be stated without reference to who Jesus is. He is God and now priest as well. God is King (1 Samuel 12:12) without being a man. To be the Son of David, Christ must become a man and he did. One cannot be a priest to represent men unless one is a man. Hebrews has laid all this groundwork of the humanity of Christ before chapter 5. Now the writer is ready to show that Jesus is the king-priest and there is no better example than Melchizedek. In fact, the Father pronounced Jesus a priest on the model of Melchizedek.

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| <p>As the <b>Christ</b>, the Chosen Anointed One, he did not come on his own mission but was sent by his Father</p> <p>As <b>Prophet</b> and Teacher Christ did not speak his own words but what his Father gave Him to say.</p> <p>As <b>King</b> he did not seize his kingdom, but was declared to be God's King (Psalm 2) and seated by the Father (Psalm 110).</p> <p>As <b>Priest</b> he did not appoint himself but, like Aaron, was called by God. And to this Lord God he made his offering.</p> <p>As a <b>Person</b> he did not glorify himself but his Father.</p> |
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The central motivation of the Son was to do the will of his Father, John 4, to bring us to Him (1 Peter 3:18). Christ has not and cannot act independently from his Father. His ministry as our Mediator has been God-centered and God-initiated. "I and the Father are One" is a deep and wonderful mystery. And it is no wonder at all that the Father's great delight is in his Son, who is the perfect reflection of himself, (1:1-3).

**5:7-10** When we read this, we recognize the situation of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is not clear from the text if the writer has in mind that the "loud crying and tears" were part of the rest of Jesus' life as a man on earth. A number of instances reveal his suffering all through his ministry. The evil spoken of him and to him, the rejection by his own people and even the unbelief of his family, are examples. He was a Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:1-4). The point of Hebrews was that Christ did not seize his office or his mission. He was sent which shows the submission of the Son to the Father. No part of the Bible makes the role of the Father sending the Son clearer than the Gospel of John. He was not merely sent; he obeyed in coming. His coming was his submission to his Father.

The text is headed to a crucial and sensitive point. There is a tension this text does not avoid. He was God the Son, yet he learned obedience as a man. The obedience was necessary to qualify Him as a priest. This priest was

one without sin. To be without sin needed two things: first, testing to prove his obedience in rejecting sin, and second positive obedience apart from some attempt to lure Jesus into sin. It is not enough to avoid wrong; He must be One who does the law of God from his heart to fulfill the prophecy of him in Psalm 40:8, "*I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.*"

As the Son,<sup>13</sup> he needed to learn nothing. His righteousness was full and perfect and it always had been. There is no growth to maturity or improvement possible in God. However as a real human being, Jesus developed not only in body, but in favor with God and man, (Luke 2:52). He had spiritual development, growth in learning obedience. All Hebrews tells us is that it was growth through suffering. (To despise suffering is to hate what God uses in all his children to produce the likeness of Christ, Romans 5:3-5.) This is enough to make his point: Since Jesus was perfect in obedience, he was perfect in righteousness. Thus we do not have a Priest approaching God for us who is less than perfectly holy. His divine perfection was an eternal constant, but his human perfection was proven over time, and when it was perfected he was then qualified to approach the Presence of God for us. There he offered his precious blood (1 Peter 1:18,19). We are made holy through the sacrifice of a holy body, with which Christ did the will of his Father (Hebrews 10:5-10). There is no such thing as a holy human body for acceptable sacrifice unless there is perfection in that person to the satisfaction of God. In other words, for Jesus to be our Priest, he must have perfection in obedience, not as a child but as a mature man. In Isaiah 50:4,5, the perfection of Christ as a man was developed by listening to the Word of God.

**5:9 The source of eternal salvation** Because Jesus is an eternal priest, with eternal results from his priestly work, the salvation he brings is eternal. It is for those who obey. This text does not say we gain God's acceptance on the condition of our obedience. The point of this paragraph is the necessity of Jesus' obedience to be the source of salvation to us. The salvation our Savior brings, has its distinct and definite result – those who are saved are described as those who obey.

**5:10 Designated by God to be high priest** This is the truth Hebrews has been moving to. Psalm 110:4 is especially in the writer's mind. He is at the point of a great elaboration on this verse, but he stops. There is a very serious problem; the people are not ready to learn, they are hard to teach because they are sluggish in their growth and not ready for the meat of God's word. They must be fed milk as babies. This has serious consequences. The writer will deal with that first and then resume his central teaching on Christ as our Great High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

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## Appendix 5: Could Jesus Sin?

Could Jesus Sin? Many make a terrible blunder here. They argue that since Jesus was human, and humans can sin, that Jesus would be less than truly human if it were impossible for Him to sin. They add to that argument a second one: that if Jesus could not sin, his temptation was not real.

Jesus came in the full likeness of our weak sinful human flesh, but he was the man from heaven, a new and different man, the product of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin mother. Thus we must make an important distinction. He, unlike us, had no predisposition to sin. Sin is natural to us because we are fallen and have had our nature corrupted. We are the abnormal humans and Jesus coming was the appearance on earth again of a truly normal man, just as Adam was prior to his fall.

Just as Adam could be corrupted it would be possible for the human nature of Jesus to be corrupted as well. The difference in the case of Jesus is that he was a person before he became a man. He was and is God. Thus Adam had one nature, human nature, whereas Jesus had two, a human nature and the divine nature he always had. These two natures are both active in one person. So as a man he could not know some information yet as God he knew all things. As a human baby he needed Mary to hold up his weak head in her arms; as God he sustained her life and held her up! These are not

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<sup>13</sup> It is awkward to translate "He was a Son" into English. Greek has no indefinite article. It does not say "a Son". It is more like "though Jesus being Son". Hebrews certainly is not suggesting that he is a Son among other sons.

contradictions but part of the great mystery of God in the flesh. So as a man Jesus could feel all the temptation that God cannot feel. God finds no attractiveness in sin! As a man, Jesus could. Yet his godly human nature filled with the Spirit he had received without limit (John 3:34), would resist sin in a way beyond the ability of Adam. And if we wonder how Jesus could resist temptation for 40 days in the wilderness, it was because God ministered to him in his weakness. At all times his divine nature was active in Christ the Son of God, to resist sin. It is impossible for God to sin and Jesus was at all times God. To this one might add an eternity of life and experience in loving his Father and never acting contrary to him. It would be unlike Jesus for Him to sin, no matter what pressure was upon him.

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## Hebrews 5:11 – 6:12

This lesson covers one of the most controversial statements in the Bible. In this third warning of apostasy (6:4-6), some conclude that people once united to Christ may still be lost if they apostatize. Some avoid this problem by arguing that the warning is only hypothetical. I am certain that all the warnings of Hebrews are real, and they deal with what can and does happen in the church.

The flow of Hebrews has been to present Christ as a Priest in the order of Melchizedek. Suddenly the writer turns to deal with the sluggishness of Christians. Something has happened to them that affects their discernment, their maturity and even makes them vulnerable to apostasy. Since the writer spoke of Christ as our Priest before and after this section, the danger he fears is related to them losing confidence in this truth, and thus confidence in Christ Himself. They had slipped from the zealous good works of former days (10:32-39). Maybe their claim of not being teachers (5:12) was a way they had to excuse themselves from boldly confessing Christ as their Savior Priest. Such caution may appear to be safety when persecution threatens, but it is really a great spiritual danger. Pulling back from confessing Christ indicates that confidence is not really in Christ, and that is a path to apostasy.

Hebrews 6 gives the topics of what those Christians considered foundational. It shows how deeply one may be involved in the church and still be lost. It also comforts believers and reviews their good works affirming love for the Lord in their care of each other. This section opens and closes with a word about sluggishness.<sup>14</sup> To counter this, the writer of Hebrews calls for diligence and fruitfulness.

Various subjects are combined: holding doctrine firmly, going on to maturity, care for others in the church, confession of Christ in the world, and hoping for the future. All these things are vital; they go together and cannot be separated. They all are essential in a responsible walk with the Lord.

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### **5:11-14 What was the problem that provoked such strong exhortation?**

This is difficult to decide. It *appears* that the readers of Hebrews were simply immature, not capable of solid food, only able to digest milk, in need of others to teach them, and such teaching would need to be of elementary things. This is the common understanding of the passage. It is easy to understand the passage this way, and we would be inclined to do so if all we had to influence our decision was this paragraph and nothing else.

Such an interpretation does not fit the rest of Hebrews smoothly; it even has a problem within the paragraph itself. If immaturity is the real problem (rather than a symptom of a different problem), then the writer fails to do certain expected things. Note these external factors:

- 1) He never writes this letter as if the readers of it are indeed so immature that they are unable intellectually to grasp what he is saying. It would be very odd to have one of the most complicated books in the Bible written the way it is, if the readers who receive it have no ability to handle solid food.
- 2) The following paragraph, “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity...” could mean let us grow into a deeper understanding. However, if they literally needed someone to

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<sup>14</sup> Again the word for sluggish serves as a inclusio. This word appears twice in all of the NT, only here in 5:11 & 6:12. In this way we are certain of the author’s literary unit.

teach them the elementary truths all over again, why then in 6:1-3 did he merely list those elementary things and not teach them at all? It is like saying, “You are only able to handle milk, so here, have some meat!”

### Internal factors:

1) The words “you are slow …”<sup>15</sup> should be, “you have become …” In other words, they once were a certain condition, but they deteriorated from that and are still in this lesser condition. It is doubtful that they really moved from a level of maturity to the knowledge level of little children. This helps to explain why the word to them is so stern. I hope we would be careful how we would scold young Christians who have not developed to maturity quickly. If a mature person reverts from active service to a passive behavior, that indicates irresponsible change. These readers moved from being teachers to learners! Something is wrong.

2) Further, being “dull of hearing” is part of a word play on the word to hear. In Greek, obey is the word hear with a prefix added. When the exhortation is put this way, it is a moral issue. The problem is not the degree of learning so much as resistance to hearing. That means it is a matter of serious spiritual danger. (Hearing as a matter of obedience is the same theme earlier in Hebrews in 2:1; 3:7,8,15; 4:2,7.) One way to back track on one’s bold confession of something is to take the position of being not quite so sure. He may say, I have to study this some more. To feign the position of a student is one way to avoid the responsibility of public confession.

The real problem may have been that some were quite capable of articulating who Christ is and what he has done. Then for reasons of community pressure, they may have ceased to affirm these things with the same boldness and vigor as earlier. They wanted to switch roles from confessors to learners. The writer of Hebrews reacts to that. We must remember how important confession of Christ is in this book.

I suggest that Hebrews at this point is prodding and embarrassing the readers to get back to where they were before. (See Revelation 2:5.) They did have ability to communicate the faith and had done so, but then later pretended they were babies. It is like claiming one is not an expert, a statement made to support an excuse for not speaking up and confessing Christ, as they once did. The writer rebukes them by calling them babies to jar them into being serious. Any move from confession to a lack of confession is extremely dangerous, because the real alternative to confession is denial! (Matthew 10:32,33). We must “*hold firmly to the faith we profess*” (4:14), “*the apostle and high priest whom we confess*” (3:1), and “*the hope we profess*” (10:23).<sup>16</sup>

I am not certain of this interpretation, but whenever we have one that fits the rest of the letter, it must be considered. I suggest that this paragraph should be seen as having a similar message as 10:32-39. Sluggish hearing and obedience means the heart is not fully in it. That indicates a hardening of heart, a warning not new to Hebrews. Soon chapter 6 will warn again of apostasy; again the theme is close to Hebrews 10:39, “*But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.*”

## Hebrews 6

**6:1-3** The appeal here is not to forsake elementary teachings, but to move on to more. We never mean that if something is elementary that it is unimportant; we mean it is not all there is. We are allowed here a glimpse of the topics they considered important in the instruction of new believers. The six topics fall into three sets of two.

1) Faith & Repentance They taught not only faith but also repentance, and this repentance was from dead works. (See 9:14). The view of sin is that it leads to death (James 1:14,15). The sin-death axis is unbreakable in

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<sup>15</sup> In 5:11, the NIV is “you are slow to learn” The NKJV & ESV are better; both say, “you have become dull of hearing”. The NIV loses the play on words related to hearing, and obscures the perfect tense.

<sup>16</sup> *Profess* and *confess* are from the same Greek word.

the justice of God (Romans 6:23). Their instruction had a frank simplicity to it. Sin is to be feared as deadly, and faith in God is not genuine unless repentance accompanies it.

**Justification by repentance?** The Bible never says we are justified before God by repentance; it is always by faith. Repentance turns from sin and thus is the converse of a turning to God for forgiveness. Only faith reaches out to receive the gift of God. A life of unlimited repentance would never save us because it is not the nature of repentance to take or to trust the promise of God in the gospel. Only faith is the means of justification, even though faith is never separated from repentance. Those who seek to have justification arising from a life of repentance are teaching salvation by works.

2) Washings and Laying on of Hands The previous set (faith and repentance) are not visible. They happen in the heart. Now comes a great contrast. The Jewish washings were known to them; surely in this context they were instructed about the washing that is distinctively Christian – baptism with water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is an external washing. Faith is in the blood of Christ for forgiveness; baptism is a visible washing that points to the blood that cleanses from sin. In Western society, there is little enthusiasm for some rite sanctified by the Word of God. People are more interested in what goes on within them, but it was the Lord Jesus who instituted baptism, commanding it in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

Laying on of hands could refer to the reception of the Holy Spirit as in Acts 8:17, or even the ministry of those men called by God to be ministers of the Word, (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). Sharing the same baptism would identify Christians as part of the same body of believers. The world cannot see faith in the heart, but it can see a rite that identifies one as a Christian. (I did not say, “makes one to be a Christian”.) Whatever ‘laying on of hands’ is, it is a visible action.

The six items mentioned are in three pairs: two are related to activity in the heart, two to what the eye can see, and the last two look to what has not yet happened.

3) The Resurrection and Eternal Judgment Basic Christian instruction included the Coming of Christ, the physical resurrection of the body, the Judgment, the eternal punishment of all without Christ, and the final suppression of all that is evil. Christian teachers in the days of the New Testament were not interested only in the present. Teaching about the future is an essential element to provide new believers with the big picture.

The writer wants to move on to other themes (6:1) and is ready to do so, if the Lord lets him get to that part in the letter he is writing (6:3)! Yet before he can show how Christ is in the order of Melchizedek, he must address the irreversible nature of apostasy (6:4-8), and then comfort his readers that he does not think they are apostate (6:9,10), and then urge upon them a diligent life of faith (6:11,12).

## The Third Warning 6:4-8

The core of the warning is 6:4-6 with vv.7 & 8 as an illustration.

Vv.4-6 make a long sentence that should be read this way: “It is impossible for those who ... (*and here there is a long description of them*) ... if they fall away, to be brought back ...”

The chief point is that there can be no restoration to repentance for those who have crossed the line into apostasy. The significance of their desertion of Christ is given in v.6. They crucify Christ – rather strong language to show it is utter rejection of him, and that it is public! Thus, this sin is not explained as a matter of our weakness; it is a forceful, public, deliberate repudiation of the Lord Jesus, just as 10:26-29 will show later. (Remember that Hebrews is a sermon; good sermons repeat the central burdens of the preacher. The matter of an incipient apostasy is probably what provoked this letter.)

**Descriptions of those who fell into apostasy** In every case, the descriptions are of an experience that had all the appearance of referring to true believers. In Ephesians 5:1-2, the entire church is spoken of as children of

God; this is followed with the realization that among them there must not be (but could be) those who have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. Likewise, the churches of Revelation 2 & 3 had within those who appeared to be true believers. Some sins become apparent while other sins never come fully into the open (1 Timothy 5:24). Judas' apostasy was revealed only at the very end. The following list of blessings and privilege show the spiritual advantage and exposure to the life and truth of the Lord among those who in time choose to crucify Jesus again. This falling away comes from persons who once claimed to believe in him, but the Lord never knew them, (Matthew 7:21-23).

- a) They had a repentance of some kind, or else it would never say that they cannot be returned to it again.
- b) They had been enlightened – this was standard language for being converted (10:32); expressed in other words, it was a *reception of the truth* (10:26). Conversion from sin is leaving a life of darkness (Colossians 1:12,13). Anyone who has any evidence of repentance would be described as one who has come into the light. After NT times, *enlightenment* would become a term for baptism, but that is not the case within the New Testament.
- c) They tasted the heavenly gift – this means they had exposure to heavenly things. To hear the gospel favorably is to receive the message of the One the Father sent from heaven. Some receive the gospel with joy, as in Matthew 13:20. Yet this can be a shallow response without any fruit (Matthew 13:23); the hearer and thus the taster of this heavenly gift can still “fall away” (Matthew 13:21). It will not fit to say that these persons only tasted but did not eat; *taste* is not used that way in the Bible (see 2: 9). Apostates were in living contact with the real things and at one time, they claimed that they too believed.
- d) They shared in the Holy Spirit – this may refer to the Spirit’s very visible activity in signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts mentioned in 2:4. Unbelievers also saw these things in the ministry of Christ, causing them to make statements that they were convinced of Christ and “believed”. Many believed in Jesus according to John 10:42; 12:42, but note that when some “believed” in John 2:23, the Lord “did not entrust himself to them for he knew what was in all men” (John 2:24). It is reported of apostate Simon that he believed (Acts 8:13) yet his heart was not right (Acts 8:20-23). So the activity of the Spirit may make an impression that is not the same as regeneration. Apostates like Judas could be active in ministry (Matthew 10:1-10), prophesying, driving out demons, and performing miracles, even raising the dead, yet he was a devil (John 6:70) who was so intimately involved we can say he shared in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:17). Christ was clear that Judas was not lost in the sense that one of God’s elect was lost (John 17:12). In fact his treachery was part of God’s eternal plan (Luke 22:21,22), but he was lost because in his unwashed heart (Titus 3:5); he loved money more than Christ. Amazing as it is, Judas shared in the Spirit in the activity of ministry but not in new life in Christ.
- e) They tasted the powers of the coming age – this is similar to sharing in the Spirit in light of 2:4. Apostates in the church saw transformed lives, the beginnings of eternal life appearing before them. Unbelievers can see a shining light (Matthew 5:14-16). Every raising of a dead person was a harbinger of the resurrection of everyone in the coming age. Jesus’ casting out demons was witness that the kingdom of God, not fully revealed, was nevertheless evident in his Spirit-filled ministry (Matthew 12:28). The coming age is not here. It waits for the second coming, but the glory of what will be had begun. It was in such a context that apostates experienced the realities around them, yet they turned to spurn Christ. Like those in the cities where Jesus did most of his miracles, the apostates will face greater judgment (Matthew 11:20-24).

**6:7,8 The Parable of Two Lands** Just as the same word of God was the common seed in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, here these different lands receive the same rain. Apostates and true believers sat in church under the same Word of God and saw around them the same visible work of the Spirit. The response in some was a sincere faith and obedience. With the apostates, it was a thorns-and-thistles response to the living God, a “crop” not immediately apparent to human eyes. The result is that one kind is blessed and the other ground is cursed and burned. In this simple way, Hebrews states again the issue and result of apostasy. If the tree bears no good fruit, it will be cut down (Luke 13:6-9); if the professing branches bear no fruit, they will be burned. The true believer will bear good fruit and thereby will show that he is a disciple (John 15:1-8). Apostasy is so godless that in spite of every advantage, as in Isaiah 5:1-7, the unregenerate heart will persist in unbelief, disobedience, and rejection of the Son of God.

**6:9-12 The Appeal for Good Works** Even though the horrid possibility of apostasy meant the writer had to deal with such a threat, it is not his appraisal of the church. He speaks softly calling them dear friends, (probably translated better as “beloved”) revealing that he is not hostile. It is impossible to be a pastor while hostile to those under one’s care. It is “feed my sheep” (John 21:17), not beat my sheep.

He believes better things, like the better land producing a useful crop (6:7). We are justified by faith alone, but this receptive faith without works in it (Romans 3:28) shows itself in due course to be a productive faith that works. A faith that has no follow on deeds is not a true saving faith (James 2:14); faith is not what we do to be justified, but if it is real, it is shown by what we do (James 2:18). Salvation has a beginning, and it will have what accompanies it. He then states his evidence: their love to God was shown to his people. This observation – the writer somehow had some pertinent knowledge of them (10:32-39) – makes him conclude that genuine salvation has occurred. He will still express a great concern concerning each individual in 6:11, just in case! (See 3:12). It should be very plain to us that the writer of Hebrews does not base his comfort concerning their salvation merely upon some claim on their part that they have been converted. His emphasis is on the fruit that demonstrates salvation (John 15:8). Their love for the Lord has registered with him, and he adds that the Lord too will reward them for it. God will not remember forgiven sins, and he will not forget love for him, shown to the people he loves.

**6:11,12 The Appeal for Diligence** This section began with the sober appraisal that they have become sluggish. They needed to pay attention to that and to its danger. After his warning came his kind appraisal about their salvation. As soon as he points to their good works, he calls for more of the same. He wants it to be characteristic of them. The emphasis then takes on the certain angle of hope. This is very important. It is not enough to believe truth! Hebrews encourages believing but also expecting, the feature of faith we call hope. Do they have anything to look forward to? Do they not have an inheritance? What of the promises of God that relate to the future? Their discouragement, shown in running a sluggish race (12:1-13), had its root in a fading hope.

We are justified by faith alone (Romans 5:1); we stand in this grace (Romans 5:2) and “*we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God*” (Romans 5:2). The rest of Hebrews 6 will encourage faith in God’s promises, and that is what hope is. Before he speaks to that, the writer connects hope with a life that anticipates God’s eternal blessings. This hope affects the present and causes people to love. A person with little hope is one with little faith. We may not see how diligence (a fruit of faith) can ever cause hope to increase, but that is what this passage teaches! I think the rule is that one virtue adds to another. Peter speaks of God’s promises, which lead to holiness of life and resistance to lust. Peter begins with faith and ends with such a productive life that the believer gains certainty of election (2 Peter 1:3-11). What may appear to be a small obedience (helping God’s people) is a diligence that, if continued to the end, makes their hope sure. Faith looks away from self to Christ for acceptance by God, but such faith leads to transformation in conduct, promoting hope in God’s promises for eternity.

Hebrews is a careful balance of warning re laziness and encouragement to diligence. He has addressed their situation, given what the issues are, and now finds he must give illustrations from the stalwart lives of others (plural), though he will wait till Hebrews 11-13 to open this subject fully. In chapter 6 he will speak of the hope of Abraham and his inheritance. The theme is quite deliberate. We should ponder what we believe God will do for us in the future. The inheritance is a gift to faith, but faith is alive. In patient hope it settles upon whatever God promises. To be without hope is to be without faith, and that would be to be without Christ!

## Hebrews 6:13-20

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**The Sermon** The scolding of 5:12-14, the exhortation of 6:1-3 and the terrible warning of 6:4-8 are followed by words of comfort in 6:9-12 and great encouragement in this present lesson of 6:13-20. This is the pattern of a sermon; it goes from teaching to warning, from duty to encouragement. Hebrews covers the full range of how the Word of God addresses with authority. No element is omitted. It constantly argues from Scripture. It connects things that belong together for those who will pay attention. Now in 6:13-20, it will touch so briefly on the example of Abraham. In Hebrews 3 & 4, the readers received a terrible example of unbelief from Psalm 95. In Abraham, they will have encouragement, though the attention here is not to Abraham’s faith, but to his Lord who gave his word as promise and backed it up with an oath. Hebrews as a sermon does

everything. It has careful interpretation and exposition of Scripture, (exegesis), exhortation of both kinds (warning and encouragement), much explanation, and even illustration. When all the key issues have been stated, Hebrews has a massive section of illustration in the well-known chapter 11.

## Two main problems:

1). Faith in Christ is an issue of truth. Thus Hebrews begins with much doctrine about Christ not being an angel but God the Son. Also he is the appointed Priest, another doctrinal affirmation. Thus, our hope for acceptance by God lies in his ministry, which includes his sacrifice, resurrection, and ascension. Faith and theology cannot be separated.

2). The other major issue of faith relates to enduring the present trouble. Will they truly inherit what God has promised? Will the future really be different? What good is it doing us to believe in Christ? The readers of Hebrews lived in a pagan world and were outcasts among their Jewish people. They appeared to lose their past heritage as Jews and as persecuted Christians the prospect of a happy future. This is faith as an issue of hope in a context of loneliness. It is still theological because the hope of what they looked for was guaranteed by the ministry of Christ and that ministry is worthless if it is not true. Hebrews promotes a faith that believes truth and a faith that hopes in divine promises.

A person may turn away from Christ for more than one reason. Apostasy can come from error or fear of persecution. In such a context of theological and social tension, those who are not partakers of Christ will give in to the error or pressure. Those who are partakers of Christ will not. The issue is, are we for him or against him (Matthew 12:30)? It connects to our doctrine of who he is, and in Hebrews 6, it relates to hope for the future. Faith is the larger word; faith agrees with God's revelation and trusts all that God says. Hope is a smaller word; it is trusting God primarily for the future.

The word hope has been twisted into its opposite in our day. To say in the language of Hebrews that we have a hope is to speak of a future certainty. When modern man says, "I hope so," he expresses the uncertainty of his wishes.

**6:12** spoke *those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised*. Hebrews now turns to Abraham as an example of faith. He is an example of faith, but the words that follow say nothing of Abraham's faith at all. Instead, he appears in Hebrews 6 as an example of One to whom God made promises and backed them up with his oath. All the attention goes to God who promises and acts to assure his friend Abraham that he is trustworthy. Great faith in an idol is futility (Isaiah 41:29), but faith like a little mustard seed can never disappoint if placed in the Lord (Matthew 17:20; Romans 10:13).

This passage ends with Melchizedek. 5:11 – 6:20 has been a parenthesis. The key texts of Hebrews are "You are" and "You are" in 5:5,6. He mentioned Melchizedek in 5:10 and stopped; then in 6:20, the writer returns to Christ as a Priest in the order of Melchizedek. During this parenthesis he spoke of apostasy, so it must be an apostasy that falls from Christ the Priest. The hope in 6:18,19 is connected to Christ our Priest entering heaven. When it speaks of moving to maturity (6:1) this too is tied to the theme that came before and after the parenthesis – one they might not be too eager to give attention too. We too should frame issues of maturity, hope, and belief in ways that center in Christ.

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**6:13-15** Abraham is mentioned in Hebrews 2,6,7 & 11. Others who believed God's promises (6:12) will be mentioned in chapter 11. At this point only Abraham is mentioned with no further reference to his faith but to his God. Often the Psalms reveal God in his deeds as in Psalms 78, 105,106. So our faith rests in more than claims. God informs us (by using propositions!) of what he has done in human history. Often history is humanity's experience of the words of God. Thus we have in God's world a record of faithfulness, not just an assertion. The Scriptures are prolific in recording the story of God's dealings with man. God could be very truthful in describing himself in words alone, but if we never witness any example of these qualities in action, we would have no depth of understanding. The Lord is the God who speaks and acts.

Making an oath is more than giving more words. An oath by nature agrees to serious consequences to the one making it if it is broken. We too do this kind of thing in raising a hand to swear in court or by signing a document. This text does show there are sober occasions when we may commit our word in the form of an oath.

A serious oath in a serious situation (such as marriage) is very fitting. It must have been a surprise to Abraham that the Lord who cannot lie was willing to swear an oath.

God had made promises to Abraham earlier that Isaac would be his heir and through Isaac would come many nations (Genesis 17:19,21; 21:12). The words were clear; then came the order to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham was so sure of God's word that he obeyed knowing God would raise Isaac from death (11:17-19). Before his eyes Abraham saw his living son; he had received the promise. Yet none of the saints in 11:39 *received what had been promised*. For them there was still more: resurrected life in the city of God. Abraham had rather amazing faith, yet it was after offering Isaac (Genesis 22:1-14) that God swore to him with an oath (Genesis 22:15-18). That we should believe God is so important to him, (11:6) that God did this amazing thing of swearing an oath to convince a man of his resolve. Abraham needed his faith strengthened. Before him was one son, but the promise was that he would be the father of many nations. We too need faith focused on the promises of God.

**6:15** This verse does not mean after waiting patiently Abraham saw the promise of many nations fulfilled. The way vv. 13-15 flow, one might think that, but we interpret Scripture in the light of the entire Bible. Abraham died long before the many nations came; even now the fulfillment is incomplete. I think v.15 means, after waiting patiently for the promised son, he received the promised son. No person yet has received all that God has promised (11:39,40). No person who believes God lacks blessings prior to its total fulfillment. In Ephesians 1:13,14 the Holy Spirit is the current gift to each believer as the guarantee of all the inheritance yet to come.

**6:16,17** Why do men swear? One reason is that sin has contaminated human communication, so we need ways of giving assurance. God condescended to use an oath to give assurance. It must have startled Abraham. Creating an awareness of God's great seriousness and pledge to keep his promise, overcomes the detrimental effect of looking only at what one can see. We must believe God for what will be. So God swore by himself and Hebrews gave the purpose of it. He wanted the unchanging nature of something to be clear. The thing to be clear was God's purpose, so all Biblical texts that reveal God's purpose are important. (Since there has been some unhealthy debate on prophecy, many avoid the theme altogether and suffer loss as a result.) God's purpose was clear to him; he wanted it clear to them. A promise is made in our time, but God's purpose has been his for all eternity. Abraham was not an heir by himself; there are many heirs. The promises to Abraham are promises to us (Ephesians 2:12 & 19). He was promised the world (Romans 4:13) and so are we (Matthew 5:5). Thus God confirmed promises he had made already with an oath. Men do that; God did it too. Things promised to Abraham are promised to us in Christ (Galatians 3:29).

**6:18 Two Unchangeable Things** The two are his word of promise and his confirming oath. We have his word. Some may ask where the oath is. This too is recorded in his word and reported to us. But we have something Abraham did not have; we have a very large record of history of how God has implemented his promise. This should strengthen our faith. It is inadequate to just say over and over or sing over and over that God is good and faithful, etc. One important way God convinces us of that is by the large Biblical record of his acts in history. He wants us to review his record.

The character and nature of God are essential to his promise, because a promise is only as reliable as the one who makes it. God can swear by no one greater than himself (v.13), a truth about God that was not stated in the Genesis passage quoted. Further reference to the nature of God is that he cannot lie. These are wonderful impossibilities. He is unable to swear by anyone greater than himself and unable like men to lie (Numbers 23:19). Doctrine is impossible to keep out of our understanding of God, for theology is simply our understanding of God.

**The Language of Contracts** The Bible uses many analogies to illuminate our relationship with him. Christ the Husband and we the Bride, is one, yet marriage to Christ is not the same in every way as human marriage. More prominent perhaps is the Father/Son analogy. The Judge and the one summoned to appear before him, even with a defense lawyer, is another. In some of Jesus' parables, he refers to masters & servants.

In Hebrews 6, we have the language of legal contracts. We read of an oath, vv.16,17; a dispute, v.16; swearing, v.13,16; providing a guarantee, v.17; providing proof, v.17; or confirmation, v.16; plus an irrevocable will in v.17.

Such use of the language of contracts is like saying something is "signed, sealed, and delivered". The chief way God presents his relationship to us is in the form of covenant: "I will be your God and you shall be my people." Yet here God used the language of commerce to show his promise in the language of a binding contract.

**6:18** To flee is to behave as a fugitive; the flight is from danger. The reason we need a priest is that God is holy and just. As holy, he deplores our sin, and as just he will reward it with death and banishment from his holy presence. God is the sinner's danger! The idea of drawing near to God in sin (i.e., not reconciled to him) is the opposite of safety. The writer has changed from a focus on God's truthfulness to why we need a promise and what the promise is. The matter of the oath to Abraham was a promise of many descendants. The focus now is on the need we have of a priest. If God is serious about his promise to Abraham, he is equally serious about his provision of the Priest for us. He has sent One and we must believe him. Abraham needed encouragement and so do we.

**6:19-20** The hope offered is simply the truth of Christ in which we trust and in whom we trust. How can we know we are forgiven? We rest in the certain hope of what he has done on the cross and his acceptance by the Father. Our hope is not a feeling within, even though the truth of Christ creates a sense of peace in us. Our hope is in heaven, and that shows it is not subjective. Feelings change; they move; this hope is likened to an anchor that does not move. Our hope is not like an anchor that attached to the bottom of the sea; it is unmovable because it is anchored in heaven above where Jesus has entered to plead for us as our Priest.

Two things are made parallel and we must read them as one. Our hope is in heaven because Jesus is in heaven. If he were rejected in heaven and told to leave to sacrifice again, our hope would not be anchored anywhere. We could have no reason for confidence to approach God, no place to run from his wrath on our sin. But Jesus has entered. In this way, Hebrews mentions briefly what will be developed in the section to follow, a section of unbroken exposition on Christ as our Priest. It stretches from 7:1 to 10:18 with some repetition even after that.

Only the high priest could enter the inner sanctuary and then he had to leave. Our priest has entered with not a word of him leaving; he is still there. He did not enter heaven simply to return to his Father's side. As the Son of God he could do that, but as our Priest he has entered heaven *for us*. That means he represents us there. At the very center of God's unyielding hatred of our sin, Jesus sits as the approved and accepted Priest on our behalf. It is his ministry for us that secures our peace. It is his ministry that is the total and exclusive hope we have. Our Lord has entered heaven, and that is where our hope is anchored. It is a hope in God's unbreakable Word and a hope in the effective ministry of Jesus.

Hebrews is now ready for a detailed review of Psalm 110:4, the promise of and even an oath to a Priest from God who continues forever, a Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

## Notes on Hebrews 7

David H. Linden, revised May 2022

**7:1-10** Hebrews sometimes mentions a subject and then deals with it later. That Christ is a Priest in the order of Melchizedek was mentioned without further explanation in 5:6 & 10. The writer said he had much to say of this, and then digressed into another matter before returning in 6:20 to say again that Jesus' priesthood was in the order of Melchizedek. In chapter 7 he will focus on this; Melchizedek is not mentioned again after 7:17.

We learn first that Christ will be a Priest of this kind only from Psalm 110:4. To know what that means it is necessary to review what earlier Scripture had said about Melchizedek; it says very little: *Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.* (Genesis 14:18-20)

Hebrews 7 does not discuss the serving of bread and wine, nor even that Melchizedek blessed God! It wants to show the significance of him as a real priest who lived well before Levi, Aaron and the later priests of Israel. Hebrews 7

establishes that Melchizedek is the greater man; Abraham paid the tenth to him, and he blessed Abraham. It will stress that Melchizedek has no recorded genealogy. The chief thing the writer wants to establish is that Jesus has a permanent priesthood, one far superior to the priests who came through Levi.

Many would question how Jesus could ever be a genuine Priest. He was not of the tribe of Levi, and the law of God regulated that priests must be of that tribe. It would appear that believing in Jesus as our Great High Priest is contrary to God's Word and therefore a false doctrine. Hebrews 7 will show to the Jewish people from their own Scriptures that the strong statement in Psalm 110 that David's Lord would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek has been there in their Bibles for 1000 years. That man had been a priest in Abraham's day, a true priest who served Abraham's God. He was not a Levite, so Jesus also can be a real priest even though he is not one according to the law of Moses. This fact demonstrates that a great change has come to Israel, because a priest outside the line of Levi shows there has been a change in the law itself, and that the promised Messiah has come. To some it would be apostasy to believe in a different kind of priest. Jesus was not qualified to be a priest by genealogy; he was not qualified to serve in the Tabernacle or Temple. Later Hebrews will make plain that not believing in Christ as the promised Priest of Psalm 110:4, is to fall away from the true faith God revealed to Israel.

To study this part of Hebrews, it is important to pay attention to the historical details found in Genesis 14 and also to the significance of them to understand the kind of priest Jesus is.

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**7:1** It is essential to Hebrews that there was a man in history named Melchizedek. This is not a myth. He lived at a certain time – the time of Abraham. He lived in a certain place – Salem, even if we are not sure where Salem was. Melchizedek had a known name, and as a priest he acted at a specific moment in history when he met Abraham.<sup>17</sup> The record is clear that there was such a man. Someone might try to argue that since Melchizedek is not a priest who is a son of Aaron that he is the priest of some other god, one not identified! That objection cannot stand for there is only one God Most High. The Lord God of Israel is that God Most High, and he will later speak of Melchizedek in Psalm 110:4.

**7:2** Later the significance of paying a tithe will be made. Hebrews 7 begins by establishing the facts of this very brief moment in Abraham's history. Zedek is the word for righteousness and Salem sounds like Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace. Maybe if this appeared in Romans, Paul would make a point from this fact. Hebrews will remain focused on Melchizedek as a priest. It shows he is a king priest, and so is Christ as Psalm 110 makes clear in vv.1 & 4, but nothing further is said of Melchizedek's kingship.

**7:3** A feature not stated in Genesis 14 is emphasized vigorously. We do not read that Melchizedek had no parents. He is not stated to be fatherless,<sup>18</sup> or that he had no mother. It is not simple to translate this since unusual words are used. Clearly it means that there is no record of his father or mother. There is no mention of his birth or death. It does not say he was never born; nor does it say he never died. We have here a strong argument from silence. The only account we have of Melchizedek is limited to one occasion. He was a priest of God Most High not because of a certain genealogy, but because God appointed him as priest. He appeared in history only as a living priest of the true God totally apart from any qualification as to his ancestors. The picture is of a living man in a continuing ministry, and in that way he is a model of the Son of God. This is a clear example of the Holy Spirit restricting information so as to give a certain kind of picture of this priest. The special purpose was to have in place, long before Israel's priests appeared, one who was different from them, the model of Christ to come. Melchizedek was like Christ in a unique priesthood.

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<sup>17</sup> The "met Abraham" is an *inclusio* appearing in vv. 1&10. This indicates that it is a literary section. In Genesis 14 the King of Sodom met Abraham. Of course, if Melchizedek and Abraham were together they also met. But for these words to appear only here in the Bible serves to mark a deliberate boundary for this section.

<sup>18</sup> The very unusual word in Greek, found only here in all of the Bible, appears in another Greek writer not to mean fatherless but "*father unknown*". It is a way of saying "without genealogy."

The high priests of Israel were a type of Christ from the standpoint of their sacrificial ministry. The Bible says nothing of any sacrifices Melchizedek may have offered. The silence of Genesis is important. Of course Melchizedek offered sacrifices because all priests do that, but he does not witness to Christ by this function. *What he does do is serve as one outside the tribe of Levi who is still a genuine priest.* Neither Genesis nor Hebrews mention his offerings. In that way he would be like the priests of Levi. It is the record of him as ever-living that is his chief likeness to Jesus. In sacrifices, the Levitical priests foreshadow Christ; from the standpoint of office, Melchizedek does.

By suppressing Melchizedek's genealogy God was giving a message. Melchizedek was made to resemble the Son of God. The Greek verb in "he *remains* a priest" in v.3 is passive, so the idea is that he was made deliberately by God to be like the Son of God. Jesus also would serve at God's call, not because one priest was father to another one. By saying a "priest forever," which Genesis does not say, the writer reveals how much Psalm 110:4 influences his reading of Genesis. The right way to read the Bible is by having one part interpret another part. He knows the Old Testament predicted that an eternal priest was coming. He knew from the psalm that in some way Melchizedek would be a pattern of the priesthood of Jesus, so he looked for similarity.

