

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Introduction

This letter, like those of James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude, are often referred to as the Jewish epistles. They were written to Jewish Christians about questions and problems they faced early in the history of the church. The following notes of introduction have been adapted from the writings of Dr. Warren Wiersbe and Dr. J. Vernon McGee.

The Author

The question of authorship has plagued this epistle throughout church history. However, it is a debate in search of a cause. The epistle was accepted into the canon on the basis of Paul's authorship. Many like to quote the statement by Origen, "who wrote the Epistle is known only to God". However, they leave out the important part of his quote.

"The thoughts are Paul's, but the phraseology and composition are by someone else. **Not without reason have the ancient men handed down the Epistle as Paul's**, but who wrote the Epistle is known only to God."

This puts the quote in an entirely different light. Clement of Alexandria (150-215AD) said that Paul wrote the epistle in Hebrew, and that it was translated into Greek by Luke. Actually, the argument for Paul's authorship is stronger than for some of his other epistles, in spite of the lack of his name in the epistle.

Following is a list, far from complete, of thoughts and phrases in Hebrews used by Paul in other epistles, but never by other authors. Compare the following...

1. Heb.1:1, 3 with 2Co.4:4; Col.1:15-16.
2. Heb.1:4, 2:9 with Phi.2:8-9.
3. Heb.2:14 with 1Co.15:54, 57.
4. Heb.7:16, 18-19 with Rom.2:29; Gal.3:3, 24.
5. Heb.7:26 with Eph.4:10.
6. Heb.8:5; 10:1; with Col.2:17.
7. Heb.10:12-13 with 1Co.15:25.

Some claim that Heb.2:3 excludes Paul as the author, since he says in Gal.1:11-12 that he received the Gospel not from men but from God. But in Heb.2:3 he identifies himself with other early Christians, using “we” to separate them from the early disciples.

Two reasons may explain why Paul did not sign his name to the book. First, he did not begin with “Paul, an apostle...” because he intended to present the Lord Jesus Christ as the ultimate apostle from God (Heb.3:1). Second, we know that Paul was hated by the Jews, and the addition of his name would only hinder the acceptance of the truth contained in it. Consider seven things the author reveals about himself that would fit the apostle Paul.

1. He was a Jew acquainted with the details of Mosaic ritualism (Heb. Ch.7-10; 13:13).
2. He was highly acquainted with Greek philosophy.
3. He had been in prison and was supported by the recipients (Heb.10:34).
4. At the time of writing he was a prisoner in Italy (Heb.13:19, 24).
5. Timothy had been imprisoned with him, but now was free (Heb.13:23, compare Phi.2:19).
6. The author hoped to be liberated soon (Heb.13:19, compare Phi. v.22).
7. The scholar Lightfoot wrote in favor of Paul’s authorship, saying, “The very style of it may argue the scholar of Gamaliel” (see Act.22:1-3).

The final argument, and to me quite convincing, for Paul’s authorship, comes from the apostle Peter. We know that Peter wrote to believing Jews who had been scattered by persecution (compare Act.8:1-4 with 1Pe.1:1). In 2Pe.3:15-16 Peter speaks of an epistle written to these same Jewish believers by the apostle Paul. He specifically separated this epistle from Paul’s other epistles, “*as also in all his epistles*” (2Pe.3:16). Peter identifies this epistle of Paul, sent to Jews, as Scripture. If Hebrews is not that epistle, then we have a portion of the inspired word of God missing!

The Recipients

This reference by Peter also helps us know specifically where the letter was sent. It would have been “*to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus,*

Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..." (1Pe.1:1). This letter, then, is a counterpart to the Epistle to the Galatians. Where Galatians deals with the Gentile side of the problem of law versus grace, Hebrews deals with the question from a Jewish perspective. No doubt it was also to be carried to Jews especially in Jerusalem and Judea, where the judgment of God was soon to fall in the coming of Titus and the Roman legions, and the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the nation of Israel. The recipients are called "*holy brethren*" (Heb.3:1), and "*brethren*" (2:11, 12, 17; 3:12; 10:19; 13:22). In addition to this, in every exhortation in the epistle, the author includes himself with them, using the words "*we*" and "*us*" (Heb.2:1-3; 4:1-3, 11, 14; 6:1-3; 8:1; 10:19-24; 12:28).

The Theme

The theme of Hebrews is twofold: first doctrinal and then practical. The main theme is that we have a perfect high priest who has offered a perfect and final sacrifice for sins (Heb.8:1-6). This is the main focus of chapters 7 through 10. Then the subtheme is that we ought to carefully and diligently "*consider Jesus*" (Heb.3:1; 12:3) so that we might go on to maturity (Heb.6:1). Paul's point here is that although the Lord Jesus is God's final word to man, our comprehension of that message will never be final. Throughout all eternity we will be learning what the coming of Christ and His sacrifice for us has accomplished (Eph.2:7).

The Outline

The outline of the Epistle is quite simple, but the concepts contained in these sections can be difficult to comprehend, especially for Gentile readers.

1. The Superior Person of Christ – Chapters 1- 4:13 (Doctrinal).
The Superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ is seen in seven ways.
 - A. Christ is superior to the prophets (Heb.1:1-3).
 - B. Christ is superior to Angels (Heb.1:4-2:18).
 - C. Christ is superior to Moses (Heb.3:1-19).
 - D. Christ is superior to Joshua (Heb.4:1-13).

2. The Superior Priesthood of Christ – Chapters 4:14- Ch.10 (Dispensational).
 - A. Christ is superior to Melchizedek (Heb.7:1-28).
 - B. Christ serves in a superior, heavenly sanctuary, ministers a superior covenant, based on a superior sacrifice (Ch.8-10).

3. The Superior Promises of Christ – Chapters 11-13 (Practical).
These fall into a familiar category of three.
 - A. The blessings of Faith (Heb.11:1-40).
 - B. The blessings of Hope (Heb.12:1-29).
 - C. The blessings of Love (Heb.13:1-25).

Along with this outline, there are five warning sections embedded within the book.

1. The danger of drifting from God's word (Heb.2:1-4).
2. The danger of doubting God's word (Heb.3:7-4:13).
3. The danger of dullness toward God's word (Heb.5:11-6:8).
4. The danger of disobeying God's word (Heb.10:26-39).
5. The danger of despising God's word (Heb.12:12-29).

Key Words

The main idea of the book is expressed in the repetition of key words like "perfect" (Heb.2:10; 5:9, 14; 6:1; 7:11, 19, 28; 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:2, 23), and "better" (Heb.1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24). The word "better" suggests infinite superiority of Christ and His work, and the word "perfect" speaks of that which is whole, complete, without lack. We also find the words "heavenly" and "eternal" often.

The Date

It is clear that this epistle was written prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, probably around 68AD, before Paul was martyred. He speaks of the temple still standing, and of priests who continue to serve there (Heb.8:4-5; 9:9-10; 10:1-3, 11). The torn veil on the day of Christ's crucifixion (Mat.27:51) showed that God had rejected the nation, and put an end to the Levitical system of worship. The book of Hebrews serves as a warning of the coming day of fiery judgment (Heb.10:25, 27; 12:28) that would fall on Israel. See Peter's warning in Act.2:40. This was the result of the nations rejection of her Messiah, the unforgivable sin of Mat.12:24, 31-32, which resulted in the kingdom being taken from Israel, for a time (Rom.11:24-25), and given to the Gentiles (Mat.21:40-44). This judgment Paul compares to the failure of Israel to enter into Canaan due to their unbelief (Num.13-14; Heb.3:1-19). Hebrews may actually have been Paul's last epistle.

The Infinite Superiority of Jesus Christ

This is the theme of the book of Hebrews. It is most interesting that in Col.1:15-19 Paul presents seven unique superiorities of Christ. Here in Hebrews, there are several sets of seven superiorities.

1. The seven superiorities of the book: Jesus is superior...
 - A. To prophets (Heb.1:1-3).
 - B. To angels (Heb.1:4-14).
 - C. To Moses (Heb.3:1-19).
 - D. To Joshua (Heb.4:1-13).
 - E. To Melchizedek (Heb.4:13-7:28).
 - F. To the Old Covenant (Heb.8:1-10:39).
 - G. To all other heroes of the faith, as He is the Author and Finisher of faith (Heb.11:1-13:25).
2. His seven superiorities over the prophets (Heb.1:1-3).
3. His seven superiorities over the angels (Heb.1:4-14).

I am sure we could “impose” our system of “seven superiorities” in every category in the book. However, it is evident that Paul is here in the first chapter, and throughout the book, following the formula he used in Colossians 1:15-19.

1. The Superior Person of Jesus Christ – Ch.1- 4

The Superiority of Christ to the Prophets (Heb.1:1-3)

The book of Hebrews begins with two assumptions (Dr. McGee). The first is that God exists. No attempt is made to prove this assertion. The second is that God has spoken. God has revealed Himself to man. He has done this through His creation (Psa.19:1-6; Rom.1:18-20), through conscience (Eccl. 3:11; Rom.2:14-16), and especially through His word, both written and living, in the Person of Jesus Christ (Joh.1:1-18). In separating the “*time past*” from “*these last days*”, Paul divides between the Old and the New testament revelation. Note here seven superiorities of Christ to the prophets. We might say, the seven glories of Jesus Christ.

1. Jesus Christ is God’s complete and final word to mankind. God’s message through the prophets was partial, but in Christ we have His full and final message to man. The phrase “by His Son” is literally, “In Son”. The emphasis is on the unique nature of His only begotten as opposed to the prophets, who were mere men.
2. Jesus Christ is the heir of all things. Because He is the “firstborn” of all creation, and “firstborn from the dead” (Col.1:18), He is the

- rightful heir of both the old, and the new, creation. Bear in mind that “firstborn” designates Him not as one who was created, which is heresy, but as the One who inherits all things (Joh.1:1-3; Col.1:15-18).
3. Jesus Christ is the creator of all things, including “the worlds”, literally, the ages (Joh.1:3; Col.1:16-17). Jesus Christ is the designer and director of human history. He is guiding history to its intended end.
 4. He is the glory and the image of God. The word “brightness” speaks of “*radiance*” and suggests the visible Shekinah glory of God. The phrase “*express image*” is from the word we get “character” from. It was used in the ancient world of a stamp left by a die, indicating the exact reproduction of the invisible God in the visible person of Jesus (Joh.1:14, 18; 14:9-11; 1Jo.1:1-3).
 5. He is the sustainer of the universe. Scientists cannot tell us how the atom, possessing both proton and neutron, holds together. It is Jesus Christ who is “*upholding all things by the word of His power*”. The word here is *phero*, which means to bear or to carry. The Lord is carrying all things forward to fulfill His eternal plan. He does this by His word, which is *rhema*, His spoken word.
 6. He alone could purge, or wash away, the sins of the world. Paul uses the word *katharismos* here, from the same root word meaning to cleanse or purify, and is used in Joh.3:25; 13:10-11 and 1Jo.1:9, as well as Heb.9:14, 22 and 10:22.
 7. He now is seated in power and glory at the Father’s right hand. This was prophesied in Psa.110:1, and will be developed in Heb.10:11-18. After His resurrection Jesus took His seat at the Father’s right hand, the place of power and authority. We refer to this time, until His second coming, as the present session of Christ.

Conclusion

In these few verses Paul has set forth the Lord Jesus Christ as the final and supreme message from God to men. All of the New Testament books are simply expounding the meaning of the revelation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. We who live in these final days of the Church age need more than ever to “consider Jesus” (Heb.3:1). For unless we fix our eyes on Him we will not be enabled to finish the race set before us (Heb.12:1-3).

The Superiority of Jesus Christ to Angels (Heb.1:4-2:18).

This section presents the superiority of the Lord Jesus to angels. Angels played an important role in Jewish theology at the time Hebrews was written. This was because angels acted as mediators between God and Moses in the giving of the Law (Deu.33:2; Act.7:53; Gal.3:19). We are also told that Michael and his angels were guardians of the nation of Israel (Dan.10:13, 21; 12:1; Rev.12:7). Since the readers had such reverence for the Law of Moses, how much more they ought to value the message brought to us personally by the Son of God.

There are three main divisions of this section. First, the author quotes seven O.T. passages, showing that Christ is superior to angels because of His deity (1:4-14). Then, he includes a parenthetical warning, the first of five in the book (2:1-4). Finally, he presents Jesus in His humanity, and shows that He is exalted above angels because of His finished work of redemption (2:5-18).

Christ Superior to Angels due to His Deity (1:4-14)

1. V.5, He is the Son, the Heir of God (Psa.2:7; 2Sa.7:14). Jesus is called the “firstborn” (Rom.8:29; Col.1:15, 18; Heb.1:6; 12:23; Rev.1:5) not because He was a created being, but because He is the heir of the Father over all things. In Scripture “firstborn” always has to do with the right of inheritance. Jesus Christ is “Son” both in His role in the Trinity, and in His humanity, as the “only begotten” of God. The second quote from 2Sam.7:14 also shows Him to be the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.
2. V.6, He is the object of angelic worship (Psa.97:7). The “*again*” in this verse speaks of the second coming of Christ. When He returns in all His glory, to claim authority over all creation, the Father will command the angels to worship Him. This is the “until” of Psa.110:1.
3. V.7, He is ruler of the angels (Psa.104:4). “*His angels...His ministers*” refers to the subservient role of angels to God. They are compared to wind (spirits) and fire. These were common Jewish ideas of the essence of angels. This may also relate their ministry to God’s mercy and judgment, as illustrated in Mat.3:11, *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (mercy on those who believe) and fire (judgment on those who do not believe)*. The word

- “ministers”* (v.7) and *“ministering”* (v.14) come from a word that speaks of divine service that is dedicated to God’s purpose.
4. V.8, He is God enthroned over His kingdom (Psa.45:6). Here God the Father speaks to Lord Jesus, calling Him God (Mat.1:23; Joh.1:1; 5:18; 10:30-33; Tit.2:13) declaring that His throne is eternal and His rule is righteous.
 5. V.9, He was anointed by the Father over the angels (Psa.45:7). God the Father anointed Jesus Christ above all the angelic realm. This is the eternal reality of which the anointing of Aaron was only a shadow (Exo.30:22-33).
 6. V.10-12, He is the immutable creator (Psa.102:25-27). The words *“You, Lord”* address Jesus, and in the Hebrew “LORD” is “YHWH” or “Jehovah”. Not only is Jesus the creator (Joh.1:1-4; Col.1:16), He is immutable/eternal (Heb.13:8), whereas creation will grow old and pass away. *“They will be changed”* anticipates the new creation, the new heavens and new earth (2Pe.3:13; Rev.21:1).
 7. V.13-14, He is seated in power, while angels continue to serve (Psa.110:1). In the ancient world, as pointed out by Dr. Fruchtenbaum in his commentary on Hebrews, to sit at the right hand is the place of equality (Ariels Commentary on the Jewish Epistles, pg.26). The seated position speaks of His finished work, the outcome of which will result in His enemies being put under His feet. Verse 14 suggests the idea of guardian angels.
 - A. Guardian angels are given to all children (Mat.18:10).
 - B. They guard believers through their lives (Psa.91:1). The implication is that when one rejects Christ, they forfeit the care of angels.
 - C. Angels are keenly interested in our response to God’s word and our life of faith (1Co.4:9; 11:10; 1Pe.1:12).
 - D. At death the believers soul is escorted into heaven by angels (Luk.16:22).
 - E. If a believer continues to sin to the point of death (1Jo.5:16) his guardian angel is withdrawn, and he is delivered over to the power of Satan (1Co.5:5; 1Ti.1:20). Though this results in physical death, the believer does not lose his or her salvation (1Co.5:5). More on this when we get to Heb.2:14-15.

First Warning: The Danger of Drifting (2:1-4)

1. The necessity, v.1a. The *“therefore”* ties this warning to the truths presented in chapter one. Since Jesus Christ is superior in every way, it is essential that we heed what He has said. As the Father said to the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”* (Mat.17:5). The phrase *“more earnest heed”* comes from two words that were used for the extreme care necessary to bring a ship into safe harbor. *“Things we have heard”* refers to Jesus’ teachings (v.3).
2. The peril, v.1b. Failure to be attentive to the word of God results in a gradual drifting away spiritually. The word pictures a ship that has slipped its moorings and is drifting away with the tide. Only the Lord Jesus Christ, through His word and by His Spirit, is able to keep us anchored in the protective will of God (Heb.6:19).
3. The accountability, v.2. If God’s word communicated by angels was sure, and every disobedience brought just judgment, how much greater is the word spoken through Jesus Christ, who is infinitely greater than angels?
4. The impossibility, v.3a. The phrase *“how shall we escape”* indicates the impossibility of escaping Divine retribution for spiritual apathy. This is the impossibility mentioned again in Heb.6:4. The reason it is impossible to escape temporal judgment, if we are apathetic/disobedient to Gods word, is found in three other *“impossibilities”* in the book.
 - A. Because it is impossible for God to lie (Heb.6:18). Both His promises of blessing for obedience, and His warnings of judgment for disobedience, will be fulfilled.
 - B. Because it is impossible for animal sacrifices to accomplish what only the cross of Christ could achieve (Heb.10:4-10). To turn away from the provisions of the new covenant (Heb.2:1-4), which were purchased at the cost of the cross, and to return to the rituals of Judaism, is to reject the reality for the shadow (Heb.9:11-15; 10:1-10).
 - C. Because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb.11:6). It is an axiom of Scripture that *“The just shall live by faith”* (Hab.2:4; Rom.1:17; Heb.10:38). Failure to do so

results in God's displeasure and judgment (Heb.10:26-31, 38, 11:6; 12:25-29).

