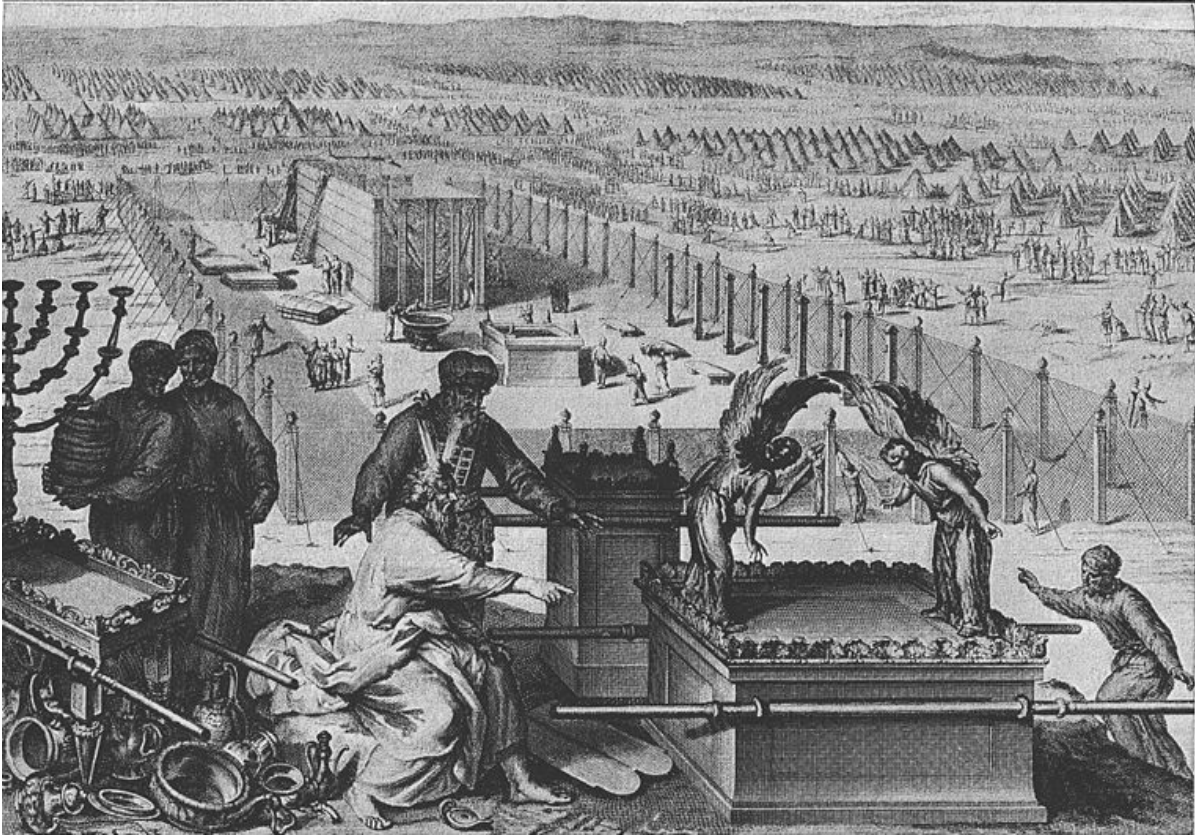


Hebrews: Notes and Commentary

By Jim Wilsford



The erection of the Tabernacle and the Sacred vessels, as in Exodus 40:17-19; from the 1728 *Figures de la Bible* via Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia

Heb 8:5

5 They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

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1. Introduction and God's Final Word Spoken by His Son (Hebrews 1)

The Authorship of Hebrews

The author was a second generation Christian for in Hebrews 2:3-4 the writer states, "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." The author was not an eyewitness to the Lord and his announcements, but received a salvation confirmed by those who were eyewitnesses. This excludes Paul and the other apostles as writers.

The author was most probably a Hellenistic Jew. The author relied heavily on the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament (written B.C. 100-80). An illustration of this use of the Septuagint occurs in Heb 1:6:

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

The footnote on this passage indicates that the reference comes from Deut 32:43, which reads in the Jewish version:

43 Rejoice, O nations, with his people,
for he will avenge the blood of his servants;
he will take vengeance on his enemies
and make atonement for his land and people.

Footnotes for Deut 32:43 offers this addition: "Masoretic Text; Dead Sea Scrolls (see also Septuagint) people, | and let all the angels worship him /"

Apollos fits the characteristic of a Hellenistic Jew extremely conversant with the scriptures as recorded in the Septuagint. Luke recorded in Acts 18:24, "24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures."

The writer was also acquainted with Timothy and possibly Titus, which also indicates Apollos:

"10 If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. 11 No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. 12 Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity." 1 Corinthians 16:10-12.

Further Apollos knew Titus: "13 Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need." Titus 3:13. The author acknowledges Timothy as one of the acquaintances: "23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you." Hebrews 13:23

The author was well educated in the idioms and logic of Greek. The logic and idioms of the Hebrew letter are different from Paul's. Paul's logic is an if-not-then logic that is given to asides and that sometimes make them hard to understand. A good example from Paul is the 1 Corinthians 15 discourse on the resurrection of Christ. 1 Cor 15:12-19 reads:

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

The author of Hebrews is more straight-line in his reasoning as in Hebrews 11 where he amasses examples and draws a conclusion in Hebrews 11:39-40: "39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

Hebrews 9:1-15 also illustrates this types of reasoning:

In the Aristotelian fashion, the author begins with a minor premise: Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.

Related it to the present time: This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. 10 They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings – external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

Showed it to be inferior to Christ: 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. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

Added a contrary premise: How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

And drew its conclusion: 15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

The Time of Writing

The latest date for the composition of Hebrews is clearly fixed as earlier than 96 AD, by reason of its use by Clement of Rome about that time. The earliest date cannot be so definitely fixed. The apparent dependence of Hebrews on Paul's Epistles, Galatians; 1 Corinthians and Romans, brings it beyond 50 AD

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The Theme of the Book

The theme of the book is the superiority of Christ and the gospel to the prophets and the Mosaic Law. This theme accomplished by illustrating that Christ is superior to the angels, a superior high

priest, a builder of a superior house, an author of a superior law (covenant), a superior sacrifice, a superior way, a King of a superior kingdom, and a superior judge.

Hebrews establishes the superiority of Christ over all that has gone before—the angels, the Mosaic Law and the prophet—and all that is to follow the revelation of God in his son Jesus Christ. The first chapter of Hebrews begins with the emphatic statement that God has spoken to us by his son. An equally emphatic statement follows that declares the son superior to the angels.

God Has Spoken to Us by His Son

Heb 1:1-3

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.

To a Hebrew audience, it would be difficult to let go of the Old Testament delivered through the prophets as the standard of authority in religion. Indeed, Paul had written two major books refuting the Jewish teachers who insisted that the Old Testament be bound on the Christians—Romans and Galatians. Now the writer of Hebrews states that in these last days, “He has spoken to us by his son.”

