

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

A LETTER ADDRESSED
TO A JEWISH-CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

PROLOGUE

The greatness of the incarnate Son of God

1 At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our
2 ancestors through the prophets; but •in our own time, the last days, he has
spoken to us through his Son, the Son that he has appointed to inherit everything^a
3 and through whom he made everything there is.^b •He is the radiant light of God's
glory and the perfect copy of his nature,^c sustaining the universe by his powerful
command; and now that he has destroyed the defilement of sin, he has gone to
4 take his place in heaven at the right hand of divine Majesty. •So he is now as far
above the angels as the title which he has inherited is higher than their own name.

2 Ch 36:15
Jn 1:3
Ga 4:4+
1 Tm 4:1+
Mt 4:3+
Jn 1:18+;
10:34
Wg 7:22+
2 Co 4:6,18
Col 1:13+;
17
Ep 1:7
Col 1:14
Ac 2:33+
Ph 2:9-11+

I. THE SON IS GREATER THAN THE ANGELS

Proof from the scriptures

5 God has never said to any angel: *You are my Son, today I have become your*
6 *father*; or: *I will be a father to him and he a son to me*. •Again, when he brings the
7 First-born into the world,^d he says: *Let all the angels of God worship him*. •About
8 the angels, he says: *He makes his angels winds and his servants flames of fire,^e •but*
9 *to his Son he says: God, your throne shall last for ever and ever; and: his^f royal*
10 *sceptre is the sceptre of virtue; •virtue you love as much as you hate wickedness.*
11 *This is why God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness, above all your*
12 *rivals.^g •And again: It is you, Lord, who laid earth's foundations in the beginning,*
13 *the heavens are the work of your hands; •all will vanish, though you remain, all*
14 *wear out like a garment; •you will roll them up like a cloak, and like a garment^h*
15 *they will be changed. But yourself, you never change and your years are unending.*

Ps 2:7
Ac 13:33+
2 S 7:14
Col 1:15+
Dt 32:43
Ps 97:7
Ps 104:4
Ps 45:6-7

Ps 102:25-27

1 a. To be a son implies having the right to inherit, cf. Mt 21:38, Ga 4:7. Here, however, God is credited with the handing over of the whole creation because the inheritance in question is messianic and eschatological.

b. Lit. the 'aeons', hebraism for the whole of creation.

c. These two metaphors are borrowed from the *sophia* and *logos* theologies of Alexandria, Ws 7:25-26; they express both the identity of nature between Father and Son, and the distinction of person. The Son is the brightness, the light shining from its source, which is the bright glory, cf. Ex 24:16+, of the Father ('Light from Light'). He is also the replica, cf. Col 1:15+, of the Father's substance, like an exact impression made by

a seal on clay or wax, cf. Jn 14:9.

d. Either at the *parousia* or, more probably, at the incarnation.

e. The author, thinking perhaps of the theophany on Sinai, 2:2+, takes this LXX text as a description of the nature of angels, subtle and changeable and therefore inferior to that of the Son reigning from his eschatological throne.

f. Var. 'your', cf. Ps 45 LXX.

g. Following Middle Eastern custom the psalm attributes divinity to the King-Messiah by hyperbole: here it is attributed literally, cf. v. 3. The divine Messiah is to reign for ever.

h. Vulg. omits. 'like a garment'.

Ps 110:1
Ac 2:33-35+
Tb 5:4+
Ps 91:11
Mt 4:11;
18:10;
26:53
Lk 1:26

God has never said to any angel: *Sit at my right hand and I will make your enemies a footstool for you.* •The truth is they are all spirits whose work is service, sent to help those who will be the heirs of salvation.^f

An exhortation

2 P 3:17
12:25
Ac 7:38,53+
Ga 3:19+;
4:3+

2 We ought, then, to turn our minds more attentively than before to what we have been taught, so that we do not drift away. •If a promise that was made through angels^a proved to be so true that every infringement and disobedience brought its own proper punishment, •then we shall certainly not go unpunished if we neglect this salvation that is promised to us. The promise was first announced by the Lord himself, and is guaranteed to us by those who heard him; God himself confirmed their witness with signs and marvels and miracles of all kinds, and by freely giving the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Redemption brought by Christ, not by angels

Col 2:15+

He did not appoint angels to be rulers of the world to come, and that world is what we are talking about. •Somewhere there is a passage that shows us this. It runs: *What is man that you should spare a thought for him, the son of man that you should care for him? •For a short while you made him lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and splendour.*^b •You have put him in command of everything. Well then, if he has put him in command of everything, he has left nothing which is not under his command. At present, it is true, we are not able to see that everything has been put under his command,^c •but we do see in Jesus one who was for a short while made lower than the angels and is now crowned with glory and splendour because he submitted to death;^d by God's grace^e he had to experience death for all mankind.

Ps 8:4-6
LXX

1 Co 15:25
Ep 1:20-23
Ph 3:21

Ph 2:6-11

As it was his purpose to bring a great many of his sons into glory, it was appropriate that God, for whom everything exists and through whom everything exists, should make perfect, through suffering, the leader who would take them to their salvation.^f •For the one who sanctifies, and the ones who are sanctified, are of the same stock;^g that is why he openly calls them *brothers* •in the text: *I shall announce your name to my brothers, praise you in full assembly;* or the text: *In him I hope;* or the text: *Here I am with the children whom God has given me.*

Rm 11:36
1 Co 8:6
12:2
Is 53:4
5:9+
Jn 17:19
Ac 3:15+
Ps 22:22
Jn 17:6
Is 8:17
Is 8:18

Mt 16:17+

Jn 12:31+
Rm 6:9
Rm 5:12f

Is 41:8-9

Rm 8:3,29
Ph 2:7

3:1+; 4:

15: 5:7+
Mt 4:1
Rm 3:25
1 Jn 2:2;
4:10

Since all the *children* share the same blood and flesh; he too shared equally in it, so that by his death he could take away all the power of the devil,^h who had power over death, •and set freeⁱ all those who had been held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. •For it was not the angels that he took to himself; he took to himself *descent from Abraham*. •It was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers so that he could be a compassionate and trustworthy high priest of God's religion, able to atone for human sins. •That is, because he has himself been through temptation he is able to help others who are tempted.

II. JESUS THE FAITHFUL AND MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST

Christ higher than Moses

2:17; 7:26;
8:1; 10:21;
11:16; 12:
22
Ep 1:18
Ph 3:14
4:14; 10:23
Nb 12:7LXX
2 Co 3:7f

3 That is why all you who are holy brothers and have had the same heavenly call should turn your minds to Jesus, the apostle and the high priest^a of our religion. •He was *faithful* to the one who appointed him, just like *Moses*, who stayed faithful *in all his house*; •but he has been found to deserve a greater glory than Moses. It is the difference between the honour given to the man that built the house and to the house itself. •Every house is built by someone, of course; but God built everything that exists. •It is true that Moses was *faithful in the house of God*, as a servant, acting as witness to the things which were to be divulged later; •but Christ was faithful as a son, and as the master in the house.