The phrase "*so great a salvation*" has the same qualifying "*so*" as in Joh.3:16, which suggests infinite quality. The use of "*salvation*" in Hebrews looks at Divine deliverance in all three stages: past redemption, present deliverance, future glorification. Thus it includes deliverance from the soon coming destruction of Jerusalem, which is "*the day*" referred to in Heb.10:25. Believers who drifted away from sound doctrine in the first century would find it "impossible" to escape the horrors of 70A.D.

5. The authority, v.3b-4. All that is written in the epistles is but the exposition of the words of Jesus Christ we read in the gospels. This is especially true of the teaching of Jesus in the upper room (Joh.13:17) which contains the seed-thoughts of all Church age truth. In the Jewish world, every truth must be attested by two or three witnesses (Deu.17:6; 19:5; Mat.18:16; Joh.5:31-40; 2Co.13:1; 1Ti.5:17). Here, we have 1) the witness of Jesus Himself, 2) the witness of those who heard Him, 3) the witness of signs, wonders and miracles from God, 4) the gifts given by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Five works of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture

1. Revelation – This is the work by which the word of God is made known to the prophets and apostles (1Co.2:10; 1Pe.1:10-12).
2. Inspiration – This is the work of directing and guiding the writing down of that which has been revealed (2Ti.3:16; 2Pe.1:19-21).
3. Preservation – This work assures us that no Scripture can ever be destroyed (Isa.40:6-8; 1Pe.1:24-25; Mat.24:35).
4. Illumination – This work opens the eyes of understanding to the student who studies God's word in faith (Psa.19:8; Eph.1:17-20; Heb.6:4).
5. Application – Here the Spirit enables the believer to apply God's word to daily life (1Co.2:4-5; Eph.3:16-20; 1Th.1:5-6).

Summary

These five warning sections (see page 4) in Hebrews progress from bad to worse. They show the progressive spiritual decline of the believer

who is apathetic and indifferent to God's word, who drifts to his or her own spiritual destruction. This warning is resumed in Heb.3:7-19.

Jesus is Superior to Angels in His Humanity (2:5-18)

In this section we see the necessity of the incarnation, Jesus becoming man, and how in His humanity and by His finished work He is exalted above the angels. Four great reasons are given for the necessity of the incarnation.

1. To be the last Adam, v.5-9. Here Psa.8:4-6 to show that God's plan for mankind from the beginning was to be created lower than the angels for a time, but to ultimately be exalted above the angels in "*glory and honor*". It was God's plan that all things were to be in subjection to man. God put Adam in dominion over the earth as a starting point (Gen.1:26-31). The "*but now*" in v.8 speaks of the present condition of mankind because of the entrance of sin and death. Yet, even in this fallen world, "*We see Jesus...crowned with glory and honor*". This may refer to the transfiguration (Mat.17:1-5; 2Pe.1:17). He became a man, lower than the angels for a time, "*that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone*", v.9b. Jesus stepped down from glory to become man, to die on the cross, and now in resurrection claims His rightful glory (Phil2:5-11; 2Pe.1:17). He is the "last Adam", who has rescued mankind from sin and made possible eternal glory, to those who believe in Him (Rom.5:12-21; 1Co.15:20-28, 50-58). **Note:** The word "*taste*", both here and in Heb.6:4-5 and 1Pe.2:3, means to "fully experience". This can only mean that Jesus Christ died for every member of the human race.
2. To become the captain of our salvation, v.10-13. Though Jesus died for all mankind, He will bring "*many sons to glory*", because only they will believe in Him as Savior. He is the "*captain*", meaning the pioneer, the prince-leader, and the trail-blazer, of our salvation. It was fitting and suitable, in the plan of God, that if we are to share His glory, He must also share in our sufferings. When the work of sanctification is related to the Holy Spirit (2Th.2:13; 1Pe.1:2) the idea is of practical purification in our lives. However, in Hebrews, the sanctification of Jesus refers to our position in relation to God (Heb.10:10). Because we are united with Him in

His death, burial, and resurrection, and imputed with His righteousness (Rom.4:3, 23-25; 2Co.5:19-21), He is not ashamed to call us His brethren. This is confirmed by a quote from Psa.22:22 and Isa.8:18.

3. To win the victory over the devil, v.14-16. Since the curse of sin was the fear of death (Gen.2:17; 3:10; Rom.5:12; 1Co.15:55-57), Jesus became a man that He might break the curse and destroy the power of the devil. By his sin, Adam forfeited dominion over the earth, and Satan became the god of this world (2Co.4:4). By His cross Jesus conquered Satan's kingdom, broke the power of death, and delivered his captives (Luk.4:18; Col.1:12-13). The phrase "*destroy him*" literally means "to render powerless" not annihilation. The cross broke the power of the devil, which is fear of death (1Jo.3:8). This help was not given to angels. Fallen angels have no chance of salvation. But remember that they fell in the full knowledge of God, having been in His presence. The "*seed of Abraham*" refers first of all to the Jewish believers to whom this letter was sent. But also includes us as the spiritual offspring of Abraham (Gal.3:29).
4. To become our faithful high priest, v.17-18. The phrase "*He had to be made like His brethren*" relates back to v.10, "*It was fitting for Him*". In the wisdom and justice of God, there could be no Savior, and no salvation, apart from the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus. By His life as "*A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*" (Isa.53:3), and through the dark valley of His crucifixion, He is able to be "*a merciful and faithful High Priest*". He is merciful to us in our sinfulness, and He is faithful to God in His righteousness. "*He is able to aid those who are tempted*", literally means, "He is able to run to the aid" of those being tempted.

The High Priesthood of Jesus is the main theme of the book, and will be fully developed in Ch.5-8. For now the topic has been introduced in advance so as to emphasize the grave spiritual consequences of turning away from Him who is our High Priest, the only way of salvation and our One and only mediator between men and God (Joh.14:6; 1Ti.2:3-6).

Hebrews Chapter 3

This chapter is crucial to the accurate interpretation of the whole book. This is because all of the five warnings sections in the book are based on what happened to the Exodus generation when they failed to trust God and enter into the land of Canaan.

“But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” (1Co.10:5)

Later the author will declare that –

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him...” (Heb.11:6)

The recipients of this letter were facing a trial much greater than that faced by the Exodus generation. For at the end of the forty years wandering, after the deaths of all those over twenty years old (Num.14:29), All the younger generation, including Joshua and Caleb, entered into the land. What these first century Jewish believers were facing was the destruction of the entire nation, which began in 70A.D. Since they failed by refusing to believe God’s word through Moses, the author will show that Jesus Christ is infinitely superior to Moses.

Jesus is Superior to Moses (Heb.3:1-19)

The Jews held Moses in the highest possible regard as one of God’s great prophets and leaders. In Jewish theology he stood second only to Abraham (Joh.8:4-5, 39). In this chapter the Lord Jesus is shown to be infinitely superior to Moses, and the New Covenant household of the church is demonstrated to be superior to the Old Covenant household of Israel. The rest that was offered Israel was that of victory and blessing in the land of Canaan. The rest that Jesus offers is that of victory and blessing in this life, and of great and rich rewards in His eternal kingdom.

The Tale of Two Households (Heb.3:1-11)

The author’s use of the word *“therefore”* in v.1 is typical of Paul, as it is used it to mark the major developments of his arguments (Heb.2:1, 17; 3:1, 7; 4:1; 6:1; 7:11, 25; 9:23; 10:19, 35; 12:1, 12, 28; 13:12, 13, 15). It would be profitable to go through Hebrews and make a list of each of these occurrences and list the point that is being stressed.

It is critical to accurate interpretation (2Ti.2:15) to note that the recipients of this letter are called "*holy brethren*" and that they are "*partakers of the heavenly calling*". In 6:4 they are called "*partakers of the Holy Spirit*". The author is not dealing with mere professors of faith, but with genuine children of God.

The necessity of determining to whom Scripture is speaking is illustrated by Jesus' words in Mat.11:28-30. The invitation of v.28 is addressed to unsaved people, and offers grace (salvation rest) to those who come by faith alone. But in v.29-30 the command to take up the yoke of learning is addressed to those who respond to the invitation in v.28, those who have believed. Eternal life is a free gift received apart from works (Rom.4:3, 5). However, discipleship is a process of growth to those who work in faith (Eph.2:8-10). In v.29 Jesus is offering the moment-by-moment rest, the faith-rest life, to those who believe. If we apply v.29-30 to the unbeliever, we have introduced a works-salvation concept, contrary to the truth of Rom.4:3 and Eph.2:8.

Jesus is Superior to Moses in His Person (Heb.3:1-6)

Then, they are urged to "*consider the Apostle and High priest of our confession, Christ Jesus*". The word "consider" means to bear down with the mind, to concentrate. We might say to be preoccupied with the Person of Jesus. This command is given again in Heb.12:3. In His coming into the world as a man, He was sent by the Father as "*the Apostle*" (the ambassador) from God to men. In His resurrection He is now "*High Priest*", the One and only mediator between God and men (1Tim.2:5). As God's Apostle He came down to live among men (Psa.68:18; Eph.4:8-10). As our faithful High Priest He ascended into the presence of God to represent us before God (Heb.9:24). The key to victory in the Christian life is to keep our spiritual eyes focused on Jesus Christ, by being diligent in the study and application of His word (2Tim.2:15; Heb.12:1-3).

Both Moses and Jesus were "*faithful*", but Moses acted as a servant, while Jesus Christ is the Son over the house (v.6). Moses was faithful in giving the law, but Jesus was faithful in bringing us the grace and truth of God (Joh.1:17). Moses was of course a sinner who needed grace. Jesus was the Savior who brought the grace of God to men (Joh.1:14). The ministry of Moses was one of slavery and death, that of Jesus was a

ministry of redemption and life (2Co.3:4-18; Gal.4:21-31). The ministry of Moses brought fear and trembling, but that of Jesus brought joy and peace (Rom.5:1; Heb.12:18-24).

A key word in this section is the word “house”. It would more clearly be called a “household”. It speaks of all those who live in the household, whether children or servants. The word “house” occurs seven times in v.1-6, and is commonly used in the N.T. for the church (1Ti.3:15; 1Pe.2:5; 4:17). Moses was a faithful servant in God’s Old Testament house (Israel), but Jesus Christ is both builder and ruler of the household, both of O.T. and N.T. saints. The word “built” literally means, not only to construct but also to thoroughly furnish and supply, to provide every necessity.

Moses was a “*servant*”, the word used here means one who is a free will slave, serving out of love. This is the “pierced ear slave” of Deu.15:16-17. Moses was unique among all the prophets in that God spoke directly to him, as one speaks to a friend (Num.12:6-8; Exo.33:11).

Jesus “*has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses*”. The phrase means to permanently hold a position of greater honor and praise.

Three reasons for this superiority are given in the following verses.

1. He who builds the house is greater than the house, v.3. There is an old saying that the artist is always greater than any of his works.
2. He is also the architect and builder of all things (Joh.1:1-4; Col.1:15-18; Heb.1:10-12), v.4. Remember from 1:2 that He is also the designer and director of the stages of world history. Jesus Christ is the Creator, Moses is part of His creation.
3. He is the Son who rules over the household, v.6. Both the Old Covenant household of Israel, and the New Covenant household of the church are under the authority and rule of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The authors point is that Moses was a faithful servant **in** the house of God, but the Lord Jesus is the Son **over** that household. Moses wrote of “*things which would be spoken afterward*”, but Jesus came to fulfill all that Moses wrote (Deu.18:15, 18; Mat.5:17).

Many are troubled by what is said in v.6. *“Whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end”*. Two false conclusions have been based on this statement.

1. That those who fail to “hold fast” to the hope of eternal life were never truly saved.
2. That those who fail to “hold fast” to the hope of eternal life have forfeited their salvation.

However, by tying together the three “if” statements in the context we can determine the true meaning.

1. Christ is ruling over His household, and we are acting under His rulership, *“If we hold fast”* our confidence and joy to the end, v.6.
2. The determining factor will be “if” we hear His voice (His word) *“today”*, and do not harden our hearts to it, v.7-8, 15. If we fail to heed God’s word daily, we will fail to hold fast our victory and joy.
3. We are active partners and participants, *“partakers”*, that is in active fellowship with, the Lord Jesus Christ “if” we hold to *“the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end”*, v.14. When believers fail to stay strong from the beginning, they leave their first love, and stand in need of repentance and restoration (Rev.2:4-5).

Jesus is Superior in the Rest that He Gives (Heb.3:7-4:13)

The author uses Canaan as a picture of rest and victory through faith and obedience. Had Israel believed God’s promises, they would have claimed these promises and enjoyed rich blessings (Deu.6:10-11; Jos.24:13). How much greater the promises we have in Christ (Heb.6:13-20; 8:6; 2Pe.1:2-4).

Second Warning: The Historical Example of Failure (Heb.3:7-11)

Again, this section is critical to rightly interpret the entire book. The Exodus generation is used as an example of those who were redeemed out of slavery, but who failed to enter into the full blessings intended by God for them. While their redemption out of slavery required only faith in the blood of the lamb (Exo.12), entrance into the promised land required both believing in the promise of God, but also in claiming the land through victorious conquest.

In the very same way the Lord Jesus offers to all who come to Him two kinds of rest (Mat.11:28-30). The first is the rest of salvation (v.28), which is freely given to all who come to Him in faith. However, the second rest (v.29-30) is discovered only by those believers who will take up the “yoke” of discipleship, who study and grow in His word, and become fellow-laborers with Him in obedient service (Rom.12:1-2). We do not want to follow the negative example of the Exodus generation of doubt, unbelief, and failure!

The quote from Psa.95:7-11 takes us back to the story in Numbers 13 and 14. Moses sent the twelve spies into the land of Canaan to prepare for the Israelite invasion. When the spies returned, ten of them declared that it was a suicide mission to go into the land (Num.13:17-33). Only Joshua and Caleb remained faithful to the plan of God to give the land to Israel (Num.13:1-2).

Because Israel believed the ten unfaithful spies, and rejected the two who were faithful (Num.14:1-10), God declared that He would destroy the nation, and build a new nation from Moses. Moses interceded on behalf of Israel, and God forgave them (Num.14:11-21). However, God declared that as discipline for their unbelief, none of the adults of that generation would enter into the land, except Joshua and Caleb (Num.14:22-38).

When this message was relayed to the people, they wanted to “repent”, and sought to go in and claim the land, but were defeated (Num.14:39-45). From this story we can conclude several doctrinal points.

1. The issue here is not salvation. These people had all believed in the Lord (Exo.4:31; 14:31), and had been redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb (Exo. 12). It is worth noting that Moses also was not allowed to enter the land, and this was also due to his unbelief (Num.20:7-12; Deu.1:37; Deu.3:23-27).
2. The land of Canaan represented victory through faith, along with all its blessings. By their refusal to continue in faith, the Exodus generation forfeited the victorious life and the resulting blessings.
3. Israel’s failure resulted from turning away from the promise of God, and believing instead in what they saw and heard concerning their circumstances. They followed appearances instead of faith.

4. The author of Hebrews is warning these first century Jewish believers that they, like their ancestors, were in danger of failing to enter into a life of victory and blessing, by rejecting the word of God and instead living in fear of their enemies' persecution.
5. In Heb.2:3 the question, "*How shall we escape?*", leads us, by the example of the Exodus generation, to the conclusion that, "*It is impossible...to renew them again to repentance*" (Heb.6:4-6).
6. There are times in history, and indeed in the Christian life, where failure to heed God's word and be guided by His Spirit will result in blessings, and eternal rewards, that will be lost forever (Heb.12:15-17; 25-29). Some opportunities once lost cannot be reclaimed. These first century Jewish believers were facing one of the greatest historical upheavals of the ancient world, the destruction of the temple in 70A.D., and the destruction of the nation of Israel.
7. Again, the issue throughout Hebrews is not a question of whether the recipients of this letter were saved. That is beyond doubt (Heb.3:1). The question is whether they will continue to grow up to spiritual maturity (Heb.5:11-6:3) and trust in the faithful promises of God (Heb.6:13-20).

In this quote from Psalm 95 should be read in the context of the whole Psalm. In the first seven verses we see the joy, thanksgiving, and worship of those who chose to live by faith and claim victory through obedience to God.

Then in v.7b-11 comes the warning to those who have hardened their hearts to God's word and promises at Kadesh Barnea (Num.13). It is worthwhile to identify the conditions that led to their spiritual failure.

1. First, they hardened their hearts to the word of God (Psa.95:8; Heb.3:8).
2. Second, they wanted to test God, instead of trusting Him (Psa.95:9a; Heb.3:9a).
3. Third, while they had seen the mighty works of God, they had not learned His ways (Psa.95:9b, 10b; Psa.103:7; Heb.3:9b, 10b). Note that in Psa.95:9-10 and 103:7 God distinguishes between seeing His works and knowing His ways.
4. Fourth, they "*went astray in their hearts*" (Psa.95:10; Heb.3:10).

5. Finally, as a result of their spiritual retreat and decline, they were not allowed to enter into His rest, the land of Canaan (Num.14:39-45; Psa.95:11; Heb.3:11).
6. These stages are similar to the same warnings Paul gives to believers in Gal.3:1-5; 5:1-9; Eph.4:17-24, and those of John in Rev.2:4-7; 14-16; 20-24; 3:1-3; 16-19.