The Last Days

When are these last days? They are certainly the days in which God’s speaks through his son. The Old and New Testaments declare the beginning and end of the last days. By definition these last days, exclude all that preceded the covenant spoken by the son, and likewise they exclude any revelation that comes after the son has spoken. These parameters exclude the Old Testament and all so-called latter day revelations. In prophecy, Isaiah described the beginning of the last days in Isa 2:2-4:

2 In the last days

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

3 Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

4 He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into plowshares

and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

In Micah 4 beginning in the first verse, Micah described the very same set of events in almost the exact word: "In the last days," he began.

In Acts 2:16-21, Peter quoted the prophet Joel from Joel 2:28-32:

16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 "In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
18 Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

19 I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

20 The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

21 And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Nothing could be more emphatic than Peter's, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." The last days began on the day of Pentecost in Act 2.

What will characterize the last days? First there will be those like those of Acts 2:41: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. And, again, in Acts 2:47: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

In the last days, there will also be the blatantly immoral ones as portrayed by Paul in 2 Tim 3:1-5:

3:1 But mark this: **There will be terrible times in the last days** . 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

James is even more graphic in his description of the greedy, murderous, and materialistic of the last days in James 5:1-6:

5:1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. **You have hoarded wealth in the last days** . 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who

mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

Peter teaches that there will be scoffers and unbelievers in the last days in 2 Peter 3:3-7:

3 First of all, you must understand that **in the last days scoffers will come**, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

The Revelation declares the very end of the last days. Rev 10:6-7 teaches that in the days of the sounding of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God will be accomplished: "There will be no more delay! 7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." The fulfillment of this passage is in Rev 11:15-18:

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

16 And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
the One who is and who was,
because you have taken your great power
and have begun to reign.

18 The nations were angry;
and your wrath has come.

The time has come for judging the dead,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets
and your saints and those who reverence your name,
both small and great –
and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

At the end of the out-pouring of God's wrath (Rev 15:1), God said in Rev 21:6, "It is done."

God Has Spoken

That God has spoken by his son is a truth established in the beginning of the gospel, confirmed by the apostles, and testified to in the Revelation. On the Mount of Transfiguration, God declared that we should hear the son. In Matt 17:5, Matthew recorded, "5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'" Jesus asserted his right and the right of the apostles to speak in Matt 28:18-20: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." This right of Jesus to speak for the Father continues to the very end of the age.

In places, too many to mention here the apostles testified to this right of the son to speak. 2 Peter 1:16-18 calls attention to the utterance of God on the Mount of Transfiguration, asserting that they did not follow cleverly invented stories:

16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

Revelation concludes with the assertion that we must hear his words. Rev 22:6-7 says,

6 The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

The rest of Heb 1:2-3 declares the indisputable power and glory of the son of God, through whom God has spoken:

- God appointed the son heir of all things.
- God made the universe through him.
- The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.
- The Son sustains all things by his powerful word.
- He provided purification for sins.
- He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Compare the above truths to those of John 1:3 and Col 1:15.

The Son of God, Superior to the Angels

Hebrews 1:4-14

4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

5 For to which of the angels did God ever say,

"You are my Son; today I have become your Father"?

Or again,

"I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"?

6 And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,

"Let all God's angels worship him."

7 In speaking of the angels he says,

"He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire."

8 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. 9 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."

10 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."

13 To which of the angels did God ever say,

"Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"?

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

The logic and expression of the preeminence and superiority of Christ over the angels, testifies to the fact that we are to hear him. His word supersedes all that has gone before. In verse 8, the scripture calls the son of God, God, which attests to the divinity of Jesus the son. It also testifies to a kingdom that has come and a king on his throne.

In verse 10, the son receives the same power over the universe in a comparison to one rolling up a garment and changing to a new one.

According to verse 13, the son is now at the right hand of God. And the angels, where are they? They are sent to serve those of us who inherit salvation. Thus by the strongest implication, Christians, as Christ the son, are superior to the angels. According to Paul in Rom 8:16-17, we are joint heirs with Christ:

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now, if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

2. Pay Careful Attention and Do Not Drift Away (Hebrews 2)

Hebrews 1 established statements of fact that Hebrew Christians should accept at face value. The first statement was that God has spoken at the end of these days through his son. To people familiar with the early history of the church, the jailing of early Christians and the martyrdom of some of the apostles and Christians like Stephen attested to these Hebrew Christians that the statement in Hebrews 1:1 is true beyond doubt. Hebrew Christians would know of Peter's defense after being jailed, accounted in Acts 5:29-32. As a Grecian Jew himself, Stephen would have been a hero to them in his preaching and his martyrdom recorded in Acts 7.

The second statement of fact, found in Heb 1:2-3, is that everything that God does and has done is through and in Christ:

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.

The third statement of fact marshaled evidence from the Old Testament, that the son was God himself and superior to the angels. The statement begins in Heb 1:4, "4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs." It concludes in Heb 1:14: "14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

Based on these indisputable statements of fact, Hebrews 2 begins with the conclusion: Pay attention to what we have heard.

Warning to Pay Attention and Not Drift Away

Hebrews 2:1-4

2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

As stated, the first verse (Heb 2:1), draws a conclusion based on the factual evidence of the first chapter. Here the key word is *therefore* which means *for the reason that* or *consequently*. From all the evidence in chapter one, the point is that we are to pay more careful attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away from it. Revelation makes the same point on hearing and doing in Rev 1:3: "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." James was even more descriptive of what the response of Christians should be to God's word given through His son. James 1:22-25 reads:

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says . . . 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

In verse two, the writer turns again to the truths of the first chapter. When God spoke through angels (God spoke through the prophets at "many times and in various ways."), two things were certain. The message was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment. The words introducing these two certainties were *for* and *if*. Something must follow as true beyond a doubt, and that something is the rhetorical question of verse 3: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

This is the same salvation first announced by the Lord when he gave his commission to the apostles in Mark 16:16: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." In this same passage, the Lord described the confirming of the word:

17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. 20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. Mark 16:17-20.

The "those who heard him" in Heb 2:3 are the apostles, who were present at the time the Lord announced salvation to all men. That "God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will" is evident in Paul's listing of the spiritual gifts that were in the early church. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 12:7-11:

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

This salvation announced by the Lord and confirmed is the only salvation available to man. Peter preached in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." That salvation is the one that God has spoken in His son, and is, according to Paul, the word of truth, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Eph 1:13.

The World to Come Not to Be Subjected to Angels

Hebrews 2:5-9

5 It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. 6 But there is a place where someone has testified:

"What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? 7 You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor 8 and put everything under his feet."

In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

God is mindful of man and He cares about the son of man (Christ). God has not subjected the world to come to the angels. In fact, the angels are now ministering spirits who serve those who will inherit salvation (Heb 1:14). In Rev 22:8-9, the angel revealing the Revelation to John claimed only to be a fellow servant:

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9 But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

The scripture quoted in Heb 2:6-7 comes from Psalms 8:4-6 and illustrates two important points: God made Christ a little lower than the angels; but then He also crowned him with honor and glory and put everything under his feet. Nothing was not subject to him. However, there remain some things left to be subject to him. For example, death is not yet subject to him. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 15:22-28:

22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

The Lord's forms when in heaven and later when on the earth was first equality with God and then on earth a being fashioned after man. Paul described these forms in Phil 2:5-11:

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
7 but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death —
even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The object of the humiliation of Jesus was so that, by the grace of God, he might taste of death for everyone. The world to come will not be subject to angels but to the son of God and to those of us who are joint heirs with him. It is in this way that God brought many sons to glory.