1:2+; 10:21
1 Co 3:9

And we are his house, as long as we cling to our hope with the confidence that we glory in.^b

Ep 2:19f▲
1 Tm 3:15▲

How to reach God's land of rest

- ⁷ The Holy Spirit says: *If only you would listen to him today; •do not harden* Ps 95:7-11
⁸ *your hearts, as happened in the Rebellion, on the Day of Temptation in the*
⁹ *wilderness, •when your ancestors challenged me and tested me, though they had*
¹⁰ *seen what I could do •for forty years. That was why I was angry with that generation*
¹¹ *and said: How unreliable these people who refuse to grasp my ways! •And so, in* Nb 14:21-23
¹² *anger, I swore that not one would reach the place of rest I had for them. •Take care,* 2 Th 2:3
¹³ *brothers, that there is not in any one of your community a wicked mind, so unbe-*
¹⁴ *lieving as to turn away from the living God. •Every day, as long as this 'today'* 10:25
¹⁵ *lasts, keep encouraging one another so that none of you is hardened by the lure of* 2 Th 2:10
¹⁶ *sin, •because we shall remain co-heirs with Christ only if we keep a grasp on our*
¹⁷ *first confidence right to the end. •In this saying: If only you would listen to him*
¹⁸ *today; do not harden your hearts, as happened in the Rebellion, •those who*
¹⁹ *rebelled after they had listened were all the people who were brought out of Egypt*
²⁰ *by Moses. •And those who made God angry for forty years were the ones who*
²¹ *sinned and whose dead bodies were left lying in the wilderness. •Those that he* Nb 14:29
²² *swore would never reach the place of rest he had for them were those who had been* 1 Co 10:10
²³ *disobedient. •We see, then, that it was because they were unfaithful that they*
²⁴ *were not able to reach it.*
- ¹ **4** Be careful, then: the promise of *reaching the place of rest he had for them* still Ex 33:14
² **4** holds good, and none of you must think that he has come too late for it.^a •We
³ received the Good News exactly as they did; but hearing the message did them no
⁴ good because they did not share the faith of those who listened.^b •We, however,
⁵ who have faith, shall reach a place of rest, as in the text: *And so, in anger, I swore* Ps 95:11
⁶ *that not one would reach the place of rest I had for them.* God's work was undoubt-
⁷ edly all finished at the beginning of the world; •as one text says, referring to the
⁸ seventh day: *After all his work God rested on the seventh day.* •The text we are
⁹ considering says: *They shall not reach the place of rest I had for them.* •It is estab-
¹⁰ lished, then, that there would be some people who would reach it, and since those
¹¹ who first heard the Good News failed to reach it through their disobedience, •God
¹² fixed another day when, much later, he said 'today' through David in the text
¹³ already quoted: *If only you would listen to him today; do not harden your hearts.*
¹⁴ If Joshua had led them into this place of rest, God would not later on have spoken
¹⁵ so much of another day. •There must still be, therefore, a place of rest reserved

Dt 31:7
Jos 22:4
Rv 14:13

1. Compared with the Son, angels are only servants employed to save human beings.

2 a. The Law, given through the intermediary of angels, cf. Gn 3:19+, and sanctioned by severe penalties.

b. Vulg. adds 'You have made him lord over the work of your hands'.

c. The first Christians, despised and persecuted, were still waiting for the coming of God's reign on earth, 2 P 3:4. Although Christ had already entered his glory, his reign on earth has to continue in time till he has conquered all his enemies (1:13) before his full and final triumph.

d. Christ is glorified because he has suffered and this triumph shows that God accepts the redemptive nature of his death.

e. 'God's grace'; rare var. 'without God' which may have been a gloss meant to emphasise that the Messiah could suffer only in his human, not in his divine, nature; but it could be an allusion to what Jesus cried out from the cross (Mt 27:46), or it could be taken as meaning that Christ died for all, but not for God, cf. 1 Co 15:27.

f. By dying and fulfilling the will of God, Christ becomes the one perfect saviour, responsible for the entry of human beings into the glory of God.

g. From the context, the translation could read 'form a single whole'.

h. Sin and death are related because both derive from Satan whose reign is the opposite of the reign of Christ.

i. By his resurrection, which is the guarantee to believers that they will rise, Rm 8:11+.

3 a. Christ is both 'apostle', i.e. someone 'sent' by God to the human race, cf. Jn 3:17,34; 5:36; 9:7; Rm 1:1+; 8:3; Ga 4:4, and high priest representing the human race before God, cf. 2:17; 4:14; 5:5,10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21.

b. Add, unwavering right till the end'.

4 a. This 'comparison between Moses and Jesus, 3:1f; cf. Ac 7:20-44+; Jn 1:21+, can be extended to the relationship between Israelites and Christians. Since the Israelites refused to believe God's promise and so never reached the peace of the promised land, 3:7-19, this promise (which cannot be empty, because it was made by God) is still open to Christians who are invited to reach the peace of the spiritual promised land, of which the earthly promised land was only a type.

b. E.g. Joshua and Caleb, cf. Nb 13-14. Var. 'because (the message) was not accompanied by faith in what they heard'.

c. 'however'; var. 'therefore'. 'a place of rest', var. 'the place of rest'.

for God's people,^a the seventh-day rest, •since to *reach the place of rest* is to *rest* 10
after your work, as God did after his. •We must therefore do everything we can 11
 to *reach this place of rest*, or some of you might copy this example of disobedience
 and be lost.

The word of God and Christ the priest

The word of God^c is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged 12
 sword but more finely: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from
 the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and
 thoughts. •No created thing can hide from him; everything is uncovered and open 13
 to the eyes of the one to whom we must give account of ourselves.

Since in Jesus, the Son of God, we have the supreme high priest who has gone 14
 through to the highest heaven, we must never let go of the faith that we have
 professed. •For it is not as if we had a high priest who was incapable of feeling 15
 our weaknesses with us; but we have one who has been tempted in every way that
 we are, though he is without sin. •Let us be confident, then, in approaching the 16
 throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in
 need of help.

Jesus the compassionate high priest

5 Every high priest has been taken out of mankind and is appointed to act for 1
 men in their relations with God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins; and so
 he can sympathise with those who are ignorant or uncertain because he too lives 2
 in the limitations of weakness. •That is why he has to make sin offerings for 3
 himself as well as for the people. •No one takes this honour on himself, but each 4
 one is called by God, as Aaron was. •Nor did Christ give himself the glory of 5
 becoming high priest, but he had it from the one who said to him: *You are my*
son, today I have become your father, •and in another text: *You are a priest of* 6
the order of Melchizedek, and for ever. •During his life on earth,^a he offered up 7
 prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the one who had the power to
 save him out of death,^b and he submitted so humbly that^c his prayer was heard.
 Although he was Son, he learnt to obey through suffering; •but having been 8
 made perfect,^d he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation 9
 and was acclaimed by God with the title of high priest of *the order of Melchizedek*. 10

III. THE AUTHENTIC PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST

Christian life and theology

On this subject we have many things to say, and they are difficult to explain 11
 because you have grown so slow at understanding. •Really, when you should by 12
 this time have become masters, you need someone to teach you all over again the
 elementary principles of interpreting God's oracles; you have gone back to needing
 milk, and not solid food. •Truly, anyone who is still living on milk cannot digest 13
 the doctrine of righteousness^e because he is still a baby. •Solid food is for mature 14
 men with minds trained by practice to distinguish between good and bad.

The author explains his intention

6 Let us leave behind us then^a all the elementary teaching about Christ and 1
 concentrate on its completion, without going over the fundamental doctrines
 again: the turning away from dead actions^b and towards faith in God; •the teaching 2
 about baptisms^c and the laying-on of hands; the teaching about the resurrection
 of the dead and eternal judgement. •This, God willing, is what we propose to do. 3
 As for those people who were once brought into the light, and tasted the gift 4
 from heaven, and received a share of the Holy Spirit, •and appreciated the good 5
 message of God and the powers of the world to come •and yet in spite of this 6

have fallen away^d—it is impossible for them to be renewed a second time. They cannot be repentant if they have wilfully crucified the Son of God and openly mocked him. •A field that has been well watered by frequent rain, and gives the crops that are wanted by the owners who grew them, is given God's blessing; but one that grows brambles and thistles is abandoned, and practically cursed. It will end by being burnt.