**Is Melchizedek an Old Testament Appearance of Jesus?** The Old Testament does have some appearances of God assuming the form of a creature, since God himself has no form! (Deuteronomy 4:9-24). The Angel of the Lord is the Lord (Genesis 22:15; Judges 2:1), who appeared as a flame to Moses (Exodus 3:2), and in some visual way to Balaam (Numbers 22:31) and Gideon (Judges 6:11,12). Is Melchizedek another appearance of the Lord similar to this?

He is not called the Angel of the Lord. He is not said to be the Son of God, but one who resembles the Son of God. He is the human king of a certain city, which indicates his regular residence there. He was a man (7:4) centuries before Jesus became a man. It makes no sense to say that Christ is a Priest in the order of himself in a previous appearance. Melchizedek is not Christ; he foreshadows Christ.

**7:4-10 Abraham paying a tithe to this great man** With no mention of any sacrifice being offered by Melchizedek, Genesis speaks of other things in the encounter of this "great man" with Abraham. Since the tithe went to Melchizedek; that demonstrates the honor Abraham had for this priest. If the Patriarch Abraham could honor this priest in this way, surely Abraham's children should admit how great he was.

**Priests as sons of Levi** Abraham was the father of Isaac, who was the father of Jacob, who was the father of Levi. For their faithfulness Levites were set apart to the Lord (Exodus 32:27-29). Later God said, "*Appoint Aaron and his sons [who were Levites] to serve as priests; anyone else who approaches the sanctuary must be put to death,*" (Numbers 3:10). God chose them to serve not by a specific call to each one but by his choice of them as a group: "*The LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name....*" Deuteronomy 10:8. One son was anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest (Leviticus 16:32). When offerings were made, the Levites collected the tenth from the other Israelites (Numbers 18:25-29).

The mention of what was given to Melchizedek reveals how crucial it is to Hebrews that Genesis records real history. There was a battle between kings; Abraham responded to it and brought home the spoils of war for his men, but a tenth of all he gave to this great man. The writer wants his readers to admit that this really happened and that there was a man named Melchizedek. If they can escape the facts of this, they will have some reason to reject another priesthood and thereby also to reject Christ.

The law requires that Levites collect the tenth (Numbers 18:21). When Melchizedek received the tenth, the law was not in effect. This fact shows that the law concerning priests had a temporary nature. Genesis says that Abraham gave the tenth. It does not say that Melchizedek collected it, but if Abraham gave it and Melchizedek accepted it then it is parallel to the Levites collecting. The writer wants us to see that Levites collect and so did Melchizedek. Further, Father Abraham represented his offspring, thus in a way Levi in his great grandfather's action paid his tithe also. Not only was Abraham showing recognition of Melchizedek, so was Levi. Therefore

Melchizedek has a priesthood greater than all the sons of Levi, and since Christ is a Priest in that order, he too has a ministry greater than all the other priests serving when Hebrews was written. To reject the priesthood of Jesus and his sacrifice is to depend on an inferior ministry when the Old Testament taught that a greater one was coming.

The writer is preaching; he exhorts them to think, and this is not the first time he made that sort of appeal. (See 3:1.) Melchizedek is great as the receiver of the tenth, and he is greater as the one who pronounces the blessing on Abraham. Abraham did not bless Melchizedek. Melchizedek did it as priest of the Most High God, and speaking that way he had the rank of a spokesman for God. Pleading for them to consider what happened that day long ago, they must conclude that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham and thus Levi as well. In his greatness Melchizedek was a witness to Christ, the Greater One to come. (See Luke 11:29-32.) Abraham took Melchizedek seriously. It is more significant that Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek than the fact that Melchizedek was the King of Salem. Anyone reading Genesis 14 could see Abraham as greater than the other nine kings mentioned there, but they cannot miss the high rank of Melchizedek.

In 7:6 Abraham is mentioned as the one “who had the promises.” The way Hebrews speaks is always deliberate. Galatians 3 & 4 teach that Abraham received what is promised not by his obedience to the law but by the promises of God. Here in Hebrews there is a suggestion of this law/promise distinction. Abraham would be blessed because of the faithfulness of God, which is the basis of Abraham’s inheritance. In chapter 7, promise is only mentioned; later in 11:8-19 it will be emphasized. The promise precedes the law and is the basis of our salvation. The priests from Levi only carried out the ceremonies of the law, but Abraham had the covenanted word of God, and thus a guaranteed inheritance before the law was given through Moses. On the basis of law the sons of Levi served. This is a way that the writer indicates the inferiority of the ceremonial law. Apart from the law’s regulation Jesus was appointed a priest in the order of Melchizedek. He fulfilled the law, but his ministry for us does not benefit us because of any regulation, but because of the graciousness of God’s promise. Thus Jesus’ ministry is of the nature of the gospel itself.

**A Priest forever** If all we ever knew about Melchizedek was that he was greater than Abraham, that would not show as much about Christ as the distinction that priests from Levi are “men who die” while Scripture presents Melchizedek only as one who is living. This is why Hebrews reports that he was “without end of life”. It is as a priest who lives that Melchizedek is a witness to Christ to come. Jesus is fully like the Father including God’s eternal existence. Hebrews 1 begins by affirming Christ’s deity. What was especially needed by the readers was to see the enduring nature of Jesus’ service as Priest, so that faith would be in him and his offering. Melchizedek, and the way he is reported was a shadow designed by God to show Christ as a priest on the basis of the power of an indestructible life (v.16), a priest forever (v.17), One who lives forever and has a permanent priesthood (v.24), One who always lives to intercede for them (v.25).

**A Problem We Do Not Have** There is a very large problem we do NOT have. It is that the Old Testament does not tell us of only one kind of priest, and then the New Testament surprises us with Jesus as a Priest of a different kind. If that were so, the Jews would have an argument for retaining their system of priests and rejecting Jesus. They could use their Bibles to do so. But it was in their Scriptures that we learn of another priest; it was not added later. This Melchizedek was mentioned in the days of Abraham, well before any mention of priests in the tribe of Levi ever came up in the Bible. Then in Psalm 110 we have a very strong statement that God has – by an oath even – sworn that one specific person is a Priest. This Person is the Lord who sits at the Father’s right hand in heaven (Psalm 110:1). We did not make all this up. It was there in the Word of God for centuries before Jesus was born. By rejecting Christ the real Priest, the Jewish people have ended up with no priest at all, just as the prophet said in Hosea 3:4,5. This dire situation endures until they turn to the Priest who is the Son of God.

## Hebrews 7:11-28

**7:11-19** The teaching about the Priesthood of Christ continues with reference to Melchizedek, however all mention of Melchizedek as an historical figure in Genesis is finished. The focus now is on Jesus, the Priest like Melchizedek who has come as promised in Psalm 110.

The priesthood of the sons of Aaron is now a great danger. If anyone holds to it as the hope of perfection, then the ministry of Christ is bypassed and the redemption he brings is rejected. The priesthood of Aaron was legitimate at one time, but its purpose was to prepare for Christ, not to compete with him. It never did bring perfection. With Christ now serving as God's new, final, and ever-living Priest, the other priesthood is obsolete and the law related to it abrogated. This is what the Jews of the time Hebrews was written needed to understand. This section is written to convince them.

The Christian faith cannot tolerate having Christ as one way of reconciliation with God beside an equally valid system of animal sacrifice offered by sinful priests who die. This issue is approached in Hebrews from a number of angles. The chief point in 7:11-19 is to show that the Levitical system was inadequate to bring salvation. There was a need for another Priest. God had promised an effective Priest, One not descended from Levi. Jesus is that Priest; his office does not depend on his genealogy; in fact he is of the tribe of Judah. He has already come in fulfillment of Psalm 110. His coming means that even the law authorizing priests must yield to this fulfillment. The purpose God had in the old system has been fulfilled in Christ, and since it has been, it must give way to the new. The new is the better hope based on the powerful ministry of the resurrected Christ.

**7:11** Psalm 110:4 dominates the mind of the writer. He knows it speaks of a Priest of a different order, a Priest who is coming. When God said he would send such a Priest there had to be a reason. Two different systems cannot coexist, so there must have been some failure or weakness in the other system, or no change would have been implemented. Hebrews links both priesthoods to the ordinance of God that established each one either temporarily or eternally. The priest and whatever God has spoken to authorize his role must stand or fall together. There are two orders of priesthood in the Bible, the Melchizedek order and the order of Aaron. The question now is which one accomplishes the purpose of bringing perfection. (Both orders are related to Christ, and both have a purpose. One points to Christ, and the other is Christ.)

Hebrews reasons very simply:

- If the old order had brought perfection there would be no need for a replacement.
- Since there is a need for the new, the old is obsolete when the new appears.

**Perfection** Earlier, perfection is asserted of Christ in 5:9 and is presented as a goal for all in 6:1. In 10:14, perfection is complete as a description of the justification of the believer. Here in 7:11, perfection in the people the priest represents is the necessary accomplishment that determines whether his ministry is effective. The old order of Aaron fails in this. It needed to be replaced because it did not attain what is needed. Imperfect priests cannot bring us what they themselves do not have.

Only Christ, the One perfect in his obedience, can bring perfection. Perfection is a word to describe the final resolution of our sinful conflict with God. It is a word that like an umbrella covers many things: the accomplishment of Christ as a priest, complete justification of the believer in the present, and finally glorification in the future. In our present experience it is still a goal not fully attained but to which progress is being made (2 Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 3:12-16). To bring about perfection, there is first our Savior perfect in obedience as a man, who has offered to God a clean offering. In justification, all sin is forgiven and Christ's perfect righteousness is fully imputed to the record of the believer. Then the Holy Spirit wars persistently against our flesh (Galatians 5:16-18) producing holiness in each believer's life, without which no one will see the Lord (12:14).

Both things are stated:

1. On the basis of the priesthood the law was given (7:11). The priesthood is the basis.
2. Those priests became priests on the basis of a law (7:16). The law is the basis.

Re #1, there can be no sacrifices unless God has appointed priests to represent the people for whom they make their offerings for sin. Blood sacrifices were required by God's law, but they depended on priests to offer them. Thus the priesthood is the basis of the ceremonial law functioning.

Re. #2, there can be no self-appointed priests, so they cannot assume their function unilaterally. The priests become priests on the basis of the law defining who may serve.

**7:12** The association of priest and law was unbreakable. If the law is changed the priests cannot serve; if the priesthood is changed the law must be also. Such change can be authorized only by God.

**Two illustrations** An illustration of change – in the land where I live, when major construction work is being done on a road, the speed limits are lowered, and cars may be sent on a detour, even at times to the wrong side of the road. All this is temporary and serves a purpose. When the road work is completed (or fulfilled), drivers must then stay on their assigned side of the road. *They cannot go back to the provisional situation and drive on the opposite side, even though it was once required that they do so.* The temporary setup became obsolete. Likewise, God had set up a priesthood in the temporary model of Aaron to be a shadow illustrating the real thing, the priestly ministry of Christ. Since the final Priest has come in His effective service, we are not allowed to return to the provisional, temporary, and obsolete service of the shadow priests.

An illustration of a model – a father may give his son a model of an airplane. He may even say, "This is a plane." Then someday he may point to a real airplane and say, "That is a plane." The little model will not fly, while the other is not a mere model, but the real thing. Yet the boy learned something true about airplanes from his model, but never hopes to take a trip in it. Likewise perfection never came through the Levitical priesthood, but truth about God's justice being satisfied by an offering for sin is also evident in the old system. All of those sacrifices waited for Christ to serve as the Priest who would later effectively achieve satisfaction with God concerning our sins.

**An authorized change of priesthood** This aspect of a change in the priesthood may not be difficult to understand, but there is another way to look at it. Surely the Jews, who cherished their tradition and respected the priesthood in the order of Aaron as God's institution, would need some revelation from God to assure them that it was God making the change. How should they know the mind of God on this?

First, the Old Testament passages Hebrews has been using are God's revelation. It was God who had Melchizedek as a priest long before the birth of Levi. It was God who spoke the words of Psalm 110 about one Priest to come who would serve forever. The implication of that is clear: the other priests would be replaced by a permanent Priest.

Second, the coming of Christ WAS a genuine revelation. God has spoken in his Son (1:1,2). The salvation he announced had much confirmation in the form of signs, wonders and miracles (2:3,4). Unbelieving Jews expended much energy and argument to seek to avoid the clear revelation comprised of Jesus' ministry. Many understood who he was by what he said, by what he did, by the testimony of John the Baptist, a prophet of God. Further, they had the written testimony of the Scriptures, which had been in the possession of the Jews for centuries. Everything Jesus said and claimed was authenticated by his resurrection. Jesus even claimed that Psalm 110 was about him! (Luke 20:41-44). Those who could produce no dead body of Jesus on the fourth day ought to have concluded that God had indeed declared him with power to be the Son of God, the Prophet they should listen to (Romans 1:4; Acts 3:22, 23).

Third, the book of Hebrews itself is the revelation of God. Those who needed further explanation were given a very comprehensive one when they read this sermon letter. Jesus said he would later reveal more through his apostles, (John 16:12-15). Whoever wrote Hebrews was part of the group that worked with the Apostle Paul. Here is official apostolic explanatory revelation. The message is simple. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God had brought about a change of both the law and the priesthood.

**7:13,14** Hebrews is clear that Jesus could never be a priest in the order of Aaron; he was from the wrong tribe for this. He is a Priest in an order where genealogy is not a factor. That Jesus was of the tribe of Judah is essential to his being King in the line of David. For his Priesthood all that matters is being appointed by God.

Note to “serve at the altar” is an example of stating priesthood in terms of *function*. Being a priest and serving at the altar are different ways of saying the same thing. That is what priests do. In our day, there is Biblical reason to deny the office of a minister to women. Then, inconsistently, some believing that will still allow a woman to function as a teacher of men in the church. We should maintain a unity of office and function. No one could serve at the altar unless he was a legitimate priest, while all priests and only priests served at the altar.

The usual way to refer to Christ as God in Hebrews is to use the word *Son*. Here it uses “Lord” as it does in 2:3 and in the closing benediction in 13:20. He is not merely a Priest of a better order and from a different tribe, Jesus is the Lord himself. “Our Lord was descended from Judah.” The word *descended* is not used elsewhere in Greek to show family descent. That should make us wonder why it is used here. It is used in Numbers 24:17 for a *rising* star, and in Jeremiah 23:5 for a *sprouting* branch. Both of these OT texts refer to the coming Messiah. So in writing of Jesus who must be a man to be our Priest, and a man to be the royal Son of David, Hebrews maintains that he is the Lord God.

### **7:15-17** Some things have been clear already. Hebrews has established that

- a genuine priest can appear from outside the tribe of Levi,
- priests who die have an inadequate ministry, and
- the appearance of a Priest of a different order implies that the order replaced did not meet the need.

Psalm 110 said Jesus would be a Priest forever. Now Hebrews will elaborate on this. Another Priest has appeared. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John make this clear. Hebrews joins the four Gospels in proclaiming his appearance. It expresses his resurrection not just as being a Priest forever, or as One who is ever-living, but in terms of his confrontation with death and his victory over it. The inability of death to hold him is affirmed in terms of the power of an indestructible life. He had authority to lay down his life and authority to take it up again (John 10:14-18). This makes more clear that he is indeed the fulfillment of Psalm 110. One might wonder before the resurrection, but all doubt should cease when he rose from the dead. He is a priest forever. Other priests could appeal to their ancestry but Jesus could point to his resurrection. A very different Priest has appeared. To reject him is to reject the power of his advocacy and mediation for sinners. No one can be more effective than a Priest who is the Lord himself interceding for his people in the power of an indestructible life. He then quotes the Psalm again, certain its fulfillment requires the resurrection of Christ.

**7:18,19** This section, vv.11-19 begins and closes with a change in the law. If there is a different Priest, there must be a different law (v.12). Now v.19 uses stronger language; the commandment that priests must come from Aaron is *set aside* which means it has been annulled. The reason is that it is part of a system that is weak. Never does Hebrews say that God’s ordinance concerning Levitical priests was bad, while the new order with Christ is good. The old was God’s choice with a good purpose. The ineffectiveness is sometimes stated in terms of fault in the people, as in 8:8. No covenant can work if the covenant is crippled by the covenant-breaking weakness of sinners. (See 4:15 for general weakness; even the high priests were weak 5:2.) A priestly order that teaches truth about God and forgiveness is good. The others priests served a good function, but they and all they did could not accomplish God’s ultimate purpose of reconciliation and perfection in those who once were sinners.

The law as God’s Word is perfect; the law as a system of approach to God was useless. It is a great benefit to learn that there is no hope in anything or anyone than Christ. The ceremonies of the law gave hope of acceptance by God on the principle of a substitutionary death. That kind of hope was an indicator hope. The work of Christ is a facilitator hope; it has accomplished redemption. The law has been replaced by something better, the better Priest with his better ministry. This results in us having a better hope. In Christ God has acted to remedy our sin. When we know this and believe in him and his offering, we possess a better hope. The gospel of Christ produces faith that is “*sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*,” (11:1) Any hope induced by God’s Word, based on God’s action, performed by God’s Son is a sure hope. Thus the weak shadows of Israelite worship were replaced by a better hope.

**7:19 Drawing near to God** This may be a description of the prayers of saints in all ages because they approached the true God. Such devotion is not the same as a priest approaching the Most Holy Place. He too drew near to God’s Presence in a way not open to others. It is obvious that that priest could not remain there. We too draw near to God (10:22) with full confidence in the sacrifice of Christ and full assurance that it has been

accepted for us. True confidence rejects all other hope for drawing near to God. This confidence is not self-confidence; it never looks at its own righteousness. Yet with all this certainty, we still do not walk with God as sinless persons in the New Jerusalem; the old order in which sin exists in us and God's earth has not passed (Revelation 21:3.4). Our drawing near to God is a better hope because of Christ, even though in the present we do not enjoy the Presence of God in the same way we will. The basis for drawing near cannot be improved, because Christ has made his one offering. He will yet appear a second time to finish in us the salvation he has begun, (9:28). Then our drawing near will be complete. Meanwhile all God's children are called to come in worship (Psalm 95:1-7; Hebrews 10:19-22).

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**7:20-28** In these verses the effectiveness of the priestly work of Christ is the chief emphasis. God did not appoint the other priests with an oath. Since God has made such an oath concerning our Priest, it is for us a truth of eternal comfort. V.19 spoke of a better hope; now follows the security we have because the Father's oath to the Son guarantees the covenant. Hebrews has many warnings; it also encourages. These verses contain personal application and assurance.

Hebrews' first mention of covenant and the first statement that he offered himself appear here. To understand this book, it is necessary to see that Jesus alone representing us in covenantal representation is the basis of our salvation. To understand Hebrews, we must see that he is both priest and offering. These verses reveal the benefits we derive from having Christ as our permanent Priest. His permanent ministry brings permanent results.

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**7:20-22** The writer continues his preaching exposition of Psalm 110. He focuses here on the oath God made. Someone might suggest that Hebrews "reads into" the psalm more than it says, but the words about a) a priest after a different order, b) who sits at God's right hand, c) who remains a priest forever, and d) that this person is appointed priest by God's oath which he will never retract – all these elements are clearly present in the psalm.

It is a fact that there was no oath for the ordination or installation of the other priests. The inference is clear: Christ has something they do not have. They were not called individually to their position. They have their priesthood from their genealogy, which does not make a statement of their character. An oath of God to a priest who is a sinner and who cannot continue in office because he will die, would be a very strange oath. Would God pledge to them and swear by himself that they may be priests only for a while?

Note three features from Psalm 110 re. the oath:

- This oath is stated in the action of the Lord swearing.
- It is elaborated by an additional statement of God's unyielding determination: he will not change his mind.
- It is addressed to Christ, not simply about Christ. (Note the two direct and personal "You are's" of 5:5,6. In both Psalm 2 & 110, in which the Father speaks to the Son.)

**7:22** Hebrews draws the implications from this oath. I think the reasoning goes like this: A priest represents people. If the priest cannot continue to represent them, whatever he advocates for them is uncertain. But if God receives the priest and accepts his offering, then those represented by the priest are granted whatever the priest pleads for them. (In our case, it is forgiveness of our sins.) If a priest continues forever, his ministry and plea are granted eternally. If God by oath commits to a certain priest's ministry, he has thereby committed to all that that priest seeks from him. Therefore God has made eternally certain to his people by his oath to Christ that Jesus' sacrifice for us is eternally effective. Jesus is our surety and guarantor. We gain certainty from God's oath. God's oath verifies the reliability of the priesthood of Christ. We cannot face a situation where Jesus' offering and obedience are inadequate due to some deficiency in Christ. The truth of Jesus' perfection is established in 5:8,9. Psalm 110:4 declares that the Father is committed to Jesus' priesthood and therefore to its success. And his priestly work was designed to save us! We should never view the work of Christ as a ministry that overcomes the reluctance of the Father to receive us, but as the provision of God to save us by Christ (John 3:16; Romans 3:25; 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; 1 John 4:9,10). Our salvation comes from the joint determination and love of the Father and the Son. It is identical in both Persons because Christ is the radiance of God's glory (1:3) including the Father's commitment to save.

*Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.* The Greek word here for *guarantor* is found only once in the Bible. A covenant broken may be annulled, but a covenant with a guarantor who will bear the consequence of our covenant breaking, is a covenant that cannot be annulled. Note that the law that appoints priests may be annulled when its purpose has been attained, but the believer's relationship with God cannot be broken by our sin since we have in Christ the ultimate Sin-Bearer and Guarantor of the covenant. We often use the word *surety* for guarantor. When a contract is signed, a surety is a co-signer. If the one in the contract defaults, the surety must pay the full amount. We are in covenant with God; perfect obedience is required of us but never found in us in this life. But we have Jesus as our surety, and only because of him can we be saved.

When we read cryptic statements like *guarantor of a better covenant*, we see how Hebrews links themes together. This is the first mention of *covenant* in Hebrews, a subject to be developed in chapter 8. Covenants have two sides. In our case it is God and his people. Further, it is one God, one Mediator, one covenant, and one people. The simple statement *I will your God and you shall be my people* (Leviticus 26:9-13) involves obligations, promises, warnings and benefits. (Often covenants include such things as signs as well, as in the Lord's Supper where the cup is the blood of the new covenant, Luke 22:20.)

**Christ our Covenant Mediator and Guarantor** Covenants may be broken by men. Breaking covenant brings the wrath of God. But the ministry of Jesus means that he is the guarantor of a covenant, not for himself but for us his sinful people. Such an undertaking by Christ guarantees eternal life for the believer. Moses was the mediator of the old covenant, but he was unable to guarantee covenant faithfulness in himself or his people. Jesus represents his people as a covenant for us (Isaiah 42:6), i.e., as our covenant mediator. As our God-appointed Priest (5:1,4), the sacrifice of his body has satisfied God concerning the sins performed in ours. As the surety, or guarantor of the covenant, he meets all requirements including all the required obedience so that we may be accepted as covenant-keepers in him and in his righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9; 1 Corinthians 1:30). With Christ as the guarantor of a better covenant, we do not stand before God either in our sin or in our righteousness; we stand before God in Christ our surety. Only in the Lord Jesus Christ and his effective priesthood sworn to by God's oath (that Jesus' mediation will continue without end), can we be assured of eternal life. The sins of those who trust in Christ are atoned for by his blood and not one drop of ours; our entrance into heaven is guaranteed by his covenant faithfulness and not by any goodness of ours.

The **parties** of the covenant of grace (distinguished from the covenant of works God made with Adam) are: God and his people. The **benefits** are twofold: full forgiveness of all our sins; and eternal life -- the law written in our hearts, i.e., holiness. This transformed life is produced by the Holy Spirit, because God treats all in Christ as his children. These benefits have begun and will be completed so that in eternity we will walk with God in absolute purity as Adam did before he sinned. The **condition** or the **means**, by which we receive all this, is faith in Jesus Christ our Great High Priest and Covenant Mediator. The **basis** of it is the obedience of Christ alone performed in his flesh on earth when he replaced Adam as our covenant head.

God did not swear *to us* that Jesus is a priest forever. Our Priest has been appointed by God as the One he chose for this work. The oath is a promise to Christ that he will remain, and thus his priestly intercessions will be granted. Psalm 2:8 further promises the nations to Christ as his inheritance. These personal commitments to Christ are connected. One promise (Psalm 110) is to the eternal nature of his appointment and the other (Psalm 2) concerns the people he will acquire as his inheritance from the Father (John 6:37-39). Only by Christ being a Savior Priest can wicked nations ever be Christ's people. Thus we find covenantal commitment to the Son by the Father. The title "Christ" shows that he is the chosen/anointed One to exercise this saving role. Since it is the Father's appointment, our Priest's pleas for us will be granted without question.

**The Covenant between the Father and the Son** When Jesus' hour had come and his High Priestly sacrifice was about to be made, he prayed, "*Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*" (John 17:1-5). This prayer indicates a covenantal understanding that Christ would do as agreed with the Father and therefore would receive the reward covenanted to him for his priestly service. This is why the Father

gives people to Christ. It is in fulfillment of a promise to him. We often call this covenant within the Trinity the "Covenant of Redemption".

In light of this covenant between the Father and Son, it seems good to me to understand 13:20 this way:

God through the blood of Jesus, the guarantor of an eternal covenant (in contrast to a covenant that might be annulled!) – the Father being satisfied with Jesus' offering as our Priest, brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of all his sheep ...

**7:23-25** Levitical priests would serve for all generations (Exodus 40:15; Leviticus 25:13) with no other tribe replacing them. This would continue till replaced by the Priest who would never be replaced. Josephus said there were 83 high priests in Israel's history from Aaron to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. All Levitical priests died. Many priests means that not one continued and none could guarantee the result sought from God. Jesus has a permanent priesthood. His continuing is a stable ministry; he continues able to save and intercede (both verbs are in the present tense). He is able to help now (4:14-16). He helps because he sympathizes with us in our temptation (2:17,18). There is a difference between sympathy and ability. A person may have sympathy but lack ability. Our permanent Priest is able in his saving/interceding role, to save absolutely, both in present distress and future judgment (John 5:24). His intercession is effective against all accusation of sin against us, no matter how accurate (Romans 8:34).

**Christians Living in Sin?** Sin cannot separate the believer from Christ (Romans 8:38,39). The Bible never teaches that persons united to Christ might live in sin without repentance. Those united to Christ cannot live in slavery to sin (Romans 6:18). We lie if we say we can walk in darkness (1 John 1:5-10) and walk with God. In Christ, sin is no longer our master. The one who has been born of God does not live in sin (1 John 3:4-10).

So there is no contradiction between the assurance we receive in Christ of eternal salvation entirely in his priestly ministry, and the warnings of Hebrews that one who lives in disobedience is not a believer, and never was, even if pure gospel is preached to him and he has become part of the covenant community. The unbelieving Israelites of Hebrews 3 & 4 were never saved. They died in their sin (John 8:21-24). But sinners who have been united to Christ – and no other kind of human than a believing sinner has ever been united to him – these sinners have in Christ an effective Priest whose blood always covers them as Christ appeals for them with assured results.

**7:25 Coming to God** The Bible often uses analogous language. When we come to God it is not physical movement. In different analogies it may refer to faith as eating and drinking, even using such language in John 6 of his body and blood! Coming to God is the opposite of going to idols. It indicates the object of their faith. But we cannot just come to God on our own. The text says we come through Christ. I am shocked at how many worship services I have been in, where the service begins with an assumption that we may just enter his Presence because we are Christians. Our access is always Christ, only Christ and necessarily Christ, for in our sin we cannot and dare not approach God apart from our Mediator. The term "those who come to God through him" is another way to describe believers. Since this is so, we discover that Christians are being described as those who approach to pray. The Holy Spirit works in us a desire to come to the Lord. The world is full of mosques, temples, shrines, and altars, but we come to God through Christ. Nothing more is needed; nothing else is effective.

Further, all thought of any group supposing they "come to God" while rejecting Jesus of Nazareth as his Son, are seeking what God will never permit. Every supposition of worship that is not through Christ is false and can receive only the contempt of God and his eternal resistance. The people reading Hebrews were tempted to approach God while rejecting the only Priest with access to him. They had to see the issue clearly; it was very inviting to relieve the community pressure and return to the obsolete priests of Israel. After 70 AD those who make that commitment had neither Christ the real Priest, nor the shadow priests whose temple, altars and sacrifices ceased involuntarily. Judaism was left in a vacuum without the one and only Priest in the order of Melchizedek, and without Levitical priests as well. They were left without Jesus the only serving Priest in heaven making intercession for his people.

**7:26-28** What kind of Priest fits our situation as sinners. He must himself be without sin. He must be able to solve our problem with God, since we are guilty sinners unable to save ourselves, or offer for our sins. And he must be of such a rank as to have full access to God to plead for us successfully. Christ is all of this for us; he meets our need completely.

In his character he qualifies to meet our need. These three words, “holy, blameless and pure” describe his moral purity. The first is not the regular Greek word for holy, but a word to describe covenantal faithfulness in the LXX, as in Psalm 132:9. The word for pure or undefiled was used to describe a high priest who, when ceremonially clean, could enter the Presence of God.

The words indicating that Christ is separate from sinners, is often understood as a moral statement. It more likely means that Jesus is no longer here on earth in the presence of sinners, and where he went they could not go (John 8:21). It fits the later emphasis of Hebrews 8 & 9 that Jesus serves in the heavenly sanctuary, and it fits the words that he is “exalted above the heavens.” That Christ has entered the Presence of God and remains there seated at the Father’s right hand, is a major theme of Hebrews. It is in this sense that he is separated now from sinners, among whom he once lived; (see Luke 5:30-32; 7:34 & 15:1).

Jesus’ moral purity continues in that as sinless he did not need to do as the other priests had to do when they offered for their own sins. He is the kind of Savior we need.

High priests made special offerings once a year for their own sins. But they also sinned daily and so they needed daily to offer for those sins. The chief point here is that they offered frequently and Jesus offered only once. Once was enough; one perfect offering was fully appropriate to answer for our sin, because what he offered was himself.

Sin against God is always committed by human beings using the only tool we have for anything we do, namely our bodies. God appropriately judges sin in our flesh, and to save us he provided the body of Christ as the proper offering (10:5-10). Our sin was judged in his body. He offered his body. Jesus is at the same time the One making the offering and he is the offering he made. No priest would dare offer his own blood to God; man is a sinner. Such an offering would be rejected and the priest would die. Jesus offered his blood, and after a time long enough to make clear that he had died, he rose the third day in witness that his offering had been accepted.

**7:28** The entire section is now reviewed. The law appoints men (note mere men) as priests even though they are morally weak. Purity of life was not a requirement, for if it were, there would have been no priests! “Weak” is a way of saying that they are sinners.

But in the case of the Lord Jesus, he was appointed not by a regulation as to ancestry but by the direct call of God coupled with an oath. His sinless life has been described already, but not only is his call to this ministry superior, he is not a mere man; he is the Son. In chapter 1 Hebrews made very clear that the Son is the Lord God. We could not have a better Priest. The one who goes to God to argue for us is God. Jesus not only died for us, he offered to God to satisfy him concerning our sin. We are saved by running to God to save us from God. The Priest’s own blood replies to God’s justice for us, asserting that our sin has been paid for (Isaiah 40:2).

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**7:28 The Perfection of the Ministry of the Son** In 2:10 it was fitting that Christ should be made perfect through suffering. This is repeated in 5:7-10: Jesus learned obedience in the process of suffering; then as a result of this development he is said to be perfect and the author of salvation. Clearly the calling of Christ to be a High Priest included all the human experience that could not happen just by appearing suddenly in the flesh and dying the same day. His temptation by Satan in the wilderness, for example, was an essential element in showing him to be holy and undefiled. His perfection or completeness as a Priest necessitated offering himself. In 7:26 his offering and exaltation are essentials of his ministry. In Hebrews the place where he now serves is extremely important. The perfected ministry of Christ is incomplete unless all has been included: becoming a man, suffering temptation, making his offering, rising from the dead as the Priest with an indestructible life, and finally entering the Presence of God. There he remains ministering in the heavenly sanctuary. When all these

elements are combined, Hebrews says of Christ that he has been perfected forever. In 2:10 we learn of his suffering which contributes to his perfection. In 7:28, he has been perfected.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, it was not that he left us; he went where he did to meet our need. In heaven he represents us; there he intercedes for us, constantly applying the benefit of his sacrifice secured for us. His blood is the eternal answer for our sin and his intercession based on it defends us from all accusation.

We have not yet been perfected in holiness. God the Son never needed to be perfected in holiness, but as a human Priest, the Son had been appointed to serve on earth. In his ascension his ministry has been perfected. It has reached its final stage. When Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished,” he spoke of his offering, not his ministry. His entrance into heaven completes his series of accomplishments, and now his perfected ministry continues. Nothing needs to be added or repeated for Christ to be the effective Priest that he is. This is the kind of Priest we have (8:1). His access to and his welcome by the Father (telling him to sit at his right hand) assure us that all he seeks for us from God will be realized. It is not possible for God to swear of Jesus’ priesthood and then reject his intercession for us. We have good reason to hold firmly to the faith we profess (4:14).

## Hebrews 8:1-13

Hebrews 8 & 9 are the heart of this sermon letter. In this literary format, the way to show what is most important is to place it in the middle. This is the middle of Hebrews. Chapters 8 & 9 are a unit marked off by the repetition of the verb “to offer” in 8:3 and 9:28, combined in both places with entering the heavenly sanctuary. Chapters 8 & 9 should be studied together.

Hebrews 7 ended the discussion of Melchizedek, but it should be noted that nothing was ever said about Melchizedek’s offerings. Jesus is a Priest in the order of Melchizedek only in the sense that his priestly office is like his. Hebrews does not compare their priestly work. In the writing of Genesis 14, the Holy Spirit suppressed that aspect of Melchizedek’s work, so that the record would present him more closely as the model of Christ. Jesus is a Priest in that order because the Biblical record of Melchizedek is confined to him being a living priest. Jesus serves without end in the power of an indestructible life. When 7:27 says that Jesus offered himself, it changed the focus from the appointment to ministry. The contrast will be of the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, with the ministry of priests in a sanctuary on earth. (Jesus’ ministry continues, but in 70 A.D., the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. Then the shadow priests could no longer serve as priests at all. If they had remained in the city they were killed in the Roman massacre.)

Chapters 8 & 9 elaborate on Jesus’ offering himself, as in 7:27, but in this passage one more major contrast is given, one necessary to saying that Jesus entered the Presence of God by his own blood (9:12). Where do other priests serve? They serve on earth in a place built by human hands. Jesus never entered the Holy Place in the Temple in Jerusalem. He often taught nearby in the temple courts (Mark 14:49), outside the sacred location where only sons of Aaron, not sons of David, could enter. A new priesthood of One Man has replaced the ministry of all the others. Any Jew who did not have God’s Word clearly in mind would be confused that God’s appointed priests in the line of Levi had become obsolete! Yet all along the Scriptures spoke of a different Priest to come.

Another major change arrived with the ministry of Jesus: the old covenant would be replaced by a new one. This too was predicted in the Scriptures – notably in the prophecies of the prophets just before and during the Babylonian Captivity. In chapters 8 & 10, Hebrews will quote Jeremiah on this change of covenant. A change of covenant tied to the ministry of Jesus strongly reinforces the message that a change of priesthood also marks the arrival of the last days when God spoke in his Son (1:2). In Hebrews 8 & 9, the entire text is exposition (with no preaching), as the writer spells out that a new ministry has replaced the old ministry, and a new covenant has replaced the old covenant. The coming of Christ is the great hinge of human history. To reject Jesus is to be left behind in what God is doing as his eternal plan is fulfilled in history.

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**8:1-5** After Jesus had offered purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (1:3). This is the chief truth Hebrews has been moving to. In Psalm 110:1, God the Father speaks from heaven. Now in 8:1-5, Jesus’ priestly service is located in heaven. We do not grasp the full range of Jesus’ saving ministry if we only think of his work on earth on the cross.

To whom was that offering made? It is deficient to think only in terms that Jesus died for us; we must consider to whom he made his offering. The offerings of old were always killed outside the holy place, never inside. On the Day of Atonement blood was carried inside, right to the throne of God between the cherubim. This animal blood was presented in a sanctuary on earth, never in heaven. No son of Aaron ever entered heaven to represent his people before God. Only the ultimate Priest with the offering effective to remove sin entered heaven for us by means of his blood (9:12). This is the awesome message of Hebrews. We have such a High Priest; he made his offering on earth and has appeared in heaven for us (6:20). There he remains today; the ever-living Priest of Hebrews 7 is the only Priest in the real sanctuary of Hebrews 8 & 9.

**The Significance of Location in 8:1-5:** We have a High Priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the heavenly sanctuary. Unlike the one built in Moses' time, the one in heaven is the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. If our Priest were on earth, he would not be a priest of the Levitical kind, for there are already men on earth who make offerings. They serve at a sanctuary on earth that is merely a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was ordered when he was about to build the tabernacle: "*See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.*"

Hebrews 9 stresses that the tabernacle on earth had a counterpart in heaven. "*When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation,*" (9:11). "*For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again,*" (9:24,25).

## The Heavenly and Earthly Sanctuaries in Hebrews 8 & 9

### The Mosaic tabernacle

on **earth** 8:4  
 an **earthly** sanctuary 9:1  
**set up by** man 8:2  
  
**made with** hands 9:11  
 a **sanctuary** made with hands 9:24  
 of this **creation** 9:11  
**a copy and shadow** 8:5  
**a copy** 9:24

### The heavenly sanctuary

in **heaven** 8:1  
**heaven** itself 9:24  
**set up by** the Lord 8:2  
**not made with** hands 9:11  
 not a **sanctuary** made with hands 9:24  
 not a part of this **creation** 9:11  
 the **true** tent 8:2  
 the **true sanctuary** 9:24  
 the **greater and more perfect** tent 9:11

**8:1,2** Some readers of Hebrews were discouraged believers, suffering persecution and perhaps wondering if they had done a smart thing by confessing Christ (3:1). The words "*we have such a priest*" were a great comfort. To show where he serves is to indicate his superior ministry. These same words are a constant comfort because our sins are ever present in us, and our hope of eternal life rests entirely on the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. This also answers directly the attack on their faith: that the Jewish rejecters of Christ could claim a high priest on earth. The Christians did not have a priest people could see. Yet the LXX of Zechariah 6:13 mentions a priest at God's right hand and no priest on earth could fit that description. Thus another OT text teaches there is a priest in God's Presence. Here Christ is called a minister, a label that highlights his activity. From the angle of sacrifice the priesthood of Christ is seen in what is accomplished

and needs no repetition, but here the point is on what he continues to do. For example, in 7:25 the ongoing work of our Priest is intercession.

That Christ *sat down* has wonderful implications. It shows his work is finished (10:11-14). Since the Father told him to sit, it also reveals the Father's satisfaction with his work on earth.

**8:2** Two sanctuaries are contrasted. The heavenly is called "true", but this does not mean that the other one was false. What the priests did there was ineffective to remove sin, but they were men appointed by God to serve the way they did. They were not false priests, but imperfect priests, shadows of the Priest to come, a type anticipating his greater ministry. The tabernacle (or tent) in the wilderness is now gone, so is the temple in Jerusalem. God has shown by this that those structures were temporary, only a shadow (10:1) of the genuine Presence of God. Jesus is the only Priest who serves in heaven. (The living saints in heaven mentioned as priests in Revelation 20:6 made no atoning offerings; they offer the sacrifices of praise Hebrews 13:15).