God Brought Many Sons to Glory

Hebrews 3:10-13

10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says,

"I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises."

13 And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again he says,

"Here am I, and the children God has given me."

God chose to make Christ who is the author of our salvation perfect through suffering. By suffering the humiliation and pain of the death upon the cross, Jesus was the originator of our salvation. Peter described the circumstances of that suffering 1 Peter 2:21-25:

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

22 "He committed no sin,

and no deceit was found in his mouth."

23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The family of God is composed of the One who makes men holy (Christ) and the ones who are made holy (Christians). As members of the family of God, the Lord calls us brothers. No longer is the family of God the Jewish nation. It is now to the Christians, that the Lord declares the name of God and it is in the presence of these brothers in the congregation that the Lord sings God's praise. Christians are the children of God, brothers of the Lord Jesus. Paul conditioned this wonderful status on our suffering together with him in Rom 8:13-17:

. . . if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Christ, a Merciful and Faithful High Priest

Hebrews 2:14-18

14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

The preceding paragraph established that Jesus was the author or originator of our salvation. This paragraph describes the Lord as a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God. The children of God, just as you and I, are flesh and blood. In sharing this humanity, in death, the Lord destroyed the devil who has the power of death. The consummation of this destruction will come at the end of the last days. John records the end of the devil in Rev 20:9-10, "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." In Rev 20:13-15, he also recorded the end of death:

13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Thus, man is free of death through the death of the Lord. Having offered this supreme sacrifice, he became a merciful and faithful high priest. He made atonement for the sins of the people, by his death, and now he can help us who are now being tempted. Salvation is freedom from sin and death, but it is also the overcoming or temptation and suffering. Christians have an author of salvation and a great high priest in their brother Christ Jesus, the Lord.

3. Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest (Hebrews 3)

The introduction of Hebrews 3 relates directly to chapter 2, where the writer has concluded in Heb 2:17 that we are brothers in every way. He also concludes that the benefit of atonement was to Abraham's true descendants. He begins chapter three focusing on this relationship of brothers and draws the conclusions stemming from the relationship in the text that follows.

Holy Brothers who Share in the Heavenly Calling

Heb 3:1-2

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. 2 He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.

By saying, "holy brothers," the author gives a sacred designation to the family relationship between Christians, Christ, and God. The idea that Christians are children of God and brothers to one another is an idea that runs throughout the New Testament. Abraham's descendants, of the preceding chapter, are the true children of God. Paul taught that the natural children of Abraham are not the children of God, but the children of promise are the children of God. In Rom 9:8, Paul wrote, "8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." These children of Abraham are those who believe according to Paul in Gal 3:7-9,;

7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

That the believing children are the true children of God becomes evident. John wrote in 1 John 3:1-3:

3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

In Rom 8:16-17, our relationship to God, as His children, secures our inheritance: "16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Our share in the heavenly calling in Heb 3:1, cited above, is this very same inheritance.

We are to fix our thoughts on Jesus who is the apostle (one sent) and high priest whom we confess. Heb 2:17 designated Jesus "a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God." This Jesus was faithful and loyal in all God's house. The relationship thus extends from Christ the son, to Christians as brothers, to God as the Father, all of which comprise the house of God. Moses was a faithful member of this house of God; however, but he was just a member of the house, along with all of us. Jesus is different as apostle and high priest, and in the following verse, he is different as the very builder of the house.

Jesus, Greater than Moses

Heb 3:3-6

3 Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. 4 For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. 5 Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. 6 But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

For the reasons given in the preceding verses, Jesus is worthy of more honor than Moses, for the builder of the house has greater honor than the house itself. The comparison puts Moses, and by extension, the Law of Moses, in the proper perspective about Jesus. Christ is both the builder of God's house and a faithful son over God's house. The house of God that Jesus built is the church of the living God. Paul wrote in 1 Tim 3:14-15, "I am writing you these instructions so that, 15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." Paul was also specific about the spiritual nature of the house of God in Eph 2:19-22:

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him **you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives** by his Spirit. (Emphasis added.)

"We are his house," in Heb 3:6 shows that the spiritual house of God is made of people—people qualified by their courage and hope.

Warning against Unbelief

Heb 3:7-11

7 So, as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you hear his voice,

8 do not harden your hearts

as you did in the rebellion,

during the time of testing in the desert,

9 where your fathers tested and tried me

and for forty years saw what I did.

10 That is why I was angry with that generation,

and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray,

and they have not known my ways.'

11 So I declared on oath in my anger,

'They shall never enter my rest.'"

The preceding verses ended with the statement, "And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast." The Christians' membership in the house of God depends on holding to courage and hope and not faltering in unbelief. The warning looks to Psalms 95:7-11 for reinforcement, echoing the warning already stated in Heb 2:1, "Do not drift away." This present passage is one of those examples from the Old Testament referred to in Heb 2:2 where "every violation and disobedience received its just punishment."

We know that the author of the Psalm was David; yet the Hebrew writer begins, "So, as the Holy Spirit says." The Holy Spirit speaks through the word of David and the other inspired writers. Rom 8:16-17, quoted above, reads, "16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit." Clearly, the spirit speaks to us through the word of God.

God responded to the unbelief of that day, "They shall never see my rest." In the next verse, the writer applies this lesson from the Psalms to these last days.

Heb 3:12-14

12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

The falling away follows the reverse order of that order by which God saved us: faith, repentance, and obedience. The one who falls away has a heart that is sinful, unbelieving, and turns away. Unbelief and the sins that go with it harden the heart with deceitfulness. As promised, in such a state, we shall never enter God's rest. Verse 14 gives the antidote to this state of sin: "14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first."

Heb 3:15

15 As has just been said:

*"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion."*

In verse 15, the writer repeats the admonition, showing its importance: Do not harden your heart!

Not Able to Enter God's Rest Because of Unbelief

Heb 3:16-19

16 Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? 17 And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

The chapter ends with this set of rhetorical questions. A rhetorical question is a question to which the answer is self-evident. The questions bring the reader logically to the main point of this discourse:

- 16 Who were they who heard and rebelled?
- Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?
- 17 And with whom was he angry for forty years?
- Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert?
- 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?

The conclusion to this passage summarizes the preceding verses as a conclusion to the rhetorical questions: "19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." The stage is also set for the discussion of the next chapter about God's true rest for the people of His spiritual house.

Hebrews 3 has taught that Jesus has secured our rest as the apostle and high priest of all that we believe and follow. We are holy brothers in this heavenly calling that makes us family members in the house of God. However, we, just as Israel after the flesh, may fall away because of unbelief. If we fall away, we, just as they, will not be able to enter God's rest.