The Meaning of Rest

In this context, the word “rest” refers to victory and blessing in the land of Canaan. However, within the wider context including chapter four, the word is used in several different ways, that are all closely related.

1. It is used of God’s rest after creation (Gen.2:1-2; Heb.4:4).
2. It is used of Canaan, the promised land, whose rich blessings had to be claimed by victory through faith (Deu.6:10-11; Jos.24:13; Psa.95:11; Jos.1:13-15; Heb.3:11).
3. It is used of spiritual rest for our souls by receiving eternal salvation (Mat.11:28; Heb.4:3).
4. It is used of the victorious life of faith (Mat.11:29-30; Heb.4:9-11).
5. Finally, it is used of our eternal rest of inheritance/reward in Christ’s kingdom (Rev.14:13).

The main burden of the book of Hebrews is to bring those who have entered into salvation rest all the way to the rest of spirituality, maturity and victorious living by faith.

The Warning Applied (Heb.3:12-19)

These believing “*brethren*” (Heb.3:1) are identified as the first century equivalent of those mentioned in Heb.2:11, 12, 17. That is, they are members of the family of God, which includes both Old and New Testament saints.

They are warned to “*beware*”, or “*watch out*”, lest they fail as the saints of the Exodus generation did. Paul makes this very same argument in 1Co.10:1-13. It is important to take note of the seven exhortations which show the sure path of escaping spiritual defeat.

1. “Consider”, 3:1. We must keep our eyes on Jesus Christ.
2. “Hear His voice”, 3:7. We must be attentive to His word.
3. “Do not harden your hearts”, 3:8. We must recognize the danger.
4. “Beware”, 3:12. We must examine ourselves daily.
5. “Exhort one another”, 3:13. We must care for one another.

6. "Hold fast", 3:14. We must get a grip on our faith, and never quit.
7. "Let us fear", 4:1. We must recognize Satan's strategy.

Speaking of the very same Exodus generation in 1Co.10, Paul says,

"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were recorded for our admonition, upon the ends of the ages have come."
1Co.10:11.

This spiritual defeat is attributed to *"an evil heart of unbelief"*. Those who think that "evil" and "unbelief" cannot refer to true believers I would recommend comparing Scripture with Scripture (Luk.11:13; 1Co.5:13; Jam.2:4). Jesus often rebuked the original apostles for their hardness of heart and unbelief (Mar.6:52; 8:17; 16:11, 13, 14). There is a five-fold progression here.

1. First comes the evil of unbelief in the heart, v.12a.
2. This results in a spiritual departure from the living God, v.12b.
3. This begins a process of hardening in the heart, v.13, 15.
4. Then life becomes a series of divine discipline, v.16-17.
5. The sad end is failure to enter and enjoy the rest of God, v.17-19.

When we get in the habit of failing to trust God, in each and every situation, we end up *"departing from the living God"*. This refers to loss of fellowship, fruitfulness, and service, not the loss of salvation. In Gal.5:4 Paul calls it being *"estranged from Christ"*. To avoid this ever present danger, we are to exhort one another daily, and hold fast to the local church (Heb.10:24-25). It is certain that if we unaware of the danger of drifting (Heb.2:1), and fail to "hold fast" to the word of God, we will fall prey to the deceitfulness of sin and become hardened of heart.

Over my 50 years of ministry I can count many who, when faced with a great test of faith (illness, loss of a loved one, death of a child, etc.) have followed this very pattern! All of us are in peril of following this path, if we do not "hold fast" to God's word "today".

God has a plan for every believer. That plan includes spiritual gifts and ministry (Rom.12:1-8; Rom.11:29; 1Co.12:7). We are called to a life of fellowship and joint-participation with the Lord in His plan (2Co.5:14-

21). However, we can only remain active partners in this plan if we *“hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.”* This is essentially a repetition of the truth stated in v.6. To be in fellowship and partnership with God is the sure path to victory and blessing.

In v.15 he repeats the warning from v.7 to emphasize the word *“Today”*. Because our enemy the devil, never sleeps, he keeps stressing the need for daily vigilance and spiritual progress (v.13). To live *“today”* in the fellowship and power of the Holy Spirit is what it means to *“redeem the time”* (Eph.5:16; Col.4:5). We have no time to waste in fulfilling the plan of God for our lives. How can we *“redeem”* each day, moment-by-moment? These five things we do every day for our bodies. Let us also do them for our souls.

1. Wash (1Jo.1:9; 1Co.11:28, 31).
We need to daily examine our lives and confess our sins.
2. Eat (Mat.4:4; 5:6; Joh.6:27; 35; 1Pe.2:1-3).
Every day we need to feed on the word of God.
3. Walk (2Co.5:7; Gal.5:16; Eph.4:1; 5:2, 8).
We need to walk in fellowship and communion with our Lord.
4. Work (Gal.5:6; Eph.2:10; Phi.2:12-13; 1Th.1:3; Tit.2:14; Jam.2:22).
God has gifted and empowered each of us for His special work.
5. Rest (Mat.11:28-30; Heb.4:1, 11).
By faith we rest in His faithfulness and promises, even in trials.

Verses 16-19 are especially valuable for they stress that these were believers who rebelled and ended up dying in the wilderness (1Co.10:1-13). The three *“Who”* questions emphasize that the Exodus generation had been blessed with great and mighty signs and wonders (As had these first century believers) and yet they still failed. Read Psalm 78 in its entirety. The other sins of Israel, including their complaining (Exo.15:24; 16:2; Num.14:2), their idolatry (Exo.32; 1Co.10:7), and their sexual immorality (Num.25:1-9; 1Co.10:8), all these sins are traced back to the same cause, *“They could not enter in because of unbelief”* (v.19).

Jesus made it clear that all the sins that men commit originate in the heart (Mar.7:21-23). Solomon warns us to *“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life”* (Pro.4:23). Two things determine the condition of the heart: first, the presence or absence of faith. Second, consistent spiritual growth, or the lack of it (Heb.5:11-14).

As an example of believers failing to “*hold fast...to the end*” (v.6), and of “*departing from the living God*” (v.12), consider the sad account of Demas. In Phi. v.24 he is named by Paul among his fellow-laborers. In Col.4:14 he is serving with Paul and Luke. Then, in 2Tim.4:10 we read, “*for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world...*”. This is not loss of salvation, but of fruitfulness, blessing, and eternal reward.

Summary

Spiritual growth, like physical growth, requires daily nourishment, exercise, and rest. If we are daily learning more and more of the word of God, and by faith applying it in our lives, and trusting in the promises and the plan of God, we will naturally grow up to maturity in our faith.

Peter gives us a very good picture of the stages of spiritual growth, as well as the blessings and eternal benefits we will receive by growing to maturity in our faith (2Pe.1:5-11). Five steps can summarize the plan of God for every believer.

1. Salvation by faith in Jesus Christ (Joh.3:16, 36; 6:29, 40; 10:27-29).
2. Growing to maturity by the Spirit and the word (Tit.2:11-14; 2Pe.2:5-7).
3. Service in effective prayer to God (priesthood – 1Pe.2:5-9), witness to the lost (ambassadorship – 2Co.5:14-21), and ministry to fellow believers (exercise of spiritual gifts – Rom.12:3-8; 1Pe.4:10-11). Every believer has this three-fold calling on their life (1Th.1:2-10; Heb.10:19-25).
4. Increasing conformity to the character of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom.8:29; 12:1-2; 1Co.11:1; 2Co.3:18).
5. Holding fast the faith to the end (Col.1:23; 2Ti.4:7-8; Heb.3:6, 14).

The Rest of Jesus is Superior to the Canaan rest (Heb.4:1-16)

Joshua did finally lead Israel into Canaan to claim the land that had been promised to Abraham. Some, like Caleb, heroically claimed their inheritance and defeated their enemies (Jos.14-15; 22:1-6). However, most failed to drive out the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, and therefore never had true rest. Let us not follow their example!

The author urges us to “*go on to perfection (maturity)*” (6:1) by a series of four exhortations.

Let us fear, v.1-10

By combining Psa.95:7b-11 with Jesus' invitation in Mat.11:28-30 we can see that *"a promise remains of entering His rest"*. There are several things listed in this section that every believer should rightly fear.

1. We should fear falling short of entering that rest (v.1b, Heb.12:15). The rest he is referring to here is what we call the faith-rest life. It is the rest of active discipleship and obedient service (Mat.11:29-30; Rom.12:1-8).
2. We ought to have a genuine fear of failing to mix the word of God with faith (v.2). It is not enough to be a hearer only (Jam.1:21-22), we must hear with faith, and let faith work through love (Gal.5:6; Jam.2:14-26).
3. We should fear being identified among those who fail to enter into the rest of God (v.3-6). All who believe in Jesus Christ have entered into the "rest" of eternal salvation, just as all who were under the blood of the Passover lamb came out of Egypt. The question was not their deliverance from slavery, but their obedience in going on to claim victory and inheritance. The rest the author has in mind is likened to God's creation rest (v.4). God rested when His work was finished. Since the work of God was *"finished from the foundation of the world"* (v.3b), this includes all that He intends to do for us. When Jesus cried out on the cross, *"It is finished"* (Joh.19:30), He was confirming the Father's Sabbath (Rev.13:8), and declaring that the work of the new creation was also accomplished. Therefore, our life of surrender, obedience, and victory is assured if only we will walk by faith (Rom.8:31-39; 2Co.5:7).
4. We should fear the danger of letting *"Today"* be a day that we fail to redeem (v.7-10; Eph.5:16; Col.4:5). We need to learn to live one day at a time. How do we accomplish this? First, we avoid living in disobedience (v.6). The word *"disobedience"* literally means to fail to be persuaded by the word of God. Second, we need to hear the word as *"His voice"* (1Th.2:13). God speaks to us through His word. Third, we must not harden our hearts, when the word of God convicts and corrects us (2Ti.3:16-17). Fourth, we need to keep in mind that *"there remains a rest for the people of God"* (v.9). The word for rest here is *sabbatismos*, speaking of a moment-by-moment rest in the soul from trusting and obeying the word of God. Finally, we must *"cease from (our) own works as God did from*

His" (v.10). The works of the flesh, of human intellect and energy, will never bring us rest. This means that we must be filled by His Spirit and walk in the Spirit (Eph.5:18; Gal.5:16). We must be cleansed not only of sin, but of self-sufficiency (2Co.3:4-6; 1Jo.1:9; 2Ti.2:20-21). Our obedience and service must come, not by effort, but by surrender and faith (Rom.12:1-2; 2Pe.1:3-7).

Let us be diligent, v.11-13

The word "*diligent*" is the same one used in 2Ti.2:15. It is sometimes translated "study", and refers to an eagerness and concentration on a goal that is set before one. In 2Pe.1:5 it is the essential ingredient which we must add, if we are to grow to maturity. Our diligence or labor is not of human effort, but rather it is the battle to keep from relying on human wisdom or strength (1Co.1:18-31), and to rely on the Spirit.

This diligence is aimed at receiving God's word as the instrument of Divine scrutiny of our souls (v.12). The piercing light of the word of God reveals to us our true self; whether we are acting out of soulish (carnal) or spiritual motives (Psa.139:23-24; Jer.17:9-10; Rev.2:23).

It is crucial for us to live "*Today*" under the searching scrutiny of God's word, because one day we will give an account to God for every day of our lives (v.13). There is nothing of our inner life, our thoughts, words, or actions, that is hidden from Him. Therefore, how important it is for us to expose ourselves to the searchlight of His word, so that our true inner condition is revealed to us, for correction and cleansing?

Let us hold fast, v.14-15

Here, the author picks up the thread from 2:17-18, concerning the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. This is the main theme of Hebrews (Heb.8:1-2), and is also the unique contribution of this book to Christian theology. He reminds us here of the need we have for such a High Priest as the Lord Jesus. Not only is He a High Priest, but He is "*a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens*". He came to us as the ultimate "apostle" sent from God, and He rose from the dead and returned to heaven to be our faithful and merciful High Priest (Heb.2:17-18; 3:1; 7:25-26).

It is only due to His faithful intercession on our behalf (Rom.8:34; 1Ti.2:5), and His sustaining ministry of grace and truth, that we are enabled to *“hold fast our confession”*. He is always willing to come to our aid when we stumble (Heb.2:18), because He has also been tempted like us, yet without ever giving in to sin. That He was *“in all points tempted as we are”* simply points to the three-fold appeal of sin (1Jo.2:16), which is illustrated by His temptations in the wilderness (Mat.4:1-10). It has often been pointed out that no one but He who never gave in to temptation could actually know the full force and power of temptation. Christ our Savior has endured it all, and therefore has not only compassion for us, but the power to deliver us.

Let us draw near, v.16

These exhortations follow a logical and spiritual progression. If we fear failing to rest in His power, we will then be moved to the diligent study and application of His word. Consistency of obedience will produce in us the ability to hold fast to the confession of our faith in Christ Jesus, our High Priest. This confident assurance will lead us into a life of increasing intimacy of prayer.

The phrase *“draw near”* is used again in Heb.10:22, and is a picture of a priest approaching the altar to make an offering. Every believer in Christ is also a priest, and an active member of a spiritual temple (1Co.6:19-20; 2Co.6:16; 1Pe.2:5-10). Because our High Priest is compassionate and merciful, we can *“come boldly to the throne of grace”*. This is true even when we need mercy for forgiveness and cleansing, and also when we need grace and help for spiritual success. This is because, by His death for our sins, He has forever removed the barrier between God and men. The phrase *“in time of need”* could be translated “well timed, at just the right time”. God will always provide for us a way of escape from temptations (1Co.10:13), as well as strength to do His will (Eph.3:14-21; 1Th.1:2-10).

Summary

In the fourth chapter the author has introduced us to the way of escaping from the spiritual perils contained in the five warning sections. These spiritual solutions will be amplified throughout the book. The believer who is aware of spiritual pitfalls, and who is driven to God’s word as a refuge, will find increasing confidence and assurance in the

promises of God, and will therefore develop an increasingly dependent and effective prayer life – all resulting in a life of spiritual rest and blessing, from which will flow the “*rivers of living water*” (Joh.7:38-39) that find their source in humble dependence on the indwelling Spirit of God.

2. The Superior Priesthood of Christ – Hebrews Ch.5-10:18.

The priesthood of Jesus Christ has already been briefly mentioned (Heb.2:17-18; 4:14-16), and, again, is the central theme of the book (Heb.8:1).

Now, the author will enter into an extended discussion of Christ’s superior High Priesthood, which continues through chapter ten. In this section we also have the third warning section (Heb.5:12-6:12).

The Divine Qualifications of a High Priest (5:1-4)

The qualifications for becoming a high priest are five in number. It is important to note that these qualifications are set by God and not by men.

1. He must be appointed by God and not by men, v.1, 4.
The high priest must be called and appointed by God, “*just as Aaron was*” (v.4; Exo.28:1; 29:1-46). Only God Himself can choose the one who is to be a mediator between God and men (1Tim.2:5).
2. He must come from among men, v.1a.
This may seem to be obvious, but it needs to be stated for two reasons. The first is that no angel could be a mediator between God and men (Heb.1:5-7). Second, and most important, this fact requires that the Son of God must enter into the world as a man. Not only was His incarnation into human flesh essential, but His earthly life, by which He was fully equipped to be our mediator (Heb.2:9-10; 4:15; 5:9). Pilate said, “*Behold the Man*” (Joh.19:5), seeing in Him nothing more than that. But Paul declares, that in all of history only One could bridge the gap between men and God, and that is, “*the Man, Christ Jesus*” (1Ti.2:5).
3. He is the mediator between God and men, v.1b.
The high priest is “*appointed for men in things pertaining to God*”. He is the bridge, the point of contact, between a holy God and sinful men. He alone is able to remove the barrier caused by sin

- and death. He must represent God in His holiness to men, and at the same time represent men in their sinfulness to God. The word *“mediator”* in 1Ti.2:5 literally means, “One who is equal to both parties”. It was for such a mediator that Job in his sufferings cried out for (Job.9:32-33).
4. He must be able to have compassion on the ignorant and erring, v.2. The word used here for *“compassion”* means neither too harsh nor too lenient. On the one hand he cannot disregard sin altogether, nor will he deal with the offender too strictly. Among men, this fellow-feeling came from the fact that *“he himself is also subject to weakness”*. Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ all previous high priests were also sinful. But in the Lord Jesus, we have one who is *“without sin”* (4:15), and yet is a *“merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God”* (2:17-18).
 5. He must offer acceptable sacrifice for sins, v.1b, 3. The Levitical priests offered sacrifices which could never take away sins (Heb.9:25-28; 10:1-4, 11). But all these animal sacrifices were object lessons to point to the once-for-all sacrifice of *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (Joh.1:29). Only the cross of Christ could remove the stain and penalty of sin once and forever (Heb.10:10, 12, 14, 17)

Jesus’ Unique Calling and Preparation (Heb.5:5-11)

The point of the author in this section is to confirm that in all of the above qualifications the Lord Jesus Christ reigns supreme above all earthly priests. As we will see in chapter seven, this includes even Melchizedek, who was only a priest, but Jesus is the High Priest of that order. He starts with the last qualification first.

