



# Hebrews

*In the past God  
spoke to our  
forefathers through  
the prophets*

*. . . But these last days  
He has spoken to us by His Son.*

*Gerald Paden*

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# Hebrews

by Gerald Paden



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# Hebrews

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## INTRODUCTION

### A Preview of the Book

The study of the book of Hebrews is an extremely interesting study that will challenge and clarify your concepts of the entire Bible. It will enrich your appreciation for the priesthood of Christ. It will establish and confirm new views about Christ, His claims, and the Biblical rights to those claims. The book of Hebrews will set forth the benefits that come from a strong faith and conviction in Christ's present ministry. This book outlines the privileges Christian people enjoy because of who Christ is and what He did.

### **The End of the Old Mosaic Law**

The book of Hebrews contains the strongest declaration and demonstration of the total removal of the old Hebrew system: its law, its sanctuary, its priesthood, its covenant agreements, and indeed, everything that was a part of the Law of Moses. With the removal of the Law of Moses, the new system inaugurated by Christ stands unique and unparalleled with all the exclusive benefits and privileges that Christ came to give. The book of Hebrews gives the best demonstration of the limited purpose of the Law of Moses. According to the message of Hebrews, the Law was only a "shadow" of coming realities which Christ introduced. That "shadow" quality of the Law was shown by the author in every aspect of the Mosaic arrangement: its priests, its sanctuary, its sacrifices, etc.

## **The Hebrew Religious System**

The writer of the book of Hebrews fully discusses the Hebrew system of religion. As is true of any such system, it is built around a number of qualities and personages. For example, the Mosaic system was developed around the Aaronic priesthood (the high priestly family), the Levitical priesthood (the ordinary ministering priestly family), the old tabernacle which was erected in the wilderness (its basic structure being later incorporated into the Hebrew temple), the sacrifices of worship and atonement which were continually offered, and finally, the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. The basic law of the Old Covenant was the Ten Commandments. There were another 613 complementary ordinances and statutes that explained and illustrated the original Ten Commandments.

## **Christ Removed the Old and Began the New**

When Christ came He fulfilled every demand of the shadow system and then completely removed that old system. He totally replaced everything about it with the new “realities,” leaving the Old Covenant as only a shadow. The new system of Christ has its own priest, its own sanctuary, its own covenant, and its own sacrifice, all of which are unique to Christianity. There is absolutely nothing of the old Hebrew system that is still being used today. There is not even one single rule, command, ceremony, or obligation imposed in the Law of Moses that is to be imposed on or practiced by Christians today! It is important to remember this fact. It will be clearly verified and justified in the book of Hebrews.

Paul explained this concept to the Galatians. If any part of the Law of Moses is still binding, then all of it is binding upon us today. He used the ritual of circumcision as his example, and proved that the Law either stands as a unit or else it falls as a unit. Paul’s point is that **none** of the law is binding on Christians today (cf. Galatians 5:3-15).

### **Christ's New World Order**

Beyond the use of the term “shadow” to characterize the Law of Moses, the writer of Hebrews also refers to the era of the New Covenant as “*the world to come*.” This concept excited the expectations of his readers, who had for centuries longed for the arrival of the new age which the Messiah would bring. In Hebrews the writer will tell us that the “*world to come*” (Hebrews 2:5) has effectively arrived. This “*world*” was not subjected to angels as the Old Mosaic world was. The new world was subjected to Messiah, the man, and to His people. Peter tells us of the excited anticipation the Hebrew prophets felt as they foretold of the coming age of Messiah (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12). They knew that the Anointed One would bring a new world order, and they impatiently longed for His day to arrive.

It is natural that the inspired author of Hebrews would build his presentation of Christ upon that yearning for the new age in the heart of everyone in the nation of Israel of his day. As the writer triumphantly announces the arrival of Messiah, he confirms that everything they had hoped for in Him is gloriously supplied to everyone who readily enters into the new covenant arrangement.

### **Justifying the End of the Old**

Naturally the author of this book will have to prove and justify his argument about the removal of the Law of Moses and its systems of religion. He knows the people he was writing to were very attached to their time-honored institution and would not take kindly to it being discarded without adequate explanation. The writer will do so by assuring his readers that we have a better covenant based upon greater promises. As he exalts the new and better covenant he will illustrate and confirm the imperfections of the old. He is not a critic of the Law of Moses – that would have been very counter-productive for his readers who still had some sentimental attachments to their traditional past. He will simply claim that “the law made

nothing perfect” (Hebrews 7:19). But even then it was not because the law of Moses was defective; it was just never intended to accomplish what the New Covenant of Christ **alone** could do. This new system brings privileges that the old could never give. The glorious relationships between God and the subjects of the new system could only be promised in the Old Testament for the coming age of Messiah. Therefore, the old law did accomplish what it was given to do — it prepared Israel for the coming of Messiah (cf. Galatians 3:24).

### **Elements of the New System**

The new priest, Jesus (after the order of Melchizedek), inaugurated a new sanctuary when He dismantled the old one. “Christ is the mediator of a new covenant” (Hebrews 9:15) based upon better promises. His blood on the cross terminated the incessant need for sacrifices under the old order, and brought in “the promised eternal inheritance” with His one-time for all-time sacrifice. Finally, the new priest, Jesus Christ, ministers in a heavenly sanctuary rather than in an earthly temple. He has a heavenly ministry because that is where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (cf. Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). That explains why the writer refers to the new sanctuary as the “true tabernacle” (Hebrews 8:2). Such a statement does not mean that the old Hebrew tabernacle was untrue. It just means the old tabernacle was the “shadow” of the future “reality” or “true” sanctuary.

### **The Nature of Shadows**

There is something about shadows that needs to be explained because this is one of the favorite terms employed by the author in the book. Shadows do not have independent existence. Shadows do prophecy the substance that cast them. It is not possible to build a house out of the shadows of a tree. It takes a “reality” tree! This is the focus of the Hebrew writer. He takes his pen and boldly writes across the entire Old

Testament system the word: “SHADOW” That includes the Law, the priests, the sacrifices, and the sanctuary. He calls the old tabernacle a “shadow” (Hebrews 8:5). He presents the old sacrifices as “shadows” (Hebrews 10:1). Evidently, the law and its priests were part of the “shadow.”

There is another thing about shadows that is worth notice. Shadows serve as a kind of blueprint of the structure to be built in the future. As an example, notice late in the evening the shadow of an airplane pass along on the ground before you. You automatically know that the “reality” airplane passed between you and the sun. And in a short time, you expect to see the plane itself pass overhead. So a shadow may arrive before the substance arrives if the light source is in the right place. Thus the shadow (the Law of Moses) came before the reality of the Christian system. That is the way the Hebrew writer explains the passing of the shadow system. Once the reality has arrived, the shadow is no longer needed even though it still confirms in part the nature of the reality itself. In effect, when we enter into the reality of the priesthood of Christ, enjoy the relationships of the new sanctuary He inaugurated, and receive the benefits of his eternal sacrifice, we will no longer need or be subject to the old shadow system.

### **The Old System Is Also Imperfect**

Not only does the author write “shadow” across the whole of the Hebrew system, he also writes the word “imperfect” over it. He will insist that the Levitical priesthood is imperfect (cf. Hebrews 7:11). He will show that if the former priests could have brought perfection to the Hebrew people, then there would have been no need for the new priesthood of Christ. Then he will affirm that “the law made nothing perfect” (Hebrews 7:19). Again, the old Hebrew tabernacle could not make the worshipers perfect (cf. Hebrews 9:9). He will continue to label the Old as being imperfect by declaring that even the sacrifices of the Law could not bring perfection (cf. Hebrews 10:1-2).

Having inscribed the word “shadow” over the old arrangement, the author then writes the word “imperfect” over it also. The first term implies that the “reality” which the “shadow” predicted is now present and that the “perfection” which the “imperfect” could not give is now a living part of the new system. The obvious intent of the author is to encourage his readers:

*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, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (Hebrews 6:1-2)*

The writer is encouraging us to abandon the old and move on to that which is perfect which only Christ can give. He assures them that “*by one sacrifice he (Christ) has made perfect forever those who are being made holy*” (Hebrews 10:14).

### **Other Confirmation of the End of the Law**

It is clearly emphasized by the author of Hebrews that the Law of Moses was designed in its very temporary nature to prepare the people of Israel for the coming of the Messianic age. Hebrews illustrates, explains, and justifies the information the Apostle Paul gave in Galatians 3:18 -25. For example, the Law of Moses was like a school bus driver whose assignment was to gather up the children of Israel and deliver them at the feet of the coming Messiah. In that context, the writer of the book of Hebrews will insist that once they are in the classroom of the Master Teacher, Jesus, they will no longer need the bus driver of the Law. There are a great number of other Scriptures that insist upon the limited tenure and purpose of the Law of Moses (cf. Romans 7:1-6; 2 Corinthians 3:1-11; Galatians

3:15-19; 4:21-31). Even the Hebrew writer confirms: “*Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house, testifying to what would be said in the future*” (Hebrews 3:5). These things that Moses testified to were spoken by Christ. Moses was presented as affirming that his own Law was not the final revelation from God — “*he was looking ahead to his reward*” (Hebrews 11:26; cf. John 5:45-47).

### **Vital Topic Presented in Hebrews**

Several topics of interest will be discussed by the author. Not only will we see the failures of the old system, but we will also see the glories of the new. And the glories of the new will cover a number of distinguishing qualities that are characteristic of Christianity. These qualities will be presented in logical order. The topics and their general locations are listed as follows:

1. The deity of Christ — Hebrews 1
2. The humanity of Christ — Hebrews 2
3. The priesthood of Christ — Hebrews 7
4. The covenant of Christ — Hebrews 8
5. The sanctuary of Christ — Hebrews 9
6. The sacrifice of Christ — Hebrews 10.
7. The blending of all these qualities together with an explanation of the Christian privilege under the new order of things — Hebrews 10

We must understand that the author is dealing with a people that have been living, as far as their heritage is concerned, under the Mosaic system for 1500 years. And now he must convince them that their time-honored system has been abolished. So he must explain the removal of that system, and he will justify his argument for its removal from the Scriptures, and in particular, from the Old Testament itself! For the writer to affirm the removal of the Law of Moses is one thing, but

when Moses himself and the Old Testament prophets affirmed that same fact, it is a source of proof that no Hebrew could afford to reject!

### **Suggested Rules For Studying Hebrews**

There are a number of suggestions that will help in the study of the book of Hebrews. Obviously, one of the first things to remember is that it was written to Hebrews who had been converted to Christ in the first century. The early church had its roots firmly planted in Jewish soil. Its first converts were exclusively Hebrews. God granted the “seed line” for the coming Messiah to the descendants of Abraham. God had been using Abraham’s offspring for almost 2000 years before Jesus was born. That gave them certain privileges and certainly much responsibility. Paul spoke of this privilege when he wrote to the Romans: “*first for the Jew, then for the Gentile*” (Romans 1:16; cf. Romans 2:9-10). The Jews did have privileges that were granted and acknowledged by God. They not only had first place in privilege; they also had first place in responsibility. Just as they were first in the blessings of Christ, they were also first in God’s judgment if they rejected the Messiah.

#### **Rule One: Read With the Attitude of a First Century Reader**

In order to understand the book of Hebrews properly, we must separate ourselves from the 21<sup>st</sup> century non-Hebrew culture and mindset. We do not normally read the New Testament with the attitude of a first century reader. It is important to go back in time and adopt the way of thinking of the first century readers of this book. They were Hebrew people who had been converted to Christianity. But at the time the book was written some of those converts were considering leaving Christ and returning to the Hebrew religion. One of the major reasons this book was written was to stop this from

happening. The author of Hebrews will encourage them to remain faithful to Christ with these words: *“Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess”* (Hebrews 3:1). In other words, he told them to consider the information he was giving them before they decided to leave Jesus:

1. They needed to consider His Deity, His humanity, and His priesthood.
2. They needed to see the difference He had made in the relationship believers have with God, as manifested in the restructuring of the tabernacle Jesus inaugurated, because the sanctuary of both covenants is not so much a physical structure, as it is the definition of a relationship with God.
3. They needed to learn how He inaugurated a new covenant between God and His people.
4. They needed to look at all the better promises and privileges His people now enjoy under the new system.
5. They needed to consider the advantages that come from a one-time-for-all-time sacrifice as it contrasted with the old Hebrew system that required a new sacrifice for every menacing sin the Hebrews committed.

So the writer begs his readers to consider Jesus before they abandon Him in favor of the old ways. Those ways did not bring perfection even when it was active. Under the new system there is perfection for every aspect of religious life. The author of the book of Hebrews wants his readers to consider why they would give up the perfect of the new and return to the imperfections of the old.

**Rule Two: Think as a Hebrew**

It will be helpful in studying the book of Hebrews if we try to think as the Hebrew thought. That means that all the terminology used in the book must have an initial Hebrew meaning and connotation. That makes it imperative that we understand the original meanings of the terms used and then adopt their definitions to our own thinking. When the writer uses concepts that may have modern applications, we must be careful not to impose our modern meanings on the text. Some terms may have a meaning exclusive to the book of Hebrews.

**Rule Three: Recognize the Lack of Knowledge With the Jewish System**

People who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century do not have much acquaintance with sanctuaries, altars, priests, animal sacrifices, and religious ceremonies. We are not familiar with the Jewish system of religion. All these factors were employed on a constant basis by the Hebrews in their sacrificial worship of God and in their ceremonies of atonement for sin. There are no significant religious groups today in the world that still use animal sacrifices to remove the guilt for human transgressions. The daily lives of the Hebrews revolved around such sacrifices, but all such systems have long ago been eliminated.

**Rule Four: Remember the Topic Within Each Chapter**

Give deliberate attention to the various emphasis the writer gives to each topic of special interest. From chapter to chapter, keep in mind which topic is under discussion in that particular chapter. For example, in chapter one the author will discuss the **deity of Christ**. He will use certain terminology that may give us the impression that he is discussing Jesus' humanity. He will talk about a "*son*," "*the firstborn*," "*when God brings his firstborn into the world*," and then about the description of His installation at the Father's right hand. All this terminology must be understood by the context. It may appear that he is

discussing Jesus' humanity instead of His deity. Therefore, these terms must **not** be understood as relating to His birth in Bethlehem. These words have to do with Jesus' inauguration as King upon His throne. They have to do with the beginning of His kingdom, the foundation of the church of Christ on the day of Pentecost. This will become clear to us as we go through the study of chapter one verse by verse.

It is important to remember that in chapter two the author will discuss the **humanity of Christ** in detail. It will be necessary for the author to prove both the deity and the humanity of Christ. When Christ became a man He emptied Himself of the expression of His deity so that He could live among men as a man so that He could accomplish the role assigned to meet the needs of the human family. These comments about the focus of chapters one and two help illustrate the importance of keeping the major topic in successive chapters well in mind going through the study of each chapter. It is clear that the author will have one major topic that dominates the discussion in each chapter.

### **Date of the Writing of the Book**

Quite evidently the book of Hebrews was written a number of years after the day of Pentecost because the readers are asked to "*Remember those earlier days after you had received the light*" (Hebrews 10:32). "*Those earlier days*" would refer to the early days of that generation. The church began in the year 32 A.D.(cf. Acts 2). Probably the book of Hebrews was written during the latter days of that first generation of Christians — probably about 35 years after Pentecost. The actual time seems to have been just a few months before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. When the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus (the son of the Roman emperor, Vespasian), he also destroyed the temple, decimated the Levitical priesthood, and terminated their sacrifices and all temple-centered activity of the Jewish nation. The Jews had risen up in

rebellion against the Roman occupation of their city and nation. They tried to overthrow Rome's control over Palestine. Jesus had given clear prophecy in Matthew 24 concerning this event. The Jews failed and Rome proceeded to dismantle Jerusalem stone by stone.

According to Hebrews 9 and 10 this book was written just before the Roman triumph over the Jews. It is clear that the Jews were still practicing the sacrifices of the Law of Moses when the book was written even though those laws were no longer valid. When the author is describing these rituals he uses the present tense verbs: "*stands*" "*performs,*" and "*offers*" (Hebrews 10:11). These sacrifices were no long valid, nor were the priests who offered them still recognized by God, nor was the Law of Moses any longer acceptable to God. The date of the writing of the book is A.D. 68 or 69. This dating will help us understand some of the discussions in the full text.

Christianity and Judaism were never intended by God to co-exist. They are two completely different systems that have nothing in common as it relates to atonement for sin and worship of God. The only relation the two systems ever had was defined by the author as the relation between a shadow and the reality of the substance that casts the shadow. It is clear to the author that the old Hebrew system had to be terminated before the new system of Christ could begin.

This book is meant to be a commentary of the book of Hebrews. All scripture unless otherwise noted is recorded in the New International Version. The passages from Hebrews that are being discussed will be presented in italic bold and indented with the scripture reference given at the end.

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# JESUS, THE SON, IS DEITY

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## Hebrews 1: 1 - 14

In the first chapter of this study several things were presented including the information about the ending of the old system of Hebrew religion. This included the Law of Moses, the Levitical priesthood, and the old tabernacle. Four rules were suggested to help understand the study of the book of Hebrews. Remember that the date of the book was set for A. D. 68 or 69. It is important to read and think with the first century in mind remembering the Jewish religious system. In chapter 2 there are two main points: (1) the continuity and consistency of revelation, and (2) seven claims to divine excellency for the Son of God. Each of the seven qualities affirms the divine nature of Messiah. The author of the book of Hebrews will make the claims for the Son's deity and then proceed through the study of the Old Testament prophets to confirm every one of the claims.

### The Continuity of Revelation

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

The Old Testament contains God's inspired message through the prophets. The original Greek of these verses states that God spoke **"in"** the prophets. In other words, God's message was given both **in** the words that the prophets spoke

and **in** the lives they lived. The prophets lived in different times and received their messages in many different avenues of revelation. None of the prophets had the total message God wanted to communicate to the Jewish ancestors. God measured out His word to the prophets according to the needs of the people.

The same God who spoke in times past through prophets is now speaking “*to us*” through His Son. This statement unites the message of the Old Testament with that of the New Testament. There is continuity of purpose in the complete message. Not only did the prophets foretell the coming of Messiah, they also affirmed that their message would give way to His. God “spoke” through the prophets, but now “*he has spoken to us by his Son.*” The verb tense of “has spoken” indicates that Messiah delivered God’s final message to mankind. After Jesus “has spoken” there will be no more messages spoken from God. Jesus is God’ spokesman for the new age that began on the day of Pentecost.

The phrase “*in these last days*” relates to the last days of the Jewish age. Most of the prophets predicted the end of the Hebrew era. They frequently used phrases like: “*in the last days*” (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1), “*the days are coming*” (Jeremiah 7:32, 9:25, 16:14, 23:5), and “*in those days*” (Daniel 11:6). All these statements speak of the termination of their religion based on the Law of Moses. The Hebrew writer picks up on those statements and applies their language to “*these last days.*” He does not discuss any further last days, because “*these last days*” relate to the time that was present (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11; 1 Peter 1:20). Other Apostles used this same type of terminology and even the Hebrew writer himself uses this concept (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11; 1 Peter 1:20; Heb.9:26).

## Seven Excellencies of the Son

*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 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. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs (Hebrews 1:1-4).*

In the first chapter of Hebrews the writer will present **seven claims to divine excellency** for the Son of God. Each of the seven qualities affirm the divine nature of Messiah. The author will make the claims for the Son's deity, and then proceed through the study of the Old Testament prophets to confirm every claim.

**First**, Jesus was "*appointed heir of all things.*" An heir is one who has received an inheritance. Before He became the "*heir*" (while Jesus was heir-elect), Paul said that He was no different from a servant though He potentially "*owns the whole estate*" (Galatians 4:1). The Greek in this Galatians' verse affirms that He is the Lord of all. This makes Jesus the sovereign over all things. He is the King and Ruler of all. This is exactly what Matthew 28:18 affirmed about Messiah. Just before He ascended to the right hand of the Father, Jesus said: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*"

Jesus was "*appointed heir*" by the Father. This appointment was foreseen in Psalms 2:6-7a: "*I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will proclaim the decree of the Lord.*" The installation and the proclamation of the decree is equal in concept with the word "*appointed.*" "*He*" who did the

appointing of Jesus to His kingly position was God the Father who also “*spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.*” **Jesus is the Heir of all things.**

**Second**, not only is Messiah the Lord of all things, He was also the creator of all things: “*through whom he made the universe.*” The Apostle John assures us that Jesus is equal with God in nature:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (John 1:1-3).*

There are other scriptures in the New Testament that confirm this fact:

*For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth . . . all things were created by him and for him (Colossians 1:16), . . . God, for whom and through whom everything exists . . . (Hebrews 2:10), and God is the builder of everything (Hebrews 3:4b).*

He was before all things and creator of all things.

This brings up some interesting questions. If Jesus is the creator of all things, how can He become the heir of everything? Does He not already own everything in virtue of His creating all things? How could God appoint Him “*heir*” of what was His already by creation? Evidently, the writer is viewing Messiah in His incarnate, human condition. When Messiah became a man, He gave up the expression of His sovereignty over His creation. He gave up His right to rule so that He could become a man. By doing this, He made Himself subject to the same laws of nature that you and I must obey. To

become a man He must be human in totality. And that demands that He empty Himself of all His divine power and prerogatives. That is the reason the author sees Him appointed heir of all things after His earthly ministry. He has returned to His throne of glory and assumed once again all the privileges of rule and reign over everything He had made. Jesus is the Creator of all things.

**Third**, “*The Son is the radiance of God’s glory.*” The word “*radiance*” implies the brilliance and brightness of Jesus’ divine glory. He is equal with the Father in heavenly brilliance. Under the shadow of the cross, Jesus prayed, “*And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began*” (John 17:5). When Jesus came to earth He emptied Himself of the expression of His divine glory. In the prayer He asked the Father to return Him to that state of glory. The Hebrew root concept for “*glory*” relates to those qualities of God’s own essence, power, and actions that are impressive to man. The word implies fullness or completeness. When we contemplate the power and majesty of God, we are thinking of His unlimited glory. **Jesus is the Radiance of divine glory.**

**Fourth**, Jesus is *the exact representation of his being*. Jesus is the representation of divine nature. The Greek word for “exact representation” is *karakter* which we spell as “character.” A typewriter has keys and the keys are the characters. When you strike the key, it produces a representation or an image on the page. The paper receives the image of the key. The key is the original. In the same way, Jesus is not an image or reproduction of God! He is the character, the key. The word *karakter* was used in New Testament times to indicate an engraving or a signet ring. Such a ring was placed on a piece of paper to authenticate the document as being from the king. It would leave the imprint of the king’s seal in the wax that was placed on the paper. Jesus is not a representation or reproduction of the divine seal; **He is**

**the Seal.** This is one of the greatest confirmations of the deity of Jesus in all Scripture. Messiah is everything in essence that the Father is as to His deity. **Jesus is the Representation of divine nature.**

Fifth, Jesus is “*sustaining all things by his powerful word.*” Other versions translate this phrase as “*upholding all things by the word of his power.*” The word “*upholds*” implies that Messiah governs, rules, and controls the destiny of all things. The same concept was expressed by Paul in Colossians 1:17 even though he did not use the same Greek word. In that context Paul affirmed that Jesus had created all things. Then he said, “*He is before all thing, and in him all things hold together*” (Colossians 1:17). Jesus exercises sovereignty over the entire universe. It is His powerful word that keeps everything together. If Jesus were to withdraw His power, the universe would explode into oblivion. The word “*uphold*” also suggests the concept that Jesus is now directing the universe toward the completion of its ultimate purpose. The universe was created with a divine purpose in mind. Christ is moving the world with everything and everybody in it toward the purpose for which it was all brought into being. **Jesus is the Sustainer of all things.**

**Sixth,** Messiah is the One who “*provided purification for sins.*” It is a fact that sin exists and sin must be purified if man is going to have a relationship with God. At this point in the book of Hebrews, the writer does not show how deity enters the picture of purification. Later, the writer of Hebrews will show how Christ, as the man Jesus, died and offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice for sin. He will show how the divine side of Jesus’ nature became a part of His sacrificial ministry and how Christ, as our divine High Priest, accomplished purification for sin. **Jesus is the Purifier for sins.**

**Seventh,** after Christ accomplished the sacrifice for man’s purification, He “*sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*” This is an interesting picture of the priestly position

considering Hebrew thinking. Christ is seated! Under the Old Testament system it was totally inconsistent for a priest to sit down. A “seated” priest indicates that the job is finished — his mission has been accomplished. It is also significant that Jesus is seated “*at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*” That fact would affirm that He has completed His mission to the satisfaction of the Father who had sent Him on His sacrificial mission. The writer of the book of Hebrews describes the duties of a priest under the Law of Moses: “*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*” (Hebrews 10:11). It is evident that it was the Father who invited the Messiah to take His position: “*The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’*” (Psalm 110:1). This means the Father had accepted the sacrifice of Christ as completing everything necessary for human redemption.

The name Jesus “*inherited*” is the name “*Son.*” The fact that He “*inherited*” the name indicates that His name is not native to His eternal deity. His position as “*Son*” was an adoptive relationship that has to do with His incarnation only. The names of the angels will later be defined by the author from passages cited from the Old Testament. Their names have to do with their functions under the command of Messiah: “*worship,*” “*winds,*” “*servants,*” and “*flames of fire*” (cf. Hebrews 1:6-7). The angels are communication tools used by the author of Hebrews to show both the deity and humanity of Messiah. The name “*Son*” has to do with the redemptive function Jesus fulfilled. It is clear that Jesus is superior to the angels just as the Creator would be over His creation (cf. Hebrews 1:4). Jesus has a Superior Position and Name.

The angels are used to affirm the deity of Christ in Hebrews 1. In Hebrews 2 when the argument shifts to a study of the humanity of Jesus, the author will use the figure of angels to show that in becoming a man, Jesus “*was made a*

*little lower than the angels*” (Hebrews 2:9). The angels are a common denominator to illustrate the deity and the humanity of Jesus.

### **The Excellencies Proven From the Prophets**

*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’? And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’ In speaking of the angels he says, ‘He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.’ But about the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.’ He also says, ‘In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. 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.’ To which of the angels did God ever say, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:5-14)*

First, the author of Hebrews made seven affirmations about Messiah, and then he proves each one of them not by offering his own confirmation, but offering testimony from the prophets – *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the*

*prophets.*” The author’s personal opinion about Jesus would not be as convincing to the average Jew as testimony quoted from the prophets who were inspired by God. There is powerful testimony to confirm all the claims because the inspired prophets said the same things about Jesus in the Old Testament scriptures. The author of Hebrews goes to those Old Testament scriptures and quotes the prophets Moses, David, Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah knowing that whatever these men had said about the coming Messiah would be accepted as true. It is interesting to note that the author will limit himself in this section either to prophecies written by or about David.

### **Testimony Confirming the “Son” Being “Heir”**

To confirm his statement that Jesus was “*appointed heir of all things,*” the author of Hebrews quotes a well known Messianic Psalm — Psalm 2. This psalm presents Messiah both as “*heir*” and “*king*” and clearly affirms that Messiah is the “*Son.*” The words “*heir*” and “*king*” are terms that explain the mission of the divine Son who became a man and then returned to the right hand of the Father to begin His reign over the universe. To establish the context of David’s prophecy it will help to read Psalm 2:1-9:

*Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his **Anointed One**. ‘Let us break their chains,’ they say, “and throw off their fetters.” The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ‘I have installed **my King** on Zion, my holy hill.’ I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my **Son**; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your*

*possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.'*

The words "Anointed One" in the Hebrew text of Psalm 2 refers to Messiah and definitely relates to Jesus. The Psalmist said the kings and rulers will try to overthrow God's program, but God's programs cannot be defeated by men. God will laugh and scoff at them, rebuke and terrify them. God's unchangeable purpose was to enthrone His Son. The Psalmist said:

*I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'* (Psalm 2:6-7).

The original Hebrew text has "*today I have begotten you.*" That statement affirms that the Father has decreed the inauguration of the Son's reign as King. The day of installation for Messiah as King over His kingdom was on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:30-36). By inspiration Peter gave the explanation of Jesus' ascension to the throne "*at the right hand of God.*"

The phrase "*you are my Son*" might cause us to think of Jesus as an offspring of the Father, because that is the meaning we attach to the word "son." Some might think Psalm 2 is speaking of when Jesus became a man. Hebrews chapter 1 is discussing the deity of Jesus and not His humanity. Remember to let the Hebrew thinking of the first century interpret the terminology that the author is using. For them a "son" did not always imply an offspring. It was often used to define a person's nature or personality. For example, James and John were called "*the sons of thunder*" (Mark 3:17) and Barnabas was known as "*the son of encouragement*" (Acts 4:36). Christians are called "*the sons of the kingdom*" (Matt.13:38) which implies they had taken on the nature of the reign and rule

of Christ.

There are three passages in the Gospel of John that show how Hebrew people used the term “*son*.” The first passage is John 5:17-18:

*Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.’ For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; . . . he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:17-18).*

The Jews understood what Jesus meant when He referred to God as “*My Father*.” In John 10:30, Jesus openly declared, “*I and the Father are one*.” The next verses say that the Jews picked up stones to stone Him because they believe Him to be a “*mere man*” and He was claiming “*to be God*” (cf. John 10:31-33). One final passage is found in John 19:7. Pontius Pilate asked the Jews why they sought Jesus’ life, and they replied, “*We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God*.” It is interesting to ponder why the Father called Jesus “*my Son*” in Psalm 2:7 in light of how the Jews used the term “*son*.”

### **Testimony Confirming the Father and Son Relationship**

To confirm his testimony that Jesus does indeed have a Father to Son relationship with God, the writer of Hebrews quotes from Nathan, the prophet, when Nathan was telling David that it would not be David who would build God’s temple. In the second quotation from Old Testament scriptures the LORD said:

*When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a*

*house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son . . . But my love will never be taken away from him (2 Samuel 7:12-15a).*

This prophecy is also cited in 1 Chronicles 17:13 and referred to in Psalm 89. The Apostle Peter mentioned this prophecy in Acts 2 to assure us that Jesus is enthroned at the right hand of the Father. These verses confirm that even in the Old Testament the Father referred to the coming Messiah as “*my Son*.” My sons are just as human as I am. It is with that same sense of equality in their divine nature that the term “*my Son*” links the Father and the Son.

### **Testimony Confirming Jesus as the Firstborn**

To confirm Jesus as the “*firstborn*” the author of Hebrews refers to Psalm 97:7 as the third quotation from the Old Testament scripture (this is not a precise quote, Ed.). The term “*firstborn*” does not relate to the first of a series in this passage. It means the unique one or the one who deserves double-honor. In relation to the Father, Jesus is consistently called the “*only begotten Son of God*” (cf. John 1:14, 18; 3:16; Hebrews 11:17; 1 John 4:9). In this context, Jesus is unique as King and Lord. Remember that this passage is not speaking of the humanity of Jesus but of His deity.

When did God bring His firstborn into the world? It is important to note what “*world*” is being referred to in Hebrews 1:6. Look at Hebrews 2:5: “*It is not to angels that he has subjected **the world to come**, about which we are speaking.*” The writer of Hebrews clearly states that he is discussing the “*world to come*” even from the beginning. The phrase “*the world to come*” for all the Hebrew prophets was the world of Messiah. The early readers of the book of Hebrews had already “*tasted the powers of the coming age*” (Heb.6:5) which was and is the Messianic age. Later in his letter, the writer states,

*“When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here”* (Hebrews 9:11a). The Greek for this verse speaks of Christ having come as the High Priest of *“the coming good things.”* He is referring to the era of Christ’s sovereign reign over His kingdom. Hebrews 10:1 states: *“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming.”* The *“world”* into which Jesus was brought was the new age He inaugurated.

Jesus was brought into that new *“world”* on the day of Pentecost. This is the *“world”* He rules. That is the context in which Psalms 97:7 commands *“worship him, all you gods!”* The angels of heaven are commanded to worship an enthroned Messiah. The angels in Revelation 19:10 and 22:9 refused to let John worship them because they were *“fellow servants”* who also worshiped God. The command was given to John *“Worship God!”* The Apostle Peter wrote about Jesus *“who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him”* (1 Peter 3:22).

### **Testimony Confirming Jesus’ Relationship to Angels**

The fourth quotation that the Hebrew writer uses is from Psalm 104:4, *“He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.”* This verse affirms that the angels of heaven were created to be instruments in the hands of Messiah. The Hebrew text states that God has made the angels to be Messiah’s *“messengers”* or *“servants.”* Christ can do whatever He pleases with them and use them as *“winds”* or *“flames of fire.”* Even the highest order of angels are just servants to Jesus. The writer of Hebrews was confirming the eternal sovereignty and deity of Jesus. Angels are never called *“my Son”* — they are called worshipers of Christ and used by Him as messengers and servants.

### **Testimony Confirming His Eternal Throne**

The fifth quotation comes from Psalm 45:6. David said, *“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of*

*justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.*” In contrast with the limited deity given to the angels, the same God acknowledges titles of deity to the Son. The original Hebrew and Greek translations of this verse are very clear in affirming the deity of the Son. God the Father (*ho Theos*/Greek) is referring to the Son as God (*ho Theos*/Greek). In the original Hebrew it is the same reference: God the Father (*Elohim*/Hebrew) refers to the Son as God (*Elohim*/Hebrew). The theme of the Hebrew text of Psalm 45 is devoted to the exalted reign of King Messiah. Messiah is seated on His throne with angels standing before the throne. He is ruling over His kingdom with a scepter of righteousness. His rule and His kingdom are eternal just as He is eternal. Both His deity and His kingship are affirmed in this Psalm.

### **Testimony Confirming His Righteous Nature and Exaltation**

This sixth testimony confirms the fact that Messiah is personally righteous, and therefore, He rules His kingdom out of His righteous nature. The quote from Psalm 45:7 affirms that God hates wickedness and has given His life to remove all iniquity from the citizens of His kingdom. His sacrifice made it possible for Him to share His personal holiness with His subjects (cf. Hebrews 2:11). In both the Old Testament quote from Psalms and the New Testament passage from Hebrews 1:9 “*Therefore God, Thy God,*” is a phrase in the vocative mood making it a direct address. God is calling Messiah by the title “*God.*” This scripture found both in the Old and New Testaments is one of the most emphatic declarations of the deity of Jesus. Jesus was “*anointed*” as King by the Father with the symbolic “*oil of joy.*” All the prophets, priests, and kings were divinely anointed during the Old Testament times. It is only fitting that this same practice was applied to enthrone Messiah. He rules with the Father’s divine pleasure.

Since the whole passage of Psalm 45 deals with terms that

refer to royal occasions (thrones, kingdoms, scepters, and anointings), it is logical to assume that the “*companions*” Jesus has been set above refers to other kings of the earth who sit on thrones, hold scepters, and rule over kingdoms.

Jesus has been exalted above all else by a divine decree and anointment. He is “*King of kings and Lord of lords*” (1 Timothy 6:15).

### **Testimony Confirming the Eternity of Messiah**

The seventh testimony the writer of Hebrews uses is from Psalm 102:25. In this passage the Father calls Messiah by the title of “*Lord*.” This passage from Psalms also confirms the fact that Jesus created all things — “*In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands*.” In the third chapter of Hebrews, Jesus is compared to Moses, but the author states, “*God is the builder of everything*” (Hebrews 3:4).

Even though the heavens and the earth were created by Jesus, they will not last. All physical creations will terminate, but the eternal Messiah will abide forever. The earth is wearing “*out like a garment*.” This is not evolution, it is devolution (the descent through natural causes, Ed.). Jesus’ existence is outside the realm of created things, so He is not conditioned by the fate of creation. His throne will last forever. It is significant that the One who created the heavens and the earth “*in the beginning*” is also the One who will “un-create” everything. He will “*roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed*.” When Jesus returns to earth for the “*second time*” (cf. Hebrews 9:28), He will put an end to the universe and everything will perish.

The phrase “*But you remain the same, and your years will never end*” refers to the unchangeable essence of the eternal King. Sameness is a quality that belongs only to deity. The universe is always changing, because it is subject to decay. Malachi 3:6 says, “*I the LORD do not change*.” Hebrews 13:8

says, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*”

### **Testimony Confirming the Complete Victory of the Messiah**

The eighth quotation from the Old Testament used by the author of Hebrews is from Psalm 110:1. The Father invites the Son to sit at His right hand on the throne of deity. The Son is victorious over the enemies that will now become His footstool. This event took place upon the ascension of Jesus after His resurrection. Peter on the day of Pentecost spoke about the resurrected Christ — “*Exalted to the right hand of God*” (Acts 2:33a). This presents the symbol of conquered enemies bowing at the feet of their conqueror. It shows the complete victory of Jesus over all who oppose His reign including Satan and his angels.

### **Testimony Confirming the Involvement of Angels**

Since angels are subjects and servants of Messiah (cf. 1 Peter 3:22), it is clear that it is Christ who commands their ministries toward the saints who are to inherit eternal salvation through Messiah. Much of what we normally consider the generic providence of God is probably accomplished through the ministry of angels. They are deeply concerned about human salvation and often in Scripture are involved to accomplish the services Christ commands of them on behalf of the saved.

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# HUMANITY OF JESUS (1)

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## Hebrews 2:1 - 10

This chapter is a commentary on Hebrews 2:1-10. Remember that the writer of Hebrews has deliberately and systematically established the fact that Jesus is divine. The author first presents some warnings based on the deity of Jesus before he begins the discussion of the humanity of God's Son who became a man. Jesus was in His incarnate state when He delivered the final message from heaven to the sons of men. The message He delivered in the first century is as relevant today as it was then.

### The Danger of Drifting From the Son

*We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 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. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (Hebrews 2:1-4).*

The phrase “we have heard” quite evidently refers to God speaking **in** His Son as was mentioned before – “*he has spoken to us by his Son*” (Hebrews 1:2). Christians must not drift away from the message God delivered through Jesus. The dignity of

the spokesman for this age demands greater attention. The author draws a comparison between the message that Messiah gave and the message that was delivered to the prophets in ages past with the help of angels.

The “*message spoken by angels*” refers to the Law of Moses which was given by inferior messengers. The author of Hebrews has already established the divine superiority of Messiah over God’s created angels who serve as Messiah’s messengers and servants. If the message spoken by angels was binding, then the message from Messiah must not be ignored lest we lose our salvation. To refuse a servant is serious enough, but it is much more serious to refuse the Master when He is personally speaking (cf. Matthew 21:33-46).

Stephen’s speech that was recorded by Luke refers to “*an angel*” appearing to Moses while he was in the desert near Mount Sinai “*and he received living words to pass on to us*” (Acts 7:38). Paul mentioned “*the law was put into effect through angels by a mediator*” (Galatians 3:19). That mediator was Moses. The superior dignity of the divine Messiah over the angels is automatic because angels are servants of God. This gives a greater importance to the message that Jesus spoke.

The “*great salvation*” is the Christian’s rescue from sin. It is the restoration of the original plan of God for man in creation. The “*great salvation*” was and is the content of the message which was first spoken by Messiah. He is not only the original source of the message, He is also the source of “*great salvation*” itself. Jesus brought salvation to the human family. The Apostles, chosen by Christ as His “*witnesses*” (cf. Luke 24:48), were the authentic channel through whom that message was delivered to mankind. Only those Apostles could testify about the life and message of Jesus. No man today can “witness” concerning Jesus because man today has not witnessed His earthly ministry.

The original Greek for “*was confirmed*” conveys that the confirming process was for the Apostles, which in turn

authenticated the message they spoke. The word “*testified*” is a past completed action signifying that the confirming process is now over. God is no longer giving miraculous testimony to any man’s message. He only gave miraculous testimony to the witnesses of Jesus’ life and message. Notice that when Mark wrote his gospel, the confirming process was still going on – “*Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere . . . and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it*” (Mark 16:20). The verb tense of “*confirmed*” in this passage is present indicative, but when the Hebrew writer composed his letter “*was confirmed*” declares that the “*confirming*” process is over. That fact assures us that the age of miracles ceased with the Apostles. Jesus spoke, the Apostles repeated His message to the people of that day, and God validated their message by signs, wonders, and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the message the Apostles preached — “*such a great salvation*” — was divinely confirmed as the final message of God. It was and still is important that all who read the message of Hebrews know that they must pay close attention to the message and not depart from it. This is the **greater message** delivered by a **greater messenger** with a **greater law** that will carry with it an even greater punishment if it is ignored.

### **The Recovery of Man’s Lost Identity**

*It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. 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? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor 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. 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. 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 (Hebrews 2:5-10).*

The phrase “*great salvation*” is really an expression of God’s original plan for man. Man was created in the beginning for fellowship with God, a relationship that would be mutually beneficial to both God and man. God’s plan for man presented a glorious picture in the beginning (cf. Genesis 1), but then sin intervened and the plan was distorted. God’s purpose for man was frustrated by human sin, and the glorious fellowship that man and God had in the Garden of Eden was disrupted. Sin postponed God’s purpose in creating man, but God ultimately restored His plan through Christ so that sin could not destroy God’s plan.

Angels were not were not placed in charge of “*the world to come*.” The writer of Hebrews does not say directly **who** the “*world to come*” has been subjected to, but it is evident that the Messiah Himself in the quality of His Humanity rules the “*the world to come*.” When the author mentions “*the world to come*,” and then adds “*about which we are speaking*,” that makes it clear that the new “*world*” has already come. The new “*world*” was inaugurated by Messiah and is the topic from the very beginning of the book of Hebrews.

The writer of Hebrews may not inform the reader immediately as to **whom** this new “*world*” is subjected, but he says, “*there is a place where someone has testified: ‘What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you cared for him?’*” (Hebrews 2:6). The “*place*” is Psalm 8 and the “*someone*” is the psalmist David. In the context of this psalm,

it is David who is impressed with the greatness of the Creator God who made heavens and earth. He wonders how a God so powerful and majestic could be concerned with a being as insignificant as man. The American Standard version translates the phrase “*that you should care for him*” as “*that thou visitest him.*”

David reflected back to creation and considered the vastness of the universe. He seems to be saying why would an almighty God even be aware of the existence of man to the point that He would “*visit*” him. Why would God identify with the needs of man? James uses the word “*visit*” when he speaks of pure religion — “*pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction . . .*” (James 1:27, KJV). To “*visit*” means to identify with the needs of someone and to be concerned about helping in their need. The same kind of Hebrew usage here suggests that God came down and identified Himself with man. That was something that David could not begin to imagine. And yet, the Psalmist answered his own question about what man is — **man is God’s creation** — “*You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet.*”

Hebrews 1 looked at **Jesus’ deity** and used the angels as a common ground to demonstrate the superiority of Christ. Angels were presented as worshipers of Christ who served as His messengers. Hebrews 2 uses angels to prove the **humanity of Jesus**. God made man “*a little lower than the angels*” and “*crowned him with glory and honor.*” The crown of glory given to man is seen in the fact that he was created in God’s image (cf. Genesis 1:27). The word “*image*” in Hebrew is the same word that is used when David says, “*even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*” (Psalm 23:4). Man is a deep shadow of God — he is the intellectual, mental, and spiritual shadow of deity. That is man’s crown of glory.

The “*honor*” man received comes from the fact that God

placed “*everything under his feet.*” Man was meant to have dominion over all that had been created by God. The original plan was for man to enjoy mutual fellowship with God and exercise his divinely given honor over all the earth. This glory and honor was realized by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but the Hebrew writer says things are different because man sinned — “*Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him*” (Hebrews 2:8b). Man is no longer the ruler of all that God created. He has lost his crown of glory and honor — “*The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!*” (Lamentations 5:16).

It is at this point that the Hebrew writer inserts the person of Jesus as the **perfect man** —

*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* (Hebrews 2:9).  
[emphasis added]

The first thought that comes from this verse is that Jesus came down to the level of man. He suffered death so that by the grace of God He might taste of death for every man. This passage makes a marvelous statement about Jesus. He was placed on the level of man who is lower than the angels. That means He gave up His deity (higher than the angels) in order to become a man. The writer says He tasted “*death*” for every man in order to become the sacrifice that would atone for human sins. Tasting “*death for everyone*” demanded His own death. As God, He could not die because one of the qualities of deity is immortality. Jesus had to take on the nature of man to be able to suffer “*death for everyone.*”

By the grace of God Jesus’ death on the cross became a valid, God-accepted substitute for man’s sins. The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus did not die as Adam did. Adam died

with his glory marred, his honor comprised, and his sovereignty lost. The Greek in this verse uses an adverbial phrase that makes it clear in this context that Jesus was crucified still crowned with glory and honor! He never compromised His integrity, never violated the moral standards of God, and never committed a sin. This is the fundamental argument that the writer of Hebrews will make about Jesus throughout the rest of the book of Hebrews. As the sacrifice for human transgressions, Jesus Himself had to be innocent in regard to transgression and sin. The picture of this perfect man is Jesus suffering death but crowned with glory and honor. He never allowed the physical to dominate the spiritual life that He possessed. This is what enabled Him to become a sinless sacrifice. Jesus was made lower than the angels and as a man, He suffered and died, yet never lost His sovereignty over the universe.

The last verse of this particular passage gives the reason for Jesus' suffering through death on the cross. He suffered to bring "*many sons to glory.*" To be able to bring "*many sons to glory . . . it was fitting that God . . . should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.*" Jesus, God's own Son, became the Author of our salvation through His suffering on the cross. Through his sins man had lost his crown — he lost his "*honor and glory.*" Man could not restore himself to his original innocence or to his position of honor as the ruler of the world. Only God could return man to his "Eden condition and privileges." God Himself could not accomplish this task without becoming a man Himself. As a man He lived the kind of life God had intended for Adam to live in the beginning. God became the innocent sacrifice to cover man's sin.