Hebrews 4 will reveal that the true rest of God for His people still stands.

4. A Sabbath Rest and a Great High Priest for God's People (Hebrews 4)

The introduction of Hebrews 4 advances the two central meanings of chapters 2 and 3. In Heb 3:1, the first point, among other things, was that Jesus is the high priest of our confession, "1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess." We must hold to this confession with confidence until the end. Heb 3:14 states, "14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first." The second point is that the children of Israel could not enter their rest because of unbelief. Heb 3:19 stated, "19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." The stage is set with these ideas: Christians have a Sabbath rest, and Christians have a great high priest, who has gone through the heavens.

A Sabbath-Rest for the People of God (Heb 4:1-11)

Heb 4:1-3a

4:1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. 2 For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. 3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

"So I declared on oath in my anger,

'They shall never enter my rest.'"

Even though the children of Israel could not enter into God's rest in the promised land across the Jordan, the writer here makes certain that the readers understand that the promise of entering into his rest still stands. Following this truth—the promise still stands—are three assertions: do not fall short of the promise; we have heard the gospel preached, but we, as they, must combine it with faith; therefore, we who have believed enter that rest. If we do not believe and obey, for they did not, God's oath, declared in anger, still stands, "They shall never enter my rest.

Heb 4:3b-7

And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." 5 And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest."

6 It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. 7 Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before:

"Today, if you hear his voice,

do not harden your hearts."

The word of God, spoken of in verse 3b, identifies the true rest as a greater rest than the one promised the Israelites who crossed Jordan. It is the rest dictated by God when he finished the creation of the world. When God rested from all his work, it is implicit that no other work remained. Therefore, when he said, "They shall never enter into **my** rest," that rest has been in place since the creation of the world, for His work has been finished since the creation of the world. That rest included the faithful who lived before Christ, and the faithful who have lived since. The rest spoken of is not the seventh day rest of the Jews or the rest in Canaan Land of the Israelites. The rest here is the eternal rest in heaven with Christ Jesus and God the Father. To turn back to a temporal, earthly rest would be foolish, indeed. The revelation of God's will to man closed, saying it is done, as God describes His rest in Rev 21:6-8

6 He said to me: "**It is done.** I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Heb 4:8-11

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath – rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

The logic is clear, God and Joshua were speaking about two very different days. The day God speaks of is the Sabbath-rest for the people of God. The rest of God comes to those who make every effort to enter. When folks, presently call Sunday the Sabbath Day, they are inaccurate and misleading in their false teaching. We do not want to miss out on the Sabbath-rest for the people of God by following their example of unbelief. We must follow the word of God and make every effort to enter that rest.

A Great High Priest Who Has Gone through the Heavens

Heb 4:12-13

12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Man cannot ignore God's word as the Israelites did. The extended metaphor that describes God's word shows the futility of disobedience. The metaphor covers the soul and spirit, the body even to its joints and marrow, the thoughts and attitudes of the heart—nothing is hidden from God; therefore, there is no hiding from God. We are exposed. We must give account.

Heb 4:14-16

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. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Amidst such exposure by God's word, how can we survive the account that we must give? We have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. *Since* in this passage is more appropriate *seeing*, which makes this clause a premise to the conclusion that follows. The translators achieve this meaning by the inclusion of *therefore*. The strong conclusion is, "Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess." In the weakness of our lives, we have the help of a high priest who is able to sympathize with us and help us. The assistance that we need is ever-present, the writer concludes, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

That we have a greater rest and that we have a greater high priest show the superiority of the New Covenant with God over the Law of Moses. The remaining chapters of Hebrews describe the great and enduring benefits of this priesthood and covenant.

5. Jesus the Source of Eternal Salvation and the High Priest, Designated by God (Hebrews 5)

Up to this point, the writer of Hebrews has established two points stated as eternal principles, beyond contesting by his readers. The first in Heb 2:3 expresses the greatness of our salvation, "3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him." The second eternal principle in Heb 4:14-16 expresses the greatness of Jesus as our high priest:

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. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

It is in the context of these enduring principles that God designates this great and eternal salvation and this great and eternal high priest.

High Priests Selected from among Men

Heb 5:1-3

5:1 Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. 3 This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

Every high priest comes from among men and represents them in matters related to God. They offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. Because these high priests come from among men, they are able to deal gently with the sinful and the weak. They themselves are subject to the same weakness as the weaknesses of those whom they serve. Thus, a high priest offers sacrifices for his own sins and the sins of the people. This is how it is with high priests, and the Hebrews would have readily understood it.

High Priests Called by God

Heb 5:4-6

4 No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,

*"You are my Son;
today I have become your Father."*

6 And he says in another place,

*"You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek."*

Hebrews 5:4 states another principle: "No one takes this honor upon himself." The corollary to this is that "he must be called by God." God appointed Christ as son and as a priest forever. The prophecies by David in Psalm 2:7 and 110:4 establish the priesthood of Christ in the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 7 and 8 will return to this subject in detail, establishing the superiority of

Jesus as the high priest. Just as Christ could not appoint himself high priest, man cannot appoint himself high priest. Therefore, there are no high priests in the world today, save Christ Jesus, the Lord.

Jesus as the Source of Eternal Salvation and as the High Priest

Heb 5:7-10

7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

It was not without price that Jesus became the source of eternal salvation and was designated high priest by God. His reverent submission to death made him free of death and made him perfect. Paul spoke of this same submission in Phil 2:6-11:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
7 but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death —
even death on a cross!
9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

If Christ had to submit and learn obedience, how much more so should we submit and learn obedience? The Lord becomes the eternal source of salvation to those who **obey him**; and at the same time our high priest in the order of Melchizedek. These truths become the premises upon which the rest of Hebrews depends. However, among the Hebrew Christians, there were problems that interfered with their understanding these principles.

The Need for Elementary Truths of God to be Taught Again

Heb 5:11-14

11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted

with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

A problem for the Hebrew Christians was that they were slow to learn. What the writer is teaching, they have heard before. In fact, they had been Christians long enough that they ought to be teaching others. They should have moved on to the solid food of God's word, but they still need milk. The end of the matter is that they have not trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. This failure makes it hard for the writer to explain the subject at hand: the Lord is the eternal source of salvation to those who **obey him**; and at the same time **our high priest** in the order of Melchizedek.

6. God's Promise Is Certain to Those Who Do Not Fall Away (Hebrews 6)

Hebrews 5 closed with the statement that when by reason of the time the Hebrew Christians ought to be teachers, they needed to be instructed in the elementary teachings once again. Without being equipped in the teachings about righteousness, which is described as solid food, people are unequipped to distinguish between good and evil. This argument, which juxtaposes the elementary principles against teachings about righteousness, continues into the next chapter. Indeed, their frailty, resulting from this failure to grow spiritually, led to their falling away and binding the Jewish teachings upon Christians.

Leaving the Elementary Teaching

Heb 6:1-3

6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so.