**8:3,4** Jesus was not a Priest in name only. He too had to offer something. This is so of every high priest (5:1). At this point Hebrews 8 does not say more of his offering, except that as a Priest it is necessary that he make an offering. If he were on earth he could not serve legally in the earthly sanctuary. The law regulated that only priests descended from Aaron could do so. Jesus did not come to break the law, but that its ceremonies and shadows would be fulfilled in him and thus become obsolete.

**8:5** The service of those priests on earth had a legitimate purpose. Their work pointed to Christ's. Their service was centered in the tabernacle Moses built. He was not allowed to build a tabernacle of his own design. God gave the pattern because that building pointed to a higher tabernacle. The one man built would be a kind of model. Exodus 25:9,40, quoted in 8:5, speaks of the old tabernacle constructed on a pattern shown to Moses. The place of the Presence of God on earth was a type of the real Presence of God, not of this creation.

**8:6** Hebrews dwells on contrasts. Other priests die and are replaced; Jesus lives forever and cannot be replaced. They were not appointed with an oath; he was. Their ministry and blood offerings are ineffective to remove sin. Now 8:6 states that Jesus' ministry is more excellent than theirs. His ministry is as superior to theirs as the new covenant is superior to the old one. When comparing covenants, it is explicit that Jesus has a unique role in this new covenant; he is the Mediator.

## The New Covenant 8:6-13

The subject of covenant had one brief mention in 7:22. There Christ is the Guarantor, the One who makes the covenant effective. In 8:6, Christ is the Mediator, the One through whom the new covenant comes. It would come as the prophets predicted, but since he is Mediator, he is its introduction. The essence of the new covenant is the work of the Spirit in the believer, but the Spirit was not given until Jesus had first been glorified (John 7:39) and seated in heaven. Then exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus sent the Spirit (John 15:26; Acts 2:33). The new covenant is another blessing (John 1:16) Jesus has secured for us in his Priestly ministry. The Spirit did not come in the fullness of new covenant ministry until Jesus had entered the Presence of God.

In the time of the old covenant, God was gracious, or otherwise no one would have been saved. The Mosaic covenant had in it offerings for sin, which clearly portrays God's gracious provision for his sinful people in Christ. Yet the law conditioned its blessings on obedience, (Galatians 3:10-12). This is where the people failed (8:8). [See below, Appendix E: An Overview of Covenants.]

- They needed perfect **righteousness as a gift** for justification. This righteousness Abraham received by faith *before* the law (Romans 4:1-3; 9-25). Likewise David, *after* the law was given (Romans

4:4-8), received righteousness apart from works. The law did not change or annul the promises of God, (Galatians 3:15-18). Justification came from God's promise, and only by faith, never by law-keeping.

- They needed **righteousness to be produced** in their hearts; that would come only by the promised Holy Spirit. The old covenant required obedience but did not supply it. The new covenant supplies it.

### The Three Purposes of the Law:

It defines sin and thereby makes sin to be guilt, the explicit transgression of God's law.

It shows the need for Christ the Savior.

It serves as a guide to godly conduct. It still does all these things.

Since Jesus is the Mediator of the new covenant promised in the prophets, there must have been some difference in the life of the covenant people prior to the coming of Christ. The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). There is a before and after. Jeremiah spoke of a future day when the new covenant would appear (8:8). He saw what it was like before that new covenant was implemented. The Mosaic covenant was not all the people had; they also had the promise of a Savior at the time of Adam's sin. They also had the promises to Abraham. They had many kindnesses from the Lord, who saved his remnant before Jesus appeared as Priest or Mediator of the new covenant. The ceremonies of the law pointed to Christ and the Messianic promises assured them of a Savior to come. All this encouraged the faith of the remnant. Like a mirror, the law showed them they needed to be washed (James 1:22-25) but, like a mirror, never did it for them. The law did not give a new heart. Many times before the work of Christ on the cross, God forgave sins. Many times before the Day of Pentecost the Lord put a new spirit in people (Ezekiel 11:18-20) and answered prayers for a new heart, such as Psalm 51:7-17. Psalm 51:19 makes very clear that they were still in the time of the old covenant.

They saw God's wonderful works in the Old Testament, but unless a man is born of the Spirit he still cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3,7). Many saw Jesus' works and heard his words but were not converted (Matthew 11:20-26). In Deuteronomy 29:2-4, the Lord had not given the Israelites "*a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear.*" Such a ministry in the heart is clearly new covenant blessing. God warned of the heart turning away (Deuteronomy 29:18) – in language similar to Hebrews 3:12. Then in Deuteronomy 30:1-8 the Lord promised to circumcise their hearts so that a response of love and obedience could occur. When the prophets told circumcised people they needed to circumcise their hearts (Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4) the prophets were crying out for new covenant blessing. Eventually Jeremiah, who preached for years to hard hearts, ended his ministry with the prayer "*Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may return*" (Lamentations 5:21). By his sovereign delays, God has often built a longing for his blessing before sending it. That is clearly the case in sending Christ, the long-awaited Son of David. It is also the case with the sending of the Spirit.

The Messiah was promised; then later the new covenant was promised in the prophets. As Israel sank into apostasy and only a remnant remained, obedience was in frightful decline. Hearts were like stone, yet God boldly announced that his purposes would be fulfilled. There would be a new covenant. When Hebrews 8 quotes from Jeremiah, this passage may have been chosen because it is the only OT text to call the promised ministry of the Spirit a *new covenant*. The writer of Hebrews wanted to emphasize the antithesis of old and new in different priesthoods. Now he does the same in different *covenants*.

### Predictions of the Future New Covenant:

- Isaiah 44:1-5,** I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring,  
**Ezekiel 36:13-38** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

**Joel 2:28-32:** And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

**Jeremiah 31:31-34** Behold the days are coming ... when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel...

### A Notable Exception

**Jeremiah 24:1-7**, especially v.7 – “*I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD*” – is a clear example of new covenant blessing in Jeremiah’s time before the coming of Christ. God may bring healing not promised to many prior to the resurrection day and the second Coming. He gives eternal life in this life, though its fullness is in the next! He could work by his Spirit when and how he chose. Yet it is still true that the fullness of blessing did not come until Jesus appeared as the Mediator of the New Covenant, and the Spirit was given (John 7:37-39).

## 8:8-12 Observations on the Quotation from Jeremiah 31

**1. The Emphasis on Time** Some things will continue until the time of the new order (9:10). When Jeremiah said, “the time is coming,” he did not refer to his lifetime. That time came when Christ the Mediator of the new covenant came. Reference to time is present in 8:8, 9& 10.

**2. The Covenant with the House of Israel Includes Gentiles!** Those from all nations who believe benefit from a promise to Israel that would come when Israel’s King appeared. At the Lord’s Supper the cup is called “*the blood of the covenant*” in Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24, but in Luke 22:20, the cup is “*the new covenant in my blood*.” If we receive the cup in the communion service, and if we have the promised Spirit working obedience in our hearts, then Gentiles who have believed are participating in the blessing promised to the House of Israel. Jesus promised one flock of Jews and Gentiles (John 10:16), not two. Gentile believers would become fellow-citizens in Israel (Ephesians 2:12 & 19), and Gentiles in Christ are children of Abraham, heirs of promises made to him (Galatians 3:26-29).

**3. No Mention of the Spirit** This is the kind of observation that easily leads to false conclusions! Joel, Isaiah and Ezekiel all mention the Holy Spirit. But so does Jeremiah, for the Spirit is also the Lord. When the Lord repeats “*I will*” in this quotation, it is the Spirit speaking as well as the Father and the Son. We should believe that simply from our understanding of the Trinity, but 10:15-17 says it is the Spirit speaking in Jeremiah!

**4. The Law in the Heart** In a book that tells us that the law is weak and useless (7:18), made nothing perfect (7:19), is only a shadow (10:1), had to be changed (7:12) and the covenant tied to it is obsolete (8:13), we should note that God promised to write the law on their hearts! Making distinctions is the work of theology. Did God promise to write his law on the heart that people should not eat pork, as the law prohibited (Leviticus 11:7,8)? Or did God promise to write worshipping the Lord our God and honoring our parents, as the Ten Commandments require? In the new covenant God does not write obsolete ceremonies on the heart; he writes his moral law which includes God’s holy Sabbath. It is not a new law that is written, but God gives a new desire and ability to keep it.

**5. The Inclusion of Forgiveness** Forgiveness is a gift of God based on the satisfaction made by Christ. We are not forgiven because we are good, nor because the Holy Spirit is doing a work of renovation in our hearts. Justification always rests on the obedience of Christ never ours. The new covenant brings about frequent forgiveness and frequent cleansing tied to a life of Spirit-induced repentance and confession of sin (1 John 1:9). The tendency to make our justification contingent on lifelong confession of sin and cleansing is a grave error we must resist. To do this is to view the new covenant obedience as a *means* of justification rather than the *result* of God accepting his justified children in Christ and giving his Spirit to them (Luke 11:13).

To make our living a condition of justification is the old error that depreciates the unique role of Christ. It is the old moralism that tells us that a person becomes a Christian by acting as one. Justification rests only on the obedience of Christ (Romans 5:19) that occurred outside our lives. Sanctification brought to us by the Spirit, is a beginning of obedience in us, Hebrews 5:9; Philippians 2:12,13; 3:12-16). Nowhere does the

Bible teach that sanctification is perfect in this life, nor does it teach that justification can ever rest on less than a perfect obedience. That alone ought to make this important distinction very clear.

**6. The Repetition of the Quotation in 10:15-17** In Hebrews 10, the second reference to Jeremiah 31 completes the chief theological section of Hebrews. The focus has been the Priestly work of Christ, and the benefit that follows is the new covenant! It is very clear that sins are put away by the offering of Christ (10:10). When the Holy Spirit said through Jeremiah, “their sins … I will remember no more” the work of Christ on the cross is the reason, not the progressive moral improvements in the believer’s life, even though these are new covenant blessings. Sins removed from our record the moment we believe in the blood of Christ are also being removed from the heart by the work of the Spirit. Forgiveness is based on the work of our Priest; the cleansing of life is produced by the Spirit.

**7. How Little Hebrews 8 Says about the New Covenant!** I have chosen to deal with the content of the new covenant more than what we find in Hebrews. The writer wanted to show that a new priesthood obviated the old one, and the new covenant made the old one obsolete. What was obsolete and aging would soon disappear. He wanted his readers to see they had nothing in the old covenant priesthood to bring them into a right relationship with God, their only hope is Christ. I think for this very specific goal, he avoided a wide-ranging exposition of the new covenant itself. He was content to point out in 8:13 that the new covenant makes the old one obsolete. There is a package here: a new order of priest requires a change in the law (7:12); a new covenant also shows that an entire system was growing old, was no longer viable, and was ready to vanish away. Hebrews will say more on the new covenant in chapter 10.

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## **Appendix 8: An Overview of Covenants**

There are three basic covenants: 1) The Covenant of Redemption [see the notes on 7:22] between the Father and the Son; 2) the Covenant of Works between God and man represented by Adam; and 3) The Covenant of Grace between God and Man represented by Christ as the Head of redeemed humanity.

The Covenant of Redemption is incapable of failure; it is between the members of the Trinity. The promise of the Father is to the Son; a Bride for him is promised and will be given. It is the task of Christ the Redeemer to redeem each one the Father has given to him through his sacrifice on the cross. (See John 17:1-8; 6:37-40).

The Covenant of Works was capable of failure, since man was able to sin and did. The blessing (eternal life) in the covenant of works depended on Adam’s obedience. He broke this covenant and brought condemnation to all men; salvation in the covenant of works is impossible. If Adam had obeyed, salvation would never have been needed. All humans are born with the sense that we gain favor with God by our works; it is the default setting of the natural heart of man and is the erroneous assumption of all non-Christian religions. The law frustrates this obsolete thinking by instilling persistent guilt. The gospel of Christ corrects it and solves it with an obedience that occurs outside the needy sinner, and for the great majority of us, outside our very lifetime.

The Covenant of Grace is incapable of failure since it is between God and Christ, who represents his weak and sinful people. We are the objects of his grace. God’s elect remnant in this covenant are required to repent and believe. Even this necessary response is produced by the Spirit in the heart so that there is no uncertainty whether those called to be in Christ will indeed believe and be justified. The blessing (eternal life) in this covenant of grace depends entirely on Christ. Christ has stepped into the leadership void created by Adam’s sin and by himself has fulfilled both conditions of the covenant of works for us. For our sin, he took the covenantal curse in his death; for our life he fulfilled all obedience to the law. We are not saved by our works but by his. He obeyed the law of God for us when we were still law-breaking sinners, so that those he represented are justified only in his covenantal obedience.

The law was given as a teacher to prepare people for Christ. Its blessings are never in the reach of any sinful man by the obedience the law requires. Thus the law has a similarity to the covenant of works. Since the law also points to Christ, who is the purpose of the law, it promotes a proper understanding of the gospel by

keeping the issue of sin clear, and by frustrating all hope of justification by the works of sinners. In the Spirit's work, the law creates a yearning for righteousness that is only supplied in the covenant of grace and, within that framework, the blessing of the new covenant.

The new covenant is the fullness of the covenant of grace. Just as Christ in the gospel graciously supplies the perfect righteousness of his conduct for our justification, the Spirit, in furtherance of salvation, begins and persists in a gracious production of righteousness in the hearts of those who are saved.

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## Hebrews 9:1-10

The writer of Hebrews turns now to the earthly sanctuary and the service of the priests who ministered there. He begins by speaking of these things as part of the first covenant. That first covenant is obsolete (8:13), valid only before Christ appeared as the ultimate Priest. Within the man-made sanctuary, certain practices were parallel to the ministry of Christ.

The high priest of Israel entered that sanctuary on earth with the blood of an animal. Hebrews is now approaching its climax. Just as the blood of animals was offered to God, the Lord Jesus as our Priest and Sacrifice entered the Presence of God by means of the blood he shed for his people. That will be the subject of the remainder of chapter 9. Both the place and the activity are of great interest to the writer. The sanctuary and blood foreshadow a different sanctuary and blood, namely the blood of Christ that avails in the sanctuary of heaven. This is the theme Hebrews 9 is moving to, but first it must lay the groundwork by giving some detail of the place and the worship activity under the ordained priests of Israel, especially the high priest. The place is described in vv.1-5 and the priestly functions, in vv.6-10.

Hebrews 9:1-10 is an introduction to "the blood of Christ." From here on, in some way, the blood of Christ will be mentioned in the remaining chapters of Hebrews. (Note it is by analogy only in 11:28. Christ became flesh and blood according to 2:14, i.e., he became human. Expressing the work of Christ as the shedding of Christ's blood is one of the graphic and deliberate ways God brings to our minds the sacrifice and priestly work of our Savior. V.5 makes clear that Hebrews passes over much it could have said on the typology of OT worship. The goal was to bring our attention to Christ and to highlight the substance of his work by means of the shadow.

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**9:1** In Greek the word *covenant* is absent in what we translate as "the first covenant". No doubt "the first" of 9:1 refers to the previous verse (8:13) where "the first" is the old covenant.

If the old covenant is obsolete, then the regulations in it are as well, yet their value to us is to increase our understanding of Christ as our priest. If we had no other model of priesthood to compare to, we would have only the work of Christ but no illustration to help us understand it. 9:1 refers to the tabernacle in the desert prior to entering the Promised Land. Hebrews never speaks directly of the temple in Jerusalem. In 8:4,5 it does refer to activity there in which Jesus did not participate, and immediately returns to speak of the tabernacle Moses built. Since the sanctuary on earth was patterned after the heavenly reality (8:5), we have in the physical construction and required service, things that are an intended analogy of the service of Christ.

**9:2-5** The Physical Structure and Contents The tabernacle in the desert had two compartments:

- The Holy Place which many priests (9:6) entered. It had a lampstand and a table with bread.
- The Most Holy Place which only the high priest (9:7) entered. Associated with it was the ark of the covenant and the incense altar [See below Appendix G: The Location of the Incense Altar.]

It is odd to us, reading a book 2000 years old and not having all the resources they had, to learn that not only were the two stone tablets of the law in that covenant box, but Aaron's rod and the pot of manna were there also.<sup>19</sup> The OT does not mention these last two items as contents of the ark of the covenant.<sup>20</sup> Hebrews does not give attention to what significance each object or activity in the tabernacle may have.

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<sup>19</sup> The OT does not say that the *ark* contained the gold jar of manna, as we read in 9:4. Before Israel learned there was to be an ark of the covenant, Exodus 16:31-35 had ordered that a jar of manna should be placed before the Lord for the generations to come.

**The Cherubim of the Glory** This expression in 9:5 is a way of saying these angels made of gold were fashioned to appear as cherubim. Note carefully Exodus 25:17-22; cherubim were even in the coverings above (Exodus 26:1) and in the veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (Exodus 26:31). God is surrounded by cherubim. His Presence over the Ark of the Covenant was between them. This is mentioned in many places in the OT and once in the NT. After Adam's rebellion, cherubim kept Adam & Eve from re-entering the Garden of Eden to eat of the tree of life. It seems the Lord assigned them to be guards of his glory. Ezekiel 28:11-19 refers to Satan as an anointed, i.e., a chosen & privileged cherub who rebelled and fell. In Ezekiel 8-11 when the Lord left his Temple because of the idolatry in it, the vision was of living cherubim leaving with him. They had special proximity to the Lord. They are indeed cherubim of the Glory. The early part of Hebrews steers people away from the worship of angels by making a vigorous defense that the Son has a more excellent Name than angels. Cherubim were given a unique presence with the Lord, but were never seated with him. In the Most Holy Place, God sat between the most intimidating of angels, whose eyes looked down at the covenant box.

**Overshadowing the Atonement Cover** That box had in it two tables of the law – two covenant copies, God's copy and Israel's. That was a law Israel and each of its citizens had broken. If God could have any favor towards his sinful people and restrain his angels of judgment, there must be satisfaction for sin. Atoning blood was sprinkled on the cover of that box. Before the eyes of God's "flames of fire" (1:7), blood covered the broken law in the box below, and so judgment was averted. The shadows of tabernacle worship were a kind of parable to illustrate the service of Christ who would go into the Presence of God on our behalf. The setting of the Lord of Glory between the cherubim is part of the way God shows access, atonement, propitiation, and a welcome into the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the Living God. There in his Presence at this moment are righteous men already made perfect, 12:22-24. The sprinkled blood has been acknowledged in heaven as the accomplishment of the cross. Hebrews is eager that we should see how crucial the sprinkled blood is to our salvation. God prepared an elaborate parable for us to help us understand.

**9:6-10** In the old administration, the matter of limited access to the Lord was demonstrated by curtains that served as barriers. Priests were all from one tribe, yet not all men in that tribe were priests, only sons of Aaron. Of all the priests, there was only one living high priest, and he could enter the Most Holy Place only once a year. The Holy Spirit showed by this that access to God would be a different way. They could see the curtain that prevented access to God. Only by Christ would there be access for all into the Presence of the Lord.

As long as that tabernacle was still standing, it gave a double message:

1. God's Presence – The Lord said, "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8; see also Exodus 29:42-26).
2. God's Remoteness – If the high priest entered at any other than the appointed time (Leviticus 16:2), he would die. If he went without blood, or improperly dressed, he would die. If he failed to have the smoke of the incense hide from his sight the cover of the atonement box, he would die (Leviticus 16:13).

The Lord was among his people and he also in some way held them back. The death of Christ would change this. On the day Jesus died, God tore in two the separating curtain (Matthew 27:51). That alone meant the Levitical order had been superseded. The way is open because of the offering of the body of Christ (10:19-22). God only accepts people in Christ, and he accepts all he has joined to Christ. (The Bible makes being called to and joined to Christ a high privilege! – 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14, Ephesians 1:18.) Access to the Father is limited to Christ as the way (John 14:6).

<sup>20</sup> This should not concern us unless we had in the OT some word that all information about the OT is contained there and nowhere else. The Bible does not make such a claim. In 2 Timothy 3:8 two men of Moses' time are named whose names do not appear in the OT! All the information we need about God and our relationship to him is found in Scripture and nowhere else. We glean much related information from archaeology and other historical records that are not part of Scripture. The OT refers to other documents that are not part of Scripture itself, as in 2 Chronicles 20:34. Thus, the NT also may give details not mentioned in the OT. That the tabernacle also was sprinkled with blood (9:21) is something the writer of Hebrews knew that is not mentioned in the OT.

Did God's people have access to God before the time of Christ? Yes they did, or else they would not be able to pray. In Psalm 100:2 (and Psalm 95:2), they came before him, but only to his courts, never entering his Holy Place. By the limitations of the tabernacle and temple, the Holy Spirit was showing that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing.

The new covenant promises to us the Spirit's work to produce obedience, yet the new covenant was not inaugurated until the time of Christ. Does this mean there was no activity of the Holy Spirit bringing obedience to OT saints? There were many godly persons in OT times, but that was because God brought new covenant blessings beyond what he had promised, blessings of an age still future to them, just as he does for us (Hebrews 6: 5).

Access to God was never a benefit brought to God's people by the shadows and types of the OT. The blessings came through Christ in advance of his coming. In the time of Hebrews, some dared to reject Christ. By faith in what their priests could do, they hoped for access to God. The writer of Hebrews wants the imagery of that curtain that blocked their view of the Presence of God to show that God had never allowed access to himself that way. God can be approached only through Christ. Long ago, the Holy Spirit was teaching a truth by means of a curtain blocking the earthly sanctuary.

Here in 9:7, Hebrews begins to describe sacrifice using the word *blood*. This is a very important feature of Biblical truth. Hebrews will oscillate between the blood of animals and the blood of Christ. The Lord had arranged a system of sacrifices with the frequent bloodshed of innocent victims in order to bring attention to the literal bloodshed of Jesus on the cross. It is one thing for God to act to save. It is essential for us that God should interpret his saving actions, and this he has done not only in words, but in centuries of ritual to prepare our minds for the ultimate reality. Hundreds of years of bloodshed pointed to the death of Jesus on a Friday afternoon. The people knew that the high priest never went into the Presence of God without taking the required blood of the animal. Thus vital truth was not only stated, it was illustrated. To this day Jews will call the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) their most holy day, while so far, most in the Jewish community refuse the true meaning of that day. The Lord will change this! (Romans 11:11-32).

#### What about Temples for the worship of God today?

God in his wisdom in times past used a building of his design for his beneficial purpose before the time of Christ. He has now spoken in his Son. One day he ruined his earthly sanctuary. He tore the curtain showing thereby that access to him was by means of Christ. Many varieties of temple worship beckon worshippers today. These temples uniformly appeal to the eye. They have ceremonies that interact in some way with a deity associated with that place. Jesus said the day had come in his coming when worship in spirit and truth would no longer be tied to any place (John 4:21-24), including the place where at one time God had set his Holy Presence.

Yet today, rails in Roman churches (noted for their splendor) hold back worshippers from a supposed altar where Christ is offered again by a mortal human priest. Faith is diverted from the Bread sent down from heaven (John 6:33-35) to a piece of bread in the hands of a man. Mormons have impressive temples that only their faithful may enter, and only if they pay. Hindus and Buddhists construct awesome colorful temples, where beautiful things of earth: flowers, flames, candles and incense are coupled with sounds without words. Prayers are offered before visible objects that represent many gods or a man who never claimed to be one. By all these things, the human heart in its desire to create its own forms of worship, departs from Christ. All things that beckon and promise access to God apart from Christ are occultic, demonic and deceitful. False religion tends to mimic some of the things the Bible teaches are now obsolete – things that have served their purpose and have been discarded.

**9:9,10** The contrast is between the external and the internal. Some rituals “cleansed” a man of ceremonial uncleanness (9:13), such as defilement for touching a dead body. This man declared “clean” could enter the congregation again, but such a ritual did not cleanse the conscience. It did not bring forgiveness or righteousness. It did illustrate that the purging sin can only come from a blood sacrifice. That cleansing would be accomplished by Christ. OT rituals had a purpose; they were an instrument of the Lord to teach the gospel. Their usefulness, limited as it was, was temporary and would serve only till the time the new order

came. It came when Jesus made his offering on the cross, and the curtain of the sanctuary on earth below and heaven above was opened. Jesus, having opened the way for us, entered into the heavenly sanctuary and sat down at the right hand of God.

## Appendix 9: Sins Committed in Ignorance (9:7)

The blood the high priest offered was only for sins committed in ignorance (9:7). This may make us wonder if we ever sin deliberately (and we do) if there is any offering for such sin. If one's hope in Christ is that every sin we have ever committed must be a certain kind of sin, i.e., a kind of sin we do not know is really sin !! – then we really have no hope of salvation in Christ. Our time in history is one where people care little about righteousness and whether anything is sinful. This is a serious sign of danger. This attitude causes us not to wonder what “sins committed in ignorance” really means. Some presume that God forgives all sin, a confusion that leaves no room for apostasy. Some sins are not atoned for (Isaiah 22:14). Some sins will never be forgiven (Mark 3:29) and that is announced concerning certain sinners in advance of their death. (The old slogan: “while there is life there is hope,” does not really apply to all!)

This theme comes up in Hebrews in a number of ways. The high priest in 5:1-3 offers sacrifices for sins of ignorance and waywardness. Sin may be from weakness, not only simple ignorance, as in the case of the disciples in Mark 14:37-40. It may even be rebellion, (Leviticus 16:16). There is a qualitative difference between those sins and the sin of the people in 3:7-4:11 who were hard-hearted; or between the sins of 5:1-3 and the sin of Judas. Judas' policy of sin was an unrepentant greed so aggravated he would betray the Son of Man for money with a kiss in spite of all warning to him. The eleven disciples were weak. Peter even denied his Lord; Judas was apostate. The offerings in Israel were never for those who had defiant rejection of God's authority. The priests' offerings were for the weak whose sins overpowered them. Those who worry about this, should be comforted by finding in their hearts repentance and sorrow for sin. Apostates lack such virtue.

A very helpful passage to show the difference between unintentional sin and defiant sin is Numbers 15:22-31. Expressions like “sins of ignorance” or “sins done unintentionally” take on the sense of a class of sin. The way to understand a kind of sin is to see it in terms of its opposite. Hebrews is not saying that we have no Savior because of the sin that so easily entangles us (12:1). Hebrews does say there is no sacrifice for the sins of the man in 10:26 who deliberately rejects the truth of Christ he once held. One cannot be part of the Christian community, i.e., at one time a Christ confessor and then a Christ-rejecter, and still have hope of repenting (6:4-6), God will not give it! The apostate has no claim on the sacrifice for sins made on the cross. No sacrifice remains for him (10:26); no sacrifice for that kind of sin has been provided. That man is a fool who chooses to live in sin and presumes the blood of Christ covers him. Those who assume God forgives all sin, and that the atonement covers every sin ever committed, argue from a posture not found in the Bible. God will forgive every sinner who repents, but he does not grant repentance (Acts 11:18) to every sinner (6:4-6). He also hardens men in their defiance (Romans 9:16-18; Romans 1:28-32) and lets them go on to judgment.

There is great comfort that Paul, the chief of sinners, could be saved, but his opposition to Christ was without the knowledge of who Jesus is. He was ignorant of Christ (1 Timothy 1:12-17). He called Jesus “Lord” while still uncertain of his identity (Acts 9:4,5). Paul was shown grace and a mercy not available to apostates. (In light of these things, we pray about our sins with the words of Psalm 19:12,13.) There is sin not in ignorance or weakness, but sin so deliberate that the apostle declines to pray for the person who commits it (1 John 5:16,17).

That the Bible makes this kind of distinction concerning sin is clearly present in Scripture. Hebrews warns that the sacrifice of Christ does not cover every kind of transgression. His priestly offering atones for all of the sins of his elect for sure, but not the sins of apostates.

" `But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people. Because he has despised the LORD's word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him.' " Numbers 15:30,31

## Appendix G: The Location of the Incense Altar in 9:3,4

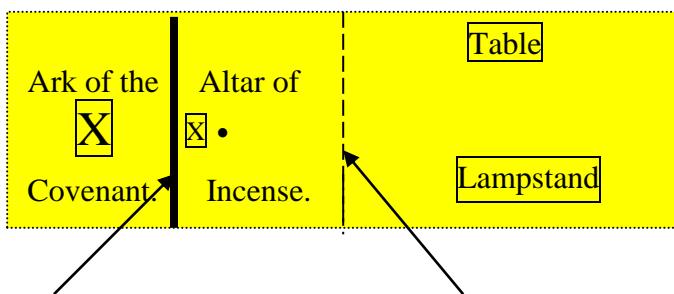
When the priest entered the Holy Place he would see the Table, the Lampstand, and the Gold Altar of Incense in that room. Hebrews 9:4 seems to say that the altar of incense was on the wrong side of the curtain, that it was actually in the Most Holy Place. Though it does not exactly say that, this appears to be an error in the Bible, and a variety of attempts have been made to resolve it.

Before I offer a solution that may well be wrong, I have this advice. When we hear a person say something that does not make sense to us, it helps to be able to ask what he meant. We do not have that opportunity with the writer of Hebrews. If we had, we might be surprised at a simple solution. We should humble ourselves and say that we just do not know the answer to some of our questions.

When the tabernacle was set up (Hebrews 9:2), the Altar of Incense was in the Holy Place in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony (Exodus 30:6). This position could be stated as being simply “in front of the ark of the Testimony” (Exodus 40:5). When in use, its incense would “burn regularly before the LORD,” (Exodus 30:8). Unlike the lampstand and the table, the golden altar (Exodus 30:10) and its incense (Exodus 30:36) were both declared to be most holy. If one stood and looked around the Holy Place, he would say that that room had the Altar of Incense, the Lampstand and the Table. It is very simple to the eye.

Some attempt to solve the problem by saying 9:4 does not really speak of the Altar of Incense in the Most Holy Place, but rather the censer associated with it. They seek to honor God’s infallible word in this way, and I respect that, but the censer was not the altar. Others point out that Hebrews could be quoting from a different text – and there is a text that supports the wording of Hebrews 9:4 – but that defense implies that the writer quoted accurately an erroneous version of the facts. In that explanation, Hebrews is not guilty of inventing an error but of repeating one. Others argue that in the Temple in Solomon’s day the incense altar was in the Most Holy Place (1 Kings 6:22). That fact is significant and ought to affect how we look at that altar, but it still will not fit the description of the tabernacle of Moses’ time (8:5) when “the tabernacle was set up,” (9:2). Later, in NT times the altar of incense was not behind the curtain, because Zechariah, who was not high priest, served at that altar (Luke 1:11).

My suggestion is that the tabernacle should also be considered in two parts, not by what is visible but by its purpose. In one half, there are items directed to the ritual activity of the worship of the Lord: the Ark and its covering, and then in front of the covering, the altar of incense. The other items were related to the priests, a light for them to see and the table with bread for them to eat. It is not surprising that the altar of incense was in the Most Holy Place in Solomon’s Temple because it is so often spoken of as related to the ark. The altar of incense was closer to the ark of the covenant than any other thing except the curtain that covered it. In the imagery of Revelation 8:3 and 9:13, the golden altar was “before the throne” and “before God”.



The veil (or curtain)

Suggested mental line. When serving at the incense altar, the priest standing at the dot [•] in the diagram, is in the half of the tabernacle connected to the worship of God. He *faced* the Lord who was in the Most Holy Place. The other items of the Holy Place would be behind him. [Diagram, not to scale]

Looking from the **angle of function**, the Lampstand was to give light so the priests could see; it was not so God could see. The Table held bread for the priests to eat. The Ark held the covenant tablets and was the location of the Lord in the midst of his people. The Altar was where incense was offered to the Lord, who received the aroma of the spices. The priest faced the Lord when he offered there. That altar was in the half of the tabernacle where things used for God were located. Thus it is not a surprise to read in 1 Kings 6:22 that this altar belonged to the inner sanctuary. For Hebrews 9:4 to say that the Most Holy Place had the golden altar of incense may simply be saying that this altar belonged to the Most Holy Place and in this sense “had”, not contained it, but had it by association and purpose. I suggest the statement is not of location but connection. The priest had no confusion whose altar it was or to whom the incense was being offered, as he offered incense there facing the ark. It was in the same half as the ark of the covenant, so it is quite natural from one perspective to speak of them together. What I suggest is not what the camera would view, but perhaps how the priest was likely to “view” things. He knew very well when he approached that altar that he was close to and facing the Holy of Holies, even though the veil covering the ark marked the boundary of the first and second “room,” and determined how far he could go.

Ordinarily for us to say a room has something, and some item of furniture is named, we mean that that room contains the item. But this is not always so; a courtroom may have guards, yet these guards may stand outside. Their function has to do with the room, while their location is outside it. The Greek verb “echein” (i.e., “to have”) has sufficient flexibility to it to allow this interpretation.

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## Hebrews 9:11-28

In this part of Hebrews we come, in my opinion, to the pinnacle of the entire book. Here we find the service of Christ, our Great High Priest, in his sacrificial, effective, one-time, unblemished, ransom-offering. Without shedding blood he would always be welcome in heaven in his own righteousness, but by his blood he was qualified to enter heaven to represent sinners in the Presence of God, since he had atoned for them on earth. There Jesus continues to serve.

Here we also find the benefits to his own: his blood cleanses the conscience and thereby enables the true worship of God. As the Mediator of the new covenant who died for his people’s unfaithfulness, Christ alone – and not the people by their faithfulness – has secured eternally their promised inheritance. The eternal redemption (9:12) secures the eternal inheritance (9:15). This passage is also the clearest in the Bible on the meaning of the blood of Christ.

Many Biblical themes converge in this passage, one that shows that the death of Christ is the crucial act of God in history and the means by which all the blessings of salvation come to us. The gospel of Christ is fused with the act of God in history. The Christian faith is not just a message; it rests squarely on our Savior’s death on earth and his advocacy for us in heaven. The gospel message cannot exist apart from God’s actions.

This passage begins by teaching that the first coming of Christ is the hinge of human history. The order is God’s creation, man’s sin, and redemption by the God-Man, Jesus Christ. The time of reformation came (9:10) precisely when the Redeemer appeared as high priest (9:11) at the end of the ages (9:26). The “end of the ages” refers to the Lord’s first coming.

In Jesus' priestly work, the ineffective has been replaced with the effective; the numerous sinful mortal priests with the one holy Priest who lives forever; and animal blood with the blood of Christ that really does cleanse from sin. No longer does a priest enter the Presence of God to leave and appear again after yet another offering. Our Lord Jesus Christ offered once, has entered the Presence, and is still there "for us" after 2000 years. He will come again to fulfill promises that had to wait for the redemption he accomplished in his sacrifice.

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**9:11,12** The ceremonial ministries of priests on earth are no longer valid. The new time has come (9:10), so this verse speaks not of good things yet to come, but good things already here, such as a cleansed conscience.

Christ came as High Priest. In a different Scripture, Jesus asserted his calling as Priest when he said of his impending offering, "*for this reason I came into the world,*" (John 12:23-28).

Christ has gone "*behind the curtain*" into the inner sanctuary (6:19,20) of God's Presence. The greater tabernacle "*not of this creation*" is heaven (9:11). In v.12 the Most Holy Place refers to heaven. We are accustomed to think of the ascension as Jesus going *up*, but 9:12 says *through*. By using "through" the writer maintains the imagery of other priests who entered by passing through a literal curtain. Jesus "*has passed through the heavens*" (4:14).

Priests often entered the Holy Place without blood, but on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with blood. It was his duty to take animal blood and sprinkle it before the Lord. Such a ministry was authorized and required by God. For Jesus to be a Priest, he too must have something to offer (8:3). He could enter the Lord's Presence on his own and be welcome, but he could not enter the Presence of God to represent sinners unless blood had been shed for them. The sacrifice that produced the blood necessary for Christ's priestly entry was his body offered on the cross. Other high priests entered by right of blood; this applies to Christ as well, but the blood of his mediation was his.

It is important to understand that a type in the OT may not be identical to its fulfillment in the NT, just as shadow of a hand is not like a hand in every respect. In the OT the high priest carried the blood with him; the NT never says that Jesus did that. 9:12 does not say Jesus entered WITH blood as some translations say.<sup>21</sup> The language that Jesus entered *by means of* his blood or *by* his blood, is that his bloodshed on the cross is what gave him the right to appear before God as our Priest. He does not appear there for us *by means of* some false argument that we have not sinned. He does not intercede *by means of* a plea that we should be forgiven apart from justice – as if God could overlook sin! He went *by means of* the satisfaction that his sacrifice had made for us. The figurative way to speak of that sacrifice is to call it his blood, because he shed his blood when he offered himself (9:25). The literal blood itself was left on the ground at the foot of the cross. His appearance in heaven to represent us is genuine, effective and legitimate because what he had done for us on the cross was all that was needed for redemption and acceptance by God. It is in this sense that he entered the Most Holy Place by his blood.

This is related to another issue in interpretation. Did Jesus *offer* anything when he appeared before the Lord in the Most Holy Place? We face here some Roman Catholic influence with its doctrine of repeated offerings of Jesus' body and blood. The OT never says that the priest who presented blood in the Most Holy Place *offered* it in the Most Holy Place. In both the type and the antitype, the offering was prior to entering the Presence of God. The goat was killed outside the tabernacle and the Lord Jesus' offering was outside heaven on earth six weeks prior to his ascension. There is only one offering event, the one Jesus made in his death. No sacrifice is made in heaven. It was made where human sin occurred, on earth!

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<sup>21</sup> I often recommend the New King James Version. Here it disappoints when it says , "with his own blood he entered...". The Greek preposition in 9:12 is *dia* not *syn*. Did Jesus go *with* his blood, meaning that his shed blood accompanied him to be presented before God? No. The NKJV may not intend to convey that thought, but the translation allows it. The King James itself did not use *with* but *by*!

**Having obtained eternal redemption** The language here is in a past tense,<sup>22</sup> so that shows that before his entrance into heaven Christ had already obtained the eternal redemption. This is important because if we miss that the obtaining was accomplished prior to his entrance, we might wonder if something happens in heaven that causes redemption. If so, that would again argue that the redemption is not accomplished only in the sacrifice on the cross and could occur later and elsewhere. Redemption always has in it the idea of a payment. (In Revelation 14:3,4 redeemed = purchased.) Since this is so, we must see that the death of Christ is a redeeming death (1 Peter 1:18) and avoid all suggestion of any later redeeming activity in heaven. The fact of one event that brings eternal redemption fits the truth that Jesus entered the heavenly sanctuary once and the redemption Christ obtained on earth is eternal. Thus there is no later act in heaven or on earth to secure redemption. Our faith does not redeem, the Lord's Supper does not redeem; there is no continuing purging of sin. Redemption was finished by one payment on the cross. He has freed us from our sins by his blood, (Revelation 1:5), by one sacrifice (10:14; 7:27). God has accepted that sacrifice and requires nothing more.

Since the redemption is eternal and Christ has obtained it, it is a certain redemption that cannot be altered or affected by any other factor. It cannot be a redemption contingent on the supposed free will of man. Redemption rests on one base, not two; it was acquired for us by Christ in his work as our Priest. His accomplishment will find its results in the lives of all sinners who are saved, and that redemption is in fact what saves them. (See the comments related to 9:15 below.)