Jesus was made "*perfect*" as the "*author of their salvation through suffering.*" "Perfection" does not relate to His moral condition because He died still "*crowned with glory and honor.*" His perfection relates to His function as our sacrifice. Until He suffered death on the cross, His mission of redemption

was not complete. Through Christ's suffering on the cross, His authorship of our salvation was made "*perfect*." Remember in the seven excellencies of Christ (cf. Chapter 1) Jesus provided purification for sins. Though such purification was the result of His divine nature, it was also the result of His humanity.

Christians are as free and innocent as Adam and Eve were in the Garden before they committed their transgression. Jesus came to earth to place the crown of glory back on our heads. In Revelation 4:10 says that the saints of all ages will gather around the throne of God and they will –

*lay their crowns before the throne and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being.'*

Christians will stand before the throne of God and lay down their crowns of restored glory — crowns that were placed upon our heads because of the sacrifice of Christ, the unmarred image of God. We receive that crown through our faith, trust, and obedience to the teachings (message) that Christ came to give. That is why Jesus is called "*the author of salvation*." He originated our existence in the beginning, He restored us to the spiritual condition of the Garden of Eden through His suffering on the cross, and He restored our fellowship with God. Jesus Christ recreated life and restored the fellowship man was meant to have with God the Father.

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## THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST (2)

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### Hebrews 2: 11 - 18

The material in the last chapter covered the discussion of Jesus bringing man back to glory and to the same kind of spiritual relationship that Adam had before his fall in the Garden of Eden (cf. Hebrews 2:1-10). This chapter will present several arguments that the writer of Hebrews makes about Jesus and His humanity.

It is difficult for mankind to understand what happened when God became a man. He had to empty Himself of all the external expressions of His divine nature. If He had come to the earth in the form of undiluted deity, He would have destroyed the human family. Scripture says no man can see God and live (cf. Exodus 33:20). Therefore, He had to suspend the external expression of all the qualities of His divine nature so that He could become a man. He manifested all the qualities of humanity without expressing His own divine nature at any time.

Jesus received His message by revelation in the same way the Apostles did through inspiration. He performed miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit just as the Apostles did. He walked on the water using the same power that the Apostle Peter did. He raised the dead with the same power that Paul and Peter used to raise the dead. Jesus emptied Himself of all the external expressions of His deity so that He could come down to the level of man, live among men as a man subject to human trials, subject to human temptations, and yet live victoriously without sin. Perhaps He wanted to prove to mankind that God did not shortchange him in creation. God did not make man vulnerable to the point that he could not overcome Satan. Jesus overcame

Satan with the same resources that man has at his disposal.

### **The Fruit of Christ's Humanity**

*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. He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.' And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again he says, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me' (Hebrews 2:11-13).*

This passage helps to explain what the writer of Hebrews meant when he said “so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9). Since Christ, the One who was holy and who “*makes men holy*,” never committed a sin, He is able to make men holy so that they can share His sinless nature. This is not talking about His holiness as a man. He can lift all mankind out of sin by forgiving their transgressions and thereby restoring their innocence. This is an important concept – “*Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.*” The ones “*who are made holy*” are Christians. The Greek in this verse simply states “*all are of one.*” The family of God (Christians) is united in holiness and shares in one spiritual nature.

The writer of Hebrews describes this family as “*holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling*” (Hebrews 3:1). Christians are brothers in holiness because Jesus has shared His own spiritual innocence with them. This is the result of the “*grace of God*” restoring the purity of Eden to man. And because “*he that makes men holy and those who are made holy*” are both one in holiness, “*Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.*” To confirm the fact that Jesus does indeed call us brothers, the writer of Hebrews quotes an Old Testament

prophecy about those whom Jesus will call His brothers: *“I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you”* (Psalm 22:22). Jesus is speaking to the Father declaring that He will praise God and declare His name in the congregation to *“my brothers.”* What a beautiful thought that Jesus sees all Christians as His brothers. Christians share His personal holiness making them all one with Him in innocence. He has built a brotherhood of holiness. If an individual has not been cleansed by the sacrifice of Christ, then he is still in his sin, and therefore, Jesus would be ashamed to call that man his brother. A man that is contaminated and ruined by sin does not have fellowship with God and he is not a spiritual brother of Christ. Any man who has not been cleansed by the blood of Christ is a brother in humanity. He is not a brother in faith or spiritual unity. Christ declares a spiritual unity between Himself and His people.

It is easier to understand this passage in Hebrews if we recall that Psalm 22 contains a description of the crucifixion of Christ. For example:

*My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing* (Psalm 22:15-18).

The psalmist David wrote about the hands and feet of Christ being pierced and the soldiers dividing His garments and throwing dice to see who would receive His unbroken robe. As a result of His crucifixion, Christ said, *“Father, I will confess your name among my brothers.”* *“My brothers”* refers to children of God who have been made holy by the blood of

Christ. Through the crucifixion (so vividly described in Psalm 22) our brotherhood with Christ was created. And that crucifixion as it was endured by Jesus is evidence of His total humanity. Jesus was totally human. He was made a little lower than the angels. He suffered as a man. He died as a man. And He calls man His brothers. He suffered in order that men might become one with Him in His personal holiness.

The writer of Hebrews is quoting a passage from the book of Isaiah when he says Jesus put His trust in God. If Jesus were expressing all the qualities of His deity as noted in the commentary concerning Hebrews 1, then He (as God) would not have to trust in anyone. But, as a man, He became as dependent upon the providence of God as any man. That is what this passage says about Jesus. He was so totally a man that He put His trust in God. In Isaiah 8:17-18 Isaiah is speaking about himself and his children. He is living in a generation of time when there were not many people in Israel who put their trust in God and depended on Him as their protector and as their providence. The Hebrew writer takes the statement that was on Isaiah's lips and applies it directly to Christ. Just as surely as Isaiah put his trust in God, so Jesus as a man also put His trust in God.

When Jesus was a baby, he was just as dependent upon the providence of God as any other baby. Psalm 22:9 records Jesus saying,

*Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.*

Jesus was dependent upon God for the rising of the sun, the rain from the clouds, the grain from the harvest, the clothing on His back, and the shelter over His head. This was the same kind of trust Isaiah had to have in God. Jesus depended and trusted

in God proving just how human He became. The prophet Isaiah declared that he “*and the children the LORD has given me*” will wait for Jehovah. They put all their trust in God. They depended on Him because He is reliable and they had learned the lesson of dependency upon God. The Hebrew writer affirms that Jesus also put His trust in God.

In this section of scripture the writer of Hebrews gives some of the fruits man enjoys because of the humanity of Jesus. Christians become a family united in holiness with Christ. Christians are confirmed as brothers with Christ. And Christians share with Christ their trust in God the Father.

### **The Mission of Christ's Humanity**

*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 — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants (Hebrews 2:14-16).*

The children of Israel were made of flesh and blood and the children of all men share in that flesh and blood, but so did Jesus. That is a Biblical definition of our nature. The writer of Hebrews assures his readers that just as surely as they became flesh and blood, Jesus also shared in their humanity. He became flesh and blood in the same way that all mankind did in the process of human birth. Jesus' conception was miraculous, but His birth was natural. After nine months of gestation, Jesus, this divine person, became a man by going through the experience of human birth.

Not only did Jesus experience human birth, He was born so that He could die. Jesus became a man “*so that by his death he might destroy . . . the devil.*” He was born so that He could,

in His human nature, destroy Satan's hold on the human family. Sin gave Satan a strangle hold on man's life, but Jesus paid the debt that was caused by sin and eliminated the Devil's claim on man. Jesus provided freedom for all those who were held in slavery by the fear of death.

Christ became a man for two reasons according to this text: **conquest** and **delivery**. Christ destroyed Satan who was the arch enemy of man (conquest). He destroyed the one who brought about the downfall of man in the beginning. Christ delivered man from the fear of death that has always existed in man's heart. He delivered all men who had been subject to the bondage of fear throughout their lifetime. There is a kind of fear that exists in the heart of man that makes him afraid of death. This is not the fear of a physical death but the fear of eternal separation from God. When Jesus went to the tomb on man's behalf and came forth victorious, He provided the confirmation that human life can survive the tomb.

Jesus' death on the cross took the place of man's death before God. He went to the cross, suffered, and died because of man's sin. Then He was raised from the tomb for man's justification. He was accepted as the sacrifice that covered man's transgressions and made it possible for God's grace to flood his life. The grace of God sets all men free from sin and spiritually restores him to his position in the Garden of Eden. The fellowship that man experienced in the Garden with God is restored. Christians stand before God as one with Him because they are one with Christ in His personal holiness. **Jesus came** into the world to become a man **so that** He could **conquer Satan** and **deliver God's children**. Men who through faith and trust in God are obedient to His commands can now enjoy the redemption that He has to offer.

Jesus manifested His humanity in all of the following ways: He was made a little lower than the angels as a man. He suffered as a man. He died as a man. He is able to call man His brother. He shared His holiness with man. He was made flesh

and blood as a man. He experienced a human birth to become a man.

The objects of Christ's mission of redemption were the physical descendants of Abraham — the Jews. Remember in Psalm 8:4 when David asked the question, "*What is man that you (God) are mindful of him?*" The Hebrew readers are the author's primary concern. Jesus did not come to help angels. I do not know why, because angels have rebelled against God and have lost their relationship with Him. But as far as the book of Hebrews is concerned there is no redemption for angels. Jesus came to help and deliver man from the slavery of sin and specifically from the slavery of Judaism (this statement will be explained later in this study).

### **Christ's Function in His Mission**

*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. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:17-18).*

The writer of Hebrews is making a different statement about the humanity of Christ in verse 17 than the one made earlier in verse 14. Yes, Jesus was made flesh and blood, but He was also made "***like his brothers in every way.***" Christ was made like man physically, but He was also made like man emotionally. He had the same hurts and pains. He had the same feelings and appetites as man. He had the same zest for life and the same urge for survival that all men have.

There are two benefits that come about because of Jesus' physical and emotional identification with His human family. He became a faithful and merciful "***high priest in service to***

God,” and He made “*atonement* (purification) *for the sins of the people*.” Jesus is qualified as a priest to serve both God and man. As a high priest, He is faithful to God and merciful to man. As a high priest He is able to purify the people from their sins. The word “*atonement*” in sacrificial terminology means to cover or to make satisfaction. In the Hebrew and Greek languages this verse conveys the fact that He paid the price to reconcile man back to God. Jesus paid the penalty for human sin. He gave God satisfaction in His sacrifice on the cross so that God is now able to grant redemption to the human family that believes in Christ. Christ became a faithful and merciful high priest in matters that relate to both God and man. Christ came to solve the religious problem that sin created between heaven and earth. Because Christ solved that problem, man can now be restored to the fellowship that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden before their sin.

The final argument for the full humanity of Christ is presented in verse 18 — God became man so that as man He could help man. Jesus suffered being tempted. It is important to understand the suffering of Christ as He endured temptation. He “*suffered*” temptation beyond the temptations recorded in Matthew 4:1-11. In Matthew’s account of the temptation of Jesus, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan after He had fasted forty days and forty nights. He endured three-fold temptations. First, Satan wanted Him to change stones to bread. Jesus was as hungry as any man who had not eaten for forty days. In order for him to resist the temptations, He had to deny the physical appetites that were demanding and crying out to be satisfied. His human nature was pleading, “Do it! Give me something to eat.” To resist temptation, Jesus had to call upon great determination, great resolution, and great commitment to the sacred mission God had given Him. Jesus’ mission demanded His sinlessness and He resisted every temptation.

Jesus died crowned with glory and honor. He never

violated divine law. He never sacrificed His moral integrity. He never committed a single sin. His sinlessness had a high price in the suffering He endured. He “*resisted to the point of shedding . . . blood*” (Hebrews 12:4). The writer of Hebrews urges his readers to “*consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart*” (Hebrews 12:3). Jesus was slandered, but He endured all kinds of opposition and maintained His integrity and innocence. Jesus resisted to the point of shedding His blood. He endured it all to the point of death on the cross. His attitude seems to have been better to lose an arm than to sin; better to lose both arms than to violate my mission; better to lose my life than to sacrifice my integrity.

It is important that Jesus remained sinless because man’s redemption depends on it. It was important to Him to be sinless for His self-respect, His integrity, and His fellowship with the Father He did not want to lose. The writer of Hebrews affirms that Jesus was innocent, but He paid a high price for His innocence. He was sinless by His own choice, not by divine manipulation. He totally became a man in every quality that any man has. He was just as susceptible to temptation as we are. It would have been just as easy for Him to sin as it is for any man. Men sometimes give the excuse that Jesus was not tempted as strongly as man is today or assume that He had some divine help when He faced temptations that is not available to man. If that were true that would have disqualified Him from being an example to man in His struggle against sin. Jesus did not have any advantages that are not available to man when He was tempted. The Hebrew writer says, “*we have a high priest . . . who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet without sin*” (Hebrews 4:14-15). That means that every possible avenue of temptation that man faces today — Jesus faced it. He faced temptation with the same reserves and strengths that man possesses and without any advantage over him.

The writer of Hebrews stresses the innocence of Christ and His willingness to suffer in the face of temptation to convince man that if he will pay that kind of price he can enjoy greater innocence, holiness, and unity in his life. Man has that expression of innocence, holiness, and unity **in Christ**. Peter wrote, *“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin”* (1 Peter 4:1). If a man is tired of sin in his life, if he is frustrated with sin, then he must begin to pay the price of innocence and innocence will come. He must begin to resist and to deprive the physical appetites of gratification, especially when that gratification would compromise morality. If man will pay the price of suffering, then holiness will become more characteristic in his spiritual life just as it was consistently characteristic in the life of Christ. He suffered being tempted as a man. He was tempted to an even greater degree than any man simply because His temptations were not only human — His temptations were also Messianic.

The temptations of Jesus came from the fact that He had suspended the expression of His deity and had refused to use the divine qualities and abilities that were rightfully His as God’s Son. Study the temptations of Jesus in Matthew 4. Christ’s deity is the appeal that Satan used to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. Satan said,

***If you are the Son of God, tell these stone to become bread . . . if you are the Son of God . . . throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels . . . so that you will not strike your foot against a stone’*** (Matthew 4:3, 6). [emphasis added.]

Satan tempted Jesus when His physical body was hungry to use His divine power to supply Himself with food. Satan tempted Jesus to use His divine power to prove that He was the Son of

God by throwing Himself off the highest point of the temple and dazzling the people with His powers.

Jesus was tempted as a man because God cannot be tempted with evil (cf. James 1:12). Satan urged Jesus to call upon His divine qualities, but Jesus refused to use those divine qualities because He did not want to separate Himself from the common experience of the human family to whom He had come to help. Therefore, He is able to help us when we are tempted. He truly was tempted in every way that man is tempted "*yet was without sin.*" That fact gives Christians boldness to approach the throne of grace, "*so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16). Approaching God's throne gives the Christian mercy and grace. Grace is available to help him when he is tempted. Mercy is available when he has already given in to temptation.

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## MOSES OR CHRIST

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### Hebrews 3: 1-19

In this section of scripture the writer of Hebrews draws a number of interesting parallels between Christ and Moses. In Hebrew thinking, Moses was second only to Abraham in importance. Therefore, the presentation of any religious system that would replace the Law of Moses would have to deal properly with the great Lawgiver. After the parallels, the writer proceeds to a number of contrasts that show Christ as the uncontested successor to the Mosaic order of things. Both Moses and Christ are viewed as great leaders who brought about an *exodus*. Moses led the people out of Egypt and away from bondage to Pharaoh. The final destination of Moses' *exodus* was the land of Canaan, the land God had promised to Abraham centuries before. Both in parallel, and yet in contrast, Jesus inaugurated a new *exodus* that was spiritual in nature. Jesus freed His people from bondage to a worse Pharaoh, Satan. By redeeming His people from their sin, Jesus is seen as the "*the author and perfecter of our faith*" (Hebrews 12:2) with the ultimate promised land being heaven itself. The writer begins this passage referring to a statement that was made in Hosea. Even though the writer of Hebrews does not quote this verse, the implication is clear. In Hosea 11:1 God said, "*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.*" Christians are presented as "*children of God*" and "*brothers of Christ*" in Hebrews 2. That analogy continues in Hebrews 3.

## Moses' Physical and Christ's Spiritual Exodus

*Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. 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 (Hebrews 3:1-6).*

### Parallels Between Christ and Moses

The phrase “*in the heavenly calling*” refers to a new **exodus** that has begun. To be able to see the parallel between the **exodus** of Moses and the **exodus** of Christ recall some of the characteristics and episodes in the life of Christ compared with the history of Israel, Pharaoh, and the promised land. When Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, they were discussing “*his departure (exodus) which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem*” (Luke 9:31). Jesus' **exodus** began on the cross making Him the counterpart to the Hebrew Passover lamb. In the land of Egypt the Jews killed a lamb the night before their **exodus** from Egypt. They took the lamb's blood and sprinkled it around the doorposts of their homes. According to God's promise when He passed through the land of Egypt to kill all the firstborn, He spared the firstborn of the Israelites –

*On that same night I will pass through Egypt and*

*strike down every firstborn . . . The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and **when I see the blood, I will pass over you*** (Exodus 12:12-13). [emphasis added.]

The cross at Calvary was the slaughter of the Christian's Passover lamb – "*Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*" (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Hebrew people had their Passover lamb and Christians also have a Passover lamb. The Hebrew sacrifice was a lamb; the Christian's sacrifice is the Son of God. With Christ's blood sprinkled on the doorpost of his heart, a Christian is freed from the bondage to Satan and sin. Christians are led by Messiah in this new *exodus* to the promised land of heaven.

Not only is Jesus "*the Passover lamb*," He is also "*the apostle and high priest whom we confess*." The term "*apostle*" continues the parallel between Christ and Moses. An "*apostle*" was one who had been sent by God. Clearly Moses was sent by God – "*Then say to him (Pharaoh) 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, **has sent me** to say to you: Let my people go . . .'*" (Exodus 7:16). Jesus was also sent by God (cf. John 17:18, 20:21). The writer does not attempt in any way to degrade or discredit Moses. He knows that he must deal with the Hebrew people by honoring Moses. As a matter of fact, he does everything he can to build up the dignity of Moses because the more he builds up Moses by way of comparison, then in the final analysis that makes Christ all the more glorious. Yet in this verse, Jesus stands unique in His position as "*high priest*." Moses was simply an "*apostle*" of God to Pharaoh. His brother, Aaron, was the high priest of Israel. Jesus, by contrast, occupies both offices.

Jesus "*was faithful to the one who **appointed** him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house*" (Hebrews 3:2). It was God who appointed Jesus, and Jesus was faithful to His appointment just as Moses had been. The Hebrew writer is

citing a famous statement God made about Moses when Aaron and Miriam raised a protest against Moses. God said,

*Listen to my words: 'When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of **my servant Moses**; he is faithful in all my house' (Numbers 12:6-7). [emphasis added.]*

Aaron and Miriam were Moses' brother and sister; they wanted some of the honor Moses was receiving. God heard their complaint, but He did not give them the honor they wanted. Moses was different than any other prophet during this time. God spoke directly to Moses. Moses had a more intimate relationship with God than Aaron or Miriam. God appeared to Aaron and Miriam in a pillar of cloud and said, "*With him (Moses) I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD*" (Deuteronomy 12:8a).

At this point the parallels between Moses and Christ end and the contrasts begin. Both were "**apostles**" and both were "**appointed**" by God, but Moses was a "**servant**" and Christ was much more.

### **Contrasts Between Christ and Moses**

The writer of Hebrews says, "*Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the **builder** of a house has greater honor than the house itself*" (Hebrews 3:3). Jesus was the real "**builder**" of the house in which Moses served. The house in which Moses served was the nation of Israel which had its beginning in Abraham long before Moses was born. And the house of Israel endured long after Moses was dead. The "**builder**" of the house is "**worthy of greater honor.**" This statement exalts Christ above Moses in significant proportions. Later in the book of Hebrews, the author will show that Jesus built His own house and that house will surpass all others with

its glory while the house of Moses faded into insignificance.

The next verse contains an unreserved declaration that **Jesus is God**. The author says, “*For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything*” (Hebrews 3:4). The contrast between Christ and Moses clearly states: Christ is God, but Moses is a mere man. Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses in the same way that the Creator is greater than His creation. The short phrase “*Moses was faithful as a **servant** in all God’s house*” (Hebrews 3:5a) conveys two very important contrasts. Moses was a “**servant**” in God’s house and he served “**in**” the house that Christ built. Moses was an important part of God’s religious order, but he was only a part.

Moses testified “*to what would be said in the future*” (Hebrews 3:5b). Moses was a witness to the end of his law and the beginning of the new law that Christ would bring. He testified to the transient nature of the system during his time and spoke of the coming Messiah who would bring new heavenly laws. Moses wrote:

*The LORD said to me: ‘ . . . I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him ’* (Deuteronomy 18:18; cf. John 5:45-47).

The writer of Hebrews has built upon the dignity of Moses, but he emphasizes that Moses was a “**servant**.” The Greek word that the author uses in this verse is the word **therapon**. This is not referring to the normal slave kind of servant. The word **therapon** has its roots directly from the Hippocratic oath. A **therapon** was a highly skilled, trained assistant to a surgeon. He was a dignified servant. Moses was a “**servant/therapon in all God’s house**.”

Next, the writer of Hebrews makes a poignant affirmation about Jesus in which two great truths are stated: “*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"* (Hebrews 3:6). First, Christ is a "**son.**" The word "**son**" stands in stark contrast to Moses, the "*servant.*" Second, Christ is "*a son over God's house.*" This is no longer the house of Israel; this is God's new house. Moses was "*in*" God's former house, but Jesus is "*over*" God's new house.

God's new house is made up of those who believe in Jesus. Christians are "*the house*" that Christ built. The "**we**" in this context refers back to the brethren who are partakers of the "*heavenly calling*" making them participants in the new **exodus**. "**We**" are the "*house*" of Christ with two conditions according to the writer of Hebrews: "*if **we** hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.*" The first condition is that Christians must "*hold on to . . . **courage.***" The Greek word for courage is **parresia**. This word has a very definite meaning for the writer of Hebrews. It is to be bold (cf. Hebrews 4:16; 10:19). Boldness comes from having access to the throne room. It means having that sense of confidence that "**we**" can walk into the immediate presence of God because "**we**" know that our sins have been removed and there are absolutely no barriers between us and God. "**We**" have full intimate communion and fellowship with God the Father. The Hebrew writer will develop a theme of "*boldness*" in the next few chapters.

Christians "*are his house, if we hold on to . . . the **hope** of which we boast.*" Christians have the glorious prospect of heaven to feed their "*hope.*" If a Christian is no longer proud enough to boast of the citizenship that he has in heaven, then he is on the verge of apostasy from Christ and he will lose his standing in the new "*house*" which Christ has built. That "*house*" is the church that He built (cf. Matthew 16:17-20).

## PARALLELS

Moses

Christ

|                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Appointed by God       | Appointed by God       |
| Faithful to God        | Faithful to God        |
| Sent by God            | Sent by God            |
| Related to God's house | Related to God's house |
| A spokesman for God    | A spokesman for God    |

### CONTRASTS

|                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| A servant               | A Son                    |
| In God's house          | Over God's house         |
| Part of God's house     | Builder of God's house   |
| A simple man            | Eternal God              |
| Witness to Christ       | Witnessed to by Moses    |
| Began a physical exodus | Began a spiritual exodus |
| Led to earthly reward   | Led to heavenly reward   |

### Warning From the Past

*So, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. 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.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest' (Hebrews 3:7-11).*

At this point, the writer of Hebrews recalls the history and almost total failure of the **exodus** led by Moses. Of the millions of Hebrews who came out of Egyptian slavery, only two families eventually entered into the promised land. The Israelites lost their faith in God and began to murmur and complain against God. They were no longer convinced that God was able to bring them to the land that He had promised Abraham.

The Holy Spirit spoke through David centuries after Israel's tragic wilderness experience to give some pertinent warnings to the future generations of God's people. He said,

*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest' (Psalm 95:7b-11).*

David's words were to serve as a warning to the people of his time — he says, *"Today, if you hear my voice."* **"Today"** stands for a day of opportunity. Moses' generation wasted the *"today"* of God's offer to enter the promised land. David was equally concerned about his generation, because they were making the same mistakes as the people of Moses' day. Evidently, the Hebrew writer shares the same concern for many of his day. The phrase *"If you hear his voice"* refers to the voice of God when He promised to give the promised land to Israel. But it is evident that Israel did not listen with faith to God's promise (cf. Hebrews 4:1-2).

The writer of Hebrews was writing to yet another generation who were in danger of falling away from the living God. Moses tried to warn his generation, David was deeply concerned about his generation, and generation number three is the generation during the first century. The generation that David was trying to warn were already located in the promised land, but they were in danger of returning to their pagan background and practices that would lead them away from God and cause them to lose their immortal souls. The present generation is not in danger of returning to slavery in Egypt, but

they are in danger of reverting back to Judaism even though they have already entered into the “new world” that was inaugurated by Messiah. The *exodus* that Christ inaugurates is a new *exodus*. The Christians during this time did not have all the familiarity with the new way of thinking. They were being drawn back to the traditional, customary ways of the Law of Moses. The writer of Hebrews is warning them that returning to Judaism would be the same kind of mistake that Moses’ generation made when they left Egypt. They had entered into the wilderness, turned back in their hearts to Egypt, and they did not enter the promised land. Turning back to paganism or to Judaism would be the same kind of mistake.

The phrase “*do not harden your hearts*” is taken from the Greek medical term *sklerunete*, which implies *sclerosis* of the heart. The day of the “*rebellion*” refers to the rebellion of Israel as they threatened a revolt against Moses because they had no water to drink. The place was called Rephidim in the wilderness, but because of the murmuring of the people against God, He called the place “*Massah*” and “*Meribah*” (cf. Exodus 17:1-7). In the Septuagint those two words are translated to mean “*rebellion*” and “*testing*.” The people were literally rebelling against God and testing His patience with their unbelief. Of course, that was a dangerous thing for them to do because it threatened their “*today*” of opportunity for entering into their land of promise.

The words “. . . *in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did*” were composed by David as he addressed the descendants of the disastrous generation of Moses. Even though it was David writing these words, it is God’s voice that needed to be heard. There were numerous occasions where Israel tested and tried God during their days in the wilderness. One example is the event at Kadesh Barnea when the spies returned with the report, “*We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them*” (Numbers 13:33b). The people of Israel

rebelled and God demonstrated His presence and power over Israel by condemning them to wander for forty years (cf. Numbers 14: 1-38; 20:1-13). David did not select any particular episode from Israel's rebellion, but drew from the prolonged hardness of heart of the people against God. The phrase "*what God did*" involved His miraculous protection and providence that sustained the multitudes of Israelites in the waste land east of the Red Sea. The Israelites not only saw themselves as "*grasshoppers*" — they viewed their God as a grasshopper size God. Their unbelief said that they did not believe God could take care of the giants in the land.

God's anger was kindled only after long provocation and trial. The fundamental reason related to Israel's straying heart. They did not believe God would and could give them the promised land, so they wanted to return to Egypt and forget all that God had done and all that He had promised. The writer of Hebrews says, "*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'*" (Hebrews 3:10). The "*ways*" of God were the ways of victory. The Israelite children's survival in the barren wilderness should have taught them that God's ways were also the ways of providence and preservation. But Israel did not "*hear*" the voice of God and their unbelief led to their spiritual apostasy from God. The writer of Hebrews draws this section to a conclusion quoting from Psalm 95:11 — "*So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'*"

One of the most tragic examples about the Israelites' apostasy is seen in a statement recorded by Moses as he prepared to "*expound*" the law to the Israelites as they were gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai. He had received the Ten Commandments and other laws by which God intended to govern His people. Deuteronomy 1:2 says, "*It takes eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir road.*" Kadesh Barnea was on the southern border of the land

of Canaan. Those “*eleven days*” turned into forty years of frustration for God and for his servant, Moses. The Israelites failed to believe in God, they murmured against Him, tempted and provoked Him. He swore His wrath against His people six different times and the Israelites that Moses led out of Egypt did not enter into the promised land (cf. Numbers 12:9, 14:23, 28, 30; 26:64-65; 32:11; Deuteronomy 1:35). The purpose of this citation is not simply to recall past history, but to issue a sober warning to all subsequent generations of believers. David used that history to warn his generation. Paul used it to admonish the Corinthian church (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-12). In this context of Hebrews, the author used history to awaken his readers to the same peril if they refuse to hear God’s voice.

David was concerned about his generation and feared that many in his day would provoke God’s anger by turning away from Him to pagan idolatries. The interesting thing about Psalms 95 is that David’s generation was **already** in the land of promise. So what is the “*rest of God*” that they were in danger of losing? It is not the promised land of Canaan. It is clear that David by the Holy Spirit made an approved extension to the events in Israel’s history. The “*rest of God*” is extended to include **eternal life in heaven** after this life is over. David was warning the people of his age that they were in jeopardy of losing their eternal reward.

### The Ever Present Application

*See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As has just been said: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the*

*rebellion.' Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief (Hebrews 3:12-19).*

The writer of Hebrews fully accepts David's extension of the history of Israel and applies it as he writes to the Hebrews in the first century. There are examples of three different generations in great danger: Moses' generation and their failure in the wilderness, David's generation repeating the same mistakes as Moses' generation, and finally the contemporaries of the Hebrew writer and their loss of faith in Messiah. The first century Hebrews were in danger of reverting back to the defunct, abrogated Law of Moses. The *exodus* that Christ inaugurated requires a new way of religious expression. The early converts from Judaism were not familiar with the new privileges Messiah brought, and therefore, were being drawn back to the familiar, traditional practices of the Law of Moses. The Hebrew writer wants them to know that if they turn back to Judaism they will be making the same mistake their forefathers made.

The "living God" in this context is Christ. He is not only "the living God, He is also the life-giving God. The "unbelieving heart" of these "brothers" will lead them back into Judaism. The writer of Hebrews gives many warnings concerning this sinful deed throughout the rest of his writings (cf. Hebrews 6:1-12; 10:26-39; 12:25-29). The author advises that they need to "encourage one another daily . . . so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Christians in all ages need the mutual encouragement of their common faith in Christ. The phrase "as long as it is called today" is referring

to the present opportunities for redemption by Messiah. Moses' generation no longer has *"today."* Their opportunity for redemption is past and gone. This is not so for the person/persons reading this book. *"Today"* redemption is still available. *"Today"* is a day of repentance if one has strayed from God. *"Today"* is a day for revitalizing one's relationship with Christ and maintaining one's commitment to Him. Take advantage of *"today"* — because we cannot boast of tomorrow.

The *sclerosis* (hardening) of the heart caused by deceitful sin threatens the eternal salvation Messiah came to offer. There was a real possibility of the born again Christians falling away from God in apostasy. It is amazing that in spite of all the warnings already given by the author, together with those that he still will give in this book, some people still believe that it is impossible for a born again Christian to be lost. The inspired writer of Hebrews certainly does not agree. Israel fell after their escape from the slavery in Egypt. David's generation was in danger of losing their eternal redemption. The generation that is being addressed in this epistle is in definite peril of making the same mistake in that they will fall away *"from the living God."* The Word of God does not give warnings against something that cannot happen.

It is a *"sinful . . . heart"* that **does not believe** in Jesus. God has given ample evidence to confirm His ministry, mission, and message. When man refuses to consider Jesus through that evidence, it is a sinful, deliberate act that evokes God's anger. If Christians holds firmly to the confidence they share in Christ they reap all the benefits that come from the new religious system He inaugurated. The scripture says *"if we hold firmly till the end"* — there must be a continued faith to primary commitments and convictions about Him. If *"confidence"* is lost before *"the end,"* then the *"great salvation"* (Hebrews 2:3) is also lost. Christians must keep the faith we have in the Leader of our own *exodus*.

The writer of Hebrews does not want his readers to be

indifferent to the warnings that have already been given so he returns to the failure of Moses' exodus: "*As has just been said: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion*" (Hebrews 3:15). The writer wants to impress upon his readers the seriousness of the dangers they would be facing if they do harden their hearts in unbelief and fall away from Jesus. Their "*today*" of opportunity can slip away just as it did for the people who fell in the wilderness. The writer of Hebrews uses real people from actual case histories that were known by the Jews. He refers to them as "*they who heard and rebelled*" and "*those Moses led out of Egypt.*" The writer of Hebrews uses the same words of warning that Moses must have used — "*Today if you hear **His** voice.*" Israel did not fail because there had been no promise for them to "*hear.*" Their rebellion was the result of hardened hearts of unbelief. They had been blessed with being able to hear His voice, but they chose to reject it.

The writer of Hebrews asks the questions:

*Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? (Hebrews 3:16-18).*

He is talking about the generation that Moses led in his *exodus* from Egypt. The children of Israel provoked God and received a forty year punishment for their mockery of faith. God's anger was not upon the innocent. It was upon "*those who sinned.*" Their physical deaths in the desert remain a tragic tribute to their infidelity. Their bodies bore testimony to the disaster their eternal souls faced before God. On the judgment day, they will reap the punishment of their sinful unbelief in God.

Disbelief is the root of disobedience! And disobedience is the fruit of unbelief. The author will unite these two infamous twins in further declarations about Moses' generation (cf. Hebrews 4:2, 6). Their condemnation was not arbitrary on God's part. It was the product of their own making. The "rest" that they would never be allowed to enter embraces the extension of purpose given by the Holy Spirit in Psalm 95 — they will not enter eternal salvation because of their unbelief. The failure to "enter" Canaan only forecasts their ultimate failure to be able to enter God's rest in heaven. Both failures (not entering Canaan and not entering heaven) still stand today as a warning to God's people in every generation. It is "unbelief" that bears the terrible fruit of damnation.

The writer of Hebrews will continue with this context of history and make a direct application to his reader's generation. There is a message in the New Testament that is presented many times. An example is found in Revelation. Jesus sent letters to the churches of Asia and He closed one with "... *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (Revelation 2:10). Christians are partakers of Christ **if** they hold fast until the end.

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# THE PROMISED SABBATH-REST

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## Hebrews 4: 1- 16

Hebrews 4 continues the discussion of the *exodus* begun by Christ and the Mosaic *exodus* that ended in failure. The children of Israel did not believe in or obey God. Because of their disobedience and lack of faith in Him, God swore that they would never enter into His “rest.” The psalmist David warned his own generation with these words from God, “*So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest’*” (Psalm 95:11). David extended the failures of the children of Israel to the ultimate failure of not entering into an eternal “rest” with God. The Hebrew writer uses both of these examples to warn his readers throughout all ages about making the same fatal mistake of not believing in and not obeying God the Father.

### God’s Sabbath-Rest Defined

*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. 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. 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.”*’ And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from*

*all his work.' And again in the passage above he says, 'They shall never enter my rest.' 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. 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.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:1-11).*

The Hebrew writer has warned his own generation about their unbelief, but their mistakes are not yet fatal. He says, *"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"* (Hebrews 4:1). The application of these lessons from Hebrew history are natural for its automatic relevancy to the writer's situation. The word *"therefore"* automatically ties Hebrews 4 to what has been written in Hebrews 3. This statement affirms that being able to enter God's rest was still an option for David's generation. God's promise of *"rest"* is a reality available. Christ's **exodus** is still **standing reality**. God still offers a complete *"rest"* to Christians through Christ and His **exodus** to heaven.

The writer of Hebrews is fearful that some of the early believers in Christ during the first century are going to fall short of being able to enter into God's *"rest."* They can still fall short of their ultimate salvation in Christ. In a very clear analogical way, the Law of Moses stood as a spiritual slavery to everyone who was under the Law much like the Egyptian

slavery the Israelites endured before their Mosiac *exodus*. No one was able to keep the Law perfectly. Its demands were so holy that they could not escape its condemnation of their sins, so the children of Israel were spiritually enslaved to a law they could not keep. The Law of Moses became a prison just as Egypt was a prison for the descendants of Abraham.

This is an important analogy that must be established with a biblical basis because Judaism enslaved people. There are a number of passages that indicate this fact. (Paul vividly illustrated this in Galatians 4:21-31.). In a beautiful analogy, he compares the Law of Moses to Hagar, the slave wife of Abraham, who bore “*children who are to be slaves.*” Christianity is paralleled with Sarah, who was free — “*his son by the free woman was born as the result of a **promise** . . . But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother*” (Galatians 4:23b, 26). Paul also said,

*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law’ (Galatians 3:10).*

The Law of Moses did not give liberty to those who violated it. The Law was good as long as an individual respected it, but once he had violated the Law, it became a curse to him with the penalty of death.

Paul taught that in their pre-Christian life under the Law of Moses, the Jews were bound to the Law as a wife is bound to her husband when he wrote to the Romans (cf. Romans 7:1-6). The former husband in this passage is compared to the Law of Moses. Christ has set Christians free from the impossible requirements of a too demanding husband. Paul said,

*But now, by dying to what once **bound** us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the*

*new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code (Romans 7:6). [emphasis added.]*

It is very clear that Paul draws the parallel between the land of Palestine in the first century because Palestine was enslaved to Rome. Rome had dominion over the city of Jerusalem and ruled the land of Palestine. It enslaved the people to a system of religion that could not make them free.

The Apostle Peter mentioned that under the Law of Moses there were obligations that “*neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear*” (Acts 15:10). Christians have fled from the enslaving powers of the Law of Moses in order to become free men in Christ Jesus (cf. Hebrews 6:18). The reason these passages of scripture are important is because the Hebrew writer does not want his readers to return to Judaism because that would be a return to the enslaving powers of the Law of Moses that could not give liberty from sin. Returning to Judaism would be parallel to the children of Israel, having been delivered from slavery in the land of Egypt, returning in their hearts to the land of Egypt and accepting slavery all over again under Pharaoh. The Hebrew writer is building on this concept to impress upon his readers that they must not consider returning to the religion of Judaism which enslaved them.

The children of Israel received good news from Moses that related to the physical land of Canaan. The good news that Christians receive does not relate to a physical land inheritance, but to a spiritual inheritance. The writer of Hebrews says,

*For we also have had the **gospel** (good news) 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 (Hebrews 4:2). [emphasis added.]*

The children of Israel heard the good news, but they did not

believe it, so to them it did not bear good fruit. They failed to believe in God and, therefore, they lost their promised land. Christians also hear good news about an inheritance from God. Neither the Israelites' failure nor the Christians' can be blamed on a lack of hearing. The readers of Hebrews and the children of Israel both heard, but the writer of the book of Hebrews fears his readers may also be condemned in their unbelief.

The writer of Hebrews says,

*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**.' And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world (Hebrews 4:3). [emphasis added.]*

The verb tense of “*enter*” is present indicative which implies that Christians are **in the process** of entering God’s “*rest*.” Christians already enjoy the “*rest*” Jesus promised in Matthew 11: 28 when He said, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you **rest**.*” The “*rest*” a Christian enjoys extends throughout their life in Christ and into its final fruition in heaven. In his reference to the failure of previous generations of entering God’s “*rest*,” there is a clear affirmation that God’s “*rest*” is still available to those who believe.

At this point, the writer of Hebrews is trying to explain what God’s “*rest*” really is. He says God’s “*work has been finished since the creation of the world*,” which helps to explain what kind of “*rest*” he is discussing. After six days of creative activity, God rested and has been resting ever since. God entered into His “*rest*” on the seventh day. The “*somewhere*” of “*For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work'*” (Hebrews 4:4) is a quote from Genesis 2:2. If a Christian can enter into God’s “*rest*,” he must “*rest*” with

God meaning that God's "*rest*" extends into eternity after time is over. God's "*rest*" for His children in Christ is heaven and it is eternal. The author delights in proving his affirmation with specific citations from the Old Testament. That gives his writings added authority with his Hebrew readers.

Once again the author of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 95:11, "*They shall never enter my **rest***" (Hebrews 4:5b) to reinforce his readers' awareness of the danger of missing out on God's "*rest*." The "*they*" of whom David spoke was the first generation of Israelites who participated in Moses' *exodus*. It is clear that the author wants his readers to understand that "*they*" represented the majority of Israel and not the entirety of those who came out of Egypt. "*They*" was limited to the **unbelieving Hebrews** in the wilderness.

The promise that God gave to His children concerning His "*rest*" still remains. The writer says,

*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* (Hebrews 4:6). The promise still remains. God has '*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*' (Hebrews 4:7). [emphasis added.]

The word "*today*" is used again referring to the **opportunity** to accept God's "*rest*."

David's time was "*a long time later*" after the *Exodus* experience for the children of Israel. David spoke of yet another "*today*" through the Holy Spirit, which means that the divine "*rest*" has not been eliminated for the people of David's day. God's "*rest*" is still an open promise that God makes to His children in all the succeeding generations. David lived in the promised land when he spoke of God's "*rest*" which makes it

clear that the land of Canaan was not the “*rest*” of which God was speaking. The writer says, “*For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day*” (Hebrews 4:8). Joshua was the leader of Israel as they conquered the land of Canaan. Even though the children of Israel did succeed in occupying the promised land, that did not mean they automatically received God’s “*rest*” also. Israel’s conquest of Canaan under Joshua cannot be confused with the promise God “*later spoke about*” through David in Psalm 95. The “*later*” refers to almost 400 years after Israel had occupied Palestine. God was speaking about a “*rest*” that was still in the future to David’s generation and the generation that the Hebrew writer was addressing. It is evident from this section of Scripture that God has no further plans for Israel than to offer them the “*rest*” that He offers to all His children under the new *exodus* of Christ.

The promise of God remains – “*There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his*” (Hebrews 4:9-10). [emphasis added.] God’s “*rest*” is called a “*Sabbath-rest*,” which is the Greek word *sabbatismos*. This word is unique to this verse and has the rough translation of Sabbath-keeping. It does not refer to the Jewish observance of the Sabbath day. The “*Sabbath-rest*” is not a law that must be kept, it is a promised “*rest*” to enter into. The “*people of God*” are Christians who share in the benefits of Christ’s new *exodus*. The Hebrew writer uses the term “*Sabbath-rest*” because the ordinance of the Jewish Sabbath was closely united with the history of the Hebrew’s *exodus* and the giving of the Law of Moses on Mount Sinai.

The word “*anyone*” affirms that all men have the universal “*today*” (opportunity) to “*enter God’s rest.*” “*Anyone*” who receives God’s “*rest*” also enjoys his own personal rest just as God began His “*rest*” in the beginning. The Apostle John wrote,

*Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will **rest** from their labor, for their deeds will follow them' (Revelation 14:13-14). [emphasis added.]*

The final destination for those who keep their faith in the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is God's "rest" — a physical rest from their labors and an eternal place in heaven.

The Hebrew writer continues, "*Let us, therefore, make every **effort** to enter that **rest**, so that no one will **fall** by following their example of disobedience*" (Hebrews 4:11). [emphasis added.] Heaven is not for those who stumble into it or passively wait for it. Heaven is for those who "*make every effort to enter*" heaven's gates. Without sober, serious "*effort*" the prize cannot be obtained. Israel fell because of "*disobedience.*" That failure is a stark example of what could happen to the readers of the Hebrew letter. Some people today believe that once a man becomes a Christian, it is impossible for him to lose his eternal salvation. The author of Hebrews does not subscribe to that false doctrine. His arguments are too well based on examples where "*some*" (cf. Hebrews 4:6) did fail in Old Testament times. It could happen to "*anyone*" who follows "*their example of disobedience.*" The author does not want anyone to "*fall.*" Take note that it is impossible for a person to "*fall*" from any place where he has not been!

### The Living Word of God

*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. 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* (Hebrews 4:12-13).  
[emphasis added.]

A **living “promise”** (Hebrews 4:1) offering a **living “rest”** (Hebrews 3:11, 18; 4:3, 5, 6, 8, 10, and 11) must be based upon a **living “word”** (Hebrews 4:12) from a **“living God”** (Hebrew 3:12). This context also involves a **living “oath”** (Hebrews 4:3; Psalm 95:11) that disobedient people shall not enter into God’s living **“rest.”** The writer of Hebrews wants his readers to be aware of both the promises and the warnings from God. The source of God’s promises is His **“word”** and that **“word”** is a living reality. God’s **“word”** is in force in every generation of time and it will never lose its power or authority. It addresses the problems of needs every day, offers opportunities every day, and demands repentance from sin every day. God’s **“word”** has all the qualities of God Himself — it is **“living and active”** and life-giving. The Apostle Peter says, *“For you have been **born again**, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the **living and enduring word of God**”* (1 Peter 1:23). [emphasis added.] The word of God is **“active.”** Through the prophet Isaiah, God draws a parallel between His word and the rain that comes down from heaven to give water to the land and helps produce the fruit. Some of that rain will return to the rivers, lakes, and seas. There is a cycle — the water returns to the clouds to bring rain again and again. Just as the rain comes down from heaven and produces its fruit and then returns to the clouds, so God’s word comes from heaven and produces fruit on this earth to be able to return that fruit to God. Isaiah said:

*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return to it without watering the earth and  
making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for  
the sower and bread for the eater, so is **my word** that  
goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me  
empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve*

*the purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).*  
[emphasis added.]

God's word is relevant and addresses today's needs. It is living and vibrant with all the authority and power of God Himself. Just as God is able to judge the total man (the joints and marrow, body and soul, thoughts and intents) so does His word judge the total man. These six qualities: "*soul and spirit, joints and marrow; . . . thoughts and attitudes of the heart*" describe the three sides of the total man: the physical, spiritual, and emotional. The "*word of God*" is able to make judgements, penetrate the thoughts of men, and know the attitudes of belief or unbelief and the attitudes of rebellion or submission. God's "*word*" has all the characteristics of God Himself because it is His message. It is "*sharper than any double-edged sword.*" It can penetrate, distinguish, judge, and perceive everything about a man's nature.