1. Jesus was not a self-appointed priest, but was appointed by God, v.5-6. In these verses he quotes Psa.2:7 and 110:4 to show that God the Father had ordained Jesus Christ as High Priest. Both of these passages record that this ordination occurred following the resurrection of Jesus (Act.13:33).
2. In v.7 the phrase *“who, in the days of His flesh”*, shows that Jesus in His humanity was also *“taken from among men”* (v.1a). Therefore He meets, in His humanity, the second qualification. Through all His life as *“a man of sorrows...acquainted with grief”* (Isa.53:3), our

Lord was under intensive training to become One who is *“able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him”* because He alone is *“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners”* (Heb.7:25-26). How glorious is our great High Priest!

3. Then, in v.7b and 8, we see that Jesus is able to have compassion on men because of the extreme and bitter sufferings He endured during His earthly life. These verses encompass the entire earthly life of our Lord, but may especially point to His intense sufferings in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mat.26:36-46; Mar.14:32-42; Luk.22:39-46; Joh.18:1). His prayer was heard by the Father, not in saving Him from dying on the cross, but in His being resurrected from the grave. His *“godly fear”* refers to His reverence and obedience to the Father’s plan.
4. The sacrifice Jesus offered was not like the Levitical offerings, which were only a shadow (Heb.10:1-4). Rather, He offered Himself as our substitute, His life for our life, His death for our death. The phrase *“having been perfected”* indicates that His earthly life and fully prepared Him to take our place. By His substitutionary sacrifice *“He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”* (v.9). The obedience here refers to faith in Him as Savior (Rom.1:5; 16:26).
5. Thus in all ways the Lord Jesus has become the perfect and eternal High Priest and mediator between God and men. In fact, He is the High Priest of the order of Melchizedek (v.10). We learn later, in Heb.7:2, that *“Melchizedek”* translates into *“king of righteousness”*, as well as *“king of peace”*. In the Lord Jesus Christ the righteousness of God and the peace of men come together (Rom.5:1; Psa.85:10). See Gen.14:17-20 for the appearance of the king/priest of ancient Jerusalem.

The doctrine of the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ is a great and magnificent body of truth, which the author dearly wants to expound to his readers. However, he finds the task difficult, because they have become *“dull of hearing”* (v.11). This is the spiritual condition of those who fail to pay close attention to the truths they have been taught (Heb.2:1), with the result that they *“drift away”* from the safe harbor of

sound doctrinal understanding. The absence of spiritual hunger will in time lead to the hardening of the heart (Heb.3:8, 15; 4:7) in those who are without a proper fear of failing to enter into the victory and blessing of the faith-rest life (Heb.4:1). That deep spiritual instruction is *“hard to explain”* is something every teacher of God’s word understands. Because it is also difficult to learn, many become *“dull of hearing”* and fail to mature as a result. The next section will comprise the third warning section.

Third Warning: Growth or Retreat the only options (5:12-6:12)

In these warning sections it is important to remember that the author is moving through a series of stages in the experience of believers who stray from the Word and the plan of God. These include drifting from God’s word (2:1-3), doubting God’s word (3:12-19), dull (sluggish) of hearing God’s word (5:11-14), disobeying God’s word (10:26-39), and finally, of despising God’s word (12:12-29). This process is often referred to as the backsliding or reversion of a Christian.

This section is a rebuke to all who fail to grow in grace and truth (2Pe.3:18) to the point of spiritual maturity. The path of stunted growth in Christians is always the same. Those who drift from God’s word (Heb.2:1) will inevitably come to doubt God’s word (Ch.3), because they do not mix the word with faith (Heb.4:2). As a result, Bible study does not benefit them, since their faith has no practical application or exercise (Heb.5:14; Jam.2:17, 26). They start out as hearers of the word, but they never become *“doers of the word”* (Jam.1:22-23).

In v.12 we see that the recipients of this letter had been believers for long enough that they should have now been able to instruct others in the faith. The work of making disciples (Mat.28:19) belongs to every believer. How tragic, then, to have those who, after years of instruction, *“need someone to teach...again the first principles of the oracles of God”*. They could not *“endure sound doctrine”* (2Ti.4:3), but love to have their ears tickled and their egos gratified.

Basic Biblical instruction is likened to milk (v.13). Milk is good for those who are babes in Christ (1Pe.2:2). However, spiritual growth demands a willingness to *“go on to perfection (maturity)”* (Heb.6:1), and to *“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2Pe.3:18).

While the gift of eternal salvation is free to all who will believe, the life of discipleship and service is costly indeed (Luk.9:23-26; 14:26-33).

Verse 14 sets before each and every believer the goal for every child of God. The “*solid food*” speaks of “*the deep things of God*” (1Co.2:10), what we might call advanced doctrinal instruction. Those who are growing into ever greater maturity are faithful to get their spiritual workout in learning and applying the word of God to life. As a result, their spiritual senses are “*exercised*” in daily life to distinguish between good and evil. The word used for exercise in Greek is the basis for our word “gymnasium”. It refers to the place we go for training, and this is what every local church should be.

It is worth ending this section with the reminder that we will all one day stand before the Lord Jesus to give an account of our lives (Rom.14:10-11; 1Co.3:11-15; 2Co.5:9-10). It was this knowledge that drove the apostle Paul, both in his personal life, and in his ministry (1Co.9:24-27; Phi.3:7-14; 2Co.5:11; Col.1:28-29). It is God’s will, expressed often in His word, that we live lives worthy of eternal reward, which will be our expression of our gratitude for all that Jesus Christ has done for us (2Ti.4:6-8; Rev.3:11; 22:12).

The goal of the faith-rest life is spiritual maturity (Heb.6:1-3)

In keeping with the negative example of the Exodus generation in chapter 3, and the exhortations in chapter 4 to enter into the life of faith and rest, the author now challenges his readers to “*go on to perfection*”. A more literal translation would be “Let us be borne/carried on to maturity”. He is urging them to rest in faith and submit to the working of the power of God by the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is important to note that, like all the exhortations in Hebrews, the author includes himself with the readers in saying, “*Let us...*”. We are never beyond the need for spiritual exhortation. Even Paul, the great Apostle, toward the end of his earthly life, was focused on “*pressing on*” to higher spiritual ground (Phi.3:14).

To achieve this goal they need to leave behind what we might call “the basics” of elementary teaching. The ABC’s of the faith, or the “milk” he mentioned in 5:12. Milk is fine for babies, but “solid food”, or advanced doctrinal instruction was essential for the mature (5:14).

Six basic doctrines are mentioned to define “*elementary principles*”. While many commentators see in these the basic elements of Judaism and the Mosaic law, I cannot agree. The reason is that the “*dead works*” they had repented of were all of the Jewish rituals and rites that pointed to Jesus Christ (Heb.9:14). With the rending of the veil at the death of Christ (Mat.27:50-51), all temple rituals were made invalid. What they foretold in shadow form, Christ had now fulfilled (Heb.10:1-4). Thus they had all become “dead works”.

The message of the Apostles to the Jewish people was their need to repent from the sin of unbelief. By restoring the veil and continuing to engage in the sacrificial system, they proved their rejection of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Act.2:36-39; 3:17-21). They needed to repent from the dead works of the law, which could never save them (Heb.9:14). This repentance would result in a true faith in God, through Jesus Christ. In the case of Gentiles, the repentance was from idols (1Th.1:9-10).

The various baptisms would specifically recognize the difference between the baptism of John, which was a sign of repentance (Mat.3:11; Mar.1:4), the baptism of Jesus, which revealed Him as the Messiah (Joh.1:25-34), and Christian baptism, which is a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ (Mat.28:19-20; Act.8:35-38; 16:31-33). These three water baptisms are outward rituals, signifying inward spiritual truth. In all, the New Testament identifies seven baptisms, four real or literal, and three ritual. The concept behind all baptisms is identification with some thing or someone.

The Seven Baptisms

Four literal baptisms

1. The baptism of Moses – 1Co.10:1-2.
Here the nation of Israel is identified with Moses, their physical deliverer.
2. The baptism of the cross – Mat.20:22; Luk.12:50.
On the cross Jesus was identified with sinners, and bore all our sins.
3. The baptism of the Holy Spirit – 1Co.12:13.

In the Church age, every believer is eternally united with Jesus Christ by the baptism of the Spirit.

4. The baptism of fire – Mat.3:11-12.

This refers to the judgment of all who reject Jesus Christ as Savior.

Three ritual baptisms

1. John's baptism – Mar.1:1-8.

This was a baptism before Christ came, in preparation to receive Him as Messiah. Repentant Jews were identified as sinners in need of the coming Messiah/Savior, and His kingdom.

2. The baptism of Jesus – Joh.1:29-34.

This unique baptism identified Jesus as Israel's promised Messiah.

3. Christian baptism – Mat.28:18-20; Act.8:36-37; 16:31-34.

Here the new believer in Jesus Christ is identified as united with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. Water baptism is an outward confession of the inward baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Again note that John's baptism was received before believing in Christ, as a preparation, while Christian baptism is received after believing in Him, as a witness.

The laying on of hands was a sign of fellowship and commitment to service (Act.13:1-3). The doctrine of the resurrection from the dead speaks of the resurrection of believers, and the doctrine of eternal judgment relates to all who reject Jesus Christ as Savior (Joh.5:19-30).

The goal of attaining spiritual maturity was stated as a possibility. *"This we will do if God permits"* (v.3). To grow to maturity takes time, and as this letter was written around 67A.D., the author knew that time was short. Already, the shadow of the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the nation of Israel was at hand. The time was short, and there was no time to waste.

When repentance is no longer possible (Heb.6:4-8)

This passage has troubled many believers through the ages. Many good Bible expositors do not even attempt to deal with it. As we approach this text we must remember the most crucial law of Biblical interpretation: the context determines interpretation. Let us review a few points of the preceding context.

1. The negative example is the Exodus generation (Ch.3), who failed to enter into the blessings of the Promised Land due to their lack of trust in the promises of God.
2. The authors' challenge to his readers to be diligent to enter, not into the land of Canaan, but to enter into a life of faith leading to victory and spiritual rest (Ch.4).
3. The problem of the readers is not lack of salvation, but a failure to grow up into spiritual maturity (Ch.5:12-14).
4. The challenge in Ch.6 then, is to become mature and fruitful. Failure to do so would result in Divine discipline in life and loss of reward in eternity.

Before we deal with the phrase "*For it is impossible...to renew them to repentance*" (v.4, 6), let's confirm that these readers are truly saved men and women. There are five qualifications listed as to their spiritual condition (v.4-5). These show that they were indeed believers.

1. They "*were once enlightened*". The word used means "once for all". It is the same word translated in Heb.10:10 "*once for all*". The word "*enlightened*" is the same one translated "*illuminated*" in Heb.10:32 (NKJV). This word refers to the illumination of the heart at the moment of salvation (2Co.4:6).
2. They had "*tasted the heavenly gift*". The word "*tasted*" is the same one used for Jesus' substitutionary death on our behalf (Heb.2:9). The gift refers to the gift of eternal life, which they are in full possession of.
3. They became "*partakers of the Holy Spirit*". The word used here is also translated "*partakers*" in Heb.3:1 and 14, which speak of union with Christ.
4. They had "*tasted the good word of God*", the idea being to taste to the full. Just as Jesus had "*tasted*" death for all mankind (Heb.2:9).
5. And with the word of God they had also tasted "*the powers of the age to come*". The signs that Jesus and the apostles had performed in the presence of these people were a preview of the Kingdom age, when Christ will rule on the earth.

There is no way that the five things listed above could be experienced by any unbeliever. These are truly saved individuals, who are in danger of committing an offense even greater than that of the Exodus generation recorded in Numbers 13-14.

There is no “if” in the original of v.6. Literally it reads, “having fallen away”. The idea is to fall by the wayside. Now we can bring in the statement, *“It is impossible...to renew them again to repentance”*. He is not talking about salvation, but repentance and restoration. Why would it be impossible for a Christian who falls away to repent and be restored? There are two good answers to this question, one is textual, the other is historical.

Let’s take the historical first. Remember the Old Testament incident that the author is building his arguments on? Those in Hebrews 3 and Numbers 13-14 who failed to enter into the Promised Land. Go back and read Numbers 14 again, Pay close attention to v.39-45. Do you see that they tried to “repent” and go into the land, but were defeated? Once the opportunity to trust and obey passed, it was too late to “repent”.

Remember that the recipients of the book of Hebrews were on the brink of a far greater calamity. In 70 A.D. the Roman legions would destroy the city of Jerusalem and the temple. By 73 A.D. the nation of Israel had ceased to exist. The window of opportunity for these first century Jewish believers to grow to maturity and fruitfulness was fast closing. Once closed, it would be “impossible” for them to reclaim the opportunity.

The textual explanation helps here as well. The phrase *“since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame”*, uses two present participles, and should be translated, “while they are crucifying...while they are putting to shame”. In other words, repentance is not impossible should they cease these actions. However, the act of denouncing the effective work of Christ, and going back into Judaism, so as to escape persecution, would likely harden the heart beyond the point of no return. Again, the issue is not eternal salvation, but growth to maturity, fruitfulness, and eternal rewards.

At a time of great historical crisis, and intense persecution of believers, to publicly deny Christ, and to identify with those who cried out for His crucifixion, would likely exhaust what little time remained, and make restoration and growth to maturity impossible.

The Evidence that Some Believers do Fall Away

1. The Corinthian Carnality – 1Cor.3:1
2. Walking as unsaved Gentiles walk – Eph.4:17-19
3. Alienated from Christ – Gal.5:1-7
4. Loss of Inheritance – 1Co.6:9-10 (see “unrighteous”, v.1 and “so qrong”, v.8, and “unrighteous”, v.8. Then, Gal.5:19-21, and finally Rom.14:17. **Point:** The “kingdom of God” is both here and now and in the eternal future.
5. Proof believers can sin “unto death” (Joh.5:16, “a brother”).
 - A. Saul – idolatry, witchcraft, 1Sam.28:3ff; 1Ch.10:13; cf. Exo.22:18; Deu.18:10; 1Sa.15:23.
 - B. David – adultery, murder, 2Sam.12:1-13.
 - C. Samson – repeated fornication, Jud.16 (with repentance).
 - D. Solomon – idolatry, 1Ki.11:1-13.
 - E. Ananias and Saphira – sin unto death, Act.5:1-11.
 - F. Demas – forsaking Christ for the world, 2Tim.4:10.
 - G. Corinthian fornicator – 1Cor.5:1-5.
 - H. Hebrews – Heb.6:4, 7-8; 10:26-31; 12:25-29.

The examples in v.7-8 verify that the issue is fruit-bearing and blessing, and not eternal life. The “earth” represents the believer. To each and every child of God is given the “rain” of God’s word and Spirit. The provisions of grace are available to all. One believer drinks in the rain and bears fruit, resulting in blessing to others, as well as blessing to that believer. His or her life is fruitful, beneficial, and “*receives blessing from God*”. This blessing in time is a foretaste of eternal reward at the judgment seat of Christ (1Co.3:11-15; 2Co.5:9-10). Like a fruitful field, this land is blessed (Psa.65:9-13).

Another believer is represented in v.8, as an unfruitful field. On it the same rain falls, but it bears thorns and briers. Remember that these are emblems of the curse that came through Adam’s disobedience (Gen.3:17-19). This “fruit” is “*rejected and near to being cursed*”. The word “rejected” is the same one used by Paul in 1Cor.9:27, translated either “castaway” or “disqualified”. It speaks of that which is rejected by God for usefulness in time and from eternal reward. Note that it is the crop of thorns and briers that are burned. This could refer to Divine discipline in this life (Heb.12:3-11), and also fits perfectly with Paul’s depiction of the judgment seat of Christ (1Co.3:11-15). The issue here

for these believers is loss of blessing in time and reward in eternity, should they turn back to Judaism. Interestingly, Jesus used this very contrast between fruitful and unfruitful branches (Joh.15:1-8). Fruitful branches, believers who abide in Christ, are blessed with increasing fruit. Branches that bear no fruit are burned. This could refer to ultimate Divine discipline which the apostle John calls "*the sin leading to death*" (1Jo.5:16).

In the parable of the soils (Mat.13:3-9), there is an issue of believer versus unbeliever, but even in this many commentators are confused. In the first case, the wayside soil, the seed never took root. Here we are dealing with an unbeliever. In the three following soils, the seed takes root (ie. the gospel is received), but with varying degrees of response. Some who receive Christ by faith, in time of trial wither away. Others are choked out, in time, by the thorns of this life. Then there are those who bear fruit to varying degrees. The idea that "true believers" cannot fall away is refuted by the eight examples above (under number 5), and by John's very clear warning to believers of the sin unto death, that is, a continuance in sin to the point that God removes the sinning believer from this life prematurely (Ecc.7:16-17; 1Co.11:29-31; Jam.5:19-20).

An assurance and a challenge (Heb.6:9-12)

The author follows the severe warning with a word of comfort. He is *confident of better things...things that accompany salvation.*" That he calls them "*beloved*" again assures us that they are children of God by faith in Christ. The issue here is not salvation, but the fruits that ought to accompany a healthy and strong spiritual life.

That they had engaged in faithful ministry in the past was certain (v.10, 10:32-34). They needed the encouragement of v.10, that God is faithful, and will never forget our "*work and labor of love*" (1Th.1:3-10). When we minister to the needs of fellow believers, we are in fact ministering to Jesus Christ (Mat.25:31-40). And all works done by faith, in the power of the Spirit, will receive eternal reward (1Co.3:11-15; 2Co.5:9-11).