**The Blood of Christ** The Apostles Paul, Peter and John, as well as Hebrews, all speak of the blood of Christ as his voluntary sacrificial death. Because the life of a creature is in its blood (Leviticus 17:11), the shedding of that blood is certain death. For Jesus to shed his blood means he gave up his life in death as a ransom payment (9:15). Since such sacrifices were always for others, the blood of Christ means Christ was a substitutionary sacrifice (9:28). His blood is the object of faith (Romans 3:25) and the basis of justification (Romans 5:9). By it Jesus redeemed his church (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:19) and brought reconciliation (Ephesians 2:13; Colossians 1:20) and purification (1 John 1:7). The blood of Christ in Hebrews appears at 9:12,14; 10:19,29; 12:24; 13:12,20. This is the greatest concentration in the Bible making reference to Jesus' sacrifice in terms of blood.

**Our High Priest in Heaven** Jesus does not make offerings in heaven; his one and only offering occurred on earth on the altar of the cross. He is still our Mediator Priest at the Father's right hand, seated there because His offering is final, unrepeatable, and finished. As a Priest he never speaks for himself and does not need to. Instead, he actively represents his people, intercedes for, and blesses them.

**He represents.** Since he has been granted admission as our appointed Priest, this guarantees our entrance (6:19,20) and shows our acceptance in Christ. An accepted offering indicates the acceptance of the one represented (Leviticus 22:17-25).

**He intercedes.** He lives to intercede (7:25) and help his weak children (2:18). He prays for our protection, unity, perseverance, joy, success in service, holiness and final glorification (John 17). His intercession is our security; no charge against us for our sin can succeed since he has already atoned for it. No accusation of sin, in fact nothing at all, can separate us from being in Christ (Romans 8:31-39; 1 John 2:1,2).

**He blesses.** Jesus' death brings comprehensive benefits to his own – blessings eternally secured. Our Priest blesses us in benedictions beyond mere words. We bless when we thank him. He blesses in words that describe what he does do. Numbers 6:22-27 is a priestly prayer with the kind of favor Christ as Priest bestows. His death removed the curse and the barrier to blessing (Galatians 3:13-15). Because he has acquired gifts for his own, he dispenses them richly: chiefly the ministry of the Spirit among us, (Luke 11:13, Acts 2:33; John 14-16; Ephesians

<sup>22</sup> It is an aorist participle. For this reason I differ a little with the English Standard Version which says here, "thus securing an eternal redemption." This securing is related to Christ's blood already shed, but it is not necessary to take the ESV to mean that the securing of eternal redemption happened after the cross. 9:12 is a logical statement not a temporal one, like saying "This is what secures the redemption." The aorist in 9:12 refers to a past action.

4:7-16), and all the things promised eternally to Abraham. God does not bless the person under his curse, but since our curse has been absorbed by Christ, Jesus dispenses blessing graciously.

**9:13** The writer now mentions that the blood of bulls and goats made a person to be outwardly clean. To this he adds the ashes of a heifer, which in Numbers 19 was used for those who had touched a dead body so they could be declared clean.<sup>23</sup> Such a symbolic cleansing did not cleanse the conscience.

**9:14** The blood of Christ is the offering of an unblemished Person, one whose entire ministry was the result of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, including making an offering of himself. It is contrary to human nature to do such a thing, yet it was the will of the Father. Jesus' Messianic obedience was supported by and completed in the Spirit's power. He obediently offered himself. Thus by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus as a man was able to offer himself as a morally pure man.

The "much more" is crucial to Hebrews. It contrasts Jesus with the animals of 9:13. One must consider who it is who offered himself. The animals were not filled with the Spirit, nor did they have any voluntary obedience. Their blood was not precious as was the blood of Christ. (His blood was precious not because it was different in kind from the blood of other men, but because it was his.) To return to the religion of shadows and copies, and to sacrifices of mere animals and away from Christ is to move from much more to much less. It is always this way with apostasy.

**The God-ward Aspect of the Death of Christ** We often fail to emphasize that Jesus' sacrifice was offered "to God". A self-centered culture likes to hear little more than that it was "for me". That Jesus died for others is very clear; it is the principle of substitution. Hebrews teaches that every priest's offering is to God, never to man. Christ's offering was to God, who was propitiated in the death of Christ. It was God to whom the ransom payment was made in redemption. God's alienation toward his elect has been removed; God is the victor at the cross in the destruction of his enemy Satan. God's justice was satisfied in the death of Christ and our sins (against God) were removed from his sight. God provided our priest and God was being obeyed and glorified by him. It is sentimentalism to say the cross is just Jesus holding wide his arms to us. He does draw from all people a people for himself (John 12:32) because he was lifted up on the cross in his offering to the Father.

The new covenant promises that those in it have a radical change of heart (8:10). This is the cleansed conscience, a benefit that comes because the blood of Christ the Mediator cleanses. Christ is not a Mediator who simply passes on information from God. He is One who has acted to change his people so that they will be the transformed people Jeremiah predicted under the new covenant.

**Cleansing the Conscience** This is Hebrews' term for genuine forgiveness. Forgiveness happens in God the Forgiver. It is his judicial decision concerning us that happens the instant we believe. By faith in his Word we know in our hearts that we have peace with God, that our sins are truly all forgiven, that in Christ we are accepted, and that we have been given a title to all the benefits of God's gracious salvation. Thus the conscience is at peace and our fear of his wrath has been removed (Romans 5:9). We have no sense of remaining under God's judgment because Christ's sacrifice has removed all danger of it from the one who rests in his finished work, and conscience knows nothing more will be required by God. Justification does not mean Christians have no further accusation of conscience reminding us we are sinful and need to repent. In the Spirit's work the conscience is brought to agree with the sober appraisals of God's law that we always need cleansing. Because of moral weakness, we come to the throne of grace in great need and even embarrassment, but also confidently in Christ – not with a sinless conscience, but one that rests in Christ – though in need of help because of remaining sin. We find grace, mercy and help because Christ is our Great High Priest (4:15,16) whose blood has atoned for us. The conscience rests in God's forgiveness by faith in his blood (Romans 3:25). Hebrews is not teaching that we can look within and with a good conscience think of ourselves as completely sanctified. It teaches that sin affects us easily (12:1); it presents only Christ as perfect in his obedience (5:9), and believers in a process of being made holy (10:14). The intercession

<sup>23</sup> Philip E. Hughes points out that this may have appealed very much to those in the Qumran community who did not recognize the temple worship in Jerusalem and had no tabernacle, because the heifer was killed outside the camp. He suggests that the mention of this ritual from Numbers 19 is more evidence that Hebrews was written to people influenced by this community.

of Christ is not a false argument that we have no more sin, but a plea that Jesus' one offering has answered for our sins. His blood has satisfied God and cleanses our consciences. We make no offerings for our sins; we only confess them, and God is faithful to purify the conscience from them (1 John 1:9).

**The Contrast** “**Acts that lead to death**” (like 6:20) – or better *dead works* – is a way to look at sin from one angle. As transgression, sin disobeys; as defilement, sin is unclean. To speak of cleansing as 9:14 does, is to view sin as filth. Death is sin’s consequence. Death is a broken communion with God; its opposite is to **“serve the living God.”** The word *serve* is commonly used for worship. The OT priest could offer sacrifices of blood, and had to do so. With cleansing from sin secured by Christ, we may approach to offer the sacrifice of praise (13:15). This is a kind of service common to all of God’s people as a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5).

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**This amazing verse, 9:15!** The blood Christ offered to God cleanses the conscience and opens the way to genuine worship (9:14). By saying that, the writer of Hebrews joined to the sacrifice of Christ the benefits that come from it. In 9:15 he links the promised inheritance (of Abraham) to the priestly service of Christ whose ransom removes sin and thereby secures that inheritance. Defective obedience can never secure an inheritance; Christ’s obedience does. 9:15 must be one of the most amazing verses in the Bible. It joins together very large matters in a very brief statement. Christ’s mediation and ransom results in an unlosable inheritance for all who are called. This verse is like a bridge that links all the continents of earth together in one location. The ransom paid by Christ connects all these elements in the eternal purpose of God.

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**Christ & Moses** Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant. Moses was the mediator of the old one (Galatians 3:19; see also the contrast in Hebrews 12:18-29). Moses could not guarantee any inheritance. Israel’s remaining in the land depended on their obedience (Deuteronomy 28:21, 58-63; 29:25-28). Moses could not even guarantee that the adults who left Egypt with him would enter the land; only two did and godly Moses did not because of his public sin (Numbers 20:2-12). But unlike Moses, Christ is perfect in obedience (5:9) and qualified to enter heaven! As a mediator, Moses could give the law, but he could not produce any obedience to it. When his people sinned, he could pray for them but could not die for them. Moses could not deliver the inheritance promised to Abraham, or the obedience promised in the new covenant. “... *The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*” (John 1:17).

Our Mediator is the Guarantor (7:22) of the new covenant. Unlike Moses, Christ does bring his sons to glory and also makes them holy (2:9-11). With Christ, it is not that two get in, but that none will be lost (John 6:39; Jeremiah 23:4-6). Israel was in the land by God’s grace, not their obedience (Deuteronomy 7-9), and only for a while. In contrast, Jesus secures for us an inheritance that is eternal. We sinners have no claim on any blessing in our obedience, but Jesus sets free from the sin and loss that the covenant-breaking in the old covenant brought (8:8; 3:11-19). What Moses could not provide, we have in Christ. The benefits promised in the new covenant come to us because Christ is its unique Mediator.

**The Promise** 9:15 does not elaborate on the promised inheritance, but 6:13 and 11:9,11 speak of the promise to Abraham. This promise was covenanted, (Genesis 15). The law in Moses’ day did not replace the earlier promise to Abraham (Galatians 3:15-18). As law-breakers they could never inherit the land, but that was not what settled the issue. Receiving the inheritance was certain because God had promised it to Abraham and his children. Since obedience is required and found nowhere else, the condition is fulfilled by the covenant keeping of Christ. We are heirs only because we are joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). Christ is the promised Seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16). All who belong to Christ are Abraham’s true seed since they have been joined to the One who is the Seed of Abraham. That is all that is needed to guarantee to them as heirs the promise to Abraham (Galatians 3:29; 4:28-31).

The new covenant is also promised in Jeremiah (8:6-13), but this is different from the promise to Abraham only in detail not in kind. To Abraham and his children, God promised to be their God, (Genesis 17:7,8). <sup>24</sup> In

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<sup>24</sup> Genesis 17 is the first specific wording that God would be Abraham’s God. He did worship and call on the Lord prior to this explicit language in chapter 17. It is interesting that Melchizedek’s benediction was that Abram should be blessed by

the new covenant the Lord repeats that he will be their God (8:10). In sending Christ, God remembered “*his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days,*” (Luke 1:72-75). This revelation makes clear that the covenant with Abraham, and the new covenant promise of access to serve the living God, are both fulfilled in the covenant Mediator, Christ.

**The Great Surprise** In any covenant God makes, he requires absolute obedience. Disobedience is always punishable by death. The great question is how a holy God can take into a covenant relationship with himself people who are sinners. It is not that he takes in people who may become sinners later; the surprise is that each person after Adam is already worthy of death at the time he or she enters a covenant with the Lord. This kind of covenant – a holy God with a sinful creature unable in himself to obey – is astounding to imagine, (Habakkuk 1:13). Such a bond could never even begin unless God had in mind a comprehensive remedy. He has one in Jesus, our most unusual Mediator! This Mediator of the new covenant is the reason those who are called receive their inheritance.

**Christ & Adam** To see the big picture, one must step back to see the original covenant God made with man. In that covenant God was one party and Adam the other. There was no third party, no mediator; none was needed. Then Adam sinned and the sanction of the broken covenant fell on him: Adam died and all who were in him died to God because of Adam’s transgression (Romans 5:15,17). Yet in the beginning of our history, God promised a Savior (Genesis 3:15); he would put a Mediator between himself and us (1 Timothy 2:5). Ages later (9:26), Jesus as that Mediator inaugurated a new covenant. Sinners cannot meet the unchanging requirement of obedience, and the penalty for disobedience we can bear only by suffering for our sin in hell forever. The only way this new covenant succeeds is that God is on both sides of it. He is faithful as covenant Lord, and he has sent us a covenant Man from heaven (Isaiah 42:6; 1 Corinthians 15:47) who when tested, proved to be faithful (2:17; 3:1-6). We must not miss how very gracious it is that God would have a covenant with sinners where all the covenant requirements fall back on the Lord himself – yet not on the Lord as God, but on the Lord God as our incarnate covenant Man (Romans 5:19). This is the only way the necessary faithfulness can be found on both sides of the covenant.

**The Blood of the Mediator** Making a covenant in Hebrew idiom is “cutting” a covenant. When a covenant was made, a victim was slaughtered and its blood, as in Exodus 24:8, was the visible blood element present to ratify the covenant, i.e., to begin it officially. This ritual in real blood would impress on the mind that covenant breaking would result in death. When Jesus inaugurated the new covenant, he too used blood to ratify it when he said, “*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins,*” (Matthew 26:28). No blood was sprinkled on the disciples that night; no threat of their bloodshed was made!! Instead *the cup of the Covenant Keeper’s blood* was passed to covenant-breakers, men whose blood he did not take in judgment, men he would redeem with his not theirs. Just as eating and drinking sustains life, they benefit from the blood shed for them on the cross. The new covenant placed their sins on the Mediator! God bore human sin for sinners. (Such grace is unheard of!) Within hours of that meal Jesus in death would drink the cup of wrath for them, while those who deserved it drank a cup of blessing (1Corinthians 10:16). For Jesus to give thanks for that cup and give it to them was unlike other covenants in blood. It was for his people the very opposite of a covenantal curse for a potential infraction. The cup of his blood implied that he would die as a ransom to set them free from the curse that the first covenant pronounced on sin. The new covenant pronounces no curse for those in it; it speaks a better word (12:24): the forgiveness of our wickedness (8:12). In the new covenant, blessing and cursing are not combined (note James 3:9-12). Because Christ is the Guarantor of the new covenant’s success, its fulfillment rests on him alone. God cannot curse the faithfulness of Christ, and that is the only faithfulness in view in the new covenant.

Until the last Passover Supper, old covenant ritual was an obligation for God’s people; then there at the same table and time, Jesus finished one ritual with animal blood and inaugurated the new covenant in his. That night the new order began. The old order (with animal blood) ceased; never again would they be required to

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God Most High. Possibly the Holy Spirit has implied by this that having the covenant relation is a blessing conferred by priestly intercession. In the new covenant as developed by Hebrews this is surely so.

keep the Passover with the bloodshed of a lamb. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7). A new worship obligation replaced the old one. “Do this in remembrance of Me” replaced a “do this in anticipation of me.” In the new covenant we are not under the old covenant in worship practice or sacrifices.

**Eternal Inheritance (9:15) – Eternal Redemption (9:12)** 9:15 deals with receiving an inheritance, the sin that loses an inheritance, and the redemption necessary to preserve it. Had Adam obeyed he would not have lost the world he was given. By means of his obedience, he would have kept the inheritance he entered at creation. Had Jesus not died as a ransom, Abraham and his children could not receive the promised inheritance that still awaits us (11:8; 11:39). The meek – who do not make a false claim of faithfulness – will inherit the earth as a gracious provision (Matthew 5:5). Adam lost the world, but Abraham would become heir of it because of the righteousness (of Christ) that he would receive by faith (Romans 4:13). Since he received it, such righteousness certainly did not come from his own obedience. Abraham died in faith rejoicing he would see the day of Christ (John 8:56), who would gain the inheritance for him. The eternal inheritance of 9:15 would require first the eternal redemption of 9:12.

**Those Who Are Called** Those God loved in advance (the meaning of “foreknew”) and chose in eternity, he also in our history called, justified, and glorified (Romans 8:28-30). The eternal inheritance is based on an eternal redemption for those whom God in his eternal purpose (Ephesians 3:11) called to salvation. (See below, Appendix 9: For Whom Did Christ Die?)

When those who are called believe in Christ who died for their covenant breaking and obeyed for their covenant faithfulness, we may speak sincerely such covenant language as, “*God is our God, and we are his people*”. In Christ we have all things graciously secured for us (Romans 8:32): forgiveness in the present, an accomplished redemption in the past, and a future inheritance both certain and eternal.

**Inheritance and the Holy Spirit** The ministry of Christ our Mediator in the past, has made our eternal inheritance certain (9:15). This inheritance in some sense is being delivered already. When a man believes the gospel, he is sealed with the promised Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). This shows that not all aspects of the promise wait for the future. That God would give anyone his Spirit is a wonder beyond our understanding; he must have a very favorable view of us because of Christ! The Spirit is a guarantee of inheritance in a different sense. Christ in his priestly intervention and obedience has secured the inheritance. The Spirit given to us shows that God has not confined promised blessing to the future. God's giving the Spirit shows he will give everything else. The blessing is underway, for the Spirit has been given in the present as “*the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire [future] possession of it ...*” (Ephesians 1:14).

**New things** The old creation has suffered from man's sin; the new creation is its replacement. There is no other creation after the new creation (Revelation 21:1-5) for it is the ultimate thing. The old man, i.e., our likeness to Adam, is replaced in God's salvation by the new man (2 Corinthians 5:17), which is a man like Christ (Ephesians 4:20-24). This is the ultimate in human life; it is in no need of revision or improvement because anything like Christ will not need a further new creation. Likewise, the new covenant is one in which full covenant faithfulness appears and remains on the human side. Faithfulness has always existed on the divine side. In the new covenant our faithfulness is Christ who has represented his people. Because God has brought sinners into this covenant with Christ, it is a covenant where sins are forgiven and remembered no more. The new covenant in full expression will eventually have perfect righteousness in each covenant member. The law already written on new hearts (Ezekiel 36:26) will be fully obeyed. In the new heavens and the new earth, the new man will inhabit the new creation because of the new covenant.

**9:16-22 A Necessary Death** The emphases of 9:14,15 has been on benefits that come from the death of Christ. Now the writer will give other reasons a death was necessary. Two illustrations now follow, one of which (vv.16,17) is unusual for Hebrews since it does not come from the Old Testament. A will is not in force unless the one who made that will has died. Death releases the benefits in a will. While the testator is

alive the beneficiary receives nothing. This simple point is that unless Christ died, no benefit from God's promises comes to anyone till Christ's ransom settles the debt of sin.

Then with a death from the Old Testament, the writer reminds them that covenants are sealed in blood. The old covenant at Sinai was put into effect when blood was sprinkled on the people and the place. For this ratification to happen, some animal victim died so its blood could be used that way. With such a ritual it was official and public that Israel had entered into a covenant with the Lord. Unless there is bloodshed there is no covenant and thus no covenant blessings. There MUST be the death of Christ for cleansing and for forgiveness. The OT shadows clearly taught that if there was no bloodshed there was no forgiveness.

**9:23** one of the puzzling verses in the book of Hebrews. We should face this verse certain of these things: Hebrews speaks of two cleansings: one external and the other a cleansing of the conscience. The Day of Atonement did have a cleansing rite even for the Most Holy Place (Leviticus 16:16). Hebrews has established that the earthly sanctuary was a copy of heaven itself. The activity on earth was an analogy of the activity related to heaven. In both a priest entered God's Presence by means of blood previously shed to plead the need of sinners.

Two puzzling things appear in 9:23:

- 1.) the reference to the work of Christ with the plural word "sacrifices," ("*better sacrifices*").
- 2.) the statement that the heavenly things are purified.

It is natural when making a comparison or contrast to repeat words even where they do not fit the same way for the things being compared, as in 1 Corinthians 15:22. This makes a parallel more obvious.

**An illustration:** in one school, uniforms are required, and in the other one they are not. A boy may say, "You have school uniforms, but my uniform is whatever my mother gives me." Note that the boy uses the word "uniform" the second time to indicate that he does not have a uniform! This happens so often in our speech that we do not notice it.

In Hebrews we are told many times that there is one sacrifice for sin (10:10,12). V.23 simply contrasts sacrifices by using comparison language the way the boy does in the illustration above. Hebrews means something like this, "These sacrifices are better than those sacrifices." The text is NOT being specific as to number but as to quality; it is simply maintaining the parallel.

The cleansing of the heavenly things is more difficult and has been met with many suggested solutions. Some will say that the "heavenly things" refer to the redeemed people. That is a way of solving the problem by changing the meaning of "the heavenly things". That will not work; the context is clear (as in v.24) that the heavenly things refer to the heavenly sanctuary.

The solution I suggest is that we ought not to press any analogy too far. If we were to press the analogy that Christ and his church are Husband and Bride, we would end up with ridiculous conclusions. The shadows of the OT were not intended to give detailed parallels. Instead of reasoning that something in heaven is in need of cleansing, we should back up to firmer ground and view this in light of all the book has said so far. If we do, we may end up with a conclusion like this:

Just as the OT priest worked in the setting of earthly things – offering sacrifices to cleanse the earthly sanctuary – on the other side of this comparison, we move from mere copy to the heavenly sanctuary itself. This other reality is referred to as "the heavenly things". Associated with the heavenly place is better blood than Levitical priests brought to cleanse the Most Holy Place below. In heaven Christ's better sacrifice has been accepted. So in heaven the Priest whose blood provided purification, sat down and there he remains (1:3). What was done in ritual on earth has a higher correspondence in heaven; it is not identical but it may be spoken of in the terms of what happened on earth. I suggest that that is what v.23 does when it speaks of

cleansing heavenly things. Two ministries are discussed; one is analogous to the other, but we should not press the analogy.

I may well be wrong, but I understand the verse this way:

It was necessary, then, for the copies [*on the “copy side” of the analogy*] of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but [*on the other side of this analogy*] the heavenly things themselves [*also have an important purification concerning them which was done*] with better sacrifices [*i.e., Christ’s, but the plural maintains the parallel*] than these [*animal sacrifices*].

We must consider the verse in its context: The ransom death sets free from sin (9:15). For benefits in a will to be released, a death is necessary (9:16,17). To inaugurate a covenant, there must be a death to provide the blood of that covenant (9:18-20). Likewise, blood was necessary to purify many other things (9:21,22); it is, in fact, a general rule of OT ritual. But when it comes to forgiveness of sin, the rule without exception is that there must be bloodshed from a clean animal without blemish<sup>25</sup> (9:22). It is the same way with heavenly things: just as blood was required to purify the copies, purification by Christ’s blood is necessary in the forgiveness that occurs in the heavenly sanctuary. The point of the context is that death is essential. We will be sidetracked with no context to help us if we delve into a question of how the heavenly sanctuary itself might be the object of some necessary purification different from the one required for our sin. Hebrews gives no evidence of any other kind of cleansing.

**9:24, 25** Jesus never served at the altar connected to the temple in Jerusalem (7:13,14). He never entered that sanctuary. And he never participated in a new covenant ritual. In the Lord’s Supper, he did not eat of the bread and the cup. He never baptized anyone with water (John 4:1,2). His role is what the signs point to, so he baptizes with the Spirit (John 1:33). The only sanctuary he entered as our Priest is heaven itself. Just as he represented his people on the cross, his service there is “for us”. His offering is a once-for-all-time offering. So he did not appear and leave, only to return again later after making another offering.

Note in light of v.23, that we have again an example of saying one thing in terms of the established ritual, so well-known under the old covenant. Jesus did not offer in heaven, nor did he go with blood (see notes on 9:12 above). The established imagery in the readers’ minds is what went on in the Old Testament; Hebrews reflects from that standpoint. Jesus did not make an offering in heaven; his offering was on earth. The writer keeps up the parallel long enough to state sharply the major differences now being addressed: a different sanctuary, a different number of times, with different blood. Hebrews moves from the familiar ritual to its substance.

**9:26** If Christ’s offering were not effective in one offering, he would have to offer again and again. If one offering for all time is not adequate, then the sins of all times, including the earlier ones, would have needed multiple offerings. If one offering by Christ is insufficient, his multiple offerings would need to begin whenever sin began right at the beginning of human history. This is one terrible implication of not having an effective atonement.

Christ did not appear at the *beginning* of human history, or when the first promise was made about him. He appeared at the *end* of those previous ages. This shows that his sacrifice was effective for the salvation of those he saved before he ever came to earth. (How were sins forgiven in the Old Testament? By the blood of Christ.)

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<sup>25</sup> The word “blemish” appears 50 times in the Pentateuch. Note Deuteronomy 17:1 “You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the LORD your God. So the apostle says, “... you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

**Self-sacrifice** The repetition is important: "He offered himself" (7:27), "by his own blood" (9:12), "Who ... offered himself" (9:14), "to offer himself" (9:25), "by the sacrifice of himself" (9:26).

**Three appearances:** He appeared on earth to make his sacrifice (9:26). He appeared in heaven in the ascension (9:24). He will appear again for those who wait for him (9:28).

**"To do away with sin"** Hebrews does not look on the atonement as a provision of God that is made effective by the response of the sinner. It is the work of Christ itself that does away with sin. Thus it does away with the sin of unbelief, of hardness of heart, of whatever sinful resistance is in those God calls. Since the sacrifice truly does away with sin, it surely saves those Christ died for. Sin is not put away by our faith; it was put away by his sacrifice.

**9:27,28** The emphasis of the necessity of this death has merged to an emphasis on its one-time aspect. This, as is typical of Hebrews, was mentioned early (7:27) and not developed at that point. Now in 9:12,25,26 it has much more attention. (This demonstrates that repetition of important themes is vital to sermons.) The necessity of Christ's death was given with a number of parallels; now the writer parallels the "once only" of his death to the fact that men die only once. (The animals sacrificed under the old covenant died only once too.) So too, Christ would die one time. One can only wonder if those who rejected the sacrifice of the Messiah, might have argued that such a death would need to be multiple as it was with the sacrifices of the old system. Maybe this is why Hebrews argues that such an idea is contrary to the situation with other human deaths; men die and face judgment only once. (We are not certain of all the error Hebrews was written to refute.)

One additional benefit of this verse is to set straight the sober truth that after a man's death, he will face the judgment. It counters the false view of a "second chance". It also says that we are appointed to death. Death for man is a firm decision by the Lord; he has *appointed* death for all men. In giving eternal life to his children, death is the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26). (The last enemy to be destroyed comes to its end at the Second Coming, not sometime later.)

Hebrews teaches by making contrasts – another feature in this model of good preaching. The writer's sense that Christ was sacrificed but once, leads naturally to pointing out a plural. Jesus' death is the one-time sacrifice of one Man for the many sins of many persons. It is likely that the death-then-judgment way of speaking suggests that Christ's sacrifice was a judgment on him for us. It does say (again) that it was for the removal of sin. It says in 9:28 that he *bore* sin, so what could he bear but sin's judgment? The text moves from saying men die once to Christ having died only once. I think this is a double parallel: men die once and then judgment, and he died once as a judgment. We can be forgiven because Jesus who bore our sins, was not forgiven for them.

When a priest would enter the Holy Place, sometimes the people would wait outside for their priest to return. That suggests that they realized that he represented them. They waited for Zechariah; the priest would bless the people, but Zechariah could not speak (Luke 1:5-22). Our Great High Priest has done all that is needed for us inside there in the presence of God, now we wait outside for him to appear again. The blessing he will bring is not the words of what he would like God to do for us. It is far more; he will finish in us the salvation he has begun (Philippians 1:6). He need never bear sin again; that is forever done. The One who makes men holy, will bring many sons to glory, and the redeemed humanity will be crowned with glory and honor again (2:5-11). We wait for his return. Many false prophets proclaim what a wonderful world they will give us, if we but follow them. There is no other salvation for this earth than the eternal redemption obtained by Christ (9:12). Its full enjoyment awaits his appearance. Only then will the saints of all ages experience the fullness of this salvation/inheritance when all at once are made perfect (11:39,40).

## Appendix 9: For Whom Did Christ Die?

**Hebrews 2** In 2:9 Jesus tasted death for everyone (or all). These persons are then referred to as *many sons* (v.10), as Jesus' *brothers* (v.11), and his *children* (v.13).\* Jesus took on the humanity of the all, i.e., the sons, brothers, and children, so that by his death for them he might set them free (2:14,15). In 2:9 it may appear that the death of Christ is for each and every human being in all of history, which if true, would imply a universal atonement. Later in chapter 2 however, those Jesus died for are the ones who are set free from the power of the devil, and obviously not all sinners will be set free from Satan's bondage. So we conclude that Jesus' death in 2:9 is for the *all* that the writer had in mind and in the remainder of chapter 2, he shows that the ones for whom Jesus died are simply his own children, when he "*made propitiation for the sins of the people,*" (2:17). The alternative to this understanding is that Jesus died for all without exception but then brought only his sons to glory. If that were true, Hebrews 2 would be arguing for an ineffective atonement in which its goal of saving all is not matched by its actual effect of saving fewer than all.

\*[Note the children of Hebrews 2:13,14 are ones *given* to Christ by the Father, which is consistent with John 6:37,39; & 17:2,6,9,24. In John 6 & 17 it is clear that the ones spoken of are not the entire population of the world but a number distinguished from it. In this way in the Gospel of John, election to salvation is taught without using the word.]

**Hebrews 9** In 9:15 Jesus died to set free from sin a specific group of people described as "*those who are called*." The description, the "*called*", is not of the total population of the world; it refers only to the ones who receive the promised eternal inheritance. Those set free from sin, those who are called, those who inherit and those for whom the ransom was paid – these refer to the same persons. Further, the text assumes that those he died as a ransom to set free are indeed set free. It would be foreign to this verse, and an insinuation of failure, to suggest that Christ died to set a group of people free but only some actually are.

### **Universal words**

- 1) What of the Bible's use of "*all*" as the ones for whom Jesus died? (This word in 2:9 appears in others places such as 2 Corinthians 5:14,15). In 1 Corinthians 15:22 – "For as in Adam *all* die, so in Christ *all* will be made alive" – the two uses of *all* do not refer to the same people. Thus the word must be distinguished by its context.
- 2) What of Jesus' death for "*the whole world*" (1 John 2:2)? A Jewish believer aware that Christ's death was not for the sins of just "us Jews", could speak of the enlarged scope of salvation which includes Gentiles as being for "*the whole world*". In the same epistle (1 John 5:19) the words "*the whole world*" cannot refer to every man on earth, because not all are under the control of the devil according to Hebrews 2:14,15. So in 1 John 2:2 "*whole world*" does not need to mean each and every person in the world. It must mean though the broad range of persons in all the world in every language and culture. (See also John 12:19 for a sweeping use of this term that cannot include everybody; it is also from the pen of the Apostle John.)

**Exclusion from Atonement** In the OT there was no offering for those outside Israel (Leviticus 16:17). In Exodus the high priest wore on his shoulders and breast piece only the names of the sons of Israel. They were the ones he represented. Even within Israel some sins were not atoned for (Isaiah 22:14). On the Day of Atonement the high priest offered only for sins of ignorance, not sins of defiance. (See Appendix F – Sins Committed in Ignorance in 9:1-10.) As it was with the OT type, so it is with the sacrifice of Christ: God gives over to depravity the one who repudiates the Lord (Romans 1:28). He thus has no claim on Christ's offering for sin. There is no sacrifice for the apostate (10:26). The Lord declared that some will never be forgiven, (Matthew 12:30-32). He did not die to set free from sin persons who will not be forgiven.

**Concerning Priestly Service** Intercession is a priestly function (7:25). In Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17:9, he did not pray for the world, and made a point of saying so. He prayed only for those the Father had given him. It will not fit that Christ as our High Priest refused to intercede for some persons, but then as a Priest made his offering quite inconsistently for those excluded from his priestly prayer. In 7:25, the ones who come, the ones he saves, and the ones he intercedes for refer to the same persons. Further, those in hell prior to the death of Christ cannot be released from their condemnation, so it is hard to imagine that an atonement was intended for those the Bible teaches are beyond

redemption. Hebrews is a priestly book; it is not surprising that 9:15 would speak of the ransom payment and the inheritance as being for those whom God calls, i.e., the many (9:28) whose sins are actually purged.

**Effective or Ineffective?** The choice is whether the atonement is limited in its power – i.e., he died for all, but this death does not actually save all those it was made for. Or the atonement is particular and intentional in its scope of redemption – i.e., he died for all his own (whom he also calls), and his death effectively secured the salvation of each one. I urge that the sacrifice of Christ was intentional in its goal and that God delivers the salvation to his elect by bringing them and only them to Christ. I decline the view that the work of Christ becomes effective by the response of the sinner, because he is unable to make the necessary response. Salvation occurs at God's initiative because Jesus died as a ransom to set free the ones God has called (Romans 8:28-30). God's call will not fall on deaf ears but on the ears of those made able to hear. (*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day, John 6:44.*)

## Hebrews 10:1-18

The long didactic section of Hebrews ends in 10:18. There will be further teaching but the chief doctrinal core of the book ends here. Unbroken exposition began with Melchizedek; only in 10:19 does the writer return to exhortation. Hebrews demonstrates that good preaching must supply truth to believe and then make an appeal for proper response.

Note the contrast: in 9:28 Christ was offered once, but other sacrifices are repeated (10:1). The repeated sacrifices the law required could not make the worshippers perfect, but what came in the new covenant did, with changed hearts and forgiveness. The new covenant makes the old one obsolete (8:13) and Jesus is the mediator/guarantor of the new one (7:22; 9:15). The emphasis merges from the accomplishment of Christ's objective work to the new covenant benefits in the lives of his own. It would be a harmful oversimplification to say Hebrews turns now from Christ's work on the cross to his work within us. But it does stress the effects of his offering, showing how his sacrifice affects those he is saving.

A variety of contrasts appear in Hebrews 7 – 10. Not all are repeated here, such as priests who die vs. One who lives forever, and what sanctuary they serve in, but many contrasts finish this passage:

- the law's requirements and the new covenant's gifts
- not being made perfect vs. being made perfect
- continuing to feel guilty vs. having forgiveness
- being reminded of sin rather than forgiveness
- many sacrifices vs. one
- sacrifices and offerings in which God did not delight, vs. his will that ordered the sacrifice of the body of Christ
- priests who continue to offer vs. our Priest who offered once
- priests who returned again and again, vs. the Priest who remained
- priests who stood vs. the One who sat down

This passage draws from Scripture. It introduces Psalm 40, returns yet again to Psalm 110, and once more to Jeremiah 31. Certain things in Psalm 40 are fulfilled only in Christ, and Psalm 110 promises a Priest who will sit down. Jeremiah's promise of new covenant blessings can come only on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice. His Priesthood supersedes other priests and all they did.

Since all this is so, it would be a major rejection of all that God promised and has done in sending Christ for anyone to reject him by putting hope in a sacrifice that cannot remove sin. Hebrews has laid a careful foundation for the personal application of these truths in the section to follow. There is no other sacrifice (10:26), and thus no other gospel.

**10:1-4** Hebrews again presents shadows and realities (see 8:5). This is not a distinction of true versus false, but of real things that compare as complete and incomplete. The two have a connection but must not be confused. The shadow of a tree is real because the tree is real, but only one is real when it comes to chopping it down for firewood. A shadow of a tree is entirely inadequate for burning. The sacrifices the law required were real sacrifices; they were even made in connection with forgiveness, but they were only shadows of the one sacrifice that could take away sin and did.

**Three contrary to fact statements:**

7:11 If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood ... *but it could not.*

8:7 If there was nothing wrong with the first covenant ... *but there was.*

10:1,2 If those sacrifices could have made perfect those who draw near ... *but they could not.*

The chief argument given here is that they were repeated endlessly. Anything that must be repeated over and over, like washing our hands, shows that a one-time event of that kind is inadequate. An OT sacrifice did not remove some sins and then a later one removed more. No, none of them removed any sin because all of them were shadows unable to take away sin. A bull or goat losing its life did not truly correspond to the seriousness of a man disobeying God. If it had to be repeated, it never accomplished the perfection of the sinner drawing near to God. If goat blood were adequate to the need, it would have stopped being offered. The law itself never commanded any sacrifice to be offered only once. All were repeated because all were only shadows. If the law had given any sacrifice offered only once, it would have been an unreliable shadow, a sacrifice that drew attention to itself and its uniqueness rather than pointing to our need of Christ by its repetition.

Perfection is a term for all of God's requirements having been met so fully by Christ that God finds the sinner fully acceptable in him. Perfection is expressed also as being cleansed, not outwardly but in the conscience, and not repeatedly but once. Perfection equals the once-for-all-cleansing of salvation. The sinner, who by faith has Christ as his sacrifice, has in that purging blood what has already satisfied God concerning his sin. Nothing in all of life is needed more and is more valuable, yet in the gospel it is freely given to us without any role on our part in removing our guilt. When the believer knows this truth and rests in this Savior, he enjoys the peace attained by Christ, the total cleansing from all his sin that has been provided for him. Therefore he has a conscience that knows nothing more is needed than Christ. This motivates him to a life of active repentance. (See "Cleansing the Conscience" in the notes at 9:14, and Appendix I "The Present Perfection of Imperfect People" below.)

Sacrifices that had to be repeated did not bring peace to the conscience. On the Day of Atonement the people had this annual reminder that sins were not removed by the offerings of the previous year. They knew that the offerings of the following year would repeat the same message about the ones being made that day.

**Provisional Things** A provisional government is one that functions for a time until the real one can take its place. I have a provisional air miles card, a piece of paper with a real number on it – to serve until the plastic card comes in the mail. Provisional things serve a good purpose but are not intended to last. The priesthood of Levi was provisional, serving until the permanent priesthood arrived (7:24). A provisional covenant was in place till replaced by a superior covenant (8:6). And so it is with multiple sacrifices forever replaced by just one (10:9), and a tabernacle that is now gone as a place where God dwelt on earth (9:8-10; John 4:19-26).

To hold to anything God presented as provisional after the ultimate has arrived, is to reject the purpose of the One who set up the temporary arrangement and then set it aside when that role was finished. Such a sin is aggravated even more if, during the provisional period, the Lord revealed that a replacement was coming. This is precisely what has happened in Scripture. The Lord with an oath announced a Priest of a different order who would serve forever, Psalm 110:4. God also promised a new covenant; and gave a detailed explicit prophesy of the death and resurrection of Christ. Christ is the wise Servant of the Lord, who, one day, one time would bear sins in one offering (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). God indicated in his Word that the provisional would yield to a single event and a single Person in the sacrifice of Christ. I think the Holy Spirit showed that Psalm 40 should be understood this way.

The readers of Hebrews needed convincing that their hope for all eternity needed an offering of substance, not mere shadow. They needed a sacrifice so effective God will oppose every thought of it being repeated in any way. In the message of Christ they had a great salvation. They needed to pay careful attention that they not drift from it, (2:1-4) for to drift from Christ is to face God without a sacrifice.

## The Value of Shadows

Why would God require sacrifices if they are only shadows? Shadows cannot exist on their own; there are other things that cause them. The shadow of a passing airplane happens only because an airplane flew overhead. A shadow is a witness to a greater reality. Had Christ come and died for sinners with no sacrifices in advance, even though they never removed sin, we would have lost a vital witness to the gospel. No one would have understood as clearly the issues of sin, wrath, substitution, propitiation, reconciliation, forgiveness, and purification from sin. The words themselves are abstract; the knife above an innocent victim and blood dripping on the ground was not. It caught their attention and taught a lesson too; it prepared God's people for Christ. To hold only to the shadow is to miss the Savior, but to be without a shadow would be a loss of what God had wisely given over centuries to make people wince at their sin and long for the coming of the effective sacrifice.