The writer of Hebrews affirms that there is "*nothing in all creation . . . hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account*" (Hebrews 4:13). The writer just described the "*word*" of God, and then immediately switches his focus to God Himself. The message is that all men are going to have to give an "*account*" to God concerning their thoughts and actions for the manifestation of their faith and their submissive obedience to Him. **All men** will be judged by God.

### **Our Man in Heaven**

*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us*

*then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need* (Hebrews 4:14-16). [emphasis added.]

The writer returns to one final thought about Christ at the end of Hebrews 4. Some biblical students suggest that there is a connection between the **written “word”** of God and the **incarnate “Word”** of God, which is Christ (cf. John 1:1, 14). Whether or not the writer intended that connection, it does form an easy transition in his thoughts.

Christ has begun and terminated His personal *exodus*. And now He stands ready to lead the Christian in his. Christ was the trail blazer. The writer uses the term of “*forerunner*” (King James Version) or the one “*who went before us*” (Hebrews 6:20) concerning Jesus. He will refer to Christ again later as “*author and perfecter of our faith*” (Hebrews 12:2). Christ has made His way to heaven and is now ready to help the Christian complete his journey to his final destiny in heaven.

Jesus is our man in heaven. He has already succeeded in reaching that land of “*rest,*” and He has opened a way for us. The success of Christ, “*who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven*” (Hebrews 8:1; cf. 1:3) serves as encouragement for every Christian. He terminated His *exodus* that began in Jerusalem many centuries ago in heaven. Since Jesus has gone to heaven, what does that tell the readers of Hebrews about His human sympathies? The writer says,

*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* (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus is still human (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5; Acts 17:31). He is still the “*son of man*” (John 5:27). Jesus still has all His human

nature intact. The Apostle John says,

*This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ **has come** in the flesh is from God (1 John 4:2). [emphasis added.]*

The phrase “*has come*” is a perfect tense verb indicating that Jesus became flesh and blood and is still flesh and blood. Jesus Christ is now glorified in heaven, but that does not keep Him from remembering all His experiences in the flesh. He still has all His human sympathies, all His memories of His human suffering and struggles against sin, and He has all His devotions and the same sense of solidarity with His human family.

Jesus can still sympathize with human frustrations. He is able to understand sin and sympathize when man does sin. Christians can almost hear Jesus say, “I know why you sinned because I stood in your shoes, and I am touched, sympathetic, and willing to help you.” Jesus was “*tempted in every way, just as we are — yet without sin.*” He did not use any powers of His divine nature that are not available to us in our moments of temptation. He did not have an advantage over us with which to resist His temptations. “*In every way*” suggests His total encounter with every passion characteristic of human nature. Actually, His temptations were not only the same ones that every man faces, He bore additional temptations exclusive to His role of Messiah. The significant difference between Jesus and all other men is the fact that He was “*without sin.*” He resisted every temptation Satan placed before Him, and He did so with the same resources any man has at his disposal. He was innocent, but He paid the price of innocence through self-discipline and fidelity to God’s purpose for His sinless life. Every man owes Jesus total devotion for His amazing resistance to all temptation.

Because Jesus sits at the right hand of God, the Hebrew writer urges his readers, *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”* (Hebrews 4:16). The Christian’s approach to the throne of grace is a privilege he receives through his obedience to his great High Priest, Jesus. The *“throne of grace”* is where God sits and Christ is seated at his *“right hand”* to *“intercede”* for *“those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them”* (Hebrews 7:25). Christians are encouraged to *“approach the throne of grace with confidence.”* Our access to God is to be exercised with boldness. Jesus obtained that privilege for us through His sacrifice.

When Christians draw near the throne, there are two things they *“receive.”* By drawing near to the Father, a Christian receives *“mercy”* for when he has sinned and *“grace”* to help him when he is under temptation. The Hebrew writer is trying to convince all Christians that Jesus thoroughly and completely identifies with their human feelings and needs.

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# THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

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## Hebrews 5:1-10

Hebrews 5 deals with the priesthood of Christ as it compares to the Levitical priesthood. There is a definite parallel between Christ and the Levites because they both have certain common characteristics. Later in his letter the Hebrew writer will draw some critical contrasts between Christ and the Levites. In this context, the author assures his readers of the parallels by noting observations concerning Christ's priesthood and then drawing parallels between Christ and the Levites. Remember that Christians have a "*great high priest*" who has ascended to sit "*at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven*" (Hebrews 8:1; cf. 1:3; 4:14). Jesus Christ, our "*great high priest*," has not forgotten His human roots or family ties with humanity. He still has all his human sympathies and is able to respond to man's needs out of a total sense of humanity. Even though this "*great high priest*" is a human being, He is able to intercede on man's behalf (cf. Hebrews 7:25). And even though He is seated at the right hand of God, that does not eliminate His ability to identify with the human family.

### Qualifications and Functions of Priests

*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. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well*

*as for the sins of the people. No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. 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.' And he says in another place, 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek' (Hebrews 5:1-6).*

In the first four verses the qualifications for a priest according to the Law of Moses are described to prove that Christ met most of the qualifications. The writer will discuss the qualifications that He could not meet in a later chapter. These qualifications make it possible for Christ to minister to Christians. He is a valid and faithful high priest in the things that belong to God.

**First**, according to the Law of Moses, the high priest was selected "*from among men.*" That is why the Hebrew writer emphasizes the fact that Jesus was totally human (cf. Hebrews 2). Jesus was made lower than the angels just as man was, He suffered like a man, had the flesh and blood of a man, and died like a man. These arguments were presented to convince all men that Jesus was a man.

**Second**, a priest's position was not a position that any individual could claim or invent on his own. A priest was not only God's representative to man, He was also man's representative to God. A priest "*is appointed*" by God.

**Third**, a priest's functions were "*related to God.*" The priests had specific obligations to serve and minister at the tabernacle. Aaron and his sons were brought

*from among the Israelites . . . so they may serve . . . as priests (Exodus 28:1). God said, 'I myself have selected your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD to do the work at the Tent of Meeting' (Numbers 18:6).*

**Fourth**, the writer of Hebrews discusses the functions of the high priest *“to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”* Under the Law of Moses sacrifices were broken into two specific categories. The first was *“gifts,”* which expressed the concept of worship toward God. They were called sweet-smelling sacrifices that were well pleasing and acceptable to God. They showed the devotions of Israel toward God who had given them life and sustained them. The priest became the instrument through whom the Israelites were able to offer their *“gifts”* to God. The second category was *“sacrifices”* which were offered as atonement (forgiveness) *“for sins.”* The priest was the only one who could offer both *“gifts”* of worship and *“sacrifices for sins.”*

Since the priest *“himself is subject to weakness”* as every other man, he was able *“to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray”* (Hebrews 5:2). The priest dealt with two classes of sinner: the *“ignorant”* and those who were *“going astray.”* One class did not know the Law, but ignorance does not excuse the sin. All sin must be atoned for and covered by sacrificial offerings of atoning blood, or man will be condemned for his uncovered sins.

The other class of sinners who a priest had to offer sacrifices for in a gentle manner is those who were *“going astray.”* The phrase *“going astray”* means they were deliberately sinning. Read Leviticus 6:1-7:27 for a list of deliberate sins. It is clear in this context that the Jews were committing deliberate sin. They were knowingly choosing to go astray. It would be easy for the priest serving under the Law to be too severe and critical in his attitude toward sinners, because he had to stand at the altar day after day offering sacrifices for sins repeatedly committed. He could easily become intolerant and harshly critical in dealing with sinners.

The high priest had to *“offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people”* (Hebrews 5:3). He was not exempt from sin himself. A priest had to remember his own

human frailty and sinfulness. This helped him to bear gently with his fellow sinners, but this one fact was the major difference between Christ and the Levites. The Levites and Christ shared many parallels: their humanness, bearing gently with fellow man, and offering gifts and sacrifices to God. The high priest serving under the Law of Moses was subject to weakness to the point that he actually sinned, so *“this is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins”* before he offered for his people (cf. Hebrews 7:27).

The priesthood of Christ is not a self-assigned position or one that a man could rightfully pursue. The writer of Hebrews said, *“No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest”* (Hebrews 5:4-5a). Christ was called by God just as Aaron was (cf. Exodus 28:1-2; Numbers 18:1). There are “priests” that exist in the world today, but they are totally without God’s authorization and calling.

God alone selects and chooses His priests. The next verse says, *“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’”* (Hebrews 5:5). Aaron was not a self-appointed priest, and neither was Jesus. God chose His Son. The writers links this verse with Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4 to confirm both the deity of Christ and His appointment as High Priest. The statement, *“Today I have become your Father,”* is a serious mistranslation of the original Hebrew in Psalms 2:7 and the Greek in Hebrews 5:5. The word *“father”* does not appear in either text. These verses are not speaking of the day Jesus was born as a man; instead it refers to the day of Pentecost when Jesus established the kingdom and He was declared the King.

**Where was Christ called to be a High Priest?** Psalm 2:6-7 records God’s call to make Christ His King. The psalmist said, *“‘I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.’ I will*

*proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my Son today I have become your Father.'*” God is affirming that Christ is His equal — “He is my King.” He is using the language of appointment, the language of divine decree. It is as though God is saying to the King, “I will make a decree. It will be the law that enacts your right to be a King.” The Hebrew writer then turns his thoughts to Psalm 110:4, but in the same context. God says, “*You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*”” God is using the language of appointment. God has appointed His Son to be a King, and in Psalm 110:4, He has appointed His Son to be “*a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.*”” The writer of Hebrews brings these two passages together to show that Christ is King and High Priest by divine appointment.

### **Jesus' Humanity Qualifies Him for the Priestly Office**

*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. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:7-10).*

The writer of Hebrews would like to convince his readers that Jesus is able to “*bear gently*” as the Law demanded of priests. “*Bear gently*” comes from a beautiful Greek word: **metriopothēin**. **Pathos** refers to the deep-seated feelings and emotions — an example would be the **pathos** of suffering. In Hebrews 5 the writer uses **metreo-pathein**, which indicates Christ’s ability to measure out (literally to meter) feelings and sympathetic understanding to human beings. That is one of the

qualifications that a high priest must have. He must be able to sympathize gently with individuals that are suffering and under temptation to sin. It seems that the author uses the intense sufferings of Jesus during the agonies of Gethsemane, the trial before Pilate, and His sacrifice for His people to point out Jesus's acquaintance with suffering. The phrase "*during the days of Jesus's life on earth*" naturally refer to the total human experience of Jesus and not just the sufferings relating to His trial and crucifixion. This fact helps us today to know that Jesus can really identify with human suffering.

Jesus "*offered up **prayers** and **petitions**.*" Generally prayers, petitions, and supplications can be used interchangeably in Scripture. Sometimes prayers are called supplications and supplications are called prayers. But when they are used together, "*prayers*" seem to indicate those requests that grow out of a deep sense of need and "*petitions*" are those requests to God that grow out of a deep sense of helplessness. When men begin to supplicate, they beg for relief. Jesus was begging for relief from God, who is able to give relief. Though "*prayers and petitions*" were characteristic throughout the life of Christ, it seems that the author particularly focuses on the closing moments of His life in this context. These supplications are a part of Jesus' experience with human frailty, especially His cries from Gethsemane through the crucifixion scene.

The crucifixion psalm is a good example of Christ's cries:

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent (Psalm 22:1-2).*

The impression is clear — Jesus is praying to God with what the writer of Hebrews calls "*loud cries and tears.*" The word

for “*loud cries*” in the Greek comes from the word *krauge*, which means the unsolicited, unverbilized groans of a man that is undergoing searing, intensive pain. Jesus was suffering deeply. Perhaps the actual fulfillment of the words from this psalm relate to the moment when Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples (cf. Mark 14:26, 32). He asked His disciples to “*Sit here while I pray*” and He took the Peter, James, and John further into the garden to spend some time in prayer. He besought the Father to give Him relief from the suffering that was coming. He fell down on His face and began to pray. The Scripture says, “*he began to be deeply distressed and troubled*” (Mark 14:33). He told the three, “*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*” (Mark 14:34). Jesus’ suffering was such a heavy burden that He felt it was enough to kill a man. So He prayed to the Father for relief.

**Can Jesus really know how to feel and sympathize with an individual that is suffering temptation, persecution, disease, or opposition because of his faith?** The Hebrew writer assures his readers that He can. How else would you explain that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus went to the Father and prayed to Him first as a child would plead with his father — “*Abba, Father, . . . everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will*” (Mark 14:36). [emphasis added.] Jesus addressed God, the Father, in the familiar terms of the intimate union He felt with the Father. He must have waited for an answer but none came — “*O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent*” (Psalm 22:2). Jesus seemed to be frustrated because He received no answer. Heaven did not respond to the Christ. He faced the problem of sacrificing Himself and giving His life as a human being for the redemption of mankind without drawing on any divine help. That was because God had to turn His back on the Christ who had taken the burden of human sin in their stead.

Christ waited for an answer, but it did not come. He went

back to His Apostles and found them asleep. He had asked them to be in prayer, but they were asleep. He was frustrated and asked them why they could not watch for just one hour (He told them that this was the hour when “*darkness reigns*” in Luke 22:53). Jesus returned a second time to pray to an Almighty God. Finally, Jesus prayed a third time, “*and being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground*” (Luke 22:44). Jesus surely knows how to sympathize with those who are hurting because He was hurting intensely in the Garden of Gethsemane. There was not a single hand touching Him at that time.

The burden Jesus felt in the garden was for human redemption. When Jesus asked God to remove the “*cup*,” He was not asking God to save Him from death and let the human family go to hell. He was saying: “Father, if there is any other way, do it that way. If You can save Me and save them, then let Us do it that way. But I am willing to do it Your way.” Such thoughts indicate that if there had been any other way in which God could have saved the human family without the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, God would have acted in that other way and would have spared his Son. Paul told the Romans, “*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*” (Romans 8:32).

The writer of Hebrews assures His readers that Jesus can “*bear gently*” with those that are suffering. God could have saved His Son from death, but would have had to condemn man to die. And even though Jesus was a Son, He did not claim any exemptions. Sonship does have certain privileges, but Jesus fulfilled the responsibility of obeying the will of the Father. Sonship did not exclude Him from the obligations of fulfilling the Father’s will. His prayer, “*Yet not what I will, but what you will*” (Luke 14:36) was heard: “*he was heard because of his reverent submission*” (Hebrews 5:7b). The Greek for “*reverent submission*” is *eulambeias*, which means godly fear and

respect. ***Eulambeias*** is often translated as “*piety*.” It suggests a deep religious devotion to God and complete submission to the will of God.

Thayer, the great lexicographer, says ***eulambeias*** means the attitude with which an individual would conduct a perilous mission. Maybe the mission is carrying a fragile, precious object across treacherous terrain. He would pour all his energies, mental attitudes, and physical resources into accomplishing that almost impossible mission, lest any distraction could cause him to stumble and drop the object. That is the attitude called ***eulambeias***. That is the attitude Jesus had toward the Father’s mission for Him. He poured all His mental, physical, and emotional resources into the successful conclusion of the terrible mission He faced. That mission was His death on the cross of Calvary for the redemption of the human family. It showed a deep religious devotion to the will of God.

Because of Jesus’ “*reverent submission*,” God heard His prayer, but He did not answer the prayer to “*Take this cup from me*.” God did answer the prayer, “*Yet not what I will, but what you will*” (Mark 14:36b). After His third prayer, Jesus resigned Himself to God’s will and assumed the attitude of total submission. There were no more prayers for deliverance, no more outpourings and groanings of a man under intense pain. Instead there was a sense of serenity and submission to the will of God. Jesus went through all the trials and atrocities of His judgement and condemnation with commitment and without a bitter spirit, showing His devotion to the will of God. He completed His sacrificial mission with a sense of dignity that is difficult for any man to understand. Think about all the hurt, the injuries, the injustice of slander and accusations, the flagellations, beatings, the crown of thorns, and the bruising of His side and His hands and feet. Jesus went through it all without a single outcry of revenge. The Apostle Peter said,

*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' 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 (1 Peter 2:21-23).*

No doubt Jesus found resolve in the fact that God would take care of the needs of justice. He learned the high price of obedience through the things He suffered because even though He had never been disobedient, in this case, He learned to obey even when He did not want to. He learned the dignity and glory of obedience in the face of death. He learned the fruit of obedience and that it is right for the sons of God to be obedient. Therefore, *"He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him"* (Hebrews 5:9). As the *"the source of eternal salvation,"* does He have a right now to demand obedience from man? He, who has given a beautiful, glorious example of submission to the will of the Father even to the point of death, surely has that right. His death was an act of obedience to the will of God, and therefore, obedience resulted in His death. Does he have a right to demand obedience of man when obedience grants the gift of life? It is evident that He does. The phrase *"once made perfect"* does not relate to Christ's moral nature. It has to do with functional perfection that comes from the successful completion or perfection of the process of sacrificial atonement for man.

The Melchizedek priesthood will be discussed fully when we study Hebrews 7 so we will reserve the commentary for that context.

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## PROGRESSING TO MATURITY

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### Hebrews 5:11 to 6:8

This section on **maturity** begins with the writer of Hebrews saying, “*We have **much to say** about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn*” (Hebrews 5:11). The “*much to say*” does not relate to Melchizedek, but to the priesthood of Christ. The writer of Hebrews does not have much to say about Melchizedek, but he has a lot to say about the priesthood of Christ. The writer seems to be saying that they are not ready to begin the discussion on the priesthood of Christ.

#### The Expectations Stated

*We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 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! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil* (Hebrews 5:11-14).

Some things about Christ are hard to understand, but it is not because those things are too complicated, but because the readers are slow to learn. They are “*slow to learn*” because they are still having difficulty giving up their attachment to Judaism. As long as they remain devoted to their time honored

past under the Law of Moses, they will never be ready to understand the new order that Christ inaugurated.

The writer of Hebrews qualifies his statement by saying,

*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! (Hebrews 5:12).*

“*By this time*” refers to the fact that these readers have been in the church long enough to be teaching other Jews about the passing of the Law of Moses and the arrival of the new age of Messiah. Since they have not been teaching, they have lost what was once taught them. They “*need someone to teach them . . . all over again.*” It is generally true that any unused instruction tends to slip away from the student.

The “***elementary truths of God's word***” relate to the initial instructions in the Law of Moses about the coming of new revelation from God through Messiah. In fact, the first notations about Messiah are found in the writings of Moses. The Greek for this phrase in the text is: ***stoixeia tes arxes ton logion tou theou***. These words in the Greek need to be given special attention.

1. ***Stoixeia*** (elementary) — generally this relates to the ABCs of any topic under discussion. It relates to the building blocks of faith in the coming Messiah through the Law of Moses and the prophets.
2. ***Arxes*** (beginning) — though this word is apparently ignored by the translators of this version, the word is definitely in the text and deserves explanation. It has to do with the initial or first foundation notions contained in the Old Testament about the future arrival of Christ. His roots are contained in Old Testament prophecy.

3. ***Logion tou theou*** (God's word) — when appearing in this form in the New Testament this phrase generally refers to the Old Testament writings. The following citations are presented to confirm this.
- a. Acts 7:37-38 — *“This is that Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.’ He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received **living words** to pass on to us.”*
  - b. Romans 3:1-2 — *“What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the **very words of God.**”*
  - c. 1 Peter 4:11a — *“If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the **very words of God.**”*

The ***“oracles of God”*** (as some translate these words) always relate to Old Testament writings.

One problem these first readers of Hebrews had in feeling comfortable with the Law of Christ grew out of their limited understanding of the Law. They did not feel free to divorce themselves from the old to be able to practice the new. They were too sentimentally attached to the old system. Therefore, the Hebrew writer says they need someone to teach them all over again and explain to them the limitations of the old Hebrew system. The writer of Hebrews has already told them that Moses stood as a witness to the things to be spoken afterwards (cf. Hebrews 3:5). In reality, Moses did witness to the fact that his message was not the definitive message of God. He witnessed to the fact that there will be another message that God will bring through the future Messiah. Probably, the Hebrew writer is making reference to a statement that Moses made in Deuteronomy 18:18, when he mentioned the fact that

God will raise up unto Israel a new prophet, somewhat like Moses. God said, *"I will put my word in his mouth."* That new prophet is Jesus Himself.

Moses bore witness to the fact that his message was limited in tenure. It would be eliminated in favor of the new message that God would speak through His Son. The writer had many things he wanted to tell them about Jesus, but they were still wrapped up in the Mosaic system. The writer compares his readers to little children who are addicted to milk at a time when they needed to be eating solid food. The *"solid food"* represents Christ's new system. The *"milk"* relates to the traditional religious practice and customs of the Law of Moses. The Jewish converts were having difficulty feeling comfortable in expressing their faith through the new system of Jesus Christ.

The writer compares the first readers of this letter to *"infants."* He says, *"Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teachings about righteousness"* (Hebrews 5:13). The ***"teachings about righteousness"*** must relate to information about the only real source of righteousness and that is the new system of Christ Jesus. The words ***"not acquainted"*** really mean that the person is unskilled in his understanding about Jesus. Quite evidently, he still has devotions to the old system of Moses, and therefore, cannot progress to the maturing foods of Christianity. ***"Milk"*** indicates feedings on the Old Testament system as though it were the food God intended to endure.

The instructions about Christ in the New Testament are referred to *"solid food"* that is meant to feed God's people. The writer states, *"But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil"* (Hebrews 5:14). *"Solid food"* would instruct the readers about the limitations of the Law of Moses, which was never meant to be a permanent system of law for God's people. The Jewish converts needed to give up the baby food the Law gave and enjoy the *"solid food"* of Christianity. Even the Law of Moses

bore witness to the fact that there would be a future revelation given through Jesus Christ. The writer was encouraging his readers to separate themselves from the Law of Moses.

In the context of these verses there is a strong statement being made about unused information. Christians are expected to teach other people what they have learned about Christ. When they do not involve themselves in reproducing their faith, they begin to lose their grasp of its implications. Then, rather than being *“teachers,”* they needed someone to *“teach”* them *“all over again.”* They should *“by this time”* be able to handle all *“solid food”* of Christ’s covenant, but since they have reverted to the *“infant”* stage of Judaism and can only handle the *“milk”* of the Law of Moses. They who do not teach what they have been taught are found to be lacking in acquaintance (experience) in the Gospel of Christ, and therefore, cannot grow in their knowledge and enjoyment of the Gospel. On the other hand, those who are involved in teaching gain acquaintance in the *“word of righteousness,”* and therefore, *“mature”* in their training and can easily *“distinguish good from evil.”* There are some important contrasts in this context worthy of being reviewed:

1. “Ought to be teachers” versus *“need someone to teach you”* (Hebrews 5:12).
2. “Elementary truths” versus *“teaching about righteousness”* (Hebrews 5:12-13).
3. “Milk” versus *“solid food”* (Hebrews 5:13).
4. “Infants” versus *“mature”* (Hebrews 5:13-14).
5. *“Not acquainted with the teaching”* versus *“distinguish good from evil”* (Hebrews 5:13-14).

The cure for perpetual immaturity is seen in teaching others about Christ.

### The Means To Accomplish It

*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, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so (Hebrews 6:1-3).*

The author continues his insistence that his readers “*leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.*” They needed to give up their devotions to the Law of Moses. They “*ought to be teachers*” about Jesus Christ to their former Jewish friends, but instead they were drifting back to the old system of Judaism. These were not teachings given **by** Christ, they were “*teachings **about** Christ.*” The “*elementary teachings*” were the ABCs about the coming Messiah found in the Old Testament prophecies. The first indication of a future redeemer is found in Genesis 3:15. Following that one, there are many other prophecies in the Old Testament that look forward to the coming of the glorious age of the Son of God, Messiah Himself. The writer uses the Greek word **aphentes** for “*leave.*” It is a present participle derived from the word **aphiemi**, which means to divorce, go away from, to depart, to abandon, or disregard (cf. Matthew 15:14; 22:22; 1 Corinthians 7:11-13).

Since Messiah is here, the challenge is to “*leave*” the realms of the promise of His coming and move into the reality of His presence. The things the Jewish Christians are encouraged to “*leave*” are the same things they are charged not to lay again — “*leave the elementary teachings about Christ . . . not laying again the foundation of . . .*” (Hebrews 6:1). They need to leave the Law of Moses behind to be able to “*go on to maturity,*” which in the Greek is the word for perfection. The Law of Moses is not going to bring perfection for anyone. The “*teachings **about** Christ*” in the Old Testament could not bring

perfection, but the teachings **by** Christ could. The actual Hebrew translation for this should be “*the teachings about Messiah*” rather than the Greek word “*Christ*.” There are a number of passages in the book of Hebrews that help explain that the Law of Moses could not give perfection. Christianity is the only system by which man can reach perfection. These passages also point out the fundamental imperfection of the whole Hebrew system:

**Hebrews 7:11** — “*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?*”

**Hebrews 7:18** — “*The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless.*”

**Hebrews 9:9** — “*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.*”

**Hebrews 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.*”

Neither the Old Testament priests, law, tabernacle, or sacrifices could make the Hebrew worshiper perfect. That explains why they must “*leave*” the old and “*go on to perfection/maturity*” under the new system of Christ. The Levitical priests never had the proper sacrifice that could bring perfection. A veil of separation was in their tabernacle which indicated imperfection in their relationship between God and his worshipping priests. The writer of Hebrews says, “*They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven*” (Hebrews 8:5). That separation from God perpetuated

a state of imperfection under the old Law. Perfection can only be attained in Christ and through His priesthood. Hebrews 10:14 says, “*because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*” A relationship between God and His worshipping priests is available only in the sanctuary that has had its veil of separation removed.

The Hebrew writer says, “*not laying again the foundation*” referring to the foundation of hope in the future Messiah formed by the Old Testament. There is a list of specific aspects within the Old that must be replaced with the New:

**First**, “*repentance from acts that lead to death*” relates to the way the Hebrew people were required under the Law of Moses to manifest their repentance for sins. They had to offer a sacrifice for each act “*that lead(s) to death.*” Repentance under the Law imposed different manifestations than repentance under the New Covenant of Christ. The Old Testament laws regulated what they ate, wore, what and how they cultivated, how they cut their hair, and so on. There were many physical rules that are not a part of the Christian system. The purpose of the Law was to make the Hebrew people **different** from the Gentile nations around them, so their repentance was different. There are new rules that govern the Christian, and therefore, there are new manifestations of a Christian’s repentance before God and away from sin.

**Second**, “*and of faith in God*” relates to a faith that was expressed in their compliance to the demands of the Law for obtaining their forgiveness through sacrificial atonement.

**Third**, “*instruction about baptism*” relates to the various ceremonial washings practiced by the Jews. The same Greek word that is translated “*baptisms*” in Hebrews 6:2 is translated as “*ceremonial washings*” in Hebrews 9:10.

**Fourth**, “*the laying on of hands*” was a ritualistic part of every sacrifice under the Law. There was a symbolic transfer of guilt for sins by “*the laying on of hands*” from the worshiper

to his substitutionary animal sacrifice (cf. Leviticus 1:4; 3:2; 4:4; 4:15; 16:21).

**Fifth**, “*the resurrection of the dead*” relates to the element of faith behind every sacrifice offered under the Law. If there was no life after death, then there would be no resurrection.

**Sixth**, “*eternal judgment*.” If there was no “*resurrection of the dead*,” then there was no “*eternal judgement*” to be concerned about. Sacrifices of atonement would have been reduced to useless ceremonies without meaning. Remember that in Chapter 5 and 6 of this book we discussed the fact that God had sworn to the Israelites who came out of Egypt, “*They shall not enter into my rest*.” That is an indication that they all faced “*eternal judgment*” for their rebellion.

All of these six aspects formed the basis of the Law of Moses in the Hebrew worship to God and its atonement for sin, but these ceremonies of Judaism needed to be left behind (or divorced) for the new order introduced by Christ. The Hebrew writer ends his list of things that must be left behind with “*And God permitting, we will do so*” (Hebrews 6:3). This verse relates more to God’s help in convincing the readers that it is not only **safe** to leave Judaism, but it is also **essential** for their perfection and salvation. The new covenant elements by which a Christians has relationship with God will be presented in Hebrews 6:4-5.

### The Real Danger of Their Condition

*It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 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 (Hebrews 6:4-6).*

Just as there were certain fundamental elements of Judaism that had to be left behind, so also there are fundamental elements of Christianity that have to be embraced and held to for life. The writer of Hebrews list six elements of Christ's new order. He begins with a very serious warning about anyone who might be tempted to turn back to Judaism despite all of his teachings to the contrary. He encourages them to stay with Christ and not to go back to Judaism. He warns them saying, "*It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened... to be brought back to repentance*" (Hebrews 6:4, 6b). It is very important to understand the warning in these verses or else the warnings are in vain for the student of the book of Hebrews even today. The Hebrew writer not only explains the reason for this impossibility, but later refers to three other impossible things (cf. Hebrews 6:18, 10:14, 11:6).

In this present context, there is one word which has much to do with the "*impossible*" situation under discussion. That word is "*once*." It comes from the Greek word *hapax* means a **one-time-for-all-time** event. It is an event that happens "*once*" and is never repeated. The word "apex" is a transliteration of the Greek word *hapax*. The author used the same word to refer to the **one time only** sacrifice of Christ (cf. Hebrews 7:27, 9:26, 27, 28). The word "*once*" is an adverbial prefix that conditions all six elements of that generation's conversion to Christ. The fundamental elements of Christianity are:

**First**, the phrase "*for those who have **once** been enlightened*" most definitely relates to the early converts from Judaism to Christianity. Their enlightened state was their accepting the reality of the presence of the long awaited Messiah and the termination of the Law of Moses.

**Second**, the phrase "*who have (**once**) tasted the heavenly gift*" refers to those same people who have received the "*gift*" of "*such a great salvation* (Hebrews 2:3). They were saved people through Christ's sacrificial blood.

**Third**, the phrase “*who have (once) shared in the Holy Spirit*,” which is the promise of God to those who obey Him in baptism. Christians “*receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” when they “*repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*” (Acts 2:38). This “*gift*” is a confirmation of redemption and of their son-ship into the family of God (cf. Galatians 4:6).

**Fourth**, the phrase “*who have (once) tasted the goodness of the word of God*” probably relates to the unchangeable promises of God which the writer talks about in Hebrews 6:17-18.

**Fifth**, the phrase “*who have (once) tasted . . . the powers of the coming age*” refers to those who had seen the miraculous demonstrations of the Holy Spirit that accompanied apostolic preaching in that first generation of Christianity. The Holy Spirit had “*confirmed*” their preaching, as “*God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit*” (Hebrews 2:3-4). It was the preaching of the original Apostles who were eye-witnesses of Jesus’ teaching and life. The Apostle’s witness was backed up by Holy Spirit confirmation through miracles that were the “*powers of the coming age*” of Christianity.

**Sixth**, “*it is impossible . . . if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance*” (Hebrews 6:6). The phrase “*if they fall away*” assures the readers of Hebrews that it is indeed possible to “*fall away*,” but their re-conversion to Christianity would not be possible for that generation. The elements that first brought them to faith in Christ are no longer present. The Apostles are now dead (cf. Hebrews 13:7). The miracles that “*once*” confirmed their preaching is a thing of the past. The Apostles’ preaching “*was confirmed*” (Hebrews 2:3-4). That is a past tense verb that affirms that the process of miraculous confirmation was over when this book was written. That means that those first converts had eye-witness testimony about Jesus and miraculous demonstrations to confirm their witness.

How could a person who was not an eye-witness and who had no miracles to back up his message reconvert those who apostatized from Christ back to the Law of Moses? Such an apostate would have already rejected the authoritative voices who had divine verification. The things that brought that first generation to faith were no longer happening when this book was written. Therefore, it is quite possible that the writer is placing a ***“one-time for-all-time”*** condition before his readers that would not relate to later generations.

The phrase *“to be brought back to repentance”* in the Greek presents three movements. Literally, the Greek says **again to renew to repentance**. The words *“again,” “renew,”* and *“repentance”* involve three actions. The **first movement** was when the first generation Jews left Judaism to become Christians. If they *“fall away”* and return to Judaism, that would be their **second movement**. And the Hebrew writer says that they cannot return to *“repentance,”* which would be the impossible **third movement**. They simply will not be restored because they had rejected God’s Apostles and the Holy Spirit demonstrations. God had no other evidences to give nor other more authoritative messengers to bring them back to faith in Christ.

**Once** a man has been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gifts, and shared with the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for him to be brought back to repentance because he has ***“crucified the Son of God all over again”*** (Hebrews 6:6). He has rejected Christ’s claim to be the Messiah. They have lost their faith which was once so well established on apostolic preaching and Holy Spirit miracles. It is *“to their loss”* that they have repeated the scene that unfolded in Pilate’s judgment hall when the Jews cried, *““Crucify him!””* (Matthew 27:22-23). In other words, having once believed in Jesus and then having lost his faith in Him, man would confirm the cry of that Jewish mob that led Jesus to be crucified all over again. By crucifying the Son of God all over again, man also subjects *“him (Jesus) to public*

*disgrace*” all over again. An apostate Christian basically exposes Jesus to public shame because he seems to be saying, “I have seen the evidence and heard the claims, but the evidence is not convincing and the claims are false.”

### **Blessings And Judgements**

*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. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned (Hebrews 6:7-8).*

The “*land that drinks in rain . . . that produces a crop*” probably relates to the people of the Jewish nation that became Christians and remained faithful. This is an example from agriculture to confirm a spiritual truth. The “*rain*” would be the words of Old Testament prophets and New Testament Apostles who preached about Jesus. If faith is born in their hearts and it remains, then the “*land*” would have been blessed by God with eternal salvation.

The “*land that produces thorns and thistles*” relates to the Jews who became Christians and then returned to Judaism. It could also refer to those Jews who were never converted to Christ. All of the unbelieving nations would be involved. “*Thorns and thistles*” describe the Jews’ rejection of Jesus in spite of all the evidence accumulated to verify every claim He made about Himself. Three things were true of those who never believed or had once believed and then fell away:

1. That land “*is worthless*” in God’s judgment. The Greek says that such land is “*rejected*” by God.
2. That land “*is in danger of being cursed.*” The Greek says such land is “*nigh to a curse.*” The curse seems

to have reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year A.D. 70, which is not many months after this book was written.

3. That land's eternal destiny is that "*in the end it will be burned.*" Just as God swore that those who did not believe in earlier generations, "*Shall not enter my rest,*" so it will be the same for future generations who do not believe.

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# THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION

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## Hebrews 6:9-20

The major point the writer of Hebrews wants to present in Hebrews 6:9-20 grows out of the **severe warnings** that he had presented earlier. He talked about the **impossibility** of the first generation of believers ever being restored to faith in Christ if once having become a part of Christianity, they reverted to Judaism and lost their faith in Jesus. Being restored to their faith was an impossibility simply because that which had brought them to faith in Christ was no longer present.

It is important that all believers consider the **promises** the writer discusses in this context. Indeed he does give words of warning, but he proceeds almost immediately to give words of comfort, consolation, and assurance. The message the writer wants to present is the fact that the very fidelity of God becomes an anchor to the Christian's soul.

### Review of Chapter Eight

Some observations from chapter 8 need to be emphasized before looking at the context of the things that accompany salvation. The writer said, *"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened . . . to be brought back to repentance... if they fall away . . ."* (Hebrews 6:4). The reason it would be impossible for the first generation to be restored was because that generation of believers lived in an environment that was unique to them. The first generation that came out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and the first generation of

Christians lived in unique situations. The children of Israel fell away in the wilderness, and it was impossible for them to reclaim themselves and ultimately enter into the land of promise because God swore in His wrath they would not enter in. The Hebrew writer seems to be drawing a parallel between the failures of the generation with Moses in the wilderness and the failure of those who lived in the first generation of the church. Both lived in the situation that having been “***once enlightened,***” there would be no further enlightening.

The first generation of Christians were unique, so what the writer of Hebrews says about the impossibility of restoration would not necessarily be true of all the following generations. Christians today are not taught directly by the living voice of the Apostles as was that generation. Present day Christians do not see the miracles that accompanied the proclamation of the gospel at the hand of the Apostles. Therefore, the thing which brings faith to men today is still available. That faith comes from the written Word of God. When a Christian departs from the message, and perhaps temporarily loses his belief in Christ, he can reclaim his faith and be brought back to fidelity because that which brought him to faith is still available. That which brought the first generation of Christians to their faith is no longer available to them. This is an important point to remember in the study of the rest of Hebrews 6.

The writer has given three specific **warnings** about the “. . . *land that drinks in the rain often falling on it . . .*” (Hebrews 6:7). If that land produces good fruit, God is pleased and He blesses the land. But if that land produces thorns and thistles, the land is “*worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned*” (Hebrews 7:8). In this verse, God is talking about the generation of Jews who lived in the time when Jesus Himself was on the earth and His Apostles preached the gospel during that first generation of the Gospel Age. Jesus told those Jews that because they had rejected him, “. . . *upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been*

*shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah . . .*” (Matthew 23:35). That is the guilt that was going to come upon the generation then living. That generation lived in the days of Jesus, heard His teaching, and saw the miracles that gave confirmation to His message. Even His enemies could not deny that He raised the dead, healed the lame, and gave sight to the blind. Everyone could see that His miracles were authentic. Nicodemus recognized that *“no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him”* (John 3:2).

When a man saw the miracles during the first century and rejected them, He also rejected the **message** that those miracles confirmed. That is why Jesus considered the first generation of Christians *“an adulterous and wicked generation”* (Matthew 12:39). Jesus foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem and discussed it in detail (cf. Matthew 24:1-35). Abel was the first individual to be slain for a righteous cause, so he was the first martyr as far as the Old Testament is concerned. The last man to be slain for a righteous cause in the Old Testament was Zachariah, son of Berekiah. As Zachariah was dying, he said, *“May the LORD see this and call you to account”* (2 Chronicles 24:22). Jesus told the Jews of His day, *“I tell you the truth, all this will come upon **this generation**”* (Matthew 23:36). [emphasis added.] The book of 2 Chronicles is the last book of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus used the example of the first blood shed under the shadows of Eden and ended with the last blood shed under the shadows of John the Baptist’s advent. He said, *“ . . . upon **you** will come all the righteous blood.”* The **“you”** He is talking about is the generation He was speaking to – **“this generation”** He continued by telling them, *“Look, your house is left to you desolate”* (Matthew 23:38). [emphasis added.] The reference to their **“house”** implies that God had abandoned the temple in Jerusalem. It was an empty place — just a shell with no one inside. That whole Jewish system of priests, sacrifices, tabernacle, and the Law itself had already

been dismantled to favor the inauguration of the new system of Christ. The first generation of Christians definitely lived in a transitional period of time.

### **Things That Accompany Salvation**

*Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case — things that accompany salvation. 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. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, ‘I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.’ And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 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. 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. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:9-20). [emphasis added.]*

Having severely warned his readers, the author proceeds to comfort them. He seems to be saying, “I do not believe that **you** have gone so far that **you** cannot return.” It is evident that the writer’s conviction grew out of his trust, hope, and belief that God was able to reclaim them through the message that he was writing to them. He is writing as an encourager — “*We are confident of better things in your case — things that accompany salvation*” (Hebrews 6:9). The confidence that he expresses also grows out of the very fidelity of God Himself. When God makes promises, He is able to keep His promises. He is not only a **promise-making** God, He is a **promise-keeping** God. The writer wants all his readers to know that God is reliable and He is trustworthy.

The writer of Hebrews affirms, “*God is **not unjust**; he will **not forget** your work and the love you have shown him as you helped his people and continue to help them*” (Hebrews 6:10). [emphasis added.] It would be “*unjust*” for God to “*forget*” or even ignore the faithful work “*his people*” had been doing. Their past in Christianity has had manifestations in Jesus Christ through work, sacrifice, and devotion to the brethren. It could be seen in the love they had shown toward God and the help given to His “*people*,” and they are still involved in serving God and helping His “*people*.” Yet, they seem to be looking back to Judaism and dragging their feet in the expressions of their faith.

The words “*same diligence*” relate either to the continuation of their past expressions of service to God’s people or to the imitation of the “*faith and patience*” of those who “*inherit what has been promised*” (Hebrews 6:11-12). This is an encouragement to remain faithful to Christ until life is over. The writer of Hebrews urges them to stay with Jesus because He is the only source of salvation. Christians must make their hope sure for hope issues into the eternal rest of God.

The writer says, “*We do not want you to become lazy, but*

*to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised*" (Hebrews 6:12). This is talking about being lazy in faith, not in business. A lazy faith is one that becomes lethargic, disinterested, uninvolved, no longer devoted, no longer praying, not attending assemblies of common worship to the Lord, and no longer expressing gifts of charity through contributions for the needs of the brethren. These are the things that belong to salvation. He encourages them to *"imitate"* the Christians who have inherited the promises through their own faith and patience. To be able to inherit the promises, there are two qualities needed: *"faith and patience."* It is obvious that a Christian does not need *"patience"* when everything is running smoothly. He needs *"patience"* when he is under trials, when persecution is being unleashed against him, and especially when he is being tempted to revert to the old ingrained customs of past religious systems. A Christian needs to maintain his faith in Christ. Patient endurance is a manifestation of faith.

When God made His promises in ages past, He kept them – *"When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself"* (Hebrews 6:13). The writer is reminding the Jews of episodes that were very well known to the Hebrew people. God confirmed His promise to Abraham with an oath: *"saying, 'I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.'"* (Hebrews 6:14). The word *"surely"* has the force of an oath. God *"swore"* upon His own existence and integrity. When God says *"surely,"* He means, "just as surely as I live, I swear by Myself and by My own existence that I will bless you." He is saying that His promises and His blessings will be maintained.

Abraham waited patiently for many years, and then he received that which had been promised. Abraham is one of the examples of men of faith whom the readers need to *"imitate"* (cf. Hebrews 6:12) even though when you read about him it may sometimes appear that he was not all that patient. Abraham

may have been impatient at times, but he never doubted. God made the initial promise in Genesis 12. In Genesis 15, He renewed the promise and expanded on it. God said, *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”* (Genesis 12:2-3). The specific blessing God promised was the coming of Messiah (cf. Galatians 3:16). When God repeated the Messianic promise, He further assured Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation (cf. Genesis 15:1-21; 22:15-18). As the years passed for Abraham, he waited with total and consummate faith in God knowing that whatever God had promised He would do.

The writer of Hebrews said, *“Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument”* (Hebrews 6:16). The writer is making the point that when men swear an oath it is done by *“someone greater than themselves.”* In courts of law, the bailiff (or someone in the courtroom) will hold the Bible so that the witness can lay his hand on it and swear by the word of God that he will tell the truth. Men have been known to swear by their mother’s head and other such things. The Jews used to swear by the gold of the altar in the Hebrew tabernacle. They understood the concept of swearing by something that was greater than themselves. These oaths gave confirmation to what had been said and put an end to any argument. A man will swear that he is telling the truth, and unless he perjures himself, that oath confirms his message. Men normally accept the testimony of others when that testimony is backed up with an oath. God used the same method.

God made His promise to Abraham not to prove anything to Abraham, but *“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”* (Hebrews 6:17). [emphasis added.] Abraham believed God kept His promises. The writer used the case of Abraham to prove to Abraham’s

heirs that God is still making and still keeping promises to His people. God swore to Abraham many centuries before the book of Hebrews was ever written. The writer used this to prove to the heirs of **the promise** that when God makes His promise, it will not change. That is the reason God backed up His promise to Abraham with an oath. Therefore, men can be confident that God kept His promise because all of the things that He had promised have been completely fulfilled. When God swore to Abraham, He did it to confirm to those who are the beneficiaries and heirs of the promise. The reason the writer emphasizes this point is because God has made other promises concerning an eternal rest that is waiting for the people of God. God promised that Jesus will come again to take us home, and all men can rely on that. God's record in being a promise-making and a promise-keeping God is sufficient to prove to the heirs of the promise that if God made the promise, then He will also keep it.

God swore so that He would be able to give His children encouragement. The writer said,

*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* (Hebrews 6:18). [emphasis added.]

God swore by Himself to convict His people that when He makes a promise, He is going to keep His promise. There are **two unchangeable things about God**: one is His promise and the other is the oath with which He confirms His promise. These unchangeable things about God are supported by the fact that *"it is impossible for God to lie."* God cannot perjure Himself, not because He lacks the material possibility to do it, but simple because God is God. He is absolute truth, and absolute truth cannot and will not be perverted. The very nature of God Himself makes it *"impossible"* for Him to lie.

This is the second **“impossible”** thing mentioned in the book of Hebrews. The first impossibility related to the fact that those who apostatize from Christ in that generation cannot be restored to faith in Him. There are two other *“impossible”* things mentioned in Hebrews: *“it is **impossible** for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin”* (Hebrews 10:4) and *“without faith it is **impossible** to please God”* (Hebrews 11:6). [emphasis added.]

The author of Hebrews writes about these three things to give Christians strong encouragement. The **“two unchangeable things”** are God’s promise and God’s oath. The **“impossible”** is God’s ability to lie. These three things convict the Christian that he can depend on God. The Christians during the first century had fled from the slavery of Judaism to enter into Christianity. They had security from past condemnations to serve as a foundation of hope. A Christian’s hope is not based upon his own performance, but upon God’s fidelity. A Christian must remain faithful with a faith that leads to obedience. A Christian’s salvation is dependant upon the unchangeable nature of God: the promises He has made and His faithfulness in keeping His promises.