In the beginning passage, the writer tells the Hebrews directly to leave the elementary teachings. By identifying the elementary teachings as the foundation, he does not minimize their importance in the overall scheme of redemption. These elementary principles were the very principles preached to convert the Hebrews and the Gentiles in the first place. One need only to look to the sermons in Acts to find these principles preached repeatedly. Indeed, they are the foundation of our faith:

- Repentance from acts that lead to death: Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30.
- Faith in God: Acts 2:37; Acts 10:43; Acts 16:31-34.
- Instructions about baptisms: Acts 1:4; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; Acts 22:16.
- The laying on of hands: Acts 8:12-23; 1 Cor 12:4-11; 1 Cor 13:8-10.
- The resurrection of the dead: 1 Cor 15; 1 Thess 4:13-18
- Eternal judgment: 1 Cor 5:10; 2 Thess 1:6:10

Christians must move on to maturity—mastering and maintaining the teachings about righteousness.

The Danger in Drifting and Falling Away

Heb 6:4-8

4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. 8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

Becoming a Christian follows an enlightenment about what God has done for us and about what we must do. Jesus taught in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This is the free gift of God, according to Rom 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." As Christians, we share in this gift from God and taste of the promised Holy Spirit, as Paul described in Eph 1:13-14: "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the

promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory." We have also tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age. Once we have been so enlightened, if we fall away it is impossible to renew us to repentance. All of this occurs because we are crucifying the Son of God all over again and once again subjecting him to public disgrace. We continually reject the word of God and the Spirit that delivers it. The sin is without forgiveness. Jesus taught in Mark 3:28-29, "28 I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. 29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." By analogy, the state of the man so fallen from the grace of God is the same as the fate of a worthless field of thorns and thistles. They will both burn.

Making Your Hope Sure

Heb 6:9-15

9 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case — things that accompany salvation. 10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." 15 And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

The writer is confident of better things of them—the things that accompany salvation. God is just, and He will treat them fairly. However, Christians must be as diligent at the end as they were at the beginning. This is how they make their hope sure. Do not be lazy, but imitate the faith and patience of those who inherit what God promised. The immediate example is the example of Abraham. God swore by himself—there is none greater—and Abraham who waited patiently received what God promised.

Hope an Anchor for the Soul

Heb 6:16-20

16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

This passage teaches that there are two unchangeable truths: the nature of God's purpose is unchangeable, and it is impossible for God to lie. The first of these—the nature of God's purpose—God made clear to the heirs, "we who have fled the world to take hold of the hope offered us." The heirs have an anchor for their soul: God's purpose will not change, and God confirmed this with His very own oath. God cannot lie. Therefore, the anchor is firm and secure. The writer says, "It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain." The antecedent of *it* is *hope*. That is that we, as Christ before us, might enter into the sanctuary. The spiritual sanctuary is heaven where Christ now performs the functions of high priest in the order of Melchizedek. This passage prepares the reader for the discussion that follows about how Christ is a superior high priest.

7. A High Priest, Who Sat Down at the Right Hand of the Throne of the Majesty in Heaven (Hebrews 7)

Chapter 6 ended by establishing our hope that as Jesus entered the inner sanctuary, heaven, so might we. This is the anchor, firm and secure. Having entered the inner sanctuary, Jesus became a high priest forever. That priesthood is in the order of Melchizedek. The chapter concludes with Heb 6:19-20, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

The preceding verses of chapter 6, taught that there are two unchangeable truths: the nature of God's purpose is unchangeable, and it is impossible for God to lie. The authenticity of Jesus priesthood stands on these two immutable truths. This passage prepares the reader for the discussion that follows about how Christ is a superior high priest.

Melchizedek Was King of Salem and Priest of God Most High

Heb 7:1-3

7:1 This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, 2 and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." 3 Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.

The Old Testament records the meeting between Melchizedek and Abraham in Gen 14:18-20:

18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, 19 and he blessed Abram, saying,

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.

20 And blessed be God Most High,
who delivered your enemies into your hand."

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

The names of Melchizedek reflect his extraordinary nature—king of righteousness and king of peace. That he appears here without the trappings of Jewish genealogies places him symbolically like the son of God with no beginning of days and end of life. Symbolically, the priest and priesthood remain forever, firmly planted in the unchangeable nature of the purpose of God. (Hebrews 6:17.) Some mistakenly take Melchizedek to be Christ; however, the metaphoric use of *like the son of God* eliminates this idea. That Abraham paid homage and that Melchizedek blessed shows Melchizedek's superiority to Abraham.

Melchizedek, a Priest Superior to Levi

Heb 7:4-10

4 Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! 5 Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people – that is, their brothers – even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. 6 This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. 8 In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the

other case, by him who is declared to be living. 9 One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, 10 because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

Now Melchizedek was great, but just how great was he? The writer asks and answers this question. The fact that Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of the plunder shows his superiority to Abraham; and since Levi descended from Abraham, Melchizedek was greater than Levi was. The logic of the writer is straightforward and we need not repeat it.

A Better Hope by Which We Draw Near to God

Heb 7:11-19

11 If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come – one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? 12 For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. 13 He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. 14 For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. 15 And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, 16 one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is declared:

*"You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek."*

18 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless 19(for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

The long rhetorical question constitutes all of verse 11. Perfection could not be attained through the Levitical priesthood, which was the basis of the Law of Moses. Another priest in the order of Melchizedek was necessary. Verse 12 states the key construct of this argument: "For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law." The Lord was not of the tribe of Levi, but the tribe of Judah. Neither Moses, nor his law, said anything about a priest in the tribe of Judah. The facts are made the more certain, since a priest in the order of Melchizedek appeared. The priesthood of Jesus rested on the power of his indestructible life. The Law of Moses was set aside because it was weak and useless, and made nothing perfect. A better hope—eternal life in Jesus—is the hope by which we draw near to God.

Jesus, a High Priest Who Lives Forever

Heb7:20-25

20 And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, 21 but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him:

*"The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind:
'You are a priest forever.'"*

22 Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

23 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; 24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

God made Jesus a high priest with an oath upon himself; and the unchangeable truth to that oath was that God made Jesus a priest forever. In this way, Jesus became a guarantee of a better covenant than the Law of Moses. All other priests die, but Jesus lives forever with his priesthood being permanent. For those who come to God through him, he saves completely. He lives on to intercede for them.

Jesus, the Son, Made Perfect Forever

Heb 7:26-28

26 Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

Hebrews 8: 1-2 summarizes the point of this last paragraph of chapter 7. In fact, it summarizes the entire discussion of Jesus as high priest. Heb 8:1 reads, “The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.”

8. The Ministry and Covenant of Jesus Superior to the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8)

Chapter 7 concluded with the teaching that Christ is a superior high priest, and his priesthood is superior to that of the old covenant. Heb 7:12 showed that the change of the priesthood required a change in the law: "12 For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law." The first verse of chapter eight summarizes the discussion of the high priest that preceded it.

A High Priest at the Right Hand of Majesty in Heaven

Heb 8:1-2

8:1 The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

Jesus is our high priests who sat down at the right hand of God. The writer calls God the "Majesty in Heaven." This places the sanctuary in heaven, this sanctuary is the true sanctuary. Later in the Heb 9:24, the writer elaborates, "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." That the sanctuary is in heaven shows that God's will is complete and finished.