The option of every believer each and every day is to be either diligent, or sluggish (v.11-12). The word translated "*sluggish*" is the same one translated "*dull*" of hearing in Heb.5:11. Those who choose the path of diligence (Heb.4:11) will hold fast in the assurance of God's word and

the blessed hope that is before us (Tit.2:13), to the very end. This is the firm conviction of our eternal security in Christ, and the commitment to live lives worthy of such undeserved grace. Such faith and endurance will *“imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”*. That is, like the great one’s of the faith that have gone before us (Heb.11), we will ultimately receive eternal rewards in abundance (2Pe.1:10-11).

The oath of God and example of Abraham (Heb.6:13-20)

Abraham is an example of a believer who, though he often failed, never quit! The promise of God did not depend on Abraham’s performance, it depended on the faithfulness of God.

The promise in v.14 comes from Gen.22:16-17. It was on Mount Moriah where Abraham was prepared to offer up Isaac on the altar. What a beautiful picture of the Father offering up His own Son for us. And the provision of the Ram caught in the thicket brought into the picture the idea of substitutionary sacrifice. It was then that God reaffirmed His original call to Abraham (Gen.12:1-3), and confirmed it by saying, *“By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord...blessing I will bless you.”* (Gen.22:16-17). It is worth noting that God gave this assurance to Abraham *“because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son”* (Gen.22:16b). However, God’s promise did not depend on Abraham, it depended on the faithfulness of God. The promise had been given years before, but now, new assurance and confirmation was given. When we are willing to act on the promises of God, He will provide us assurance of His presence and blessing.

It was only *“after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.”* (v.15). Not only had God fulfilled His promise to give Abraham a son by Sarah, in this incident, he gave Isaac back to Abraham! Though Abraham had often failed, he had never given up. And God was faithful to His promises.

The reason God made this statement to Abraham, according to the author of Hebrews, was not only for his benefit. It was to confirm all His promises to *“the heirs of promise”*, that is, to all believers (Gal.3:29). We who follow in the path of the heroes of the faith (Heb.11), have double

assurance that God will fulfill His word: His oath upon Himself, and the promise of a God who cannot lie.

A Refuge and an Anchor of the Soul

What a beautiful phrase we find here! *“(that) we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us”* (v.18). The idea pictured here is that of one fleeing from the avenger to one of the cities of refuge (Num.35:6-32; Deu.4:42; 19:5-6; Jos.20:9). The idea of the Lord as our refuge is also common in the Psalms (Psa.9:9; 14:6; 46:1; 57:1; 59:16; 62:7-8; 71:7; 91:2, 9). We are so often troubled and tempted, fearful and in anguish – yet we find supernatural comfort and refuge in the word and promises of God.

This *“hope”* which is for us *“an anchor of the soul”* is the assurance that in Christ we possess eternal life and a place in His kingdom. In ancient Greek thought the idea of an anchor, and of a sure hope, were almost synonymous. An anchor is only of value when you can't see it. It is hooked on the bottom of the sea. But ours is secure, because it is fastened to Christ, *“the presence behind the veil...even Jesus”* (v.19-20). He is both our *“forerunner”* (trailblazer) and our *“High Priest...according to the order of Melchizedek”*. With these closing words of chapter 6 he brings us back to his main topic, our gracious and glorious High Priest. The High Priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ will now be fully developed in Chapters 7 through 10.

A Better (Superior) Priesthood – Hebrews 7

This chapter picks up the main theme from 5:1-10, the High Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This theme is now fully developed through chapter 10.

In the last few verses of chapter 5 the author urged his readers to move on from the milk of the word to the strong meat. This is the only way a believer can *“go on to perfection”* (Heb.6:1), meaning spiritual maturity.

Beginning with chapter 7, the author begins to set forth the strong meat of advanced doctrinal instruction. It is critical to understand that this strong meat relates to the present ministry of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God. This is why the book of Ephesians is so powerful, because it is all about the “*mystery*” of our Lord’s present session and ministry to the Church, and what it provides for us spiritually.

Melchizedek greater than Abraham (v.1-10)

In this section the author sets forth three great reasons why Melchizedek is greater than Abraham. In this extended argument, the greatness of Jesus Christ as our High Priest is set forth. His inauguration of the New Covenant provides all the spiritual resources needed by believers who are tested and tried, persecuted and harassed. He alone is “*able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*” (Heb.7:25).

In blessing Abraham, Melchizedek shows that he is greater, v.1, 6-7

In Genesis 14:18-20, in three short verses, we find the only historical record we have about Melchizedek. From this information the author, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, will draw a number of conclusions.

After Abraham had defeated the kings, and delivered Lot, he was met by the king/priest Melchizedek. He was blessed as having been favored by “*God Most High*” (Gen.14:19-20). This is the first occurrence of this title (“*El Elyon*”) for God in the Old Testament. It speaks of the God who is above all and over all. Melchizedek blessed Abraham as one belonging to “*the Most High God*”, and therefore as a man such as described later by David who “*dwells in the secret place of the Most High*” and who would “*abide under the shadow of the Almighty (El Shaddai)*” (Psa.91:1).

The author makes the point (v.6-7) that Abraham was the recipient of the Messianic promises. Yet, as great as he was, “*beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.*” Melchizedek is shown to be far greater a personage, as he is able to confer blessing on the Father of the nation of Israel.

His office and ministry proves him to be greater, v.2-3

Melchizedek stands unique among all the characters of the Old Testament. He is the first priest to appear, and the only king/priest ever mentioned, before Jesus Christ. His name translates “king of righteousness”, and as Salem (later Jerusalem) means “peace”, he is “*king of peace*”. He is a type of the Lord Jesus. That he is recorded “*without genealogy*” in the book of Genesis, a book of genealogies, is significant.

With no record of his beginning or end, he is “*made like the Son of God*”. The word *aphomoiao* means “to produce a facsimile or copy”. Not only does it show that Melchizedek was not Christ preincarnate, but the perfect tense of the verb indicates that Melchizedek, as he is recorded, remains a permanent type of Christ. In other words, the record of his life is left in mystery, so as to be a picture of Christ. The Lord Jesus is High Priest of the order of which Melchizedek was only a priest.

It is worth remembering that included in his blessing was the provision of bread and wine, an obvious preview of the Lord’s table (Mat.26:26-30; 1Co.11:23-26). This may be the first incident, of which his offering of Isaac was the second, wherein Abraham “saw” Jesus’ day (Joh.8:56).

Jesus Christ is declared to be the High Priest of an eternal priestly order, of which Melchizedek was but one priest. We should also note that every believer in Jesus Christ is a priest of this eternal order (1Pe.2:4-10). As such, we are obligated to intercede on behalf of men, and to offer up sacrifices of praise (Heb.13:10-16).

Abraham’s tithe proves that Melchizedek is greater, v.4-5

Melchizedek appeared on the scene just as the king of Sodom was about to offer Abraham the spoils of the victory. His intervention helped to keep Abraham’s focus on the promises he had received, so that he rejected any spoils at all, other than what he offered as tithes to Melchizedek. This was a great spiritual victory, and he was later rewarded with a confirmation from God that He would be Abraham’s “*shield, and exceedingly great reward*” (Gen.15:1).

By virtue of Abraham’s tithe, the Levitical tribe which came through Abraham, were also included as those who were inferior to Melchizedek. The authors point is that Melchizedek was greater than

Abraham, his priesthood was greater than the Levitical priesthood, and the Lord Jesus Christ is greater by far than all. This is especially true since He is *“the Most High God”* by which Melchizedek blessed Abraham.

Jesus Christ a greater priest than Melchizedek (v.11-19)

The priesthood of Melchizedek was greater than that of the Levites. But Jesus is the High Priest of that order. Since the Mosaic Law was committed to the Levites, the change of priesthood means a change of law. Five things distinguish the priesthood of the Lord Jesus from the Levites.

1. He is of a superior order, that of Melchizedek (v.11).
2. He is of a different tribe, in fact, the kingly tribe (v.13).
3. His priesthood is not based on physical lineage, but on a Divine oath (v.16-17).
4. His priesthood annuls both the Levitical order, and the Mosaic law that it served (v.18). The word *“annulling”* (*athetesis*) used here comes from a common legal term for the cancellation of a treaty.
5. This change of priesthood and law brings to us a perfect and better hope, *“through which we draw near to God”* (v.19). The torn veil in the temple (Mat.27:51), speaks of free access for every believer into the very presence of God (Heb.4:14-16; 10:19-25).

It is worth taking note of the contrasts mentioned in v.18-19. The Old Covenant, the Mosaic Law, was weak and unprofitable. Paul makes the same point in Rom.8:1-4. While the law served its purpose, in pointing us to Christ (Gal.3:19-25), it was temporary in nature. The very fact that the prophets spoke of another priesthood (Psa.110:4) and another covenant (Jer.31:31-34), proves that the Old Covenant and the Levitical priesthood, were to pass away. These were intended to pass away in the light of a far greater and more perfect provision, in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Law offered, at best, only *“a shadow of the good things to come”* (Heb.10:1). That it was designed to pass away was shown by the fading glory on the face of Moses (2Co.3:7-18). But now in Christ we have a perfect covenant, that brings us into the very presence of God (Heb.4:14-16). For any Christian to turn back from the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ, to the *“weak and beggarly elements”* of the old covenant (Gal.4:9) is an act that puts the Lord to an open shame (Heb.6:6).

The greater Priest offers a greater covenant (v.20-28)

The oath of the Father (v.20-21; Psa.110:4) by which the Lord Jesus was ordained our High Priest is crucial to the author's argument (Heb.5:5-6, 10; 7:17, 20-21). The reason for this is that a new superior spiritual priesthood demands a new and superior covenant between God and men.

This covenant is now introduced in v.22 where Jesus, who was ordained High Priest by an oath from the Father, is now "*Surety of a better covenant*". This surety or guarantee is secured by the oath from the Father. Remember the argument in Ch.6:13-20 about God's oath to Abraham? How much greater security do we have in His oath to His beloved Son?

And so the New Covenant is greater because it is based on the oath of God, an eternal and suitable High Priest, and a once-for-all perfect sacrifice. This New Covenant, promised long ago by God (Jer.31:31-34; Eze.36:22-28) is far superior to the Mosaic Covenant in six ways.

1. Because it is secured by the victory of Jesus Christ, our High Priest, v.22.
2. Because whereas Levitical priests lived and died and were replaced, the Lord Jesus continues forever as our High Priest, v.23-24.
3. Since Jesus is eternal, He will never cease to intercede for those who come to God by faith in Him, v.24-25. Our eternal security rests on His perfect, once-for-all, sacrifice and His eternal Priesthood. He is able to save "*to the uttermost*", meaning not only for eternal life, but also for abundant and fruitful life now (Joh.10:10; 15:4-5). The doctrine contained in this word "*uttermost*" includes the idea of past salvation (justification), present salvation (sanctification), and future salvation (glorification), all received "*by grace through faith*" (Eph.2:8-9; Rom.8:28-30).
4. Also, Jesus is a more suitable High Priest, because He is unique from mere human priests. Note that He is "*fitting (suitable) for us*" because He accomplished what was "*fitting for Him*" (Heb.2:10). He is a fitting High Priest for us in five ways, v.26.
 - A. Because of His nature - He is holy. We who are sinners need a sinless mediator (1Ti.2:3-6).

- B. Because of His compassion - He is harmless. He has compassion, because He is able to sympathize with our weakness (Heb.4:15a).
- C. Because of His life - He is undefiled. Unlike the Levitical priests, who were sinners, He had no need to offer sacrifice for Himself, but only for us (v.27). He has been "*in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*" (Heb.4:15b).
- D. Because of His uniqueness - He is separate from sinners. The word "*separate*" is in the perfect tense, suggesting His eternal uniqueness as the God-Man. He is separate, but not without compassion.
- E. Because of His exaltation – By His resurrection He has become higher than the heavens. This is the point of the Father’s oath (Psa.110:1-4; Heb.7:17, 21).

What a wonderful contrast that, though Jesus is like us in many ways (Heb.2:17; 4:15; 5:7-8), yet in the above things He is separate from us.

- 5. Jesus’ superiority as High Priest rests on His perfect, once for all, sacrifice of himself for our sins, v.27. In that "*He offered up Himself*", we have the perfect "*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (Joh.1:29), making "*one sacrifice for sins forever*" (Heb.10:12). Our salvation is secure because of "*the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*" (Heb.10:10).
- 6. Finally, He who had no sin or human weakness, and who was appointed by the Father’s oath, has been "*perfected forever*" to be our High Priest, v.28. Remember that the idea of being "*perfected*" means to attain to a set goal. Having finished His work of redemption, He now remains our King and Priest forever (Heb.5:7-10).

The finished redemptive work of Christ is seen in the phrase "*once for all*" (v.27, 10:10). But as our High Priest, He remains "*forever*" (v.28).

Summary

Our goal: spiritual maturity

All through this marvelous book, the author is urging his readers, and us, to "*go on to perfection*" (literally: be carried on to perfection) by

trusting in and drawing near to our heavenly High Priest (Heb.4:16; 6:18-20; 7:25; 10:22-24; 12:1-2). The book of Hebrews is written to lead believers who are downcast, discouraged, beaten down, despairing, and weary, to look up to our faithful and merciful High Priest, seated at the right hand of the Father, and to trust in His ability to carry us to the end of our race.

Our focus: Christ risen and glorified

The key to endurance and ultimate victory is summarized in the phrase, *“Looking unto Jesus”* in Heb.12:2. In other words, the key to victorious living is the faith-rest life of surrender and *“looking away unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith”* (Heb.12:2, literal translation). We must get our eyes off of self, others, and problems, and be wholly absorbed with mental preoccupation on Jesus (Heb.3:1; 12:3 *“consider Him”*).

Our confidence: blessings through victory

It is important to point out, in concluding this first full chapter on the ministry of Jesus as a *“priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”* (v.17, 21), the purpose of His ministry. Going back to Genesis 14:18-24, we find Melchizedek suddenly appearing to Abraham, to minister blessing, associated with bread and wine. It is as if he cut in front of the king of Sodom, who was preparing to offer Abraham all the spoils of victory. But, through the ministry of Melchizedek, Abraham was delivered from falling to the temptation to receive either spoils or praise from the worldly source. Instead, he took an oath to the Most High God (El Elyon) that he would not take even *“a sandal strap”*, so that both history and Scripture would testify that his greatness and wealth came, not from a worldly source, but from the Most High God alone.

Our Assurance: God’s grace is sufficient

The Lord Jesus, in His ministry to us, calls us to look away from this world as a source of supply, and to rest in His provision alone for both our physical and spiritual sustenance. The reminder of His faithful supply (Phi.4:19), is found in the bread and wine of the Lord’s table. This is a continual reminder of the faithfulness of our Melchizedek, *“who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens”* (Heb.8:1).

A Better (Superior) Covenant – Hebrews 8

The better covenant, introduced in 7:22, is now developed in full. The finished work of Jesus on the cross has made the old covenant obsolete (Heb.7:18; 8:13; 10:9). Paul tells us in 2Cor.3:11-13 that from the very beginning of the Old Covenant it was shown to be temporary and, like Moses' fading glory, designed to pass away. In effect, the author is urging them to lay aside the old wine and wineskins, and receive the new wine of abundant life in Jesus Christ (Mat.9:14-17; Mar.2:21-22; Luk.5:33-39).

In this chapter we find **three great provisions** that far surpass anything provided by the old covenant. Remember that the word "*better*" is used 13 times in this epistle. The Greek word *kreitton* comes from *kratos* which means strong, superior in dignity, worth, and advantage. In this chapter it is used twice in v.6.

1. The New Covenant has a better (superior) High Priest, v.1

The "*main point*" here refers to the central focus of the book of Hebrews. (Rom.8:33-35; Heb.2:17-18; 4:14-16; 7:24-28). This refers to the current ministry of Jesus on our behalf from heaven, which we refer to theologically as the present session of Christ. It is this doctrine that is the key to living effectively as a believer-priest in the Church age. We must learn to live in the light, not only of His finished work on the cross for our redemption, but also in the light of His present ministry of intercession on our behalf. We must never forget that we are seated with Him spiritually in victory (Eph.2:5-6; Col.3:1-4).

That "*we have such a High Priest*" reminds us that Jesus Christ is the present possession of all who come to Him in faith (see Heb.10:19-21). His High Priestly prayer (Joh.17) shows the complete spiritual unity of Christ and His people.

That our High Priest is "*seated*" shows that His sacrificial work is "*finished*" (Joh.19:30; Heb.9:28; 10:12, 14). His present session at the Father's right hand (between His ascension and the rapture of the Church) is a work of both "*Majesty*" (authority – Mat.28:18) and of a "*Minister*" (v.2) to the needs of His people. Thus the work of both King and Priest are combined.

2. The New Covenant has a better (superior) Tabernacle, v.2-5

This topic will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 9. The tabernacle of Moses was a copy of the heavenly tabernacle (v.5, 9:24). Again, like the sacrifices, it is a shadow of a greater reality (Heb.10:1).

Since Jesus serves in a greater tabernacle, He must also have a greater sacrifice to offer (Heb.9:14, 23, 28; 10:5-10, 12, 14), one that sanctifies forever, and need never be repeated.

It is helpful to compare the seven articles in the tabernacle to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Tabernacle Type

1. The brazen altar – a picture of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (Joh.1:29, 36; 10:11).
2. The laver of cleansing – a picture of sanctification by faith in Him (Heb.9:14; 10:10, 14), and daily cleansing by confession (Joh.13:10; 1Jo.1:9).
3. The lampstand – a picture of Christ as the light of the world (Joh.1:9; 8:12; 9:5).
4. The showbread – a picture of Christ the bread of life (Joh.6:33, 35, 41, 48, 51, 53-58).
5. The altar of incense – a picture of Christ our propitiation (Rom.3:25; Eph.5:2; 1Jo.2:2).
6. The veil – a picture of the body of Jesus Christ (Heb.10:20).
7. The ark and mercy seat – a picture of Christ in present session (Heb.4:16).