Christians have *“this **hope** as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain”* (Hebrews 6:19). [emphasis added.] The soul is anchored in the unchangeable nature of God Himself. This *“hope”* is *“firm and secure.”* It is built on the present position of Christ in the *“inner sanctuary behind the curtain.”* It is there that Jesus carries on His priestly functions for His people. He has gone into heaven and is enthroned at God’s right hand. The Christian’s **“hope”** has penetrated the **“curtain.”** That curtain or veil in the Hebrew temple symbolized the separation between God and His worshipers under the old Hebrew system. The veil symbolized the sin problem that caused the separation between man and God. When Christ died on the cross, that veil was torn in two from top to bottom (cf. Matthew 27:51; Mark

15:38; Luke 23:45). The tearing of the veil symbolized the fact that through the sacrifice of Christ the sin problem had been solved. It also symbolized that Jesus had entered into the “*Most Holy Place*” (cf. Exodus 26:3; Hebrews 9:11-28), which symbolized heaven itself. The Christian’s “*hope*” is based on the fact that one man, who is his great High Priest, has penetrated the separation between heaven and earth. Our “*hope*” is based on the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Jesus Himself is the one who entered “*the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.*” The writer of Hebrews says, “*Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek*” (Hebrews 6:20). Our hope is actually in Jesus Himself. It is not simply a conviction and not simply individual faith. Jesus Christ is our hope — and our hope has gone into Heaven. When Jesus solved the sin problem, the separation between God and man caused by sin was eliminated. Christians stand in the presence of God without veils of separation today, because Jesus penetrated the veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. There **was** a veil to separate God from His worshipers, but Jesus penetrated that curtain.

The veil that once separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was ripped apart from the top to the bottom which indicates this was an action done by God Himself as He eliminated the veil of division. Until the sin problem was solved, man remained separated from God. That is the reason any individual that has any sin to his credit on the day of judgement will have to be eternally separated from God. God cannot endure and will not tolerate the presence of sin in His Holy of Holies — Heaven. A Christian’s sins are forgiven by Jesus’ atoning blood, and therefore, he has the privilege of entering into the very presence of God. It is a spiritual presence rather than a physical one. The writer of Hebrews defines that relationship as the basis of our hope. Our hope is Jesus Christ, our man in heaven.

Christ has gone into heaven as a High Priest and a Forerunner. The translation of Hebrews 6:20 leaves out a Greek word that is *prodromos*. It means a trail-blazer or forerunner. If one man, Jesus Christ, has made it to heaven and has blazed a trail for us, then that tells us that other men can follow that same trail into the very presence of God. This is what the Hebrew writer later refers to as a “way” – *“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, **by a new and living way** opened for us through **the curtain**, that is his body”* (Hebrews 10:19-20). [emphasis added.] Christians have a “new (fresh) and living (life-giving) way” into the very presence of God. Jesus has inaugurated a “way” for us into Heaven itself.

The writer of Hebrews wants to convince and convict his readers that God is worthy of all trust. Let us base our hope and confidence on the fact that when God makes His promise about future redemption, **He** will indeed keep that promise.

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# THE ETERNAL HIGH PRIEST

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## Hebrews 7:1-17

This chapter covers the priesthood of Christ. His priesthood is not modeled after the Levitical order. It is a new kind of priesthood ordered after the type of Melchizedek. The writer of Hebrews explains the “*order of Melchizedek*” and about the man himself. Hebrews 7 is not the first time the author has mentioned the fact that Jesus is a priest. In Hebrews 1:3 he says, “*After he (Jesus) had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*” These actions – “*provided purification for sins*” and “*sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven*” – on the part of Jesus demanded priestly involvement. The writer of Hebrews mentions the priestly nature of Jesus many times:

*For this reason he (Jesus) 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 (Hebrews 2:17). [emphasis added.]*

*Therefore, since we have a **great high priest** who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God . . . (Hebrews 4:14). [emphasis added.]*

*And, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be **high priest in the order of Melchizedek** (Hebrews 5:9-10). [emphasis added.]*

In Hebrews 5:11 the writer of Hebrews says there is “*much to say about this*” (Jesus being designated by God to be a high priest), but his readers “*are slow to learn,*” meaning they were no longer listening to what God had to say through His Son. At this point, the writer of Hebrews is ready to discuss the priesthood of Christ. He has finished telling his readers that Jesus, the Trail Blazer and our great High Priest, the one who sits at the right hand of God, the one who has begun and will terminate our exodus from earth to heaven, is a “*high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek*” (Hebrews 6:20; cf. 5:6, 7:3, 17, 21).

### **The Person and Priesthood of Melchizedek**

*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, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means ‘king of righteousness;’ then also, king of Salem means “king of peace.” Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! 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. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. 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. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham,*

*because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor (Hebrews 7:1-10).*

### **The Person, Parentage, and Priesthood of Melchizedek**

There are a number of explanations that need to be made about the man, Melchizedek. He was the **“king of Salem”** and a **“priest of God Most High.”** Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything when *“He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him”* (Hebrews 7:1). The only information available about Melchizedek in the Word of God is summed up in these statements. The only information available from a historical perspective comes from Genesis 14:17-24:

*After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). Then Melchizedek **king of Salem** brought out bread and wine. He was **priest of God Most High**, and he blessed Abram, saying, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.’ Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. The king of Sodom said to Abram, ‘Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.’ But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me — to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share.’*  
[emphasis added.]

When Lot was captured by the kings of the valley, Abram rallied his personal forces, pursued the kings' armies, conquered them, and took the spoils of victory. As Abram and his men started back home, they met Melchizedek, gave him a tenth of the spoils of battle, and received a blessing from him. The only other time Melchizedek is mentioned in the Word of God is Psalm 110:4: "*The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.'*" God made this statement about Messiah with a declaration that His priesthood was based on the oath of God. The oath of God declares the unchangeability of what God has promised. In this context, God promised that Jesus would be "*a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*"

Melchizedek is actually more famous for what we do not know about him than for what we do know, and yet there are some interesting things that come from the things the Scriptures say. **First**, he was a **king** — the "**king of Salem.**" The word **salem** means peace (in Hebrew, it is **shalom**). "**Salem**" is the name given to the city of Jerusalem in Psalm 76:2. Jerusalem was the center of Melchizedek's kingly position. **Second**, as the King of Salem, he was a **king of peace**. **Third**, he was a "**priest of God Most High.**" All of this information has much to say about the priesthood of Christ which was modeled after the Melchizedek order.

**Fourth**, the writer of Hebrews says, "*his name means 'king of righteousness; then also, 'king of Salem' means 'king of peace'*" (Hebrews 7:2). His name comes from a compound Hebrew word: "*Melek*" which means king and "*tsadek*" which means righteousness. By putting these two Hebrew words together, the writer presents a transliteration (to use the closest corresponding letters or characters of a different alphabet or language, Ed.) of his name. Not only was he a peaceful, priestly king, he was also a **king of righteousness**.

Jesus is "*a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek*"

which means He was going to be made after the type of Melchizedek. Melchizedek became a blueprint or shadow of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the kingly, righteous, and peaceful priest. Psalm 2 prophesied that *“I (God) have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill”* (Psalm 2:6). Psalms 110 prophesied, *“You (Jesus) are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek”* (Psalm 110:4). God appointed Jesus to be His **king** and His **priest** forever.

**Fifth**, Melchizedek was **unique**. Notice what the writer says about Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:3, *“Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.”* As a man Melchizedek certainly had a mother and a father, but he did not receive his priesthood from his mother or his father. As a man, he certainly had a family who preceded him, but he did not receive his kingly position from any of them. He became king in his own right and he was appointed a priest of God in his own right. He did not receive these honors as a successor because of his genealogy. The words *“without genealogy”* are presented in an appositive position to the words *“without father or mother.”* An appositive is an inserted phrase designed to explain the main clause of the sentence. *“Without father or mother”* may also relate to the fact that there is no history of his family ties in biblical records. The point the writer is making is that Melchizedek did not get his priesthood or his kingship from his ancestors nor did he pass it along to any successors.

The phrase *“without beginning of days or end of life”* simply relates to the fact that there is no biblical history for the beginning or the end of Melchizedek’s priesthood as there was for other priests in the Old Testament history. Exodus 28 and Numbers 18 record the beginning of Aaron’s priesthood when Aaron received his call from God. Numbers 20:22-29 records when Aaron died and his son Eleazer became a priest in his stead. Israel went into an extended mourning over the death of Aaron. His priesthood had a *“beginning of days”* and an end.

His priesthood was terminated by his death, but because there is no record of a beginning or an end of Melchizedek's priesthood, he is forever isolated in time.

Melchizedek was a one man priesthood. His priesthood was isolated in time just as Christ became the only priest of the new system. Melchizedek is the first priest to ever be mentioned in the

Bible, which also makes him a blueprint of Jesus as a priest. This kind of Hebrew parallelism is the basis of **type** and **antitype**. God developed the unique personality of Melchizedek and had him encounter Abraham to build a blueprint of Christ and His priesthood. Jesus is a kingly, righteous, peaceful priest who is unique in that His priesthood was original and non-genealogical. He will forever be a priest of God Most High.

**Sixth**, Melchizedek was "*like the Son of God*" (Hebrews 7:3b). This phrase indicates that God had already planned the priesthood of Jesus before the foundation of the world (cf. 1 Peter 1:20) and, of course, before Melchizedek was ever born. God simply carved out of history this interesting person, Melchizedek, so He could formulate a prophetic pattern of the priesthood of Christ.

### **The Preeminence and Permanency of Melchizedek**

All the Hebrew people were the physical descendants of Abraham. He was the forefather of the Jewish nation. He was called "*the patriarch*" (Hebrews 7:4) and later he will be defined as "*him who had the promises*" (Hebrews 7:6). The writer insists that Abraham was great, and yet in spite of his greatness, Abraham "*gave him (Melchizedek) a tenth of the plunder!*" (Hebrews 7:4). All the future priests, the Levites, would descend from Abraham. It is significant to note that Abraham exchanged tithes and blessings with this man who was obviously greater than he. Even though Abraham was considered the greatest of all Hebrews, he acknowledged on

two counts that Melchizedek was greater. That conveys the fact that any priesthood that descends from the “*order of Melchizedek*” is greater than any priesthood that descended from Abraham. It was a **superior priesthood**.

The fact that Abraham “*gave him a tenth of everything*” (Hebrews 4:2; cf. 4:4) is very significant. The Levites did not receive tithes because they were of more noble birth or because they were considered of better blood and more aristocratic in ancestry. All Hebrews came from the same loins of Abraham. The tribes of Simeon, Judah, Dan, Zebulun, and all the other tribal groups gave a tenth of their possessions to the Levites from the tribe of Levi. The only reason they gave their possessions to the Levites was because the Levites were elevated above all other individuals as a part of God’s priesthood. The Law of Moses required “*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*” (Hebrews 7:5). Abraham, as the great “*patriarch*” of all the Hebrews, acknowledged that Melchizedek was his superior, one elevated above himself, as a priest of God Most High and deserving of the gifts of tribute. By federal representation as the head of the Hebrew clan, Abraham acknowledged Melchizedek’s superiority by giving him “*one tenth of the plunder.*”

The writer of Hebrews says, “*This man (Melchizedek), however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and **blessed him** who had the promises*” (Hebrews 7:6). Even though Melchizedek’s priesthood was not based on his ancestry, he was superior to the greatest of all Hebrews. Abraham was great on two points: he was the patriarch, the head of the Hebrew religion, and he was the one to whom God gave “*the promises.*” God said,

*I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a*

*blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”* (Genesis 12:2-3).

On these two counts, Abraham was the greatest of all the Hebrew patriarchs. Melchizedek’s superiority is **first** seen in the fact that he was given gifts of tribute or “*a tenth of the plunder*” and **second**, in the fact that he “*blessed him who had the promises.*”

The fact that Melchizedek “**blessed**” Abraham is also a very significant fact that points to the superiority of his priesthood. The writer of Hebrews says, “*And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater*” (Hebrews 7:7). Abraham is “*the lesser*” who was “*blessed by the greater,*” Melchizedek. Tithes (“*a tenth of everything/plunder*”) flow upward from the “*the lesser*” to “*the greater,*” but “*blessings*” flow downward from the “*greater*” to the “*lesser.*” In these two areas, Abraham acknowledged the superiority of Melchizedek himself, and therefore, the superiority of his priesthood. The “*order of Melchizedek*” was a superior priesthood to the Levitical order that would later come from the loins of Abraham. Christ was going to be superior to the Levitical priesthood. The logical conclusion is that the priesthood of Christ is superior in glory, grandeur, and significance to any privilege or honor that would be granted to the Levites.

The major difference between the Levitical priesthood and the “*the order of Melchizedek*” was the fact that all the Levitical priests died. The Levitical priesthood was a genealogical order because they died. “*The order of Melchizedek*” was not a genealogical order (cf. Hebrews 7:23). The writer of Hebrews says, “*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*” (Hebrews 7:8). The “*order of Melchizedek*” was a **living priesthood** (cf. Hebrews 7:3).

Symbolically, the Levites representatively paid tithes to Melchizedek through their forefather Abraham. The writer of Hebrews says, “*One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor*” (Hebrews 7:9-10). Abraham, as the federal head of all the tribes of Israel, established the precedence which implicated the Levites by legal application. This fact would mean that the Levites themselves must acknowledge that their priesthood was inferior to that of Christ. Even though Levi was not yet born, it is enough to know that Abraham acknowledged the superiority of Melchizedek making his priesthood greater than the Levitical. Perhaps this type of reasoning is not impressive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but Hebrew logic easily understood the principles involved. And the reasoning would be significant to the Hebrew mind, particularly in their evaluation of the Levites as they stood in contrast with Christ.

### **A Change in the Priesthood**

*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? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, 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. For*

*it is declared: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek' (Hebrews 7:11-17). [emphasis added.]*

The Jews were probably asking why they needed another priest, because in reality they had more than enough priests. The author says,

*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?' (Hebrews 7:11).*

It seems as if he is saying that such a question should not be asked now. That was a question that should have been asked in the days when God selected Aaron and the Levites, because the Melchizedek priesthood preceded theirs. The priesthood of the Levites could not grant perfection which was needed by the people worshiping God. Therefore, a new priesthood had to be programmed.

The new priesthood could not be made after the order of Aaron, because it was based on genealogy. A genealogical priesthood is an order based on father, son, grandson, and great-grandson. When Aaron died, Eleazar became priest. When Eleazar died, Ithmar became priest. When Ithmar died, Eli became priest. When Eli died, Samuel became priest. Priestly position was handed down from father to son to grandson based on physical descendants much like a dynasty that is passed down from father to son to grandson. A genealogical priesthood is not the nature of Christ's priesthood. The reason the Israelites had to have a priesthood based on genealogy is the simple fact that those priests died, and therefore, they could not continue forever. Jesus does not need

that kind of successor because He is not subject to death. He is a divine priest, He is God, and therefore, He serves forever.

The writer of Hebrews affirms, “*For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law*” (Hebrews 7:12). God arranged for a change to take place. The psalmist said, “*The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek’*” (Psalms 110:4). He is prophetically speaking of the future Messiah. So even in the days of David, God was already planning a new priesthood. When the change of priesthood was made, the Law also had to be changed. The Law had been given to the people on the basis of perfection, but the priesthood pre-existed the Law (cf. Exodus 19-20). The priests were already functioning among the people before the Law was given on Mt. Sinai. A religious system that is based on a particular type of priest creates a religious government that is peculiar to it. A political government that is based on a monarchy or a democracy has a constitution that functions according to its governmental head. If a monarchy is changed to a democracy, then the foundational constitution would also have to be changed.

The phrase “*He of whom these things are said*” is a statement that needs to be clarified. The “*things*” in this verse are definitely regarding the “*coming of another priest — one in the order of Melchizedek*” mentioned in Hebrews 7:11. There are two basic reasons given in this context for changing the Law. The **first** reason there must be a change of Law is because Jesus was not a Levite and only Levites could serve as priests under the Law of Moses. Hebrews 5:1 and Numbers 18 confirm that a priest had to be taken from among men, so God selected the Levites to be His priests. The Levites received the priesthood as a gift of service. God said, “*Anyone else who comes near the sanctuary must be put to death*” (Numbers 18:7b). The phrase “*anyone else*” refers to any individual who did not belong to the Levitical tribe who tried to serve as a

priest. He would be put to death. That says that the Levites were the only ones who could serve as priests. They had a monopoly on the priesthood under the Law of Moses, and no unauthorized individual would ever be privileged to serve as a priest. Therefore, the writer emphasizes that when a change of priesthood was made there had to be a change of the Law. The priesthood and the Law had to stand together or fall together. There was no way Jesus could serve under the Law of Moses, because priests had to be from the tribe of Levi. Jesus sprang from the tribe of Judah (cf. Hebrews 7:14; Matthew 1:1-6), and that would disqualify Him as a priest under the Law of Moses.

Hebrews 7:14-15 establishes a valid rule for the hermeneutic of the silence of Scripture. The writer says,

*For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears.*

Moses did not say anything about Judean priests. No man ever stood before the altar to offer sacrifices who was not a Levite. If Jesus was going to be a priest after the “*order of Melchizedek*,” He could not be a priest according to the Law of Moses, so the Law had to be changed when the priesthood was changed. The phrase “*what we have said*” clearly relates to the changing of the Law when the priesthood was changed. The **first reason** for changing the Law was because Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi. The **second reason** the Law had to be changed was because Jesus belonged to the different order — *the order of Melchizedek* — and that disqualified Him to be a priest under the Law.

Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi and He was not a direct descendant of Aaron, therefore, He could not serve as a priest. On these two counts, Jesus could not serve as a priest under the Law of Moses. He belonged to the wrong “*tribe*” and

the wrong “*order*,” so both the Law of Moses and the Aaron/Levitical priesthood had to be changed. The Law demanded that Aaron, his sons, and his father’s family be the only priests of the Mosaic era (cf. Numbers 18: 1, 4, 6, 7). The writer of Hebrews describes Jesus as “*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***” (Hebrews 7:16). All the Levitical priests received their priesthood from “*ancestry*,” but Jesus received His priesthood by divine appointment. His right to the priestly office was not based on genealogy or inheritance. He was made a priest after a different kind of law, a law that God Himself established when He intervened in time.

Once again the author quotes from Psalm 110:4, “*For it is declared: ‘You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek’*” (Hebrews 7:17). The psalmist wrote, “*The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind . . .*” (Psalm 110:4a). This is a law of direct and divine appointment rather than the law of physical inheritance. Jesus was made a priest based upon “*the power of an indestructible life.*” Though He did die as a human sacrifice, He did not die as a divine priest, because even in His physical death He was still a living, functioning priest. In fact, He is the one who entered the Hebrew temple and ripped the veil of separation from top to bottom, but that happened while His physical body was still hanging on the cross (cf. Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38).

There are three major aspects of the priesthood in the prophecy of Psalms 110:4. The first is that Jesus is to be a “**priest**.” The second is that He will be a “**forever**” priest. And the third is that he will be a “**forever priest after the order of Melchizedek**.” These three qualities found in the priesthood of Christ elevate Him and His ministry far above the imperfections of the Aaron and Levitical systems of priests.

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# THE SUPERIOR HIGH PRIEST

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## Hebrews 7:18-28

This chapter continues a study of the priesthood of Christ as contrasted with the Levites themselves rather than as a parallel of Melchizedek's priesthood. The writer of Hebrews illustrates how different the priesthood of Christ is from the Levitical priesthood. There are several areas of immediate contrast between these two priesthoods that emphasize that the priesthood of Christ is not only different, it is also better. It is a stronger, perfect priesthood. Earlier in Hebrews 7 the writer of Hebrews explained that the Levitical priesthood was passed from father to son. When the father died, the son automatically became a priest through genealogy. Jesus did not become a priest "*on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry*" (Hebrews 7:16). Jesus became a priest by direct, divine appointment.

### The Superiority of Christ's Priesthood

#### Superior As To Its Regulation

*The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God (Hebrews 7:18-19).*

The Law of Moses and all the ordinances that were given concerning the priests that served under the Law ("*former regulation*") had to do with the priests who became priests by

inheritance. The writer of Hebrews says, “*The former regulation is set aside **because** it was **weak** and **useless**.*”

The weakness of the priesthood under the Law of Moses was basically the fact that it was based on genealogy. There was a continual succession of priests as their priests died — “*death prevented them from continuing in office*” (Hebrews 7:23b). This was a “*weak*”-ness in the Levitical system because when one priest would die, another priest would have to function in his place. The Levitical system was also “*useless*” because those priests could not give the worshipers “*perfection*” in their relation to God (cf. Hebrews 7:11). When the writer of Hebrews says, “*If **perfection** could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood,*” it is automatically understood that “*perfection*” could **not** be obtained by the Levitical priesthood. That is why the writer says it was a “*useless*” kind of priesthood. Regardless of how long it stood or how long it functioned, the Levitical priesthood was never able to bring God and His worshiping priests together in perfect harmony without the veils of separation. God “*set aside*” the entire process by which the Levites were made priests. That process was eliminated so that there will never be another Levite who serves with God’s recognition as His priest.

In place of the old, there is now a “*better hope*.” Not only was it impossible for the Levitical priests to bring “*perfection*” to the people, there was nothing the Law could do to bring “*perfection*” either. The new “*hope*” obviously refers to the new priesthood of Jesus. The new priesthood “*is introduced*” after the old priesthood was eliminated, because the two priesthoods could not and will not coexist. The “*better hope*” relates to the unveiled relationship Christians enjoy with God in “*the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf*” (Hebrews 6:19). Through Christ’s priesthood, Christians have the privilege of approaching “*the throne of grace with confidence*” (Hebrews 4:16). That is what the writer of Hebrews means when he says,

*“by which we draw near to God.”*

### Superior As To Its Oath

*And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, 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.”’ Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. (Hebrews 7:20-22).*

Not only was the Levitical priesthood “*weak*” and “*useless*,” it was also a priesthood that was made without an oath. In contrast Jesus became a priest “*with an oath*.” God swore and He will not change his mind — Christ will remain a priest forever (cf. Psalm 110:4). Remember this oath covers three qualities: Jesus was “*sworn*” to be a “**priest—forever—in the order of Melchizedek**” (Hebrews 7:17). These three things were confirmed by “*an oath*” from God. God never made that kind of clear-cut, definitive, and final statement for the Levitical priests. He never promised they would be priests forever. Their priesthood was temporary, transient, and provisionary. It only stood until the new priesthood of Jesus was inaugurated. This information justifies the priesthood of Jesus. He will never need a successor. He will never vacate His office as the Levitical priests did when they died.

The **permanency** of Jesus’ priesthood brings advantages to the believer that the Old Testament could only speak about through prophetic anticipation in the coming age of Messiah. Christians have “*a better hope*” and “*a better covenant*.” Jesus is the “**guarantee of a better covenant**.” A “**covenant**” is a pact, an agreement, or a partnership between God and His people. The fact that Jesus is the “*guarantee*” means that He is the assurance and pledge of the good “*covenant*” relationship that Christians now have with God. He is the One who stands

good for the terms of the covenant and confirms the validity of its every privilege and promise. He is our assurance that this covenant will not be abolished as the old one was.

### **Superior As To Its Permanency**

*Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood (Hebrews 7:23-24).*

The total number of high priests under the Law from Aaron to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was 83 according to Josephus. This statement relates back to the weakness that existed in the genealogical nature of the Levitical priesthood. The oath of Psalm 110:4 promised that Jesus would be a priest “forever.” Another version conveys the thought that He never had and never will have a successor because He will never vacate His priestly office. The Greek word **aparabaton** literally means that no one will ever intrude into His position as priest. His priesthood will never be terminated. In that way it is comparable to the “order of Melchizedek” – it is “without beginning of days or end of life” (Hebrews 7:3). This statement alone is sufficient to totally discredit any present day human priesthoods that claim to be an extension of the Melchizedek or the Levitical priesthoods. These present day priesthoods have absolutely no biblical basis for their claims. They are more “priest-craft” than priesthood, which in Christianity is as much out of place as witchcraft. Christ’s priesthood belongs to Him and Him only. There will never be another priest of any origin who will serve in the place God has “appointed” for Jesus to occupy “forever.”

### **Superior As To Its Effectiveness**

*Therefore he is able to save completely those who*

*come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 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. 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 7:25-28).*

The practical benefit that comes out of the priesthood of Christ is that Jesus ***“is able to save completely.”*** This phrase implies much more than the words suggest. The phrase in Greek is ***eis to panteles***, which can be translated ***“to the uttermost”*** (Hebrews 7:25, KJV). That Greek statement also conveys the fact that Jesus is not only totally able to save, He is able to save **at all times under all circumstances**. Think about the difference sin made in the lives of Adam and Eve. At one time, everything was beautiful and the fellowship between God and man was perfect. There was perfect harmony between God and man and between Adam and Eve. When sin intervened, the image man had received from God became marred and stained. He no longer carried a crown on his head and he lost his dominion. He had to stand before God with the penalty of death upon his head for violating God’s law. He stood condemned with a guilty conscience facing the consequences of his sins. Therefore, there were consequences to the sins that all men commit.

This passage says that Jesus is able to save ***“to the uttermost.”*** That means that whatever sin does to man, **Christ is able to undo**. Christ can remove the stain of sin, the guilt of sin, the condemnation of sin, the penalty of sin, the consciousness of sin, the separation of sin, and all other

consequences of sin — “*Therefore, he is able to save completely!*” (Hebrews 7:25). In depth, that is a much more beautiful statement than it appears on the surface. Because Christians are “*saved completely*” through Jesus, they can “*draw near to God*” (Hebrews 7:19), “*because he always lives to intercede for them*” (Hebrews 7:25b). The intercession of Christ is seen in a redemptive context because it is He who saves the souls of men. That is His purpose and function — it is the ongoing operation of His priesthood. Through His blood He purifies His people (cf. Hebrews 2:17) and He continues to “*always . . . intercede for them.*” Should Christ suspend His divine intercession, man’s next sin would immediately bring him condemnation from God.

It is clear that the Levitical priesthood expired before the new priesthood could be inaugurated since the two systems could not and did not coexist. Jesus was the officiating priest at His own sacrifice on the cross, so it would seem that the old passed away moments before Calvary. When He was hanging on the cross as a man, He was the sacrifice, but He was also the divine Priest ministering at the altar of Calvary. He offered Himself as the atoning sacrifice. Under the Law of Moses the Levites would offer an animal in sacrifice to God. The priest was someone and the animal was something else. In the New Covenant situation, Jesus is not only the human sacrifice that was offered, He is also the divine priest that does the offering. He is the officiating, ministering priest who officiates at the ceremonial altar of Calvary and brings about the sacrifice of Himself on behalf of the sinful human family. He presented Himself unto God as a blameless, spotless sacrifice to atone for the sins of men.

Jesus **was** the sacrifice, but He **is still** the sacrifice. His priesthood is “*forever*” functional. He did terminate the sacrificial part of His ministry at Calvary so that sacrifice inaugurated the priestly part of His ministry. Every time one of the believers in Christ commits a sin today, Jesus intervenes as

a priest and applies the blood of His sacrifice to make it possible for that sin to be forgiven immediately so that sin never appears on the record book of God's divine accounting. As long as the Christian remains with Christ Jesus, he has a priest who not only brings about his salvation, but He maintains that salvation as his intercessor. Christians think about intercession as a prayer than an individual would offer to God on behalf of someone else. That is a valid definition for intercession, but the intercession of Christ on his behalf also involves the Christian's salvation. He "*saves completely*" in the past and continues to save in the present.

Isaiah 53 portrays the picture of the suffering Lamb of God:

*Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows . . . stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted . . . pierced for our transgressions . . . crushed for our iniquities . . . **and the LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all** . . . he was led like a lamb to the slaughter . . . he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors. **FOR he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors** (Isaiah 53:4-7, 12).*

Jesus poured out His life because He was making "*intercession for the transgressors.*" He continues to serve as the great High Priest. He is still interceding and saving. He keeps the Christian in a saved relationship with God. These are the benefits of Christ's sacrifice and His priestly ministry that are far "**better**" than the Levitical priests. His intercession is "*to be able to save completely **those who come to God through him***" (Hebrews 7:25b). There is no other way a Christian can penetrate the veil of separation and obtain access to the Father — Christians have access into the throne room only through the great High Priest. Through Jesus Christ Christians enter into the

very presence of God the Father because the sin problem has been solved through Christ the Lord.

### **The Nature and Qualifications of Jesus as High Priest**

Notice the contrast between Christ and the Levites. They were many; He is one. They died; He still lives. They could not bring perfection because they were weak and unprofitable; He is strong and able to save. The contrast is clear. Through Christ's priesthood, there is a "*better hope*" and a "*better covenant*." The Hebrew writer continues, "*Such a high priest meets our need — one who is **holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens***" (Hebrews 7:26). The Greek for "*meets our need*" would be better translated with consideration given to the imperfect tense of the verb. It should say, "For such a high priest, we **used to be needing**." When the Jews were still under the Law of Moses, they did not have the kind of priest they truly needed. This verse defines the ideal priest — "*one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens*." These are the qualifications that would have been required by the Levite if he was going to meet all of the needs of the people. It is clear that only Jesus possessed those qualities, and it is clear that the Levitical priest had none of them.

The **first** qualification is "*one who is **holy***." The word "**holy**" generally means one that is set apart for God. The normal New Testament word for holy is **hagio**, but the word in this context is **hosios**. **Hosios** has more of a moral connotation than the word **hagios**. The Jews had **holy** days, a **holy** temple, **holy** places, **holy** sacrifices, **holy** vessels, and even **holy** garments. None of those things actually possessed moral qualities. They were "**holy**" only because they were dedicated to the purpose of God. The priest the Jews "**used to be needing**" would have all the moral qualities that were so evidently absent from the lives of the Levitical priests. They needed a morally perfect priest. This statement assures that Jesus Christ was

already morally perfect.

The **second** qualification is “*one who is . . . blameless.*” The priest under the Law had to be without any physical defect that would disqualify him (cf. Leviticus 21:1-24). This physical perfection was not as important as the spiritual quality of being “*blameless.*” The Greek word is *akakos* which means to be harmless, without guile or fraud. This quality in a priest defines his relationship with others. There would be no deceit in his dealings with other people. He would be perfectly honest in all situations and never offensive.

The **third** qualification for the priest is “*one who is . . . pure.*” The Greek word *amiantos* implies that there is no defilement. It suggests an unspoiled life that was free from contamination. Under the Law a priest could be disqualified from service for a number of ceremonial defilements. Those physical defilements only point out the importance of the spiritual qualities Jesus possessed which guaranteed that He would never be unfit to serve.

The **fourth** qualification is “*one who is . . . set apart from sinners.*” The kind of priests who served during the Old Testament were sinners just as the people they served. The phrase “*set apart*” does not mean in the sense of being aloof, separate, or distant from the people that he was serving. The writer is discussing the ideal priest who was not involved in the sin problem. He needed to be one who was on the side of the cure rather than on the side of the disease. Mankind needed a priest that was **innocent** of the sin problem.

The **fifth** qualification for the priest needed to be “*one who is . . . exalted above the heavens.*” “*Above the heavens*” is the place where the ideal priest would need to serve. As long as a priest lived on earth, with earthly limitations and with the restrictions of finite man, then whatever he would be able to do would be limited by those limitations. He needed to be right at the right hand of God where his ministrations in behalf of his people could be most effective.

The **sixth** qualification is that man needed a priest who could offer a sacrifice not only for today's sins and the sins of yesterday, but the sins of tomorrow. When the Jews committed a sin under the Levitical priesthood it broke their fellowship with God. There were prescribed animals a Jew had to take to the temple and ask the priest to offer in atonement for his sin. This was how the Jew became reunited in his relationship with God. If this individual, having offered his sacrifice, committed the same sin on his way home, he immediately lost his fellowship with God again. This was a problem day after day. The Hebrew writer says, "*. . . the other high priests . . . need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people*" (Hebrews 7:27a). He describes the priestly ministrations under the Law of Moses, "*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*" (Hebrews 10:11). Man lived in jeopardy of his sins because he needed the kind of priest who could offer a sacrifice that could not only handle the sins of yesterday and today but also the sins of tomorrow.

Jesus fulfilled the **sixth** qualification because He was

*unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day . . . He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself . . . But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 7:27; 10:12).*

Jesus was the only High Priest who could offer Himself "*. . . once for all . . . for all time **one sacrifice** for sins.*" The words "*day by day, first for **his own sins***" are significant in contrast to Jesus. The Levite priest was a daily sinner, therefore, he had to make atonement for his own sins before he could begin to minister to the needs of the people. Those words stand as an

accusation of the “*day by day*” sins of the people. The major problem with that system was that yesterday’s Levitical sacrifices would not cover today’s sins. The writer says the ideal priest would be a priest who would offer one sacrifice that would cover the sin problem forever, so that the next sin committed would not require another trip to the tabernacle. Back then, when sin broke the fellowship between God and man, the man stood in jeopardy of his sin. They used to need the kind of a priest that could offer one sacrifice that would handle the sins of yesterday, today and even those of tomorrow without the disruption of fellowship with God. This is the kind of priest needed — one who has the blood of his sacrifice already available to cover the next sin. Jesus is the only one who can fulfill that qualification.

The **seventh** qualification is “*one who is . . . **perfect forever.***” The writer of Hebrews makes one final contrast in this chapter, “*For the law (Law of Moses) 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 7:28). The Law appointed men with infirmities as high priests. They had weaknesses, sin problems, and death problems. That was the only kind of priest the Law could obtain, because the Law appointed “*men*” in contrast to the “*oath*” which appointed “*the Son, who has been made perfect forever.*” The word “*oath*” is another reference to Psalm 110:4. “*The oath, which came after law*” actually came about 500 years later. The Levitical priesthood had already been inaugurated before the days of Moses. That means that while the Levitical system was already functioning, God was planning a new priesthood in Christ Jesus. Jesus became a priest “*after the law.*” The “*oath*” did not appoint a man with infirmities to be a priest — it “*appointed the Son.*”

“*The Son has been made perfect forever*” — His “**perfection**” does not relate to His morals, for He was morally “*holy, blameless, pure and set apart from sinners.*” His

**“perfection”** has to do with His functional perfection as a priest. Jesus fully accomplished all the sacrificial and priestly functions necessary for Him to be able to **“*save completely, those who come to God through him*”** (Hebrews 7:25). The fact of His divine priesthood is confirmed in the word **“*Son.*”** The discussion in Hebrews 1 established the fact of Jesus’ deity in convincing fashion. The **“*Son*”** is co-equal with the Father in nature. The Levites were simply co-equal with the rest of mankind. The Jews had human priests, but Christians have a divine priest. That is the reason He will never die. That is the reason He never needs a successor. And that is the reason He is enthroned in heaven.

Listen to the triumphant words of Hebrews 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.**”*

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## THE BETTER HIGH PRIEST

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### Hebrews 8: 1- 9

This chapter on the priesthood of Christ will expand to cover the “*covenant*” He inaugurated through the shedding of His blood. Christ is presented as the “*new*” minister and priest serving under “*better*” conditions of the “*new covenant*.” The writer of Hebrews closed Hebrews 7 by showing that the kind of priest the Jews “used to be needing” was not the kind they had. Through Jesus they now have exactly the kind of priest they need. The Levitical priests could not handle the sin problem. Their sacrifices did not bring perfection and their tabernacle did not grant an immediate, unveiled relationship with God. The Levitical priests had built-in imperfections in their ministry which included their sinfulness and physical death. They could not supply what mankind really needed. For this reason, God inaugurated a totally “*new*” system that has a priesthood based on the divinity of Christ, the Son of God. He serves as a priest who has been and will be functionally “*perfect forever*” (cf. Hebrews 7:28). Not only is He “*perfect*” in the ability to carry on the ministrations of His position as a priest, He brings about perfection in His people. He is totally able to handle all of the sin problems that are created by human transgression, and is, therefore, able to inaugurate a “*new*” relationship with God and His children.

In Hebrews 9 the writer will talk about the ministry of priests under the Law of Moses. He will discuss the old Hebrew tabernacle which appeared to be one complete structure, but was composed of two different tabernacles in reality. The priests entered daily into the Holy Place to carry out worship functions in the first part of the tabernacle. Their purpose was

to conduct the services of divine worship in the Holy Place. The second part of the tabernacle was called the Holy of Holies (Most Holy Place). The High Priest entered this area of the tabernacle only one time a year not for the purpose of worship, but for the purpose of atonement. His function was to accomplish the symbolic sacrificial expiation (to pay the penalty of wrongdoing for another, Ed.) for sin on the Day of Atonement. The writer refers to the functions carried out by the priests and the High Priest as a “*ministry*” of the priests (cf. Hebrews 9:6). Obviously a priest is someone, and the ministry he accomplishes is something else. It is important to remember that Jesus was a “*new*” priest and He had a “*new*” ministry.

### Christ, The Sufficient High Priest

*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, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man (Hebrews 8:1-2).*

There is obvious pride in the author’s statement, “*We do have such a high priest.*” This triumphant announcement revolves around “*the point.*” In Greek *kephalaino* means top, head, or the major point. In reality, the author is saying that Jesus fits **all** the qualifications listed in Hebrews 7. He totally meets the needs of the people: “*holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens*” (Hebrews 7:26b). Jesus is the only kind of priest that sinful men have ever needed and now — “*we do have such a high priest.*” Surely this triumphant declaration would cause those who were thinking of drifting back into the old Hebrew system to change their minds. In the old Hebrew system there had always been a need for an effective priest. Why would they now consider departing from the only priest who could truly supply that need?

Jesus is not only exactly **what** they were needing, He is also exactly **where** they needed their priest to be. He is “*at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven*” (Hebrew 8:1b). He was not an earthbound priest with earthly limitations — He is “*in heaven.*” “*Heaven*” is exactly where mankind’s Great High Priest needs to be for that is where atonement is accomplished, forgiveness is tendered, grace is granted, and mercy is applied. Man’s Great High Priest (cf. Hebrews 4:14) ministers in the sanctuary which the writer of Hebrews calls “*the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man*” (Hebrews 8:2). The phrase “*true tabernacle*” does not imply that the old Hebrew tabernacle was a false one. The writer is dealing with the fact that the “*true tabernacle*” is the reality sanctuary of which the old Hebrew tabernacle was a “*shadow.*” The old tabernacle was just as earth bound as the priests who served within. The new “*sanctuary*” inaugurated by Christ is in heaven. Moses “*set up*” a physical tabernacle, but the writer says, “*the true tabernacle (was) set up by the Lord, not by man*” (Hebrews 8:2; cf Hebrews 8:5). The old Hebrew tabernacle was a “*shadow*” of the “*true tabernacle*” in which Jesus serves as High Priest. The terminology the writer of Hebrews uses — “*a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven*” (Hebrews 8:5) illustrates the difference between the old Hebrew tabernacle with its veil of separation between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place and the glories of the new tabernacle **without any veil of separation** between God and His worshipers. That means the sin problem has been solved. Jesus serves in the reality tabernacle because the other one was just a blueprint and a temporary shadow of the future realities.

### The Ministry of High Priests

*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. If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. That 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 (Hebrews 8:3-5).*

This passage is a repeat of the statement made earlier when the writer of Hebrews said a priest is appointed to offer gifts, which were worship offerings, and sacrifices, which were offered as atonement for sins (cf. Hebrew 5:1). To qualify as a priestly minister, Jesus automatically had to offer "*both gifts and sacrifices.*" The early readers of Hebrews would have known that under the Law of Moses the priests offered animal sacrifices. The writer will clearly explain everything concerning the kind of sacrifice or worship gifts the "*new*" priest offers to God.

Keep in mind that Christ through His ministrations as the "*new*" priest is the Mediator of all Christian worship that is offered to God. Therefore, a part of Christ's priestly ministry involves the purification of the worshiper himself. Scripture gives evidence that Christ is involved in purifying man's worship imperfections. This indicates that man's worship is not what it ought to be. God deserves much more than what man is able to give in his human limitations. God is deserving of worship without the imperfections and frailties of the physical body. Christ intervenes and offers God the praise and devotion He deserves. Christ mediates and makes our praise and devotion perfectly acceptable before God. The gifts that Christ offers are the gifts of a Christian's praise and adoration. The sacrifice for sin that Christ offered was Himself.

If Jesus "*were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law*"

(Hebrews 8:4). The Levitical priests were no longer valid before God, but they were still functioning as priests. Their sanctuary was no longer recognized by God because their system had been dismantled by the coming of Christ. He could not function as a priest in that old Hebrew sanctuary because He belonged to the wrong tribe, the wrong order, and His ministry was in the wrong place to fit into the Hebrew system. He ministers in the “sanctuary” that is the “*true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man*” (Hebrews 8:2). This “sanctuary” is not an earthly sanctuary but one located “*in heaven.*”

The Levitical priests served

*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’ (Hebrews 8:5).*

The Levitical priests were serving in the symbolic residence of God with Israel. Even during their time of service this tabernacle was “*a copy and shadow.*” The phrase “*a copy and shadow*” in Greek is two nouns joined together by the conjunction “*and.*” In the New Testament usage this verbal construction produces a two-in-one thought — literally translated it would be “*shadowy copy.*” This means that the old Hebrew tabernacle was a very, very dim outline of the “*pattern*” that was shown to Moses while he was on Mount Sinai. The Lord gave Moses a description of the earthly tabernacle he was to build. It was an earthly tabernacle made of animal skins, but it served only as a shadow.

Remember that shadows do not have independent existence. A shadow cannot exist by itself. A shadow is cast only when there is a substance (form) or reality for the shadow to be cast from. If you see the shadow of an airplane pass across the ground in the late evening hours, you automatically know

that there is an airplane between you and the sun. The shadow of the airplane may arrive before the airplane appears. The shadow is cast by the reality of the airplane. The old Hebrew tabernacle was a shadow of the future realities of Jesus' heavenly sanctuary. Melchizedek was a shadow of the coming priesthood of Christ. The tabernacle was a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary of Christ. And the Law of Moses was a shadow covenant of the realities of Christ's covenant. It is clear that the writer of Hebrews considered the total Hebrew system nothing more than a "shadow." He says,

*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 (Hebrews 10:1).*

Moses was given a solemn warning to "make everything according to the **pattern** shown to you on the mountain" (Hebrews 8:5; cf Exodus 24:40). He was building the "shadow . . . according to the pattern" and any changes to that "shadow" would have changed the future reality. The future reality could not be changed because it was what God had planned for the priesthood of Christ, His sacrifice, sanctuary, and His covenant. These things could not be changed.

### **The Ministry of Jesus Christ**

*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. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. 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*’ (Hebrews 8:6-8).

The writer of Hebrews refers to “*the ministry*” of Jesus in contrast to the Levitical priests’. His ministry was accomplished and is still being accomplished in the new “*sanctuary*.” Remember that when a change was made in the priesthood, there also had to be a change in the Law (cf. Hebrews 7:12). The Law was the foundation of the whole Levitical system which meant that every article, every ordinance, every rule, every regulation, and every commandment of the Law of Moses had to be taken out of the way. Jesus inaugurated a completely “*new*” system in His ministry. The writer of Hebrews says His ministry 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*” (Hebrews 8:6). The basic reason Jesus is a better priest is because there is a “**better**” sanctuary, and “*it is founded on **better promises**.*”

Hebrews 8 follows the same reasoning the author used in Hebrews 7. The automatic conclusion concerning a “*superior . . . covenant . . . founded on better promises*” is to ask what was wrong with the first covenant. What was wrong with the Law of Moses? The Law of Moses was a God-given law, but it had a limited tenure. It served the purpose God had in mind, but it could not remove the sin of those under its authority. The Law of Moses was not designed to remove sin. It was not enough to make the worshipers of God perfect in their relationship to Him. If the Law of Moses had been able to bring about human redemption, then Christ would have died in vain (cf. Galatians 2:21). If man could have been saved by his own law-keeping, then there would have been no reason for Calvary. The problem with the Law of Moses was that it could not remove the sins of the people, so there had to be a “*new covenant*.” The Law of Moses was a good law that served its purpose. It functioned like the laws of electricity. Electricity

serves mankind well — it heats our buildings, cools us in the summertime, lights our rooms, and cooks our food. The laws of electricity serve us well as long as we do not violate its laws. If we violate the law of electricity, it will kill us and it is impossible for it to restore life. That is the nature of the Law of Moses. Another example is the law of gravity — it is a very good law that serves its purpose, but if its laws are violated, it can kill you.

Hebrews 8:7 says that the “*fault*” was in “*that first covenant*” — the Law of Moses:

*For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. In Hebrews 8:8 the writer says, ‘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.’*

The “*fault*” of the people was that they violated the Law and the “*fault*” of the Law was that it could not handle their violation. It could not take away their sins. What did God do? He will always have people with a sin problem, so He inaugurated a “*new covenant*” that could handle the sin problem. God’s people will always have a sin problem — that is the frailties of the flesh. Mankind will always struggle with the imperfection of being human, but now God has a Law that is able to handle the transgressions of the people.

The writer of Hebrews has already established the conviction that if a priesthood is changed then there must be a change in the Law also. He quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34. Jeremiah lived 525 years before the time of Christ, but through that prophet God made the promise of a “*new covenant*.” Jeremiah is one of the prophets through whom God spoke to the fathers

in times past (cf. Hebrews 1:1). God 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*” (Hebrews 8:8b). This promise of a “*new covenant*” is like the one God made in Psalms 110. He promised a “*new*” priesthood 500 years after the Levitical priesthood had been inaugurated in the days of Moses. A thousand years after the Law of Moses began, Jeremiah (through God) promised a “*new covenant*” with “*new*” benefits. In the Greek language there are two words that are generally used for things that are “*new*.” The first one is **neo** which means something that is **new** in time like neo-morality or neo-doctrines. The writer of Hebrews uses the Greek word **kainos** which means that the “*new covenant*” is not only new in time it is also new in kind. There is going to be a “*new covenant*” with totally “*new*” benefits. The writer of Hebrews will continue to explain this “*new covenant*” in the rest of Hebrews 8.