1 Jn 5:16A

2 Tm 2:6

Gn 3:17-18

Words of hope and encouragement

- 9 But you, my dear people—in spite of what we have just said, we are sure you are in a better state and on the way to salvation. •God would not be so unjust as to forget all you have done, the love that you have for his name or the services you have done, and are still doing, for the saints.^e •Our one desire is that every one of you should go on showing the same earnestness to the end, to the perfect fulfilment of our hopes, •never growing careless, but imitating those who have the faith and the perseverance to inherit the promises.
- 13 When God made the promise to Abraham, he *swore by his own self*, since it was impossible for him to swear by anyone greater: •*I will shower blessings on you and give you many descendants*. •Because of that, Abraham persevered and saw the promise fulfilled. •Men, of course, swear an oath by something greater than themselves, and between men, confirmation by an oath puts an end to all dispute. •In the same way, when God wanted to make the heirs to the promise thoroughly realise that his purpose was unalterable, he conveyed this by an oath; so that there would be two unalterable things^f in which it was impossible for God to be lying, and so that we, now we have found safety, should have a strong encouragement to take a firm grip on the hope that is held out to us. •Here we have an anchor for our soul,^g as sure as it is firm, and reaching right *through beyond the veil* •where Jesus has entered before us and on our behalf, to become a high priest of the order of Melchizedek, and for ever.

10:32-34

Ep 1:15p

2 Th 3:7

Ga 3:14,29

Ep 1:13-14

Gn 22:16f

Rm 4:20

Nb 23:19+

2 Tm 2:13

Ti 1:2

Lv 16:2

Mt 27:51p

9:3: 10:20

Jn 14:3

3:10

Ps 110:4

d. God's people, resting in Canaan after the Exodus, is taken as a figure of God resting in heaven after the creation: the new covenant calls those who are faithful to its terms to share God's beatitude.

e. All that God has revealed through the prophets or through his Son, 1:1-2; 2:1-4; 3. Since the promises and threats of the message are still 'alive' and in force, they make it impossible for human beings to avoid declaring their true intentions, i.e. they 'judge' them.

5 a. Lit. 'in the days of his flesh' (on the word 'flesh' cf. Rm 7:5+). The emphasis of this section is on humanity: a priest must be human since he represents human beings and he must share their sufferings since he must feel compassion for them, cf. 2:17-18; 4:15. Jesus suffered in this way all through his life on earth, and especially in his agony and death.

b. Not saved from dying, since that was the whole purpose of his life, Jn 12:27f, but rescued from death after dying, Ac 2:24f. God transformed his death by raising him to glory after it, Jn 12:27f; 13:31f; 17:5; Ph 2:9-11; Heb 2:9.

c. Lit. 'because of his *eulabeta*' (i.e. religious awe). It was because the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane was a prayer of total submission to the will of his Father, Mt 26:39,42, that it was heard and answered.

d. Having totally succeeded in his task of being priest and victim.

e. 'The doctrine of righteousness' like 'God's oracles' can mean either the O.T., cf. 2 Tm 3:16, or the whole body of doctrine. Here it seems to mean

all that Christ taught about the righteousness of God as applied to mankind, Rm 3:21-26, and especially about his own priesthood of mediation, prefigured by Melchizedek, the 'king of righteousness', 7:2.

6 a. In spite of the difficulties his readers will have, the author is going to try and stimulate them by formulating the difficult doctrine already mentioned in 5:11.

b. Anything done without faith and the divine life is called a 'dead' action because it is done in the context of sin, Rm 1:18-3:20, which leads to death, Rm 5:12,21; 6:23; 7:5; 1 Co 15:56; Ep 2:1; Col 2:13; cf. Jm 1:15; Jn 5:24; 1 Jn 3:14.

c. Not only Christian baptism, cf. Ac 1:5+; Rm 6:4+, but all the washings, lustrations and purificatory rites then practised, including the 'baptism of John' Ac 18:25; 19:1-5.

d. The irreparable apostasy of rejecting Christ and not believing in the power of his sacrifice to save.

e. The same phrase is used, Rm 15:25,31; 2 Co 8:4; 9:1,12, about a collection for the church in Jerusalem. The 'saints' are all Christians, but especially members of the mother church at Jerusalem and in particular the apostles, cf. Ac 9:13+.

f. I.e. the promise and the oath of God who 'does not lie', Ti 1:2.

g. Anchor: symbol of stability in the classical world, adopted in Christian iconography of 2nd c. as a symbol of hope.

A. CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD HIGHER THAN LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

Gn 14:18+
Ps 110:4+ **Melchizedek^a**

Gn 14:17-20 **7** You remember that *Melchizedek, king of Salem, a priest of God Most High,* 1
went to meet Abraham who was on his way back after defeating the kings, and
blessed him; •and also that it was to him that Abraham gave *a tenth of all that* 2
he had. By the interpretation of his name, he is, first, 'king of righteousness' and
 also *king of Salem*, that is, 'king of peace'; •he has no father, mother or ancestry, 3
 1:2+ and his life has no beginning or ending; he is like the Son of God. He remains
 Jn 7:27 a priest for ever.

Melchizedek accepted tithes from Abraham

Gn 14:20 Now think how great this man must have been, if the patriarch *Abraham paid* 4
him a tenth of the treasure he had captured.^b •We know that any of the descendants 5
 Dt 14:22+ of Levi who are admitted to the priesthood are obliged by the Law to take tithes
 from the people, and this is taking them from their own brothers although they
 too are descended from Abraham. •But this man, who was not of the same 6
 descent, took his tenth from Abraham, and he gave his blessing to the holder of
 the promises. •Now it is indisputable that a blessing is given by a superior to an 7
 inferior. •Further, in the one case it is ordinary mortal men who receive the 8
 tithes, and in the other, someone who is declared to be still alive. •It could be said 9
 that Levi himself, who receives tithes, actually paid them, in the person of
 Gn 14:17 Abraham, •because he was still in the loins of his ancestor when *Melchizedek* 10
came to meet him.

From levitical priesthood to the priesthood of Melchizedek^c

Now if perfection had been reached through the levitical priesthood because 11
 the Law given to the nation rests on it, why was it still necessary for a
 Ps 110:4 new priesthood to arise, *one of the same order as Melchizedek* not counted as being 12
 8:6f 'of the same order as' Aaron? •But any change in the priesthood must mean a
 change in the Law as well.
 8:4 So our Lord, of whom these things were said, belonged to a different tribe, 13
 Gn 49:10 the members of which have never done service at the altar; •everyone knows he 14
 Mt 1:1f; 2:6 came from Judah, a tribe which Moses did not even mention when dealing with
 Rm 1:3 priests.
 Rv 5:5

The abrogation of the old Law

This^d becomes even more clearly evident when there appears a second 15
 Rm 1:4+ Melchizedek, who is a priest •not by virtue of a law about physical descent,^e but 16
 Jr 33:18 by the power of an indestructible life. •For it was about him that the prophecy 17
 Ps 110:4 was made: *You are a priest of the order of Melchizedek, and for ever.* •The 18
 10:1; 11:40 earlier commandment is thus abolished, because it was neither effective nor useful,
 Rm 7:7+ since the Law could not make anyone perfect; but now this commandment is 19
 10:19+ replaced by something better—the hope that brings us nearer to God.

Christ's priesthood is unchanging

What is more, this was not done without the taking of an oath. The others, 20
 indeed, were made priests without any oath; •but he with an oath sworn by the 21
 Ps 110:4 one who declared to him: *The Lord has sworn an oath which he will never retract:*
 8:6-13 *you are a priest, and for ever.*^f •And it follows that it is a greater covenant for 22
 which Jesus has become our guarantee. •Then there used to be a great number of 23
 those other priests, because death put an end to each one of them; •but this one, 24
 9:24; 10:19+ because he remains *for ever*, can never lose his priesthood. •It follows, then, that 25
 Nb 18:1

his power to save is utterly certain, since he is living for ever to intercede for all who come to God through him.