3. The New Covenant is founded on better (superior) promises, v.6-13

The new covenant is superior to the covenant of the law, because it is enacted on better promises. This is because the covenant of the law is **conditional**, while the new covenant is **unconditional**. The difference is found in the words, “*If you will...*” (Exo.19:5), which indicates that the fulfillment of the promise depends on human faithfulness, as opposed to the words “*I will...*” (Jer.31:31, 33, 34), which bases the covenant on God’s faithfulness alone. In Heb.8:8-13 we read the words “*I will*” six

times. These are the better promises of a better covenant. These promises fall under five main categories.

1. The promise of a covenant based on grace alone, v.6-9.
2. The promise of new birth, v.10 (cf. Jer.31:31, Rom.8:4; 2Co.3).
3. The promise of personal knowledge of the Lord, v.11.
4. The promise of complete cleansing from sin, v.12.
5. The promise of liberation from Moses' Law, v.13 (Gal.3:23-29).

Had the Mosaic covenant accomplished what God wanted and met the needs of sinful men, there would have been no need for another covenant. In fact, the Mosaic covenant was inferior to even the Abrahamic covenant (Gal.3:16-18). However, the covenant of the law had a role to play in pointing the Jewish nation, and all the world, to faith in Jesus Christ (Gal.3:19-25)

The introduction of the new covenant (Jer.31:31-34; Eze.36:23-27; Rom.11:27) indicates the old covenant will become obsolete. The word used here in Heb.8:13 indicates something that is gradually disappearing (Again, see 2Co.3:13-18; Heb.7:18; 10:9).

Doctrine of the New Covenant

It is impossible to assimilate the full knowledge of any doctrine without examining it categorically. This means the gathering of all major texts on the topic, and organizing the information into a logical sequence. There are three major components that make up the concept of Biblical context: 1) Historical/cultural, 2) Language/grammar, 3) doctrines/categories. Here is a categorical review of the doctrine of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant

1. The new covenant was anticipated by the fading glory reflected on the face of Moses (2Cor.3:7; Exo.34:29-35).
2. The old covenant was temporary from the start, but the new covenant is eternal in nature (Heb.7:16-17, 21, 24-28; 10:10-14).
3. The new covenant is specifically prophesied in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Though the new covenant was originally offered to Israel and Judah, it was entered into by the church (see point 7).

4. Whereas the Old covenant was conditional, dependent on human obedience (and therefore “weak through the flesh”), the new covenant is unconditional, dependent on the faithfulness of God, and the finished work of Christ (Heb.10:12-14). Note the conditional “If...then” in Exo.19:4-5, as opposed to the several “I will” statements in Jer.31:31-34 and Ezek.36:23-30.
5. The old covenant operated under a barrier between God and man, illustrated by the veil. The new covenant opens the way into the very presence of God, pictured by the rent veil (Mat.27:51; Heb.4:14-16; 10:19-21; Heb.8:8-14).
6. The old covenant operated under an external law, that had no power to transform the inner life. The new covenant works under the power of an inner law, by a renewed heart and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jer.31:33; Ezek.36:26-27; Heb.8:8-12).
7. In the upper room, Jesus indicated that His crucifixion would inaugurate the new covenant, and that those who trust in Him as Savior could only enter it into (Mat.26:26-28; Mar.14:22-24; Luk.22:19-20; 1Cor.11:23-26).
8. The specific provisions of the new covenant are as follows (Jer.31:31-34; Ezek.36:24-27; Heb.8; Heb.10:19-25).
 - A. Personal knowledge of and relationship with God.
 - B. Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every believer.
 - C. Once for all cleansing from the debt of sins.
 - D. Every believer in Jesus Christ becomes a king-priest (1Pe.2:5, 9; Rev.1:6; 5:10).
 - E. Every believer has a three-fold ministry to fulfill, as priests interceding with God, as ambassadors to the lost, and as ministers to the saints (2Cor.5:14-21; Heb.10:22-24).

A Better (Superior) Tabernacle - Hebrews 9

The author now picks up on the idea of a better tabernacle, introduced in 8:2. It is obvious that the better (superior) priest (ch.7), who offers a better covenant (ch.8), must serve in a better tabernacle, one that is permanent and eternal. In v.1-10, he shows the inferiority of the earthly tabernacle. Then, in v.11-28 we see the superiority of the heavenly tabernacle.

Though it was difficult for these first century Jewish believers to grasp, the precedent for the older giving way to the younger had been clearly

established in the O.T. scriptures. This principle is pictured repeatedly, where the firstborn is superseded by the younger. Just as Ishmael gave way to Isaac (Gen.17:17-20), and Esau gave way to Jacob (Gen.25:23), and Manasseh gave way to Ephraim (Gen.48:13-20), and even Reuben gave way to Judah (Gen.49:3-4, 9-12).

The main ideas of this chapter are that we have a **better Priest**, who offered a **better sacrifice**, on which a **better covenant** is established.

The limitations of the earthly tabernacle, v.1-10

In the tabernacle we have what is called “shadow-Christology”, (based on Heb.8:5, 10:1 and Col.2:16-17). This simply means that all the physical articles of the tabernacle were a faint picture of the Person and Work of Christ. The introduction of the “better covenant” (Heb.8:7-13) of course requires a “better tabernacle” (Heb.9:11-14), with Jesus Christ as both High Priest, who offers Himself as the more perfect sacrifice.

The Earthly Tabernacle, v.1-5 (review page 47)

Earthly vs. Eternal, v.1

Shadow Rituals vs. Spiritual Reality, v.2-5

1. The Tabernacle – three parts (Outer court; holy place, holy of holies).
 - A. The brazen altar – picture of Christ the lamb of God.
 - B. The Laver – perfect cleansing by faith in Christ.
2. The Lampstand – Christ the light of the world.
3. The table of showbread – Christ the bread of life.
4. The veil – represents the body of Christ, which veiled the glory of God (Heb.10:20).
5. The golden censer (altar of incense) – Christ our propitiation. This article is mentioned in connection with the Holy of Holies because...
 - A. It was connected to the Ark of the covenant in regard to its construction of gold (1Ki.6:21-22).
 - B. Also, when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, he carried the altar of incense, or perhaps a censer of incense, behind the veil.

6. The Ark of the covenant – The mercy seat a picture of Christ in present session (our intercessor – Rom.8:34; Heb.7:25).

The ark of the covenant was made of wood, a picture of Christ's humanity, overlaid with gold, a picture of the deity of Christ. The articles inside were a picture of the sins of mankind: the manna represented sins of the tongue (Num.11:6-10), the rod of Aaron pictured mental attitude sins (Num.16:1-40), and the broken tablets represented sins of the body (Exo.32:1-18).

Of these articles and their meaning the author says, "*Of these things we cannot now speak in detail*" (v.5b). The reason for this is that his main focus is that Jesus Christ is the High Priest of a new and better covenant, and He offered Himself as the perfect, "once for all" sacrifice (Heb.9:11-12; 10:10, 12, 14).

A Barrier vs. Access to God, v.6-8

Every article and function of the tabernacle was pointing forward to the greater and finished work of Christ, by which the old covenant was fulfilled, and the new covenant was instituted.

The daily service of the priests in the holy place (v.6) were a constant reminder to all that approach to God came only by sacrifice (the brazen altar and the twice daily sacrificial lambs, Exo.29:38-39). Blood sacrifice brought cleansing (the laver), resulting in spiritual illumination (the golden lampstand) and fellowship with God (the table of the bread of the presence (showbread). This made it possible to pray effective prayers, which God would receive (the altar of incense, see Rev.5:8; 8:3).

However, the ministry of the high priest (v.7-8) on the day of Atonement (Lev.16:1-2, 29-34), was a reminder that full and final redemption was not yet available. It was designed to cause the people to look forward to that complete redemption which only Jesus Christ could make.

Temporary vs. Eternal, v.8b

All of these rituals "*while the first tabernacle was still standing*" (v.8) looked forward to a time when those imperfect offerings (v.9-10) would be fulfilled in the perfect offering of Jesus Christ. The rituals of the old

covenant were sign-posts pointing to a “*time of reformation*”, the new spiritual order of the new covenant and the Church age.

Weak vs. Powerful, v.9-10

What the old covenant anticipated, but could not accomplish, Jesus Christ has done – bringing forgiveness of sins, and imputed righteousness to all who believe in Him (Rom.8:1-4; Gal.3:10-14; Col.1:12-14).

Summary of v.1-10

Here the author points out at least five limitations of the earthly tabernacle and its worship.

1. It was an earthly tabernacle, a shadow of something greater, v.1.
This is set in contrast with the true eternal tabernacle (Heb.8:1-2).
2. It was merely a shadow of better things to come, v.2-5.
Each article of the tabernacle speaks of some aspect of Christ’s person and work.
3. It represented a barrier between God and men, v.6-8a.
“*The way into the Holiest of All*” (v.8) is a reference to our ability to enter into the very presence of God, through the work of Christ.
4. It revealed the temporary nature of the old covenant, v.8b-9.
The contrast in the phrases “*while the first tabernacle was still standing*” and “*for the present time*” draw a dramatic line between the rituals of the old covenant and the spiritual reality we enjoy in the new covenant, by faith in the Lord Jesus.
5. It pointed to a time when redemption would be complete, v.10.
The “*time of reformation*”, that is, the time of the new covenant. Both the shadow nature, and the daily repetition of the offerings, was a reminder that to be made “*perfect in regard to the conscience*” (v.9), a greater and more perfect offering must be made. That offering only Jesus Christ could make, when He offered Himself in our place. When we put our trust in Him, we enter fully into a “*new and living way which He consecrated for us*” and we are able to “*draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*” (Heb.10:19-22).

The perfect Priest, Tabernacle, and Sacrifice means perfect security for the believer, (v.11-28)

In this section, the author uses the term “*once*” three times to indicate that which can never be repeated. The word *hapax* means “once for all” – see Heb.6:4; 9:7, 26, 27, 28; 10:2, 10; 12:26, 27). This word is used nine times in Hebrews, more than all the rest of the New Testament combined. Do you see that the book of Hebrews, more than any other New Testament book is the strongest argument for the security of the believer?

Christ’s sacrifice brings perfect peace and security (v.11-14)

In v.1-10 the author speaks of the old covenant, where *typical* priests entered into the *typical* tabernacle, to provide *typical* cleansing. (By *typical* we mean as a type, or shadow, of future reality. Here we have the Lord Jesus, the perfect High Priest, entering heaven, the perfect Tabernacle, offering for us His perfect sacrifice, resulting in perfect cleansing and security.

v.11) The “*good things to come*” is a reference to the new covenant (v.15), which provides full and final justification, sanctification, glorification, and ultimate eternal inheritance (see Rom.8:28-30). The “*more perfect tabernacle*” is a reference to heaven itself (v.24).

v.12) The “*blood of Christ*” which was the reality to which all old testament sacrifices pointed, has “*obtained eternal redemption*” for all who believe in Him. The word “*obtained*” is an aorist middle participle, indicating that redemption was completed on the cross, after which He entered into heaven.

v.13-14) Here, the “much more” argument (A Fortiori) is used to contrast the shadow offerings of the old testament, with the reality of fulfillment in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. For 1400 years hundreds of thousands of sacrifices were offered, which could never take away sins (Heb.10:1-4), and yet they offered ritual cleansing and comfort to the offerers. Yet the “once for all” offering of Jesus has the power to cleanse our conscience completely. The “*dead works*” refers to any effort to be justified by works of the law (Heb.6:1).

It should be noted in this single verse that each member of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit) were involved in the offering of Jesus on the cross (compare Rom.1:1-4).

The doctrine of the blood of Christ

1. Throughout the Old Testament, the term “blood” is a reference to the life of the person or animal (Gen.4:10; 9:6). To shed blood was to take away the life of the owner.
2. When animal sacrifices were offered, the symbolism was that the innocent animal was giving its life as a substitute for the guilty party making the sacrifice (Heb.9:18-22).
3. When the Bible speaks about the blood of Christ, it is inclusive of the totality of His sacrifice, the offering of His life as the God-Man.
4. The prophet Isaiah captures this idea in Isa.53:12, “*He poured out His soul (life) unto death*”.
5. This sacrifice was for the penalty of sin, which is spiritual death, separation from God (see Gen.2:17; 3:7-9; Mat.27:46).

Christ’s sacrifice ratified the new covenant (v.15-22)

Three great points are made in this section.

1. Jesus Christ, by means of His sacrifice, has become the mediator of the new covenant (v.15, see Jer.31:31-34; Ezek.36:25-27).
2. This covenant is also a last will and testament, giving to each believer a share in the eternal inheritance (v.15b-17).
3. This covenant/testament had to be consecrated by the blood of Christ (v.18-22). “*Without the shedding of blood there is no remission (forgiveness)*”. This goes back to what is said in v.11-14. The wages of sin is death, and the life is taken by the shedding of blood. Christ offered Himself as our substitute, shedding His blood in our place.

Christ’s sacrifice solved the sin issue forever, (v.23-28)

1. The sacrifice of Christ purifies us for heavenly access (v.23).
2. Christ Himself now appears before God as our mediator (v.24, see 1Ti.2:5).
3. His sacrifice resolved the sin issue forever (v.25-26).
4. Because of His finished work, the hope of every believer is eternal salvation, not eternal judgment (v.27-28).

Hebrews Chapter 10

This is the key chapter of the book of Hebrews. Here the author draws the necessary conclusions drawn from his arguments in Ch.1-9.

This is the final argument, begun in Heb.1:1-3, for the vast superiority of the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ to anything the old covenant had to offer.

Overview of Chapter 10

1. It was impossible for O.T. sacrifices to take away sins, v.1-4.
2. Jesus came to fulfill the law, providing the perfect offering, v.5-10.
3. The once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus provides perfect cleansing, v.11-14.
4. Because of this, our sins are forgiven forever, v.15-17.

5. Because of Christ's finished work, no further offering is required or possible, v.18.
6. However, we learn in v.19-25 that, with greater privilege and provision comes far greater responsibility.
7. Therefore, v.26-39 warns us, that failure to grow to maturity and spiritual productivity, carries greater discipline.

A Better (Superior) Sacrifice - Hebrews 10:1-18

The better priest, who inaugurated a better covenant, and who serves in a better tabernacle, of necessity must base His entire ministry to us on a better (superior) sacrifice. Here the thought from 9:22 is fully developed.

The Inadequacy of animal sacrifice to save, v.1-4

The law was a "shadow" in that it reflected the reality of Jesus Christ (Col.2:17; Heb.8:5). The repetition of the sacrifices revealed their impotence. They were a daily reminder of man's sinfulness (Lev.16:24, 33-34). Their value was in what they pointed to, the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf (Isa.53:4-6).

Jesus came to do what animal sacrifice could not, v.5-9

At His incarnation (compare v.5-7 with Psa.40:6-8), Jesus acknowledged that His human body was dedicated to the cross. He came to do what the entire Old Testament looked forward to. His death and resurrection ended the old covenant, and inaugurated the new covenant.

In the Hebrew of Psa.40:6, instead of "*a body you have prepared for Me*", it says, "*My ears you have pierced*", a reference to the voluntary pierced-ear slave of Deu.15:17. Paul develops this thought beautifully in Phi.2:5-9. The phrase "*takes away*" (v.9) means to "abolish (see 7:18; 8:13).

His once for all sacrifice provides once for all salvation, v.10-18

The word "once" is *hapax*, meaning "once for all". It is used more in Hebrews than all other N.T. books combined (Heb.6:4; 9:7, 26, 27, 28; 10:2; 12:26-27). This is why, contrary to much modern teaching, the book of Hebrews is the strongest argument for eternal security of the believer than any other book! Jesus' "once for all" sacrifice has "*perfected forever those who are being sanctified*" (v.14). Thus our justification is secure, our sanctification (spiritual growth) is ongoing, and our future glorification is certain.

Fourth Warning Section – Heb.10:19-39

Here the author builds on the three former warnings, each one becoming a bit more severe. The exhortations in v.19-25 are the means we have of escaping the “*fearful expectation of judgment*” in v.26-31.

It is important to emphasize here that both the positive exhortations of v.19-25, and the warnings that follow v.26 are based on the finished work of Christ on the cross (v.5-18). The tenth chapter of Hebrews shows us that the cross of Christ provides for those who trust in Him both the eternal security of our salvation, as well as severe judgment for those believers who live in disobedience to His word.

The three exhortations to escape judgment, v.19-25.

The phrase “*Therefore, brethren*” speaks to believers in light of the cross of Christ. Jesus Christ offered the one and only sacrifice that could bring complete forgiveness and eternal life (v.12). Those who believe are “*perfected forever*” positionally in Christ, though in practice we are “*being sanctified*” (v.14) day by day.

In v.19-21 we see three present possessions of every believer. We have boldness to enter into the presence of God (v.19; 4:14-16), we have a new and living access beyond the veil (v.20), and there we have a High Priest, who is faithful and merciful (v.21; 2:17-18; 7:26-28). In light of these great spiritual possessions, we are given three exhortations which clarify the three ministries every believer is to engage in.