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# A BETTER COVENANT

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## Hebrews 8:9-13

This chapter will continue to look at the study of the “***new covenant***” the writer introduced in Hebrews 8. The “***new covenant***” has a number of qualities built into it that distinguish it from the Mosaic covenant. Not only is the “***new***” based on “***better promises***” (cf. Hebrews 8:6), relative to life under the “*new covenant*,” but there are also “*new*” privileges to be enjoyed in the life to come. “*New covenant*” people are highly privileged above the conditions they formerly had under the old Mosaic covenant.

*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. 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. 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. 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. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’ By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear (Hebrews 8:8-13).*

This passage of scripture contains an exact quote from Jeremiah 31:31-34 beginning with *“The time is coming, declares the Lord.”* In these verses the prophet Jeremiah related some of the reasons why God determined to make the “new” arrangement which He announced in Jeremiah’s day. It would be important for the Hebrew people to understand why God planned to make a “new covenant.” Remember the “new covenant” would provide a “better” priesthood, a more perfect relationship between God and His people, and would involve a perfect sacrifice in Christ. God seemed to be saying that He had a covenant with Israel but Israel did not live as though they had a covenant with Him. God said, *“They did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them”* (Hebrews 8:9b). In the Hebrew text, Jeremiah’s original statement explains why God *“turned away from them.”* The Hebrew says, ***“I was a husband to them.”*** It is impossible for a covenant to exist when only one party in the two-party agreement keeps the conditions of the covenant. Israel first *“turned away”* from God, so there was no way God could maintain the covenant relationship with Israel. A man and a woman can be united in marriage and they can live together, but if the wife leaves the home there is no way the husband can maintain the marriage. A “covenant” is a two-party agreement. When one of the parties does not keep the agreement, there is no way the other party can continue to keep the agreement/covenant.

God said the “new covenant” would not be like the one He made on Mount Sinai with the children of Israel shortly after He had delivered them out of the land of Egypt. The “new covenant” would have built-in elements that would eliminate the possibility of repeat failures from the first covenant. Hebrews 8:10 begins the list of the “new” ingredients which characterize the “new covenant.” The first covenant was made *“with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,”* but the Lord declared, *“This is the covenant I will make with **the house***

*of Israel*” (Hebrews 8:10a). Israel and Judah were nations under the Law of Moses with two kings and two different religious systems. This “*new covenant*” is going to be different because there will be only one nation and they will only have one king.

The prophet Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah, who also prophesied concerning the elimination of the division between Israel and Judah at the time when the “*new covenant*” would be established. Ezekiel 37:15-27 contains a beautiful prophecy about the healing of the division between Israel and Judah. God told Ezekiel to pick up a stick and write the name Israel on it. Then he was to pick up another stick and write the name Judah on it. God told Ezekiel to bind the two sticks together in such a way that they became one stick. God interpreted the symbolism of the two sticks when He said, “*I will make them one nation in the land . . . There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms*” (Ezek. 37:22). Then God added this significant promise to the prophecy: “*. . . They will be my people, and I will be their God*” (Ezekiel 37:23b).

The **first “new”** ingredient in the “*new covenant*” is that there will be only **one kingdom**. Jesus Himself will be the King and the church of the Lord Jesus Christ will be the holy nation. The **second** ingredient in the “*new covenant*” out of Jeremiah 31 is: “***I will put my laws in their minds.***” The laws of God “*in their minds*” simply means that the people under the “*new covenant*” are going to know God’s law **before** He makes a covenant agreement with them. If they do not know God’s law and are not committed to observe it, there will be no covenant relationship between God and the people. God said they will have His laws written upon their minds, which means they will be good students of the law who know their obligations and the assignments they have been given. They will be practical in their observance of those commandments and assignments because they know the law. They will not be ignorant of the

purposes God has in mind for His “*new covenant*.”

The **third** ingredient of the “*new covenant*” is the fact that God said He would write His laws “*on their hearts*.” The Greek literally says “***I will engrave them*** (the laws) ***upon their hearts***.” What is the difference between having a law that is written upon the “*mind*” and a law that is written upon the “*heart*” of an individual? When the law is written on the mind the individual **knows** the law, but when it is written on the heart, that means he agrees with it, understands it, and accepts it. The individual believes in that law and confirms his conviction through his practice of the law.

Remember in Deuteronomy when God gave the first covenant. He had given the Ten Commandments and He called the children of Israel to attention with the words: “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Then God said, “***These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts***” (Deuteronomy 6:6). It is interesting that even in the Old Covenant system when God gave the Law of Moses, He not only wanted them to know the Law in their mind, He also wanted them to have that law written upon their heart. That being true, then what is **new** about the “*new covenant*”? It is clear that God demanded the same thing when giving the Old Covenant. The explanation is that the people of Israel became subjects of the Mosaic covenant **by birth**, and as infants they were born into covenant relationship with God. The circumcision that generally took place on the eighth day after their birth (if they were male) confirmed their covenant relationship with God. What does an eight day old baby know about the law of God or having the law of God within his heart? He does not know or love the law, and yet God had a covenant relationship with him in spite of his lack of knowledge about God’s law. The “*new covenant*” was going to be different — before there could be any covenant relationship, God’s people

were going to know and love Him and His law. That creates a great distinction between the old covenant and the “*new*.” God will have a covenant relationship only with people that already know and love Him and His law.

As an example, think about a man who lives in a certain section of the city and must drive through a school zone every day to go to work. In the school zone there are signs that demand that traffic slow down around the school to protect the children who are coming and going from school. Generally, there are flashing lights that indicate where to slow down during the period of time when children will be in that area. Almost every time the man drives to work he passes through the school zone when the lights are flashing to tell him to slow down. He feels this is an imposition on his time and he does not always slow down because he is usually in a hurry. He would prefer to drive through the school zone at a higher rate of speed than is allowed. If there is a policeman on duty, the man will slow down, but if he does not see a policeman, he goes on through the flashing lights choosing not to slow down.

One day the man is driving past the school when there is no policeman and even though the lights are flashing, he continues his normal rate of speed which is twice the speed the flashing lights demand. A little child walks from behind another automobile and he almost hits the child with his car. The child is “scared to death,” but unharmed because the man turned the steering wheel drastically as he hit his brakes and rammed into a tree instead. The man was already angry about the flashing lights to tell him to slow him down, and now the child has totally interrupted his morning commute. He leaves his car to approach the child and give the punishment he thinks the child deserves for darting into the street. When he finds the child hiding behind another automobile, he realizes that the child he almost hit is his own child — his only son. If not for but a few inches of space, he would have killed the most precious person in his life.

Because of this experience the flashing lights that once demanded he slow down in the school zone takes on a **new significance** to the man. Now he sees and understand the purpose of the flashing light. At one time, he knew the law and it had been written on his **mind**. If the policeman had been there that morning, he could have given evidence that the driver knew the law in his mind because the man would have slowed down even though he did not agreed with the law. But after the experience of almost hitting his only son, the man can see the purpose behind the law — the law was there to protect **his child**. Now the law is not only written upon the man's mind, it is also written upon his **heart**. The man not only **knows** the purpose of the law, now he also loves and agrees with the law. He is able to see that the law is in his best interest because it protects his most precious possession.

God's laws are written on the "*hearts*" of "*new covenant*" people. "*New covenant*" people know God's laws and they love the law of God, because they understand and see the purpose of that law. God says that in the "*new covenant*" He will have a relationship only with those who know His law in their minds and love it in their hearts. They must agree with His law and practice it because they see the beauty and purpose of it, and see the harmony it brings between themselves and God. People who once obeyed in rebellion are now really obeying out of desire and love. The man who has this law written upon his heart is a man that not only knows and loves the **Law-giver**, he loves the **Law** and he walks in that law because it leads a "*better*" life.

The **fourth** ingredient in the "*new covenant*" is revolutionary. In Ezekiel God said, "*They will be my people, and I will be their God*" (Ezekiel 37:23). God binds His people together just as Ezekiel bound the two sticks representing Judah and Israel. He said, "*I will gather them . . . into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land . . . There will be one king over all of them . . .*" (Ezekiel 37:21-22). God will claim

them as His people and they will claim Him as their God. When Paul was writing to the Corinthians he wrote about this concept. He insisted that Christians should not be

*yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? . . . What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? . . . For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people' (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).*

God told His people that He is going to ***“live with them and walk among them.”*** God’s children now have an intimate relationship with God. They have fellowship and unity with Him. There is a *“new”* relationship between God and His children which is defined by the *“new”* tabernacle in which the Christian worships today. Under the old system the tabernacle had the veils of separation. There were two distinct veils that separated the worshiper from his God during the Old Testament. One was the veil of priesthood, the other was the veil of sin. Until those two veils were eliminated, the worshiping man and his God could not have perfect communion. God’s people have a *“new”* relationship that allows them to dwell together with God. There is perfect harmony between them; they have a common address dwelling together in the temple of God.

The **fifth** ingredient in the totally *“new covenant”* is the fact that *“new covenant”* people will not have to be educated about who God is. Under the Law of Moses children born to the twelve tribes of Israel were born into a covenant relationship with God, but as babies they did not know God. They were not even acquainted with His name, much less His nature. In the *“new covenant”* God says, “I will not have a covenant with people who do not know Me.” Knowledge of God will be a

precondition to any and all covenant relations between God and His people. “*New covenant*” people will **“know” God** — “*they will all **know** me from the least of them to the greatest*” (Hebrews 8:11). God’s people will have His law upon their minds and hearts **before** they have a covenant with Him.

The Greek language in this context is clear about the depth of knowledge required for covenant relations. The word **“know”** appears twice in Hebrews 8:11, but two different words are used in the text to indicate the kind of knowledge that is required. The first “*know*” has to do with the **individual learning** about God. The writer of Hebrews says, “*No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘**Know the Lord**’*” (Hebrews 8:11a). This kind of knowing describes the learning process. God is saying that “*new covenant*” people will not have to be taught who God is because they will already **“know”** God. This is the second Greek word for **“know.”** *Eidesousin* comes from the Greek *oida* which means that the person has a **settled conviction and firm knowledge** about the subject under consideration. In this context it implies that all “*new covenant*” people will have a strong, full knowledge about God. They will “*know*” about God’s nature, His love, His character, and the conditions of His redemptive purpose.

These two kinds of knowledge represent the fundamental difference between the “*new*” and the old covenant. In the old system they were born into covenant relationship, and then, had to be educated. Read Deuteronomy 6:4 again. Not only were the Hebrews commanded to love God and His laws, they were to **“Impress them on your children”** (Deuteronomy 6:7a). The text clearly demanded that they diligently teach God’s laws to their children. Under the “*new covenant*,” education will precede the formation of covenant relations. This one element eliminates any kind of infant church membership, any kind of a ceremonial that would try to include uneducated and untaught children into the church family. The phrase “*from the least of*

*them to the greatest*” indicates that there will be no exceptions to this rule. Those that do not “*know*” God, whether they be children or adult, must have a settled knowledge about God before He becomes a covenant partner with them.

The basic difference between the old and the “*new*” is found in this fact: under the old, they were made covenant partners with God and were then educated about God and His laws; under the “*new*,” the education precedes the induction into covenant. This is the reason Jesus demanded that a person be “**made a disciple**” before his baptism into the family of God (cf. Matthew 28:20). The making of a covenant is a personal, conscious, knowing decision for everyone. In order to be a part of a “*new covenant*,” each person has to understand God’s law and ratify the covenant. The ratification comes by making the conscious decision to become subjects of the covenant and commit to compliance with its conditions. Under the law of Moses it was a process of physical birth. Under the “*new covenant*” it will come about through the process of the “*new*” birth which has to be a deliberate decision on the part of a man of faith. God says the “*new covenant*” will be different because My people will all “*know*” Me. There will be no one in this “*new covenant*” that does not know who God is. In John 17:3, Jesus said, “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*” Full knowledge of God is presented in many other passages of the New Testament as a precondition to covenant privilege (cf. John 6:44-45).

The **sixth** ingredient in the “*new covenant*” is the fact that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ that will make it possible for God to completely and totally cover the sins of the people. Those who have God’s law on their minds and in their hearts will have their sins forgiven. God said, “***I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more***” (Hebrews 8:12). This statement means that God remembered their sins until they were adequately covered with the blood of Christ.

Jesus' blood covered the sins committed under the first covenant (cf. Hebrews 9:15). Therefore, until those sins were covered by Christ, God did remember them. When Jesus offered His sacrifice their sins were forgiven. God can remember them no more because forgiveness is an ever present reality. Under the old system, forgiveness was only a future promise. Forgiveness was based on the future sacrifice of Christ. God forgave sin under the Old Testament covenant because He was writing a promissory note against the cross of Calvary. In other words, God committed Himself to pay the debt at Calvary.

These are the six “new” ingredients of the “new covenant”:

- 1) There will be only one kingdom and only one king.
- 2) God will put His laws in their minds.
- 3) God will put His laws in their hearts.
- 4) God will live with His people in a “new” relationship.
- 5) God's people will “know” God.
- 6) God will forgive their sins.

These “new” ingredients form a strong argument against anyone leaving “new covenant” privileges to return to the inadequacies of the old system. In Hebrews 10 the writer of Hebrews discusses the “new” sacrifice that Christ will offer to explain what God means when He says He will not remember their sins.

That concludes the quotation from Jeremiah. The writer of Hebrews continues in Hebrews 8:13 saying, “*By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear*” (Hebrews 8:13). He is affirming that God made the old covenant “old” in the days of Jeremiah. Jeremiah lived 525 years before the time of Christ. The old covenant had been active for almost a thousand years when God promised to “**make a new covenant.**” Declaring a “new covenant” automatically made the first covenant old.

The old covenant was not old when God gave it on Mount Sinai to Moses. It became old in the days of Jeremiah when God said, ***“I will make a new covenant.”*** If someone has an automobile that has been used for several years, he may announce to his wife that he plans to get a new car. And she immediately asks, “What are you going to do with the old one?” She had never referred to the “old” car as being “old” before. It was the announcement of the coming “new” car that made the former car “old.” The Hebrew writer makes two statements about the old covenant. It became old because it was subject to the aging process and that which is old is destined to get older. Then, being *“obsolete and aging”* means that it will not be long until it *“disappears.”* That Old Covenant **disappeared** on the cross of Calvary.

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# THE BETTER TABERNACLE

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## Hebrews 9:1-10

### Introduction

Hebrews 9 introduces the new “*sanctuary*,” the new priest inaugurated under the “*new covenant*.” The priesthood of Christ was discussed in Hebrews 7 and His covenant was discussed in Hebrews 8. All the changes in the overall system have created a new relationship between God and His people. The basic purpose of the tabernacles in both covenants was to define the relational characteristics of each covenant between God and man. Actually the old Hebrew tabernacle was just a definition of the broken fellowship between God and His people. The Hebrew people stood outside and worshiped from a distance. The first veil of separation indicated the separation between God and the Hebrew people from worship in the Holy Place. Only the Levitical priests could function in this area of the tabernacle. They acted as the mediators on behalf of the people who were not allowed in the Holy Place. The Hebrew people worshiped God through mediation and the intervention of the Levitical priests.

There was also a veil of separation which symbolized the sin problem that could not be solved under the old Hebrew system. Before Adam and Eve sinned they had a perfect, unveiled relationship with God. The Garden of Eden stands as a definition of the ideal fellowship between the Creator and His creation. That was the intent of God when He created man in the beginning. Man was created for fellowship with God. It was a noble purpose, but sin destroyed that fellowship, broke the relationship, and alienated man from God. Since then man’s separation from God and from that original purpose has been

symbolized by the veil of separation. When God drove Adam and Eve from Eden,

*he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24b). God said, The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever (Genesis 3:22).*

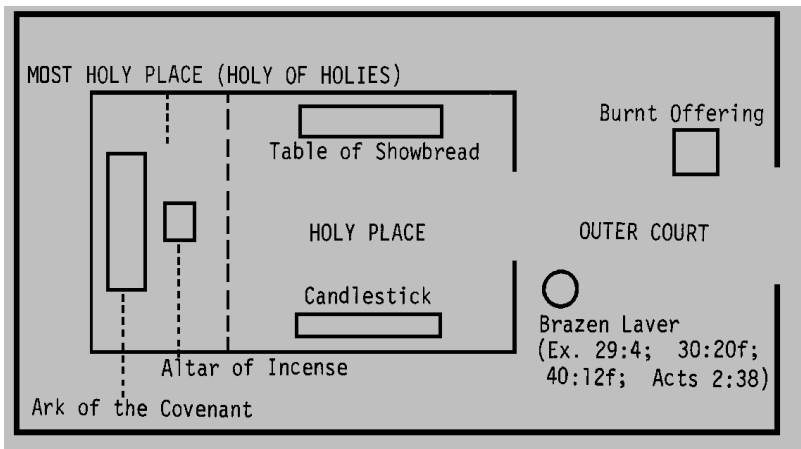
God did not want man to “live forever” in that state of rebellion, so He placed the cherubim with flaming swords at the east of Eden “to guard the way.” The cherubim with their flaming swords stood there to prohibit man’s return to the relationship that he had before his sin was committed. The interesting thing about the old Hebrew tabernacle is that two cherubim were interwoven into the cloth of both veils of separation. They bore their flaming swords as the avengers of God. They protected the all-holy God from any intrusion into His presence by sinful man. The veils were visible, external signs of broken fellowship between God and man. Sinful man cannot get back to the relationship that Adam and Eve had with God in Eden until the sin problem has been solved. Only then will man be accepted and his worship acceptable to God. Hebrews 9 will discuss the changes that Jesus introduced into that old Hebrew tabernacle with its two veils of separation.

### **The Tabernacle Description**

*Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most*

*Holy Place, 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. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now (Hebrews 9:1-5).*

The writer of Hebrews begins by saying, “Now the first covenant **had** regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.” It is already clear from the verb tenses that the first covenant no longer has acceptable “worship” or an “earthly sanctuary.” That has all been dismantled. The writer is talking about the covenant of Moses which God no longer recognizes. That old covenant which had already been eliminated had laws, ordinances, and commandments that governed the worship of the people. It grew older as time passed and was already vanishing during the days of Jeremiah. It finally vanished completely at the cross of Calvary. Just as surely as Christ **died** on the cross, so did the Law of Moses. Paul told the Colossians that God “*canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross*” (Colossians 2:14). The “written code” was the Law of Moses. For that reason Paul insisted that no one



judge Christians under the “*new covenant*” for not keeping any of the laws of that old system. Those Laws of Moses have never been obligatory for Christian people. Christians are under a “*new covenant*” with new ingredients, new privileges, and new relationships. The “**regulations**” mentioned were those that regulated worship under the Mosaic covenant. Obviously the “*new covenant*” has “*new*” ordinances to govern their worship to God.

There is a rhetorical form used by the writer in Hebrews 9:1 that is often ignored by the translators. It is called the “**men - de**” argument in Greek. Roughly translated, it stands as a contrast between two systems. Literally it means “on the one hand” (**men** - in Greek) and “on the other hand” (**de** - in Greek). By inserting this rhetorical form into the text, it would appear in these words: **“On the one hand the first covenant had regulations and also an earthly sanctuary.”** Then in Hebrews 9:11 the rest of the rhetorical form is presented in these terms: **But** “*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.*” The writer wants his readers to be aware that the “*new covenant*” has “**regulations**” for “*worship*” just as did the old. Those “**regulations**” contained in the new rules are how the “*new covenant*” people are to organize their “*worship*” to God.

Just as the Old Covenant had commandments that regulated the worship activity of the people of Israel, so the “*new covenant*” has commandments that regulate worship today. There are patterns of worship that govern what God wants His people to follow. If Christians do not find an authorized command for some worship activity in the New Testament then that activity would not be a part of acceptable worship for God’s people. In other words, God has always regulated the worship He wants His people to offer. The story of Cain and Abel confirms the fact (cf. Genesis 4:1-16). Whether in Old or New Testament times, it is always God who

established the standards of acceptable worship. The worship of the Hebrew people was to be conducted at the tabernacle that was built for that specific purpose. It was an “*earthly sanctuary*.” As such it stood in stark contrast to the heavenly sanctuary Jesus inaugurated.

Hebrews 9:2-5 gives the description of the Hebrew tabernacle. The original passage in the Greek language makes it evident that the Hebrew tabernacle was two distinct tabernacles. The American Standard Version says, “*For there was a tabernacle prepared, the first, . . . which is called the Holy Place. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holy of holies;*” (Hebrews 9:1-2, ASV). The “*first*” tabernacle in Greek is ***hagia***, or “*the Holy Place*.” Within this room stood “*the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread*” (Hebrews 9:2). The “*lampstand*” was the symbol of God’s guidance through the light of His word. The “*table and the consecrated bread*” symbolized God’s providential care for His people. These were renewed daily in expression of Israel’s worship.

The Greek terms used in this context help explain the author’s argument. He says, “*Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place*” (Hebrews 9:3), but the writer had not mentioned a first curtain. The Greek implies a first curtain in the statement “*behind the second curtain*.” The first curtain separated the ordinary people from the Levites because only the Levitical priests could enter into the ***hagia***. The “*second curtain*” separated the ordinary priests in their function from the high priest and his function. In the phrase “*behind the second curtain was a room*,” the word “*room*” in Greek is the same word translated as tabernacle. That “*second room (tabernacle) was called the Most Holy Place*” (Hebrews 9:3). ***Hagia*** referred to the “*Holy Place*.” ***Hagia hagion*** referred to the “*Most Holy Place*.” These two tabernacles must be kept separate in your mind because the writer of Hebrews has specific lessons to teach through the explanations of their

differences.

The writer of Hebrews lists the articles found in the

*Most Holy Place . . . 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* (Hebrews 9:4).

The Greek in this context indicates that the golden censer that was used by Aaron on the Day of Atonement was in the Most Holy Place. This indicates that the tabernacle was set up for services that would be conducted on the Day of Atonement as it is defined in Leviticus 16. Normally the altar of incense was placed in the Holy Place. That altar was used 364 days a year in the Holy Place by the ordinary priests for the purpose of worship, but on the Day of Atonement this verses seems to indicate that the golden censer was moved into the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy Place also contained the gold-covered chest of the covenant. In it was the golden jar of manna reminding Israel of God's providence during their years of wandering in the desert of Sinai (cf. Exodus 16). It also had Aaron's rod that budded (cf. Numbers 17) and the two tables of stone, "*the Ten Commandments*" (cf. Exodus 34:1-28).

The "*cherubim of the Glory*" which were above "*the chest*" were there to protect the dignity of God, the holiness of His Law, and the righteousness of His judgments. They were there to keep sinful man from any intrusion into the presence of the all-holy God. The writer of Hebrews says that the "*cherubim*" overshadowed "*the atonement cover.*" They were there because it was in the "*ark of the covenant*" that God had His symbolic presence with Israel, and it was from that place that God granted mercy and atonement to Israel.

### **The Tabernacle Ritual**

*When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. 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. 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. 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. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings — external regulations applying until the time of the new order (Hebrews 9:6-10).*

There was not only a division between the “*Holy Place*” and the “*Most Holy Place*,” there was also a difference in the ministries that were carried on in each of them. The “**outer room**” was the first tabernacle “*called the **Holy Place**.*” The ordinary priests functioned in the “*outer room*” on a daily basis as they carried on the activities of worship to God on behalf of the nation. Their ministry of worship involved the renewal of the oil for the candlestick, renewal of the shewbread, and the burning of incense as expressions of praise and gratitude to God. They also offered the daily burnt offerings and grain offerings for the nation.

This discussion and description of the tabernacles evidently relates to the Day of Atonement when Aaron alone entered into the **hagion** “*Most Holy Place*” (cf. Leviticus 16:17). The writer continues, “*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*” (Hebrews 9:7). Aaron’s purpose in the “*Most Holy*

*Place*” was not for worship as the other priests. His assignment involved atonement for the nation. That is the reason he never entered into the Most Holy Place **“without blood.”** On the Day of Atonement the High Priest was required to sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial animals on the *“gold-covered ark of the covenant”* (cf. Leviticus 23: 26-32). The phrase *“only the high priest entered the inner room”* reveals in advance the functions of Christ when He ultimately and completely made atonement on the cross of Calvary. At that time, Christ symbolically entered into the Hebrew tabernacle and tore the veil of separation between the *hagia* and the *hagion*.

The writer of Hebrews informs his readers that the Holy Spirit was the grand designer of the whole Hebrew system. There was a purpose behind His design. The writer of Hebrews says, ***“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”*** (Hebrews 9:8). The design of the whole Hebrew system in the Law of Moses communicated the message that sinful man could not return to the same kind of relationship Adam had with God until the sin problem had been fully solved. This message not only predicted the coming function of Christ, but it also declared the inability of the Mosaic system to make the people perfect under it.

God established His symbolic presence with Israel in the tabernacle when it was first erected by Moses and the Israelites (cf. Exodus 40:34-38). There was a pillar of fire by night and a column of smoke by day that indicated God’s presence in the Most Holy Place. The Hebrews would call this the place of the *Shekinah*, which means the place of the glory of divine presence. The writer wants his readers to know that no man could enter into the presence of God as long as that veil of separation remained by divine ordinance. The Holy Spirit communicated this limited access into the presence of God through the functions of the priests. Only one man could enter the Most Holy Place and he did that only one time a year. When

the high priest finished his atonement assignment for the Day of Atonement, he was required to leave the Most Holy Place, and the veil was closed again to maintain the separation.

The phrase “*that **the way** into the Most Holy Place **had not yet been disclosed***” implies that a **way** would later be “*disclosed,*” but “*as long as the first tabernacle was still standing*” that way could not be shown. It is important to notice what the “*first tabernacle*” relates to. It is the **hagia** where the ordinary priests carried on worship functions on a daily basis. The “*first tabernacle,*” discussed in Hebrews 9:2 and 6, must lose its “*standing*” in God’s sight before such unveiled relationships could be restored. There will be no way for many to enjoy the relationship that God and Adam had together. Genesis 3 tells the history of God and Adam enjoying fellowship in the Garden of Eden. Their communion was without limitation because there was no sin to hinder an intimate relationship between God and man. They were at peace one with the other. And the fellowship was mutually rewarding to both God and Adam and Eve. Here the Holy Spirit indicates that because of sin that fellowship was broken and it cannot and will not be restored until this “*first tabernacle*” is removed. As long as the “*first tabernacle*” stands to symbolize the separation between God and man, there will be no way for man to be in the presence of God.

There are two ways that “*first tabernacle*” could lose its “*standing*” before God. One way would be to take it out of the picture — dismantle and remove it. The other way would be to take the blood of Christ and remove the sin problem, and in that way remove the veil of separation. If the veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place were removed, then the whole tabernacle would become the Most Holy Place. That would eliminate the **hogia**, which is the room separated from God by the veil with the menacing cherubim and their flaming swords. With the veil of separation removed, the **hagia** would no longer exist and the entire tabernacle would become the **hagia hagion**.

When that happens every Christian could enter into the presence of God under the “*new covenant*.” Every Christian can **stand** in the ***hagion*** without veils of separation between him and God. His worship is immediately accepted by God and well pleasing to Him. Every Christian is qualified as a covenant subject and qualified by the blood of Christ to be an acceptable worshiper. That is the glorious picture the writer of Hebrews presents of the sacrificial work of Christ.

Return to the scenes of Calvary and remember some of the deeply significant events that took place when Jesus died. He died as the human sacrifice for man’s sin. But He was also divine, and as such, continued to function as the great High Priest. He was a functioning priest even in His death. As the divine priest He entered into the Hebrew tabernacle and ripped apart the veil of separation between the ***hagia*** and the ***hagion***. He tore that veil from top to bottom, indicating that this function had been carried out by God. When Jesus removed the veil, the “*first tabernacle*” no longer had any “*standing*” before God.

The writer of Hebrews says,

*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. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings – external regulations applying until the time of the new order (Hebrews 9:9-10).*

In spite of all the functions of the ordinary priests and the high priest of the Law of Moses, their activities could not cleanse the conscience of Hebrew worshipers. Their gifts and sacrifices did not avail. Even so, that old Hebrew tabernacle was still a “*shadow*” and stood as an “***illustration***” of the ineffective nature of the ministrations of those priests. The phrase “*for the present time*” may indicate that the Mosaic tabernacle will

always stand as a demonstration of what happens when sin separates man from God. Even though that old system no longer **stands**, it illustrates the glory of the “*new order*” in Christ.

The “*time of the new order*” is not a good translation of the Greek word *diorthoseos*. A better translation would be “the restoration of what once was” or “a correction back to the former conditions to reform what was once deformed.” The relationship Adam and Eve once had with God is what had been deformed and now needed to be restored. Their perfect relationship was deformed by sin. When Christ solved the sin problem at Calvary, that kind of relationship was reformed, restored, and can now be enjoyed by all “*new covenant*” people.

A very tragic thing happened in Jerusalem after Jesus died and thereby through his death on the cross ripped apart the veil of separation in the Hebrew temple. Tragically, some unknown Hebrew went back into the old Hebrew tabernacle and stitched that veil of separation back together. In doing so, he ignored the fact that Jesus had solved the sin problem and eliminated the separation between God and man. That is tragic. But there was another tragedy attached to this event. It allowed the Levitical priests to continue their daily and annual ministrations as though they still had validity before God even though that entire system no longer existed. The “*renewal of all things*” (Matthew 19:28) has been accomplished by Christ. He has renewed all things and has returned man to the privilege of the God-Adam relationship by removing the sin problem. That problem was the cause of the separation between God and man. When God can say, “*I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more*” (Hebrews 8:12), the condition that existed in the Garden of Eden **has been restored**. And the old Hebrew system that stood as a constant reminder of that broken fellowship **has been eliminated forever!**

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# THE BETTER MINISTRY

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## Hebrews 9:11-22

This chapter will continue to discuss the elements of the new “*sanctuary*.” The writer of Hebrews adds the fact that Jesus has a new “*ministry*” that grows out of the sacrifice He has offered. The writer draws a parallel between the atonement sacrifices of the Law and the sacrifice of Christ under the “*new covenant*.” It is clear from Hebrews 9:10-11 that the “*new order*” of Christ has arrived which means that the “*good things . . . are already here*.”

### The Sacrifice and Eternal Redemption

*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. 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. 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. 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! 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* (Hebrews 9:11-15).

Christ did not enter into the old Hebrew tabernacle with its veils of separation. He did not maintain the broken fellowship between God and man. The writer of Hebrews says,

*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* (Hebrews 9:11).

This “*tabernacle*” is “*greater and more perfect*” because it is heavenly. Jesus is a minister of “*the true tabernacle*” which is a heavenly “*sanctuary*” (Hebrews 8:1-2). The old Hebrew tabernacle was a physical “*shadow*” belonging to the physical creation. Jesus’ “*sanctuary*” is heavenly and therefore greater. It was not “*man-made*” and does not belong to the physical “*creation.*” There is no earthly “*sanctuary*” for the residence of God. There is no earthly temple made by human hands. God does dwell in His temple, because His people themselves are the temple (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19) and He is the creator of His people. The new spiritual temple is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle John said, “*Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them*” (Revelation 21:3).

Jesus “*came through the greater (heavenly) and more perfect tabernacle.*” This new “*tabernacle*” is “*perfect*” because it has no veils of separation. It restores the original relationship man had with God in the Garden of Eden. They were able to live and dwell in harmony. The new priest inaugurating the new sanctuary brought about this new relationship. The writer of Hebrews will also talk about the fact that the new priest has a new sacrifice and His blood has been sprinkled in the appropriate place in relation to the new sanctuary.

In Hebrews 9:7 the writer of Hebrews affirmed that the high priest **never** entered the Most Holy Place *“without blood”* and in Hebrews 9:12 he says, *“**He (Jesus)** 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.”* Jesus entered into the Most Holy Place *“once for all.”* The Greek word *ephapax* means that His sacrifice will never be repeated. **“One-time-for-all-time”** is the literal meaning of the word. The phrase *“by his own blood”* stands in contrast with *“the blood of goats and calves.”* It was with **that “blood”** that Jesus *“obtained eternal redemption.”* Jesus did not have to do as the priests of the Law who entered into the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of a new sacrifice. Jesus offered one sacrifice for sins that accomplished what the Hebrew writer calls *“eternal redemption.”* His one sacrifice eternally has the power to redeem and cover sin for all time. There are sins not yet committed by Christians, but they are already potentially covered by the one sacrifice of Christ that has eternal redeeming power. Jesus *“entered the Most Holy Place”* with His *“own blood”* to make atonement before God for human sin.

The writer of Hebrews summarizes the total effect of all the sacrifices of the Law of Moses when he asks what good *“the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a (red) heifer”* accomplished when it was sprinkled on those who were defiled in the Old Testament? These actions did absolutely nothing for sin. The only thing it did was remove the physical defilements of the Hebrew worshiper as they offered their sacrifices of praise unto God. The writer says, *“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”* (Hebrews 9:13). The sacrifices that the priests offered removed the physical defilements that would have disqualified them from functioning at the tabernacle. For example, if a priest had touched a dead body or a serpent, he would be ceremonially

unclean until he had bathed himself and sprinkled himself with the ashes of a red heifer that had been sacrificed in an appropriate fashion. The Hebrew writer insists that their sacrifices only dealt with ceremonial defilement — it could cleanse only outwardly. Those were “*shadow*” sacrifices, and they could only give “*shadow*” cleansing.

The sacrifices offered before the “*new covenant*” were “*shadows*” of the sacrifice of Christ. Every Hebrew lamb that was sacrificed was a prediction and blue-print of the coming sacrifice of Christ. It helps to build the parallel by recalling the prophecy of Isaiah about Jesus: “. . . *he was led like a lamb to the slaughter*” (Isaiah 53:7b). As a “*lamb*” He did not cry out against the abuse. He was passive in the hands of those that destroyed His life. The sacrifices of the Law did not touch the sin problem. The blood of a thousand goats, the blood of a thousand sheep, bulls, heifers or anything else could not remove the sin of one man. The writer of Hebrews assures his readers that “*it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*” (Hebrews 10:4:). What do goats and bulls know about sin? What do they know about God, about ethics, worship, or about atonement? They know absolutely nothing, but that is not so concerning Christ. The writer of Hebrews says,

*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!* (Hebrews 9:14).

He draws a strong contrast between the dumb animals of the Law and the loving, caring sacrifice of Christ. Those sacrifices could eliminate “*shadow*” defilements but could not touch the soul of a man. If a priest was ceremonially defiled, it took the blood of goats and calves and the ashes of a heifer to remove

those impurities.

By way of contrast ***“the blood of Christ,”*** who was a loving, caring, knowing, deliberate, self-sacrificing Savior, can ***“cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”*** Notice the wonderful things the writer of Hebrews says about the blood of Christ. In Hebrews 10:1 he calls these ***“the good things that are coming.”*** **First**, he says that **Jesus offered His blood** according to the directives of the Holy Spirit. Jesus lived His entire life under the direction of the Holy Spirit. When God wanted Jesus to do something, He simply informed Him through Holy Spirit inspiration and the instructions were followed with total devotion. In this way the Father guided His steps through the Holy Spirit. Jesus offered His sacrifice by the guidance and directions of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 9:14 affirms that Jesus ***“offered”*** the sacrifice of ***“himself.”*** This verse says that Jesus was the priest that was ministering at His own crucifixion at Calvary. Christ ***“offered himself unblemished to God.”*** Evidently He is heaven’s gift to man, but Calvary is also Jesus’ gift to God. He was man’s gift, because He was a man, and He offered ***“himself”*** as an innocent man who was able to make atonement because He had no sins. The sins for which He died were not His, they were ours. Jesus offered Himself unto God ***“unblemished”*** by sin. That means He was never guilty of moral imperfection which made it possible for His sacrifice to be a substitute for all Christians. If He had committed only one sin, He could not take the penalty for the sins of anyone because He would have been under the penalty for His own wrong doing. He would not have been able to cover their sins because He could not even cover His own sin. Being innocent, He did not owe His life to the penalty for His sin, so He could give His life for others. The dead cannot give their life for the dead, and everyone who has committed sin are spiritually dead. Jesus was ***“unblemished,”*** and therefore, He could give His life for **us** by taking **our** death

and granting **us His life**.

Jesus' blood can "*cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve (and worship) the living God.*" Christians can offer acceptable worship to God with a cleansed conscience. The "*blood of Christ*" can cleanse the conscience of a man. His blood removes sin and gives a clear conviction of personal innocence in Christ Jesus. This is a gift of divine grace. Under the Law worshipers were not admitted into the immediate presence of God. They always stood at a distance worshiping through the intervention of the priests as mediators. Every time they came to offer a sacrifice they knew they were not in the same relationship with God that Adam had in the beginning. The veils of separation kept them from the immediate presence of God. The writer of Hebrews insists that "*the blood of Christ*" has removed the veils lifting Christians to the position and privilege of priests whose worship is now acceptable to God.

The grand purpose of the forgiveness of sins through "*the blood of Christ*" is not to be seen as an end within itself, but rather a means to a greater end. Innocence for the guilty is a beautiful gift from Christ. It is the most glorious condition that a man can enjoy. It is a by-product of the sacrifice of Calvary, but that is not an end within itself. The end purpose in the removal of sin is "*so that we may serve the living God*" (Hebrews 9:14b). The removal of his sin makes the Christian a qualified and acceptable worshiper of God. The Apostle Peter told the people on the day of Pentecost to "***repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit***" (Acts 2:38). Clearly the "***remission of their sins***" is a prerequisite to the reception of the "*gift of the Holy Spirit.*"

The "***gift of the Holy Spirit,***" a seal of inheritance, is the prize of repenting and being baptized (cf. Acts 2:38). The remission of sins is a pre-condition to the reception of this "***gift,***" which is the indwelling person of the "*Holy Spirit.*" It

is that indwelling person of the “*Holy Spirit*” that gives confirmation that Christians are God’s people (cf. Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6, Ephesians 1:13, 14). The remission of sins is a precondition to the reception of the Holy Spirit, but in this context the forgiveness of sins and the cleansing of “*our conscience*” is a precondition to acceptable worship of God. When the Christian’s conscience has been cleansed, he knows that there is absolutely no debt between him and God. There are no barriers of separation between the Christian and God because that is how completely and perfectly innocent the blood of Christ has made every Christian in the presence of God. A Christian is not innocent by his own performance but innocent by imputation, innocent by gift, and innocent by the blood of Jesus Christ.

The **second** “*good thing*” (cf. Hebrews 10:1) the writer of Hebrews lists for his readers because of the cross of Christ is the **mediation of Christ**. Hebrews 9:15 says,

*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.*

Not only does Christ’s blood cleanse sins and make all Christians acceptable worshipers in the presence of God, but His blood also makes it possible for Him to mediate a “*new covenant*” relationship between Christians and God. The “*new covenant*” with all its new ingredients was discussed in Hebrews 8. The fact that God totally changed their whole system of religion would be a matter of concern for the Hebrew people. The Jew might feel that since God had eliminated the sacrifices of the Law of Moses, dismantled their tabernacle, and taken away the Levitical priesthood that He would also abandon the Old Testament saints. The Hebrew people probably felt God

had left them outside His purposes leaving them deserted and without hope.

The writer of Hebrews assures his readers that Christ died to cover their sins also. Christ's death removed the veil of separation not for Christians, but “*that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — . . . to set them free from the sins committed **under the first covenant***” (Hebrews 9:15b). The veil of separation only existed under the old system, but Christ tore that veil from top to bottom and removed it (cf Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:30, John 19:23). From that moment forward there has never been a veil of separation in this new heavenly sanctuary. The torn veil symbolized the fact that Christ has perfected those that lived under the old system through His sacrifice. By His blood the Jews were granted “***the promised eternal inheritance.***” That means that their relationship with God was changed at Calvary. The way it was changed is open to speculation, but it is clear from Hebrews 11:40 and 12:23 that those Old Testament saints have now been “*made perfect.*” Jesus removed the veil of separation for them, not for Christians.

The Greek text says that Christ's blood obtained “*redemption of the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*” It is important to remember that God forgave the sins of people under the Law of Moses in view of Calvary. He knew that Jesus was going to die. He knew that He would cover the sins of those people under the old system, and therefore, He was able to forgive the people of the Old Testament. He did so by writing Himself a promissory note and committing Himself to cover those sins later. When Christ died He covered the sins that were committed under the first covenant.

It would be good to compare Hebrews 9:15 with Romans 3:25-26 where Paul taught the same basic concept. He said,

*God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate*

*his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished — he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

When Christ died He covered the sins that were forgiven before Calvary under the Mosaic covenant. He also died to cover sins that would be committed afterwards. It has always been on the basis of the Cross that God has forgiven sins. The blood of Christ covers the sins of all men in all ages. And therefore, when God eliminated the old Hebrew system, priests, sacrifices, covenant, and tabernacle, He did not leave those people that lived back in that age without a system of redemption. Their sins were forgiven before Calvary, but were not covered until Christ paid the penalty due them.

Because of His blood, “*Christ is the mediator of a new covenant.*” A “**mediator**” is one who arranges a relationship between two parties — one who mediates is one who coordinates. He is a peacemaker between two parties that have been alienated from each other. The cause of the alienation was sin. And the two parties are God and man. Christ is the bridge that spans the abyss between the two. There was an enormous chasm caused by human sin. By removing the sin, the abyss (separation) was removed and God and man can now be brought back together in perfect harmony.

To be able to accomplish all these benefits for the Hebrew people of ages past, a death had to take place. Death was the Law’s imposed penalty for sin. That is why Jesus “*died as a ransom to set them free from the sins* (and therefore the penalty of sin) *committed under the first covenant.*” Jesus “*set them free*” when He mediated a “*new covenant.*” His sacrifice gave the children of God “*the promised eternal inheritance.*” Through Christ’s death on the cross, their status before God was changed. He “perfected” them (cf. Hebrews 10:14, 11:40,

12:23).

### The Sacrifice of Christ and the New Covenant

*In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. 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. He said, This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.' In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:16-22).*

The writer of Hebrews discussed some of the new elements of the “*new covenant*” in Hebrew 8. In this passage he introduces some new thoughts about the covenant that were not clearly explained in Hebrews 8. He says that Christ died to inaugurate the new covenant because “*a will*” requires “*the death of the one who made it.*” The Greek word for a covenant is *diathekes*. That is the same word that is translated as “*a will*” in Hebrews 9:16 and 17. There are biblical covenants that do not require the death of the “*one who made it,*” but since this covenant required death, it becomes a special kind of covenant that takes on the nature of a “*testamentary covenant.*” A “*testamentary covenant*” involves the concept of a “*will*” made by a father to his heirs in which he makes provision for the distribution of his properties upon his death.

An example of the way a last will and testament functions would be when a father makes out his will and promises to leave his possessions to his children. The father has the right to attach some conditions to his will. Perhaps he has five farms and five children and he wants to make sure each child receives a farm. He may want each child to respect and accept the conditions he has attached. When the father prepares his will which is an expression of his **desires** for his heirs, the will is recorded and signed before a legal representative and placed in the court records. When the father dies, his will becomes effective and it cannot be changed. The father cannot change it because he is dead. That is the reason it is called a “**last** will and testament.” As long as the father is alive he can change the will, but his death seals the portions going to each heir and binds the conditions he has established in his will.

After the father’s death some of the children may look at the conditions he has set aside and decide they do not want to accept the father’s conditions. Other children may look at the property and decide they are willing to accept the conditions so that they can receive their inheritance. The children who reject the conditions attached to the father’s last will and testament will not receive their inheritance because their will/desires are not in harmony with the father’s “*will*.” This means that there is not a “*covenant*” between the father and his children. There is simply a one sided will and a disappointed father. When the child chooses to accept the conditions in order to inherit the possessions and property of the father this is the basis of a “**covenant**.” It becomes a two way agreement that is binding on both parties.

An important observation needs to be made from this whole context. God has a “**will**” with every person on the face of the earth. The apostle Paul told Timothy that God “ . . . *wants (wills) all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4). Certainly not all men will “**be saved**,” but God still “**wills**” that they be. God does not want

anyone to perish, but wants everyone to come to repentance (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). God has a covenant only with those who have ratified His **“will”** and have accepted His conditions. He has a covenant only with those who have His law written upon their minds and hearts and who know those laws and abide by them. He has a covenant only with those who abide with Him and become one house with Him so that they reflect the Father’s **“will.”** God has a **“covenant”** with the man who accepts His **“will,”** but He has a **“will”** with the entire universe. God wants every man to be saved. That is the reason He commissioned the church to preach the gospel to every man on the face of the earth (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). It is through the gospel that men learn of God and of His inheritance, but only by fulfilling the conditions in the covenant can they become heirs. If men are lost it will be because they have not ratified the **“covenant”** that God has made for them through Christ Jesus.

Jesus died to confirm and make the covenant **“will”** of God unchangeable. The writer of Hebrews confirms that this is a testamentary covenant when he says, ***“because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living”*** (Hebrews 9:17). Every man has the option of ratifying (to accept, approve or confirm, Ed.) and probating (the official proving of a will, Ed.) for himself. When man submits himself to keep the conditions of the covenant, then he will be a saved man and enjoy all the privileges that go with that covenant relationship.

The writer of Hebrews draws a parallel between the inauguration of the old and new covenants. He says, ***“This is why **even** the first covenant was not put into effect without blood”*** (Hebrews 9:18). The word **“even”** strongly suggests that the major topic under discussion relates to the fact that the **“new covenant”** was **“put into effect”** **with** **“blood.”** It is evident from the verses following that the same is true of the old covenant. Considering the nature of these **“covenants,”** it takes **“blood”** to inaugurate each of them, so the writer wishes

to make two or three points concerning the parallel between the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant and the inauguration of the covenant of Christ.

