

Notes on Hebrews

2016 Edition

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Introduction

DATE

The writer said that he and those to whom he wrote had come to faith in Jesus Christ through the preaching of others who had heard Jesus (2:3-4). Apparently those preachers had since died (13:7). The original readers had been Christians over an extended period of time (5:12). So probably the earliest possible date of composition was about A.D. 60.

Some scholars believe that the book must have been written before A.D. 70, since the writer spoke of the mentioned sacrifices as being offered at the time of writing (7:27-28; 8:3-5; 9:7-8, 25; 10:1-3, 8; 13:10-11). However, the writer showed no interest in the *temple*, but described the sacrifices like those the Israelites offered when the *tabernacle* stood. He evidently used the present tense to give these references a timeless quality, rather than indicating that temple worship was still in practice. Nevertheless a date of composition before A.D. 70 seems probable.¹

"The best argument for the supersession of the old covenant would have been the destruction of the Temple."²

The reference to Timothy's release from imprisonment (13:23) appears to date the book later in the life of that outstanding man. Almost all scholars believe that the Timothy referred to in Hebrews is the same one named elsewhere in the New Testament. No other New Testament writer mentioned Timothy's imprisonment. The imprisonment of Christians seems to have been a well-known fact of life (10:34; 13:3). This was true after Nero launched an empire-wide persecution in A.D. 64. All of these factors, when taken together, seem to point to a writing date near A.D. 68-69.

WRITER

As to authorship, most students of this subject are not dogmatic or even certain, for good reason.³ As early as Origen, the Alexandrian church father who died about A.D. 255, no

¹William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1—8*, pp. lxii-lxvi; Andrew H. Trotter Jr., *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 27-38; Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 30-31.

²H. W. Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 3.

³See Hughes, pp. 19-30; Trotter, pp. 39-57; or Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 600-4; for good discussions.

one knew who the writer was for sure. After careful study of the authorship of Hebrews, Origen wrote, "But who it was that really wrote the epistle, God only knows."⁴

"The language of the Epistle is both in vocabulary and style purer and more vigorous than that of any other book of the New Testament.

". . . The vocabulary is singularly copious. It includes a large number of words which are not found elsewhere in the apostolic writings, very many of which occur in this book only among the Greek Scriptures . . ."⁵

"All that can be said with certainty is that Hebrews was composed by a creative theologian who was well trained in the exposition of the Greek Scriptures. . . . He was surely a hellenistic Jewish-Christian."⁶

Commentators have made cases for the writer being Paul,⁷ Apollos,⁸ Barnabas, Luke,⁹ Peter, Jude, Stephen, Silvanus (Silas), Epaphras (Epaphroditus), Philip the Evangelist, Priscilla, Mary the mother of Jesus, Clement of Rome, Aristion, and others. However, the masculine participle *diegoumenon* ("to tell"), which refers to the writer in 11:32, would seem to rule out a female writer. Ancient testimony mentioned only four possibilities: Paul, Luke, Barnabas, and Clement. None of these suggestions has found enthusiastic general reception for various reasons. Probably we should be content to share Origen's agnosticism on this question—and look forward to getting the answer in heaven.¹⁰

"The absence both of solid testimony, internal or external, and of any firm traditions means that, as things are, the riddle of the authorship of Hebrews is incapable of solution."¹¹

The early Christians originally accepted all the New Testament books as inspired by God because they each contained teaching from an official apostle. For this reason, the writer was probably either an apostle or a close associate of at least one of the apostles (cf. 13:23).

RECIPIENTS

The original recipients of the epistle are also unknown. The title "The Epistle to the Hebrews" implies that they were Jewish Christians. This title is ancient and is probably a safe guide to the identity of the first readers. References in the epistle also suggest that the original readers were mainly Jewish. The writer assumed, as we can infer from his material, that they were very familiar with the institutions of Judaism. The warnings

⁴Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, p. 247.

⁵Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. xliv. See Trotter, pp. 117-43.

⁶Lane, p. xlix.

⁷W. J. Conybeare, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, pp. 788-790; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5:503.

⁸A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 5:329.

⁹David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*.

¹⁰See Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 3-21.

¹¹Hughes, p. 19.

against turning away from Jesus Christ back to the Old Covenant also imply this identity. Other indications are: the emphasis on the superior priesthood of Jesus, and the many appeals to the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. However, the brand of Judaism in view seems to have been Hellenistic rather than Palestinian (Hebraic) While conceding that it is now impossible to identify the original recipients exactly, some respected scholars favor the theory that they were probably former Jewish priests, probably of the Essene variety.¹²

The reference to the generosity of the readers and their helping other believers (6:10) suggests that the original audience did not live in Palestine. The Palestinian churches had a reputation for needing material assistance, rather than for giving it to other Christians (cf. Rom. 15:25-31; 1 Cor. 16:3). Probably, therefore, they were Jews of the Diaspora. This conclusion has support in the writer's consistent use of the Septuagint Old Testament version. Hellenistic Jews used this translation widely, but Palestinian Jews did not use it as much. Arguments for the recipients being Palestinian Jews include: their intimate knowledge of temple rituals, and their opportunity to escape suffering by conveniently returning to the observance of Jewish practices and feasts.¹³ I think the arguments for their living outside Palestine are stronger.

In most of the New Testament churches, there was a mixture of Jewish and Gentile believers. The appeal of this epistle would certainly have been as great to Gentiles, tempted to return to paganism, as it would have been to Jews facing temptation to return to Judaism. However, the writer's primary concern appears to have been, that, his Jewish readers were failing to appreciate that Christianity is the divinely revealed successor to Judaism. He did not want them to abandon Christianity and return to Judaism.