1. Let us draw near, v.22. (Priesthood)

This is the ministry of our priesthood (1Pe.2:4-10). We perform this ministry when we intercede on behalf of others, in the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph.6:18; 1Th.5:17-19; Heb.13:15). In order to be effective in our prayer life, we need to cleanse ourselves daily through self examination and confessions of sins (1Co.11:27-31; 1Jo.1:9). The O.T. priests washed at the laver daily (Exo.30:17-21).

2. Let us hold fast, v.23. (Ambassadorship)

Every believer is called to be an ambassador for Christ (2Co.5:14-21). Our witness to the world is that by faith in Jesus Christ we have the hope (absolute confidence) of eternal life. Our confidence is not based

on our performance, but on the fact that *“He who promised is faithful”*. No one who doubts the eternal security of the believer is capable of holding this confession *“without wavering”*. Our assurance and security are based on the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ our Savior.

3. Let us consider one another, v.24-25. (Ministry)

Each and every child of God is spiritually gifted by the Holy Spirit (Rom.12:3-8; 1Co.12:7; Eph.4:7; 1Pe.4:10-11). These gifts are given for the building up of the body of Christ. We are all members of His body, dependent on the other members for our full spiritual development. We are to edify one another in love and good deeds (1Th.5:11-22). The arena in which these activities are to take place is the local church. To forsake our gathering together is to fail our 3-fold ministry.

The fourth warning: against willful disobedience, v.26-31

The willful sin in this context is the forsaking of the local church. The word *“forsaking”* implies a desertion by which others are left in peril. The use of the present participle indicates a habitual absence from the local gathering of believers.

It should be remembered that under the O.T. law, sacrifices were made for sins of ignorance, sins of omission, and sins of defilement (Lev.4-5). Willful and deliberate sins were not covered, but instead were dealt with by judgment (consider Achan, Joshua 7; and Exo.21:14; Deu.17:2-6;). While we know that confession of sins brings forgiveness and cleansing (1Jo.1:9), continual sin, without confession and correction, will result in increasing levels of Divine discipline (Heb.12:3-11).

For these first century Jewish believers, forsaking the church to go back into Judaism, would result in them sharing the fate of the *“adversaries”* (v.27), who would die in the fiery judgment of the fall of Jerusalem (70A.D.). By their defection they would be guilty of the three offenses listed in v.29.

1. Trampling underfoot the Son of God – That is, to turn from confidence in His finished work, to the offering of shadow sacrifices again.
2. Counting the blood of the covenant...a common thing – To treat the sacrifice of Christ as common as other religious rites. The phrase *“by which he was sanctified”* speaks of the fact that the

person doing this is a true believer, having benefitted from the sanctification mentioned in v.10.

3. Insulting the Spirit of grace – showing contempt for the grace of God administered to us by the Holy Spirit.

What could be worse than to die without mercy (v.28)? The apostle John warns us about the “*sin unto death*” (1Jo.5:16). This refers to unconfessed and persistent sin continued in until death. This could play out in several ways.

1. Immediate and unavoidable death (Act.5:1-11).
2. Prolonged illness until death (Rom.8:13; 1Co.11:29-32).
3. Becoming a “*castaway*”, rejected for further service (1Co.9:26-27), and denied eternal reward (1Co.3:11-15).

It is evident from v.30 that the author is dealing with discipline on God’s people, not on unbelievers (see 1Cor.11:29-30). It would be better to die without mercy than to live without grace! That this warning is to true believers is made clear in the passage in the following ways.

1. The author addresses the readers as “*brethren*” (v.19). They are the same ones called “*holy brethren*” (Heb.3:1).
2. The three exhortations include the author with them, “*Let us...*” (v.22-24). None but believers could be included with the author.
3. The author includes himself in the warning about willful sin, v.26.
4. It is to “*His people*” that these warnings are addressed, v.30.

We must never forget that God is faithful to judge His own people (1Pe.4:15-17), but He always does so in love (Heb.12:5-7). These stern warnings are now followed with words of encouragement.

Encouragement to recall and reclaim blessing and rewards, v.32-39.

The author reminds these believers of their early Christian experience. They had left their “*first love*”, and the only remedy was to “*Remember...from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works*” (Rev.3:5). That they were genuine believers is shown by the fact that they “*were illuminated*” (v.32), a term used in Heb.6:4 for the moment of entering into eternal life.

They had previously suffered for their faith, and had supported Paul in his chains. They had endured persecution and privation because of the sure conviction that they possessed eternal treasure (Mat.6:20).

His challenge is *“Do not cast away your confidence”*, and the reason is that *“If we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end”* (Heb.3:14), it will result in *“great reward”* (v.35). It is only by endurance in our faith that we can receive this promise (v.36). Our lives ought to be lived out in the light of the Bema seat of Christ (Rom.8:17; 1Co.3:11-15; 2Co.5:10).

If we live life in light of the return of Jesus Christ (v.37-38), the issue will be whether we will face Him in confidence or in shame (1Jo.2:28-3:3). We are to live by faith, and not by sight (2Co.5:7). Those who fail to hold fast their confidence, and draw back in fear, cannot please God (Num.14:20-24, 29-32; 1Co.10:1-12).

The author concludes by saying *“But we are not of those who draw back to perdition (destruction), but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”* (v.39). Notice that the author uses the word *“we”*, including himself, along with other believers. The word *“perdition”* is a terrible translation, and implies eternal condemnation in hell. The word *apoleia* used here means *“ruin, destruction”*, and refers to the sin unto death (1Jo.5:16). There are those who hear the gospel message, and who then draw back in unbelief, unto eternal destruction in hell. This is not the issue the author is addressing. The danger he is dealing with is to those who hear and believe the gospel, and then draw back in continued disobedience. For them the five warning passages of Hebrews are written, and the historical evidence of the destruction of Jerusalem gives us a terrible example of what rebellious believers would have suffered at that time, as they shared in and aligned with the unbelieving adversaries of God (v.26-27).

The phrase *“believe to the saving of the soul”* should literally be translated *“to the possession of the soul”*. It is the same sense, though using different words, that Jesus spoke of in Luke 21:19, *“In your patience possess your souls”*. Our soul is like a ship, which we are to command, rather than forfeiting control to our enemy, the devil.

The spiritual war is fought in the battlefield of the soul. Either we take possession of the field, or the enemy does. Our life is an ongoing battle,

each day we are either gaining or losing ground. The Christian life can only be lived one day at a time.

When we stand before the Lord Jesus Christ at the Bema seat, the place of reward (1Cor.3:10-15; 2Cor.5:9-10), our daily score, as it were, will be tallied and we will receive reward according to the sum of our life.

Hebrews Chapter 10 Summary in Light of Romans 8:1-4

Romans 8:1-4; The four victories of the Christian life

It is typical of Paul that he will reveal a doctrinal truth, and then in later writing he will expand on that same idea. For example, the book of Colossians presents Christ as the head of the Church, then Ephesians, which was written later, expounds on many of the same truths, but from the standpoint of the Church as the body of Christ.

Another example is that Galatians, possibly his first epistle, sets forth the doctrine of grace versus law, and of faith versus works, which theme is then developed further in the book of Romans.

Here, in Rom.8:1-4, we find the seed thoughts, that are now being presented more fully in Hebrews chapter 10. Let us look at the **four victories of the Christian Life**.

1. The victory of forgiveness over condemnation, v.1.
2. The victory of life in the Spirit over death under the law, v.2.
3. The victory of the power of Christ over the law's impotence, v.3.
4. The victory of spirituality over carnality, v.4, 1b.

To Summarize

When we enter into union with Jesus Christ by faith we have...

1. Justification, v.1.
2. Reconciliation, v.2.
3. Propitiation, v.3.
4. Sanctification, v.4.

The Four Victories in Hebrews 10

1. The victory of forgiveness over condemnation, Heb.10:16-18; see 9:14, 28.

2. The victory of the power of Christ over the impotence of the law, Heb.10:1-10.
3. The victory of the power of the Spirit over death under the law, Heb.10:11-18.
4. The victory of spirituality over carnality, Heb.10:19-39.

III. The Superior Promises of Christ - Hebrews Ch.11-13

In the concluding three chapters of this epistle we find the three chief Christian virtues that are peppered throughout the epistles of Paul. Faith is confidence in God's word and promises (Ch.11). Hope is focused on the return of the Lord Jesus (Ch.12), And love is the power of the Spirit of God for effective service (Ch.13).

The author has encouraged these believers to *"imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises"* (Heb.6:12). He now reviews the lives of many O.T. heroes, as examples of those who overcame their weaknesses and held fast their faith to the end. These are historical examples of what *"the just shall live by faith"* (10:38) means.

The Power of Faith, Ch.11

Here we see what it means to *"live by faith"*. The O.T. believers chosen by the author, under the Spirit's guidance, were men and women who often failed. They were not perfect, but they were being perfected/sanctified by their persistence in pursuing the faith.

The definition/nature of faith, v.1-3

In these three verses we have four defining qualities of faith.

1. **Substance** – This involves the personal benefit of faith at work in our lives. The word *hupostasis* is used 5 times in the N.T. In 2Cor.9:4; 11:17 and Heb.3:14 it is translated "confidence". But in Heb.1:3 *"express image"* means "essence or substance". In Jesus we see the visible nature or character of the invisible Father (Jo.14:9). In the same way faith, working in the lives of believers, gives growing assurance of the eternal kingdom we hope for.

2. **Evidence** – This is essentially an expansion of the above. The true evidence of the invisible kingdom of God is found in the lives of faithful believers. To us faith gives **substance** (personal), to the world **evidence** (public), of invisible spiritual realities.
3. **Testimony** – The “*elders*” here refer to O.T. saints, some of whom are about to illustrate what a “*good testimony*” looks like. “Testimony” (*martureo*) can refer both to God’s approval recorded in His word, and also of their witness to the world (v.5b).
4. **Understanding** – Believers have an understanding of creation and of history that unbelievers cannot attain to. The word “*worlds*” is *aionas*, literally “the ages or dispensations”. It speaks of the history of the world from creation to its end. The phrase “*were framed*” is from *katartizo*, “to mend, to set right, to make complete”. It was used of the setting of a broken bone. God arranged the plan of world history “*by the word of God*”, before the world began (Joh.1:1-4). That which is visible rests on the firm foundation of the invisible. Both creation itself, and all of history, was spoken into being by the breath of God (Psa.33:9-11).

Point 1: Faith may be seen in three stages: 1) saving faith, 2) living faith, and 3) dying faith. In each stage faith provides **substance** of the invisible realm, **evidence** of God’s power, **testimony**, both within and without, and **understanding** of God working in this world.

Point 2: Faith must have a working object. Faith is only as strong as it’s object. God reveals Himself to us through His word. Thus faith looks through the Bible to Almighty God, who is revealed to us in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Four Declarations of Faith

1. That our “blessed hope” (Tit.2:13; Heb.10:37) is spiritual reality.
 2. That the invisible kingdom of God is real and is our eternal home.
 3. That the only way to be commended by God is to live by faith.
 4. That both creation and history will be “set right” by God in time.
- How powerful is Hab.2:4, when he says, “*The just shall live by faith*”?

Point: While I will not delineate this in each case, every example given in chapter 11 demonstrates substance, evidence, testimony, and understanding.

The faith of those before the flood (Antediluvians), v.4-7

It is worthwhile to note that the three antediluvians mentioned demonstrate an outline of the book of Ephesians. The evidence of our worship will be seen in our walk and our work.

1. Worship, Eph.1-3.
2. Walking, Eph. 4-5.
3. Working, Eph.6.

Abel, (worship) v.4 (Gen.4:1-10)

Abel, not Adam, is used here because he is the first one openly commended by God in Scripture (testimony, v.2).

1. The substance of his faith.
His offering shows that he believed in the sacrificial system which God had previously demonstrated (Gen.3:21).
2. The evidence of his faith.
His offering looked forward to, and visibly portrayed, the “promised Seed” (Gen.3:15), the coming Messiah/Savior.
3. The testimony of his faith.
The response of Cain demonstrated the convicting power of Abel’s offering. Even in this early form, the gospel comforts those who believe, and convicts those who choose the path of unbelief. His blood sacrifice testified to the absolute inadequacy of Cain’s offering, showing that human good can never save (Rom.2:1-24).
4. The understanding of his faith.
Abel knew, based on the promise and sacrifice God made for Adam and Eve (Gen.3:15 &21) that the only atonement for our sins would be the sacrifice of the coming Savior, Jesus Christ.

Enoch, (walking) v.5-6 (Gen.5:18-24)

1. Enoch’s faith gave substance to the invisible God he knew. He believed that “*He is*”, That God is eternally self-existent.
2. His walk (lifestyle) gave evidence to the world around him that God “*is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*”..
3. He both received testimony from God, “*that he pleased God*”, and gave witness to the world.
4. God demonstrated His pleasure in Enoch, both by word, and by the act of translating him into heaven.

5. Enoch's faith, and God's testimony of it, helps us understand the value of living godly lives in an ungodly world.
6. The brief record of Enoch gives us understanding that this life is only the beginning for those who believe, "*because God (took) him.*"

In the life of Enoch, as recorded in Genesis 5, lays the foundation for four great doctrines.

1. The immanent and transcendent nature of God. Though He is infinite, yet He is near to those who trust in Him.
2. It is possible, even for sinful men, to please God through faith and obedience.
3. Those who please God will be richly rewarded in eternity.
4. The doctrine of the rapture is not without precedent.

Noah, (working) v.7 (Gen.6:1-9, 13-22)

1. Noah's faith in God's word to him, gave substance (the Ark) to things never seen before (the flood).
2. Noah's faith gave him a conviction of things yet unseen.
3. Noah's faith was expressed in his deeds, that of preaching and of building.
4. As the Ark was built Noah gave evidence, through preaching, of what was to come (1Pe.3:18-22; 2Pe.2:4-5).
5. Noah's faith, in conjunction with his works, condemned the world of unbelievers, and saved those who believed his message.

Summary: two great lessons

1. The lives of these three men clearly demonstrate the value and the power of what it means to live by faith (Heb.10:38).
2. They also remind us that our worship must be balanced by our walk (lifestyle) and our work (Eph.2:10).

The faith of the Jewish Patriarchs, v.8-22

Here we are looking at those from the flood to the exodus. It is worth noting that the author spends most of his time on events from Genesis to Exodus.

As Gregory Koukl points out in his book “Reality”, there are four books that we need to fully digest from the Biblical story. Genesis tells us how the world began, and how it went wrong. John tells us how God has won the world back through Christ. The book of Romans gives us the doctrinal overview of God’s redemptive plan. And Revelation tells us how history will end.

The faith of Abraham, v.8-10 (Gen.12:1-3)

1. Abraham’s faith to answer God’s call to go out, v.8.

- Abraham was the ninth first-born son, most likely a very wealthy and influential man in Chaldea, before the Lord called him.
2. His faith to dwell in the land as a sojourner, v.9.
 3. By faith he waited for the city, which was invisible, v.10.
The fact that Isaac and Jacob are called *"heirs with him of the same promise"* includes them as well in the hall of faith.

The faith of Sarah, v.11-12

1. Sarah's faith in Him who is faithful, v.11.
The power of faith is always in its working object. It is not just what you believe, or how long you have believed, but WHO you believe in.
2. How the faith of Sarah complemented that of Abraham, v.12. God used Abraham and Sarah as a team, where each had a vital part to play for the fulfillment of the plan of God.

The power of dying faith, v.13-16

Here, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob (as well as all those with them who believed), show the power of a believer who dies well.

1. They go to their death, not having seen the promises fulfilled, but still believing them.
2. They confess that they are strangers, sojourners, on the earth.
3. They declare that their homeland is not of this world.
4. Though they had opportunity to turn back (like the recipients of Hebrews were prone to) they did not waver in their faith.
5. They realized that death was the door that would lead them home to their homeland and heavenly Father (Phi.3:20).
6. Access to the "better" country comes only through our better priest (Jesus Christ) who offered a better sacrifice (Himself).

The greatest test, and testimony, of Abraham, v.17-19

In Genesis 22 we read the story of the great test of Abraham's faith. We must understand that at every level of spiritual growth, our faith must be tested and proven (Rom.5:1-5; Jam.1:2-3, 12; 1Pe.1:7; 5:10-11).

1. What God asked of Abraham defied everything he knew about God, about the promised Seed, and about a father's love, v.17-18.
2. The only way Abraham could possibly pass this test, was if he concluded that God would raise Isaac from the dead, v.19.

3. In the playing out of this great personal drama, Abraham and Isaac gave a portrait and a preview of what God would do with His only begotten Son at the cross, v.19.

Note: In Rom.4:13-25 the Apostle Paul takes us through the inner struggle, and the ultimate victory of Abraham, and what it means to us.

The faith of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, v.20-22

These verses lead us to the end of the book of Genesis, showing that Abraham passed on his faith to his son, grandson, and great-grandson. There is something so beautiful in a family heritage of faith and faithfulness. In each case that follows, we see expressions of faith when each one was near death.

1. Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau (Gen.27:1-40).
It is most interesting that the author mentions Esau here. Most commentators and Bible students assume that Esau was an unbeliever. Two passages correct this view, if you will carefully read Gen.25 (note that Esau, like Abraham, *“was gathered to his people”*, a phrase not used of unbelievers. Secondly, in Heb.12:15-17, Esau is used as a warning to believers, not to follow the path he took. This would be out of place if he were not also a believer.
2. Jacob “when he was dying” blessed the sons of Joseph and worshipped (Gen.48:1-22). Here is the story of how Ephraim was placed before Manasseh, in the foreknowledge of God. This is another example of *“the older shall serve the younger”* (Rom.9:12). This takes on its full significance when we apply it to Jesus Christ, the elder brother in the family of God, who came *“not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Mat.20:28).
3. Joseph, “when he was dying”, anticipated the exodus, based on his faith in what God had told Abraham (Gen.15:13-21). Therefore he gave instructions about carrying his bones back to the promised land. Why? So in the resurrection he could rise from the land God promised to Israel.

The doctrine of faith

1. Faith comes by hearing and believing the word of God (Rom.10:17).
2. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1Jo.5:4-5).

3. Faith must have a working object capable of fulfilling the hope of faith. Only Jesus Christ, crucified, buried, and resurrected, is able to do this (Joh.3:16, 11:25, 20:31; 1Co.15:1-5; Rom.10:9; Gal.5:6).
4. It is impossible to please God by any other means than faith (Heb.11:6).
5. Abraham is the standard example of saving faith (Gen.15:6; Rom.4:3; Gal.3:6-9).
6. Faith is not static, it is dynamic. It grows and progresses into the works of service (Rom.1:17; 2Co.5:7; Gal.2:20; Jam.2:17).
7. Faith leads us to spiritual maturity, that we might be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus (Rom.8:28-30; 12:1-2; 2Co.3:17-18).

The faith of Moses, v.23-29

Moses is singled out here for seven great decisions which changed the course of world history. These decisions began with his very obscure parents, Amram and Jochebed (Exo.6:20; Num.26:59; 1Chr.6:3). It is interesting that Jochebed was actually Amram's Aunt (Exo.6:20). Later, this type of marriage was forbidden, as being a practice picked up in Egypt (Lev.18:1-3, 12).

Seven decisions of faith that changed history

1. The heritage of faith of Moses' parents, v.23.
2. The identification of faith, v.24.
3. The sacrifice of faith, v.25.
4. The priority of faith, v.26.
5. The focus of faith, v.27.
6. The obedience of faith, v.28.
7. The historical impact of faith, v.29.

Faith demonstrated from Joshua to the prophets, v.30-40

These verses give us a brief overview of faith from the conquest of the land down to the faith of the prophets. This closes out the history of the Old Testament.

1. Joshua, v.30 (Josh.1-6).
Joshua faithfully followed the instructions given to him by the Lord (Jos.1:5-9; 3:7-17; 4:14; 5:9-15). The result was victory!
2. Rahab, v.31 (Jos.2&6).
Though only briefly mentioned, the faith of Rahab was great. In jos.2:11 she confesses her faith in the God of Israel. Her faith

- resulted in works (Jam.2:25), by which she led her family into the faith (Jos.6:23). The greatest result of her faith was that she was included in the lineage of Jesus Christ (Mat.1:5).
3. Gideon to David, v.32.
How many volumes could be written concerning the faith of these who are only mentioned in passing? We find it intriguing that Barak (Jud.4&5), Samson (Jud.13-16), and Jephthah (Jud.11) are included here. However, consider also the many sins of David. God uses sinful men, who lay hold of Him by faith in His word, to accomplish His plan and purpose.
 4. Victorious faith, v.33-35a.
In these verses we are given ten examples of the victories of faithful men and women. However, the Bible makes it clear that not all who are faithful are victorious from a worldly point of view. God has a different plan for each of us. It is the faithful obedience to His plan, and not how it looks to men, that counts.
 5. Faith through sufferings, v.35b-38.
The word “*others*” here specifically speaks of others of the same kind of faith. While some were delivered, others were persecuted, tortured, and slain. Yet, concerning these the author says, “*of whom the world was not worthy*” (v.38). It God’s estimate of their worth, not that of the world, that will count for all eternity.
 6. The reward of faith, v.39-40
The central promise of the O.T. is fulfilled in Christ, v.40. The “*something better*” refers to all the “better things” we have in Christ.
 - A. A better priest (Heb.9:11-15).
 - B. A better sanctuary (Heb.9:11, 24-26).
 - C. A better sacrifice (Heb.9:23).
 - D. A better covenant (Heb.7:22; 8:6).
 - E. A better hope (Heb.7:19).
 - F. Better promises (Heb.8:6).

The goal of the eleventh chapter is to impress on us what is meant in 10:38, “*Now the just shall live by faith*”. Now we enter chapter 12, where the focus is on hope.

The Perseverance of Hope, Ch.12

Building on the spiritual virtues of faith, hope, and love mentioned earlier in the book (Heb.6:10-12; 10:22-24), the final three chapters build on these qualities: Ch.11 – faith, Ch.12 – hope, Ch.13 – love. While faith looks to the past (salvation), and love looks at the present (present conduct), hope looks to the future (Christ’s eternal kingdom).

The power of Biblical hope is that it gives us the strength to endure (Rom.5:1-5). The idea of endurance is found in v.1, 3, 7, 20. In this chapter we have the fifth and final warning section (v.12-29).

The author and finisher of our faith, v.1-3

The “*cloud of witnesses*” refers to the heroes of chapter 11, who by their lives testify to the power of faith. In ancient Greece, runners trained carrying weights, which they would “lay aside” at the time of the race. They would also take off their robes, which could entangle their legs.

The goal was to “*run with endurance*” the particular race God had set before them. This life is a marathon, not a sprint. For other references to endurance see Heb.10:32, 36; 12:3, 7, 20.

In v.2-3 the Lord Jesus Christ is set forth as the ultimate hero, the “*author*” (“*captain*” or, prince-leader, Heb.2:10) and “*finisher*” (the one who perfects or completes) of faith. Jesus ran His unique race “*for the joy that was set before Him*”. His eyes were on the eternal prize of His reign in the kingdom of God, which included “*bringing many sons to glory*” (Heb.2:10). He is now seated in power and authority at the Father’s right hand (Heb.1:3; 8:1; 10:12; Psa.2:6; 110:1).

The discipline of God is motivated by love, v.4-11

During times of suffering and affliction, it is common for believers to question the love of God, or the genuineness of their faith. The author instead urges us to see the hand of God at work to purify and refine our faith. To become “*weary and discouraged*” again picks up the idea of the long distance runner toward the end of the race.

The quote in v.5-6 is from Pro.3:11-12, to remind us that even when we are being disciplined, we are under the unfailing love of God. Three kinds, or degrees, of Divine discipline are listed.

1. Rebuke – this refers to verbal correction (2Ti.3:16).

2. Chastening – the word literally means “child-training”, and includes the use of the rod of correction.
3. Scourging – this word connotes severe and painful discipline. The root of this word means to scourge, to beat with a whip.

All who belong to God will be disciplined, for the simple reason that we all fail in many ways (Jam.3:2). The word “illegitimate” would speak of those who claim to have faith, but are false professors.

The word “partakers” in v.8 speaks of those who are “companions” in the journey of faith (see this word used in Heb.1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4). Just as an earthly father who loves his children would discipline them, so as to develop character and obedience, even so God, who loves us so much more, disciplines us for our benefit.

No one enjoys discipline in the moment. Yet all who have been well trained value the fruit of discipline. For the believer who humbly accepts the discipline of God, that fruit is *“the peaceable fruit of righteousness”*. As we become *“partakers of His holiness”* His peace permeates our souls and our lives.

Fifth and final warning section, 12:12-29

Remember that there are five warning sections in the book of Hebrews.

1. Warning against drifting from God’s word, Heb.2:1-4.
2. Warning against doubting God’s word, Heb.3:7-4:13.
3. Warning against dullness in hearing God’s word, Heb.5:11-6:8.
4. Warning against willful disobedience to God’s word, 10:26-39.
5. Warning against despising/rejecting God’s word, Heb.12:12-29.

These warnings are progressive and show increasing hardness of heart. Parallel passages such as Eph.4:17-19 and Gal.5:1-7 are similar. Each of these passages is addressed to believers, warning of the dangers of

spiritual apathy, which leads to ever greater degrees of departure from the word and will of God.

This section must be seen in the light of the teaching on divine discipline in v.3-11. For the sake of review here is a brief summary.

1. Only by keeping our eyes fixed on Christ can we endure, v.3-4.
2. We should neither despise nor be discouraged by His discipline, v.5. God disciplines in love those who are His own children. This discipline is evidence of our salvation!
3. God's discipline increases, the longer we resist, along three lines; rebuke, chastening, and scourging, v.5-6.
4. No believer escapes discipline, for none are perfect, v.7-9.
5. The goal of divine discipline is always purification and blessing, v.10-11. Correction brings blessings in time and reward in eternity. The word "*trained*" in v.11 is the same word used in Heb.5:14 translated "*exercised*". We get "gymnasium" from it.

Do not fail like Esau, 12:12-17

The discouraged and downcast believer is pictured as a runner whose hands are hanging down, with feeble knees and stumbling feet (v.12-13). But strength is available, and it comes from God's word, received in the local church (Heb.10:25). The goal is not to be a dislocated limb (a believer out of fellowship), but rather to find spiritual healing through grace and truth. This requires a continual focus on the Lord Jesus Christ as the source of our hope (v.2-3).

Our lives are to be a continual pursuit of peace and holiness, or sanctification, "*without which no one will see the Lord*". The holiness of Jesus Christ is a gift to all who believe in Him. We are included in the phrase "*holy brethren*" (Heb.3:1). The goal of the Christian life is that we keep on "*perfecting holiness in the fear of God*" (2Cor.7:1).

Those who believe have been sanctified forever in our **position** in Christ (1Co.6; Heb.10:10). Now our lives are to be a process of **practical** sanctification. In other words, we are "*being sanctified*" (Heb.10:14). As we keep our eyes on Christ, and continue to grow in grace, we are purified even as He is pure (1Jo.3:3). Those who reject the offer of eternal life in Christ are devoid of all sanctification, or holiness, and will

never see Him as we will. The basis of our holiness is the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom.4:3, 22-25; 2Co.5:21).

Esau's experience is used as a picture of a believer who has traded eternal reward for present gratification. He sold his birthright and inheritance for one meal. It is important to notice that his "afterward" (v.17) is just the opposite of the "afterward" in v.11. Believers who only live for the here and now, who ignore their spiritual responsibilities, will one day stand before the Lord and "suffer loss" (1Co.3:15) in terms of eternal reward they could have gained (Rev.3:11).

When it was too late, Esau sought to repent, even with tears, but the opportunity was past. At that point it was "impossible" for him to repent (Heb.6:4-6). This verse is poorly translated, leaving a wrong impression of what it actually says. It should read:

"For you know that indeed afterward when he wanted to inherit the blessing he was rejected, for he did not find a place for repentance, though he sought it with tears."

This is a good picture of the believer who stands before the Lord at the Bema, and watches his life go up in smoke, and sees the reward he could have gained, had he been faithful (1Co.3:11-15). There will be tears of regret, but it will be too late to repent and claim the rewards that have been forfeited through self-indulgence. It is worth noticing that in Jesus' message to the seven churches (Rev.2-3), the call to repent is repeated seven times!

We are under grace and not law, 12:18-24

The covenant of the law is here contrasted with the new covenant. One declared that access to God was impossible. The other extends a welcome mat for each and every believer to draw near to God. One so emphasized death, that even Moses was terrified. The other holds out the promise of welcome in our eternal union with Christ Jesus. One engendered only fear of God, the other of love, fellowship, and obedience. The first covenant showed that access to God was barred. The new covenant declares that the way into the Holy of Holies is open to us at all times (Joh.4:23-24; Heb.4:14-16; 10:19-22).

This same contrast is made by Paul in 2Co.3:4-18, another of the many parallels found in Hebrews that relate to his other epistles. The glory of the Old Covenant was intended to fade away, as illustrated by the fading glory on Moses face. But the glory of the New Covenant is permanent and eternal. The single best summary of the contrast of the old and new covenants is found in Romans 8:3. (Read Rom.8:1-4 for context).

“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.”

I like to think of the welcome described in v.22-24 as depicting what happens when a believer dies. Out from the gates of the New Jerusalem comes first a welcoming crowd of angels, singing as they come. Then comes *“the general assembly”*, the saints of the Old Testament, mentioned in Heb.11, the heroes of the faith, who welcome us. Then we are met by *“the church of the firstborn”*, which can only refer to church age believers. Then, we meet the Father, the judge who declares all those justified by faith as *“men made perfect”*. From God as judge we have nothing to fear, because of the work of Christ. Then, finally, we are led by the Father through the gates of the city, where none other than *“Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant”* meets us, to welcome us to our eternal home which He has prepared for us (Joh.14:2-3). What a glorious picture!

We are receiving an eternal kingdom, 12:25-29

The warning *“see that you do not refuse Him who speaks”* (v.25) refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, *“the author and finisher of faith”* (12:2), who is speaking to us through His word. For believers who reject His word, there is no escape from discipline in time (Heb.12:3-11), and loss of reward in eternity (1Co.3:10-17).

He whose voice shook the earth at Sinai will once again speak, so that *“the things which cannot be shaken may remain”*. This will include all our works done in faith and obedience to the leading of the Spirit of God.

Knowing that we are bound for an unshakeable kingdom, we ought to be motivated to so utilize the grace of God that we might serve Him now in reverence and godly fear. If we live our lives now, in the light of

eternity, what a difference it will make on that day, when we stand in His presence.

The fact that *“Our God is a consuming fire”* (v.29) should hold no fear for those who know that this fire can only consume the things of this world and of this life, things that are temporal. That fire can only refine and purify all that is done by faith (1Co.3:12-14; 1Pe.1:3-9). Therefore, let us live each day for our King, and for the glory of His kingdom. It will all be worth it in the end.

The Labor of Love, Ch.13

This chapter closes the book by exhorting the readers, and us, to live by the power of the love of God. Paul tells us in 2Cor.5:14-15 that the love of Christ ought to be the driving and guiding force in our lives. These exhortations explain what the author means in 12:28, *“by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear”*.

Love in personal relations, 13:1-6

The word for *“brotherly love”* (v.1) is *philadelphia* which speaks of the love of the Spirit shared among believers (1Joh.3:1, 11, 14, 18; 4:7, 12). However, in v.2 the phrase *“entertain strangers”* is *philozenias*, which could include those we do not know.

By showing love to unknown strangers, some have entertained angels. Abraham (Gen.18:1-8) and the mother of Samson (Jud.13:1-24) are examples.

Love should also compel us to care for those persecuted for their faith (v.3), and should also guide the marriage relation. God designed sex for both procreation, and for pleasure, but only within the marriage bed. All forms of sexual perversion will be judged.

Love should also guide us in relation to material things (v.5). To be assured of the ever-present fellowship of our Lord ought to deliver us from the lust for, or reliance on, possessions. Spiritual contentment gets our eyes off things and onto the Lord (Luk.12:15; Phi.4:11; 1Ti.6:6-10). These exhortations are especially relevant in times of persecution, when doubts and fears can diminish our love through the deception of self-

preservation. We have nothing to fear knowing that *“The Lord is (our) helper”* (Psa.118:6, see also Psa.34:7).

Love in the local church, 13:7-17

This section begins and ends with the exhortation to remember and obey those in positions of spiritual leadership. They are to be remembered in their teaching, and by their conduct, both of which should point to the Lord Jesus Christ, who never changes.

Strange doctrines are always a danger to believers (v.9, Eph.4:14; Col.2:8-10; 1Ti.4:1-3). In this context the danger was a turning away from our “altar”, the cross and finished work of Christ, back to old covenant worship (v.10-11).

Under the old covenant, after the sacrificial blood was offered, the bodies of the animals killed were burned *“outside the camp”* (v.11). The author draws the parallel that Jesus also suffered outside the gates of Jerusalem. This provides for an analogy, whereby believers need to be willing to suffer scorn and rejection, bearing the reproach of Christ (v.12-13).

This world is not our home (v.14), for like Abraham, we are looking for *“the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Heb.11:10). This is the New Jerusalem (Rev.21:1-4).

The sacrifices of the believer under the new covenant are praise to God, thanksgiving, the sharing of our substance, and obedience to our under-shepherds (v.15-17).

Love expressed in prayer support, 13:18-19

Paul often requested the prayers of those to whom he ministered (Eph.6:18-20; 1Th.5:25; 2Th.3:1). He knew that prayer is how we engage and participate in the outworking of the plan of God. Our prayers are so valued by God that He treats them as an incense offering (Rev.5:8; 8:3). By their prayers Paul (the clear author of the book according to 2Pe.3:15-16), would be released from prison and able to return to them (v.19).

Love’s farewell, 13:20-24

In the benediction of v.20-21 Jesus is called "*that great Shepherd of the sheep*". In Joh.10:11 Jesus calls Himself "*the good shepherd*", and in 1Pe.5:4 He is called "*the Chief Shepherd*".

1. The good shepherd is Jesus laying down His life for the sheep, and this matches the message of Psalm 22.
2. The great shepherd is Jesus supplying the needs of the sheep, and this matches the message of Psalm 23.
3. The chief shepherd is Jesus returning to claim His sheep, and this matches the message of Psalm 24.

The great shepherd works for the edification and fruitfulness of the body of Christ (v.21-22, Joh.15:1-17). The phrase "*make you complete*" is from *katartizo*, and means to supply or equip us with all spiritual resources (Eph.4:12), that we may become mature (Heb.6:1) and fruitful in doing His will.

He hopes to come with Timothy to see them, when he is released. His closing words, "grace be with you all", again echo the authorship of the apostle Paul (2Th.3:16-18).