Rm 8:34▲
1 Jn 2:1▲
Rv 1:18▲

The perfection of the heavenly high priest

- 26 To suit us, the ideal high priest would have to be holy, innocent and uncontaminated, beyond the influence of sinners, and raised up above the
27 heavens; •one who would not need to offer sacrifices every day, as the other high priests do for their own sins and then for those of the people, because he has done
28 this once and for all^a by offering himself. •The Law appoints high priests who are men subject to weakness; but the promise on oath, which came after the Law,^b appointed the Son who is made perfect *for ever*.

3:1+
Ex 29:1
1 Jn 3:5-6
9:25-28
3:3; 9:7,12;
10:11-14
Rm 6:10

5:9

B. THE SUPERIORITY OF THE WORSHIP, THE SANCTUARY AND THE MEDIATION PROVIDED BY CHRIST THE PRIEST

The new priesthood and the new sanctuary

- 1 **8** The great point of all that we have said is that we have a high priest of exactly this kind. He has his place *at the right* of the throne of divine
2 Majesty in the heavens, •and he is the minister of the sanctuary and of the true
3 Tent of Meeting which *the Lord*, and not any man, *set up*.^a •It is the duty of every high priest to offer gifts and sacrifices, and so this one too must have something
4 to offer. •In fact, if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there
5 are others who make the offerings laid down by the Law •and these only maintain the service of a model or a reflection of the heavenly realities. For Moses, when he had the Tent to build, was warned by God who said: *See that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain*.

3:1+
Ps 110:1
Ac 2:33+
Nb 24:6
1XX
3:1
7:13f
9:23; 10:1
Ac 7:44
Rv 11:19
Ex 25:40

Christ in the mediator of a greater covenant

- 6 We have seen that he has been given a ministry of a far higher order, and to the same degree it is a better covenant of which he is the mediator,^b founded on

7:12,22; 9:
15; 12:24
1 Tm 2:5
1 Jn 2:1

7 a. Melchizedek the priest-king: an O.T. type of Christ. Gn 14 is oddly silent about any ancestors or descendants of Melchizedek and this suggested the idea that he represented the eternal priesthood, vv. 1-3, cf. vv. 15-17 and Ps 110:4+. He was superior to Abraham in so far as Abraham offered him, Gn 14:20, a tithe of everything that had been captured, so *a fortiori*, the argument goes, he was superior to all the descendants of Abraham, including the Levites, v. 4f.

b. The tithe paid to levitical priests, Dt 14:22+, was both the stipend for their ministry at the altar and acknowledgement that as priests they were members of a higher class than those who paid. Levi (in the person of Abraham) could only have paid his tithe if Melchizedek were a priest of an even higher class than himself.

c. The argument here is based on Ps 110:4. This text prophesies that the King-Messiah will not be descended from Levi, but will be an eternal priest in the same sense as Melchizedek. This implies that when Christ comes, his sort of priesthood will replace the levitical priesthood, and this in turn will necessitate a new law since the old one was only concerned with the levitical priesthood, vv. 12, 16f, 21.

d. What has been said in v. 12.

e. Lit. 'a law of a carnal commandment', namely the law that restricted the priesthood of Levi to his physical descendants, cf. Nb 1:47f; 3:5f; Dt 10:8f; 18:1f; 33:8f.

f. Add 'of the order of Melchizedek'.

g. The one and only sacrifice of Christ is the centre of salvation history, Ac 1:7+. It closes a long epoch of

preparation, 1:1f; cf. Rm 10:4; it occurs at 'the appointed time'. Ga 4:4+, Rm 3:26+, and it begins the eschatological epoch. Though the Last Day, 1 Co 1:8+; Rm 2:6+, will follow, 2 Co 6:2+, only at some unspecified, 1 Th 5:1+, time in the future; salvation for the human race has been in essence certain from the moment when, in the person of Christ, it died to sin and rose to live again. Heb makes a special point of how the whole of this hope flows from the absolutely unique, unrepeatable sacrifice of Christ, 7:27; 9:12,26, 28; 10:10; cf. Rm 6:10; 1 P 3:18. Being unrepeatable, 10:12-14, this sacrifice is different from all others in the O.T. that had to be repeated again and again because they were unable actually to save anyone.

b. Cf. the promise made before the Law was given, Ga 3:17.

8 a. The argument so far has been to prove that what Christ is, i.e. an eternal and perfect priest, is superior to what the levitical priests are, since they are all mortals and sinners, ch. 7; now the argument goes on to show that what Christ does is equally superior to what the levitical priests do: Christ's sanctuary is better because it is in heaven; 8:1-5, cf. 9:11f, while the one on earth is only a copy of it, Ex 25:40; and the covenant brought by the mediation of Christ is a better covenant, vv. 6-13, cf. 9:15f.

b. Technically Christ is the one and only true mediator: he is true man and true God, Col 2:9, and so the one and only intermediary, Rm 5:15-19; 1 Tm 2:5, cf. 1 Co 3:22-23; 11:3, between God and the human race. He unites them and reconciles them, 2 Co 5:14-20. Through him come grace, Jn 1:16-17; Ep 1:7, and complete revelation, Heb 1:1-2. In heaven he continues to intercede for those who are faithful to him, 7:25+.

better promises. •If that first covenant had been without a fault, there would have been no need for a second one to replace it. •And in fact God does find fault with them; he says:

Jr 31:31-34
Mt 26:28+
1 Co 11:25

*See, the days are coming—it is the Lord who speaks—
when I will establish a new covenant
with the House of Israel and the House of Judah,
but not a covenant like the one I made with their ancestors
on the day I took them by the hand
to bring them out of the land of Egypt.
They abandoned that covenant of mine,
and so I on my side deserted them. It is the Lord who speaks.*

10:16-17

*No, this is the covenant I will make
with the House of Israel
when those days arrive—it is the Lord who speaks.
I will put my laws into their minds
and write them on their hearts.*

*Then I will be their God
and they shall be my people.
There will be no further need for neighbour to try to teach neighbour,
or brother to say to brother,
'Learn to know the Lord'.
No, they will all know me,
the least no less than the greatest,
since I will forgive their iniquities
and never call their sins to mind.*

10:17

2 Co 5:17 By speaking of a new covenant, he implies that the first one is already old. Now
Rv 21:4-5 anything old only gets more antiquated until in the end it disappears.

Christ enters the heavenly sanctuary

Ex 25-26+
26:31

9 The first covenant also^a had its laws governing worship, and its sanctuary, 1
a sanctuary on this earth. •There was a tent which comprised two 2
compartments: the first, in which the lamp-stand, the table and the presentation
6:19 loaves were kept, was called the Holy Place;^b •then beyond the second veil, an 3
innermost part which was called the Holy of Holies •to which belonged the gold 4
altar of incense,^c and the ark of the covenant, plated all over with gold. In this
Ex 30:1+
Ex 25:10+
Ex 16:1+
Nb 17:25
Ex 24:12+
Ex 25:17+
18+
were kept the gold jar containing the manna, Aaron's branch that grew the buds,
and the stone tablets of the covenant. •On top of it was the throne of mercy, and 5
outspread over it were the glorious cherubs. This is not the time to go into
greater detail about this.

Lv 16:1

Ex 30:10

7:27+
Lv 17:11+

10:20

1 Co 10:6+

11:40+

Col 2:16-17

Under these provisions, priests are constantly going into the outer tent to 6
carry out their acts of worship, •but the second tent is entered only once a year, 7
and then only by the high priest who must go in by himself and take the blood to 8
offer for his own faults and the people's. •By this, the Holy Spirit is showing that 9
no one has the right to go into the sanctuary as long as the outer tent remains 10
standing; •it is a symbol for this present time.^d None of the gifts and sacrifices 11
offered under these regulations can possibly bring any worshipper to perfection 12
in his inner self; •they are rules about the outward life, connected with foods and 13
drinks and washing at various times, intended to be in force only until it should
be time to reform them.