**10:5-7 The Words of Christ in Psalm 40** Psalm 40 was written by David. When it says, "*My sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see*" in v.12, such words cannot refer to Christ. We might approach such Psalms with a rule that the Psalmist must speak of himself or Christ, and never words common to both. If so, we apply a rule the Scripture does not use. Christ is the Son of David, and when David spoke as king, he spoke of a throne that really belonged to Christ. He and his sinful sons were each for a while unworthy occupants of the throne of Christ. The true king of Israel was always the Lord himself (1 Samuel 8); every other human king in some way showed himself unworthy of that role. The Holy Spirit had David say words of truth about sacrifices and obedience, words, probably unknown to him, that fit the mouth of Christ far better than his.

A number of prophets spoke against offerings made with disobedient hearts (Isaiah 1:10-17; Amos 5:21-27; plus Hosea 6:6, which was quoted by Christ twice). The OT did not set sacrifice against obedience; it insisted that they be joined. David repented with a contrite heart in Psalm 51:17 as a kind of sacrifice, and spoke of animal offerings on God's altar (in v.19). It was God who required them, so it would be a great evil to disregard his appointed shadows! Yet his special delight was in one offering that would be the epitome of sacrifice, the one to end all others, and the epitome of obedience, the perfect doing of his will by the One offering.

In Psalm 40, David wrote as a man whose heart had been moved to obey; he spoke words beyond himself. Ten centuries later the Holy Spirit would take David's words in Psalm 40 and show how well they fit the entire mission of Christ. The words express perfectly Christ's attitude and assignment from his Father, as well as the fullness of time when all the other offerings would cease. The old system was not God's delight; he would set it aside when its fitting replacement came. The incarnation of Christ is stated here as God preparing a human body for his Son, a body to be offered, a body that would replace the offering of all animal bodies. It would be used in a sacrifice that would delight, please, and satisfy God forever. This could be said of no other offering of any kind in all of history.

The body to be offered is only part of the picture. With Christ, unlike the offerings of the OT, we do not have the evil of a proper sacrifice presented to God by a rebellious heart. Psalm 40 anticipated a better offering made by a fully obedient Man; i.e., by Christ doing God's will.

At this point two strands meet: the obedience of Christ to come here on his Messianic mission, and his obedience as a man born under the law. Just as Jesus is both the Priest who offers and the offering he made, he is the One obedient to God by assuming the body prepared for him, and further, living obediently as a man, he was the unblemished sacrifice. Obedience from both angles was essential. He obeyed by coming, and when here he was perfected in human obedience in order to be the source of salvation (5:9).

**10:8-10** The replacement that pleases God is already here. For this reason he sets aside the first to establish the second. The first is the entire system of blood sacrifices required in the law, plus the men who offer them. The second is the once-for-all-time, pleasing sacrifice of the body of Christ, the only Man in history to do God's will. The *second* brings holiness the *first* could not produce. When God has set aside the first order, we should not seek to reestablish it. This was one error tempting some of the readers. To reverse God's 'first' and 'second' is to gain blood but not cleansing, when we have been given cleansing with no further need for blood.

**Ear or Body?** Why does the OT say in Psalm 40:6, "... *my ears you have opened*" when 10:5 refers to a *body*? The OT was translated into Greek more than 150 years before the birth of Christ. One scholar suggests that the translators took the original *ears* as the part for the whole. If God has our ear, he has us. This fits so well the words of Christ in Isaiah 50:5, where the opened ear is the language of obedient listening. All translators moving from one language to another, face hard choices on how to say **that** thought in **this** language. For some reason the LXX chose to say *body* rather than *ear*, to convey the meaning of the Hebrew. For example, the NIV replaces "bowels" in Philemon 12 with the more understood metaphor "heart". A devoted *body* is also a way to express obedience. Since Psalm 40 and Hebrews 10 emphasize doing God's will, obedience may be indicated either way. Scripture elsewhere uses the imagery of both ear and body for obedience (Romans 12:1 and Isaiah 50:5).

**10:11-14** Except for the Ark of the Covenant as the Lord's throne (Psalm 80:1), the tabernacle had no chair. Priests stood during the daily incense offerings in the Most Holy Place. They did not sit; there was no seat for them. The tabernacle was built according to God's design (8:5) with the deliberate absence of a place to sit. Priests stood to serve and left. This is a deliberate contrast to Christ entering God's Presence and remaining. Jesus being seated was mentioned in 1:3; Hebrews waited till chapter 10 to say that the other priests always stood.

With all that has been said about taking away sins, one wonders why it comes up again in 10:11,12. The crucial contrast had to be held before the readers. Other priests had a temporary ministry, never finished, always in need of repetition, and thus never actually taking away sin. Repeated offerings that remind of sin (10:3) are the opposite of God remembering our sins no more (10:17). The author had to make his point clear: a repeated offering means sin has not been removed by a prior offering; if the offering does not need to be repeated, its work is finished. The finished work of Christ is shown in a negative and a positive: it is not repeated, and the Lord Jesus sat down. There he remains and does not leave to go and make a sacrifice again; he stays seated at the Father's right hand. The finality shows God's purpose had been attained.

**10:13** Jesus is active in building his church (Matthew 16:18), but here it is the Father's activity turning Christ's enemies into his footstool (Psalm 110:1). The note of a reward for his work is behind this. When his enemies become his footstool, they can no longer shake their fists in his face. They are defeated. The coming of the Day of Judgment is certain; all will bow, either in advance allegiance or eventual submission. Christ is the key issue between God and man. We bow now by acknowledging him in every role the Father gave him, accepting him as Lord and accepting also his mediation for his people. The first readers of Hebrews knew there were people tempted to reject the Priesthood of Christ in spite of all the OT taught about it. They may have known of wavering church members (3:12-14). The warnings of apostasy appear early and late in this book; another is about to appear in chapter 10. Anyone who rejects Christ's work rejects him.

**10:14** Jesus waits (10:13) seated (10:12) because his sacrifice has made perfect those for whom it was offered. The beneficiaries are stated as those who are being made holy; it is not a universal atonement. If his sacrifice failed to make perfect, then it was in need of further work, and his being "all done" and seated would be a contradiction of unfinished business. His perfect work and the perfection delivered to those he represented form a tight connection.

**The Perfection of the Believer in Christ** This perfection is as perfect as the sacrifice offered to God. The resurrection has this same note of approval and finality. Jesus was raised because in his righteousness he deserved to be, and

because the offering he made was accepted for his people. *He was delivered for our sins and raised for our justification* (Romans 4:25). It is not that Jesus in his ministry did his part and now the completion of being “perfected” (10:14) falls back on the one being saved. The perfection of the forgiven sinner rests only on the perfection of the sacrifice of the perfect Christ who died and rose again. Christ has removed every obstacle to fellowship with God. Any addition to Christ and his work introduces a subtraction against the adequacy of his mediation. This is a massive and fatal insult to the work of Christ. It denies that he genuinely represented his saints to accomplish and deliver redemption effectively. This is one of the chief points of Christian gospel where the Church of Rome has come to grief, and many these days in Protestant circles are failing to see, (and trust in) the supreme value and completeness of the work of Christ.

**10:15-17** We should not miss the way Hebrews speaks of Holy Scripture. The writer again takes words of David in Psalm 40 and says they are the Lord’s. This is a proper view of God’s Word. No matter how many human authors he used, it is still his word, with the same quality of truth and dependability of God’s character. 3:7 says the Holy Spirit *says*; here it is he *witnesses*. And that way of saying it joins two things together intentionally. 10:14 says God has made men perfect and also makes men holy. Now we learn that what the Holy Spirit said in Jeremiah 31 about the new covenant is the same content. Men made perfect and holy is what God promised in the new covenant, but when that covenant was promised in the OT, it spoke of benefits that were coming. Now Hebrews affirms that the change of heart and justification (forgiveness of sins) are new covenant benefits and explicitly connects them to the sacrifice of Christ.

Note the flow of thought in Hebrews 10:

- One sacrifice once for all time has been offered, v.12.
- Because it is effective, Christ sat down with no further sacrifice needed, v.12.
- A double result has been secured by this sacrifice: perfection and sanctification, v.14.
- It is to this very thing that the Holy Spirit was testifying when he promised a new covenant. His testimony was of benefits that come through Christ’s death, vv.15-17.

Note 1) the “first he says” in v.15 – re God’s law in the hearts; and 2) “then he adds”, v.17 – re sins remembered no more. This first and second way of speaking highlights that justification and sanctification are not synonymous but are distinguished new covenant blessings.<sup>26</sup>

**10:18** In 10:1-4 offerings for sin were repeated; in 10:18 no longer needed. The provisions of the law were inadequate, but in the new covenant sin is taken away. Christ has done the will of God (10:7-10) in his body in life and in death; therefore new covenant blessing is fully secured. With no more sacrifice for sins, the priests may put away their knives, trust in the sacrifice that saves, and join the rest of the house of God (under our Great Priest 10:21) offering with all his church sacrifices of praise (13:15,16).

## Law and Gospel

10:1 gives what the law cannot do (perfect the worshipper) but 10:15-17 shows that in the new covenant the heart is changed (10:16) and sins removed (10:17). Why such a difference? In the law God tells man what he requires of them; in the new covenant God tells what God does for them. This doing by God for man is our salvation. This is the gospel. Salvation is accomplished by the Son whose mission concerning our sin was to do the will of the Father (10:7-10). Thus we are justified by the doing and dying of Jesus Christ (gospel). We cannot be saved by what we do

<sup>26</sup> It is not the point in Hebrews 10 how OT saints could be justified and sanctified. Romans 4 makes clear that Abraham and David were justified by faith apart from works, just as we are (Romans 3:28). It puzzles us how the new covenant blesses before it was ratified. It would be ratified only in the blood of Christ, yet since all salvation is in this covenant and no other, it was how God was saving in his covenant of grace in all ages. We are saved by a sacrifice made, and they were saved by a sacrifice that would be made. The foundation and means of salvation are identical. The way the gospel was manifested to their eyes differs.

(law). Our best obedience is corrupt, so attempting to be saved by keeping the law simply brings to us the wrath of God (Romans 4:15), since the law cannot approve of our sin and shows our sin to be sinful! Yet the law in itself is holy and good (Romans 7:12). A fundamental distinction in the Bible is to see the difference. God's good law cannot save, because God's bad man cannot obey. He has sinned, so no hope in law remains. God's gracious gospel is that God sent Christ here to keep the law for us, to suffer the penalty of the law for us (this is gospel). We are justified apart from our works (law) by means of faith (gospel). Faith is consistent with the gospel, because faith for justification does not produce or plead its good response to God's law (that would be law). Instead a sinner as a sinner, without any production of virtue, (that too would be law), receives from God eternal life, the righteousness of Christ, and forgiveness of sin (gospel). We do not shed any blood of ours, which would just be another way for us to meet the law's demands. All this comes as a gift, so it is gospel. In the new covenant God in his activity (gospel) brings to us forgiveness. Further, in the new covenant the believer receives the gift of the Spirit (gospel) and the Spirit produces the good fruit of the new covenant in our hearts, bringing us by his mighty power (gospel again) to a sincere obedience to his law by his children. If we begin with the gospel, we will end with obedience to the law. If we begin with law, we will never come to the gospel, nor to Christ, nor to any of the benefits of the new covenant. Seeking God's favor by means of our contribution to justification is legalism. It means, when we believe the lies of our hearts, that we have lost the gospel, rejected the only Priest who can save, cannot have the Spirit, and will die in our sins as proud self-deceived law-breakers.

## Appendix 10: The Present Perfection of Imperfect People “made perfect” and “being made holy”

**The apparent contradiction!** If a person has been perfected, how is it possible that he is in the process of being made holy? 10:14 says, “... *by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*” This sounds like a contradiction, as if it meant that people are perfect and are not. We should not avoid this question because it will nag at the conscience of any person aware of his sin. Perfection is vital to the gospel. We rest on the perfection of the sacrifice made and the perfection granted.

Jesus makes people perfect; the verse says that. But when? Is it the time of our physical resurrection when Christians are perfected? (From the angle of our conduct, this is true.) However, 10:14 speaks of perfection in another sense. It is clear that Christ has already made perfect the ones he is currently sanctifying. A person might even wonder if Hebrews is giving people a puzzle to solve. It is not; it is simply stating, in the priestly vocabulary of Hebrews, the same doctrine in other Scriptures that say the believer in Christ is righteous – even though he has sin in his conduct. If this is a great puzzle, it is not confined to Hebrews. What 10:14 is teaching is the absolute perfection of persons still very much imperfect. How can this be?

The simple answer is that we are perfect in Christ and imperfect in ourselves. We are righteous in status and yet not fully righteous in conduct. Sin remains in us, so the Christian is perfect in one sense and imperfect in another.

Hebrews speaks in terms of clean vs. unclean. “Perfection” is a term for clean. The leper needs to be cleansed. That is the language of the Jewish altar and sacrifice so deeply embedded in Hebrews. Law court language is different. It is also more common in the NT. In the legal way of speaking, it uses words of acquittal vs. condemnation. Thus justification is forensic and describes our salvation in words of forgiveness and declarations of righteousness.

**An illustration from our culture** In our day we have passports. I am a Canadian citizen; my passport says I am a citizen, but it is not a statement that I am a fine citizen. Further, a passport never means that a person is a partial citizen, or that some citizens are more citizen than others. In Canada there is no scale of citizenship; it is a status one has or does not have. A status does not have a matter of degree; conduct is subject to a scale

of relatively good or bad. From the standpoint of clean or unclean, Christ has made perfect by his sacrifice those for whom he died.<sup>27</sup>

The perspective of perfection in Hebrews is the cleansing that allows approach to God. A variety of words are used to describe what is delivered to us as the effect of Christ's sacrifice: cleanse (9:14; 10:2); set free from sins (9:15); do away with sin (9:26); take away sins (9:28); make perfect (10:1); have been made holy (10:10); and made perfect (10:14).

10:1,2 teach that if the sacrifices of the law had been effective, the worshipper would have been cleansed. This verse implies that what those sacrifices could not do is what the sacrifice of Christ does do. Likewise, 7:19 says the law made nothing perfect. The contrast would be nonsense if it were saying the law made nothing perfect and neither did the mediation of Christ. The whole point of 10:1,2 is that Christ's sacrifice has done what the law cannot. 7:19 implies that in this perfection granted, one may draw near to God. Every approach to God demands purification from sin.

The perfection attained for us by the sacrifice of Christ must be the same quality as that found in Christ. Since Jesus was made perfect (7:28), this cannot be his perfection as the Son of God (1:3) because he always had that. It was his human perfection that was developed in the days of his life on earth (5:7-10). It was the obedience learned in suffering and made perfect in time that qualified him to be our Savior. If Christ then makes perfect, and he does, then his perfection is the kind mentioned in 10:14. The human righteousness of his obedience is the kind 10:14 has in mind. Our perfection is not possible unless there is the imputation of his righteousness.

Hebrews does not distinguish the human perfection developed in Christ (in 5:9 and 7:28) from the human perfection he grants to those he is making holy. Thus righteousness received as a gift (Romans 5:15,16,17) is the same righteousness that comes from God (Philippians 3:9) for those in Christ through faith in him. The obedience acquired is the obedience of Christ (Romans 5:19). In this way we are made to be the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21); he is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). Just as the righteousness Abraham had was one he received by faith (Romans 4:13) – and a *received* righteousness cannot be a reference to his conduct – we too by faith are made perfect (10:14) by the righteousness God imputes to us entirely apart from our works (Romans 4:6). Thus Christ makes perfect the man who in himself was ungodly (Romans 4:5) with sin remaining in him (1 John 1:8-10), but in Christ that man has become righteous.

This appears to be an intolerable tension. It would be if it were an eternal situation; we must remember it is temporary. God does not allow us to be perfect in Christ in status while he does nothing to transform our conduct. No person who lacks holiness in life will see the Lord (12:14), because such a man has never been made perfect by Christ. If he had been, the Lord's sanctifying work would have produced a harvest of righteousness in him (10:14; 12:11). Making people holy in 10:14 is a work of God in every child of his so that all share in his holiness (12:4-12). It is never true that the believer lives in sin. (See Can a Christian Live in Sin? in the notes at 2:11.) Becoming holy is brought to us progressively. The gift of eternal life is ours now; the resurrection of the body is future. Jesus took away our sins in his first coming (9:28) yet brings salvation in his second (9:28); likewise, Christ has made perfect already (10:14) those he continues to make holy (10:14).

## Hebrews 10:19-39

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<sup>27</sup> It is not a question that Hebrews deals with to say *when* this perfection has occurred. I submit that one is justified when he believes and not before, since even God's elect were under God's wrath before they were made alive to God, (Ephesians 2:1-5). Since we are speaking of justification, I think the time factor is resolved in this way. Christ in his life and death had the obedience and death necessary for our justification. It was accomplished in Christ in his time on earth. This benefit is applied to us in our lifetime in calling, regeneration, faith, and justification. Justification is still not a declaration about our lives, but about the new status granted to us as a gift, merited and attained for us by Christ.

The core of Hebrews, concluding in 10:18, is its doctrine of Christ as our Great High Priest. Now follows urgent exhortation – an appeal to respond in faithfulness and perseverance to the truth established. It begins with access to God by Christ and calls for faith, hope and love in a series of “let us” appeals.

Then comes one of the strongest warnings in the Bible. Those who reject Christ will have the unrestrained vengeance of God upon them. As in 6:9-12, such a warning of apostasy does not mean all are apostate, but all should fear denying Christ. As in chapter 6, this warning too, is followed by an approving review of their past faithfulness. In chapter 10 the approving review was in the face of persecution. Their confidence in Christ is supported by their assurance that God is faithful to his promises. Christ will return and we must live by faith in such a promise.

The long segment of Hebrews that fixes our thoughts on Christ (3:1), now calls us to trust him in our particular settings of distress and temptation to shrink back for relief. Such preaching in chapter 10 is about to be fortified by the examples in chapter 11 of others who persevered because they lived by faith. In the end, they and we will receive all that God has promised (11:39,40).

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**10:19-21** The writer turns from teaching to preaching. Every sermon has in it a call for a response; if a speech only informs and does nothing more, it is not a sermon. However, making an appeal is irrational unless some truth from God has been given to respond to. The ‘therefore’ of 10:19 shows that the exhortation is directly connected to the preceding large body of doctrine. Within the exhortation itself, he reviews the doctrine (10:19-21). We must not disconnect preaching from doctrine. The doctrine expounded in Hebrews follows Scripture very carefully.

### **The brief restatement of teaching that precedes the exhortations:**

**1) Confidence to enter** This means we have certainty of access as a result of Christ’s sacrifice. He has secured this access for us so that we may boldly enter. (See 4:16.)

**2) the Most Holy Place** The theme of Christ entering heaven and our access there are first joined together in 4:14-16: “*We have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, ... Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence...*”

**3) by the blood of Jesus** Jesus entered by his blood, (9:12) which cleanses our consciences (9:14). Thus our confidence is not in our spiritual development. It is horrible to hear people affirm that by means of and because of their spirituality they have immediate access to God. This grossly underestimates the great holiness of God and the horribleness of our remaining sin. We have one reason only for a legitimate access to him; it is that Jesus shed his blood for the removal of our sins. God is satisfied with that; he is not impressed with our spirituality, which is always defective and always a contrast to the purity of Christ. We need a true and humble appraisal of ourselves. Seeking to enter the Presence of God apart from the blood of Christ as our right-of-entrance, is as foolish as a priest offering his own blood. Our confidence in entering is not self-confidence but Christ-confidence.

**4) by a new and living way opened for us** – having free access to the heavenly sanctuary is new. The restriction of only one priest only once a year with animal blood is obsolete. This opened way leads to life. It is the opposite of the dead works (9:14) men invent. It is living because we approach the living God, who does not kill us for an unauthorized entry. Since we are invited in Christ, we are welcome in Christ. Such drawing near to God brings transforming life and glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). In v.19 we enter; in v.20 it is he (Christ) who entered first and has opened the way for us.

**5) through the curtain** – many Jews would immediately feel such a thought is a preposterous claim. They knew no one went through that curtain but the high priests. Other priests saw it and stayed back from it. They not only could not enter; even the high priest could not look in! The smoke was meant to hide the presence of God from view. Now Hebrews says we, all the ‘brothers’ of v.19, may pass through that barrier into God’s

holy presence! This we do when we pray and when we meet as believers for worship. We enter the presence of God authorized by God because of the sacrifice of Christ.

**6) that is, his flesh** – Earlier it was by his blood. But body and blood are closely tied together in Christ's sacrifice. To speak of his body means that he as a Person was actually offered; to speak of his blood is to refer to the bloodshed of his death. These are both presented to us in the Lord's Supper, and this is a paragraph that deals with life in the church. This could be the reason both the flesh and blood of Christ are referred to as our means of access. In 10:22 it will refer to baptism as the washing of our bodies.

**7) and we have a great priest over the house of God** Christ is the Son over God's house in 3:6. The house Christ is over is defined in 3:6 as those who hold on to their courage and the hope of which they boast. In 10:21 it is as priest that Christ is over the house of God; this shows the extent of his priestly service. So we may enter as he did, by his blood. The One who shed his blood is there as the great living Priest over his church. He has represented us (5:1) so that we could approach God. The invitation to draw near is consistent with his work.

**Christ a Priest to Angels?** Christ is a king to angels; he rules over them, but not as the Son of David. Surely God has spoken to them through him, which would make him a Prophet to them as well. But he could not be a priest to angels unless he became one of them to intervene on behalf of them for their sin. This grace God never extended to any rebellious angel. He has appointed a Priest only for human sinners, but since the Father has done so, and since Jesus is a Priest over the house of God, we must not deprecate his work. In Christ we may draw nigh to God (10:22) and enter the Most Holy Place (10:19), so we must. It is commanded. It is the goal of his labor for us as his people.

#### The parallel in 10:19,20:

free access (19) ..... a way which is new and which leads to life (20)  
to the heavenly sanctuary (19) ..... through the curtain (20)  
by means of the blood of Jesus (19) ... that is, by means of his flesh (20)

#### Three Exhortations:

- A) Let us draw near to God;
- B) Let us hold on to hope;
- C) Let us care for each other.

**A 10:22** Drawing near to God We draw near with a sincere heart. This is a clear reference to the new covenant benefit in which a new heart is the work and gift of God in 10:16. We are to draw near with a sprinkled heart, i.e., a heart cleansed by the blood of Christ. This is a reference to the new covenant benefit of forgiveness, with lawless acts remembered no more (10:17). Both benefits are brought to us by Christ. We cannot generate new hearts, nor create our forgiveness. The necessary conditions of our approach to God have been fulfilled by Christ. It is true that the new heart alive to God and the sprinkled heart cleansed occur in our lifetime, but were secured in Jesus' work long before.

**The full assurance of faith** Assurance is always destroyed when we look within to gauge our righteousness. Anyone who does that and dares to give himself a good report has actually turned away from the work of Christ. Our full assurance rests on the quality and effectiveness of Jesus' work. We believe his intervention for us sinners on the cross is fully sufficient, because the Father told the Son to sit down never to offer again. Knowing, believing, and trusting in his Priestly mediation gives the heart assurance. This assurance comes by faith in Christ's accomplishments. We do not have a cross-eyed faith with one eye on Christ and another on ourselves. We can only believe in Christ if we believe in his work.

**Assurance from different angles:** In 1 John we have an aspect of assurance related to being aware of a transformation of life. 1 John 3:7-10 teaches we will know we are children of God by the presence of righteousness in us. Such assurance is a *subsequent* assurance. It rests on Christ's work outside us (1 John 2:2). Note 1 John speaks of propitiation twice, stressing Christ's cross as the root of salvation, with the Spirit giving life as a result. Faith is only in Christ's work, then subjective assurance is brought by the Spirit. We have absolute confidence in the work of Christ, and then evidence we are in Christ by the Spirit's fruit (1 John 4:13). We must not confuse root and fruit. One is a matter of perfection in which we boast, and the other a matter of unfinished work in us that brings gratitude and humility. Though the imperfect still demonstrates a genuine union with Christ, only Jesus' finished work is perfection, and thus the ultimate basis of all assurance. It is this basis of assurance that Hebrews stresses in chapter 10. In chapter 12 the writer, like 1 John, will relate personal righteousness and Fatherly discipline to indicate our adoption as sons. Hebrews does not base our confidence in 10:19 in our sanctification!

**The mention of clean water** Baptism is especially significant in such a paragraph as this. 10:19-25 reviews the reason to draw near; the appeal is to a group. Some of its exhortations can only be obeyed in the context of *joint* confession and the *shared* life in the church. Our right of approach is tied to the blood and flesh of Christ, the same things the cup and bread in the Lord's Supper direct us to. Then v.22 adds bodies (our bodies) washed in clean water. In this way the unseen salvation of the heart – sprinkled with the blood of Christ at conversion – has an external and visible parallel in water baptism. Note the text does not refer to hearts washed, which could be a metaphor, but to bodies washed, which is not a metaphor. In this way the work of Christ on the cross, the salvation delivered to the believer, the two sacramental signs of salvation, and the life of believers in the church all come together. The timeframe stretches from the sacrifice of Christ in the past to his future coming. All of this exhortation aims toward diligence in the present.

We draw nigh in faith (v.22), and we are to hold to hope (v.23), and find ways to love (v.24). These three: faith, hope, and love, (6:10-12) are the same as in 1 Corinthians 13:13. This does not prove that Paul wrote Hebrews, but it is obviously parallel to his thought. The idea that Hebrews was written by someone associated with Paul, if not Paul himself, is strengthened by 13:22-23. (Faith, hope and love appear also in Romans 5:1-5; Galatians 5:5,6; Colossians 1:4,5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; 1 Peter 1:21-22. In each case faith leads the sequence.)

**B 10:23 Holding on to hope** The word *hope* has developed into a meaning very contrary to what the Bible means. We may say of uncertainties that we 'hope' for some outcome. Thus a person may 'hope' to be married or 'hope' to find a good job. When we say we hope in the resurrection, we speak of a certainty, not a wish that could be disappointed. Hope is a word that has been burdened with a meaning that is its opposite! To say, "Let us hold to the hope we profess" is not a statement to build up our wishing or desire. We are to hold to this hope (the entire foundation of our salvation in the work of Christ) without wavering. There is no other way of salvation; there is no other Savior, and no other blood. His resurrection and entrance into heaven are facts of history. We should be unmovable and unwavering in this.

I am tempted to argue that we should be as unyielding in tenacious faith in the work of Christ as we are in our belief in arithmetic.  $2+2=4$ , but the truth of mathematics is not covenanted nor personal. The gospel is. It is God who personally reveals his gospel, even at times swearing by himself. Our hope also has the integrity of God as well as his action as its foundation. "He who promised is faithful."  $2+2=4$  is true, but we do not have God telling us, "I promise you that this is so." Nor do we have that this is "for us" in the way our Great High Priest died for his people (7:27). We hold firmly to our hope not just because it is factual, but because God is faithful.

**C 10:24,25 Caring for each other** God has created us as communal beings. Humans were not meant to be solitary. Times of solitude may be beneficial, but worship that avoids fellow believers departs from what God desires (Psalm 35:18; 68:26) and is always unnatural. The exhortations here can only be obeyed in the context of a church, for whenever all the things commanded and implied in this one paragraph are done, we find a church. In their case it was a time of persecution (10:32-34). There

was suffering and Christians are to help. The call is not for an *attitude* of love (which might not be expressed, and thus would not be love) but for an *activity* of love by taking the initiative in relief for those in need. The exhortation does not say we should respond to love with love, for it must begin somewhere. If each one initiates good deeds, then all will be prompted by the love of brothers and sisters to respond in kind. Love is willing to “go first”.

Meeting together is a dynamic of Christian life. One may become a Christian as an individual, but we cannot live a solitary life as Christians, refusing worship and fellowship with others. This text commands us to resist all cultural influences that would hinder meeting together. The communal life of the church requires:

- loving deeds, (10:24,25)
- a shared confession of Christ (4:14),
  - confession public enough to provoke persecution (10:32-34)
  - confession that is as doctrinal as Hebrews, and is taught in the church (13:7)
- a common calling (3:1),
- a common destiny (2:10), and
- a setting where Jesus in the midst of the congregation leads us in praise (2:12), i.e., corporate worship.
- the practice of baptism (10:22) – and thus both sacraments.
- the practice of church discipline (12:15; 3:12,13)

### **10:26-31 The Warning of Apostasy** (The fourth of six warnings)

There is another reason for meeting. To stray from the group that confesses and worships is to stray from the Lord we confess and worship! Absence from gathering together is a major step in the direction of apostasy. The writer knows with alarm that some have the *habit* of not meeting. His appeal is not for mere attendance, but for the nurture that comes from within the church to others in the church. Any church so large that it cannot produce mutual encouragement is literally too large for its own good. Without encouragement we head into solitude, and when we are alone we are far more vulnerable to the deceptions of Satan, the pressures of the world, and the lusts of our flesh. God does not bring his grace to us individually as if he had not placed us in a family of believers. He works grace through the ministry of the Word by men called to such a role, and by sacraments which ought not to be practiced in isolation. To resist the means of edification is to resist the Lord who appointed them for our profit. To resist God’s means is also to expose ourselves to the peril of apostasy!

**A Missing Word in the NIV:** The warning section is connected to the preceding with a “for”. This conjunction is retained in the ESV & NKJV, but deleted in the NIV, which at times drops conjunctions! Doing that in this case deprives readers of a connection in the text. (The “for” is also omitted at 12:18.) Thus in 10:26 apostasy is not a subject *unrelated to what precedes it*. It is the opposite; apostasy is a sober issue *connected to absence from the life and worship of the church*.

This stern warning follows the pattern of 6:4-8. Both warnings are about a) deserting Christ, b) in spite of early exposure to Christian truth, life, and fellowship. Both teach there is c) a point of no return, with d) the certainty of divine damnation. Both warnings are followed by statements of great comfort.<sup>28</sup>

Apostasy is a deliberate, persistent, and settled repudiation of the Lord without repentance. It is that kind of response to God after possession of genuine truth, and the light of the gospel (10:32). This is very different from lapses into sin in our weakness. With such and yet in Christ, we approach the Throne of Grace with godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10,11) seeking help (4:16). [See Appendix F: Sins Committed in Ignorance (9:7)] When apostasy has set in; there is no help.

Since this warning follows a long presentation of the Priestly work of Christ, apostasy is now shown to be sin without a sacrifice. To be without Christ is always to be without his mediation, (10:26) and that means one faces God alone without the only Mediator who can bring relief from judgment. To be without Christ in deliberate rejection is to place oneself under a far greater wrath of God. The knowledge in 10:26 is not a

<sup>28</sup> William Lane’s valuable commentary shows the parallel in detail.

minor exposure to the gospel. The Greek noun indicates a full knowledge of what was being rejected. To be without the Mediator means one must face the Judge who had offered to be that sinner's Mediator but was rejected (John 5:22).

Contempt for God brings on a reaction far greater than is possible from men. God defends the infinite value of his glory; he cannot allow his Name to be defamed (Isaiah 48:11). In forgiving us, the only way he could protect his honor as God was to deal in justice and thus wrath with Christ taking our place. To reject the Substitute is to endure the full measure of God's justice alone.

**Hell fire** There really is a hell, and its fire will only burn out when God stops hating sin. (Let him who reads understand.) I am convinced that fire is a metaphor to express the ferocity of God's judgment. Many offerings were made by literal fire (Exodus 30:20). Fire was a literal vengeance in Number 11:1-3 and 16:35, yet it often showed the Presence of God as in Deuteronomy 5:1-5, even part of his gracious provision (Deuteronomy 1:32,33). In Deuteronomy 9:1-4, a devouring fire is a *metaphor* for driving out Canaanites who died by a sword of metal not fire. Prior to the resurrection, men in hell are there as spirits not as bodies literally burning. The fire metaphor is retained throughout Scripture because it is such an apt figure of God's awesome presence, of his purifying activity in both salvation and judgment (Matthew 3:11-12). No metaphor of judgment was used more by Christ in the four Gospels.

The apostate knew of the Priestly service of Christ; at one time he confessed Jesus in this world and identified himself as a believer, one of the covenant people. If that person falls away (6:4-8), he declares by apostasy that he really is an enemy of God (10:27) – the opposite of being God's "friend" (James 2:23). He is recognized by God as an enemy; God will be ashamed of him (the reverse of 11:16) and Christ will disown him (Matthew 10:33) as one he never knew (Matthew 7:23). The apostate had exposure to the blessings of the new covenant, but never received the new heart and the forgiveness held out in that covenant. The apostate entered into the new covenant to the same degree as the disobedient ones who died in the wilderness entered the promised land (3:7 – 4:14). In unbelief they repudiated what they could have had by faith. They entered neither the land of promise, no matter how close they were, and they never entered life in the new covenant. In wrath, God remembers their sins.

**10:28** refers to Deuteronomy 17:2-7, where the covenant breaker was to die with no opportunity to avoid justice, (compare 12:17). Mercy was not permitted (Deuteronomy 13:8). Such a person was to die at the city gate, a way to show one has been denied entrance as one of the people of God. The covenant breaker is an outsider. That poor soul in Deuteronomy was never exposed to the full light of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostate who rejects greater light deserves greater punishment (Matthew 11:24).

### **10:29 Three Descriptions of the Apostate's Sin:**

- Trampling the Son of God under foot
- Treating as unholy the blood of the covenant that sanctified him
- Insulting the Spirit of Grace

**Trampling the Son of God.** (See chapters 1&2.) We sinners often mistreat our fellow man. This is a crime against the Lord God who made our neighbor in his image (Genesis 9:6). The apostate treats with contempt the Son of God as if he were merely another man. *Son* (from Psalm 2) is Hebrews' choice word for the deity of Christ. Christ is the Creator who upholds the universe; he is the full glory of his Father, meaning he too is Yahweh, the Great Lord God of Israel. Yet a man can dismiss Christ as unworthy of respect. Those who crucified the Lord of glory had no idea who he was (1 Corinthians 2:8). With the apostate it is different; he once sang with others the high praise of Christ; now he tramples underfoot the One angels worship.

**Treating Christ's blood as common.** To grasp a verse like this requires the familiar principle that we must be aware of what part of the Bible we are reading. Hebrews tells us the blood of animals never took away sin, and only the blood of Christ does. The error attracting some was to reverse this, as if animal blood had saving power to satisfy God concerning our sins, and Jesus' blood had none. This is the significance of the "falling away" of those in the church who repudiate Christ to return to sacrifices that were mere shadows. But they have a certain consistency in their error: if he is not the Son, then his blood really is common and it

is no better than any man's. One error leads to many: the contempt for Christ as a Person makes the rejection of his Priestly work inevitable.

**That blood had sanctified him!** There is a double problem; not only was Jesus' blood considered to be not holy or as common as any other blood – it was blood that had a special application to the apostate. The blood now being treated as unholy was the same blood that at one time had “sanctified” him. And further, it is the blood of the covenant that sanctified him. This implies the apostate had some covenantal bond to the Lord. We could take this statement in two ways:

- 1) We could adopt the view that the blood of the covenant had the same sanctifying effect on the apostate person (head for head) as it had on every other member of the covenant community. Then because of his apostasy, the man once genuinely sanctified by the blood of Christ, lost his place in the covenant when he repudiated Christ. This explanation means he was once as much a part of the covenant people and in covenant with the Lord as those who are saved.

If we had only one sentence in the Bible about this, this would seem to be what the text is saying. This explanation however ought to be rejected. It is not true that the apostate had the same operation of the Holy Spirit in him. Some shrink back but others believe (10:39). Those who shrink back and those who believe are different classes of people. Apostates were never born of God; “*no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him,*” (1 John 3:6). Only the responsive land receives blessing (6:7,8). Those with salvation have what always accompanies it (6:9) – endurance for the sake of Christ. “*They [the apostates] went out from us, but they did not really belong to us [at any time]. For if they had belonged to us, [but they never did] they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them [ever] belonged to us,*” (1 John 2:19). This moving away from Christ did not cause them to lose the new covenant work of the Spirit sanctifying them; their apostasy revealed that they never had it. No apostate was ever united to Christ, ever given the Holy Spirit, or ever represented by Christ in his offering on the cross. Long before Judas' apostasy was apparent to the disciples, Jesus said of him, “One of you is a devil!” (John 6:66-71). When the Lord said, “*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom,*” (Luke 12:32). He did not include Judas in the word “you”, even though Judas as one of the Twelve was present at the time Jesus said it. The Lord did not mean the man now in hell would be part of the eternal kingdom of Christ. Jesus could not predict something that turned out to be false. God cannot lie. Apostates, while they profess allegiance, are indeed (externally) part of the church, as it is visible to us, but not as the true Bride of Christ seen clearly by God. Only in the future, will all the weeds be identified and finally separated from the good grain (Matthew 13:36-43) and the bad fish as well from the good (Matthew 13:47-50).

- 2) We could adopt the view (which I embrace) that the blood of the covenant sanctified the apostate person only in a certain sense. He once professed to be a believer in Christ. Others were convinced and treated his confession of Christ as genuine, thus he was a member (in good standing!) in the holy church that belongs to God. He was in that sense a “Christian” – just as an unbelieving Israelite was an Israelite but not one of God’s remnant people (Isaiah 10:20; Romans 11:5). The man who later trampled the Son of God at one time confessed with others the saving blood of Christ. As “sanctified” he too drank the cup of the new covenant professing salvation in Jesus.

His confession was false. His evil heart of unbelief departed from the living God, (3:12). He lacked the new heart all in the new covenant have been given (8:10). Such a new covenant heart has the law of God impressed on it; which results in obedience. The multitude that left Egypt professed faithful allegiance till a crisis of faith and obedience came. Then their shallow covenant allegiance revealed itself as unbelief.

When the apostate man drank the cup, he proclaimed that he benefited from the new covenant in Christ's blood. Then at some time he repudiated the blood of the covenant and all it implied. He no longer hoped for forgiveness in Christ. His new ‘confession’ was that the blood of Christ did nothing for him. To the apostate soul, Jesus' blood was worthless and his former allegiance an embarrassment. The blood of the covenant at one time marked him as one who supposedly had God as his God. It was his professed hope for all eternity, but all he confessed about Christ he later treated as false. Jesus' blood had no more significance than any

other blood. In this way he treated as common the blood of the covenant that once identified him as a covenant member before all observers but God. He was never truly sanctified, though he had the right words and the outward signs. He never had the Spirit writing the law of God in his mind. He never had the Lord as his God; he never was one of the true covenant people united to Christ. Clearly, “... *not all who are the offspring of Israel are [truly] Israel*” (Romans 9:6). Some are Israelites in name only; believers are the remnant according to God’s election (Romans 11:5). The apostate was as much a forgiven participant in the new covenant (8:12) as the unforgiven souls in hell. Like Esau, he was never one of God’s chosen (Malachi 1:2,3). His relation to the new covenant was not in Christ (Romans 5:1,2); it was identical to the ‘people of God’ in Hosea 1:9, of whom God said, “... *you are not my people, and I am not your God.*” So the apostate of 10:29 was sanctified by the blood of the covenant in exactly the same sense that the apostates of 6:4-6 shared in the Holy Spirit.