The writer of Hebrews refers to the days of Moses:

*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 (Hebrews 9:19).*

The Hebrew leader read every commandment of the Law to all of the people. He must have read the Ten Commandments, the other 613 ordinances and statutes contained in the covenant, and all of the assignments that God had made to His people. When the reading was done, he took the blood of a calf and a goat and used scarlet wool and hyssop to sprinkle four things: ***“the scroll, all the people, . . . the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies”*** (Hebrews 9:19, 21). The things used in the tabernacle ceremonies involved all the vessels of worship, the altars of incense and burnt offerings, the golden candle stick, and the table of shewbread.

As Moses preformed this initial cleansing, ***“He said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep’”*** (Hebrews 9:20). The old ***“covenant”*** was inaugurated with animal blood. The ***“scarlet wool and branches of hyssop”*** were used to sprinkle the blood on the items listed. There was only a symbolic value attached to these activities of Moses. The system he thus inaugurated was the ***“shadow”*** system of which Christ is the reality fulfillment. The ***“blood of the (old) covenant”*** can compare only in symbolic or shadow form with the ***“blood of Christ”*** which **mediated** the ***“new covenant”*** (Hebrews 19:15). Remember that animal blood could only cleanse the external, physical defilements of the people or objects to which it was applied. That blood did not relate to their forgiveness of sin.

The writer of Hebrews adds details that were not given in

the Exodus 24:3-8 account when he says,

*In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:21-22).*

The sprinkling of the tabernacle and its vessels of worship did not take place at the same time the covenant was inaugurated because the tabernacle did not exist then. The sprinkling of the tabernacle and its vessels probably took place at a later date during the dedication of the tabernacle. According to the Law, blood was used in almost all cleansing ceremonies with a few exceptions. Some things were cleansed by water, some by fire, and some by scarlet wool and hyssop. But when it came to remission of sins, according to the Law of Moses, there were **no exceptions**. The shedding of blood was always prerequisite to the forgiveness of sin. Atonement with animal blood was always demanded (cf. Leviticus 4, 5 and 6).

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# THE TRUE MINISTRY OF JESUS

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## Hebrews 9:23-28

### Review

This chapter is a continuation of the discussion concerning Hebrews 9. The writer of Hebrews said, “***even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood***” (Hebrews 9:18). That was the Mosaic covenant which was inaugurated through a series of “*ceremonials*.” Sacrifices were offered and the blood was sprinkled. The writer draws a parallel between what God did with Israel 1500 years before the time of Christ and what He did through the sacrificial blood of Jesus. Moses read the Law to the people, and then he sprinkled blood on “***the scroll, the people, . . . the tabernacle and everything used in the ceremonials***” (Hebrews 9:19, 21). The entire system of Hebrew worship including sacrifice, sanctuary, covenant and all the people was dedicated by blood. Remember that entire system was only a “*shadow*” of “***the good things that are now here***” (Hebrews 9:11).

### The Necessity of Purification by Blood

*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. 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 (Hebrews 9:23-24).*

The writer of Hebrews begins this passage of scripture by saying, *“It was necessary”* for both the old and the new system to be dedicated by the blood of the sacrifices specified for each by God. Just as the old covenant related to people who worshiped through sacrifices offered at an earthly tabernacle, so the new covenant has its equivalent law, people, sacrifices, and sanctuary where their worship is conducted. The old covenant is called *“the copies of the heavenly things,”* which makes them a shadow of *“the heavenly things themselves.”* The *“copies”* belonged to the old, but the reality of the *“heavenly”* belongs to the new. *“These sacrifices”* relate to *“the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop”* (Hebrews 9:19) with which Moses dedicated the old covenant. The *“better sacrifices”* relates to the *“blood of Christ”* (Hebrews 9:14). Christ introduced the *“heavenly”* realities of all those Old Testament *“shadows.”* It is important to remember that *“shadows”* do not have independent existence.

It is clear that the writer of Hebrews is talking about the sacrifice of Christ when he uses the phrase *“purified with better sacrifices.”* He used the plural form of *“sacrifices”* because Jesus fulfilled all the sacrificial typology and symbolism found in the Old Testament. Those sacrifices were presented with values borrowed from Christ. Each Old Testament sacrifice symbolized some aspect of the sacrifice of Jesus. He was the reality that cast the *“shadows”* of the burnt offering, the grain offering, the peace offering, the sin and trespass offering, the Day of Atonement offerings, the Passover offering, and the red heifer offering. In fact, He fully accomplished what each of those sacrifices symbolically indicated. Roll all those offerings into one package and they define in detail the one sacrifice of Jesus. A careful study of the book of Leviticus would be of great value in understanding the many details those sacrifices predicted about the sacrifice of Jesus.

There were many different sacrificial animals that were used under the Law of Moses. Some animals were taken from the herd (cattle and oxen); some belonged to the flock (sheep and goats), and some were taken from the fowl (turtledoves and pigeons). Whether related to the animal itself or to the particular sacrifice in which it was used, Jesus is the reality of which they are the **“copy”** or **“shadow.”** That is the reason the writer refers to the *“sacrifices”* of Christ in plural form. It is because He is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament typology.

Christ did not enter the Hebrew tabernacle — *“a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one,”* because He had only one function to perform in that *“man-made sanctuary,”* and that was to rip its veil from top to bottom (cf. Matthew 27:51). He restructured the relationship that God’s worshipers now have with Him. Jesus *“entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence”* (Hebrews 9:24b). He is *“a high priest, . . . who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man”* (Hebrews 8:1-2).

Jesus is **“in God’s presence”** on our behalf. The writer of Hebrews said earlier, *“If he were on earth, he would not be a priest”* (Hebrews 8:4). There are several reasons that disqualify Him from service in an earthly tabernacle. He belonged to the wrong tribe, the wrong order, and the wrong realm. There would be no purpose for a heavenly minister to function in an earthly sanctuary. The writer declares there was no possibility of Jesus being a priest if He was earthbound. *“In God’s presence,”* He has a permanent priesthood (cf. Hebrews 7:24-25) which will never be transferred to another person. He is the only priest who will ever exist in the new covenant. He lives forever to intercede for those who come to God through Him.

There are a number of different things that Jesus is accomplishing for Christians. He grants salvation to all who enter into the kingdom through baptism. He maintains that salvation and the relationship established with God. He not only gives life, He also maintains life. He continues to intercede for

all Christians in redemption. Every time a Christian commits a sin Jesus intervenes and applies His blood to cover the sin. He has “*obtained eternal redemption*” (Hebrews 9:12) for all Christians. Under the Law of Moses when a Hebrew sinned, he lost his fellowship with God and the priest had to offer a sacrifice before he could be forgiven. Jesus does not have to intercede in that way every time a man sins because He “*obtained eternal redemption.*” His “one-time-for-all-time” sacrifice has eternal redeeming qualities. He never has to offer another sacrifice. He just applies the blood He offered on the cross of Calvary as a means of intervention in our behalf.

Jesus not only maintains the Christian’s state of redemption, He also appears as the “*mediator.*” He is the channel through whom the Christian presents his worship to God in an acceptable form. In the old system Moses sprinkled the vessels of worship with the blood of calves and goats (cf. Hebrews 9:19, 21). New Testament worship is also sprinkled with blood — it is the blood of Christ. That implies that the worship of Christian people today is not as pure and holy as it ought to be. It is not as dignified as God deserves. Paul told the Romans that there are people who know God but do not worship “*him as God*” (Romans 1:21). God deserves sacrifices of praise, devotion, and gratitude that truly express who He is. His dignity and divine nature demand worship that no man can offer without the cleansing Jesus gives. His perfection allows the Christian to present his imperfect, but acceptable praise to God.

There are a number of New Testament passages that say worship to God is offered through the mediation of Christ. In Ephesians 5:19-20, the apostle Paul insists that worship of praise is acceptable to God when offered “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” In Colossians 3:16 Christians are instructed, “*And whatever you do, . . . do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.*” Hebrews 13:15 commands, “*Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise.*”

And in 1 Peter 2:5 Christians are described as *“a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

### **The One-Time Sacrifice of Christ**

*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. 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. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 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 (Hebrews 9:25-28).*

Jesus was different from the Levitical priests not only in the sanctuary in which He served but also in the number of times that He entered into the Most Holy Place. The writer of Hebrews says that He did not have to *“offer himself again and again . . . every year.”* If Jesus had to imitate the pattern of Hebrew high priests then Calvary would have to be repeated again and again . . . *“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”* (Hebrews 9:26). Jesus did not have to do that because with the sacrifice that He offered on Calvary He accomplished eternal redemption (cf. Hebrews 9:13).

Jesus also differed from the high priest of the Law because He entered the heavenly sanctuary **“by his own blood”** (9:12) and the high priest under the old system entered **“with blood that is not his own”** (Hebrews 9:25). Since the sacrificial blood

of the Levitical priests was simple animal blood that **could not “take away sin”** (Hebrews 10:4), their ministrations availed nothing as far as related to redemption. In contrast, the blood of Christ “*obtained eternal redemption*” (Hebrews 9:12). Christ offered the **“one-time-for-all-time”** sacrifice and the very nature of its benefit excluded its repetition. With one sacrifice He accomplished that which the accumulation of all the Hebrew sacrifices of all ages could not.

The benefits of Christ’s sacrifice cover all human history “*since the creation of the world.*” He did not die just to cover the sins of Jews under the old covenant and Christians under the new. His sacrifice covered the sins of all those who lived during the patriarchal period of history. His saving power reaches all the way back to Eden. Jesus “***has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself***” (Hebrews 9:26b). The Greek word for “***appear***” in this verse is a present perfect verb. The same Greek word was used in Hebrews 9:24 in the present tense: “*now to appear for us.*” The same word will be used again in Hebrews 9:28 in the future tense. These three “***appearances***” of Christ fully define His total redemptive activity. Christ “***has appeared***” at Calvary in the past to sacrificially “*do away with sin.*” He “***now appears***” before God on our behalf in the present to accomplish His ministry as a priest. And he “***will appear***” at the end of time to finish the redemptive process by taking His people home to be with God.

The phrase “***at the end of the ages***” refers to the end of the Mosaic dispensation. The same concept was used by the writer in Hebrews 1:2: “*But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*” Paul refers to the end of the Jewish age as “***the fulfillment of the ages (that) has come***” (1 Corinthians 10:11). In 1 Peter 1:20 Jesus was presented as the Lamb of God who “***was revealed in these last times for your sake.***” The “***end***” definitely relates to the end of the whole Old Testament system.

The point of Hebrews 9:27-28 is not that men “***die once***”

nor that judgment follows death. The writer of Hebrews says, ***Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 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 point is that just as “*man is destined to **die once***” so Christ’s sacrifice was a **one time event** – never to be repeated. And “*just as*” judgment inevitably follows death, so shall Christ “*appear a second time*” to finish the process of redemption. Judgment follows man’s **one-time** death in the same way that Jesus’ second coming follows His **one-time** death. Jesus did not have to die many times “*just as*” man will not physically die but “*once.*”

Jesus will come “*a second time, (but) not to bear sin*” as He did in His first coming (cf. Hebrew 9:26). He will not come back to the world to be sacrificed again. He will not even put His foot on the face of the earth again. His people will be raised and they will “*meet the Lord in the air*” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). At Jesus’ ascension two men dressed in white assured those who were watching that “*This same Jesus . . . will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven*” (Acts 1:11). He departed the earth on ascension day on the clouds. And His return will be on the clouds where His people will meet Him “*in the air.*” Calvary is finished; it will never be repeated. The “*second time*” will be at the end of the world. The declared purpose of Jesus’ second coming is to take His people home to full redemption and eternal salvation. The first time He came was for the purpose of saving souls. The second time He comes will be to save our bodies from the tomb and to take us home.

The phrase “*those who are waiting for him*” refers to those who believe in Him and are assured by His resurrection that they too shall be raised. The high priest of the Law entered

annually into the Most Holy Place, but then had to exit again for another sacrificial offering. This is not the case for Jesus because when He had ***“offered for all time one sacrifice for sin, he sat down at the right hand of God”*** (Hebrews 10:12). Jesus never has to exit the Most Holy Place to offer another sacrifice. Yet He is coming out of the sanctuary one last time. He came from heaven the first time, and then He returned to heaven upon the completion of His mission. From heaven He will come again, and then to heaven He will return again with the redeemed of all ages. That will represent the consummation of the plan of the ages.

There are many other scriptures in the New Testament that give confirmation to the concepts presented in this context including John 14:1; Acts 17:31; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Timothy 4:6-8. Perhaps Romans 8:24 gives the best explanation of the Christian hope: *“For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”*

Hebrews 9 is an interesting chapter that should be read often to enjoy the glories of the message it presents.

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# CHRIST'S SUPERIOR SACRIFICE

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## Hebrews 10: 1-18

This chapter presents the final section of the writer's mosaic on the priestly ministry of the Christ. This section deals with the sacrifice of Christ as it contrasts with the sacrifices of the Law of Moses. The writer of Hebrews will present a strong contrast between old covenant sacrifices and the new covenant sacrifice. There is nothing more characteristic of the Old Testament than its system of worship and atonement sacrifices. Their sacrifices not only dealt with their worship toward God as it centered around the tabernacle, the altar, and the sprinkling of the blood, but also atonement for the forgiveness of sin. Atonement brought about the reconciliation of both the individual Hebrew and of the nation. Even though the Law of Moses had already been taken away, its tabernacle had been vacated by God because He was no longer symbolically resident in the temple of Jerusalem, and its sacrifices were no longer valid, the Hebrew priests were still functioning as they always had believing that their service was acceptable to God.

### The Year by Year Remembrance of Sin

*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. 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. But those sacrifices are an annual*

*reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4).*

The sacrifices of the Law were “*only a shadow of good things that are coming — not the realities themselves*” (Hebrews 10:1a). The “***good things coming***” were the sacrifice of Christ seen in its composite fulfillment of the “***shadow***” sacrifices of the Law. The shadows that existed under the Law system not only involved the “*shadow*” priesthood, the “*shadow*” tabernacle, the “*shadow*” covenant, and in this section particularly the “*shadow*” sacrifices. These “*shadow*” sacrifices simply foreshadowed the cross of Calvary. Since those sacrifices were only “*shadows*,” “*it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, **make perfect** those who draw near to worship*” (Hebrews 10:1b). It was impossible for the Hebrew worshiper to be made “*perfect*” in his relationship with God. The endless repetition of those sacrifices confirm their futility as far as perfecting the worshiper.

Earlier passages discussed the tabernacle as a temporary figure — “*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***” (Hebrews 9:9). In Hebrews 10:1 the writer of Hebrews lays the fundamental defect of the Law system as their sacrificial system. Their sacrifices simply could not remove the sin problem. They could not be acceptable worshipers before God, because the very holiness of God demanded that those who stood in His presence be free from sin. The veils of separation that the Old Testament system established and maintained between God and His worshipers symbolized the fact that man does not have the same relationship with God that he had before the sin problem was ever introduced in the Garden of Eden. Adam and God walked hand in hand together in a beautiful relationship. The

fellowship between them was unhampered, unhindered, and unlimited by the existence of any kind of veil of separation.

When the sin problem intervened, man was driven from the presence of God and the cherubim of glory were placed at the east of the Garden of Eden to keep man from coming back into that unveiled relationship. Unveiled relationship could not exist until the sin problem was solved. The built-in inadequacy of those sacrifices was that they did not remove the sin, therefore the veils of separation remained. In Hebrews 9:14 the writer affirmed, *"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!**"* He insists that every priest had to stand *"day after day . . . year after year"* (Hebrews 10:11) because the old covenant sacrifices maintained the veil of separation between God and His worshippers.

If the old covenant sacrifices could have ever restored the relationship that God and Adam had in the Garden of Eden, then those sacrifices would have ceased — *"If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins"* (Hebrews 10:2). The fact that they continued *"year after year"* should convince the reader of the futility of those sacrifices. It made no difference how many times the Levitical priests offered their sacrifices those veils of separation remained intact.

The writer of Hebrews says, *"But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sin, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins"* (Hebrews 10:3-4). The people were **reminded** of their sins because the veils between them and God remained in spite of all the sacrifices they offered. It is also evident that God was **reminded** because He knew their sins were not yet covered. It is clear that the priests were **reminded** because they had to repeat the sacrifices they offered on an annual basis. The fact that God **remembered**

does not necessarily imply that He remembered theirs sin **against** them. He forgave their sin, but those sins were not covered by the sacrifices under the old covenant. The old covenant sacrifices “*ceremonially*” made the people “*outwardly clean*” (Hebrews 9:13), but it did not touch the conscience because that “*blood of bulls and goats*” could not “*take away sins.*”

The whole scene is one of frustration to all the parties involved. There is the impression that the frustration is not only felt on the part of the worshiper, it is felt also on the part of God. Remember that those sacrifices did give God the expediency with which to forgive sin, but that was only in view of the cross of Jesus. Hebrews 9:22 says that sacrificial blood was necessary for forgiveness according to the requirement of “*the law,*” but that sacrificial blood from the bulls and goats was not the “*blood*” that actually covered the sin.

## The Perfect Sacrifice of Christ

### A Body Prepared for Christ

*Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.’ Then I said, ‘Here I am — it is written about me in the scroll — I have come to do your will, O God.’ 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). Then he said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’ He sets aside the first to establish the second (Hebrews 10:5-9).*

Prophetically, Jesus acknowledged that the sacrifices of the

Law are not giving God what He wants. The prophecy was recorded in Psalms 40:6-8. God really wanted man to be restored to the relationship that was defined by Eden. God created man for fellowship with Himself. Eden expressed the intimacy of unhindered communion and fellowship that God wanted. Such union is certainly what man would want, but when man sinned, that relationship was destroyed and the blood of bulls and goats simply could not restore it.

The Hebrew writer prophetically goes back to the days of David when the Psalmist wrote Psalms 40: *"Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased'"* (Hebrews 10:5-6). This statement was made by Jesus to God the Father. This is the way in which Jesus confronted the fundamental shortcoming of the Law of Moses. He addressed God and said in substance: "I recognize that those sacrifices are not giving You what You want. Let Me tell You, Father, I will go to the earth and I will give You exactly what You want. And through My sacrifice I will restore the relationship that will bring exactly the desired relationship that You have always wanted with mankind."

Prophetically, Jesus was programmed to restore what the old covenant sacrifices could not produce. The phrase *"sacrifices and offering you did not desire"* simply states that God's will for fellowship with man was not being accomplished by Levitical sacrifices. *"Sacrifices"* had to do with atonement and *"offerings"* had to do with their worship of God. Neither provided God with the relationships He desired.

The phrase *"but a body you prepared for me;"* (Hebrews 10:5b) is one that requires an explanation. The original Hebrew in Psalms 40:6 was translated *"but my ears you have pierced"* or more accurately in the language of the psalmist David, "You dug out my ears." When this verse was quoted by the writer to the Hebrews it was translated as, *"Sacrifice and offering you*

*did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me.*" The best explanation for the difference in these two translations is given in the prophecy of Isaiah 50:4-7:

*The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, **wakens my ear** to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has **opened my ears**, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.*

This is an extensive citation, but it gives many insights into the attitude Jesus had toward the instructions the Father gave Him and the total disposition He had to make for his entire body to accomplish God's redemptive purpose. "**Wakened ears**" are ready to hear the Father's will. "**Opened ears**" permitted Jesus to be educated in what God wanted done, and those ears gave Him the message to speak in such a way to be able to "*sustain the weary.*" The listening attitude of Jesus with "**opened ears**" enabled Him to say, "Speak Lord, your servant hears, command and I will obey." "**Dug out ears**" are attuned to God's commands. Though the mission was to be filled with suffering, the Lord Jesus was "**not rebellious**" nor did he draw back. When the Father has the "**ear**" of one who said, "*'Here I am . . . I have come to do your will, O God'*" (Hebrews 10:7), then the will of God will be fully done. God not only had Jesus' "**ear**," but Jesus said, "*I offered **my back** to those who beat me, **my cheeks** to those who pulled out my beard, I did not hide **my face** from mocking and spitting . . . Therefore I set **my face** like flint*" to be able to endure the suffering. On the cross His **head**

was crowned with thorns, His **hands and feet** were pierced with nails, His **side** was pierced by the spear, and His **soul** was given as an offering for sin. With this explanation it is easy to see how the Greek translators arrived at their interpretative usage of "*a **body** you have prepared for me.*"

Hebrews 10:6 confirms the conviction that neither worship sacrifices of "*burnt offerings*" or atonement sacrifices of "*sin offerings*" were pleasing to the Father. They simply did not give what pleased God. Hebrews 10:7 introduced the "*will*" of God: "*Then I said, 'Here I am — it is written about me in the scroll — I have come to do your will, O God.'*" What Jesus prophetically proposed to give God was exactly what God desired. Jesus is promising to come and give God what He wants. This is in perfect harmony with what was "*written . . . in the scroll*" about the mission of Jesus. "*The scroll*" would relate back to the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Jews used the term "*the scroll*" to refer to the Torah. Since this is in the context of a contrast between the Jewish sacrifices and that of Jesus, it is likely that this specific reference is being made to the book of Leviticus where the worship and atonement sacrifices were ordained in the Law of Moses. The "*scroll*" could relate to the overall story of Hebrew sacrificial worship and atonement, the ordination of the Levitical priests, the building of the tabernacle, and the giving of the Law. The "*scroll*" pointed to all the "*shadows*" of the coming sacrifice of Jesus. There are very few passages of scripture that more adequately explain the futility of the sacrifices of the Law and the beauty of the attitude of Christ in relation to His sacrificial mission given by the Father.

Hebrews 10:8 says, "*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).*" "**Sacrifices**" were defined as atonement sin offerings. "**Offerings**" were defined as burnt offerings of

worship. The **first** point was that they were neither “**desired**” by God nor was He “**pleased**” with them. And yet those “*sacrifices and offerings*” were **required** by “*the law.*” The reason the Law required them is to be understood by the fact that they were prophetic of Christ’s work of atonement and mediation of worship. Though the law ordained them and they were instituted by God and carried out by divine decree, they still did not accomplish what God wanted. They were never intended to remove sin. They stood as a blueprint of a sacrifice that would remove the sin problem. In acknowledgment of that fact Jesus said: “*Here I am, I have come to do your will*” (Hebrews 10:9a).

When Alexander the Great conquered the land of Palestine and the Greek language began to replace the Hebrew tongue in daily life in the nation of Israel, they began to forget their native language. God had to provide the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek so the people could understand His law. That explains the usage of Greek in New Testament times. It also explains the variations in the wording of the original Hebrew text into Greek as in the example of the idiomatic expression of “***dug out ears***” being translated with the statement a “***body prepared for me.***” Quite evidently a person with ears that are closed does not listen to the commands of God. God refers to that kind of person as one with “*uncircumcised ears*” (Acts 7:51). A man who has had his ears “*dug out*” would be one to whom God could speak. There is a great difference between animals who know nothing about God’s will and the Messiah who lovingly gave His life to completely satisfy the will of God. God wanted a sinless sacrifice and, in Jesus, that is exactly what He received.

**First**, God did not want the Levitical sacrifices, so “*He sets aside the **first** to establish the **second***” (Hebrews 10:9b). God set aside the **first** sacrificial system of the Law of Moses to be able to “*establish the **second**,*” which refers to the sacrifice of Christ. This completes the removal of all the

elements of the Hebrew system and the inauguration of these elements through Christ. Hebrews 7 presented the removal of the Levitical priests and the inauguration of the priesthood of Christ. Hebrews 8 presented the removal of the Mosaic covenant and the inauguration of the new covenant of Christ. Hebrews 9 presented the removal of the old Hebrew tabernacle and the inauguration of the new heavenly sanctuary of Christ. Hebrews 10 presents the sacrificial system of the Law ***“set aside”*** so the sacrifice of Christ can be ***“established.”***

Once again there are two systems that cannot and will not coexist. The priests of the old system were ***“set aside”*** ***so that*** the new priest could be ***“introduced”*** (Hebrews 7:18). The old law was removed ***so that*** there would be a place for the new covenant (Hebrews 8:7-13; 9:1). The former sanctuary was abolished by the rending of the veil ***so that*** its replacement could become the new heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 9:8, 11). In Hebrews 10: 9 God ***“set aside”*** the sacrifices of the old ***so that*** He could ***“establish”*** the new sacrifice. This concept is clearly confirmed by the Greek in this verse. In Greek, there is the ***hina*** clause, which is used for the purpose of defining — one thing is done ***so that/in order that*** another thing may happen. The book of Hebrews is full of ***hina*** clauses, but none is more definitive than the one used in this context.

### **Complete Coverage For Those Once Corrupted by Sin**

*And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 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. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever*

*those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: '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.' Then he adds: 'Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.' And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:10-18).*

God's "**will**" was that "*we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*" (Hebrews 10:10). Jesus' sacrifice on the cross fully satisfied the desire of God the Father. That one sacrifice gave God what all the old system of sacrifices could never give. God was never pleased with those sacrifices under the Law of Moses (cf. Psalm 40:6; Hebrews 10:5). The sacrifice that pleased God was "*through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*" It is through His body that "*we have been made holy.*" Jesus is the only One who could make men holy (cf. Hebrews 2:11) because He is the Holy One. The writer of Hebrews addresses his readers as "*holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling*" (Hebrews 3:1) knowing that it took the offering of the "*body of Jesus*" to bring about that holiness. By His vicarious sufferings, Jesus made Christians partakers in His holiness. Quite logically those who are holy are permitted to "***draw near to worship***" God (Hebrews 10:1, 22), because all sinful impediments have been removed.

Not only did the priests have to repeat their sacrifices "*year after year,*" but it was a daily duty as well. The writer of Hebrews says, "***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***" (Hebrews 10:11). The "*day after day . . . duties*" were just as futile as those sacrifices offered "*year after year.*" The fact that the Hebrew priests had to "*stand*" "*day after day*" is in sharp contrast to

the fact that Christ “*had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins*” and then “*he sat down at the right hand of God*” (Hebrews 10:12). A seated priest indicates that his work is finished. And a priest that is seated “*at the right hand of God*” indicates that the Father is satisfied with the accomplished work of Calvary. This verse triumphantly proclaims that Christ’s mission has been accomplished. God is satisfied with His work and it is God who invites Him to “*sit at my right hand*” (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:13).

The sacrifices that were offered day after day and year after year again and again many times were offered for the same sins and maybe even the same individual. Yesterday’s sacrifice would not take care of today’s sin under the Law of Moses. Their last sacrifice would not take care of their next sin, but by contrast, the sacrifice of Christ solves the sin problem **forever**, even for the sins not yet committed! Christ’s “*one sacrifice for all time*” wraps up the sacrificial requirements for the restoration of sinful men to full fellowship with God.

The writer of Hebrews says, “*Since that time* (Since the time when Christ sat down at the right hand of God) *he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool*” (Hebrews 10:13). Christ’s universal dominion is confirmed. The nature of His reign is clearly established in 1 Corinthians 15:23-28. The “*enemies*” relate to all those who reject His high priestly ministrations. All unbelievers and all those who revert back into Judaism after their conversion to Christ are called “*the enemies of God*” (Hebrews 10:27). They are the ones who are guilty of “*crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace*” (Hebrews 6:6). The term “**footstool**” is an indication of the total and devastating defeat that is forthcoming to the “*enemies*” of Christ. When He comes to receive His people is the time when His enemies will be vanquished to eternal perdition.

The writer of Hebrews presented one of the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice for man as “*we have been made holy*”

(Hebrews 10:10). He continues that same thought in Hebrews 10:14 saying, *"Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."* The blood of Christ brings about sacrificial perfection. It has eternally redeeming powers so that they will never need another sacrifice. The Law of Moses could not make the Jew holy; every sin required another sacrifice. Christians are *"made perfect forever."*

In Hebrews 10:15-17 the writer of Hebrews quotes from Jeremiah 31:33-34. He wants to join the promise of the new covenant with the new covenant sacrifice of Jesus which makes new covenant people *"perfect forever."* This passage says:

*The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about **this**. First he says: '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.' Then he adds: 'Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.'*

The Holy Spirit is credited with the inspiration of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the establishment of the new covenant. The Holy Spirit inspired the writer of Hebrews in his interpretation and application of that prophecy.

The writer of Hebrews wanted to be sure his readers knew that he was commenting on the prophecy from Jeremiah so he repeated several phrases straight from the prophet. These phrases have already been explained earlier in this commentary (see comments made concerning Hebrews 8:10-12). The verse separation in this context is quite awkward. Hebrews 10:16 should begin with the words *"First he says: . . ."* and then present the citation from Jeremiah. Hebrews 10:17 joins this Hebrews 10:16 with the words *"Then he adds: . . ."*

The most astonishing element of the new covenant is a sacrifice that would allow God to *"remember no more"* the sins of the people. There is more than appears on the surface in this

statement. Since God has the **forever standing** sacrifice of Christ to cover sin, He no longer **records** the sins of His people. Their sins are covered and never entered into the record books of God. That is the full implication of what the prophet Jeremiah foretold. God **remembered** the sins of Israel, even though they were forgiven through the old system, but they were **not covered** until after Jesus' sacrifice at Calvary. God remembered the sins of the Israelites until Calvary, and there they were **taken away**, so God no longer **remembers** them. And it is clear that sins are already covered at Calvary, so they are neither **recorded** or **remembered** against His people today.

Hebrews 10:18 is translated, "*And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin,*" but the Greek simply says, "*where remission is there is no more sacrifice needed.*" "**Remission is**" says Christ offers **standing** remission. This verse discusses the verb tense of "**forgiveness.**" It is a present tense verb, and therefore, speaks of **constant sacrificial atonement** always available to God's people. "**No more sacrifice for sin**" needs to be made, even for the next sin committed. In this way Christians are sacrificially perfected.

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# THE CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE

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## Hebrews 10:19-25

The writer of Hebrews combines all the ingredients of the new system into a song of praise and an explanation of the privilege that belongs to Christians. This chapter will only cover a few verses because there is so much vital information. The writer of Hebrews has switched back and forth between the new **priest**, new **covenant**, new **sacrifice**, and the new **sanctuary** which all combine to bring Christians into the full exercise of the benefits of all that is “*new*.” The writer is able to mix all these elements together because they do interrelate significantly. When he talks about the termination of the Mosaic covenant and its sacrifices in Hebrews 10:17-18 and God’s promise to “*remember no more*” “*their sins and lawless acts*,” he is talking about the new Christian system.

Hebrews 9:10 spoke of the “*the time of the new order*,” which refers to the “*renewal of all things*” as it was accomplished by Christ (cf. Matthew 19:28). The result of this “*renewal*” is the return of man to the relationship he had with God in Eden. Quite evidently the return is experienced only on the spiritual level. It will not be accomplished on the physical or metaphysical level until Christ returns to redeem His people from the grave. But even now the spirit of man (in his immortal soul) enjoys full fellowship with God through the combined elements of the new system.

## A Call to Persevere

*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new*

*and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 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. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 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 (Hebrews 10:19-25).*

The writer of Hebrews uses the Greek word *parresian* when he says, “Therefore, brothers, since we have **confidence** to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus” (Hebrews 10:19). This Greek word has more significance than mere assurance. It implies strong boldness and courage. The best translation is the “right of a free man to speak.” He has the right to speak and may even appear a little daring, but not audacious or risky especially since all Jews knew that they had no **right** to enter into the Most Holy Place. Christians have the *parresian* (a confident right and privilege) to enter the Most Holy Place because their right has been obtained by Christ. The word “boldness” (Hebrews 4:16) expresses the attitude with which all Christians can exercise the privilege that enables every Christian to walk into the intimate presence of God, which is called the “throne of grace.” This access to the throne room explains the instructions to “draw near to God.” The Hebrew worshiper was not perfected in his conscience when he drew near to worship, but Christians are frequently encouraged to “draw near” (Hebrews 4:16, 7:19; 7:25; 10:1; 10:19; 10:22). This Christian privilege to “draw near” and “enter the Most Holy Place” was purchased “**by the blood of Jesus**” (Hebrews

10:19). Jesus has already penetrated the symbolic veil between heaven and earth as a **forerunner** — “*who went before us, has entered on our behalf*” (Hebrews 6:20). He blazed a trail into the throne room for Christians to follow. His literal entrance into the throne room gives Christians the privilege to make a spiritual entrance.

The writer of Hebrews joins the “*blood*” and the “*body*” of Jesus as a two-fold description of Christ’s sacrifice. Entrance into the Most Holy Place is possible only by the blood and body of Jesus. The “*new way*” is one that is fresh and recently inaugurated. The “*living way*” is a life-giving way. The writer said that as long as the old tabernacle existed with its veils of separation, there could be no “*way*” “*to enter the Most Holy Place.*” Jesus “*opened for us through the curtain*” a “*way.*” “*Through the curtain, that is, his body*” simply means that the sins that separated man from God were borne in his body on the cross (cf. 1 Peter 2:24). Isaiah prophesied about the new way Christ would create, “*And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness*” (Isaiah 35:8a). He insisted “*The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it*” (Isaiah 35:8b). The unclean will not travel along this “*highway*” because it is the “*way*” that leads to the throne room!

In Hebrews 10:21 the writer of Hebrews adds the element of “*a great priest over the house of God*” to those of the covenant, the “*Most Holy Place,*” and the sacrifice to complete the total picture. The “*great priest*” is Jesus and the “*house of God*” is the church. The writer of Hebrews has already triumphantly affirmed “*Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage* (boldness) *and the hope of which we boast*” (Hebrews 3:6). Only members of the church have the privilege of access to the throne room. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, “*God’s household . . . is the church of the living God*” (1 Timothy 3:15). The greatness of the Christian’s High Priest lies in the

fact that He has taken away sin, which was always the impediment to intimate fellowship with God.

The writer of Hebrews continues,

*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 (Hebrews 10:22).*

The attitudes with which Christians “draw near” are as important as the purposes for which they “draw near.” The **first** attitude already mentioned is “**confidence**” (boldness). Now he adds “*a sincere heart in full assurance of faith*” as the **second attitude**. The “*sincere heart*” is for the purpose of drawing near to God, and the purpose of drawing near is to worship. It is imperative that the worshiper be transparently genuine and completely sincere in his worshipful praise of God. If there is no thanksgiving to express, no songs of praise to sing, no gifts of love to offer, and no humble devotions to manifest, then why draw near? Remember “*the blood of Jesus . . . cleanses our consciences . . . so that we may serve*” (“**worship**” in Greek) **the living God**” (Hebrews 9:14). Christians can derive, with unquestioned conviction, that we are acceptable in the presence of God “**in full assurance of faith.**” We have a right to be in the Most Holy Place. Jesus obtained that right for us on the cross. Since that **right** cost Jesus dearly, it would be a travesty, an unconscionable act of ingratitude for us now to fail to exercise the privilege of drawing near! Christians must not neglect the collective church assemblies when it gathers for worship on the Lord’s day.

There are two preconditions mentioned to drawing near. The **first condition** is “*having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.*” The heart relates to the conscience of the worshiper. The worshiper’s conscience has been mentioned by the writer other times in this book (cf.

Hebrews 9:9; 9:14; 10:2; 13:18). The **“sprinkling”** is done by Christ, the Priest, with His own blood. Moses sprinkled the old covenant people with the blood of calves; they were the *“copies of the heavenly things”* (Hebrews 9:19-23). But the *“heavenly things themselves”* had to be sprinkled with the blood of *“better sacrifices than those”* (Hebrews 9:23). First Peter 1:2 makes mention of *“Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of his blood.”* It is the **“sprinkling of his blood”** that *“cleanses us from a guilty conscience.”* The sin is gone, so the conscience is clear!

The **second condition** is *“... having our bodies washed with pure water.”* The washing of the body relates to Christian baptism. The *“pure water”* is simply the waters of purification. In the New Testament baptism is often referred to as a *“washing”* (cf. Acts 22:16; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5). It is clear that the *“blood of Christ”* is *“sprinkled”* on the *“heart”* at the moment *“the body”* is *“washed with pure water.”* And it is *“the blood of Christ that cleanses the conscience from acts that lead to death”* (Hebrews 9:14). In this context of Hebrews 10:22, the **“sprinkling”** and the **“washing”** are joined together in one act. The Apostle Peter affirms *“... 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”* (1 Peter 3:21). It is at the baptistery that the candidate asks God to apply the blood of Jesus to cover his sin and cleanse his conscience. Without the sprinkling of the blood and the washing of the body, there would be no privilege of drawing near to God — and whatever worship might be offered would never be accepted by God (cf. Isaiah 35:8-10). It is only for the redeemed.

The **third attitude** for those who draw near to God is *“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess”* (Hebrews 10:23). Christians need to have an **attitude of “hope”** that holds firmly to the return of Christ to redeem His people from the earth and the grave (cf. Hebrews 9:28). This is the same *“hope”* that is

*“an anchor for the soul, firm and secure”* (Hebrews 6:19). It is **“hope”** that is based on the unchangeable character of God and confirmed by His verbal promises backed up by His oath (cf. Hebrews 6:17).

The **fourth attitude** for those who draw near to God is they must manifest a confidence in the fidelity of God *“for he who promised is faithful”* (Hebrews 10:23). He promised Christians they would enter *“his rest”* (Hebrews 4:9-10). God’s promises are sure, for He cannot lie! (cf. Hebrews 6:18). The writer of Hebrews is pleading with his readers not to give up on the exercise of their privilege. They must not lose their **faith in Christ** who is the source of their hope. They would be hopeless if they returned to the first covenant which has been dismantled.

Hebrews 10:23-24 seems to indicate that some readers were reverting back to the old Hebrew system. This greatly disturbed the writer of Hebrews. He urged Christians to *“consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds”* (Hebrews 10:24). Christians must monitor the spiritual status of one another. It is important that they literally prod each other to *“love”* toward God and *“good deeds”* toward one another. This is one of the other purposes for drawing near in collective assemblies. The major purpose is to worship God, but assemblies are also useful for the opportunity they give to *“consider how we may spur one another on.”* The best way to **“spur”** a weak Christian is to remind him of all the privileges he enjoys in Christ, which were impossible under the old system.

The writer of Hebrews is calling upon his readers to remain strong in their Christian faith. He continues, *“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”* (Hebrews 10:25). The phrase *“give up meeting together”* in the Greek has the force of choosing to separate themselves from *“meeting together.”* For some it had already become a settled practice or *“habit”* to not meet with each

other. This language would not apply to a person who occasionally misses a church service. It applies more to one who has totally given up *“meeting together”* probably because he is losing his faith in Christ. Some in this situation were probably returning to the assemblies of the Jews in their synagogues on the Sabbath even though those Hebrew gatherings were no longer valid before God. The total Hebrew system had been removed with the inauguration of the new system of Christ. They needed to *“hold unswervingly to their hope”* in Christ (Hebrews 10:23).

The writer of Hebrews evidently is referring to church meetings on the Lord’s day because it is on that day that Christians enjoy the privilege of collective worship in the throne room. All Christians need to hold unswervingly to that privilege. This verse demands that Christians *“exhort one another”* (Hebrews 10:25, ASV). *“Exhort”* is really the force of the word rather than *“encourage.”* The whole book of Hebrews was written as an exhortation. Hebrews 13:22 says, *“Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.”* With the explanation of the deity and humanity of Christ as the Priest whose sacrifice of Himself mediated a new covenant and established a new sanctuary relation with God, the reader of Hebrews would be exhorted to hold tenaciously to his faith in Christ for the privileges He brings. It would be good to use this book as subject matter when dealing with a Christian who is straying away from Christ. What better message could he be given than the promises of God through Christ, the privileges of those who believe, and the peril of those who depart from Christ. All these subjects are adequately presented in this book.

The writer of Hebrews says that their encouragement should be *“all the more (intense) as you see the Day approaching.”* The phrase *“the Day”* does not refer to the Lord’s day. He is encouraging his readers to use the Lord’s day assemblies to encourage each other in view of *“the Day”*

*approaching.*” He is referring to a specific “*Day.*” Various suggestions have been made by students and teachers on what “*Day*” is intended. There seems to be at least four suggested possibilities from which to select.

1. The Lord’s day seems to be discounted because the writer of Hebrews urges Christians not to “*give up meeting together . . . and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*” “*The Day approaching*” would hardly fit into the weekly assembly of “*meeting together*” because it seems evident that this “*Day*” was a specific day on the near horizon for those readers.
2. The day of judgment has been suggested as an optional view for defining “*the Day.*” But in view of the fact that judgment day will “*come like a thief in the night*” (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10), it does not seem likely that such a view could be given much credit.
3. Some have suggested that “*the Day*” may be the day of each person’s death. But that seems so remote to the context of this book that it hardly deserves further consideration. Few people can “*see*” the day of their death “*approaching.*”
4. The day most suited to the content of this book seems to be referring to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year A.D. 70. There are a number of facts that support this view. Jesus had clearly told His disciples of the total destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and most of its people in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 17 and 21. He had even given them visible signs to identify the arrival of that day. In those Gospel records, He said that He personally did not know the exact day Jerusalem would fall prey to the Romans (cf. Matthew 24:36), but that it would happen in that generation (cf. Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30;

Luke 21:32). He foretold the vengeance of God that would *“come upon this generation”* (Matthew 23:36). Therefore all those early Christians knew that such a *“Day”* was coming. When it did come, they were to flee the city of Jerusalem, otherwise they would be taken with the unbelievers among the Jews. The Romans would spare none! Jesus had pointed to things His people could *“see”* to indicate the arrival of that day (cf. Matthew 24:28, 33, 42; Mark 13:29; Luke 17:37; 21:20). Luke 21:20 is particularly graphic, *“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near.”*

In view of those visible evidences, the disciples could easily *“see the Day approaching.”* It is little wonder that the writer of Hebrews encouraged his readers to hold tenaciously to their faith in Christ and not revert to Judaism. For when the Romans were finished with Jerusalem, *“They will not leave one stone on another”* (Luke 19:44) in the entire city. The temple will be torn down completely. The priests will be exported to Rome or be killed in the siege. There will be no more sacrifices offered in Jerusalem or elsewhere by Jews. So those being tempted to return to the Hebrew religion will have nothing to return to after A.D. 70. Even if the Romans had not devastated the city, none of those services would have had any validity before God anyway! In Hebrews 10:37 the author stated that Habakkuk’s prophecy was to be fulfilled *“in just a very little while.”* It is therefore evident that his readers were living under the shadow of the total destruction of Jerusalem and the religious system that was centered there in Judaism.

Again to support this fourth view, notice that the writer of Hebrews warns those who ignore his exhortation and return to Judaism in the very next verse: *“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left”* (Hebrews 10:26). In other words, they would be returning to a religious system that would not have

any valid sacrifice for atonement. The prophecy of Habakkuk 2:1-3 applies to their present situation:

*I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he (God) will say to me, . . . Then the Lord replied: 'Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an **appointed time**; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.'*

The “**appointed time**” would inevitably come even if it lingered long after Habakkuk’s time. The prophecy speaks “**of the end**” evidently of the city of Jerusalem. It is clear from Hebrews 10:37-39 that the writer considers the prophecy of Habakkuk as applying to his specific generation of readers. In Hebrews 10:39 he warned that “*those who shrink back*” into Judaism will be the ones who are “*destroyed*.”

Once again in Hebrews 12:26-27, the writer of Hebrews applies a graphic prophecy from Haggai 2:6-7 to his generation as they stood under the menace of the Roman onslaught against Jerusalem. Haggai spoke in the days after the restoration of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonian army in the days of the exile of Judah. The Jews that had returned to Jerusalem had constructed a temple from the rubble gathered from the devastation done by the Babylonians seventy years before. Haggai prophesied that just as the former temple had been destroyed, so God said,

*In a little while I will **once more** shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come and I will fill this house with glory.*

The Hebrew writer promised that this **shaking** was about to take place in the final removal of the Jewish temple. In Hebrews 12:27 the author interprets: *“The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken — that is created things — so that what cannot be shaken may remain.”* The **“shaken”** things are Jerusalem, the temple, and the whole religious structure of Judaism. The things that *“cannot be shaken”* is the eternal **“kingdom that cannot be shaken”** (Hebrews 12:28) — the unshakable kingdom of Christ.

From these obvious applications of the Hebrew writer, it is clear that **“the Day approaching”** related to the destruction of Jerusalem. He simply warns his readers to stay with the Christ for His new world order is the only one that will survive the Roman desolation. Stay with the Christ and stay faithful to your Christian privilege of drawing near to God through the collective assemblies of the church on the Lord’s Day.

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# THE PENALTY OF FORSAKING

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## Hebrews 10:26-39

The lesson of Christ's Superior Sacrifice in chapter 18 presented a declaration of the Christian privilege. Chapter 19 discusses the peril, the danger, and the mistake an individual would be making to give up that privilege. The writer of Hebrews points out how completely unique Jesus is and what peril would come upon an individual if he were to leave Christ. Hebrews 10:25 mentioned that some were into the custom of completely separating themselves from assembling with other Christians on the Lord's Day. It is evident that the writer is afraid that if abandoning the Christian privilege continues, the individual is going to fall into a condition that is irreparable.

### **The Penalty for the Willful Sinner**

*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 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? For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living*

*God* (Hebrews 10:26-31).