But now Christ has come, as the high priest of all the blessings which were to 11
come.^e He has passed through the greater, the more perfect tent, which is better 12
than the one made by men's hands because it is not of this created order; •and he 13
has entered the sanctuary^f once and for all, taking with him not the blood of goats
and bull calves, but his own blood, having won an eternal redemption for us.
The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer are sprinkled on those who

4:14; 9:24;
10:20
Ac 7:48
7:27+
Mt 26:28
Rm 3:24+
10:4
Nb 19:2-10,

have incurred defilement and they restore the holiness of their outward lives;
 14 how much more effectively the blood of Christ, who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal Spirit,⁹ can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God.

17-20▲
 Ps 51:7▲
 10:10+
 2 Co 13:13+
 1 P 1:18-19
 6:1+
 12:28
 Rm 1:9+

Christ seals the new covenant with his blood^a

15 He brings a new covenant, as the mediator, only so that the people who were called to an eternal inheritance may actually receive what was promised: his death
 16 took place to cancel the sins that infringed the earlier covenant. •Now wherever
 17 a will is in question, the death of the testator must be established; •indeed, it only becomes valid with that death, since it is not meant to have any effect while the
 18 testator is still alive. •That explains why even the earlier covenant needed
 19 something to be killed in order to take effect, •and why, after Moses had announced all the commandments of the Law to the people, he took the calves' blood, the goats' blood and some water, and with these he sprinkled the book
 20 itself and all the people, using scarlet wool and hyssop; •saying as he did so: *This is the blood of the covenant that God has laid down for you.* •After that, he sprinkled
 21 the tent and all the liturgical vessels with blood in the same way. •In fact, according to the Law almost everything has to be purified¹ with blood; and if
 22 there is no shedding of blood, there is no remission. •Obviously, only the copies of heavenly things can be purified in this way, and the heavenly things themselves
 23 have to be purified¹ by a higher sort of sacrifice than this. •It is not as though Christ had entered a man-made sanctuary which was only modelled on the real one; but it was heaven itself, so that he could appear in the actual presence of God
 24 on our behalf. •And he does not have to offer himself again and again, like the high priest going into the sanctuary year after year with the blood that is not his
 25 own, •or else he would have had to suffer over and over again since the world began. Instead of that, he has made his appearance once and for all,^k now at the
 26 end of the last age, to do away with sin by sacrificing himself. •Since men only
 27 die once, and after that comes judgement, •so Christ, too, offers himself only once to take the faults of many on himself, and when he appears a second time, it will
 28 not be to deal with sin but to reward with salvation those who are waiting for him.¹

8:6+
 Ga 4:1-7

Ex 24:6-8+

10:29
 Ex 24:8
 Mt 26:28D

Lv 17:11+

8:5

4:14; 7:25;
 9:11f
 Ac 7:48
 1 Co 10:16+
 7:25+

7:27+
 Jn 1:29
 Ga 4:4+
 1 P 3:18+
 10:10
 1 Tm 6:14+
 Is 53:12
 Ac 3:20-21
 Ph 3:20-21

9 a. Om. 'also'.

b. In the desert Tent-Sanctuary, Ex 25-26 (cf. the Temple of Solomon, 1 K 6) a curtain hung between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, Ex 26:33. Only the high priest ever went into the Holy of Holies and he did so only once a year on *yom kippur*, the Day of Atonement. Cf. Lv 16:1+.

c. Ex 30:6; 40:26 says that the incense altar, Ex 30:1+, was in the Holy Place; Heb may be following a different liturgical tradition, or the sense may be that the place of the altar of incense was immediately in front of the curtain of the inner sanctuary.

d. The spiritual meaning of this ceremonial arrangement is that under the old covenant the people had no access to God. Under the new covenant, Christ himself is the way to the Father, Jn 14:6; cf. Heb 10:19+. The abrogation of the old worship can thus be appropriately symbolised by the Temple curtain splitting wide open at the death of Jesus, Mt 27:51p.

e. Var. 'blessings already won'.

f. In his ascension Christ 'passed through' all the successive heavenly spheres that form the 'Holy Place' of the celestial Tent, and so came into the presence of God in the celestial 'Holy of Holies'.

g. Var. 'the Holy Spirit', cf. Rm 1:4+.

h. This section is parallel to 8:6-13; it shows that the

death of Christ was essential for him to act as mediator. It does this by making use of a pun: the Greek word *diathēkē* can mean 'pact', as in vv. 15, 18-20, or 'last will and testament', as in vv. 16-17; this makes it possible for the author to argue that a 'pact' or covenant suggests the death of a 'testator'. All pacts were sealed with the shedding of blood. Ex 24:6-8.

i. E.g. the altar, Lv 8:15; 16:19; the priests, Lv 8:24-30; the Levites, Nb 8:15; the sinful people, Lv 9:15-18; a mother, Lv 12:7-8, etc.; one exception, cf. Lv 5:11.

j. The 'purification' of the sanctuary, whether the earthly or the heavenly one, does not necessarily imply any previous 'impurity': it is a consecratory and inaugural rite.

k. The sacrifice of Christ is unique, 7:27+; being offered 'at the end of the last age' (lit. 'at the completion of the aeons'). i.e. the end of human history, there is no need for it to be repeated, since it wipes out sin, not with non-human ('alien') blood, but with Christ's own blood, cf. 9:12-14, so its effect is unconditional.

l. The first coming of Christ gave him a direct relationship to sin, Rm 8:3; 2 Co 5:21. The second coming of Christ will, since the redemption is complete, have no connection with sin. Christians wait for this *parousia* that will take place at the Judgement, 1 Co 1:8+; Rm 2:6+.

SUMMARY: CHRIST'S SACRIFICE SUPERIOR TO THE SACRIFICES OF THE MOSAIC LAW

The old sacrifices ineffective

8:5; 10:11
Col 2:17
7:19
Rm 7:7+
10:19+
11:40+
9:13

10 So, since the Law has no more than a *reflection* of these realities, and no finished picture of them, it is quite incapable of bringing the worshippers to perfection, with the same sacrifices repeatedly offered year after year. •Otherwise, the offering of them would have stopped, because the worshippers, when they had been purified once, would have no awareness of sins. •Instead of that, the sins are recalled year after year in the sacrifices. •Bulls' blood and goats' blood are useless for taking away sins, •and this is what he said, on coming into the world:

Ps 40:6-8
LXX

*You who wanted no sacrifice or oblation,
prepared a body for me.*

*You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices for sin;
then I said,
just as I was commanded in the scroll of the book,
'God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will.'*

6

7

Notice that he says first: *You did not want* what the Law lays down as the things to be offered, that is: *the sacrifices, the oblations, the holocausts and the sacrifices for sin*, and *you took no pleasure* in them; •and then he says: *Here I am! I am coming to obey your will*. He is abolishing the first sort to replace it with the second. •And this *will* was for us to be made holy by the *offering* of his *body* made once and for all by Jesus Christ.

1 S 15:22
Jn 6:38
Mt 26:39;
42p
9:14,28;
10:12,14
Jn 10:17-18
Ep 5:2
7:27+

The efficacy of Christ's sacrifice

10:1-4 All the priests stand at their duties every day, offering over and over again the same sacrifices which are quite incapable of taking sins away. •He, on the other hand, has offered one single sacrifice for sins, and then taken his place for ever, *at the right hand of God*, •where he is now waiting *until his enemies are made into a footstool for him*. •By virtue of that one single offering, he has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying. •The Holy Spirit assures us of this; for he says, first:

7:27+;
10:10+
Ps 110:1
Ac 2:33+
10:10;
11:40+
Jn 17:19+

8:10
Jr 31:33-34

*This is the covenant I will make with them
when those days arrive;*

16

and the Lord then goes on to say:

8:12

*I will put my laws into their hearts
and write them on their minds.
I will never call their sins to mind,
or their offences.*

17

When all sins have been forgiven, there can be no more sin offerings.