A Superior Covenant and Superior Promises

Heb 8:3-6

3 Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. 4 If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. 5 They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." 6 But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.

Since all high priests offer gifts and sacrifices, it was necessary for to have something to offer. This sentence becomes the foundation of the better sacrifice offered by Jesus. However, men offer their sacrifices from the earth, prescribed by the law. The sanctuary of the law is only a copy and shadow of the true sanctuary in heaven. Here, the writer begins a long and sustained metaphor on how the things of the law are copies and shadows of the heavenly things from Christ. God instructed Moses to make everything according to the pattern shown him, because they were shadows of heavenly things to come. The conclusion drawn in verse 6 shows the ministry of Jesus as a priest is superior to the ministry of the old covenant priests; the covenant of Jesus is superior to the old covenant; and the new covenant is founded on better promises than the old covenant. The better sacrifice that Jesus offered was his blood.

God Found Fault with the Old Covenant

Heb 8:7-9

7 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. 8 But God found fault with the people and said:

"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 9 It will not be like the covenant I made with their

forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

"If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant," shows a condition contrary to fact. The first covenant failed in the ministrations of the priests, failed in its lack of a mediator between God and man, and failed without any promise of eternal life. Therefore, God sought another. God found fault and pronounced His dissatisfaction to the people. This quotation from Jer 31:31ff affirms in prophecy that God would make a new covenant with his people. That the writer of Hebrews quotes the Jeremiah text in full shows that God had made a new covenant with Christ the high priest. The differences between the old and new covenants follow in the rest of the quotation.

God Made a New Covenant

Heb 8:10-12

10 This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 11 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

The differences in the two laws are great, with the covenant of Christ superior in every point to the covenant of Moses. "I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts" was the theme of the Sermon on the Mount. Christ taught that it is written that we are not to kill. He taught do not even be angry. Do not commit adultery said the law, but he taught that we are not to lust after a woman. Paul explained this difference in Rom 8:1-2, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." He further explained in 2 Cor 3:6, "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant- — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Under the new covenant, we no longer have to teach people to know the Lord, for they will already know him when they become his children by obeying the new covenant. Jesus taught in John 6:43-45, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me."

In stark contrast, the Jews were Jews by birth and continually needed to be taught about the Lord. Under the new covenant, all Christians know the Lord by definition. It is in this relationship as children of God and disciples of the Lord Jesus, that we receive the better promises unavailable under the old covenant. God forgives our wickedness and remembers our sins no more.

The Old Covenant Disappeared with the Advent of the New

Heb 8:13

13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

When in Jeremiah, God called the covenant of Christ new, it was evident the old one had become obsolete and aging and would soon pass away with the coming of Christ. When Christ came, he fulfilled the law and the prophets and nailed the old covenant to the cross.

9. The New Covenant and the Old Covenant Compared (Hebrews 9)

Chapter 8 began greatness of Jesus as high priest at the right hand of God, serving in the true sanctuary set up by the Lord. Heb 8:1-2 taught, “1 The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.” This same high priest, Jesus, made the old covenant obsolete and established a new and better covenant. Chapter 9 continues to establish the superiority of the new covenant comparing the spiritual nature of the new covenant and the new priesthood in a detailed comparison to the old covenant.

The Gifts and Sacrifices of the Old Covenant Unable to Clear the Conscience of the Worshiper.

Heb 9:1-5

9:1 Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. 2 A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. 3 Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, 4 which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. 5 Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

The writer begins by listing the specific items provided by the regulations for worship and for the earthly sanctuary under the old covenant of Moses. The items that he lists, but does not discuss, become important to the metaphors and symbols of the rest of this chapter and chapter 10 (See Heb 9:5). Each item is a copy and shadow of what is now in heaven. Heb 8: 5 has already taught this principle: “5 They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’” A copy and a shadow are never the real thing. As one reads forward from this point, the copies and shadows of the old covenant find one to one relationship to what is in the church and in heaven. No ambiguity exists between the old covenant that became obsolete and disappeared and the new covenant that is eternal. The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary have given place to the church and heaven, which constitute the sanctuary of the new order with Christ as high priest and Christians as priests.

Heb 9:6-10

6 When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. 7 But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. 8 The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. 10 They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings – external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

Just as the priest of old entered into the outer room to fulfill their ministry, so do Christians today – the holy priesthood of God – minister in the church daily to perform spiritual services and declare the praises of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:5 describes our priesthood and spiritual sacrifices we offer, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” This royal priesthood is synonymous with holy nation, which is the church of the firstborn, Christ. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to

God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” The Hebrew writer will summarize the words synonymous with the church and the comparisons begun and developed here in Heb 12:22-24:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the **church of the firstborn**, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Emphasis added.

The gifts and sacrifices of the old covenant could not clear the conscience of the worshiper. They were only external regulations of the old order. In the next paragraph, the writer asserts that the blood of Christ is able to cleanse our consciences.

The Blood of Christ Able to Cleanse Our Consciences

Heb 9:11-14

11 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. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Christ, as high priest is over the good things that are already here, eliminates any future developments. For example, his priesthood and kingship exists fully in the church and in heaven. There were no, and will be no, developments after his resurrection to the right hand of God. The greater and more perfect tabernacle is the Most Holy Place. What a big difference it is that he entered by his own blood. His blood is unblemished, and the redemption through his blood is eternal. This precious blood of Christ cleanses our consciences from acts that lead to death, making it possible for us to serve the living God as priest offering spiritual service. We must not minimize the power that is in the cleansed conscience. Our priestly service begins with the act that brings us to the blood of Christ. Peter wrote in 11 Peter 3:21-22:

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

No Forgiveness without the Shedding of Blood

Heb 9:15-22

15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

16 In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, 17 because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. 18 This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. 19 When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop,

and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. 20 He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep." 21 In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. 22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Christians receive an eternal inheritance, because Christ mediates a new covenant. The Hebrews under the old covenant had no such promise. When he died, he set them free from their sins. This ransom was necessary to put his covenant into effect. In the old covenant, the blood of calves constituted the blood of the covenant, and so it was said, "This is the blood of the covenant." When he instituted the Lord's Supper, Christ dedicated his new covenant forever. Matt 26:27-29 records, "27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.'" The conclusion is obvious: without the shedding of Christ's blood there could be no forgiveness

Christ Appearing Once for All To do Away with Sin by the Sacrifice of Himself

Heb 9:23-28

23 It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 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. 25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The blood of Christ is a sacrifice far superior to the copies used under the old covenant. Also, the sanctuary – heaven itself – is the true one. That Jesus appears for us in God's presence is a blessing beyond others. The summary of the discussion is in verse 26, "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." Verse 27 is an often quoted principle eternal: It is appointed once for a man to die and after that comes the judgment." This truth, which should get the attention of all mankind, is a corollary of another truth: Christ was sacrificed to take away sins; he will appear a second time to bring eternal life to those who are waiting for him.