The word “*sinning*” in Hebrews 10:26 is a present participle which relates to the sin of not meeting together “*as some are in the habit of doing*” (Hebrews 10:25). The sin in this context is the sin of forsaking Christ. That sin manifests itself in the cessation of attendance at the Lord’s Day worship assemblies. The phrase “*knowledge of the truth*” gives the information that the parties under discussion had once been fully taught about Christ, had embraced Him, and had enjoyed the Christian privilege for a period of time. If they go back to the Hebrew system, the writer tells them they are going back to a sacrificial system that does not have any value. In Christ, they have a standing sacrifice. Hebrews 10:18 triumphantly announced “*where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin*” – there is no more need for another sacrifice. Christians have been sacrificially “*made perfect forever*” (Hebrews 10:14). Christians will never need another sacrifice to remove sins because the sacrifice of Christ also takes care of all the sins that will ever be committed on the face of the earth. The point is that in Christ they have a standing sacrifice. The Christian has a sacrifice that is a standing, valid, God-accepted, God-acknowledged, and God-pleasing sacrifice. Leaving that valid sacrifice and going back to the now defunct Hebrew system would mean leaving the only sacrifice that atones for sin.

The phrase “*If we deliberately keep on sinning*” does not relate to just any sin that a person may voluntarily commit. If that were true, then any sin a Christian commits, knowing beforehand that it is a sin, would place him in a condition without possible pardon. That would demand that the Christian live sinlessly from the time of his baptism. The writer is not talking about just any sin. He is referring to the sin of apostasy from Christ as the next verses confirm.

There is no sacrifice remaining, but there is *“a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God”* (Hebrews 10:27). **“Judgment”** will come to that individual who abandons Christ because he will stand before God without Christ’s sacrifice to atone for his sins. There is the fierceness of a **“raging fire”** that will consume the adversary. The Greek literally expresses the fire as a product of God’s zeal and fervor. When a Christian leaves Christ he becomes hostile to the cause of Christ and is an adversary to the Christian system. Having left Judaism to become Christian, and then to abandon Christianity and return to Judaism is tantamount to declaring Christianity to be an enemy force. These individuals become inimical (hostile) to Christianity which causes God to become hostile to them.

The *“fearful expectation of judgment”* says the prospect of greater punishment awaits the apostate from Christ who had once known the truth but has now rejected it. It is **“fearful,”** and a man should shudder at the prospect. It is also **expected**, which means that it is sure and certain. It cannot be avoided, and it will be accompanied with the *“raging fire”* of Divine wrath. Possibly the writer of Hebrews believes this judgment awaits those who leave Christ and revert to Judaism. It is possible they will be destroyed in the *“raging fire”* of the destruction of Jerusalem. But the final import of this verse involves the eternal damnation of this man’s soul in the **“raging fire”** of hell. If one begins to habitually absent himself from Christian assemblies and to consistently frequent services at the Jewish synagogue, it will not be long before he has completely abandoned Christ and all that He represents to God and man. The Hebrew writer is firmly convinced that if an individual leaves Christ, then eternal judgement lays upon his head, for he has now become an enemy of God.

To clarify the confusion that surrounds **deliberate sins**, it is important to remember that all the sins man commits are deliberate because sin is a **choice** for him. Man chooses to sin,

and that creates his moral accountability. It would be impossible for a person to **consciously but unwillingly** sin. Sin is the union of the will with the unholy desire that makes sin to be sin anyway. Even if a person knows his action is sinful but proceeds in it he has a standing sacrifice that will cover that sin if his faith in Christ is still intact. He knows it is wrong, but he does it anyway. He is ashamed of it, but he still believes in Christ. He still trusts in Christ's sacrificial atonement, and he has standing forgiveness. His relationship with God is not destroyed because of sin. The Christian does not live under the menace of his transgressions, because he has a standing sacrifice. Redemption **is**, remission **is**, and therefore, the Christian stands with an enjoyment of that continued relationship with God because Jesus not only gave him life, He maintains life. By analogy, Christians are plugged into Jesus as a **life support system**, and if we unplug from him, then there is no other life support system. Unplugged from our life support system, who is Jesus, we are abandoned to the direct consequences of our sin.

When man deliberately rejected the Law of Moses, the penalty was severe and immediate — *"Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses"* (Hebrews 10:28). Even under the Law there was no sacrificial provision for such "high-handed" sins. The writer uses the severity of the lessor Law to confirm the more dire consequences for violent rejection of the higher Law of Christ. The writer of Hebrews presents two other warnings based on the comparison of the lessor Law of Moses and the greater Law of Christ: *"How shall we escape . . . "* God's judgment (Hebrews 2:3) and *" . . . They did not escape when they refused him "* (Hebrews 12:25). Both these passages stand as warnings for the Christian to consider if he is contemplating a return to Judaism. God imposed the obligation on the people of Israel to take one who rejected His Law out of the gates of the city and to stone him because he had abandoned the Law of

God. One who rejected God's Law considered that Law unimportant; he was belligerent and rebellious in his rejection. God did not want that kind of individual to remain in the camp of Israel contaminating the thoughts of others. A parallel is shown to the individual who rejects the Law of Christ. The Old Testament records what happened to the man who rejected the Law of Moses — "*he died without mercy.*"

By way of comparison, a man who rejected the Law of Moses and refused to be governed by it received the physical punishment imposed by the death penalty. God says it will be a much more severe spiritual penalty that awaits the man who has rejected Christ. The writer of Hebrews asks the question:

*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? (Hebrews 10:29).*

The "**man**" who rejects Christ has done three things: "*trampled the Son of God under foot,*" "*treated as an unholy thing the blood*" of Jesus, and has "insulted" the Holy Spirit.

Trampling "*under foot*" Jesus indicates an attitude of loathing and disgust. When a person steps on a scorpion, that is enough to kill it. But if he proceeds to stomp it into the ground, that expresses his anger and abhorrence. Such action toward Jesus would indicate that the person no longer believes Him to be the Messiah and is expressing his disgust toward Jesus. In Hebrews 6:6 the writer of Hebrews says these actions are "... *crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.*" When man rejects Christ and believes He is an imposter, **that is the deliberate sin** of Hebrew 10:26.

The phrase "*treating as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him*" refers to man's attitude to the sacrifices of Christ. The word "*unholy*" in the Greek is **koinon**

or common. The writer of Hebrews is saying that one who has this attitude treats Jesus' blood as if it has no more redeeming power than ordinary human blood. But this was the ***"blood of the covenant"*** that Jesus inaugurated. Hebrews 9:15 affirms that it was through Jesus' blood that he *"mediated the new covenant"* and this was the blood that had once *"sanctified him"* (Hebrews 10:29). Jesus' blood cleanses that ***"man,"*** grants him a clear conscience, gives him throne room standing, and obtains for him the promise of eternal rest with God. It would be totally ridiculous to affirm that such a *"man"* was not once saved by the blood of Jesus. That *"man"* had been ***"sanctified,"*** and sanctification equals salvation. Hebrews 10:11 says that Jesus' sacrifice made us ***"holy,"*** and Hebrews 10:14 affirms, *"that by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."* There is no reason to think that this *"man"* was not a man saved by Jesus' blood. This point is stressed because some false teachers assume that once a person is born again he cannot sin and be lost, but the Hebrew writer strongly opposes this assumption.

The next thing mentioned about this *"man"* also confirms he has lost his salvation. The scripture says he *" . . . **has insulted the Spirit of grace**"* (Hebrews 10:29). He makes himself an enemy of God because the Holy Spirit is given as a seal or confirmation of sonship. A person places a brand or mark on his property to confirm ownership. God gives the Holy Spirit to Christians to prove that they are His children (cf. Acts 2:38, 5:32; Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:13-14, 4:30). The indwelling Spirit gives confirmation of salvation and sonship. And if we are sons, then we are heirs of God (cf. Romans 8:15-16). Christians are told, *"Do not grieve the Spirit, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption"* (Ephesians 4:30). When one ***"insults the Spirit of grace,"*** he has driven the Spirit from himself by his rejection of the Messiah.

The writer says, *"For we know him who said, 'It is mine to*

*avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people'"* (Hebrews 10:30). This quotation comes from Deuteronomy 32:35-36. The context in Deuteronomy is significant because this is the point when God gives Israel the "Covenant of Blessings and Cursings." The writer affirms, *"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Hebrews 10:31). The words of Hebrews 10:31 seem to be an adaptation of 2 Samuel 24:14 where David clearly expected God to do right about His people: *"Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great."* These words are comforting words for the believer, but they are terrible words for the apostate from Christ. Hebrews 12:29 states that *"our God is a consuming fire."* The **"man"** who has turned his back on Christ is the *"man"* who should have *"a fearful expectation of judgement and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God"* (Hebrews 10:27). When God consumes His enemies they will fall headlong into the eternal penalties of divine judgement.

### **The Reason and Reward of Patient Endurance**

*Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 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. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And*

*if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. ' But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved (Hebrews 10:32-39).*

Memory is an excellent tool used by the writer of Hebrews with his readers. He wants them to go back to the early days of their conversion. In some cases, that may mean remembering as far back as the day of Pentecost, when the church was fresh. When the church began, Christians were excited about their conversion, their intimate union with God, and the intensive fellowship with the brethren. Acts 2:42-47 explains the early characteristics of the church:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe . . . All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

In Hebrews 10:32 the writer of Hebrews is asking his readers to remember how it used to be in the beginning. He says, “Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.” He wants them to remember when they “received the light” and “when you stood your ground” when their former Jewish friends and family ridiculed them for their faith in Christ. They were persecuted, but still “stood” with Jesus even “in the face of suffering” for the cause of Christ. They did

not let the opposition turn them away from Jesus — they did not give up.

The Jewish opposition to the early church is a matter of record. It was severe and cruel: *“Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated”* (Hebrews 10:33). Those early Christians were unmoved and undaunted by the persecutions. Whether endured personally or by standing in solidarity with fellow Christians who were hurting, they maintained their faith. The writer of Hebrews still wants them to remember how they were opposed and insulted; they were called names that were not at all complimentary. Evidently those who did the persecuting harshly turned their fury against Jesus, the One in whom the Christians fervently believed. Some Christians themselves may not have been hurt personally or called names, but other brethren were. Many Christians were thrown in prison and their fellow Christians **“stood”** by their sides.

The writer of Hebrews tells his readers, *“You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better possessions”* (Hebrews 10:34). Christians were called upon to support those who were in prison and they **“joyfully accepted”** their own property being taken from them. Not only were their possessions taken, but their rights were denied. In the first century when a Jew left the family’s time-honored religion, he was often disinherited by his unconverted Hebrew father. The Christian was stripped of his inheritance, which may have been part of why some of them were thinking of returning to Judaism; at least they would get their inheritance back.

Jews converted to Christianity were considered traitors to the Hebrew cause, and therefore, treated as if they had died and they would be disinherited. The reason they were able to take the loss of inheritance **“joyfully”** was because they knew that Christ brought them *“better possessions”* of an eternal nature.

If a man knew the real value of those “*better possessions*” he would be willing to give up anything on earth in order to get the heavenly possession. When Jesus invites people to give up everything they have, it looks like a great sacrifice, but it is not. If they give up everything they have in order to get everything that **He** has, even if they are fabulously rich, it is still an advantageous trade. Whatever price must be paid to live faithfully to the cause of Christ is a price well worth paying.

The writer of Hebrews knew that people “*throw away*” the things they think are worthless. He said, “***So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded***” (Hebrews 10:35). Christianity is not worthless! It alone possesses all worth (cf. Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl: Matthew 13:44-45). The “***confidence***” mentioned in this verse is really the same as the “*boldness*” mentioned earlier. It is “*boldness*” to enter the throne room in an exercise of faith (cf. Hebrews 10:19). There is “*boldness*” to approach the throne of grace to receive grace and mercy (cf. Hebrews 4:16). Christians need to keep their “***confidence***” in Christ because “*it will be richly rewarded*” not only in this life, but also in the life which is to come.

Evidently some of those early converts had a “*throw away*” attitude about earthly properties. All of them voluntarily sold their possessions and made distribution according to need. But as time passes, after a number of years those possessions begin to take on a little more value to them. Those properties become a little more enticing and tempting. So the writer of Hebrews warned them not to allow possessions to draw them away from the greater reward. They could give up Christ and their Hebrew father would welcome them back into the family and reinstate them back into inheritance. The choice was theirs — they could be welcomed back into their earthly families and be disinherited by the Heavenly Father or they could choose to be given a heavenly home and be disinherited by their Hebrew father. Which would have the worst result?

The writer of Hebrews urged his readers saying, “*You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised*” (Hebrews 10:36). Perseverance is needed when trials and temptations lay heavy on a man’s life. Patience is a better translation of the Greek in this verse. Be patient and you will receive what God has promised: present privileges in Christ and eternal inheritance when Christ returns. Inheritance from God is still an open option for the readers. But if they depart, they may have no more “todays” in which to return.

Something else to be remembered in this context is the fact that the Romans are coming. They will completely destroy and raze all Hebrew property that is in their path. The Hebrew writer is urging his readers to stay faithful to Christ because the days are few before the Romans come. Then it will become evident why it would be foolish for a Christian to abandon Christ for some earthly property. He says,

*For in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him’* (Hebrews 10:37-38; cf. Habakkuk 2:3-4).

These verses contains a prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem. The time is very short. The Hebrew in the Habakkuk text says, “*in a little while,*” suggesting that the readers are standing under the very shadow of that event. The phrase “***He who is coming***” could refer to Christ as He comes in judgment against the rebellious nation of Israel at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. Or the phrase could refer to the Romans. In either case, the event is coming soon and will not delayed.

Habakkuk 2:4 declares an eternal principle by which God deals with man. It is the principle of obedient faith. Others may

well face the “**raging fire**” of divine judgement on a rebellious nation, but the Christian “**will live**” spiritually in union with God. He will have spiritual life. The passage does not speak of simply physical life, though evidently those who were faithful to Christ and believed His warnings given in Matthew 24 would flee Jerusalem and go to the mountains for safety. Those who fled would preserve their physical lives, but the text more properly deals with the spiritual life preserved for the man of faith. Anyone who rejects the Faith and returns to Judaism, in spite of all the warnings to the contrary, shall likely lose his physical life in the siege. But worse, since God “*will not be pleased with him,*” he shall consequently lose his soul.

The writer of Hebrews closes this section of scripture with: “*But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved*” (Hebrews 10:39). The **shrinking back** would be a return to the defunct Hebrew religion. Those who do so “**are destroyed**” both physically and spiritually — and ultimately eternally. Yet the writer wishes to encourage his readers by expressing his confidence that they have not yet gone so far as to be irreconcilable to faith in Christ. Perhaps it is more a wish that he expresses than a clear affirmation that their condition is not hopeless. One final word of encouragement is given: “*We are of those who believe and are saved.*” The salvation relates to the soul and the object of the faith is the Christ — for only in Him is there salvation.

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# THE TESTIMONY OF FAITH

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## Hebrews 11:1-40

Throughout the book of Hebrews the author has been encouraging his readers to remain faithful to their initial beginning in Christ. Particularly in Hebrews 10:38-39 he insisted on the urgency of clinging to the Lord quoting Habakkuk 2:4: *“But my righteous one will live by faith.”* He closed the last section of scripture with encouraging words: *“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved”* (Hebrews 10:39). Faith is the only way God has ever dealt with men. It is the principle by which God grants life to a man. There is an obvious need to define faith both by what it is and by what it does for a man. Soul-saving faith is a special kind of faith. Not everyone who believes has a soul-saving belief. The faith which the author is discussing in Habakkuk is faith that waits for God to speak. Habakkuk 2:1 says, *“I will wait for the word of Jehovah.”* Faith includes waiting and acting upon it. Habakkuk insists that when God says to run, the man of faith runs. That is the nature of the faith Habakkuk was writing about. And the man who has that kind of faith is made **“righteous”** by his faith and he **“lives”** spiritually. The man who lives by faith is declared righteous, not by his performance, but as a gift that grows out of the fruits of Calvary.

### Soul Saving Faith Defined

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

## The Essence and Expression of Faith

In Hebrews 11: 1 the author used the verb of being: *“faith is.”* It is true that faith “does,” but **being verbs** define the nature or essence of what is being discussed. The Greek is much more definite about the essence of faith than this translation indicates. The author says first that *“faith is the foundation (**hupostasis**) of what we **hope** for”* (KJV). All **“hope”** is based upon faith, and faith gives *“foundation”* to the aspirations of the age to come. That is one of the qualities of faith. Another quality of faith is being *“certain of what we do not see.”* The word for **“certain”** in the Greek is *elegxos*, which is often translated *“evidence”* (KJV). The word *“evidence”* refers to all the information given in a court room so that a **conviction** or acquittal can be obtained. It is the same word used by Jesus in John 8:46, when he asked: *“Can any of you **prove** me guilty of sin?”* In John 16:8 Jesus said the Holy Spirit would *“convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”* This **proof/ conviction** is really the *“evidence”* of which the Hebrew writer speaks. He says that faith gives its demonstration — there is visible evidence that the person believes.

How does one give **“evidence”** of *“what we do not see?”* Faith relates to *“unseen”* things, but it expresses itself in very visible ways. Though the definitions of faith that were given are adequate, it appears that the author realizes that his definition is a little unwieldy (hard to handle) for his readers. So it appears the author decided the best way to define faith was to look into the lives of those people who have it. What does faith lead people to do? How does it manifest itself? What are the *“unseen”* elements that are characteristic of their faith? What is the *“hope”* to which faith gives foundation? There are two things to look for in this context. The **first** regards the *“evidence”* of *“unseen”* things where faith gives its demonstration. The **second** relates to the *“hope”* that is being presented in the ingredient of faith. As the writer of Hebrews

goes through a long list of men and women of faith in ages past, look for the **“unseen”** things to which they give faithful evidence. Then look at what they **“hoped”** to obtain because of their faith.

### **The Demonstration of Faith**

*This is what the ancients were commended for. 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 (Hebrews 11:2-3).*

God’s commendation of people of faith in ages past was because their trust was in God who inspired their **“hope.”** Their **“faith”** in **“things not yet seen”** (Hebrews 11:1, KJV) led them to give practical, visible demonstrations in their lives that proved they believed. Since **“the righteous will live by faith”** (Habbakuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Hebrews 10:38), it is clearly implied that those mentioned in this chapter were justified people. Man can see the world, its mountains, seas, the sun, moon, and the stars. All of these are visible, external evidences of the **“unseen”** nothing out of which God created the world. The visible creation is **“evidence”** of an **“unseen”** God who created it. Man did not have to see creation to believe that it exists or that God made it. Creation is self-authenticating. That becomes a parallel to the writer’s definition of faith. Faith is also self-authenticating. A man does not have to be asked if he has faith. An examination of his life gives ample **“evidence”** and demonstration of the presence or absence of faith. The writer of Hebrews begins early in history and proceeds through a long list of men and women who were evidentially people of faith.

### **Abel — Faith in Worship**

*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 (Hebrews 11:4).*

The first case for the witness stand is **Abel**. In a courtroom situation, the witness must answer questions, so consider the following questions:

“Abel, do you believe that God exists?” . . . . . “Yes.”

“Have you seen him?” . . . . . “No.”

“Do you believe that he is worthy of worship?” . . . . .

“Yes.”

“Do you believe that your worship ought to comply with His orders?” . . . . . “Yes.”

“Can you prove that you believe all those things?” . .

. . . . . “Yes. Do you see that altar with the specified animal being offered to God as worship? That is my evidence of faith.”

“Abel, what is the *“unseen”* element in your faith?”

. . . . . “God.”

The visible evidence of Abel’s faith was the altar and its sacrifice. By definition from the Hebrew writer, Abel was a man of faith. He would have been foolish to offer a sacrifice to a non-existent God. Though God is invisible, there was a convicting demonstration that Abel, nevertheless, believed in Him. The writer of Hebrews says, *“And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.”* Abel speaks through his evidential faith that God is, and that He is worthy of obedience and praise. It would seem that Cain also believed that God existed, and that He was worthy of praise, but he did not seem to believe that He was a God that had to be obeyed completely.

*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. 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 (Hebrews 11:4-6).*

The writer of Hebrews presents Enoch as the next example. From the history of Enoch's life recorded in Genesis 5, it is clear that he was a true man of faith. The same statement is made twice about him: ***“Enoch walked with God”*** (Genesis 5:22, 24). In this case the invisible ingredient once again is God Himself. How does a man walk with an invisible God? The answer is he walks by faith. It is the **walk** of faith that is the demonstration of a man's faith. How long did Enoch walk? He lived 365 years and all of those years he *“walked with God.”* A good question is “How does God walk?” If Enoch walked with God, he had to know **how** God walks. Quite evidently, Enoch knew how God walked, and through his own walk he gave enough proof to insure that he was worthy of heaven. Enoch knew that God walks in truth, in righteousness, in love, in mercy, in peace, and in forgiveness. Enoch's example says he liked the way God walks and he walked with Him. The longer he walked like God, the closer and closer they became to each other. Enoch finally found himself walking side by side with God. They walked together so beautifully that God just decided to take Enoch home with him. Enoch did not taste of death. How does a man walk with an invisible God? He walks in the likeness of God's character — in the qualities of His moral and ethical standards. John the Apostle said, *“Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did”* (1 John 2:6). It is not enough to simply say, “I believe.” Faith must be demonstrated.

Since faith is a demonstration, so-called faith (a faith without the evidence) is not faith in the Biblical sense.

The writer of Hebrews assures his readers that a lack of faith has negative consequences:

*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 (Hebrews 11:6).*

A man without faith cannot possibly “**please God.**” Real faith has two very essential elements as its contents. There must be the conviction that God exists and the added conviction that He rewards those who seek Him. Without these two convictions, “*it is impossible to please God.*” James 2:14-26 contains a lengthy discussion about the nature of faith. James ended by saying, “*so faith without deeds (works in KJV) is dead*” (James 2:26). Abel **offered**. Enoch **walked**. That offering and that walk are demonstrations God can accept and reward.

### Noah — Work done in Faith

*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 (Hebrews 11:7).*

How does a man build an ark by faith? Does he simply fold his arms and believe it into existence? Does he trust that God will make it happen? An ark is built “*by faith*” by taking a hammer and a saw and about half a forest of gopher wood and putting together an ark. It only took Noah 120 years to get it done, but when it was finished it stood as one fantastic demonstration of Noah’s faith. An ark on the mountain side is real “*evidence*”! Since faith is “*evidence of the unseen,*” what

was the “*unseen*” element in Noah’s faith? He was “*warned about things not yet seen,*” and that warning prompted him to build an ark by faith. The “*unseen*” for Noah was the coming flood. When God informed him of the impending flood, he moved with “*holy fear*” which stresses the attitude that accompanied his building of the ark. Because of Noah’s “*faith*” and “*holy fear,*” his actions saved his family and made him an “*heir of righteousness that comes by faith.*” God declared him righteous because he was a man who trustingly accepted what God said about the flood.

Noah had never seen it rain, so it is easy to imagine the conversation that might have taken place when God told Noah about the flood. He probably asked, “What is a flood?” The details God gave him would explain the “*holy fear.*” Surely Noah wanted to know when it was going to happen. God would have told him it would be in 120 years. It would be easy to imagine Noah saying, “I am not a very good swimmer. Is there anything that I can do to prepare for the flood?” That would be when God gave Noah the details about the ark. Noah must have begun construction immediately. He accepted the reality of the “*unseen*” flood simply because God had foretold its coming.

Notice something interesting about Noah. The Bible does not say what his profession was before he was told about the flood. He might have been a merchant, a farmer, a rancher or maybe a builder. Whatever his former profession was, when God told him about the flood, he suddenly changed his profession. Before he received God’s prophecy, ark building would have been the lowest item on Noah’s list of priorities, but when God told him about the coming flood, it suddenly revolutionized Noah’s priorities, and ark building became a priority one assignment. That information totally and radically changed his profession. Noah became a professional ark builder. He may have done other things, but his emphasis was to build an ark because he knew the flood was coming.

Noah’s actions are the evidence of what faith does to a

man. Faith will lead a man to **offer** sacrifices unto God, knowing that he is and that He deserves to be worshiped. It will lead a man to **walk** in the moral standards of God. Faith will lead a man to change his profession. Faith will lead a man to rearrange his priorities. Faith will lead a man to build a monstrous ark even in the face of ridicule of his contemporaries. Since Noah's contemporaries had no faith, the work of Noah on the ark must have appeared the height of stupidity. They ridiculed Noah, but he kept building his ark because he knew what God had promised, God would accomplish.

### **Abraham — Waiting and Obeying in Faith**

*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. 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. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 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. 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 (Hebrews 11:8-12).*

Faith obeys even when it does not see the destination God has promised. Abraham began his trip “*even though he did not know where he was going.*” Imagine a husband coming home to his wife and saying, “Get packed, we are going to leave for a land God is going to give us.” Sarah may have questioned

Abraham about where this land was, but he did not know. He was sure that if God promised the land, then God would know where it was and how to get them there. He did not even need to know where he would spend the first night because he knew God was leading him. God cannot lead a man who stands still. Biblical history assures us that God conducted them to the promised land.

Another interesting thing about Abraham's faith was the way he lived when he arrived in the promised land. He did not have to see the promised land to know that God was going to give it to him. That was the "*unseen*" element of Abraham's faith. He lived in tents in the land of promise after God got him there. The land of promise was his country, so why did he continue to live as a nomad in a tent? Why did he not settle into the land and build a permanent residence for his family? Scripture says, he lived as "*a stranger in a foreign country.*" A "*stranger*" is a non-resident; "*a foreign country*" means the place was not where his citizenship was. God had given this land to Abraham, but "*he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God*" (Hebrews 11:10).

Abraham did not settle into the land because when people start settling into the land, it seems like the land starts settling into them. He was a transient—he was temporary, a passer-by and his tent affirms that fact. This world was not Abraham's home (cf. Hebrews 11:13-16, 37). The writer of Hebrews says, "*The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground*" (Hebrews 11:38). Men and women of faith deserve more than this world can give. The "*city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God*" is heaven. The conditions that surround a man's life here on earth are not important if he has confidence and faith that heaven will be his eternal home. The invisible elements of Abraham's faith were the physical land of promise first, but more significantly it was the "*city with*

***foundations.***” Abraham’s faith caused him to live in harmony with those “*unseen*” but real destinies. God promised him an earthly land, but that is not the one that attracted his attention. That was not the possession around which his life of faith was built. His faith was built around the eternal city. He could not see it, but he knew it was there.

Even though Abraham was “*past age and Sarah herself was barren*” and well beyond the age of childbearing, God gave them a child because of their faith. Both of them were almost a hundred years old. Even when Sarah was of childbearing age she was sterile, which means that her body was “*twice dead.*” Abraham “*faced the fact that his body was as good as dead — since he was about a hundred years old — and that Sarah’s womb was also dead*” (Romans 4:19). And yet by faith this couple received power to conceive. The “*unseen*” in the manifestation of their faith was a child by the name of Isaac. It was their conviction that what God had promised, he was able to accomplish. They knew “***him to be faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man . . . came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand of the seashore***” (Hebrews 11:11b-12). Abraham and Sarah knew that God was worthy of their deepest trust. Because they believed, their descendants became a great nation, just as God had promised in Genesis 12:2-3. The “*unseen*” element for Abraham and Sarah was the innumerable descendants, but they acted on their faith.

### **The Promised Land and Heaven**

*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. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had*

*been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 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** (Hebrews 11:13-16).*

The writer of Hebrews inserts these statements as he talks about all the people of faith. These people all lived during the patriarchal age which was the pre-Mosaic era. Faith has always been the principle by which God governed His people. These examples go back to the shadows of Eden. These principles of faith by which He dealt with people in the Hebrew age are the same principles of faith by which He deals with people in the Christian age. God has never functioned with people on any other basis than a living, dynamic, demonstratable faith. Their faith was not diminished by age or circumstances. They were people of faith until they died. They were therefore men and women who were made righteous *“by faith”* (cf. Habakkuk 2:4).

Though they did not *“receive the things promised,”* they knew by faith that they would receive them. Even those promises which they did not receive, by the eye of faith *“they saw them and welcomed them from a distance.”* They lived in view of the *“unseen”* realities of heaven. Some people will not believe until they see. The truth is really that people cannot see until they believe. Only through faith are men able to see things that those without faith do not see. Men with faith are able to live as aliens on earth. The unbelieving live as residents of this world.

Time limitations impose restricted treatment of Hebrews 11:14-16. God delights in seeing those who accept Him at His word and is not ashamed to be associated with them as their God. People who accept God’s Word consistently reject earthly, temporary amenities in view of the more glorious, eternal

rewards God has for His people.

### **Children Named Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph**

*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, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones (Hebrews 11:17-22).*

Without his faith, Abraham would have consented to be a murderer. But with faith he was willing to proceed with the burnt offering of his son, and then step back and watch God raise him from the dead. Many others demonstrated their faith just as Abraham did. There was faith with a clear hope. And there was always the invisible ingredient manifested by visible actions. They gave that manifestation of faith to God.

### **Moses — Faith in War**

*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. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather*

*than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 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. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. 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 (Hebrews 11:23-28).*

The Hebrew writer continues by talking about people under the Mosaic dispensation. Look at the faith of Moses. He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and thereby apparently gave up the position of king of Egypt. He chose mistreatment with the people of God rather than enjoyment of sin for a season. The long term glories in heaven would not be sacrificed to short term pleasures in Egypt. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ greater value than all the treasures of Egypt. Here is a manifestation of faith that has relations toward Messiah, and Messiah is 1500 years into the future. And yet Moses knew that Messiah was coming because God had promised. On the basis of that, Moses gave up the kingly position in Egypt. He gave up all the treasures and pleasures of Egypt.

### **The Children of Israel — Winning in Faith**

*By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith*

*conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 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. 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. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 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 — the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect (Hebrews 11:29-40).*

It was on the basis of faith that Israel crossed the Red Sea. By faith they conquered the land of Canaan. By faith the walls of Jericho fell. By faith a harlot named Rahab was saved because she knew that God was with Israel. The writer of Hebrews summarized what he did not have time or space to develop. He says, “*What more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets.*” He would have liked to spend a little bit of time looking at what some of those people did by faith. Faith will always give its demonstration, and if there is no demonstration, if there are no external acts of obedience to manifest that faith, then it is not biblical faith. Faith is faith when it results in surrender and submission to the will of God. Faith is faith when it results in obedience, so the writer says,

*“what more can I say?”* How much more demonstration do we need about faith building upon the invisible? Faith has its *“hope”* founded upon the convictions that God is trustworthy. Men of faith can conquer kingdoms, administer justice, gain what was promised, shut the mouths of lions, quench the fury of flames, escape the edge of swords, see weakness turned into strength, become powerful in battle, rout foreign armies, receive back their dead, and many other such victories. Some glorious things can be accomplished by faith.

Yet for faith some horrible things can be endured without wavering. For faith some were tortured, refused to be released, faced jeers and floggings, were enchained, put in prison, were stoned, were sawed in two, died by the sword, went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated, lived in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. Faith is victorious even in the face of apparent defeat. The writer confidently affirms, *“this world was not worthy of them.”* But to God they are worthy! God *“is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them”* (Hebrews 11:16). He has prepared a *“better country – a heavenly one”* (Hebrews 11:16). It is a *“city with foundations* (that will last throughout eternity) *whose architect and builder is God”* (Hebrews 11:10). Faith is the dynamic of successfully living in that city and the key to eternal life in the hereafter. So He has **“prepared for them a city.”** And this city’s **“builder and maker is God”** and it is a **“city that has foundations”** that will last throughout eternity. Faith is the dynamic of successful living here, and the key to eternal life in the hereafter.

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## CHRISTIAN ENDURANCE

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### Hebrews 12:1-13

In the previous chapter the writer of Hebrews spent considerable time building confidence in “*faith*.” In this chapter he wants to make application of the dynamics of “*faith*” through which men of ages past accomplished great things for God. Those men also endured great things because of their “*faith*.” The contemporary generation of Christians seem to be so urgently in need of “*faith*,” so he gives considerable attention to it. Granted, the times are stressful, but that is when “*faith*” shines more beautifully.

Without doubt the greatest example of “*faith*” that needs to be presented is that of Christ. He stands apart in His expression of “*faith*” in God and in man. He is unique as the “*author and perfecter of our faith*” (Hebrews 12:2). Remember that the generation this author is writing to is under the very shadow of the destruction of Jerusalem — Jesus said, “*All these things are the beginning of travail*” (Matthew 24:8, ASV). The writer is concerned about the survival of his readers, both physically and, particularly, spiritually. That is why he gives so much attention to “*faith*.” He will show them how “*faith*” acts under stress and persecution. “*Faith*” always leans on God. He wants to impress on the mind of his readers that they need to learn how to depend on God. Though external circumstances may give an impression that God has abandoned His children or that they are left prey in the hands of the enemy, it is always true that even when others hurt us there can be divine purposes that can be accomplished for the man who has “*faith*.”

The writer of Hebrews closed out the last section of scripture by giving a long list of great men of “*faith*.” He

showed how they stood firm, they did not bend or yield in the face of persecution, opposition, or even death. Hebrews 11:39 says that all these people were commended by God for their “*faith*,” and yet they did not receive the promises. Some of the promises he was speaking about relate to the coming of the new Messianic age. These people of “*faith*” died before that age arrived, but they died in “*faith*.” The writer closed Hebrews 11 with “*God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect*” (Hebrews 11:40). The “*us*” in this verse refers to Christians; the “*they*” referred to Old Testament men and women of “*faith*.” “*They*” could not be perfected in their relationship with God without “*us*” being made perfect also. That does not mean that their salvation depends upon “*us*,” because Christ is the source of salvation for them and for us. Without Him, neither we nor they could be made perfect before God. With His sacrifice and priestly ministrations available, both we and they can be perfected. He who gives us perfection can and does also bring perfection to those great people of “*faith*” from ages past. Our common salvation has its roots in a common source, Jesus Christ.

### **The Charge to Run Patiently**

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:1-3).*

The “*great cloud of witnesses*” refers to those men from

the Old Testament who gave so much evidence of “*faith*” in God. They surround the Christian like a cloud. They are not “*witnesses*” or spectators of the way Christians run the race; they are “*witnesses*” to the fidelity of God. They stand as the proof to the utility of “*faith*” in Him. Christians serve as the spectators of the way the men of old ran their race. The record of their successes is written on the sacred pages of the Old Testament so that Christians can see the validity of trusting in God regardless of the price one has to pay in this life.

The writer of Hebrews urges his readers to “*throw off everything that hinders,*” referring to attachments of any kind that pull one away from Christ. It could be family relationships or even family inheritance. The words “*throw off*” are the middle voice verb in Greek which demands that each person act upon himself in the removal of all impediments in service to Christ. The phrase “*the sin that so easily entangles*” seems to insist from the context that it regards a lack of “*faith*.” Unbelief is a sinful condition because God has given adequate evidence to confirm every word He has ever given. When “*faith*” begins to fade, then the actions by which it manifests itself automatically begin to disappear from one’s life. Remember “***faith is the evidence***” (Hebrews 11:1, KJV), and when the “*evidence*” is lacking, then “*faith*” is not faith.

All Christian soldiers fight with a “*helmet of salvation*” (Ephesians 6:17) on their heads. So Christians do not run their race to produce their salvation. They run as saved people. Christ purchased salvation for all Christians, so the Christian runs for survival. He is not therefore fighting to be saved, but as one already saved. If our salvation depends on how we run, then God pity the lame! Actually, man’s “*faith*” is a response to the fidelity of God – “*he who promised is faithful*” (Hebrews 10:23) and “*God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown . . .*” (Hebrews 6:10). God’s fidelity and righteousness stimulates the Christian’s response to Him through “*faith*.” Those men of “*faith*” from ages past witness

to God's fidelity toward them and their faithful response to Him. The writer of Hebrews uses their examples as stimuli to encourage his readers.

Those men from ages past serve as examples, but Jesus is the best example of "*faith*." He lived totally faithful to God. His fidelity was never compromised by any personal interest that would jeopardize His relationship with God. The writer of Hebrews says,

*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 (Hebrews 12:2).*

The Greek word **arkegon** is sometimes translated as "*author*" or "**pioneer**" and could as easily be translated "*conductor*" or the "*leader*" of our "*faith*." The word "**perfecter**" suggests He is the one that is conducting His faithful subjects toward the glorious heritage He has prepared for them. Jesus is presented as the one "**who went before** (into heaven for) **us**" (Hebrews 6:20). He is called a forerunner – **prodromos**. Jesus stimulates "*faith*" by His own example and through His role as the one who is "*the author (beginner) and finisher of our faith*" (KJV). "*Faith*" does have its convictions out of the demonstrations of God's fidelity. Jesus "*authors/originates*" "*faith*" by giving the "*evidence*" that He is indeed the Son of God and every claim that He made about Himself is literally true. He is the "*author . . . of our faith*," but He is also the terminator of it. He is the one who began it and He is the one who will conduct it to its logical conclusion which is Heaven itself.

It is important that all Christians "*fix our eyes on Jesus*," because He is the supreme example and goal of all "*faith*." He is the one "*who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame*." The phrase "**for the joy set before him**" clearly relates to the sacrifice He made when He left heaven for

His earthly mission. The word “**for**” in the Greek is *anti*, which means over against or instead of. It relates to the “*joy*” of co-existence with the Father in heaven with all the glories of His divine nature. Instead of choosing the heavenly joys, He gave those up and came to the earth to endure the “*shame*” of the cross. This verse speaks of the enormous sacrifice Jesus made to bring about salvation. In order for Him to accomplish that mission he had to “*scorn the shame*” of the cross. Men do many things to avoid shame, but Jesus deliberately accepted the shameful humiliations of crucifixion so that Christians might be redeemed. We owe Him unmeasured devotions. In leaving heaven, He gave up all that God has to give. And then on earth, He gave up all that man has to give. Read Philippians 2:5-9 for greater explanation of this dual sacrifice of Jesus Christ. After the shameful experience of Calvary, “*he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*” It is easy to see by this example how honor follows pain and glory follows suffering.

In Hebrews 12:3 the writer of Hebrews continues, “*Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*” Prolonged opposition from sinners creates weariness and faintness of heart, but Christians can take lessons from Jesus when persecutions come. Sinners accused Him of some of the most unreasonable things. They slandered His birth, His name, His native city, His claims, and even His miracles. Notice that Jesus ran His race and He never allowed the encumbrances, the concerns of physical existence, to stand in His way. Even in His temptation, He would not compromise His integrity. He would not compromise His relationship with God in order to satisfy any physical need. He always maintained His integrity. The writer of Hebrews is presenting Jesus as an example of one who has faithfully fulfilled His course and has maintained His fidelity toward God.

### The Value of God’s Discipline

*In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 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, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.' Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 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! 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. 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. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 'Make level paths for your feet,' so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed (Hebrews 12:4-13)*

Hebrews 12:4 begins a section on the value of God's discipline. This is yet another comparison of Jesus' sacrifice because Jesus resisted "to the point of shedding . . . blood" and even to the point of His own death. The writer of Hebrews challenges his readers, "*In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*" Jesus struggled against sin in His own life, and then to the "point of blood" for the sins of others. Persecutions will arise against Christians and there will be severe trials and oppositions. There

will be death for some. For some there will be some of the same things that are listed in the closing verses of Hebrews 11.

The writer of Hebrews is saying **it is worth the fight, it is worth the “struggle”** you may have to endure. “*Struggle*” in the Greek is normally the word **agonia**. The English word “agony” comes from that word. But in Hebrews 12:4 the word used is more intense. He called it **antagonizomai**. Christians must take a position antagonistic to sin. When we begin to resist sin and **antagonize**, sin becomes an antagonist. Christians struggle against it, so there is fighting/wrestling. The Apostle Paul told the Ephesians,

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12).*

Wrestling tells us that our warfare against sin is a hands on battle, it is hand-to-hand combat. So remember that Jesus did resist unto blood. And I believe that we have to be impressed and deeply grateful to the blood of Christ because here is one man who paid a higher price and suffered more for our salvation than we would have been willing to pay.

When the Romans come, persecution will be added to the already existing antagonism from the former fellow Jewish compatriots because the Christians will not fight against the Roman invaders. Christians are going to flee, and that will create opposition on the part of their fellow nationals. They will be enduring persecutions and oppositions from two major sources: Romans and Hebrews. That is why the writers says they may have to resist to the “*point of blood.*” Remember though that whenever a Christian suffers, he always suffers with the help of God. He needs to learn to rely and lean upon God in the periods of stress and any persecution he endures.

In Zechariah 13 there is an amazing prediction of what will

happen in Palestine when the Romans come to destroy Jerusalem and what will be happening in the days of Messiah. The writer tells of the fountain that will be opened for the cleansing of sin, but it is a fountain of the blood that will flow from the veins of Messiah. The sword of Divine justice will come down upon the neck, not of the sinner, but of the One who is his substitute, Jesus Christ. The sword is in the hand of God and He is going to punish human sin. The sword falls as God says, *“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones”* (Zechariah 13:7b). The prophet continues to discuss what will happen in the next few years to the sheep. They (the ones who believe in Messiah) will be scattered (cf. Acts 8:1-4). Through the prophet Zechariah, God says He will turn His hand against the little ones. Two-thirds of the land will perish which means that two-thirds of the people will be cut off. History affirms that does happen. The Romans carried thousands of Jews to Rome in slavery.

God promised that one-third of the people would be left in the land, but they will be brought into the fire so that God can *“refine them like silver and test them like gold”* (Zechariah 13:9a). The two-thirds that were destroyed by the Romans did not believe in Messiah and they have rejected Him and will fight against the Romans. The Christians will not fight against the Romans, but they will endure great persecutions at the hand of the Romans and Jews. They will be tried and tested. God said His people will call on His name and He will answer them. Zechariah 13:9b says, *“I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’”* Though Christians will suffer, they are not being punished by God. He is refining His people as gold and silver would be refined.

The writer of Hebrews tells his readers:

*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, because the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son' (Hebrews 12:5-6).*

This quotation is from Proverbs 3:11. God wants to teach His people about regimented life according to His plans. The King James Version translates “disciplines” as “chastens” His sons. A son may think parental chastening is punishment, especially if a switch is used. The root idea of the word “chasten” is “to make chaste.” It means to make something pure and holy by the removal of dross or rubbish. That is the purpose God has in mind. Persecution will come, and through it God can accomplish some good purposes. God does not cause the opposition, even if He has some purposes to bring about through it. God is not the one who will lay His hand on His people. He is not trying to hurt them. If Christians understand what God can and will do through it all, then they can endure the stress and will come out purer after it is all over. Christians may lose the physical battle, but they will win a spiritual battle through it all.

There are some very important lessons to be learned in this passage. **First**, it gives the confirmation of sonship – “*My son, . . . the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?*” (Hebrews 11:5-7). In these verses Christians learn that they have a heavenly Father who is concerned about us in the same way that our physical fathers were when we were young. Christians have dual parentage. When a father is really concerned about the maturity, integrity, and discipline of his son, that father will correct his child. A father who loves his children will impose chastisement when it is necessary. The writer of Hebrews says if a person is without that discipline, then that must mean there is no father who really cares for you.

An undisciplined child is going to develop into a brat that is a problem both to the family and to society. He will not abide by the laws either of God or of man. God is testing His people, treating them as sons, and training them for the greater life. Often when Christians suffer, they are confused and wonder if God still loves them. Discipline is an expression of true love on the part of a caring father. The lack of discipline would indicate that the father does not care how his son acts or grows up. The writer of Hebrews goes as far as to call these sons “*illegitimate children*” – “*If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline) then you are illegitimate children and not true sons*” (Hebrews 12:8).

Children revere and respect their physical fathers because they gave corrective training. The writer continues his thoughts saying,

*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! Our fathers disciplined us for a while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness* (Hebrews 12:9-10).

God, our heavenly Father, disciplines with Paternal concern for our spiritual well-being. One of the greatest fruits of proper discipline will be spiritual “*life*” in God. Earthly fathers only discipline for a few days as does our heavenly Father, but the point is that this discipline will produce eternal rewards. God disciplines His children because He wants them to “*share in his holiness.*” Without God’s holiness, “*no one will see the Lord*” (Hebrews 12:14). God allows discipline for our eternal profit while our earthy fathers discipline for a physical and temporary profit. God is concerned about long term results in the profit that will be eternal in nature.

The writer of Hebrews states the obvious, *“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”* (Hebrews 12:11). This kind of discipline will produce peaceful fruits of righteousness. Discipline is not pleasant, but the end result validates the purpose of it.

Knowing that all men need training in the ways of *“righteousness and peace,”* the writer of Hebrews continues, *“Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ‘Make level paths for your feet,’ so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed”* (Hebrews 12:12-13). He quotes from Isaiah 35:3-4 and Proverbs 4:25 which are parts of the beautiful promise God made about the new *“Way”* Messiah will inaugurate. Isaiah said, *“And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness”* (Isaiah 35:8a). The writer of Hebrews is encouraging his readers to stay on that *“Way.”* They need to set goals and keep their aim. Jesus is the focus they need to walk toward with conviction. Straight and level paths make for smooth and safe travel.

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# THE DIGNITY OF THE CHRISTIAN POSITION

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## Hebrews 12:14-29

The student of the book of Hebrews is aware of the fact that the writer of Hebrews gives a lot of attention to “*faith*,” because he understands that it is the ingredient that enable a Christian to ignore external pressures and to maintain commitment toward the invisible realities of God’s dealings with His people. It is difficult for man to ignore the external because he is so conditioned by things that happen to him and by things he sees. Man tends to be afraid of things he sees, and yet the writer assures his readers that there are unseen realities. God is ever present though no one can see Him. His hand is with His people. The apostle Paul stressed the importance of building upon this conviction: “*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are **being renewed day by day***” (2 Corinthians 4:16). The Christian is gaining in vigor, because his “*faith*” is gaining momentum for him. And though externally he is enduring pressure, the apostle tells us that such temporary affliction is really producing “*an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal*” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). Growing “*faith*” produces benefits that far outweigh any of the suffering that could be laid upon us.