18

IV. PERSEVERING FAITH

The Christian opportunity

4:16; 7:19,
25; 10:1
6:19-20;
9:8,11-12
Jn 14:6
3:1+; 6:4; 14
Zc 6:11-12
Rm 6:4+
1 P 3:21

In other words, brothers, through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary,^a •by a new way which he has opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is to say, his body. •And we have the *supreme high priest* over all *the house of God*. •So as we go in, let us be sincere in heart and filled with faith, our minds sprinkled and free from any trace of bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. •Let us keep firm in the hope we profess, because

19

20

21

22

23

- 24 the one who made the promise is faithful. •Let us be concerned for each other, 3:2; 4:14;
 25 to stir a response in love and good works. •Do not stay away from the meetings 11:11
 of the community, as some do, but encourage each other to go; the more so as you 1 Co 1:9+
 see the Day^b drawing near. 3:13
 1 Co 1:8+

The danger of apostasy

- 26 If, after we have been given knowledge of the truth, we should deliberately 6:4-6; 12:17
 27 commit any sins, then there is no longer any sacrifice for them.^c •There will be
 left only the dreadful prospect of judgement and of *the raging fire* that is to *burn*
 28 *rebels*. •Anyone who disregards the Law of Moses is ruthlessly *put to death on the*
 29 *word of two witnesses or three*; •and you may be sure that anyone who tramples
 on the Son of God, and who treats *the blood of the covenant* which sanctified him
 as if it were not holy, and who insults the Spirit of grace, will be condemned to a
 30 far severer punishment. •We are all aware who it was that said: *Vengeance is*
 31 *mine; 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. Mt 12:31-32p
 Mt 10:28p

Motives for perseverance

- 32 Remember all the sufferings that you had to meet after you received the 6:4,10
 33 light,^d in earlier days; •sometimes by being yourselves publicly exposed to insults Ep 5:14
 and violence, and sometimes as associates of others who were treated in the same 1 Co 4:9
 34 way. •For you not only shared in the sufferings of those who were in prison,^e but
 you happily accepted being stripped of your belongings, knowing that you owned
 35 something that was better and lasting. •Be as confident now, then, since the reward
 36 is so great. •You will need endurance to do God's will and gain what he has
 promised. 13:3
 Mt 5:11,40
 Mt 6:20
 Lk 21:19
 Ac 14:22+
 1 Th 3:4
- 37 *Only a little while now, a very little while,* Is 26:20
and the one that is coming will have come; he will not delay. LXX
 Lk 21:28
 38 *The righteous man will live by faith,* Hab 2:3-4
but if he draws back, my soul will take no pleasure in him. Rm 1:17
- 39 You and I are not the sort of people who *draw back*, and are lost by it; we are
 the sort who keep *faithful* until our souls are saved. Lk 21:19
 1 P 1:9

The exemplary faith of our ancestors

- 1 **11** Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the Rm 1:16+;
 2 existence of the realities that at present remain unseen.^a •It was for faith 4:20; 8:
 24-25
 2 Co 4:18
- 3 It is by faith that we understand that the world was created by one word from Gn 1
 God, so that no apparent cause can account for the things we can see.^b Rm 1:20
- 4 It was because of his faith that Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain, 12:24
 and for that he was declared to be righteous when God made acknowledgement Gn 4:4
 of *his offerings*. Though he is dead, he still speaks by faith. Gn 4:10
 Jb 16:18+
 Mt 23:35

10 a. Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and he could do so only once a year. From now on, all who are faithful will be able to reach God through Christ. Cf. 4:16; 7:19,25; 10:1; Rm 5:2; Ep 1:4; 2:18; 3:12; Col 1:22.

b. When Christ returns at the end of history, cf. 1 Co 1:8+. This verse may refer to the signs preceding the *parousia*, particularly to the disturbances that prelude the destruction of Jerusalem, itself one of the 'visitations' of the Lord.

c. The sin of apostasy or deliberate revolt against God, cf. 6:6+. The fire, v. 27, is the traditional weapon God uses in anger, Is 26:11; Mt 3:11-12; Mk 9:48-49+; Rv 11:5.

d. 'Enlightenment' or 'illumination' in N.T. as in patristic writers always refers to baptism, 6:4; Ep 5:14

(cf. Rm 6:4+).

e. Var. 'of my chains', referring to Paul's imprisonment, Ph 1:7; Col 4:18.

11 a. Var. 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for (heaven) and the conviction of things unwanted (hell)'. The Jewish Christians to whom he is writing have been discouraged by persecution, so the author emphasises that it is only what is future and what is invisible that concerns hope. This verse was adopted as a theological definition of faith, i.e. the anticipated and assured possession of heavenly realities, cf. 6:5; Rm 5:2; Ep 1:13f. The examples taken from the lives of O.T. saints are meant to illustrate how faith is the source of patience and strength.

b. Creation seen with the eye of faith reveals 'unseen reality': before creation everything real existed in God from whom everything comes.

- Sl 44:16 It was because of his faith that Enoch was taken up and did not have to
 Gn 5:24 experience death: *he was not to be found because God had taken him.* This was
 because before his assumption it is attested that *he had pleased God.* •Now it is
 Rm 2:7; 10: impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must
 14 believe that he exists and rewards those who try to find him.^c
 Ex 3:14 + It was through his faith that Noah, when he had been warned by God of
 Jr 29:12-14 something that had never been seen before, felt a holy fear and built an ark to save
 Gn 6:8-22 his family. By his faith the world was convicted,^d and he was able to claim the
 Mt 24:37-39 righteousness which is the reward of faith.
 1 P 3:20
 2 P 2:5
 Rm 1:16+ It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to *set out* for a country that was
 Rm 12:1-4 the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that *he set out* without
 Rm 1:5+ knowing where he was going. •By faith he arrived, *as a foreigner*, in the Promised
 Gn 23:4; Land, and lived there as if in a strange country, with Isaac and Jacob, who were
 26:3; 35:12 heirs with him of the same promise. •They lived there in tents while he looked
 Rv 21:10-22 forward to a city founded, designed and built by God.
 10:23 It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able
 Gn 17:19; to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise would be
 21:2 faithful to it. •Because of this, there came from one man, and one who was
 Rm 4:19-21 already as good as dead himself, *more descendants than could be counted, as many
 as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore.*
 Gn 22:17 All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been
 Ex 32:13 promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognising
 Dn 3:36 that they were only *strangers and nomads on earth.* •People who use such terms
 LXX about themselves make it quite plain that they are in search of their real homeland.
 Jn 8:56 They can hardly have meant the country they came from, since they had the
 Gn 23:4 opportunity to go back to it; •but in fact they were longing for a better homeland,
 Ps 39:12; their heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God,
 119:19 since he has founded the city for them.
 13:14 It was by faith that Abraham, *when put to the test, offered up Isaac.* He offered
 Ph 3:20 to sacrifice his only son even though the promises had been made to him •and he
 Rv 21:2 had been told: *It is through Isaac that your name will be carried on.* •He was
 Gn 22:1-14 confident that God had the power even to raise the dead; and so, figuratively
 Si 44:20-21 speaking,^e he was given back Isaac from the dead.
 Jm 2:21-22 It was by faith that this same Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob and Esau for the
 Gn 27:27f, still distant future. •By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's
 39f sons, *leaning on the end of his stick as though bowing to pray.* •It was by faith that,
 Gn 48:15f when he was about to die, Joseph recalled the Exodus of the Israelites and made
 Gn 47:31 the arrangements for his own burial.
 Gn 50:24-25 It was by faith that Moses, when he was born, *was hidden by his parents for
 Ex 2:2 three months*; they defied the royal edict when they *saw* he was such a *fine child.*^f
 Ac 7:20 It was by faith that, *when he grew to manhood*, Moses refused to be known as the
 Ex 2:11 son of Pharaoh's daughter •and chose to be ill-treated in company with God's
 13:13 people rather than to enjoy for a time the pleasures of sin. •He considered that
 Ps 89:50f the insults offered to the Anointed^g were something more precious than all the
 Ex 2:15 treasures of Egypt, because he had his eyes fixed on the reward. •It was by faith
 Ex 12:11; that he left Egypt and was not afraid of the king's anger; he held to his purpose
 22:23 like a man who could see the Invisible. •It was by faith that he kept *the Passover*
 Ex 14:22,27 and sprinkled *the blood* to prevent *the Destroyer* from touching any of the first-
 born sons of Israel. •It was by faith they crossed the Red Sea as easily as dry land,
 while the Egyptians, trying to do the same, were drowned.
 Jos 6:20 It was through faith that the walls of Jericho fell down when the people had
 Jos 2:11; been round them for seven days. •It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute
 6:17 welcomed the spies and so was not killed with the unbelievers.
 Jm 2:25 Is there any need to say more? There is not time for me to give an account
 Jg 4:6; of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, or of David, Samuel and the prophets.
 13:24 These were men who through faith conquered kingdoms, did what is right and