10. The New and Living Way (Hebrews 10)

The preceding chapters have established that Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, his law is the perfect law, and heaven is a perfect tabernacle. In chapter 10, these themes combine to present the true way for Christians – the new and living way. This chapter begins by continuing the comparison between the old and new ways.

The Law, a Shadow of the Good Things Coming

Heb 10:1-4

10:1 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2 If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, 4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

The law, as a shadow of the good things to come and not the realities, forever describes the present status of the law. The sacrifices could not make perfect the worshippers. The acts of the law could not cleanse them of their guilt for their sins. The causal statement of the passage shows the inability of the law to provide salvation: "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." The way of Christ and his shed blood is the only way to take away sins.

Christ Made Us Holy Once and for All, Forever

Heb 10:5-14

5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7 Then I said, 'Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.'"

8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. 13 Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, 14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

The quotation in verse 5 is from Psalms 40:6-8 in the Septuagint Version. The Hebrew writer explains it fully in verses 8 through 13. The conclusion is that we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Christ, according to the will of God. In the end, he has made us perfect forever. A key thought is that God set aside the first to establish the second covenant. The sacrifice of Jesus was once for all. Those who are, thus, holy are perfect forever because of the sacrifice of Christ.

The New and Living Way

Hebrews 10:15-25

15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

16 "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."

17 Then he adds:

"Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

18 And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The very Holy Spirit of God tells us about these things. What follows is a concise description of what God has done and what He intends for us to do. God will put his laws in our hearts and write them on our minds. He will remember our sins and lawless acts no more. Where these have been forgiven because of the blood sacrifice of Christ, there will no longer be any sacrifice for sin.

On our part, we must do the following:

- Enter with confidence the Most Holy Place (heaven where the sanctuary is) by the blood of Jesus.
- Enter by the new and living way opened for us by the curtain, his body.
- There, in the Most Holy Place, we find a great high priest over the house of God.
- We must draw near to God with a sincere heart and in full assurance of faith.
- Where we have (*having* in the text is a present participle whose action is at the same time as the time of *draw*) our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.

These culminating acts parallel directly and identically with John 3:5 where Jesus taught, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." Paul also taught that the cleansing of the church requires the washing of water and the word. In Eph 5:25-27 he said, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. Finally, Peter wrote words connecting baptism and a good conscience toward God. In 1 Peter 3:21-22, Peter said, "This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand

In verse 23, the writer teaches that after we enter the Most Holy Place, we must continue to press forward:

- We must hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess.
- We must consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.
- We must not give up meeting together.
- We must let us encourage one another.

We must do these things all the more as we see the Day approaching.

What of Those Who Keep on Sinning?

Heb 10:26-31

26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. 28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The early part of the letter to Hebrews deals with not falling away because of unbelief as they did under the first covenant. There is no more sacrifice for us if we turn away. God's judgment will come with raging fire to those who continue in sin. This passage is an exact parallel to Paul's warning to the Thessalonians in 2 Thess 1:5-10:

5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

Persevere and Receive His Promises

Heb 10:32-39

32 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. 33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

37 For in just a very little while,

"He who is coming will come and will not delay.

38 But my righteous one will live by faith.

And if he shrinks back,

I will not be pleased with him."

39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

The conclusion to this section of the letter speaks for itself. These Hebrew Christians had suffered mightily—more than we have been called upon to suffer. Yet, they remained faithful. Now the writer admonishes them that they do not throw it away. To do so is to lose the rich reward of the

Lord. The final promise is that the Lord will return. We do not want to be among those who shrink back, but we want to be of those who believe and are saved.

The final phrase — *believe and are saved* — leads to the 11 chapter, the great chapter on faith.

11. Without Faith It Is Impossible to Please God (Hebrews 11)

As the notes on the 10th chapter pointed out, chapter 10 is the centerpiece of the Hebrew letter. It instructs us on how to enter heaven and how to draw near to God. It is at this point that the writer proclaims that those who draw near must do so with a “sincere heart in full assurance of faith.” Heb 10:19-25 spells out how we achieve and maintain the reward:

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Chapter 10 concludes by turning again to belief and salvation in verse 39: “39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.” In all, the Hebrew letter uses the words *faith* and *believe* 37 times. Thirty of these uses occur in the 11th chapter, making it the great chapter on faith in the Bible.

What Is Faith?

Heb 11:1-3

11 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for.

3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

This great chapter on faith begins with a link back to the statement in Heb 10:21-22, “22 let us draw near to God with a **sincere heart in full assurance of faith**, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” Faith is being sure with nothing doubting. According to Paul in 2 Cor 5:7, “7 We live by faith, not by sight. This is the assurance that Peter spoke of in Acts 2:36, “36 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” *Certain*, as used in verse one, marks the degree of our faith. What we do not see is not only possible, but it is probable; what we do not see is not only probable, but also certain. God from the beginning has displayed the evidence of this certainty. Paul wrote in Rom 1:20, “20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

It is by this faith that we understand that God created the universe by his command. This truth of verse 3 eliminates any view of creation other than God spoke it into being. This statement of fact is an eternal truth, which no one can contest from either nature or the Bible. The corner stone of our faith is that God created the heavens and earth and all that are in them.

Once we have accepted that God is creator of all things, it becomes necessary that we do his will. Such was the case of Abel and all those faithful who followed him.

Examples of Faith Teach Us about Faith

Our Faith Speaks for Us

Heb 1:4

4 By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

It was by the kind of faith defined in verses 1-3 that Able offered a better sacrifice. By faith, he did what God commanded, and by faith, God commended him as a righteous man. Any one who thinks they can be faithful and not do what God commands, commits the sin of Cain, being so arrogant as to believe God must not be obeyed. The application of these facts apply forcefully to our modern religions where obedience to God takes second place to self-will. If we are faithful, we will learn and do God's will.

Without Faith It Is Impossible to Please God

Heb 11:5-6

5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Enoch's great example of faith was that by faith, he pleased God by doing His will. In verse 6 the writer states another eternal principle: "And without faith it is impossible to please God." The reason this is true is that anyone who comes to God must believe that God exists and believe that he rewards us if we earnestly seek. First, we believe; and second, we earnestly seek him. There is no other way.

Our Inheritance Comes by Faith

Heb 11:7

7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

That Noah believed God and built the ark made him an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. This righteousness is one that acts and does what God says to do. Perhaps, what is called for in this modern world is Noah's **holy fear** in the hearts of those who say that they believe in God but do not follow the will of God.

Our Promise Is the City with Foundations Designed and Built by God

Heb 11:8-12

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

Twenty-first century Christian, when God calls, do you obey and go? do you look forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God? John in Rev 21:2-3 describes the city, "2 I saw the Holy City , the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

By his faith Abraham became the father of spiritual Israel. Paul asserted in Rom 9:7-8, "7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."

Now as the children of God, we receive the holy city. Heb 12:22-24 summarizes:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

We Must Be Living by Faith when We Die

Heb 11:13-16

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

We, as these great examples of old, must be living by faith when we die. We must long for that better country, that heavenly country, that city prepared for us by God.