**Insulting the Spirit** To trample the Son of God is to trample the One who is the glory of his Father. Then the apostate profanes Christ’s blood, and insults the Spirit. The rejection is of the Father, Son and Spirit. In 2:4 we see the witness of the Spirit. The arrogant man can look at the miracles and the mighty works of God in Christ (John 10:24-29), and still not believe. He may even conclude that it is the work of demons (Matthew 12:22-37). Christ did all things by the Spirit, (Matthew 12:28). The Father sent the Son to make himself known to his own (John 1:18; 17:25, 26). God gave the Spirit to testify (John 15:26) to make us know the things of Christ (John 16:14,15) but the world, and the apostate in the church, cannot receive him (John 14:17)! To the natural man the things of God are all foolishness (1 Corinthians 2:14). So the entire package, i.e., the Father’s spoken word and the Son offering himself through the Spirit, are all rejected. In spiritual blindness, a man can look at all this light and prefer the darkness (John 3:19-21) because his deeds are evil and he prefers his sin and a religion without Christ. This is a blasphemous insult to the Spirit and his testimony (2:4). Apostasy turns against kindness of the Spirit of Grace who delivers the gospel of grace with longsuffering to sinners. Men still choose to spit in the face of God and tell him they are not interested in his mercy and do not want it. They shall not have it.

We have been given enough reason for God to react. Hebrews 10 is back to the matter of judgment again. This paragraph has moved from apostasy (v.26), to a lack of a remedy for it (v.26), to judgment against it (v.27), to judgment deserved (v.28), to the wickedness of the apostate (v.29), and back to judgment again.

**10:30,31** God’s determination to save is shown in his oath to Abraham (6:13-20). He determined, also by oath, to damn those who profess to be his people but are unbelieving covenant breakers. He swore in anger they would not enter his rest in the Promised Land (3:18). We should tremble at his Word (Isaiah 66:2) and fear (4:1) lest there be in any one of us an unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God (3:12). If we *know him*, then we know he is a God of Judgment. Note the tenderness mixed with the warning; he again speaks of his readers and himself as ‘we’. This has the power of saying, “But we know this of the Lord, don’t we?”

Hebrews has shown that judgment is well deserved; next it shows that God’s vengeance has been revealed In Scripture. Deuteronomy 32:35,36 speaks of personal vengeance as God’s prerogative alone. He vindicates his own in judgment, separates them from the ungodly, and punishes rebels at the same time. Judgment is not a possible future, but a certainty. Apostates depart from the living God (3:12), and it is into the hands of the living God that they fall. There is no horror that exceeds facing the wrath of the Lamb (Revelation 6:16,17), being rejected from the glory of his presence (2 Thessalonians 1:9), and being cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). This horror happens to many who profess to be his people.

**10:32-34** This section like 6:9-12 shows that the writer had specific knowledge of those receiving the letter. Here he again recognizes grace in their lives. After their conversion to Christ (i.e., when the light of the gospel entered the heart), they had endured verbal insult, probably physical violence, loss of property and prison. They suffered with those who suffered (Romans 12:15). All of this love for others was an expression of love for God (6:10). They compared their losses with the better possessions they were assured of as believers in the resurrection (6:2) in the coming age (6:5) when Jesus will come (10:37). Earlier they saw their situation more clearly; earlier they recognized their trouble as temporary and their reward as eternal.

The sad news behind all these repeated warnings is the evidence that weariness (12:3-12) was replacing their former joy. Dullness (5:11) threatened boasting in a clear confession (3:6; 4:14). Some in the little church, especially those whose habit it was to stay away (10:25), might fit the Lord's dire description in Matthew 13:21 of the hearer of the Word who endures only for a while.

Later the writer will maintain an analogy of running a race; the analogy of physical endurance begins in v.32. The weary runner may quit the race, and the discouraged Christian may withdraw from the struggle to seek whatever will relieve the persecution. The easiest way to do that would be to confess Christ no longer, and that is what the temptation was and that is what apostasy is (Luke 11:23). In this paragraph they were being called back to their first love (Revelation 2:4) by the charge to remember their former courage. It is quite simple to see now how helpful it would be to be presented with examples of those who by faith endured in their lifelong race. Hebrews 10 shows the reason for Hebrews 11.

**10:35-39** The reminder of past faithfulness comes to its climax, "Do not throw away your confidence." They saw things clearly when they were comforted by the promise of better and eternal possessions. Their later weariness was not with work but with the kind of struggle (12:4) Christians have in a world hostile to their Lord and them. In the circumstances of the readers of Hebrews, this tension was increased by the presence and confession of all who say that Jesus is the Son above all angels; that Jesus is High Priest forever; that the former ritual is obsolete, and that access to God is confined to an approach to God only by the blood of Christ. The world and the religious world react as one (Acts 4:27,28) to resist such proclamation and allegiance. The gospel of Christ is a threat to the kind of life the world prefers. The presence of Christians stirs the world's hostility (John 14:17; 15:18-25; 16:1-3). It does not welcome its conscience being bothered with a message of repentance and the gospel of Christ.

Hebrews challenges us to do the will of God, just as Christ did (10:7-10), encourages with the coming of Christ and a rich reward, teaches that our trials are brief, and warns that deserting Christ is so displeasing to God that he will destroy all who do it.

**10:37-38** The readers knew their small losses; they must now think of what they will receive. Faith believes in the Person God had promised in Habakkuk 2:3,4. In that prophet, God had promised *a coming revelation* that would answer the question of Habakkuk – one coming with certainty. Now under the Holy Spirit we find Habakkuk 2:3,4 enlarged to have specific reference to the coming of Christ. In other words, not only is an answer coming; he is coming. By the time Hebrews was written, Christ had come, but just as in 9:26-28 there are two appearings. The way the Habakkuk text is being used in a very little while (Isaiah 26:20), the Coming One will come. Believing that promise determines our view of all that happens now. By faith we believe it will be *a little while* without any delay in the time God has chosen.

For still the vision awaits *its appointed time*; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it *will surely come; it will not delay*. "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith (Habakkuk 2:3, 4).

For, "Yet *a little while*, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him" (10:37, 38).

Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead. Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for *a little while* until the fury has passed by. For behold, the LORD is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no more cover its slain (Isaiah 26:19-21).

Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest *a little longer*, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been (Revelation 6:11).

Just as we become righteous in Christ by faith – a Biblical teaching of obtaining a righteous status entirely apart from our conduct – we also live by this faith and thus believe in all God has promised. God has promised more than the gift of righteousness by faith (Romans 3:5 and Galatians 2 & 3). He has promised a city with foundations (11:10).

**10:39** The apostate shrinks back. At some point he sees no gain in maintaining his shallow profession any longer. His unregenerate heart never held to Christ, so when persecution comes he concludes that holding to Christ is an unnecessary loss. He finds no reward being associated with Christ and so *shrinks back* while the believer clings to Christ and is saved – not by his clinging, but by the Christ in whom he trusts.

This is the context of Hebrews 11. Many Christians enjoy this chapter on faith and overlook the reason it was given. Faith sees clearly and in temporary trials chooses to respond to God's word in obedience. The man justified by faith apart from his obedience to the law, is the man who by faith lives in obedience throughout his life. The man who shrinks back (i.e., turns away from or turns against Christ), is the man whose assessment of Christ is that he and his sacrifice are worthless. Jesus Christ is unworthy of his allegiance. The apostate will seek to save his life (John 12:25), but without faith in the One who cannot break his promise he loses his life forever. Hebrews 11 shows how the man of faith lives under duress; he pleases God and is eternally rewarded (11:6). Faith obtains the life promised; the one who shrinks back, tramples the Son of God (10:29) and ends up being trampled by him (Isaiah 63:1-4).

They must not throw away their confidence, *it will be richly rewarded* (10:35). Our confidence is in the value of Christ's blood (10:19), produced by the Spirit who impresses the heart with Christ and his work, resulting in saving faith – a faith that trusts for the future. Possibly 10:35 is the most concise way to state the heartfelt appeal of Hebrews.

**Rewards** Our confidence will be rewarded (10:35). In every age the human heart assumes we gain from God what he owes to us for 'goodness' and performance. This reveals a different estimate of our sin from what God has. This error is also related to the idea of reward. The Bible must use some words for the good the Lord has stored up for his children; one it uses is *reward* (Matthew 5:12). Our work in every form of obedience will be rewarded. It is not that good works merit, for all we are able to do is inadequate and stained with sin (1 John 1:8) so would justly merit stern rejection. Good works are always the result of God graciously equipping us (Philippians 2:13) to serve in some small way (Luke 17:10), so such undeserved credit cannot accrue to us for doing works that are at the same time his workmanship (Ephesians 2:10). Yet the Bible encourages us with what is ahead. It may be called an inheritance, but Christ is the heir and with him we share it (Romans 8:17). Such an inheritance is a gift – with the pure definition of *gift* as something graciously given (Titus 3:7). We are not called to be passive but active in the pursuit of reward – looking forward to what we will yet receive on a path that has full possession of eternal life as its climax. So our confidence is not self-confidence but confidence in God and his promise. All we endure is 'compensated' in such a great outpouring it does not compare with what little we have suffered (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18). Every reward has been merited for us by Christ. As his adopted children we are overwhelmed with his kindness. With confidence in God's faithfulness, we trust and suffer joyfully, knowing our life cannot be lost (John 12:25,26), that our toil is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58), for we will still enjoy all the good God has planned. Hebrews is very keen that those who waver should see that forsaking Christ does not bring relief; rather God will make those who fall away to be eternal losers, giving up an eternal reward that can be enjoyed only by having Christ.

## Hebrews 11:1-40

The stories in Hebrews 11 may be the most well-known part of the entire letter/sermon. It is obvious that stories are easier to follow than abstract reasoning. We should bow before the Lord since he has chosen to give us both. Thus the simple sentence, "Jesus died for our sins," is a statement of history and a theological explanation at the same time. We cannot dispense with either one. Teaching the history/story of the Bible is the prime way to introduce God's Word to children. The events do not stand without spiritual significance. God is known by his deeds as well as his statements. Both fit together in a comprehensive and unified revelation of God.

Many lessons can be taken from the persons mentioned in this chapter. The examples chosen connect to the appeal in 10:35-39. There the readers were encouraged and warned not to throw away their confidence, to wait for God's reward, to persevere, to live by God's promises believing he will be true to his Word. The examples were not chosen to illustrate the nobility of OT saints, even though this is evident everywhere. The overriding issue is that "He who promised is faithful" and for this reason we should "hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess," (10:23). To miss the connection of chapters 10 and 11 is to view chapter 11 as a detached storybook rather than one reason after another to encourage their faith in the face of similar circumstances.

The visible church will be sorted into two classes of men with a gap between that cannot be crossed. Some shrink back; some believe. The destiny of one is hell, and the other, heaven. The issue then presses upon us: what does it really mean to believe? What distinguishes faith from a false faith, a living faith from a dead faith that cannot save? James 2 teaches that the reality of faith is demonstrated by its results. Hebrews 11 illustrates what true faith is like.

Faith in chapter 11 often looks to the future. Chapter 10 referred to Christ as the Coming One (10:37). Hebrews 11 illustrates that faith brings to reality the certainties of God's promises. Faith does not need to see to believe. Since God has disclosed that portion of the future we need to know, which alone makes it as real as the present. In fact, the future is often more clear for us than the present, because only in it are all of God's promises fulfilled. The world lives with an uncertain future as its norm. Believers have a certain future while living in an uncertain present. Hebrews 11 should be read in the light of chapter 10 and of Jesus, the chief example of persevering faith in chapter 12. 11:1,2 defines the point of the examples that follow. God commended these saints for faith. We should observe how greatly their faith determined the way they lived and died, and how their brief life was a pilgrimage, a longing for a better country.

In Acts 7, Stephen made a brief review of the OT. We live in a day when two things are out of favor. In our lazy Western culture (not lazy on the sports field but in the mind) we like neither **theology** nor **history**. That makes many view a book like Hebrews as not very relevant to the felt needs of so many professing believers. Some think doctrine is unimportant, but come running for help when a new teaching causes trouble in the church! Hebrews boldly states our salvation doctrinally in terms of Jesus the human Son of God as our Great High Priest. This confession ran against the prevailing view of the majority of Jews in the first century. So Hebrews used the Scriptures (in those days acknowledged as the Word of God), to refute the error of denying any priest from outside the line of Levi. It also used the long and respected tradition of Israel to give as witnesses, faithful men and women who were often misunderstood, maligned, and ridiculed by their countrymen. For this reason we have Hebrews 11. Hebrews is a book that teaches and preaches theology and history. It humbles us by its mastery of the big picture as it views issues from the standpoint of God's revelation from the beginning to the end of human history.

In the notes that follow, I try to hold to how the examples relate to the situation of the readers. I plead for those reading chapter 11 to do so mindful of the end of chapter 10. For this reason, I do not delve into how Isaac and Moses are types of Christ, even though that is a fruitful and legitimate study. Because the writer saw a crisis of faith and evidence for the beginning of apostasy, this affected his use of these examples of faith. I have therefore chosen to stick with the issue of a persevering faith. The readers of Hebrews included people tempted to drift away (2:1). They needed the testimony of ancient people who in similar trials received the commendation of God.

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**11:1,2** "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*"(ESV) This is a perplexing verse to understand and translate. It humbles those who try. The Greek noun (hypostasis) for "assurance" in the NIV is used 20 times in the LXX for a dozen different Hebrew words. Trying to define the word, and thus grasp the verse fully is like fitting a mattress into a refrigerator. Nothing fits perfectly. Is this word substance, or being sure, or guarantee, or assurance? The Bible translators have no clear consensus. Many pages in commentaries do not result in a definite conclusion. Languages often do not have exact parallels in other languages. Thus the commentary of William Lane in his research into Greek literature outside Scripture is very valuable.

It would be less tantalizing if the statement were not so central to the point Hebrews is making. This concise statement opens this section, and the rest of the chapter is to illustrate the point, but it is easier to understand the examples than the thesis they were given to exemplify! My advice is to admit our difficulty without

worry. The chapter itself is well understood and has been a tremendous encouragement for centuries. One way to grasp v.1 is to find how the later verses fit it. The rest of the chapter is saying what v.1 means.

Another important question is whether faith/hope is objective or subjective? In other words, is faith simply inner assurance, or is it an objective certainty. 2+2 equals 4 no matter how we may feel. We should have an inner certainty of this truth of arithmetic, which is objectively certain whether we agree with it or not. This aspect of faith is vital. Take the coming of Christ as an example. We are subjectively certain it will happen, but it is also an objective certainty which we believe. In English, *certainty* has for most people the idea of subjective assurance. Seeing the word both ways may help us understand v.1. By faith we are assured of things that are real, not because we imagine them to be true, but because their reality has been established for us by the Word of God. Then when we believe, faith makes them real for us! For the first people hearing v.1, when Hebrews was read to them, it probably made perfect sense.

In Hebrews, faith and hope at times are virtually the same, as in “*full assurance of faith*” (10:22) and “*let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess*” (10:23). It is quite natural for us to see hope as an internal trust we have concerning the future. However, in Hebrews hope is also presented as objective. In 6:18-20 a hope already existing is offered to us, so it is not subjective. This hope is an anchor for the soul, quite external to us, because it enters heaven (6:19,20). Our subjective hope does not enter heaven, but Christ has. So, a) a trusting hope and b) the hope held out to us by the Lord are both called our hope. In the NT the latter is more common. Christ is our objective hope (1 Timothy 1:1), and the One our subjective hope is in (1 Corinthians 15:19). Likewise, the faith in our hearts (Romans 10:9,10) is in Christ, and the truth we believe is the objective faith we confess (1 Timothy 3:9).

Apparently *hypostasis* could mean a guarantee, or a seal of authenticity. In this sense, faith makes a supporting statement, or it supports all the action that rests on it. Thus Hebrews 11 will say repeatedly that by faith (as a foundation) something was done. Perhaps it carries the idea that by faith we vouch for what God has said, as in John 3:33. This, of course, pleases God (11:6) who commends believers for their faith (11:2). The word is a combination of “under” (*hupo*) and “standing” (*stasis*), so it may carry the sense that faith is the foundation of the conduct seen in the lives of these OT people.

It may help to say that 11:1 is not defining faith as much as it is showing what faith does. When faith was present, God’s people did amazing things. Had it been absent, they would have done nothing mentioned in chapter 11. It makes them see what they otherwise could not; it makes them hold as realities what the world would find foolish. Faith connects with certainties known only by the revelation of God. It considers the future as real as the present, even when the man of faith has nothing more to support his certainty than a promise from God. He needs nothing more. God commended the faithful of early and later history for their faith. Now the writer of Hebrews is ready to review the record of OT witnesses to show how faith pleases God so much, AND to show why we should not throw away our confidence (10:35).

**11:3** The writer begins at the beginning of Genesis before there is any man. He takes up creation first and speaks of the faith of all, (i.e., not just the OT saints but us as well) when he says, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command.”

Here we encounter a paradox: we must know something in order to believe, and we must believe in order to know. Noah could not know of a flood before God spoke to warn of it (11:7). Yet we cannot know unless we believe. There is no other way to know that the world was created by the word of God than by faith, but by faith we do know it is so. The world will say we only believe – the suggestion is that we are irrational – but we reply that we know. We have the Word of the Lord who was present when he did it. When he tells us something, then we know, but only if we believe him. Visible things were not created from visible things. Faith does not make this true, but it does bring us into the certainty of it. We do not claim to know how God can create by his Word; we simply know it is so.

The matter of believing what we cannot see, and “seeing” what we can only know by God’s Word, is a theme that will return in vv.7 & 13. The faith of OT saints and our believing in creation from things invisible is the same kind of faith. The reason Moses persevered is that in faith “*he saw him who is invisible*” (11:27).

**11:4 The faith of Abel** The Biblical record of Abel is so brief that much speculation has risen to go with it. This in itself is an indication that the brief life of Abel has acquired much attention; he still speaks. He believed in the Lord, and while we know so little of what may have been in his heart, God commands him for righteousness. No righteousness could have been in Abel had he not believed. It was not so with Cain. With both Cain and his offering God was displeased. Genesis 4:7 may be the decisive word to explain why; if the man who offers is wicked, whatever he offers will be rejected. Jesus' offering was made only after he was perfected, and thus it has been accepted. Some think Cain's offering was rejected because it was the fruit of the ground, and because God had cursed that ground. That hardly fits OT offerings where wine and grain offerings were given to the Lord (Leviticus 23:37). The chief distinction seems to be in the men rather than in their offerings.

It may be odd that Abel is chosen as an example of faith. He seems to have so little reward for it. The evil man lived and the righteous man died. But Hebrews is interested in who gains the commendation of God. A short life with God's commendation speaks much more to us than a long life of sin and eventual destruction. Abel does have the distinction of being the first human being to become part of "*the spirits of righteous men made perfect*" (12:23). Though he is an example of personal righteousness, he was made perfect because the Lord made him to be.

**11:5,6 The faith of Enoch** We move from righteous Abel whose life was cut short by death to a man who never died! Faith should not be judged by duration of life but by how that life was lived. Both men arrived in the presence of the Lord, thus both were made perfect by the blood of Christ. Hebrews was written to affirm Christ as our Great High Priest. It is not contradicting its own message here when it refers to righteous persons. They too, are accepted by God only because of the ministry of Christ. When Adam sinned he represented Abel, Enoch, and Noah, so they all needed Christ. God is pleased with faith; v.6 now adds that he rewards it. Enoch is a prime example. He believed and God commanded him. Enoch is a witness of what God does with all who believe. Enoch was simply taken to the Lord's presence without dying. At the coming of Christ, that will happen again. For those who die in Christ, they enter the same place as Enoch.

The lesson of this man's life is given in v.6 where it calls for all to come to the Lord. I take this to mean coming by prayer, and that Hebrews implies that Enoch's walk with God was characterized by prayer. What he sought was God in a world that hated him. Because of such faith and such a view of God's worth, the Lord rewards by turning his gracious face to his people (Numbers 6:22-27). Enoch was also an early example of Jesus' desire that his own should be with him (John 17:24). For those alive on earth before the perfection of heaven, the Lord already makes his home with the one who, like Enoch, has his commands and obeys them (John 14:21-23).

These two verses are a combination of the most unusual (Enoch did not die), and the most general rule for all, i.e., that anyone who comes believing God exists, and that God responds pleases him, and will be rewarded. It is not futile to seek the Lord, because he will be found and will pardon (Isaiah 55:6,7). Apart from escaping death, what he did for Enoch, the Lord will do for all. Those who seek his face shall have it, and those who (unlike Enoch) die, yet die in the Lord, will find that their death is an entrance into his presence (Philippians 1:23). In this more usual way they join Enoch in the city of the Living God (12:22ff).

**11:7 The faith of Noah** The example of Noah follows Abel, a righteous man, and Enoch who pleased God. Noah was both a preacher (2 Peter 2:5) and an heir of righteousness. In the brief and cryptic words of Hebrews 11, personal righteousness is demonstrated in faithfulness, but no detailed explanation is given how that perfect righteousness is received by simple faith. The writer is moving very fast through his list of saints to show the certainty and commendation of faith (11:1,39). Some teach that righteousness for justification is attained by faithfulness. This is a major blunder; we should take the doctrine of justification from those portions of Scripture that actually teach it, and we should not misread the many passages that speak of personal righteousness in the saints to contradict them. The world was wicked (Genesis 6:1-7), but Noah

found grace in the sight of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). Then we read that Noah was a righteous man (Genesis 6:9). If he were a righteous man and that was why God showed him grace, that explanation makes grace ungracious. Saving grace (to be distinguished from the Creator's kindness) is grace because it is shown to sinners. Noah, a son of Adam, was a sinner to whom God was gracious.

Noah believed God's warning and so built an ark over many years. He surely faced ridicule for this, but his certainty about the flood was as real to him as yesterday's sunset. Future history announced by God is no less certain than past history. Noah did not build because he looked at clouds and predicted a flood. He believed God and did so over a long time. He received what he hoped for, the salvation of his family; he was certain of the flood no one could see. He believed and he and his family were saved. The world did not believe in spite of God's warning and Noah's preaching. They were condemned, as are all who do not believe. Those in the church should heed both examples, not just Noah's. Those who shrink back will be destroyed as surely as all the unbelievers in Noah's day. Only those who believe are saved. Because Noah believed, he built an ark; his faith was not shallow; it resulted in the good works that always accompany salvation (6:9); his faith was characterized by diligence to the end (6:11) and through faith he received what was promised (6:12).

Hebrews turns words of promise and warning into concrete examples by reference to people like Noah. Just like the temptations the readers of Hebrews were facing, Noah was tested, but he persevered (10:36). The writer hopes they will follow his example.

Noah by faith became an heir. Christ is the heir of all things (1:2), so for Noah to be an heir of anything, in the mind of God he must be united to Christ. There is no inheritance for any fallen son of Adam apart from Christ. Adam in the old creation lost all for all his family. Any inheritance from Christ, the replacement head of a new family in a new creation, is grounded in the accepted obedience of Jesus Christ. This righteousness is received by faith in him. Noah too, in the grace of God, became an heir (Romans 8:17,32) to a righteousness that was not his but became his by faith (Philippians 3:9).

**11:8-19 The faith of Abraham** The review from early Genesis is over. Abel and Enoch received much attention in embellished Jewish writings. Hebrews 11 now gives more attention to the father of faith (Romans 4:16,18) than it does to anyone else. Abraham is a man of whom Scripture has much to say.

**11:8-10 Leaving home** Abraham was in a foreign land when God called him; this foreign land was his homeland; when he left he had no family ahead of him, no knowledge of the new land, and he went for one reason only: God had called him to go. Abraham had worshipped other gods; God took him from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him to Canaan (Joshua 24:2,3). God promised Canaan as an inheritance, a land he had never seen. Abraham believed God, and therefore he obeyed and went. This is the opposite of the Israelites in Hebrews 3,4 who would not enter that same land because of their unbelief. The connection cannot be broken; if we believe, we will obey; if we disobey, we do not believe. Abraham is an example of faith that was real before the promises were realized. .

Abraham would see the land promised to him, but in this life he did not have it as his inheritance. He lived in it but in temporary quarters. It was his by promise but not possession. He was wealthy (Genesis 13:2) but lived in tents. Why not build a city there and a large house? Abraham knew he was a stranger there all his days. He even had to send outside the land for a wife for his son. While he lived there, the Lord said to him, "*The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God*" (Genesis 17:8). Abraham looked for a city with foundations; I suppose that might be intended to contrast with the tents he lived in that were simply pitched on a piece of ground with no other foundation. God said he was an alien, and Abraham agreed. There was something far more coming, something he could not see, but it was certain to him since God had promised it. One day he would die without seeing that city with real foundations. The promise of God was not limited to that brief life; it would be an everlasting possession for him and his, so he believed in the resurrection and longed to see the day of Christ (John 8:56).

Even Isaac and Jacob lived in tents. To most observers, this little group of foreigners who believed in a promised inheritance had very little to show for it, no land as their own, and for a long time not many

children from the man God said would be the father of many nations! The people reading Hebrews could say that it was not going well for them either. The writer wanted them to know that the persevering faith of Abraham occurred in a similar situation. By faith Abraham looked for what he could not see. His faith gave substance and certainty to the things hoped for. This would be enough to show he was a man of faith, but our lives are also to be lives of faith from beginning to end, so other examples in Abraham's life follow.

**11:11,12 Having a son** This subject is the most delicate and anguished of all the things Abraham faced. To the issue of his son must be added the later matter of Isaac being offered. God would not allow his servant to be his heir (Genesis 15:2-4), nor the child born to the servant Hagar. The son must be their biological child by the miraculous conception in Sarah with elderly Abraham as the father – whose body was as good as dead (Romans 4:19). His faith was tried over a long time. He accepted the decisions of God. He continued to believe; his view of God was theologically sound; he believed God would be faithful to his word. There would be a son from Sarah's womb. People may conclude that God is slow, but as long as God is faithful, faith can wait.

**11:13-16 The sermon continues** The writer steps back to review what he has said already. Not one of the examples he gave is of a person who made a claim of belief in Christ earlier in life and that kind of "confession of faith" was all there was to it. His examples all continued to live by faith and were still believing, trusting, hoping, and obeying when their life on earth ended. This is the kind of example the readers of Hebrews needed to emulate. God is not pleased with those who shrink back (10:38,39), but with those who believe. Those who really believe do not shrink back. Those with the faith of Abraham "*walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had...*" (Romans 4:12). Faith in the time of death reveals that one really does believe in the promised inheritance since there is nothing else left in life to hope in. This will be seen in the case of both Isaac and Jacob below.

They received the promises but not all the things promised. What they saw, they saw by faith (Ephesians 1:18), not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). They knew the promise of a great inheritance would be kept after they died. Only the resurrection is consistent with the faithfulness of God. An "everlasting possession" is meaningless to the dead, but by faith they will inherit and be alive to do so. All believers will sit down with a living Abraham in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8:11).

It glorifies God, and his people identify with him when they confess that they are "aliens and strangers" (Genesis 17:8). It means they are looking for something else. Our Christian confession means we cannot fit in well here, and we ought to view this world as corrupt and worthy of passing away (1 John 2:15-17). Our citizenship like Abraham's is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). If we say that God's city is our own, our better country, the heavenly one we long for, then we confess covenantal allegiance. We are saying that God is our God, and God will not be ashamed to speak the same way of us. But if we cannot accept joyfully our property being taken from us because we confess that Christ is our true Priest, then we are denying that we have in him "better and lasting possessions" (10:34). In this sermon/letter, the preacher/writer reminded them that they once had an attitude toward this world like Abraham's. Now he wonders if they will throw away their confidence (10:35). Abraham never did. Will they also die in faith (11:13) by holding their confidence firm to the end (3:14)?

**Do We Have the Same Hope?** It is puzzling to hear explanations that OT saints had physical blessings but in the NT we have spiritual blessings. That is quite distorted, because we have the same inheritance; they looked for the same city we look for (11:10; 13:14). Abraham and David are examples of justification by faith (Romans 4). They were aliens in the land just as we are in this world, according to 1 Peter 2:11 – a statement in which the church is spoken of using explicit language for Israel in 1 Peter 2:9. Even when they possessed the land, with many Canaanites destroyed, King David at the pinnacle of Israel's power said, "*We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers...*" (1 Chronicles 29:15). So Abraham and David were looking for a country with permanence and holiness. They wanted what we can state better in the words that came through Jeremiah – when the new covenant is completely

fulfilled and implemented on earth – “*they will all know me from the least to the greatest*” (8:11). The hope of OT & NT saints is for a redeemed earth (Isaiah 11:9) ruled by the Son of David, the King of Israel in Zion. This King is the cornerstone of the church (Isaiah 28:16, Ephesians 2:20). In Christ, Gentiles will no longer be aliens to Israel but fellow-citizens in it and members of the same household (Ephesians 2:19).

Abraham had the option to return to his birthplace. (One can only wonder what he would tell his former neighbors.) That would be like the apostate Israelites who wanted to return to Egypt and would not enter God’s rest. Their hard hearts are not examples of faith. But the surrounding country was not home either. Their real home was the place they had never been, one they were certain of but could not see (11:1), a place God has prepared. All that is seen is temporary (2 Corinthians 4:18). The earth we know will be destroyed and replaced with “*a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness*” (2 Peter 3:13). This is God’s objective promise, and we must look forward to it with the assurance of faith, or we are so unlike Abraham it should make us wonder if we are really his children by faith at all.

**11:17-19 The reasoning of faith** The command to offer up Isaac put Abraham in a position where he could only see one way that the different things God had said could be reconciled. It was never a possibility in Abraham’s mind that God could be untrustworthy. God said that it was through Isaac and no one else, that Abraham’s seed would continue. Isaac was the son born of promise, and God’s promise required that he live to have children (Genesis 17:18, 19). Then God told Abraham to sacrifice him. Abraham understood God’s words. They seemed to be in conflict.

Other examples in chapter 11 emphasize how faith sees, how faith obeys, how faith endures ridicule and even murder, how faith acts, and in the case of creation, that only faith understands. None of that was new to Abraham, but this example shows how faith reasons. The test must have been extremely trying, but Abraham’s mind was clear. He did not waver in faith or obedience (Romans 4:20,21); he would do what God said. He simply reasoned that if God commanded Isaac in sacrifice, and God had made these clear promises about him, that God would raise Isaac from the dead. The previous promises of God are never annulled by his later commands. This is how Abraham reasoned. It is not that he was a master of logic; he was certain without doubt that God would keep the promise that through Isaac Abraham’s seed would be called. That Word of God was all he had and all he needed to make his decision. The readers of Hebrews needed the same faith in their reasoning.

## 11:20-22 The faith of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph

**Isaac** The writer quickly covers three more generations. Note that there was a living Isaac to have children. God’s promise was never in jeopardy. The words Isaac spoke concerning the future were blessings he had no power to control. He made no statement of what he would do; it was all up to the covenant keeping God of his father Abraham. In Genesis 27:27-29, he spoke in faith of what God would do; Isaac was a spokesman. For his words to have any effect, they depended on blessing from the Lord after his death. In Genesis 27:37 his use of “I” has reference to the validity of the word he had pronounced in the Name of the Lord; even Isaac could not change it. Isaac would not have blessed either man had his faith been in his own ability to fulfill. He spoke with certainty because God had made promises to Abraham, and Isaac knew that word was true. With Isaac, future blessing was a matter of certainty.

**Jacob** Why would Jacob bless each of his sons when he was so weak he had to lean on his staff to do so? His body lacked the strength to support its own weight. He was near death, but he knew the God of his fathers could not be unfaithful. It was worth his last bit of strength to sit up and bless Joseph’s sons and later his own. Genesis 48/49 demonstrates confidence in the promises of God. Because he was certain they would leave Egypt one day, he insisted that he be buried in the Promised Land. Nothing Jacob said makes any sense apart from faith in the Word of the Lord. It is clear Jacob’s faith grew as he aged; he did not give up his confession. His early sins are notorious, but the grace of his Great High Priest was transforming (4:14-16). Jacob became more and more a holy man who was taken to glory (2:10,11). His end was characterized by

bold confession of his Lord (3:6). In many ways Jacob was not a good example, but his God made him into one.

**Joseph** As in the case of Jacob, Hebrews refers to Joseph's faith at death. The dying man was looking ahead to the promises of God being fulfilled. In Egypt a man in his position would have a notable resting place in death, but for Joseph that was the world. His God had promised his great-grandfather Abraham a land of their own and he chose to be buried there. His orders concerning his bones (Genesis 50:24,25) were obeyed. In the exodus from Egypt they took his bones with them (Exodus 13:19). "*God will surely* come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," (Genesis 50:24,25). Exodus 13:19 repeats the words, "*God will surely...*" This is what the writer wanted to hold before his readers as normal. The patriarchs had trouble too, but in it they held firmly to the end the confidence they had at first (3:14).

## 11:23-29 The faith of Moses

**11:23** The faith of Moses' parents is mentioned first, a faith in a time of great affliction with the threat of death. We wonder what they knew of his future. We do know they feared the Lord their God more than the king of Egypt. The Lord intervened and preserved the life of the baby. He could have sent a host of flaming angels to guard his parents' home, but he chose to have his people live in danger by faith. The hand of the Lord turned the heart of Pharaoh's daughter (Proverbs 21:1). His working was outside the realm of what they could see in advance. Moses' parents acted in faith in matters they could neither see (11:1) nor predict.

**11:24-28** Moses is the last person to be reviewed in any detail. (Sermons cannot go on forever.) I suspect that by listing these well-known faithful saints, the writer was challenging his readers whether they were true Jews. The history of Israel includes rampant idolatry. Only a remnant was true to the Lord. By showing faith in the face of struggle and opposition (12:3,4), he enhanced the parallel in which they too were called to persevere and wait for God's rich reward. We have no examples in Hebrews 11 of people regretting faith in the Lord, and there will never be one (Romans 10:11). Moses is an example of a believer in a difficult choice, one that would bring immediate difficulty. He did not choose the easy path.

Moses had to choose which of two peoples he belonged to. He chose to identify with a despised people in slavery. In this way he chose the mistreatment that would be the inevitable result of refusing high recognition as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to give up the comforts of the palace, and some of those comforts would be against God's commandments, so they are called the pleasures of sin. He chose not to be short sighted. Life is very brief. All the nobility in Egypt are currently mummies, while Moses' body was buried by God (Deuteronomy 34:5,6). He lives with Christ now and was even granted the most unusual privilege to appear with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9). He refused Pharaoh's palace but became a noble in the courts of the Lord. The early estimate was that he lost much, but the palace of Egypt has fallen into decay; Moses has received some of his reward (11:6); he remains part of an unshakable kingdom (12:28), and he awaits more to come (11:39, 40). He traded the treasures of a kingdom now gone from the earth, for lasting reward in the eternal kingdom of Christ. Many in his time would mock his decision as foolish, but Moses lived by faith.

**11:26** Moses not only chose disgrace for the sake of Christ, he valued identification with the coming Messiah. It is a privilege to suffer for the Lord, one limited to this life (Philippians 1:29). Matthew 5:10-12 clearly applies to Moses, one of the OT prophets. We do not know exactly what Moses knew of Christ, but in the five Books of Moses the Lord Jesus is the promised seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). He is the true Seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16-18). Further, Christ was the great prophet to come, One like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18,19). He was the One to whom all the signs of ceremonial bloodshed pointed. All hope of redemption and the Redeemer himself would come through Israel. Moses chose to be part of the people of God. He was a faithful servant in God's house (3:5). Christ is over that house, and Moses like every other believer is part of it. He chose in faith and held on to the hope of which he boasted (3:6).

**11:27,28** Moses left Egypt, probably referring to his flight to Midian (Acts 7:27-29). He left in faith; he did not go back on his decision by returning to the courts of Pharaoh. He waited for God's time to deliver Israel. What kept him going was believing in the promise and oath to Abraham. In this sense he saw the One who is unknown to the world and invisible to human sense. Some forty years passed before Moses saw the burning bush. The day came when he returned to Egypt to confront Pharaoh in the Name of the Lord. The last plague was the Angel of the Lord killing the firstborn. The gospel was that they should eat the Passover and apply the blood outside the door. They had to believe it was necessary to do that. Since they really believed, they did so and were spared.

**11:29** The faith here is of the people, and Moses is part of that people. By now it should be clear that the writer could have said "by faith" to much more detail of their history. In the case of Moses, there is an active faith concerning him as an infant and faith expressed to the time of Passover. The people had faith to pass through the Red Sea, or they would have turned back. Later they did hold back in unbelief from entering the land, but that was inconsistent with the faith of leaving Egypt. There is danger passing through a sea that stands like walls on either side, and the Egyptians are the chief evidence of that danger. Faith was expressed in relation to the unseen danger prior to the death of the firstborn; faith was expressed in the visible danger of passing through the sea.

**11:30,31** The text does not mean the wall of Jericho had faith. We read the Bible with some common sense. On that occasion, the people did something that does not make walls fall down. To many their obedience was foolish as they marched around the city for seven days. After a five or six days with nothing happening, the inhabitants of Jericho might look on this action as silly. Israel obeyed and God brought the walls down. God's ways may vary; sometimes he used a sword in their hands; sometimes he told them to do nothing but observe (Exodus 14:13, 14).

Rahab heard what happened to kings nearby who opposed the Israelites and what happened to the Egyptians. She could not see the God of Israel, but she was convinced by his actions that he was the One who would prevail in taking the land of Canaan. In this certainty she welcomed the spies and did not die with those who opposed the God of Israel. Rahab had a far more consistent faith than the generation that passed through the Red Sea, drank from a rock, saw the glory of God over the tabernacle day and night, and ate the manna from heaven. She only heard of God's mighty deeds; Rahab had seen none of them, but she was certain he would take over her city. God does not push away any who believe in him; he spared her life. Some have hearts that will not believe no matter how much privilege they have (3:7-11). Rahab had only hearsay and believed; she shames those with so much more. (See also Matthew 12:38-42.)

## **11:32-38 The Concluding Review**

The writer has surveyed OT history from creation to entering the land. He had made his point, but there were so many more he could refer to as exemplary examples of the certainty that comes by trusting God's Word. These came in the period of the judges, the monarchy, the prophets, and even Maccabean times between the Old and New Testaments. He names some judges, one king and no prophets. Their achievements could be as public as fighting a war and as private as facing torture and death. We detect the days of Daniel and his companions when it mentions lions and quenching flames. It sounds like David running from Saul when it speaks of escaping the edge of the sword. I doubt the writer would speak this way unless he felt his readers recognized these incidents in the OT.

As the paragraph progresses, there is less of surviving hardships as in 11:32-35, and more of being killed in them (11:35-38). Some like Daniel and his friends had relief during this life, but with others there was none. Some women had loved ones returned to them from death. Others were not spared; they were content to wait for a better resurrection than a temporary extension of days on earth. Reference to insult, persecution, and loss of property in 11:35-37 is the deliberate agenda of the writer; he chose to show a similarity to the suffering expressed in 10:32-34. He is about to say, "Let us run with perseverance the race set out for us." First he will hold up as marvelous examples to us how well they ran their race.

The murder by stoning may refer to the killing of prophets (Matthew 23:29-36). Jewish tradition says Isaiah was sawn in two. The world was not worthy of them. We are left to admire them and in spite of all they suffered, no effort is made to make us feel sorry for them. Great reward has overwhelmed their trouble; their suffering is not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed (Romans 8:18). The coming exhortation in 12:1 & 2 is to live up to their example. The final loss for these pilgrims was of home, shelter, and ordinary clothing. Yet their trouble was swept away by the reward of God's commendation and the "something better" he has for them to enjoy eternally (11:39,40).