34 earned the promises. They could keep a lion's mouth shut, •put out blazing fires and emerge unscathed from battle. They were weak people who were given
 35 strength, to be brave in war and drive back foreign invaders. •Some came back to their wives from the dead, by resurrection; and others submitted to torture,
 36 refusing release so that they would rise again to a better life. •Some had to bear
 37 being pilloried and flogged, or even chained up in prison. •They were stoned, or sawn in half,^a or beheaded; they were homeless, and dressed in the skins of sheep and goats; they were penniless and were given nothing but ill-treatment.
 38 They were too good for the world and they went out to live in deserts and
 39 mountains and in caves and ravines. •These are all heroes of faith, but they did
 40 not receive what was promised, •since God had made provision for us to have something better, and they were not to reach perfection except with us.⁴

Dn 6:23
Dn 3:49-50

1 K 17:23
2 K 4:36
2 M 6:18-7:42

Jr 20:2: 37:15f

1 P 1:10-12
7:19; 9:9;
10:1,14;
12:23+
1 P 3:19+

The example of Jesus Christ

1 **12** With so many witnesses in a great cloud on every side of us, we too, then,
 2 should throw off everything that hinders us, especially the sin that clings
 2 so easily, and keep running steadily in the race we have started. •Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of the joy which was still in the future, he endured the cross, disregarding the shameful-ness of it, and *from now on has taken his place at the right of God's throne.*
 3 Think of the way he stood such opposition from sinners^a and then you will not
 4 give up for want of courage. •In the fight against sin, you have not yet had to keep fighting to the point of death.

Ga 5:7+
2:10
Mt 4:3-11p
Jn 6:15
2 Co 8:9
Ph 2:6-8
Ps 110:1
Ac 2:33+
Lk 2:34

10:32f

God's fatherly instruction

5 Have you forgotten that encouraging text in which you are addressed as sons?
My son, when the Lord corrects you, do not treat it lightly; but do not get discouraged
 6 *when he reprimands you. •For the Lord trains the ones that he loves and he punishes*
 7 *all those that he acknowledges as his sons. •Suffering is part of your training;^b*
 God is treating you as his *sons*. Has there ever been any *son* whose father did not
 8 train him? •If you were not getting this training, as all of you are, then you would
 9 not be *sons* but bastards. •Besides, we have all had our human fathers who punished us, and we respected them for it; we ought to be even more willing to
 10 submit ourselves to our spiritual Father, to be given life. •Our human fathers were thinking of this short life when they punished us, and could only do what they thought best; but he does it all for our own good, so that we may share his
 11 own holiness. •Of course, any punishment is most painful at the time, and far from pleasant; but later, in those on whom it has been used, it bears fruit in peace
 12 and goodness. •So *hold up your limp arms and steady your trembling knees* •and
 13 *smooth out the path you tread;* then the injured limb will not be wrenched, it will grow strong again.

Pr 3:11-12
LXX

Rv 3:19

Lv 17:1+
2 P 1:4
Jn 16:20
2 Co 7:8-11
1 P 1:6-7
Jm 1:2-4
Is 35:3

Pr 4:26
LXX

c. The faith that is essential for salvation has two objects; belief in the existence of one personal God. Ws 13:1, who by his very nature cannot be seen, Jn 1:18; Rm 1:20; Col 1:15; 1 Tm 1:17; 6:16; Jn 20:29; 2 Co 5:7, and belief that God will pay a just wage for all effort spent in searching for him; cf. Mt 5:12p; 6:4,6,18; 10:41fp; 16:27; 20:1-16; 25:31-46; Lk 6:35; 14:14; Rm 2:6; 1 Co 3:8,14; 2 Co 5:10; Ep 6:8; 2 Tm 4:8,14; 1 P 1:17; 2 Jn 8; Rv 2:23; 11:18; 14:13; 20:12-13; 22:12.

d. Noah's confidence in what God had said 'convicts' a sinner, cf. Ws 4:16; Mt 12:41.

e. Lit. 'by a parable'. The saving of Isaac from death prefigures the resurrection of all humans and, according to traditional exegesis, the death and resurrection of Christ.

f. Some authorities insert the story of the murdered Egyptian here, cf. Ex 2:11-12; Ac 7:24.

g. In the psalm, God's 'Anointed' who is 'insulted' refers to the people of God, v. 25, consecrated to Yahweh, Ex 19:6+. The author of Heb applies the text to Christ himself on whose account Moses

(through faith, since the Messiah was still in the future) suffered. Cf. 10:33; 13:13.

h. Some apocryphal books say this was how king Manasseh had Isaiah executed. Add. 'tempted' (put through ordeals).

i. The eschatological epoch of 'perfection' was inaugurated by Christ, 2:10; 5:9; 7:28; 10:14, and access to the divine life has been made available only by him, 9:11f; 10:19f. The O.T. saints, who could not be 'perfected' by the Law, 7:19; 9:9; 10:1, had thus to wait till the resurrection of Christ before they could enter the perfect life of heaven, 12:23; cf. Mt 27:52f; 1 P 3:19+.

12 a. Lit. 'endured contradictions of sinners against himself'; var. '...against themselves'.

b. To the eyes of faith, the various trials of life are all part of the way God is bringing us up. The argument depends on the biblical concept of education, *másar*, *páidela*, mean 'teaching through hitting, punishing', cf. Jb 5:17; 33:19; Ps 94:12; Sl 1:27; 4:17; 23:2.

Unfaithfulness is punished

Always be wanting peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one can ever see the Lord. •Be careful that no one is deprived of the grace of God and that no *root of bitterness should begin to grow and make trouble*; this can poison a whole community. •And be careful that there is no immorality, or that any of you does not degrade religion like Esau,^e *who sold his birthright* for one single meal. •As you know, when he wanted to obtain the blessing afterwards, he was rejected and, though he pleaded for it with tears, he was unable to elicit a change of heart.

The two covenants

What you have come to is nothing known to the senses:^d not a *blazing fire*, or a *gloom turning to total darkness*, or a *storm*; •or *trumpeting thunder* or the *great voice speaking* which made everyone that heard it beg that no more should be said to them.^e •They were appalled at the order that was given: *If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned*. •The whole scene was so terrible that Moses said: *I am afraid*, and was trembling with fright. •But what you have come to is Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem where the millions of angels have gathered for the festival, •with the whole Church in which everyone is a 'first-born son' and a citizen of heaven. You have come to God himself, the supreme Judge, and been placed with spirits of the saints who have been made perfect; •and to Jesus, the mediator who brings a new covenant and a blood for purification which pleads more insistently than Abel's. •Make sure that you never refuse to listen when he speaks. The people who refused to listen to the warning from a voice on earth could not escape their punishment, and how shall we escape if we turn away from a voice that warns us from heaven? •That time his voice made the earth shake, but now he has given us this promise: *I shall make the earth shake once more and not only the earth but heaven as well*. •The words *once more* show that since the things being shaken are created things, they are going to be changed, so that the unshakeable things will be left.^f •We have been given possession of an unshakeable kingdom. Let us therefore hold on to the grace that we have been given and use it to worship God in the way that he finds acceptable, in reverence and fear.^g •For our God is a *consuming fire*.