The writer of Hebrews draws some contrasts and builds important concepts about the external needs for his readers. External needs have to do with the appetites of the physical

body, but also the eternal signs of their faith. It is the internal soul of a man that really counts. Minister first to the internal, because it is easy for man to be manipulated by his external needs. External needs are those that respond to the physical senses, the animal appetites. And yet there are other needs of a spiritual nature that are not felt through the senses; they are understood through the mind. God appeals to the reasoning of the mind through His revelation. We know that the spiritual being is there and the spiritual being has needs. The writer says to be sure to stay away from the manipulative forces of the external, but be molded by them to build character, vigor, and strength, which develop the spirit side of man.

### **Exhortation to Holy Living**

*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. 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. 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 (Hebrews 12:14-17).*

It is extremely important to keep this section in context with what was discussed earlier. The Romans are coming, and they will make no distinction between Jew and Jew. A Jew that believed in Christ or a Jew that does not believe in Christ — each will still be a Jew to the Romans. They are going to persecute all Jews. The writer of Hebrews says, “*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord*” (Hebrews 12:14). Christians are not going to be a part of the warfare. They must pursue

personal holiness. This is an imperative command because without pursuing peace and holiness *“no one will see the Lord.”*

Hebrews 12:15-17 proceeds to give warnings that grow out of some very significant scriptures in the Old Testament. The first one is: *“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”* Ah, that is peril. The grace of God is available to all. Man can enjoy it for a season and then lose it or he can miss it completely. Those who have been sanctified once and are cleansed by the blood of Jesus can be defiled once again by turning away from Him. The writer pleads that ***“no bitter root grow up.”*** This is a reference from Deuteronomy 29:18 which has the covenant made with the Israelites in Moab, what was called the Covenant of Blessings and Cursings. The explanation of the conditions of that covenant are detailed in Deuteronomy 28, 29, and 30. There God gave His blessings to those who keep His law and pronounced the curses upon those who violated it. That is the context from which this citation is derived. It could happen to any person who turns away from the living God.

The challenge that the writer is presenting is that no man be defiled. “Defiled” means to lose holiness. God commanded man to *“be holy.”* Christ made man holy by the blood of His sacrifice. God did not want him to be defiled and lose his holiness again. Becoming defiled and losing his holiness meant that man would lose his relationship with Christ. The writer says:

*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. 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 (Hebrews 12:16-17).*

There is no indication in Scripture that Esau was sexually immoral. The Greek word that is used is  *pornos* . It can be defined as any sexual deviation, but it is also used to speak of anyone who is guilty of spiritual adultery. Spiritual adultery happens when a man who is in covenant relation with God becomes an idolater. It is possible that this is what the writer of Hebrews was referring to. That pathetic episode is recorded in Genesis 27. There was the encounter between Jacob and Esau. Jacob offered Esau a bowl of soup in exchange for his “*birthright*.” Esau did the most deeply profane thing of accepting Jacob’s offer because he was such a sensual, hungry person. He traded something very sacred for something profanely unimportant. That is the reason he is called immoral. He simply prostituted the spiritual for the physical. He gave up the lasting for the temporary. He gave up the blessings of the patriarchy, a double inheritance of his father’s goods, and all the other privileges of the firstborn. In the Greek the word for the rights of the firstborn is  *prototakoia* . As firstborn he was honored above other children. He would have become the patriarch on the death of his father and named the ruler of the clan. Esau traded all of this for one bowl of soup (cf. Genesis 25:27-34). The term “*birthright*” will be significant in later verses in this chapter because all believers are called “**God’s firstborn**” (Hebrews 12:23). The writer insists that his readers not make the same mistake Esau did. Under no circumstances should the Christian sell his “*birthright*,” because Christians are the doubly honored. Christians have the privilege of being the firstborn children of God. They occupy that position of honor in the presence of God, but just as Esau sold his physical birthright, a Christian could sell his spiritual birthright.

After Esau had traded his “*birthright*” and Jacob had received his father’s blessing, Esau tried to get his patriarchal father to restore his “*birthright*.” Esau pleaded and pleaded with Isaac:

*When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry . . . 'Bless me — me too, my father!' But he (Isaac) said, 'Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.' Esau said, ' . . . Haven't you reserved any blessing for me?' Isaac answered Esau, 'I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?' Esau said to his father, 'Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!' Then Esau wept aloud (Genesis 27:34-38).*

What was done was done. The terrible consequences of profane sensuality cannot be avoided. The Apostle Paul said it this way: *"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows"* (Galatians 6:7). Esau had to learn the lesson that certain actions bear certain inevitable results. Whatever a person sows, that is what he is going to reap. He cannot sow one thing and expect to reap something else. Esau was pleading for a change of the circumstances, but he was pleading against his own history. He could not change history. Isaac knew he could not change history, even though Esau was not willing to accept it. The minor brother, Jacob, had no right to the blessing, but by his cunning behavior he "bought" the "birthright" from Esau for a bowl of soup. Even *"though he sought the blessing with tears"* (Hebrews 12:17), Esau did not receive his father's blessing.

### **Contrast Between Sinai and Zion**

*You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 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, because they could not bear what was commanded: 'If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.' The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, 'I am trembling with fear.' 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, 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, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. 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? 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.' The words 'once more' indicate the removing of what can be shaken' — that is, created things — so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire' (Hebrews 18-29).*

At this point the writer of Hebrews draws the attention of his readers to the contrast between the physical, visible, earthly manifestations accompanying the giving of the Law of Moses and the silent, invisible, heavenly manifestations that characterized the giving of the new covenant of the Messiah. Esau was a man manipulated by the physical senses. Israel was also manipulated by the physical as it related to their religion. They wanted God to show Himself visibly so that they could

live by sight rather than by faith. The writer of Hebrews said:

*You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to the darkness, gloom and storm; 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, because they could not bear what was commanded: 'If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.' The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, 'I am trembling with fear' (Hebrews 12:18-21).*

Faith empties all fear of that which is visible; it fills the soul of the believer with a calm confidence and trust. Fear was associated with the Law of Moses. Why would they want to go back to the scenes of Mount Sinai and a religion that caused them to tremble with fear? Remember how the visible signs of God's presence on the mountain created fear among the people of Israel (cf. Exodus 19:16)? The coming of Messiah was not a fearful, awe-inspiring event. It did not involve "*darkness, gloom and storm . . . a trumpet blast or . . . a voice*" that brought fear into the hearts of the people. Perhaps the loud, sober and even menacing voice of God created terror in the people. The "*trumpet blast*" called them to attention, but it was His words that "*they could not bear.*" The all-holy God could not be approached by the unholy. No creature was allowed to stand in His presence uninvited. The command to stone even the animals that touched the mountain intensified their fear of what would happen to them should they violate the orders issued in such a stern tone from God. To draw near to God physically in those circumstances would have resulted in physical death for any of them. Even the prophet Moses, the one who had received the Law personally, was terrified. The physical signs of God during the Old Testament created more fear than confidence. The manifestation of Christ did not have

the same results.

Instead of fear, the coming of Christ and His covenant brought the people *“to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God”* (Hebrews 12:22a). A spirit of fear is contrasted to the calm, quiet, invisible realities of God’s spiritual presence with His people. *“Mount Zion”* was originally a Jebusite fortress during the days of David. Later it was conquered by David and he extended the stronghold to cover the entire city of Jerusalem. The whole city came to be known as Mount Zion, the new Jerusalem. Solomon later built the temple in Jerusalem. When God symbolically established his residence in that temple, it came to be recognized as the dwelling place of God. Christians have not come to a physical city but to a ***“heavenly Jerusalem.”***

The psalmist David used this same symbolism in many of his psalms: *“Sing praises to the LORD, enthroned in Zion . . .”* (Psalm 9:11) and *“The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne.”* ***“Mount Zion”*** is symbolic for God’s residence, but it is a ***“heavenly . . . city.”*** Christians are the *“temple of the living God”* (2 Corinthians 6:16). We are His dwelling place. The name Jerusalem means “the city of peace.” It is not a city of fear as Israel had when they were in the presence of God.

The writer of Hebrews describes this dwelling place as a place of joy:

*You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 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, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel* (Hebrews 12:22b-24).

*“Thousands upon thousands of angels”* stand before the presence of God. Their **“joyful assembly”** stands without fear in spiritual union with God. Their **“joy”** contrasts Israel’s **fear** at the giving of the Law. It is significant that the writer of Hebrews is gathering all the prophetic terminology used in the Old Testament to describe the coming kingdom of Messiah and His church. The prophets Isaiah, Micah, Daniel, and others employed these same terms to define the coming reign of Messiah with His people.

The word *“firstborn”* does not relate to Christ in this passage. That term is often applied to Him in the New Testament, but in this verse *“firstborn”* applies to all Christians. Christians are God’s *“firstborn”* children; they are His doubly honored heirs. The Greek word for *“firstborn”* is plural indicating that it refers to all Christians. The phrase *“whose names are written in heaven”* confirms this thought. Remember that Esau sold his position as the *“firstborn”* of Isaac for a bowl of soup, and this word is likely used in consideration to Esau’s failure. The writer tells his readers that they *“have come to God, the judge of all men.”* Remember in Hebrews 4:16 and 10:19 he told them they could come to God with boldness and confidence. At Mount Sinai, the Hebrew people seemed to be repelled from God’s presence, but in the church His people can *“draw near”* with confident joy. God is *“the judge of all men,”* but Christians do not fear Him because they will be there on the judgement day, but they will not be under judgement (cf. John 5:24-27).

The phrase *“the spirits of righteous men made perfect”* seems to relate to the men of faith from Hebrews 11. That chapter closes with the affirmation that *“ . . . only together us would they be made perfect”* (Hebrew 11:40). They have been made perfect by the blood of Christ. Through the blood of Christ Christians come into the relationship where all redeemed of all the ages (Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian) are gathered around the throne of God joined by the angels in a *“joyful*

*assembly.*” Christians have also “*come . . . to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.*” Under the dominion of Messiah, we enjoy the relationship of intimate union with God, Jesus, the angels, the redeemed of the ages and our fellow Christians. These relationships are spiritual in nature and are spiritually perceived. We know it by revelation. We do not experience it by the senses. We prefer this relationship, revealed by God’s Word, perceived in the mind and experienced through faith. We do not need external signs of the physical that scare us in order to see the beauty of what the writer is saying.

Last of all, Christians have “*come . . . to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*” This blood of Christ makes all these relationships and privileges possible. It was His blood that inaugurated the “*new covenant,*” cleansed our conscience, and dedicated all the heavenly counterparts from the old Hebrew system. The blood of Messiah “*speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*” The “*sprinkled blood*” of Messiah “*speaks*” of redemption, both present for the soul and future for the body. Abel’s blood and his faith speak (cf. Hebrews 11:4) of the validity of trusting God and serving Him. Abel’s blood “*speaks*” about the worth of paying the price to maintain our faith even if it leads us to be destroyed by an envious brother. Abel was a martyr to a righteous cause, but Jesus’ blood “*speaks a better word.*” Though the cause for which Jesus died was righteous, His blood was not “*common*” as some were treating it (Hebrews 10:29). Jesus’ blood speaks a better message about a new covenant with a new sanctuary, a new relationship with God, and with a forever priest to minister to the needs of His people. Christians have come to glorious relationships in His kingdom that make the old system fade into almost total insignificance.

Within the book of Hebrews, words of warning can also be words of encouragement. The writer of Hebrews has shown the difference between the awesome, fearful, and terrifying signs of the visible presence of God and the quiet calm of the invisible,

spiritual union with God. He says:

*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? 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.' The words 'once more' indicate the removing of what can be shaken – that is, created things – so that what cannot be shaken may remain (Hebrews 12:25-27).*

**“But now”** we can see the glory of living according to faith in the invisible reality. Hebrews 1:2 says, **“but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . .”** It is possible for a Christian to turn away from Christ and to lose the redemption that He has brought to us. The writer continually insists again and again that there is the peril of turning away from Messiah (cf. Hebrews 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, and 12). The writer is urging his readers not to lose what they have. Christians must stay with Christ. They must maintain their commitment and live by faith. Do not give in to the physical. Do not give in to the urge to return to the old Hebrew system because if they do, the writer assures his readers, they will receive greater punishment than those that have refused God under the old system.

The warning is taken from Haggai 2:6. At the giving of the Law of Moses, the voice of God *“shook the earth, but now he has promised”* again. He will not only shake the earth, He will also shake the heavens. God shook the religious part of the Law of Moses when He terminated it by **“nailing it to the cross”** (Colossians 2:14). He will soon shake the total commonwealth of the Jewish people when the Romans dismantle the political structure of that system in the year A.D. 70. The writer of Hebrews is building not only on the fact that God shook Mount

Sinai when He made His visible appearance there. He shook the earth down through history to the days of the Babylonian captivity. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city of Jerusalem, exported Israel to Babylonia in captivity for seventy years. Under Cyrus, the king of Babylon let the Jews return to Jerusalem and they found the city in rubble. Using the salvaged materials available, they built a shanty town, lean-to temple that was not very beautiful.

There were some men in Haggai's day that remembered the former glory of Solomon's temple as a fabulous structure, but it had been totally destroyed. There was no comparison between the two temples. Some of the old men wept for the glory of the former temple, but there were others who would pass by the newer temple and were not bothered by its appearance. It bothered Haggai that the newer temple built from the rubble was accepted by some. He cried out, "*Does it not seem to you like nothing?*" (Haggai 2:3). He was ashamed of the temple because it did not seem to be a suitable place for God to dwell. God spoke to Haggai and assured him that even the temple during his time would also be dismantled. God was looking forward to the time when Titus, the son of Vespasian, the Roman emperor, would enter the city of Jerusalem and totally and completely devastate the city. The prophecy of Haggai is about to be fulfilled as the author of Hebrews writes his book. But that physical temple was abandoned by God before the cross of Christ (cf. Matthew 23:38; Luke 13:35). The warning in Hebrews 10:37 says, "*For in just a very little while*" referring to the destruction by the Romans.

The heavenly temple or sanctuary of Christ can never be shaken. It does not belong to the nature of "***created things***" as was the old Hebrew temple. It will not be shaken because His sanctuary is heavenly. There will never be a Nebuchadnezzar that will assault "*Mount Zion, . . . the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.*" It cannot be touched by the armies of men. The unshakable kingdom of Christ is the church. The

writer of Hebrews closes this section of scripture with:

*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. For our 'God is a consuming fire' (Hebrews 12:28-29).*

Christians receive “*a kingdom*” as the evidence of Messiah’s rule when He sends the Roman army to remove all remaining vestiges of the old Hebrew system. While the old is being swept away, the new is being firmly established among men through the spread of the Gospel. That which can be removed will be removed, but that just confirms the permanency of that which remains. With the coming of Messiah, the temporary will give way to the permanent. There is a call to praise and thanksgiving in the unshakable kingdom of Christ. There is also a call to worship God with total “**reverence**” for His dignity and “**awe**” for His power.

The **fire** that consumes Jerusalem expresses God’s judgment upon the unrighteous enemies that reject His Messenger, Jesus Christ, and the message He brings. Though others will be consumed by those fires, Christians are not touched or menaced by it.

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## REMEMBER . . .

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### Hebrews 13:1-16

In this chapter the writer of Hebrews assures his readers that “*faith*” is crucial. It is critical to the survival of a believer in Christ. He reminds his readers of their Christian privileges and duties, and of certain Christian men of faith, stalwarts who have already won the victories in Christ. He assures them that there are present day leaders on whom they can depend. It is evident that God is always there. He is always dependable, and regardless of how the external circumstance may appear, we are “*more than conquerors*” (Romans 8:37). Christians can be confident in the continual exercise of their faith and their devotion to Christ. They must be in submission to the arrangements God has made for the government and organization of His kingdom. Christ is still on the throne regardless of what Caesar does to the people. There are some doctrinal confusions that are beginning to be introduced as optional ways of believing, but doctrinal clarity and consistency of practice go hand in hand. They create the best atmosphere for doctrinal stability.

### Remember to Love the Brothers

*Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering (Hebrews 13:1-3).*

The writer of Hebrews has already told his readers that God records and rewards all good deeds shown by brethren to each other. A factor that contributes to survival as Christians in a period of stress is the maintenance of wholesome relationships with the family of God. He says to “*Keep on loving each other as brothers.*” Christians must continue to express the sense of solidarity that had manifested itself in the past. He tells them to keep their public contact with the church with faithful consistency (cf. Hebrews 10:25). Relationships in the church are important to every one’s survival. Relations in the common assemblies of the church make it possible for each Christian to prod, encourage, and provoke one another “*to love and good works*” (Hebrews 10:24). Isolation exposes one to unnecessary danger.

The writer of Hebrews also encourages his readers to “*... not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*” The “*strangers*” are probably foreign Christians who have been scattered by the persecutions of that day during a period of time in the city when there was intense persecution against the Jews by the Romans. Christians had been instructed to “*flee to the mountains*” (Matthew 24: 16) when the Roman hoards began to besiege Jerusalem. Many of the early believers were scattered from their native land (cf. 1 Peter 1:1; James 1:1). The writer is telling Christians who live in the “*mountains,*” to remember to “*entertain strangers.*” Christians needed to show hospitality to those who were not native to their villages. The Jews would surely reject them, but Christians were told to receive them into their homes. By being hospitable, “*some have entertained angels without knowing it.*” Remember that Abraham showed his hospitality toward those he did not know and through them he was richly blessed (cf. Genesis 18:2; 22:11, 15). Abraham and Lot were richly blessed when they entertained those who had come from outside the city (cf. Genesis 19:1-22).

Then the writer of Hebrews reminds them to “*Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoner, and those who are mistreated as if you were suffering.*” Since this letter was written during a period of persecution, he tells them to remember those who are in prison. Doubtless he is talking about his fellow Christians who have been imprisoned simply because of their faith. He says to remember them as if you were their fellow prisoner. In other words, mentally put yourself in prison. Think of yourself being deprived of the freedoms and amenities of life. Think about being without the ministry of family, the privilege of travel, and the exercise of your rights. If you were in that situation, what would you like for those on the outside to do for you? What ministries would you want them to perform toward you personally and your family who would be deprived of your presence? By remembering the unfortunate prisoners and those who have been “*mistreated,*” the Christian can minister to them as he himself would want to be ministered to if he were the one suffering the persecutions. It is possible that one day he will also be called upon to suffer.

## **Remember the Warnings**

*Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 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.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:4-8).*

The writer of Hebrews did not want his readers to despise marriage because there were some doctrines which suggested that relationships in marriage are unholy. Such false doctrines teach that the only way to be pure is to separate from any marriage relationships. Evidently incipient Gnosticism was creeping into the church and threatening its family life. Gnostic doctrines were based on the practice of asceticism. It is a doctrine imported probably from pagan sources that believe that all physical unions, even the one of husband and wife, were unholy. Such doctrines ignore that in the beginning God ordained marriage with all its privileges. Let no one condemn the ordinance of God. God honored it and ordained the union of Adam and Eve when He said, “*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. . .*” (Genesis 1:28b).

The phrase “. . . *the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral*” insists that all extra matrimonial encounters are condemned by God. He will judge the “*adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*” Christians must honor marriage and the purity of the marriage bed as a legitimate state as God ordained it. God recognized it, He instituted it, and Christians should not let anyone bring accusations against the state or conditions of marriage. Paul told Timothy that within a few years men were going to arise teaching “*things taught by demons*” (1 Timothy 4:1). Among some of the things man began to teach and command involved the rejection of marriage. These false teachers even commanded men not to marry, but Paul identified these doctrines as coming from “*demons*” and inspired by Satan himself. He also said it was the result of an apostasy from the truth of Christ.

The next exhortation from the writer of Hebrews has to do with “*the love of money.*” He says,

*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’*

(Hebrews 13:5).

Paul told Timothy,

*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 (1 Timothy 6:10).*

The man who loves money is devoted to the accumulation of it. His motives are rooted in his lack of trust in God's providence. Contentment that is based on possessions is never secure. God promised He would never leave or forsake His people. These words were first given when the leadership over Israel was transferred from Moses to Joshua. The new leader had just received the mantle from Moses when God gave him those words of assurance (cf. Joshua 1:5; Deuteronomy 31:6). Moses had already gone to Mount Nebo to be buried by God. There must have been considerable insecurities in Joshua. God was telling Joshua to not worry because, *"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Joshua 1:5).

What God says to His people becomes **the source** of their confidence in Him and their response to Him. Because we know that God is never going to leave us, *"So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'"* (Hebrews 13:6). This response comes from Psalm 118:6-7. In the original Hebrew, the psalmist claims, *"The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies."* Paul stated it this way: *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31). If God is for us, it does not matter who is against us, but if God is against us, it does not matter who is for us. Psalms 118 is definitely a Messianic psalm, because it refers to the coming of

Christ as “*The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone*” (Psalm 118:22). The “*builders*” who rejected Christ were the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day (cf. Acts 4:11). Messiah will build His kingdom in “*the day the LORD has made*” and it will be a day of rejoicing and gladness (cf. Psalm 118:24). Jesus taught the disciples: “*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Matthew 10:28).

The writer of Hebrews assures his readers there are stabilizing factors: “**Remember** your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the **outcome of their way of life** and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:7-8). They have their faith and the promises of God which will be strong stabilizers in the midst of persecution and opposition. Faith is crucial to their survival. They must never leave the faith principles they have been taught. The apostles were the ones who originally taught the Word of God to the first century Christians. The fact that the writer of Hebrews uses the phrase “*remember your leaders*” may indicate that most of the apostles were dead. The “*outcome*” of their lives may refer to the way in which their deaths confirmed the validity of their message. They died in faith for the faith and deserved to be imitated because of their faith. Jesus foretold a violent death for some of His disciples (cf. John 16:2).

The Christians who were reading this letter could indeed “*remember*” the faith of their leaders, how it kept them strong even during that period of time when they were being destroyed because of their faith. Many of these readers may have been personally acquainted with some of the apostles. Perhaps some of them saw how Jesus’ disciples were called upon to stand up for their faith, to endure persecution and ultimately death. Their faithful lives and deaths carried them to the same victory all Christians are rewarded with when they live by faith. Christians are called to “*remember*” those men who had the

responsibility, the leadership, and the authority over you in the times past. Not only did the Old Testament have its heros of faith, but so did the New Testament. In Hebrew 13:17 the writer says, *“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.”* These men are the elders or bishops of the church that have been ordained by the Holy Spirit to *“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock. . .”* (Acts 20:28). The reference in this verse is to the present day *“leaders”* who are alive and to be obeyed. The *“leaders”* of the past, the apostles, have died and gone to their reward. They victoriously maintained their faith even though their physical lives were not preserved. Their departure would produce some instability on the part of the believers, so the writer reassures them by saying, *“Jesus Christ is the **same yesterday and today and forever.**”*

### **Remember and Follow the Redeemer**

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 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. We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. 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. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (Hebrews 13:8-*

16).

The ever-present reality of Jesus is the stabilizing force of a Christian's faith. And He is the One to whom we look. He is the One on whom we have our vision fixed: "*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith*" (Hebrews 12:2). Even though the "*leaders*" on earth may change, Jesus is always the same. The phrase "*the same yesterday and today and forever*" simply declares His eternal presence with His people. He is described in Revelation as, "*. . . the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come*" (Revelation 4:8b). In Malachi the Lord says, "*I the LORD do not change*" (Malachi 3:6). His unchangeable nature is the only stabilizing influence in a world racked by change. The earth scene is forever changing. Earthly personalities are forever going to be in revolution and changing one after the other, but the heavenly scene is stable and not shaken by change. Earlier the writer of Hebrews said, "*But about the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever*" (Hebrews 1:8). In that context it is affirmed that the earth is wearing out, but Jesus will remain the forever unchanging Lord.

Some of the "*strange teachings*" concerning marriage were mentioned in Hebrews 13:4, but in Hebrews 13:9 the writer says, "*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.*" The "*ceremonial foods*" refer to the physical food that was part of the priest's privileges of eating of the sacrifices from the altar. This food was of "*no value*" in comparison to being "*strengthened by grace.*" The priests' food was physical; the Christian's food is spiritual. The spiritual, non-physical part of man is sustained by God's grace. Those who choose to return to the Hebrew system are not at all sustained by their "*ceremonial foods.*"

The spiritual contrast that Christ offers His people is "*an*

*altar* from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat” (Hebrews 13:10). The cross of Calvary is the “*altar*” that brings Christians the spiritual privileges that the old Hebrew system could only speak about in predictive, shadow form. The Old Testament did speak of the glorious “*feast of rich food for all peoples*” prepared by the Lord for the ages to come (cf. Isaiah 25:6). Jesus did not come to supply daily bread for man, but He did teach His people not to be concerned about what they would have to eat, drink, or wear (cf. Matthew 6:25-34). Pagans worry about these things, but those concerns are contradictory for a Christian. Jesus promised that if men place the kingdom of God and His righteousness first in their lives all their needs of a physical nature will be supplied by God’s providence. The spiritual banquet that Jesus provides His people is the reality of the physical feast seen in the Old Testament sacrifice of the fellowship/peace offering and the ritual of a festive banquet celebrated in the courtyard of the tabernacle between God and His officiating priests (cf. Leviticus 3; Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24).

The “*peace offering*” (Leviticus 3:1-17, KJV) was a ceremony where the Hebrew family could come to the tabernacle where God would host a physical banquet. It was called the “*peace offering*” to celebrate a period of intensive fellowship between God and man. They would eat of the sacrificial animal in a banquet that God Himself hosted. This was not hosted in the home of the worshiper, because God was the host and He provided the banquet. It was spiritually analogous to the feast the father prepared for the prodigal son in Luke 15. When the prodigal son came home, the father celebrated the joyous reunion with his son who had been dead and was alive. He was lost and then found. The father was so glad his son had returned that he killed the fatted calf and the father hosted the banquet of celebration. In that context, the father is God. The prodigal son is the temporarily unfaithful child of God who has come back home. God welcomed him

back, forgave his sins, and celebrated with a great banquet. The writer of Hebrews uses the desires for physical food to define spiritual matters. Christians have an “*altar*” and God is celebrating with a banquet of spiritual food. Jesus brings the food that will delight the soul of a man. He said, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*” (Matthew 5:6).

There are other parallels to be drawn from the Hebrew sacrifices: “*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*” (Hebrews 13:11). This parallel comes from Leviticus 4 and 16. Anytime blood was taken into the Holy Place or the Most Holy Place, the bodies had to be burned outside the camp of Israel. There was significant typology built into that format of sacrifices. It foreshadows the sacrificial ministry of Christ. Just as the high priest carried the blood of the animal into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, so Jesus as the new High Priest carried His blood into the Most Holy Place in heaven (cf. Hebrews 9:23-24). Then just as the bodies of Levitical sacrifices were burned outside the camp, so Jesus was led outside the city of Jerusalem to suffer the penalty of sin. This process was the same whether for the sins of daily life in Israel or for the offerings on the day of Atonement. No matter what the reason for the blood taken into the Holy Place or the Most Holy Place, all the bodies were burned outside the camp.

The fires for burning the bodies was considered the fires of *saraph*, which symbolized the outpouring of divine wrath on the sins of the people. Jesus is the One who bore the penalty of our sins in His body and He became the object of God’s wrath against those sins. The writer of Hebrews says,

*And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make his people holy through his own blood. Let us,*

*then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. (Hebrews 13:12-14).*

Jesus makes the people holy through His own blood. Because of the **“blood,”** Jesus suffered *“outside the city gate.”* He was crucified *“outside the city gate”* because typology dictated that it be that way. The Levitical sacrifices were burned outside the camp because they were patterned after the sacrifice of Christ that was foreknown in all its details. Those sacrifices were modeled after Him rather than His sacrifice being copied from the Old Testament. When Jesus was crucified *“outside the city gate,”* it was symbolic of the fact that He was rejected by the people of the city as well as being rejected by God. God turned His back on Jesus just as any man guilty of a “high-handed” sin in Israel was taken outside the gates of the city and stoned to death as evidence of his immorality or blasphemy against God. Israel rejected Jesus and God turned His back on Him in such a way that on the cross Jesus cried out, *“‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ — which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”* (Matthew 27:46).

Since the people of Israel rejected Jesus and took Him *“outside the city gates,”* the people are asked to voluntarily *“go to him outside the camp.”* *“Let us”* serves as an invitation for God’s children to go to Him, the crucified Savior, and to reject the city. Christians had to choose to leave Judaism and go outside its confining Laws to unite with Jesus. Israel abandoned Jesus and Christians must abandon Israel. The phrase *“bearing the disgrace he bore”* refers to the external appearance of shame that was associated with crucifixion. The Law of Moses said: *“Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree”* (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). The Law of Moses cursed those who were crucified, but Christians glory in the cross. Jesus was an object of public disgrace in the eyes of the

Jews, so Christians must be willing to face and accept the same kind of rejection and disgrace when they choose to follow Jesus. Christians do not shrink away from Christ just because others may shame us from being Christians.

The physical city of Jerusalem was not an “*enduring city*.” This may also refer to the fact that the city of Jerusalem will not endure the onslaught of the Roman army. All that it represented to the Mosaic religion was going to disappear. They would seem to be a people without a country, but they were not going to be without a city — “*For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the **city that is to come***” (Hebrews 13:14). God has prepared a city for the people of faith (cf. Hebrews 11:16). This city is “*Mount Zion, . . . the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God*” (Hebrews 12:22). This city is the church in this present age and it will be with God eternally in heaven in the ages to come. Christians do have an “*enduring city*” even though it is not of this world; it is a “*city that is to come*.”

The book of Hebrews is built around the topic of worshiping God. In the earlier part of the discussions, the writer of Hebrews consistently affirmed that under the old Hebrew system the worshipers were not made perfect in their relationship with God. As a contrast he affirmed clearly that Christians were made perfect. They have immediate, unveiled access to the Most Holy Place (cf. Hebrews 10:19). The ceaseless gratitude of a redeemed people ought to continually flow up before the Father and the Son. The writer says,

*Through Jesus therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with other, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (Hebrews 13:15-16).*

The “*sacrifice of praise*” would be verbal praise as indicated

by “*the fruit of lips that confess his name.*” Even though it is verbal praise, it is deeply spiritual and sentimental as the gratitude flows from the heart. The “*fruit of lips*” would involve worship in song, prayers, preaching, teaching, and exalting the virtues and glories of God and the Savior, Jesus Christ. These “*sacrifices*” would directly relate to public worship activities offered on the Lord’s Day, but could also include individual worship on a daily basis. This is only a part of the sacrifices of a spiritual nature that Christians offer. **First**, they must “*offer your bodies as **living sacrifices**, holy and pleasing to God*” (Romans 12:1). **Second**, they must offer the “*fruit of lips.*” And then, doing good and sharing with others is also part of the “*sacrifices*” that the Christian offers to God. These are sacrifices of service to brethren which are presented to God and “*with such sacrifices God is pleased.*” There was a deep sense of solidarity among the early Christians whether it involved sharing in each others pain of persecution or sharing in the fellowship of financial resources or sharing in the joint participation of collective worship to God.

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## FINAL EXHORTATION

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### Hebrews 13:17-25

This is the last chapter in this study of the book of Hebrews. In this section the writer will give some personal references that are significant to him and of interest to his readers. He will give final exhortations to bring the book of Hebrews to a proper conclusion. God has prepared a dwelling place for His children. Jesus told His disciples before He had established the Kingdom:

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you (John 14:1-2).*

In Hebrews 13:14 the writer refers to “*the city that is to come*” — this is the destiny of all Christians. This is not an earth bound place. He is talking about heaven itself. The people who do not belong to the family of God will be destined to eternal ruin. The earth and its children are destined “*to wear out like garments,*” but the children of God will live eternally (cf. Hebrews 1:11-12).

Christians have assignments and ministries of service toward one another. Collectively, they have ministries of worship toward God. Caring for one another is an important part of the Christian's service to God. Manifesting their faith and gratitude for salvation involves sharing their resources. Helping the church and expressing their praise to God is a part of the Christian's ministries. In all that Christians do, they are constantly aware of the intercession and spiritual care Christ

expresses toward them in the fulfillment of His priestly ministries. The book of Hebrews was written to help remove the barriers between Christians and God. It is only “*through Christ*” that Christians are able to offer acceptable worship and service that is pleasing to God. Christ removes all imperfections for the worshipers and their less than perfect worship. The worship and service of Christians is the a constant verbal outpouring of gratitude. It is also practical in the flow of good deeds toward the needy among them. Doing good for others is a part of serving God. Jesus was known for “*doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him*” (Acts 10:38). The Christian becomes the living embodiment of the virtuous life that can be seen in Jesus. Another “*sacrifice*” Christians offer is sharing their financial resources with one another. The Greek word for this act of charity is *koinonia*. New Testament historians used this word to describe the practical life-style of the early church.

### **Added Encouragement in Perseverance**

*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. Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon (Hebrews 13:17-20).*

The present day “*leaders*” have “*authority*,” but they do not serve as successors to the apostles. The apostles do not need successors because they are able to fulfil their apostolic ministrations through their message and the witness of their faith. The present “*leaders*” were selected by the church out of their own numbers. They were men of maturity and leadership

skills to be spiritual conductors. These men were called by various names in the New Testament. The names do not mean there is any type of hierarchy in the church. The names simply identify the men under different aspects of their function in the body of believers. They are called “*elders*” because they are expected to be mature in age and in faith (cf. 1 Timothy 3:5-6). They are also called “*bishops*” because they oversee and monitor the spiritual welfare of the church as Hebrews 13:17 indicates. They are called “*shepherds*” because they are charged with feeding the “*flock*” just as shepherd feeds his sheep (cf. Acts 20:28). They are seen as stewards over the flock that belongs to the Lord (cf. 1 Peter 5:1-3). In the New Testament church these men were always plural in number and functioned locally (cf. Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1-2; Titus 1:5-6). These verses instruct the church to

*Obey . . . and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17).*

At this point the writer of Hebrews speaks about personal needs and matters related to himself and his colleagues. He says:

*Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon (Hebrews 13:18-19).*

In the introductory remarks to the study of the book of Hebrews, it was mentioned that we do not know who the author of Hebrews really was. There are some indications that perhaps Paul was the one who had organized the content, though he

does not seem to be the one who wrote the message down. Hebrews 2:3 says the writer himself got this information from the apostles who were the original eye and ear witnesses of the life and message of Jesus. Paul, John, James, Peter and others were his sources. This message bears the stamp of Apostolic teaching in content.

The writer presents himself conscientious in his devotions. He wants his readers to know the message that has been presented came from a **“clear conscience.”** Some may feel that his warnings were somewhat severe and the penalties he explained were too harsh. But with his own conscience bearing him witness, this is God’s message and not the author’s personal views. Several times the writer attributed his interpretations of Old Testament symbolism and New Testament fulfillment to the direct instructions of the Holy Spirit (cf. Hebrews 9:8; 10:15). He is particularly interested that they pray that *“I may be restored to you soon.”* Perhaps he had formerly lived among the very people to whom he was writing and hopes that in God’s providence he may have an opportunity to return to their presence soon.

### Final Exhortations

*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, 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. Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter. I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you. Greet all your leaders and all God’s people. Those from Italy send you their greetings. Grace be*

*with you all* (Hebrews 13:20-25).

Hebrews 13:20 is called a **doxology** (*Doxa* means glory). This is the kind of closing remark that is characteristic of all the New Testament epistles, but especially those written by the apostle Paul. These closing remarks are a final expression of praise and gratitude to God. It is also a prayer that “*the God of peace*” make you perfect in every way. The writer of Hebrews can confidently speak of “*peace*” with God because of the priestly ministry of Christ. He was sent by God to restore the peaceful relationship between God and man that existed in Eden. Sin destroyed that beautiful fellowship, but now that Christ has finished His sacrificial work at Calvary there is reason for the outpouring of praise and gratitude for salvation through Jesus Christ.

Throughout the book of Hebrews the work of Christ centered around His High Priest ministry. In this context Jesus is exalted as “that great Shepherd of the sheep.” This terminology is very significant to Hebrew people. God has always been known as the shepherd and Israel as His flock of sheep. The beautiful Shepherd Psalm (23) calls to mind the way God has provided Messiah as the Shepherd of the new era. Jesus Christ Himself maintains the same kind of providential care to lead His people to green pastures, still waters, and to provide protection even when they walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Christians should not be afraid nor fear any evil because their Shepherd-Priest is always with them. His rod and staff will comfort them. He provides all of their needs. Messiah is that great Provider that maintains a shepherd’s care for His people. The Shepherd is One who lays down His life for His sheep (cf. John 10:11). The Shepherd is the One who “*goes ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice*” (John 10:4). The Shepherd leads His sheep. The writer of Hebrews wants to bring together the priestly function of Messiah and His shepherding care over His people. The

Shepherd gives His sheep a sense of stability and security in a period of severe transition, opposition, and persecution. The *“blood of the eternal covenant”* was shed by the Shepherd to cover the sins of the sheep (cf. Zechariah 7:13-14). The fact that God *“brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus”* stands to confirm His present reign in heaven and His future coming to take His people home.

The writer of Hebrews prays that God will equip his readers *“... 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”* (Hebrews 13:21). God equips His children with all the essential gifts they need to be able to serve Him. Paul told the Philippians, *“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose”* (Philippians 2:13). When God demands ministries of His people, He provides the equipment they need to accomplish the task. God is actively working in the lives of Christians. He is not an absentee sovereign. He did return to Heaven, but He has not forgotten His people. Jesus was made functionally perfect in the fulfillment of His mission. Now He makes His people functionally perfect to accomplish the ministries God wants His children to perform. Those could be ministries of praise to Him for redemption in their spiritual sacrifices of worship. Or they could be ministries of service to His people through doing good and sharing with others their resources and in doing good works as another form of service to God. The purpose of all praise and worship is to give *“glory for ever and ever”* to Christ who is worthy of all such devotions. Eternity is in view in Hebrews 13:21. There will forever be those who praise and glorify the Messiah in heavenly circles, but in the meantime, He is still the object of proper respect, gratitude and worship.

The book of Hebrews is normally considered an explanation of the priesthood of Christ and a treatise on the redemptive activity of Messiah. In Hebrews 12:22 the writer of Hebrews urges his brethren to *“bear with my word of*

*exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.*” The author defines the purpose of the book of Hebrews as “*a word of exhortation*” and something that he considers to be “*only a short letter.*”

If someone tried to sum up the life of Jesus, it would not be a “*short letter*” because it would include:

Jesus’ short life,  
His priestly ministry,  
His sacrificial functions,  
His continuous ministry for the benefits of His “one time for all time” sacrifice on Calvary,  
His structuring of the new sanctuary,  
His present ministry in that sanctuary,  
His inauguration of the new covenant,  
His maintaining of the new covenant relationship between God and His children,  
His humanity,  
and His divinity.

How could any one sum up a life like that? It is amazing that the writer of Hebrews was able to do just that. It is quite evident that this book has to be a product of revelation, because there is no way that any uninspired man could describe, define, and inter-relate all of the qualities of the priesthood of Christ into one brief book like this. Solomon said, “*of making many books there is not end*” (Ecclesiastes 12:12). This book of Hebrews began beautifully and concluded gloriously. It is an amazing treatise and a masterpiece of exhortation. It presents the plan of the ages that has been accomplished and worked out through Christ Jesus.

The writer calls it an “*exhortation*” and the exhortation comes through loud and clear. When a Christian considers Jesus, he will not depart from Him. Look at Jesus! Look at His priesthood! Look at His deity! These facts combined with the fact that God gave up the glories of Heaven to come down to

earth and endure what man was not willing to endure in order to be saved will exhort. Consider Jesus' humanity. He so completely identified with the human family that He was subjected to all the trials, sufferings, persecution, opposition, and at the same time having the same ambitions, desires, feelings, and appetites of any man. Yet he stood firm in His integrity and never once gave in to the enemy force. Those facts have to impress any reader and will surely exhort any serious student of Jesus' life. He resisted unto blood in His struggle against sin. Every one should be exhorted by a study of the life of Jesus Christ, so the Hebrew writer says, "*bear with my word of exhortation.*" The exhortation grows out of what Jesus has done and is doing.

Many Christians were leaving the church in the day this book was written and the same is happening in the church of today. Generally, they leave Christ before they leave the church. That is the reason the writer insists that everyone consider Jesus (cf. Hebrews 3:1; 12:4). People leave the church when they lose their loyalty to Christ. They have lost their touch with reality, because He is invisible. They have lost the foundation of faith and need to come back and renew Jesus as the center and the focus of their attention to build their convictions out of the illustrations and the demonstrations that God has given. The writer of Hebrews does a beautiful job of exhorting people that are on the verge of apostasy from Jesus. The whole book is an "*exhortation*" which is still just as valid a source of reclamation for those who are turning away today. When people leave the church, what can be done to get them back? Can they be brought back? It is clear the author thinks they can. A clear view of Christ is the best tool for accomplishing their restoration. The book of Hebrews contains the essence of Christianity. It is Christ alone who has the holding power over a person's faith. He can bring back the prodigal and the wanderer. The book of Hebrews will bring back those who are straying from Christ and the church and from their

responsibilities.

The writer of Hebrews offers a bit of comfort to the Palestinian Christians: *“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 writer wants to leave the imperial city and come to visit the brethren. Palestinian Christians would be the most familiar with all the talk about temple activities, but they would be most vulnerable to the dangers of the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Romans. They would also be the ones who were more closely associated with the beginning of the church on the day of Pentecost. The writer reminded them more than once of their former strong devotions in Christ and the church. These facts indicate that this book may have been initially sent to the churches in the region of Jerusalem and its environs.

Considering Hebrews 13:23 it does not seem that the writer of Hebrews was writing from prison, but this can not be completely ruled out. The book was written while the writer was in Rome. It is possible the author could have been Luke who was a companion of Paul and may have temporarily been imprisoned with Paul. Notice the author says that Timothy has been released from prison. We know that Paul and Luke and Timothy were together in the city of Rome. It is possible that when Paul was in prison the last time that they also took Luke and Timothy with him. If Luke was the author and imprisoned, then he expects to be released quite soon. Timothy had already been released and Paul was not released, but sentenced to die as a martyr.

The writer of Hebrews closes out his letter by mentioning the *“leaders”* of the church one more time (cf. Hebrews 13:17). He obviously had a deep appreciation for the diligent work God’s *“leaders”* do for the stabilization of the church. He says, *“Those from Italy send you their greetings. Grace be with you all.”* This is the place of origin for the letter. The author is careful to acknowledge the international brotherhood of the

church.

### Final Observations

Out of all the discussions in the book of Hebrews about the Aaronic high priests and ordinary Levitical priests and throughout the extensive attention given to the priesthood of Christ, the author never once referred to Christians as priests, but there are other New Testament writings that refer to Christians as priests (cf. 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:5; 5:10; 20:6). A possible explanation might be that the whole book is dedicated to the **priesthood of Christ**. His priestly position is central to the Hebrew letter. And though the author does not mention our priesthood he does assume it, and he does tell us to offer up sacrifices of praise to God continually. Every priest is appointed to offer gifts (cf. Hebrews 5:3), so if we are called to offer gifts, then he is assigning the function of priests to Christians even though he does not specifically call us priests. We do have an **“altar”** where we have a right to eat (cf. Hebrews 13:10). This is mentioned when he is talking about the rights of priests under the Law of Moses.

Every Christian is a priest who has the right to eat at the altar of Calvary because we have been elevated to the dignity of priests. We are not Melchizedek priests. There is only One who is a priest after the order of Melchizedek and that is Jesus Christ. Christians are priests with the function of priests. The writer of Hebrews does not present every Biblical doctrine concerning Christian worship or use all the terminology that would be fitted with those functions. Other New Testament writers present various terminologies and definitions. Perhaps the writer of Hebrews did not want to detract from the fact that Jesus Christ is the great High Priest and He is the central figure of this book. The author leaves the theme of Christian priesthood for others to discuss.

Notice that the author never mentions the Gentiles in the

book of Hebrews. His emphasis is on the new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah, so the Gentiles are not part of his focus. The Gentiles fit into the picture in the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 13:3; 15:6; 22:18. God's promise to Abraham was that "*all the nations on the earth will be blessed.*" The Gentiles were not part of the Mosaic covenant and neither are we. Only the Hebrew people were obligated to observe any of the commandments of the Law of Moses. The Law has nothing to do with Christians; it was never a part of our lives. The book of Hebrews is not the place to look for how the Gentiles are included in the redemptive work of Christ. The books of Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians cover the work of Christ in the life of the Gentiles. The writer of Hebrews was writing to people who came out of the Jewish religion. It is clear that he takes the blood of Christ all the way back to the Garden of Eden in its redemptive work (cf. Hebrews 9:26).

This is a marvelous book. The writer of Hebrews closes his book with five final words: "*Grace be with you all.*"

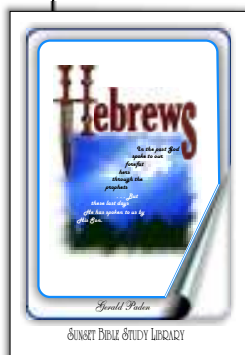
## Gerald Paden



Gerald Paden was educated at Abilene Christian University (B.S.) and subsequently served as a missionary in Italy for 18 years and still has a great interest in the evangelization of that country. Gerald specializes in *Church Growth Studies*. His courses in Sunset International Bible Institute include *The Levitical Sacrificial System*, *The Book of Hebrews* and *The Epistles of John*. He teaches in the Sunset School of Missions and is instrumental in motivating families to go to the Mission field. Gerald is married and the father of three children.

Gerald has rich contributions to add to your study of inspired Scripture. His years of study and ministry qualifies him to author this kind of commentary. His years of mission experience on foreign fields shines through and enhances his understanding of the Scriptures. His love for and faith in Jesus Christ permeates his writings.

Gerald has held numerous meetings and campaigns and taught in several preacher training schools in mission fields.



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