**11:39,40 Bringing the saints together.** God's great purpose has always been "*to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ,*" (Ephesians 1:10). This truth has been a major difficulty for dispensationalism. God does not have two different agendas, one for Israel and one for the church. 11:39 says the OT saints have not yet received all that had been promised to them. Abraham in his flesh is not now walking on this earth, yet the earth is his promised eternal possession. A resurrection is coming for him. The Lord's timing is that the better thing planned (i.e., the resurrection and all that follows it) will not occur until all of them (the OT saints), and we who live after the first coming of Christ are made perfect together. In my opinion, this argues strongly for a single coming of Christ, (not in phases or stages) rather than a rapture of the church only – which, by the definition of "church" in the dispensational view, does not include OT saints. For me personally, as one indebted by family and many other ties, and grateful for the love, counsel, evangelism, and nurture of very dear dispensational teachers, this great awkwardness led to a major revision of my understanding of the unity of the Bible. The dispensational doctrine I once held made it necessary to exclude OT saints from the rapture; that became the chief thing that made me reconsider and in due course adopt covenant theology.

**Perfect appears again!** It has been used of Christ in his human life when he had been perfected in obedience (5:9). It is used of the believer who by means of Christ's sacrifice has been perfected forever (10:14), though the needed process of holiness continues. Now it is used in connection with the Second Coming of Christ. All the saints of the ages will be perfected together. The righteous in the heavenly Jerusalem are perfected *spirits* already (12:23); all that is needed to finish their salvation (9:28) is for them to have bodies perfected when raised at the resurrection. Those OT saints commended for their faith (11:39), and we who believe and are saved (10:39), will receive what has been promised. This perfection includes being made like Christ in character (1 John 3:2) and receiving bodies like Christ's glorified body (Philippians 3:21).

## Hebrews 12:1-13

All the examples of faithfulness in chapter 11 were mere men and women. The writer now turns to Christ as his ultimate example of endurance. He also changes the way he speaks. All of chapter 11 was a report of facts; 11:40 switches from 'they' to 'we' and begins to exhort. The end of 12 will give the final warnings of the book. The reflection on the suffering of Christ will be followed by a major pastoral concern, namely the suffering of his readers. Though these sufferings are not the same – Jesus' death was atoning and ours is not – there is still a connection. The writer wants them to know what good purpose there is in their sufferings.

A cycle is now completed. He wrote of their suffering in 10:32-34 and urged a persevering faith; he illustrated with the OT saints the faith he wanted to see produced in his readers. Now in 12, he follows with the cross of Christ and his glory at the right hand of God, and comes back to their suffering again. It is therefore clear that the writer is concerned that they be faithful in their trials and encouraged with the witness of others. If we think of Hebrews as chiefly a doctrinal writing and do not see the strong pastoral motivation in it, we simply do not understand the book. Chapter 11 and the example of Jesus both have to do with suffering in the past. The writer's agenda now is to address the current crisis with careful explanation and exhortation.

Early in Hebrews the writer defended the deity of the Son and then the uniqueness of the Priest in the order of Melchizedek. By using the OT he showed no Jew could reject Christ and support only the sacrifices and priests of Levi without rejecting the Scriptures they claimed to believe. It was a vigorous intellectual and theological defense of the faith. Along with this, was the issue that turning from Christ was apostasy from which there could be no recovery. The issue

was not just an intellectual debate. Having or rejecting Christ has eternal consequences. Chapters 6 & 10 mention their personal trials. In Chapter 12 before final warnings, Hebrews becomes very pastoral, paying careful attention to their need of gentle rebuke and giving patient teaching from Scripture about their sufferings. Both are mixed with a large dose of encouragement, with more to come in 13:5,6. Hebrews has such a pastoral side to it, that the author calls it in his closing comments “a word of exhortation” (13:22).

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**12:1-3** Two encouragements begin chapter 12: the witnesses of the OT and the example of Christ. We always have comfort when we know our trials are not unique to us (Philippians 1:29,30; 1 Corinthians 10:13). The struggles we face are fundamentally the same in every age. The more we see that, the more encouragement we will receive from the testimony of those who have run a good race and finished their course. Just as believers in different locations had fellowship in giving (2 Corinthians 9), Hebrews reveals a unity among saints in different times.

**12:1** Many suppose that this verse is teaching that the OT saints are in the stands of a great stadium observing the life of later believers. The word “witness” in the NT never means observer. The OT saints are witnesses in what they show and exemplify, not in what they supposedly observe of later generations. *They witness to us* of the reality of a lifetime of faithfulness. God is pleased with them (11:6). They are testimonies of endurance and patient faith. Those readers of Hebrews who might be engrossed in their own trouble should be encouraged by the similar experience of OT saints. They ran well and died well; they looked forward to a better resurrection (11:35) and God commended them. The message is clear – let us endure well so we too may have such a commendation.

This verse is not limited to the few OT saints mentioned in chapter 11. They were a small sample; the true picture is of a vast number of faithful “finishers” – in fact, a great cloud of them. In this race we are not involved in a petty, soon-to-be-forgotten sideshow; we are called into a huge enterprise of God that involves a multitude. God encourages us with an immense number of saints (Revelation 7:9).

We do not yet see the city of God with our eyes, so we need spiritual discipline like that of athletes. Runners take off unnecessary garments so they can run better. The weight that will always slow us down is our sin – any sin. The Christian is to be proactive in discipline and aware of peculiar weaknesses so that we do not cater to them.

The writer is a pastor who places himself with his people. He says *let us* throw off, *let us* run, *let us* fix our eyes on Jesus. The readers know he is in the same struggle. This is side-by-side fellowship. The verse assumes that we have sin. A call to holiness (12:14) is never an assumption that we will ever be free of sin in this life.

The appeal to run with perseverance means we cannot be satisfied with faithfulness in the past as a reason to become lazy or dull (5:11). He makes a similar point in 10:32-39. Since the race is marked out for us – obviously by God – it is our obligation to participate. Anything less is rebellion. Laxity amounts to choosing the wrong example (4:11) such as those who, in unbelief, would not enter the promised land (3:16 – 4:11).

**12:2,3 The Example of Jesus** It is a distortion of the gospel to present Jesus only as an example. In his unique redeeming ministry he is a Substitute for us as well as the Lord God over us. Scripture does show him in limited ways as an example in John 13:12-17 & 1 Peter 2:21-23.

The call to fix our eyes on Jesus brings back the volume of material about Christ as our high priest in previous chapters. The common tendency to treat doctrine and life as detached from each other is impossible to defend in Scripture. Fixing eyes on Jesus is essentially the same as fixing thoughts on Jesus in 3:1, and in assimilating truth about him. Fixing eyes on Jesus is not a call to mysticism. It is a call to reflection on the divine revelation of Christ. One longstanding way to distract our attention to Christ is to fix our eyes on pictures God has not given, pictures invented and painted by some man with no idea what Jesus looked like. One of the chief gifts to aid us in fixing the mind on Jesus is the letter to the Hebrews.

**Jesus, the Author and Finisher of Faith** “Author” has no reference to a writer; the word in Greek has the sense of a beginner of something, and even better the leader who is out front as the first. This may seem strange when all the OT examples of faith precede Jesus in time. Their faith was not perfect, while Jesus in his human experience was perfect in obedience. That cannot be said of any other man. The same Greek word appears only three other times in the NT (Acts 3:15; 5:31 & Hebrews 2:10). The context of 2:10 has Jesus defeating the devil to set his people free. This also sets him apart from all the other examples of faith, for that is a unique accomplishment of Christ that precedes and enables his people to resist the devil as a consequence (1 Peter 5:9). For this reason some like to translate the word “champion”. He is the Champion of faith, because he too battled sin and all opposition to God, and he has done so as our leader. We are called into fellowship with Jesus not only in a moral sense of personal sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:8,9) but also in purposeful sharing of his sufferings (Philippians 3:10). We could be sanctified in a moment, as in death (12:23) or the Second Coming (1 John 3:2), but suffering requires living for a while in a hostile world.

The burden of Hebrews is that the readers should finish their race in faith. We fix our eyes of Jesus in the sense of his completing his mission. His being seated at the right hand (again from Psalm 110:1!) emphasizes completion. In Christ we have eternal life, but not eternal conflict. One great privilege of this brief time prior to his Coming is that this is our only opportunity to suffer for him. He has finished his race; now he is getting us through ours. The word for *Finisher* is not found anywhere else in the Bible or in any Greek writing of the time of Hebrews. It is a form of “perfect” (5:9), perhaps coined for this verse! We should remember that many things have been accomplished. The incarnation, offering, resurrection and ascension are all history. Those called to finish their race need the clear sense that much has been done. One of us, One who became a man, is already resurrected and glorified in heaven. He is the forerunner (6:20), already there with more to follow. We are not called to frustration but to active involvement in a great contest with a large number of winners as examples, plus Jesus the Captain of his team who is already home.

“*For the joy set before him*” – this is often taken to mean Jesus’ motivation in suffering; he knew what good he would accomplish. That interpretation may be correct; if so, we ought to see it as the joy he would have in his finished mission and the ultimate answer to his prayer in John 17: 24. Since Christ is presented here as an example, the implication is that we too will be satisfied and joyful for finishing the race well (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Perhaps the *joy* Jesus faced has reference to the joy he declined in favor of going to the cross, knowing the shame and pain but refusing to consider that a reason to divert him in his race. This interpretation means there was a joy that would tempt him to turn to it and away from the race marked out for him by the Father. He chose the Father’s will (10:7-10) instead of a different joy before Him, and that is the example he is for us. Whether this view is correct, it is clear that the order was the cross prior to glory (1 Peter 1:11; Hebrews 2:9,10) and that order was standard for Jesus and is for us. We cannot run a good race if our attitude is different in this matter (Philippians 2:5).

**12:3 Consider Him** The language here is not the softer “let us” speech of vv.1,2; it is an imperative. We are commanded to think on Christ’s endurance of opposition. If we do not, we will be surprised by trials (1 Peter 4:12) and unprepared. Considering the kind of race he ran and its conclusion will not discourage us, but not thinking about it will. We deal with deep mysteries and we must still believe the truth, even when we do not fathom the situation. God, in an intentional encounter with evil, chose that the Son of God would face the opposition of sinful men. We need to consider him to be willing to endure the same.

**12:4-11** These verses contain correction, but they mainly provide explanation before exhortation is resumed. Here is an explanation from God on the purpose of our suffering. It is hardly complete to tell the readers of Hebrews that they ought to suffer well because others did. The readers’ current hardship also had a purpose. It was a blessing to them, and a benefit their loving heavenly Father will not deny any of his children.

**12:4,5** The struggle against “sin” is probably the same as the opposition of sinners (v.3) faced by Jesus. Thus it probably does not refer to a private struggle with sin in the heart, but to the external opposition of

persecution. That kind of sin has the obvious possibility of bloodshed, but the readers of Hebrews had not experienced death.

Two kinds of reproof appear here. The writer reminds them that they have not suffered to the point of death as Jesus did. This puts their trial in more accurate perspective. We are tempted to magnify our trouble beyond reality. The other is a gentle rebuke that they have forgotten some word of God that so directly addresses their situation. This means the text was indeed known to them and that it had fallen out of consideration in their thinking. We probably know many Scriptures that we fail to connect to our lives. Our lives will have more peace and righteousness when we remember Scripture we have forgotten. The writer repeats the Word of God to them from Proverbs 3:11,12. The writer's rebuke is that they have overlooked an encouraging word from the Lord. The Proverbs text is Solomon speaking to his son, but the Holy Spirit had it recorded for us so that it would be our heavenly Father speaking to us.

**12:5,6 The Scripture they forgot** (Proverbs 3:11,12) The intimate language "my son", begins a loving explanation. The Lord's discipline means he owns us as his own; he loves us and has a good purpose in his discipline. Their experience of sin against them, the opposition of sinners, was what they could see. Proverbs 3 is what they needed to understand. We face the danger of misreading God's purpose and viewing trouble as the same kind of treatment from the Lord as what the opposition delivers. That would be a serious mistake. God's discipline comes in the bond of sonship, in which God is not passive in his parental activity. In love, he wants what is better for us. In his wise discipline, he trains us in righteousness, and he may even use the sins others commit against us for our benefit.

**12:7-11** We have a model to help us understand. This model is imperfect. Not all earthly fathers are alike; many still realize that there was often a good motive in their discipline. If we receive none from an earthly father it indicates more than carelessness; it shows he has no sense at all of the neglect of his child. It is a denial that we are accepted as sons. The discipline of God (Deuteronomy 8:5) is much better. Its motive is pure and it comes in his wisdom. So we believe his word that it is good for us. We respected earthly fathers and we must respect God our Father too.

God is called "the Father of spirits" (Numbers 16:22). It is another way to say we must remember that the One who loves and disciplines us is God, God above all, above all these other beings referred to as spirits. No one is more exalted than God. If we can accept the discipline of a fallible father and respect him, surely we can submit to the sovereign wisdom in whatever the Lord has marked out for us (12:1). Sharing in God's *holiness* (the Greek word is used only here in the NT) may be a description of the final state of the believer, in the sense of being brought to glory (2:10). If so, it is still clear that current discipline in suffering is contributing to that goal. We enjoy a measure of the harvest of peace and righteousness now, a kind of before-dinner-taste (Ephesians 1:13,14), yet full salvation (9:28) is in the coming age (Isaiah 32:17). Being comfortable with the world is detrimental. The Lord has good ways to loosen us from it.

**12:10** "That we may share in his holiness" 12:11 "A harvest"

Confessing Christ is probably what provoked opposition. Boasting in Christ (3:6) and confessing boldly brought to them a stiff reaction from sinners. Hebrews teaches that the pain is short term, but life (v.9) and the harvest of righteousness and peace is the lasting good we gain (v.10). We come to share in God's holiness. Suffering is handed out by men. Training, strengthening, and sanctifying is the gracious work of God comprehended by faith. Issues become clearer to us when we are hated for Christ's sake. Surely we see our pilgrim life more clearly in this world. Surely we look much more to the city of God when we suffer in the city of man. Our sanctification is not only the will of God (1 Thessalonians 4:3), it is the agenda of God. He loves his children too much to let us wander in sin. God is determined to lessen our affection for the world, for friendship with it is enmity with God (James 4:4).

The absence of discipline would indicate the absence of Fatherly attention to us! The experience of discipline is the Father training us for running the race. He not only put us in it but trains us for it (5:14). "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word," (Psalm 119:67).

**12:12,13** Feeble hands and unsteady knees; this is the body language of discouragement in Isaiah 35:3,4, connected to a fearful heart. Hebrews quotes a little of Proverbs 4:26. In its larger context, Proverbs 4:20-27 mentions many parts of the body in father-son counsel, urging the son in the path of righteousness. By choosing “level paths” for their feet in Proverbs 4, the writer maintains his analogy of running a good race. The call to strengthen arms and knees is simply to take to heart all that has been said earlier in chapter 12. To fix the eyes on Jesus, to consider Him, and to remember God’s word of encouragement will strengthen the heart. Hebrews does not pump up enthusiasm by drawing on internal resources. The heart is “strengthened by grace” (13:9). Weariness (12:3) and losing heart (12:5) are serious threats to the health of the church. This kind of issue requires pastoral attention and teaching, and this very doctrinal book does not leave it out.

The sense of a level path in Proverbs 4 is ethical since the counsel there is choosing righteousness over sin. Sin hinders running the race marked out for us (12:2). The Lord taught that the level path is straight (Matthew 7:13,14), so it does not turn in any direction contrary to God’s revelation. The level path heads heavenward (Philippians 3:13,14) to the city that is to come (13:14). Here we run for we are pilgrims going somewhere; in the New Jerusalem we shall walk (Revelation 21:24) relaxed because we are at home with the Lord.

Christ has arrived at home (12:2). It is right that he should be seated and that we should still be running. We do not coast to heaven. We arrive in God’s rest only by ceasing from our works (4:9,10). We are safe and assured through faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ; then we make every effort to enter his rest (4:11). We do this with diligence to make our hope sure (6:11). The church should be warned that the real problem with slackers is that they may not be headed to heaven at all! (More people should read Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress.)

The writer probably does not describe all in the church as “lame ones”. Only some had the habit of absence in 10:25, not all. The continuing good works in 6:10 show they were not all lame. The recurring burden of “not one” in 3:12 and 4:1, reveals the writer’s burden for the lame. Thus I conclude the lame are the weaker ones. The strong must think of them (Romans 15:1). When the strong run a good race, it encourages others to do the same. The strategy of ministry in Hebrews stresses the effect of mutual encouragement (3:13). Fellowship is not for fun; it is for a joint pilgrimage to the city with foundations. “ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus...” (Romans 15:5).

**A little review!** Our suffering is a fellowship of the suffering of Christ since we face the same opposition and hostility that Jesus endured. In finishing well, he is our chief example. Our suffering has been “marked out for us” by our loving Father in the peculiar time, place and opportunity in which he has placed us. We are to believe his encouraging explanation of these things, submit to it in faith, and respect him as the Supreme “Father of spirits”. In combining suffering with confessing Christ (remember, the hostility endured was in reaction to something!) He trains us and works in us an increase of peace and righteousness anticipating the goal of sharing his holiness. On the path we run we are to help each other.

## Hebrews 12:14-29

The race of the Christian may result in fatigue and discouragement with drooping hands and lame legs (12:12-13). Quitting the race is a temptation. Forgetting the big picture and seeing – not by faith but by the senses – only what is immediate and touchable is a grave danger. A classic example is found in the choices of Esau who treated eternal things as worthless. He is a negative example, the opposite of all the examples of true faith in chapters 11 & 12. Judas is not mentioned; in Hebrews, Esau is the classic apostate. In this section appear the last two warnings of the sermon. As is typical in Hebrews, they are combined with encouragement of what we already have in Christ (12:22-24). It is one thing to be discouraged, which happens with believers, but it is eternal peril to turn away from Christ, disregarding God’s promises while hoping for an easier life now.

**The Structure of Hebrews 12:** 12:14-29 shifts from suffering as beneficial chastening in 12:1-13 to the danger of apostasy. We must not reject the God who speaks (vv.19,20,24,25). These verses are a unit, but those who read the NIV are deprived (yet again) of a conjunction at the beginning of v.18. That missing conjunction indicates that the words that follow are related to the example of Esau. The preaching is very direct – unlike the “Let us” language in 10:19-25. It uses the second person in verses 14,18,& 25; the last paragraphs are linked by the repetition of “speaks” in vv.24,25.

Chapter 13 is a large footnote worthy of the book, but it is here in the strong preaching of chapter 12 that the sermon reaches its conclusion. Twice in 12:1-13 & 12:14-29 it follows a pattern of exhortation (either as appeal or warning) followed by exposition (explanation) and then exhortation again.

**A Summary:** A number of themes throughout Hebrews are mentioned in the concluding segment of the sermon. Such repetition provides a way to discern the great burden of the writer and the response he was seeking:

- Forfeiting blessings through carelessness: **12:15-17** ... (*see also: 2:1-4; 4:1,2,11; 10:24,25;35,36*).
  - Mutual responsibility for each other: **12:15** ... (*see also: 3:12,13; 4:1; 10:19-25*).
  - The unchangeable finality of the apostate's loss: **12:16,17** ...(*see also: 3:7- 4:11; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 10:38,39*).
  - The contrast of covenants: **12:18-24** ... (*see also: 8:5-13; 9:1-28; 10:1-18*)
  - The contrast of mediators (Jesus and Moses): **12:18-24** (*see also 3:1-6; 7:22; 8:6; 9:15;* ).
  - The unapproachable God vs. access to Him: **12:18-24** ... (*see also 4:14-16; 6:19,20; 7:19,25; 9:11-14; 9:24; 10:10,12-14, 19-22*).
  - The blood of Christ: **12:24** ... (*see also 9:11-28; 10:19,29; 13:12,20*).
  - Hearing the God who speaks: **12:25-27** ... (*see also: 1:1,2; 2:1-4; 3:7-4:14; 5:11-14; 6:13-20; 8:8-13; 10:36-39*).
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**12:14-17 The Example of Esau** This opens with an appeal for peace and holiness. Both words may refer to a relationship with God. We have the peace of reconciliation through Christ (Romans 5:1-11). We have been granted the holiness (or perfection) of the purging of our sins by the blood of Christ (9:14; 10:10,14). Such blessings are the kind of thing that mattered so little to Esau. 12:14 cannot mean that our pursuit increases reconciliation through Christ's blood, for we add nothing to his blood. The peace called for is with others, so the pursuit is for living in harmony and holiness (2 Timothy 2:22). Esau never had such a pursuit. Pursuing holiness is pursuing a gift not found in any source but Christ. Hebrews is not telling us to chase after our own morality. To forsake Christ is also to turn from all the results of his salvation.

**12:14** Without holiness no man will see the Lord. (For this see Appendix J: Is Holiness a Factor in Justification? below.)

**12:15** There is no way to see to it that no one misses the grace of God unless there is some kind of accountability among believers and the mutual encouragement of 3:13. We are to confess Christ together (3:1; 4:14). The appeal of 10:19-25 is for a life shared with others. Hebrews surprises those of us conditioned by the individualism of Western culture when it moves so naturally from supportive communal life to missing the grace of God and becoming like Esau. One rejects the grace of God by rejecting the Son of God. A life without holiness shows this has already happened. Esau had other pursuits than holiness. We miss the grace of God by unbelief, no matter how much exposure we may have to his grace. God knows those who are his (2 Timothy 2:19); we do not. The church cannot see a relationship known only to God, but the church can observe conduct and respond accordingly.

For “bitter root” see Deuteronomy 29:18. Bitterness here does not refer to a poor attitude in an unhappy person; it is the poison of having in the congregation an individual whose heart [like Esau’s] turns from the Lord to idolatry. Left unrestrained, it will only grow to cause much trouble; others will also defect. Esau is an example either of sexual immorality (assumed because he had two wives), or it may be a metaphor for his defection from the Lord. Covenantal unfaithfulness is often stated in the OT in terms of sexual unfaithfulness, as in Ezekiel 16 & 23. Esau was sensual in his choice of a meal over his birthright. He thought little of the Lord God he could not see, caring only for this life, a man so different from the faithful saints of 11:6,10,27. Esau’s life was godless.

Esau gave up his privilege as the firstborn. Later when it was taken from him and he sought to gain it back, it was too late. His remorse was over his loss, not his sin. The apostate cannot be brought to godly sorrow and true repentance again (6:4-6). When the apostate finally learns loss and seeks to “repent” in a self-serving way, it is too late. The ESV says, “he found no chance to repent”. Isaiah 34 speaks of the great loss of the descendants of Esau, the great apostate of the OT. From the same womb came Jacob, i.e., Israel, a father of God’s people. Jacob was a wicked man whose life was changed in God’s gracious salvation. He became a man of faith who pursued holiness (11:21) and gave thanks for God’s grace. Esau spurned and lost the blessing and inheritance that was his covenantal right.

## 12:18-24 The Contrast of Two Covenants

This is one of my favorite passages in God’s Word. It is astute in making a clear distinction how we approach God, either with or without Christ as our mediator. It presents the end of our race and the glory of the coming kingdom as the present possession of the believer. No matter what suffering we may face – and the people who first read Hebrews faced much trouble – we have before us the life of heaven. We have come to the Judge who has not judged us in our sin but in our covenant Guarantor (7:22). Being judged in this way, we are accepted in him.

Here we see a fully unified worship of heaven and earth in which every saint of God who has ever lived is included. No rebel angels are included. It is all very God centered. The writer moved by the Holy Spirit to write it, does not mention the Spirit, but he too, with the Father and Son, is here as the living God.

I urge all who study these notes to read and ponder this marvelous description of the divine reality the world cannot see and would not enjoy. It is like the conclusion of Romans 8 with a sense of triumph. Here is a most satisfying remedy for all who feel the temptation to give up the race.

**12:18-21, the Unapproachable Scene of Mount Sinai** Hebrews does not intend to give the history of the event at Sinai when the law was given. It has a deliberate perspective; the writer is emphasizing the difference in two situations. God was unapproachable at Sinai; even Moses, the mediator of the old covenant trembled. God is not even mentioned in vv.18-21! Everything described here was what they could sense by touch, sound, and sight. Their experience was vivid but with no encounter with the Lord. [Note that *mediator* is used in Hebrews only of Christ; though Moses was a mediator briefly, only Christ remains our Mediator.]

The scene is one of terror. The words chosen are the imagery of danger: fire, darkness, gloom, storm, and a loud trumpet blast. They begged for relief. Few today present God in terms that frighten, but Hebrews does. There is nothing more terrifying than a holy God announcing his law to sinners who must then face his justice for breaking it. God rejects sinners; he is unapproachable by us, unless we have the Son of God as our Priest Intercessor. If Christ is out of the picture, we live in the dread of 12:18-21. The gospel is that Christ has taken our sin and death for us; thus he brings sons to glory. Unlike the scene at Sinai, the glorious Presence of God is no longer a threat to us. He does not serve only to change our status; he brings the law breakers he saves to holiness (2:9-11). Moses could do none of these things.

## 12:22-24, Seven Encouraging Facts Related to the Presence of the Lord in Mount Zion

**1. You come to Mount Zion.** At Sinai they could not approach even the base of a mountain. In the new covenant, sinners made perfect are welcomed to Mount Zion without a barrier to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God – not three places, but one. We do not come to a law that accuses us and declares us guilty for our sin. Those described here have already come to the Lord who has forgiven their sins and remembers them no more (10:17). Those who hold to continuing sacrifices could find them on earth in the Jerusalem below (Galatians 4:24-26). That Jerusalem would soon be destroyed, leaving those who reject Christ in favor of obsolete offerings, with no Christ and no sacrifice of any kind (Hosea 3:4), no altar, and no access to God. The joy of forgiven sinners is in the language of a new exodus in Jeremiah 31:1-30 when redeemed sinners come to Zion. Then at Jeremiah 31:31, the promise of a new covenant is given.

**2.** You come to angels in vast numbers. Early in Hebrews, the writer clarified their subordination to the Son. Angels worship and serve (1:6,7). In the city of the living God, we do that together in a joyful assembly. Their joy joins with the joy of the redeemed.

**3.** You have come to the church comprised of God's firstborn. (Esau treated his right as the firstborn carelessly and lost it.) The "firstborn" is a term used to express the exalted position of Christ (1:6; Colossians 1:15-17; Romans 8:29; Revelation 1:5). With others, it indicates those consecrated to God as in the first ones born of man or animals (Exodus 13:2,12,13). Among the nations, Israel his chosen (Deuteronomy 7:6), was his firstborn. "*Israel is my firstborn son*" (Exodus 4:22). The church in this text is the holy nation of all the redeemed (1 Peter 2:9). Their names have been written in heaven. (A strong verb is used here for enrolled, found also in Luke 10:20 and Revelation 21:27.)

**No Esau's** No beneficiary in the new covenant is like Esau; none is apostate. The real citizens of Zion cannot apostatize, since no sins will be held against them (10:17), and the particular sin of rejecting Christ (1 Corinthians 12:3) can occur among them (10:16). It is impossible to bring apostates back to repentance (6:4-6), but because of the Spirit's effective work, it is impossible for those on whose hearts the law is being written to turn away (Jude 24,25; 1 Peter 1:3-5). The blood of Christ has redeemed them; he is the personal guarantee (7:22) of their inheritance (9:15). He always lives to intercede for them (7:25), and never fails in what he seeks for us. There are no Esau's in the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven. For all those the Mediator of the new covenant represents, the Lord will surely be our covenant God, and we will surely be his people – with no exceptions to render the new covenant ineffective like the one mediated by mere Moses.

When v.22 says, "*you have come*," it is not an assertion that all in the visible church are surely saved. It speaks of the true church within the professing church as in 6:9-11 where the writer expresses confidence in the genuineness of their salvation. (See also 10:39 and 3:1). Yet he does this, always aware that there may be someone among them who turns away from the living God (3:12) and so cannot come to the living God (12:22-24).

**4.** You have come to God. Such words must ring in our hearts as evidence of the ultimate goal of our salvation. This is the hope of Job 19:26 and Matthew 5:8. The wicked have no interest in him (Romans 8:7; John 14:17) while the believer waits for him (9:28) and loves his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). It is to God the Judge of all they have come. Positioned in the middle of the seven items, means in the writing of that culture that it has been given greatest emphasis. In the old covenant, they came to a mountain without coming to God. In the new covenant, we have come to God already. The writer dares to present God as Judge without any overtones of terror! God was also Judge in vv.18-21. The difference is that the Judge has no condemnation (Romans 5:16; 8:1) for the person justified in Christ. If the Judge accepts us we are not guilty, and if he accepts us we are righteous. As a boy I heard Christians sing with joy:

The terrors of law and of God with me can have nothing to do;  
My Savior's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.

**5.** You have come to the spirits of righteous men made perfect. This refers to those who have died; their bodies were buried, and their spirits are now with Christ, not passively, but in the joyful assembly.

**Is Justification Limited to Forgiveness?** It is characteristic for Hebrews to speak of purification from sin from the ceremonial unclean / clean angle. But to call men **righteous** requires more than the forgiveness stated as perfected or purified. Righteousness always involves obedience. It is not possible to be justified only in the sense of sins removed. Every covenant with man demands righteousness, and in the new covenant we have a Mediator who meets our every need (7:26)! Justification has two sides. In Christ righteousness is as much ours as cleaning the conscience. No one can be justified in a bare declaration that means we are not guilty of sin unless there is a corresponding and inseparable verdict of righteousness with it. Unless we are righteous, we are sinners! God is incapable of an irrational decree. A man who lacks righteousness is sinful (James 1:22-25). Genuine forgiveness

must address this need of righteousness. The demand of obedience is an ever-present factor in the judgment of God when he pronounces men perfect through the blood of Christ (10:14).

Some suppose that the overriding preoccupation in Hebrews on purification from sin means we have perfection apart from the judicial demand for righteousness. 12:23 makes explicit that the spirits of those who died in Christ are indeed *righteous*. It did not use the word *perfect*. They were not perfect in righteous conduct when they died. With incomplete sanctification, their necessary righteousness could only be acquired from Christ, and it was essential for their entrance into the heavenly Jerusalem. Without perfect righteousness, we can only face God in the fear of Sinai. The teaching of purification from sin without the simultaneous imputation of righteousness is a false and impossible distinction. Righteousness also comes by faith (11:7) as surely as purification does. [Note that 11:7 is in Hebrews!] The positive requirements and negative sanctions of the law have both been fully met for us by our covenant Mediator. What God has joined together in one Scripture, theologians in other texts should not seek to separate.

**6.** You have come to Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant. In the other scene on Mount Sinai, Jesus was the Lord God of Israel giving the law, the law his people broke and were helpless to obey. The law was mediated by Moses (John 1:17), but the new covenant, effective to meet every demand on us, came when the Lord the Law Giver came to help us (2:14-18). The Law Giver became our human Law-Keeper (1Corinthians 1:30). Then he willed to be charged and killed in our place as the Law Breaker (2 Corinthians 5:21). Now in him, believers are considered by God to be law keepers. We are treated accordingly as he brings many sons to glory (2:10), right into the Presence of the Judge of all with confidence (4:16). The Mediator of the new covenant delivers all his children. He says, “Here am I, and the children God has given me” (2:13). He destroys their enemy, leaving none in Satan’s control. He sets them free and, as their priest, has satisfied God for their sins (2:17).

No member of the new covenant can have Christ as his Mediator and fail to arrive in the city of the Living God. Our priest has no failures. All in Christ have right of access already. The way has been opened (10:19,20) by Christ. Hebrews does not teach that our access depends on some further condition that falls on us. The perspective of 12:22-24 is not that here is what you might come to if you keep covenant, but here is what you have come to since you have Christ as your Mediator.

**7.** You have come to his sprinkled blood. Apart from the covenanted promise of no further flood to destroy the earth, God has made no later universal covenant with man. The sprinkled blood was often a threat to the one entering a covenant. In the new covenant, the threat has been taken by the Mediator Himself, something Moses as mediator never did. The sprinkled blood shows the application of all the benefits of the priestly work of Christ has begun.

Abel’s blood cried for vengeance concerning his murder by his brother Cain. Jesus’ blood speaks peace to us, because he became a man not to kill us but that he might save his sinful brothers. He speaks a better word, forgiveness, than justice imposed on us. He speaks forgiveness because he satisfied justice for us. He speaks in his church declaring the Name of the Lord, leading us in singing his praises (2:12).

**12:25-29** In my opinion, there are three paragraphs in 12:18-29, each beginning with a “you.” The teaching that “you have not come” and “you have come” follows the issue whether we will be like Esau who missed the grace of God. That issue is whether the grace of the new covenant will be rejected. This possibility provokes his stern warning, the last of six.

“The One who speaks” is God. Only his Word shakes heaven and earth. The Lord who spoke on earth is the same One speaking from heaven “Today” (3:7,13; 4:7). He has spoken in his Son (1:2) and spoken on oath, appointing him Priest forever. We are given access to these words. He spoke again in the promise to Israel of a new covenant. The Holy Spirit was speaking when he had David say the words from Christ in Psalm 40. Hebrews is rich in what God speaks. To reject what he says is to reject him.

Those in the church can be careless like Esau. They can drift from the message first spoken by the Lord (2:1-4). He is the God who has spoken of his pleasure in his Son. The Father showed this after Jesus had obtained eternal redemption (9:12) when he told him to sit while he made Jesus’ enemies his footstool (1:13; 10:12). In

this way God speaks to us of Jesus' work as finished and successful. To detract from it is to refuse him who speaks the gospel from heaven. Apostates refuse the God who speaks, but those who have come in true faith to Mount Zion listen. If God is ignored, there is no escape (2:3); salvation comes in heeding his Word (John 5:24).

The apostate in the church and in his high exposure to the gospel, comes to Mount Zion in one sense only; he has come to the real thing, but has never entered in. Like the ones promised the land of Canaan who would not enter, the apostate rejects, but it is the real thing he rejects and so he is lost. He is a covenant breaker like Esau, who never entered into the life, inheritance and blessing of the covenant.

**12:26** On Sinai God's voice shook the earth, but only the earth. That was not the final shaking. The great shaking to come, quoted from Haggai 2:6 is the Day approaching (10:25). That day is the terror of God shaking heaven and earth; the trembling earth will flee in fear from the wrath of the Lamb (Revelation 6:15-17). Yet for those who do not refuse him now, it is a day we are eager to see (9:27,28; Revelation 22:12,20).

**12:27,28** Some things can be shaken (1:10-12) – created things – and that includes the mountain that can be touched (v.18) and everything related to it. Some things cannot be shaken, such as the oath of the Lord that Christ is a Priest forever. The obsolete covenant (8:13), obsolete sacrifices (10:18), and the obsolete priesthood (7:12,18) are also shakable and will all disappear. How foolish to refuse him who speaks from heaven in favor of what will vanish from the earth.

The “*you* who have come to Mount Zion” is now the *we* who “are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (NIV). Thus he sternly warns those who waver, without taking the view that those in Christ are in jeopardy. “*We are receiving*” shows the same family kinship with them as the “*you have come*” in v.18. The constant concern over apostasy does not hinder family language in chapter 2 and throughout the letter, yet brotherly speech does not restrain warnings of apostasy.

The call is to be thankful for what God has provided and promised in Christ. By his blood we have access so we can worship acceptably in this Mediator. Every other kind of worship is unacceptable. The Son learning obedience by what he suffered, the work of our Priest, his entrance into heaven with the way opened to us as well, plus the loyal assembly of saints in heaven, and a lasting city to come – all this makes us worship with deep gratitude, reverence, and awe.

The Esau's in every age will trample the Son of God underfoot and treat the precious blood shed for Christ's church (Acts 20:28) with disdain. The One who speaks from heaven will be answered with contempt. Then sinners will find the God they denied is the God whose holy fire consumed our sin-offering on Calvary. The covenant God (“our God”) will be a consuming fire against all who decline the only Mediator able to rescue from his wrath (John 3:36).

## Appendix 12 A Is Holiness a Factor in Justification?

Some say 12:14 shows that since we cannot see the Lord without holiness, our holiness must be a condition we meet in order to see the Lord. Such a view holds that our justification will be determined finally by our holy living. This means justification rests not only on Christ, but also on our contribution towards a hoped for, favorable, final verdict on the Judgment Day. It also means once a person is justified initially, there remains a question whether he will eventually be justified at all. Some say our justification must be ‘maintained’. Those who teach this, teach a justification by our faithfulness not by faith alone. They argue that justification is by a faith that works (i.e., justification is received by faith and OUR obedience), rather than a faith that simply receives the gift of justification in its completeness.

They further confuse the righteousness of justification by including OUR holiness as what is necessary to obtain it. Ours is added to the holiness of Christ! Since our righteousness is always defective, only an unholy God could ever pronounce it acceptable. This view is a grave error. Only faith apart from all attempts at righteousness is consistent with justification being a gracious gift of God. It must be by faith alone and not by our holiness in order to be by God's grace (Romans 4:16).

12:14 teaches that holiness is always present in a true believer. Esau, in spite of his covenant privilege as a child of Abraham, did not truly believe in the God of his fathers. Jacob believed but Esau went his carnal way. His lack of holiness was rooted in his unbelief. Those without holiness do not have the Spirit, and do not belong to the Lord (Romans 8:9-11), whatever covenant privilege they may have had. Hebrews teaches we cannot live like Esau and see the Lord, but it is not teaching that we will see the Lord as a result of our holiness. Rather, it is the blood of Christ alone that gains us access to the Lord, (10:19) to see him. Holiness results and access to God is provided, when Jesus' blood has been sprinkled on our sinful hearts (10:22). Jesus is the full Guarantor of the new covenant (7:22) who has already met all covenant conditions for us. Only by his mediation do we receive the promised eternal inheritance (9:15). In fact, such is the nature of his salvation that Hebrews teaches he has already made holy (10:10) those he is making holy (10:14; 2:11). (See also Appendix I: The Present Perfection of Imperfect People in Hebrews 10.)

Justification by holiness is not taught in Hebrews. The device we must be careful to discern is taking a description of believers and turning a *description* into a *condition* of justification. It is the old error of suggesting that the way to become a Christian is to be one. Those who cannot distinguish between the holiness of Christ and the partial holiness found in us, simply do not have a clear sense of the gospel.

Another Hebrews text mistreated in a similar fashion is 5:9. Jesus is the source of salvation for all who obey him. Here Christians are again described in terms of salvation's moral effect. It does not teach that this effect is the cause. Morality is a result of salvation, never a means to it, because if it were, no sinner could ever attain it.

## Appendix 12B: The Views of William L. Lane on Covenant

I have tried to make my notes simple for those who do not have English as their first language. I have usually avoided complicated questions. This appendix is included because it is relevant to Hebrews, but I have not attempted to maintain simplicity. Many will skip it, but I hope the pastors will read it.

Since I am indebted to the two-volume commentary of Dr. Lane, I must acknowledge that in these notes. His work is to me utterly amazing in its detailed research and exegetical ability. For me it has been a published work worth far more than I paid. He has helped me immensely and I recommend his work with enthusiasm but with reservation. The fly in the ointment relates to covenant obligation in relation to justification. The essay above, Is Justification Limited to Forgiveness? is a partial response to Lane. I believe the issues are of such importance that I ought not to release my notes nor post them on the Internet without expressing my difference with him.