APPENDIX

Final recommendations

13 Continue to love each other like brothers, •and remember always to welcome strangers, for by doing this, some people have entertained angels without knowing it. •Keep in mind those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; and those who are being badly treated, since you too are in the one body. •Marriage is to be honoured by all, and marriages are to be kept undefiled, because fornicators and adulterers will come under God's judgement. Put greed out of your lives and be content with whatever you have; God himself has said: *I will not fail you or desert you*, •and so we can say with confidence: *With the Lord to help me, I fear nothing: what can man do to me?*

Faithfulness

Remember your leaders,^a who preached the word of God to you, and as you reflect on the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith. •Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever.^b •Do not let yourselves be led astray by all sorts of strange doctrines: it is better to rely on grace for inner strength than on dietary laws which have done no good to those who kept them. We have our own altar^c from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. •The bodies of the animals *whose blood is brought into the sanctuary* by the

- 12 high priest *for the atonement of sin are burnt outside the camp*, •and so Jesus too
 13 suffered outside the gate to sanctify the people with his own blood.^a •Let us go to
 14 him, then, *outside the camp*, and share his degradation. •For there is no eternal
 15 city for us in this life but we look for one in the life to come. •Through him,^e
let us offer God an unending sacrifice of praise, a verbal sacrifice that is offered
 16 every time we acknowledge his name. •Keep doing good works and sharing your
 resources, for these are sacrifices that please God.

Nb 19:3
 10:14
 Mt 21:39p
 Jn 19:20
 Ac 2:58
 11:26
 11:10, 14-16
 1 Co 7:29-31
 Ph 3:20
 Ps 50:14, 23
 Ho 14:3
 Ac 2:21 +
 Rm 1:9 +;
 10:9
 Ph 4:18

Obedience to religious leaders

- 17 Obey your leaders and do as they tell you, because they must give an account
 of the way they look after your souls; make this a joy for them to do, and not a
 18 grief—you yourselves would be the losers. •We are sure that our own conscience
 is clear and we are certainly determined to behave honourably in everything we
 19 do; pray for us. •I ask you very particularly to pray that I may come back to you
 all the sooner.

Ezk 3:18
 Co 16:16
 1 Th 5:12f
 Rm 15:30
 Ep 6:19
 Col 4:25
 1 Th 5:25
 2 Th 3:1
 Ph 2:24
 Phm 22

EPILOGUE

News, good wishes and greetings

- 20 I pray that the God of peace, *who brought our Lord Jesus back from the dead*
to become the great Shepherd of the sheep by the blood that sealed an eternal
 21 *covenant*, •may make you ready to do his will in any kind of good action; and
 turn us all into whatever is acceptable to himself through Jesus Christ, to whom
 be glory for ever and ever, Amen.
 22 I do ask you, brothers, to take these words of advice kindly; that is why I have
 written to you so briefly.
 23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been set free. If he arrives
 24 in time, he will be with me when I see you. •Greetings to all your leaders and to
 25 all the saints. The saints of Italy send you greetings. •Grace be with you all.

Is 63:11
 Zc 9:11
 Ezk 34:1 +;
 37:26
 Jn 10:11
 1 P 2:25; 5:4
 Ph 2:13
 Rm 16:27 +

Ac 16:1 +

c. Lit. 'or be profane like Esau'. This refers to the sin committed by Esau when he surrendered the position that was his by birth, of being heir to the messianic promises.

d. Lit. 'You have not approached something that can be touched', var. '...a mountain that can be touched', cf. v. 22.

e. As at the theophany on Sinai, when the old covenant was made. The new covenant replaces fear with peace.

f. Cosmic upheavals are traditional metaphors in apocalypses for the time when God intervenes to introduce a new regime, cf. Am 8:9 +; 1 Co 1:8 +; Mt 24:1 +.

g. This is the real conclusion, and an apt one for a letter that lays such emphasis on the liturgy. The 'unshakable' kingdom summarises vv. 22-24. God reigns over both his angels and his saints in the kingdom of heaven, the eternal and spiritual Jerusalem. From now on Christians are able to enter this kingdom and live there a life that is a eucharistic liturgy.

13 a. The heads of the community.

b. Christ Jesus was the central theme on which the heads of the community preached. They may die but Christ remains, and so it is to him that Christians owe their allegiance.

c. Not the table used for the Eucharist, but either the cross on which Christ was sacrificed, or Christ himself through whom we offer the sacrifice of prayer to God. Non-Christian Jews who still 'served the tabernacle' cannot participate.

d. On the Day of Atonement the high priest went into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled it with the blood of animals that had been killed, and the bodies of these animals were burnt outside the camp. This prefigured how Jesus as expiatory victim was to be killed outside the walls of Jerusalem. The lesson drawn from this is that Christians should break with Judaism and think of themselves as exiles from the world.

e. 'Through him', add. 'therefore'.

THE LETTERS
TO ALL CHRISTIANS

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS TO ALL CHRISTIANS

There are seven New Testament letters which are not Pauline and which, in spite of having no other obvious connection, were very soon grouped together. Three of these letters are attributed to John, two to Peter and the other two to James and Jude. They were already given the title 'universal' or 'catholic' by the end of the 2nd century; it is not certain why, possibly because most are addressed to the whole Christian Church and not to particular communities or individuals.

The letter of *James* was generally accepted as canonical in the Church from the 2nd century onwards. Its author is usually identified with the James, 'brother of the Lord', Mt 13:55p; cf. 12:46+, who played an important part in the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem, Ac 12:17+; 15:13-21; 21:18-26; 1 Co 15:7; Ga 1:19; 2:9,12, and who was put to death by Jews about the year 62 (Josephus, Hegesippus). He is obviously not the apostle James, son of Zebedee, Mt 10:2p, martyred by Herod in 44, Ac 12:2, though he could theoretically be identified with the apostle James, son of Alphaeus, Mt 10:3p; even early writers, however, were doubtful and most critics nowadays reject it. Paul's turn of phrase in Ga 1:19 is ambiguous. But even without being one of the Twelve, James, as 'the brother of the Lord', was sufficiently prominent for the apostolic authority of his letter to be accepted from the beginning.

The traditional attribution of the letter to James, 'the brother of the Lord', leader of the Judaeo-Christian community in Jerusalem, is supported by internal evidence. The author was familiar with the Old Testament and with the teachings of Jesus, yet his letter, though it is full of Hebraisms and makes use of parallelism, and is in a didactic style that is characteristically semitic, was obviously written in Greek. It is written, moreover, with such elegance, such a rich vocabulary and with such a skilful use of the 'diatribe', that many critics have found it hard to believe the author was a Galilean. No accurate estimate, however, can be made as to how competent first-century Palestinians were in writing Greek, and James may have been helped by a disciple familiar with the hellenistic world and its culture.

The letter is addressed to the 'twelve tribes of the Dispersion', 1:1, i.e. to the Jewish Christians scattered all over the Graeco-Roman world but concentrated in countries near Palestine like Syria and Egypt. The whole tone of the letter shows that it was intended for Jewish converts and presumes that the readers are familiar with the Old Testament since, unlike Paul and the author of the Hebrews, James hardly ever makes use of direct quotations but argues from the imprecise and rather general allusions that underlie the whole text.