God Raises the Faithful from the Dead

Heb 11:17-22

17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

22 By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.

What did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph have in common? They all believed in a promise of life beyond the grave. God can raise the dead.

Nothing Must Intervene with Our Faith

Heb 11:23-31

23 By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

29 By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.

31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

Nothing must intervene with our faith—not riches and wealth, earthly power and prestige. Just as Moses, we must keep our faith and the practices of the faith as given by Christ, even though Christ is invisible to us. We must keep our faith as we pass through the Red Sea and Wilderness of our lives. We must choose the right and withstand the enemy,

By Faith We Endure

Heb 11:32-38

32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

This cluster of heroes demonstrates that God's true children endure to the end.

All the Faithful under the Old Covenant Made Perfect Together with Us

Heb 11:39-40

39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

No matter how great the feats of faith by these witnesses of the Old Covenant, they could not receive or even know what God had planned for us and for them together with us. Even the prophets spoke of the grace to come. Peter explains in 1 Peter 1:10-12:

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those

who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Paul adds in 1 Cor 2:7-10 that even the rulers did not know, otherwise they would not have crucified the Lord of glory:

7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen,

no ear has heard,

no mind has conceived

what God has prepared for those who love him" –

10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

12. Receiving a Kingdom that Cannot Be Shaken (Hebrews 12)

As noted in the introduction chapter 10, Heb 10:19-25 spells out how we achieve and maintain the promised rest:

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Chapter 11 illustrated the principle of diligently seeking after God by ushering forward one witness after the other from the old covenant dispensation, concluding with Heb 11:39-40. "39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

Running the Race Marked Out Before Us

Heb 12:1-3

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

The word, *therefore*, begins chapter 12 by drawing conclusions based on the testimony of the lives and actions of that great cloud of witnesses from of old. Those things that hindered them were the sins of disobedience to the clear teaching of the new covenant. The writer taught the certainty of the punishment for those beset with these sins in Heb 6:4-6:

4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Heb 10:26-31 speaks directly to how severe and certain this punishment will be:

26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. 28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

This passage uses an analogy of our lives to the Christian race. None of the endurance of the witnesses of old matches that of the Lord upon whom we are to set our eyes, seeing that he endured

suffering and shame. God rewarded him with a seat at the right hand of His throne. The importance of the entire race analogy is that we are not to "grow weary and lose heart."

Accepting the Discipline of the Lord

Heb 12:4-17

4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 13 "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. 16 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. 17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

The second analogy in the chapter is one where the discipline that God gives us is comparable to that of a loving father. Granted, Christians must have wondered, "Why the struggle, Christ reigns supreme." After the discipline analogy, the writer precedes to amplify the teaching on the sins against which we struggle. The passage specifically teaches to be at peace with all men and to be holy. Without holiness, we will not see the Lord. Do not let trouble rise up is a command to the church. It will defile many. Do not be sexually immoral. Our reward can be totally lost, just as Esau lost his.

Coming to Mount Zion

Heb 12:18-21

18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

Mount Sinai was temporal, and the senses comprehended the physical terror of the entire unfolding in the old covenant. They heard, they saw, and they touched. Even Moses was terrified.

Heb 12:22-24

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24

to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

But the new covenant is spiritual. Mount Zion replaces Mount Sinai; the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, replaces physical Jerusalem. We are come to the heavenly hosts of angels and to the church of Christ, the firstborn. Our names, with theirs, are written in heaven in the book of Life. We are come to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant – the one of which he said before dying: “ 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Matt 26:28. The kingdom is with us, the church is with us, the heavenly Jerusalem has come. No turning back; no turning back.

Receiving a Kingdom that Cannot be Shaken

Heb 12:25-29

25 See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken – that is, created things – so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

God will shake the created things. We cannot escape if we refuse him. Therefore, we must receive the kingdom that cannot be shaken. Paul called that kingdom the kingdom of light and the kingdom of the Son he loves in Col 1:12-14:

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

John concluded the Revelation with similar descriptions. Rev 1:5-6 reads, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.” In Rev 5:10, the teaching is repeated, “10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God.”

13. Concluding Exhortations (Hebrews 13)

Chapter 12 ended with what is, perhaps, a summary exhortation for the entire book in Heb 12:28-29, "28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our 'God is a consuming fire.'" Our power in Christ rests on our knowledge that his kingdom is eternal. In that kingdom, we must worship only as he dictates and with the attitude that he requires. That God is a consuming fire should forever caution Christians that they should not take God casually in matters of faith and practice. A series of admonitions aimed at keeping Christians from falling away follow.

Exhortations to Do and to Think Righteously

Heb 12:1-3

1 Keep on loving each other as brothers. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

This first series of exhortations aims at the Christians' attitude to one another and to strangers. To keep on loving one another harkens back to the statement in Heb 10: 24, "24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." In Gal 6:10, Paul speaks of our obligation to do good to all men, "10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." These strangers maybe angels. Finally, he admonishes us to remember those in prison and mistreated as if they were we. The writer has elaborated on this idea early in Heb 10:34, "34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions." The point made here is that those not imprisoned must empathize with those in prison.

A Moral Perspective

Heb 13:4-6

4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

6 So we say with confidence,

"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

It is not enough for a Christians to be active in well doing, but they must avoid immorality and the things forbidden. Marriage is sacred, and all must honor it. To make this very clear, he speaks of the pure marriage bed. The sinful include adulterers and sexually immoral. The comparison with modern life is evident.

We must be free from the love of money. God gives us everything that we need. Paul expands this idea in 1 Tim 6:6-10:

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and

harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

As many have said, it is not money that destroys us but the love of money. With the Lord as our helper, what else can we need, and what can man do for me?

Remembering your Leaders

Heb 13:7

7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

The leaders to be remembered here are most likely the preachers and evangelists, since they are described as the ones “who spoke the word of God to you.” *Consider the outcome of their life* alludes to the necessity for preachers. Paul wrote in Rom 10:14, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” The Christian obligation toward preachers is also clear. Gal 6:6 teaches, “Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.”

A Continual Sacrifice to God

Heb 13:8-15

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. 10 We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

11 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. 12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. 14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

That Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever shows that the teaching never changes. Old timers used to say, “If anything is new, it is not true; if it is true, it is not new.” With this certitude of the gospel, strange teachings should never carry away Christians who hold to the single, unwavering truth of the gospel. Just as Jesus, we are out side the camp or city gate where Jesus suffered and shed his blood. But we, as he, have an enduring city that is to come.

Through Jesus we offer a sacrifice of praise, confess his name, do good to others, share with others, thus pleasing God.

Obeying Your Leaders

Heb 13:17

17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

The leaders spoken of here are the elders who are also bishops and pastors. These are those ordained to shepherd the flock of God. Paul speaks of the esteem owed to elders in 1 Tim 5:17,

especially those whose work is preaching and teaching, “17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” The elders only message is the one that has been taught. Titus 1:8-11 teaches: “9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

Mutual Prayers and Final Requests

Heb 13:18-25

18 Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. 19 I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

22 Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.

23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.

24 Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.

25 Grace be with you all.