I intended to send my remarks to him so he could clarify his words and even correct any misunderstanding. However, I learned just before writing this that he passed away in March, 1999. Thus what I write lacks the benefit of a response from him. I hope some person with a better handle on his position can respond. If I find anyone clarifies Lane's published words adequately, I will gladly revise my remarks. My reaction to his position concerns the nature of faith/faithfulness; what it means to be in the new covenant; and whether Christ secures salvation for all in the new covenant.

Hebrews deals with early indications of apostasy in the church. There are baptized pseudo-Christians who are part of the church. Their unbelief will result in disobedience and departure from the living God. We consider professing persons as in covenant and label them as Christians because of their profession of faith. We too have both Jacob's and Esau's who profess the Lord as their God. Thus Lane will refer to apostates at times as

Christians. That is not what I am objecting to. We call all in the church Christians even when we know that not each one is. The Lord alone knows.

Lane says people may renounce their heavenly calling (p.459) and lose covenant status (pp.444, 488). This sounds as if he is saying that one with salvation may lose it. Esau and all the apostates of ancient Israel can be described as those who lose covenant benefits. I do not differ with Dr. Lane for that, provided he does not mean that one has been united to Christ in a saving union by spiritual rebirth, and then that that kind of covenantal bond may be broken. Regrettably, among ministers today who profess to be reformed, even in very confessional federations, some think we can be united to Christ and still be lost. It is a contradiction to hold that believers are secure in Christ, and yet those in a living covenantal bond with him may apostatize and be lost. This is more than mere ambiguity; it is error.

At this point, Lane is not specific enough, in my opinion, to make certain he is in the clear on this. He holds that one may lose covenant status, and apparently new covenant status. Can we have Christ as our Priest who atoned for us; and can we have the new covenant mediation of Christ interceding for us, and can we have the Spirit writing God's law on our hearts, and then can we still lose all this? Any Calvinism that says so is simply Arminian. Lane also speaks of the "invalidation of a sacrifice for sin" (p.488). This raises questions that needs resolution. It is one thing to say Christ secures certain things *for us*, but we must be clear whether these benefits are secured *to us*. What is merely available does not save. Salvation delivered is also our hope. It is not just blood shed on the cross, but blood sprinkled on us. In the new covenant (Hebrews 10:15-18), there is no doubt whether the salvation is applied. Lane says, "The session at the right hand is the guarantee of the absoluteness of Christ's exaltation and the utter security of those who have placed their hope in him..." (p.415). This is very sound. There are many more to match it.<sup>29</sup> The problem comes when things are stated in terms of covenant.

Hebrews does not teach a doctrine that Moses as mediator failed to have all his people enter the promised land and that Christ also, even as the Guarantor of the new covenant, may fail to have all those he saves "completely" enter into God's rest. Lane translates 7:25, "He is able to save absolutely those who approach God through him" (p.174). He says further that Jesus' saving includes being "utterly certain" (p.176). My question for him would be, if Christ really saves with utter certainty, is our covenantal faithfulness a factor for entrance into the heavenly Jerusalem?

Lane is in safe territory to present Esau's loss as a covenantal loss. The promises to Abraham were also to Esau, but Esau gave up his inheritance. My major objection is this: In terms of the new covenant – where all sins are forgiven and the heart is made by the Spirit to be obedient – how can those in this covenant in Christ, represented by him in his death for sin and represented by in his covenantal obedience – how can such a soul be lost? Is Christ's saving work invalidated by man so that the gift of eternal life depends on a combination of Christ's objective work and also on our faithfulness?

That current issue on the nature of faith is whether justifying faith has become faithfulness. We are justified by a simple faith that receives. By this I mean that this faith does not provide; it takes; it receives. It looks away from ourselves and all our virtues, all our repentance, and all our faith (let alone faithfulness). It looks to Christ and his work alone. This is the cause of all the inadequate covenantal faithfulness that ever emerges from within. And it always does 30, 60, or 100 fold.

Note the progression of Dr. Lane's thought on pp. 490, 491, especially paragraph 3. I have arbitrarily assigned numbers to the paragraphs:

¶ 1      The new covenant encounter with God signifies access to God in the presence of those who gather for the festive acclamation of his "worship." Christians come to God, the Judge who is the God of all, the one from whom Israel felt estranged at Sinai and fled. They meet him in joyful assembly, together with angels, the faithful men and women of God under both covenants, and Jesus himself. It is the writer's firm conviction that the high priestly

<sup>29</sup> Another is: Re the motif of "the unique self-offering of the high priest Jesus as the ground of Christian certainty: Jesus is our eternal high priest who has opened for us the true presence of God (cf. 10:19-21). His presence behind the curtain is the firm pledge that we also shall pass through the curtain and enter within the inner sanctuary" (p.154).

work of Jesus in his death and heavenly exaltation has secured for Christians in the present time a living relationship with God, which fulfills the promises of the new covenant. Expressed in terms of the vision of vv 22-24, the Christian's experience with God now is the pledge of his ultimate transfer to the actual presence of God in the heavenly city.

¶ 2 The final two images in the writer's vision (v 24), which focus on Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and the efficacy of his sacrificial death, serve to situate the entire vision of the heavenly city in a salvation-historical and covenantal perspective. The eschatological encounter with God is mediated through the encounter with Jesus and with the message of salvation that he proclaimed (2:3-4). The emphasis in v 24 falls on the activating of the final covenant through the death and exaltation of Jesus. It demonstrates that Jesus' death, which secured for the community the objective blessings of the new covenant, is to be interpreted as covenant sacrifice.

¶ 3 This pervasive emphasis upon the covenant is not incidental to the writer's pastoral strategy. Covenant privilege calls for allegiance and obedience. The clear implication of the central paragraph in this section [12:14-29] is that entrance into the city of God is conditioned ultimately on the acknowledgment of covenantal obligation. Loyalty and compliance with covenantal stipulations are grateful responses to the objective blessings secured by Jesus. The privileged status of the Christian community as the people of the new covenant has as its consequence the greater obligation to the voice of the covenant-God.

¶ 4 The sharpness of the warning addressed to the community in 12:25-29 is thus fully justified in the light of the promised blessings by which Christians are to regulate their lives. Those promises, reviewed in vv 22-24, are fully warranted by the new covenant. However, life under the new covenant is conditioned not only by promise in the sense of future blessings but by promise in the sense of future scrutiny. That aspect of the present and future is explored in terms of the promise in Hag 2:6 LXX [This is an error; he means Habakkuk 2:6] that a divine "shaking" will profoundly affect the new covenant community. Those who carelessly ignore the revelation of the eschatological salvation of God through his Son and who show contempt for the blessings of the new covenant cannot possibly escape detection. A discriminating judgment will remove from the community those who through apostasy have denied their character as men and women consecrated to the service of God.

¶ 5 In the final paragraph of the section [i.e., 12:14-29] the developed contrast between the old and the new covenants, which is elaborated in the distinction between warning on earth and warning from heaven, is transformed into the opposition of shaking and unshakable, the removed and that which remains (vv 26-27). This subtle change is significant. It serves to shift the emphasis in the section from the essential difference between the old and new covenants to the crucial distinction between those who are faithful and those who are not within the new covenantal community. The repeated exhortations to faithfulness and warnings against apostasy that have appeared throughout the homily find their culmination in vv 25-29, which express a final, urgent warning based on the proximate nearness of a definitive judgment.

¶ 6 Christians under the new covenant are to enter into an experience of maturity in which all of life becomes an expression of worship...

## My response to Dr. Lane's explanation of Hebrews 12:22-29

Re ¶ 1 I can only wonder in what sense Lane uses the label *Christians*. I note that 12:23 speaks of the spirits of *righteous* men and Lane has spoken of them as *faithful*. I have yet to find any indication that he believes we have the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. Further, what did Christ secure for us, a definite admission into the Presence of God from which we cannot be expelled with Christ as our Priest, or a temporary relationship which can vanish? He has indicated that we can lose covenant status, presumably he means the loss of new covenant status, and that means the new covenant is not really a relationship of absolute safety, even though Jesus is its Guarantor and Mediator. Having a living relationship with God (which is rather vague) does not adequately describe new covenant promises. The promise that God will "*remember their sins no more*" (10:17) gives a secure new covenant status that cannot be invalidated. The new covenant is not that our sins are forgiven for now but that later in the Judgment Day our destiny will be reconsidered when God scrutinizes our faithfulness. That would make confidence, one of the great themes of Hebrews, impossible. Nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39). Romans and Hebrews cannot disagree with each other.

Re ¶ 2 It is proper that Dr. Lane should affirm that this vision is in *covenantal perspective*. V.24 makes that clear. I wonder what the covenantal perspective is. Many assume covenants are all alike with promises from God and covenantal stipulations on us. These stipulations of covenantal allegiance and obedience are

conditions of God's promised blessing. If nothing is added, this slant with a crucial omission, greatly distorts the covenantal perspective for salvation. We must always keep in view the covenantal obedience of Christ who has been made "a covenant for the people" (Isaiah 42:6; 49:8). Here many are lost in confusion. The pathetic error is that Christ's meeting covenant stipulations for us, is omitted from the formula except for forgiveness of sins! I ask my reader to follow this sequence carefully:

- a. God always requires obedience.
- b. Obedience is a requirement for covenantal blessing, no exceptions.
- c. The obedience in our lives can never satisfy God and obtain the ultimate blessing of eternal life.
- d. That is, we do not relate to God in a covenantal way identical to the demands on Adam. Our sin, and only one sin will do it, means we are already covenant breakers.
- e. Yet all hope for a functioning covenant with God that gains his blessing requires perfect obedience. The standard of absolute obedience is unyielding.
- f. The needed obedience is supplied to us graciously by God as a gift.
- g. This obedience is the perfect righteousness of the entire lifetime of Jesus living as a man under the law.
- h. He obeyed for us in human flesh as our substitute.
- i. He has met all covenant obligation upon us for our salvation.
- j. As obedient children we must obey. God never permits us to sin.
- k. If we do not obey it reveals that we have not received the justification that comes in Jesus' obedience.
- l. The obedience in us will be rewarded (graciously) but it is imperfect and could never gain justification for us. We are not to be passive about obedience.
- m. Our covenant obligation in the new covenant is different from Christ's. It is simple faith to receive the gift and righteousness of God in Christ.
- n. Our further new covenant obligation to God is obedience. This he works in us and requires of us. Our righteousness does nothing to gain the status of righteous for us.
- o. Our obedience is an active response of gratitude to and worship of the Lord. This covers all our service and all of our good works, none of which ever merit eternal life.
- p. Our only hope of covenant acceptance and eternal life lies entirely and exclusively in the mediatorial work of Christ who has represented us in both his life and his death.
- q. Having simple faith in Christ secures (since God has so promised) all the blessings of the covenant.
- r. Entrance into the city of God is conditioned on the covenantal obedience and vicarious representation of Christ, and received by a receptive faith.
- s. The new covenant promises and the Spirit creates a new heart, thus producing faithfulness and holiness in us – without which no man shall see the Lord.

Re ¶ 3 Note what Lane has said, "Covenant privilege calls for allegiance and obedience. The clear implication of the central paragraph in this section is that entrance into the city of God is conditioned ultimately on the acknowledgment of covenantal obligation." Unfortunately Lane has unmistakable reference to our covenantal obligation. If he had said we will enter heaven by means of our good works, then many would see the error quickly. Instead he said the same kind of thing in the language of covenant. For many that makes the error plausible. Lane makes no reference here, or elsewhere that I have read in his writing, of the vicarious righteousness of Christ securing our entrance into the city of God. Much that he said earlier in Hebrews about free access by Jesus' sacrificial death (p.284) is undermined by the necessity of our meeting covenantal obligation. Apparently, Jesus by his human faithfulness did not fully meet the every condition for us. Something more is left for us to do. In the view of covenantal moralists, our covenant Mediator does not quite get the job done.

Re ¶ 4 The future judgment will reveal but not decide, who has been blessed by the Father previous to the judgment. The good works show that the Father has already owned us (Matthew 25:34) and produced them in us. If the new covenant is conditioned on some future scrutiny, a scrutiny that in Lane's view can only be a scrutiny of our faithfulness, then justification is not a settled decree; it awaits a future review. This is more than a deflection from the work of Christ; it simply destabilize the effectiveness of Christ bringing all his sons to glory. Jesus does not bring us part way. Christ has already made perfect those who believe. The One who brings to glory also makes men holy (2:10;11). The *making perfect* and the *making holy* are not

identical. One (justification) is a complete saving act that occurs at the moment of faith in Christ, and the other (sanctification) is a variable work that commences with our union with Christ. The notion that one can be made perfect by Christ but enters heaven by meeting his covenant obligation, makes Christ a partial Savior!

If entrance into the city depends on us, we can forget the joyful assembly we have supposedly come to in 12:22-24, for it is a mirage of things hoped for but still in doubt. The appropriate feeling, if entrance is based on our “loyalty and compliance with covenantal stipulations,” is the abject fear and trembling of those who stood before Sinai. Hebrews 12 is teaching the opposite of this. The answer to all uncertainty is that we do have a Great High Priest, and the one issue for us is whether we really believe in Him. For all our failure and sin, we come in confidence to our Priest, as persons already admitted into the Presence of God because of his offering. Jesus’ sacrifice has been accepted for us, and nothing more is needed. The gospel in Hebrews is my answer to Dr. Lane’s otherwise wonderful commentary. I am sad to say that as far as I can tell, it has in it the bitter root of a false doctrine. This error is promoted lately, especially in reformed circles, in the name of covenant and covenantal obligation.

On p. 471, Lane retains no room that *made perfect* might refer to a verdict of righteous. He limits this benefit of being perfect to: sin being purged by the death of Christ, and thereby consecrating the believer. In this way he takes what is rightly the dominant emphasis on perfection in Hebrews to exclude the verdict of righteous. It is an odd verdict if it is one of sin removed while an intolerable absence remains – the absence of acceptable righteousness. (See above: Is Justification Limited to Forgiveness?) Since God requires absolute faithfulness of us, and Adam lost all for all in one sin, the sinner needs to know where he will find the righteousness he needs. How being made perfect can leave this out is a vacuum Lane did not fill.

Hebrews 11:7 “... By this he [Noah] condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”

On p. 340, with reference to 11:7 that speaks of Noah becoming heir of the righteousness that comes by faith, Lane says, “*The Biblical description of Noah as a righteous person is thus subsumed under the aspect of faith. Noah responded to God with a full measure of faith, and this accounts for the attestation of Scripture that he was righteous.*” In short, Noah’s righteousness was his faithfulness. The righteousness received by faith and the righteousness of Noah’s later life after the flood are not the same. By faith Noah received righteousness as an inheritance from God because of Christ. Hebrews 11:7 does not teach that the inherited righteousness bestowed is identical to the righteousness produced in his conduct. It is nonsense to say that Noah inherited his own righteousness. In this same context, Lane speaks of “the righteousness God bestows upon persons of faith” (p.341). Those good words remain undeveloped in his commentary and thus they are vague. It would be good to hear him expand on this, but I do not see how they can be reconciled with all the ways he has more than omitted the imputation of righteousness in his commentary.

Re ¶ 5 The unshakable is the accomplishment of Christ. The danger now is changing the question from what is truly unshakable in 12:22-24, to whether our faithfulness is unshakable. What remains and what is unshakable is what Christ has done to bring us to Mount Zion. What is unshakable provides reason for us to hold firmly to the faith we confess (4:14). To make this part of Hebrews 12 say that the crucial distinction to be those who are faithful and those who are not, is to move everyone to shaky ground. It is crucial whether we believe, and faith will be shown in faithfulness, but making our place in Mount Zion to be the result of us meeting covenant stipulations of allegiance and faithfulness, moves our hope away from the objective work of Christ to the health of our faithfulness. Hebrews does not do that to us. Our hope, even in weakness and with numerous sins, is always in Christ. Our hope is never in the consistency of our response, but in Christ, the object of our faith. Those who refuse him who speaks from heaven are those whose hearts have been turned from Christ, and those are not ones who believe (10:39). That is the danger and that is the warning. We must not have faith in Christ confused with faith in our faithfulness, even though Lane does not state his point so crassly.

I reject Lane’s suggestion in ¶ 5 that the warning from heaven is a warning that rises from the new covenant. The threat of bloodshed for sin in the new covenant was a threat assumed by Christ and not us in the very

moment the new covenant was inaugurated. It is a terrible distortion to think that THIS covenant, which only blesses, is like others that pronounce a curse. Such a view of the new covenant misses that Christ is the surety of the new covenant. Hebrews 12 is showing how unlike each other the two covenants are! When the Lord's Supper was instituted, Jesus held that the new covenant members had sin worthy of death, but his role as mediator of a different kind of covenant was to take that all on himself. The cup is his bloodshed for our sins, not ours. God does not threaten his children with hell. He does threaten all who reject the new covenant, but that is a threat extended to those who have no status in Christ as members of it. He warns those who reject the new covenant, not those who come without fear to Mount Zion because of Christ.

So, I must sadly report that I find Dr. William Lane, who was a notable New Testament scholar and even a graduate of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, to be deficient in his view of covenant. This deficiency is not widespread in his commentary, and his reflection on the work of Christ is excellent, but if he thinks entrance into heaven is conditioned on our faithfulness, then this is a serious inconsistency in his teaching.

## Hebrews 13

Chapter 12 was the end of the Hebrews sermon as a unified sermon. In chapter 13, it is more like a regular letter now. A few important exhortations appear in this postscript, some of which could appear in any letter. Yet even here there is a unity with the rest of the book. Jesus makes people holy through his blood (13:12); clearly, this is still Hebrews.

The close of this letter is an example of gracious Christian speech. It has prayer and asks for prayer. It has greetings, blessings, and encouragements. The strong warnings have been given; they are not repeated, but the encouragement is. The clear evidence is that the writer knows the readers. In some way, he speaks of leaders past and present. This is a word from a churchman; the interest is not just spiritual, evangelistic, moral, and theological; the well being of an established church is evident.

Even though this is postscript, it is very far from being un-theological. Doctrine flows naturally from his pen, and his great interest in the priestly role of Christ comes to expression again. Hebrews 13 would not fit as well on the end of any other epistle.

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**13:1-3** The love commanded for others is shown by the writer himself. Like the Lord, he again calls them "brothers" (2:11,12). His next appeal is worded in such a way in Greek that it reveals that the grace of hospitality was in decline among them, even though they continued to help others (6:10). They had become dull (5:11). When 10:32-34 speaks of their fervor to serve others in prison, it is stated in the past tense, so they needed to be stimulated in this way. 13:1,2 it does not avoid that there is a need for this virtue, yet it urges to keep loving in a way that recognizes that they have this virtue. It follows with an example of a surprise blessing for a person who is a model for us. They would all recognize that it is Abraham again as a good model. Three "strangers" approached; before Abraham knew it was the Son of God and two angels, he had decided to serve them (Genesis 19). He found himself blessed by their presence. This exhortation fits what has gone before in Hebrews. Faith is manifest in persistent confession and also in mutual care for each other. The diligence of 6:11 (vs. laziness) is inseparable from genuine faith.

The matter of prison is quite specific. Some of their number had been (10:34), or may yet be in prison (13:3). A saint famous for his attention to Paul in prison was Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 1:16-18). In Hebrews, Christians are identified not only by their profession with words, but also by the pattern of their deeds. The sacrifice of praise to God is side by side with good works, which are also a sacrifice to the Lord (13:15) and pleasing to him. (In writing these notes, I have had proof-reading help from a number of Christians I have

never met!). The NIV unfortunately omits the word “body” in v.3. We may suffer in the body. Christian sympathy for this kind of trial is very important. We pay attention to our own pains; we are commanded to remember the physical pain of others.

**13:4 Sexual impurity** The most forceful way to state a commandment in the Hebrew language was used in the Ten Commandments in the form “not you shall …” Here in 13:4, the high standard begins with a positive. It is not just that adultery and fornication are horrible, but that marriage should be properly honored! This is a strong corrective to the monastic movements that depreciated marriage as somewhat sub-Christian. Some later texts deliberately omitted the words “among all.” Their notion was that marriage is a concession for those less spiritual people who cannot contain their lust – a demeaning appraisal of marriage though it is a gift of God (Proverbs 19:14). This low view of the goodness of the Creator’s work continues to infect the Roman Catholic Church to this day in denying marriage to its pastors. This leads to an increase of sexual sin!

There are two different ways to disparage marriage. One is given above, i.e., to demean it, and the other is to ignore it. The marriage bed should be kept pure. It is good and beautiful; the Song of Songs, [maybe that means the best one Solomon wrote, the song above all his others!] an entire book of the Bible is dedicated to the full-orbed love of married persons, including erotic love. The other dishonor to marriage is to disconnect sexual fulfillment from the covenant of marriage. This sin may be adultery, the breaking of covenant by a married person, as in Proverbs 2:16-19. Or it may be fornication, the ignoring of the marriage covenant by single persons. Such sin often happens far from the eyes of others. Perhaps this is why we are often reminded that God is the Judge of what others may never see. (See 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8.)

**13:5,6 The love of money** In some Scriptures sexual sin has a close association with greed (Ephesians 5:3; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Colossians 3:5). Sexuality immorality is an obvious form of greed, because it disregards the true welfare of the other. Longing for the needs of self applies also to money. It is easy to magnify what we believe we need. We may work for money but we may not steal it. We must not love it. A fair test whether we love our money is our willingness to part with it so that others benefit. The rich farmer was rich in goods but not rich to God (Luke 12:13-21). Another test is given here – *contentment* with what we have. This is immediately joined a promise in Deuteronomy 31:6. This promise however says nothing about money or the supply of our physical needs, yet the Holy Spirit joins contentment to the promise that we will not be forsaken. This shows that a statement of God’s provision in defeating their enemies (Deuteronomy 31:3-6) may be applied legitimately to another provision. Even though the quotation in v.6 refers to danger from an enemy, the same point can be made from the way 13:6 quotes Psalm 118:6,7. It is a good rule: “The meaning is one, but applications are many.” Thus we are not to love money but be contented with what the Lord has allotted us. He has committed himself to our care.” We have been delivered from the big fear (2:15). His continued presence (v.5) and help (v.6) give reason to remove all the other fears, including the fear of man (Luke 12:4-7; 1 Peter 3:14).

**13:7,8 A Look into the Past** To remember leaders is quite different from obeying and greeting them (13:17, 24). They are to remember esteemed leaders who have died, perhaps those who led them to Christ and baptized them. But they have passed away. The writer has repeatedly pointed to good models beginning in 6:12, and maybe hinting at their legacy of godly evangelists in 2:3. Then there is all of chapter 11, followed by the example of Christ. We see the grace of God in others and learn from it. In 13:7, the emphasis is on the message they had received. The clear intent is that they should not turn from such a heritage. The matter of incipient apostasy is never far from the writer’s mind. He does not want them to throw away their confidence (10:35) nor their own heritage in hearing and responding to the gospel. It is not possible to remember the leaders who have passed away the way the writer wants them to, if they drift from the message learned from them. The human touch here is valuable. The readers of this letter had observed the lives of those teachers, obviously persons faithful to the end. The gospel did them much good and produced admirable fruit in their conduct. He does not want this to fade from their memory. It is another way to suggest, “Be careful what you turn away from!” Apostasy is rejection of Christ (6:6), but 13:7 then shows it also as a repudiation of tender friendships and good memories.

It is in this context that the famous motto and confession appears: “*Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today and forever.*” This brief word shows how propositional truth grabs the heart! It is a statement that cannot be true unless Christ is the eternal Son of God (1:11). Yet its appearance here probably ties in with their good memory of earlier days (10:32). They were urged to remember their former leaders. That is a close association with the Jesus Christ proclaimed to them then. That message has not changed; the Lord of that gospel has not changed, and they must not change either! What was true always will be, including the faith their evangelists and pastors had in Christ.

**13:9-11 Ceremonial foods** The writer moves from the old faith of old teachers, to the danger of new doctrines. The proverb has much truth: “If it is new, it is not true; if it is true, it is not new.” The devil’s storehouse of error is quite sparse; his dull stock lacks the richness of truth eternity cannot exhaust (Ephesians 2:7). The devil is left with recycling old errors with a new coating on them to make them appear novel and exciting. We do not hold our doctrines; they hold us. This is so in God’s truth (Romans 6:17; John 8:32), and since error deceives and takes its victims to hell, we must conclude that what we believe determines life and death. One new doctrine had to do with food. This cannot be a benign issue because it carries people away. This is further evidence that, just as we do not control our sin, because sin controls whoever indulges it; these doctrines are not carried by those who adopt them; rather the new doctrines carry them, and carry them away – away from Christ.

Some food issue is being discussed. Other Scriptures deal with food issues, such as food offered to idols in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 and a form of spirituality by asceticism in Colossians 2. The issue here is ceremonial food. One wonders why this is called a *new* doctrine, since food laws were part of the law. It could be a new argument these Christians were facing for the first time.

My conjecture on this follows. Perhaps the new doctrine related to food was a retort from the resisting Jews against the Christian Jews, and it was having some success. Hebrews was written while the Temple was still functioning. The Temple had for many a powerful emotive effect. When the disciples pointed to it (Matthew 24:1,2) they may have had in mind its grandeur. The Jews would naturally think of it as God’s Temple with a sense of pride. The writer of Hebrews had to work hard to show the obsolescence of the priesthood, animal sacrifices and the most holy place. New objections still arise. The Christians ate a sacramental meal. (My point here is really speculation.) This would be a well-known matter among all Jews. The response might have been that the priests of Israel often had as their portion meat from the altar. Those priests were privileged to eat holy food from God’s holy altar. That was indeed the high privilege of the priests of Levi. Believing in Christ meant abandoning ineffective offerings in every respect. This meant no food from the altar for any Christian. They had left their privilege when they confessed Christ as the final offering. Those who were converted priests (Acts 6:7) might feel a sense of loss because of Christ.

Whatever was really behind the matter of ceremonial food, we do know priests and their families had the right to eat of the offerings (Leviticus 7 & 22). A converted priest who rejected obsolete offerings and refused to eat them, by that act declared himself no longer a priest. He lost more than food; he loses his position and gained scorn. There must have been some kind of attraction back to these ceremonial foods (v.10). Someone could say, “Look what I am losing!” My conjecture is that they may have heard arguments about the simplicity of the Lord’s Supper with mere bread and wine, which would be eaten by all not a select few. The Jews could argue that the Lord had appointed these priests. The activity tied to the altar signified a relation to the Lord God of Israel. They could argue that giving up that altar (and the ceremonial food from it) was spurning their God. Perhaps some were being convinced by this kind of reaction to Christian teaching.

In making its reply, the Book of Hebrews, does not repeat all its arguments about the sacrifice of Christ. The writer does remind them that foods alone are of no spiritual value. What went on the altar and what came off it, did not cleanse the conscience (9:9,10). What does affect us is receiving grace. Grace does for the heart what food does for the body. The grace of God is his decision to send us Christ (10:10).

In my opinion, 13:10 reverses the argument something like this:

You argue that those foods signify that that altar is forever associated with the Lord, and that not eating from it is the loss of a God-given right. But there is one condition that prohibits your priests from eating of the sin offering. "*Any sin offering whose blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place must not be eaten; it must be burned,*" (Leviticus 6:30). Under the law you are the ones denied something that is a right granted to all of us. Our sin offering is Jesus Christ (Isaiah 53:10) who was offered on a different altar. We derive from the altar of his sacrifice forgiveness and the grace that strengthens our hearts. We have not lost; we have gained. If you refuse him you have no right to the altar we have. You cannot have your altar and ours. If the blood of a sin offering was taken into the Most Holy Place you must burn the body offered; you cannot eat of it. Jesus the Priest in the order of Melchizedek has entered the Most Holy Place in heaven after shedding his blood for us. By faith we partake of his flesh and blood and receive from him eternal life (John 6:48-58). And this is an altar from which your priests have no right to eat.

**13:11,12 Outside the Camp** After pointing out that there was food the priest could not eat, the writer tells what happened to the bodies of animals whose blood had been taken into the Most Holy Place. This has reference to the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, the only day the high priest went alone into the most holy place. Those bodies were burned, so no priest could eat that meat. They were burned outside the camp, i.e., outside the perimeter of where the children of Israel camped in the wilderness around the tabernacle. To go in one must be ceremonially clean; to be outside is to be ceremonially unclean. Leviticus 16:28 required the man who burned the animals to wash so that he could return to the community.

The sacrifice of Christ was a sin offering. The writer points out not just what is done with those bodies but *where* they were burned – outside the camp. So it was with Jesus that he was crucified outside the city gate of Jerusalem. The sin offering anticipated Christ's offering.

A major surprise occurs here; the Jews understood that taking anything outside the camp made it unclean. Jesus suffered outside the city gate (i.e., outside the camp). He did this to make the people holy. To so many Jews this would be preposterous! Christians say Jesus, whom we claim is holy, died as an offering to God in an unholy place. That would make him unholy to be there! Jesus the Holy One died for sinners. We could not go to him in his holy place; he came down to us (Romans 10:6) on our unholy ground. Jesus was made to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21); our sins were imputed to him. By Christ as our sin offering taking on our ungodly deeds, our sin was judged and removed. In this way Jesus makes the sinners he died for holy.

He bore disgrace. The point here is not just that Jesus died a disgraceful death; he carried the disgrace of our sin. He took the shame that was ours. Now the writer makes a powerful appeal. A number in the Christian community endured derision because of their confession of Christ. They were demeaned as members of a despised group who seemed to be without priest, sacrifice, ceremonial foods, religious festivals, tradition, and authenticity. For a devout Jew, this was a weighty matter. Becoming Christians had brought them shame among their own people.

Jesus endured reproach too. We cannot belong to him, agree with him, or have him as our hope without experiencing the sneer of the world. The death of Christ involved mocking. Taking up our cross means we will have our words misunderstood, disagreed with, and our hope demeaned. In some way we will experience rejection. The solution to all this is never to avoid it, but to go gratefully to him outside the camp bearing the disgrace he bore, just as, in some sense, Moses did (11:26). Christ suffered without reviling or insulting those who mistreated him (1 Peter 2:21-25). There is no hint in Hebrews 13 that we should ever give as we receive when it comes to insults. Hebrews is eager to answer the challenge when it is alleged that we lose by confessing Christ. It is true that those early Jewish believers lost the sacrifices, the Jewish clergy, and the shadows that pointed to the Messiah. They were viewed as losers. What they kept was the substance, the Messiah himself, and his reproach. What the others held on to were shadows, the praise of men (John 5:44), some ceremonial foods, and their sins.

The strong temptation was to go back into the city and be at peace with rejecters of Christ. This would make them apostates who sided with the ones who had Jesus crucified. The choice is to be crucified with him or to join the crucifiers. No decision could be more clear. The way of faith and life was to accept the reproach and,

with it, the eternal reward. Those wavering and sorely tempted should go in their weakness to the Throne of Grace. Their High Priest, who knows human temptation intimately, is their right of access. At that throne they will not find scorn from an unsympathetic deity, but an understanding mercy and grace to help in time of need (4:15,16).

**13:13,14** By “outside the camp” and “outside the city gate,” the writer drew attention to Jerusalem. It had rejected Christ. In no way would they have considered killing him in their temple. The location of the cross outside the city suited them well. They knew the significance of his death outside the city.<sup>30</sup> The writer now takes up another painful subject. The believing Jews could say of their city, “This is no longer our home; we do not belong here.” They too were “out” like the man in John 9:28-34. A polarization was developing over Christ (Matthew 10:32-39). Christians no longer had a place in Jerusalem, the city that had rejected the Son of David. Like Abraham they were looking for a city to come (11:10) a better country (11:16). Jerusalem was not an enduring place. In 70 AD the Romans would vent their unbridled anger on the Jews in the massacre that exceeds all others. They not only destroyed the city; there were no survivors. Jesus had warned that this was coming (Matthew 24:15-25). Those who recognized him as the Son of God knew to believe him, and escaped. Those who rejected him (probably including Christian apostates who remained in the city when the Roman armies appeared), died a horrible death. We are not of those who shrink back from Christ and are destroyed (10:39). We have the city to come, an unshakable kingdom (12:28) that Roman legions cannot invade.

**13:15,16 Our double offering** Never again should ceremonial blood be shed in the Name of Christ. The Passover has been replaced by the Lord’s Supper and circumcision by baptism. The unique sacrifice is unrepeatable. We were neither the victim offered nor the priest to offer. But we do offer sacrifices pleasing to God of another kind. It really is ridiculous to think we who have sin could ever offer anything to God, but we may and must. The sacrifices we offer are pleasing to God because we come “through Jesus”. (Those words are in the emphatic position.) We offer substandard offerings to our holy God and he is pleased. Everyone should see how astounding this is. The only way we may do this is that we are accepted as his children in Christ, because of Christ, and we stand before him perfect because of the blood of Christ. Now thanksgiving from the heart comes through our lips. We are not blessed by eating ceremonial foods, but because we have been strengthened by grace. We realize the grace of the Lord, so that in heartfelt thanks we praise him.

This is not the hypocrisy of empty words, praising a God we cannot see and not caring for those we can, because our worship of thanksgiving is accompanied (6:9,10) by grace shown to others. We are to share with those who may be as unworthy of grace as we are, for this is how the grace of God works. Both praise and good works are sacrifices to God, not comparable to Christ’s, but in response to his. This means every believer in every place is a priest who continually serves in this kind of liturgy throughout the earth.

**13:17** Jewish believers in Jesus eventually lost their welcome in Jerusalem and in due course in synagogues throughout the world as in Acts 13. They were not, however, without a community. Perhaps Hebrews was sent to a house church. The writer definitely knew them, and he knew of deterioration among them. Their pilgrimage was to be the journey of a company, not the lonely trek of an individual. God has given many prayers and instructions in the Bible in a plural form. They had leaders and were to obey their leaders, quite obviously not the ones in v.7 who had died.

Some specific things in Hebrews show a sense of mutual responsibility, such as “*See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness,*” (3:12,13). In light of 13:17, I suggest we should read these pastoral instructions together something like this, “See to it brothers (and leaders) that you keep watch over each individual, so that...”

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<sup>30</sup> I have a similar paper Why Crucify, Why not Stone? on my website [www.grebeweb.com/linden](http://www.grebeweb.com/linden). The point is that the Jewish leadership did not stone him as they did Stephen because they wanted Jesus crucified so that the method of death would indicate the curse of God on him. By this they only enhanced the gospel (Galatians 3:10-14). Likewise, having Jesus die outside the wall of Jerusalem also made the gospel more clear.

For us to obey 13:17, we must submit to authority recognizing the responsibility the Lord has placed on the elders of the church and their accountability to him. These leaders were ones who kept watch over their flock. Hebrews does not order obedience to leaders whose small interest is themselves. Attitude goes a long way to making their work a joy and not a burden. Though the enduring heavenly city is seen only by faith and is the city to come; it has a very real presence on the earth; we must not treat it with disdain in spite of its imperfections. We cannot have a healthy church unless faithful leaders receive due respect.

**13:18,19** When the writer asked for prayer and urged obedience to its leaders, he had not judged the church to be in apostasy. Whoever wrote Hebrews had the mind and skill of a genius and the tenderness of a shepherd. Yet this man asks for prayer. He humbly admits his need to those he instructed. We are all weak; we all need the Lord. If he would be *restored* to them, then he had been with them before; he knew them. He had a clear conscience giving the warnings he wrote in this letter. He also indicates that he wants to come to see them. He did not wait to address their need till he arrived.

**13:20,21** Hebrews ends with one of the most beautiful benedictions in the Bible. God is the God of peace because Christ our Mediator has obtained peace with God for us (Romans 5:1). Since God is this God of peace with no hostility toward us, the writer calls for blessings on the people.

First he reviews the work of Christ with special insight on the resurrection. Had Christ died for us and not risen again, it would mean his offering was not accepted. For a priest to make an offering and then end up a dead priest would show that his representation for others had been rejected. The resurrection is the act of God the Father to show his approval of the offering presented to him. So if he brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, he is satisfied. The Father is satisfied not only with the Priest he raised; he has also accepted those the Priest represented. Since this foundation is secure, the prayer that seeks our blessing will be granted.

He also included reference to the blood of Christ. No part of the Bible gives more attention to the blood of Christ than Hebrews. It is not surprising that it would appear again in this final word. But it is again the blood of the covenant, the eternal covenant. This cannot refer to a covenant between the Father and the Son, since no blood was involved to ratify that eternal covenant. It was enough that the Father and Son agreed, and that would make their mutual covenant inherently unbreakable. The blood of the eternal covenant in 13:20 is the blood of the new covenant. Because it is eternally effective, no later covenant will be needed. The old covenant was obsolete; it did not have Christ and his blood as its foundation, but the new covenant rests on Christ as Mediator and Guarantor. His blood is the guarantee that all covenantal obligation concerning our sin continue to be effective. Thus with Christ's work finished and his sacrifice accepted, there is no impediment to his being resurrected by the Father. He received what he deserved, and in him we too receive what he deserved. [That is not a misprint; yes, we by faith receive what he deserves: eternal life.] Thus it makes perfect sense for every blessing to come to us on this basis. The blood of Christ has procured for us in advance every blessing that shall ever come to us. Further, Jesus is the Great Shepherd. Yahweh is my Shepherd I shall not want because my Great Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep (Psalm 23:1; John 10:11). A shepherd's care is a constant care. This shows in this prayer by mention of his continuing working in us.

The blessing mentioned is very general, "everything good". But it is valuable that it is stated this way, because such words indicate how all blessing has one source. That source is not vaguely stated as all are from Jesus with no more specification. Everything good for us is from God because of the blood of Christ. It is in this setting that God equips and works in us. So every gift and talent, every virtue and grace is ours because of our Great High Priest. He is the Author and Perfector of our faith (12:2). We do not please him on our own, for God works in us what is pleasing to him. Though the Spirit is not mentioned, yet he is how God works in us. It is through Christ, for apart from him, we would have no communion in the Spirit or favor from the Father. It is Christ who is the channel of God's blessing and every benefit is based in his priestly mediation. Thus the writer, who knew this and could state the work of Christ perhaps better than any other man, ends his word about Christ with a doxology "*to whom be glory forever and ever.*" That is the delight of a man who knows so well how God's blessing comes.

**13:22-25** This is a post script to a post script. He calls his letter an exhortation, because it is a sermon in sermon form. This explains the missing name at the beginning. Hebrews is brief; one can only imagine what else he could have said had he taken up other themes. They all know Timothy and he hopes they arrive together. All would be glad to hear Timothy has been released. Maybe it was written in Italy, explaining the mention of people from there. Those are details that would be clear to the readers not to us. For some reason they are to greet *all* their leaders. We do not know why that was said that way. Perhaps some had less than proper respect for certain leaders.

The word of “grace for all” ends this letter. It is the principle in God’s heart that best describes our salvation. Love is his motive; his unbending justice determined that salvation can only be through the sacrifice of our Priest, but grace describes the way God deals with us. To this, we add that holiness characterizes all that God is and does, and his sovereignty is his inherent right to show his grace as he chooses. The world has many religions; only the gospel of Christ is gracious from first to last, and grace makes a fitting finale to Hebrews and to my lecture notes.

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