Probably the letter originally went to a house-church, outside of Palestine, that had a strong Hellenistic Jewish population. This church may have been in or near Galatia, in view of conditions that existed there that the Epistle to the Galatians reflects. However, they may very well have lived in another area. Many scholars believe that the letter went first to a church in or near Rome.¹⁴ Evidently, knowledge of where the original recipients lived disappeared about the same time as knowledge of who the writer was.¹⁵

PROVENANCE

In view of 13:24b, it has seemed to some scholars that the writer was in Italy when he sent this epistle, perhaps in Rome. However, the expression "from Italy" in that verse probably refers to those living outside Italy, such as Priscilla and Aquila, who were Jews forced to leave Rome by Emperor Claudius' edict in A.D. 49 (Acts 18:2).¹⁶ This expression suggests that the writer was not in Italy when he wrote.

¹²See *ibid.*, pp. 10-15.

¹³See J. Dwight Pentecost, *A Faith That Endures*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁴See Lane, pp. lviii-lx; Ellingworth, p. 29; and Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, pp. 25-27.

¹⁵James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. xvii.

¹⁶See Merrill C. Tenney, "A New Approach to the Book of Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:491 (July-September 1966):234-35.

"A great many other places, virtually covering the Mediterranean world from Spain to Galatia, have been proposed both for the epistle's origin and for its destination."¹⁷

GENRE

Many students of the book have observed that Hebrews is more of a sermon in written form, than an epistle in the traditional New Testament sense.¹⁸ The writer even described it as a "word of exhortation" (13:22). Hebrews is like a sermon reduced to writing (cf. James; Jude). Indications of this fact are the writer's references to speaking and hearing (cf. 2:5; 5:11; 8:1; 9:5; 11:32). His epistle is more typical of speech than of writing.

". . . Hebrews is a sermon rooted in actual life. It is addressed to a local gathering of men and women who discovered that they could be penetrated by adverse circumstances over which they exercised no control. It throbs with an awareness of the privilege and the cost of discipleship. It is a sensitive pastoral response to the sagging faith of older and tired individuals who were in danger of relinquishing their Christian commitment. It seeks to strengthen them in the face of a new crisis so that they may stand firm in their faith. It warns them of the judgment of God they would incur if they were to waver in their commitment. Exhortations to covenant fidelity and perseverance are grounded in a fresh understanding of the significance of Jesus and his sacrifice."¹⁹

"It [Hebrews] is called an epistle and so it is, but of a peculiar kind. In fact, . . . it begins like a treatise, proceeds like a sermon, and concludes like a letter."²⁰

There is an alternation in the genre of this epistle, from exposition to exhortation to exposition to exhortation, and so forth. Noting these major changes makes interpreting the book much easier. The blocks of material by genre are as follows. I shall note the changes in the notes that follow as well.

Exposition	Exhortation
ch. 1	2:1-4
2:5-18	3:1—4:14
4:15—5:10	5:11—6:12
6:13—10:18	10:19-39
ch. 11	chs. 12—13

¹⁷Hughes, p. 18.

¹⁸See Lane, pp. lxxix-lxxxiv, for an extended discussion of the genre, or Trotter, especially pp. 59-80.

¹⁹Lane, p. xlvi. See also Ellingworth, pp. 78-80.

²⁰Robertson, 5:328.

Within the two parts of chapter 12, there is further alternation between exhortation and exposition, though the main genre there is exhortation: exhortation (12:1-2), exposition (12:3-11), exhortation (12:12-13); and exhortation (12:14-17), exposition (12:18-24), exhortation (12:25-29).

PURPOSE

The writer urged the original readers to persevere in their faith, rather than turning from Christianity and returning to Judaism. A note of urgency and pastoral concern permeates the whole letter. This tone comes through especially strongly in the five warning passages and in the encouragements that follow these warnings.

". . . the purpose of the writer to the Hebrews is not to give us an interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. . . . Using material not from the prophets but primarily from the Psalms, with other materials added to elaborate the argument, the writer's goal was to establish the superiority of the gospel in contrast to all that went before, particularly the levitical system. The primary evidence of the supremacy of Christianity is presented in its *finality*. Coming to Christ means final access to God without any barrier."²¹

". . . in Hebrews the author is battling to stop a stampede from Christ back to Judaism, a revolt (apostasy) in truth from the living God. . . . It is the first great apologetic for Christianity and has never been surpassed."²²

THEME

"The comprehensive theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews is that of the absolute supremacy of Christ—a supremacy which allows no challenge, whether from human or angelic beings."²³

"To the writer to the Hebrews Jesus was the one person on earth who gave access to reality [the great goal of the Greeks] and access to God [the great goal of the Jews]."²⁴

STYLE

Various stylistic devices enable the student of this book to identify the sections of the writer's thought. These devices include *inclusio*, linking words, the repetition of key terms, alternation between exposition and admonition, and others, which I shall point out where appropriate. These rhetorical devices were common in the writer's culture, and his use of them indicated to the original readers where his thoughts were moving.

²¹Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 56.

²²Robertson, 5:331.

²³Hughes, p. 2.

²⁴William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. xvii.

"... *Hebrews* is written in the best Greek in the New Testament."²⁵

The Book of Hebrews is very similar to a sermon that has been adapted to an epistolary (letter) format. The Books of James and Jude are similar in their styles.

OUTLINE²⁶

- I. The culminating revelation of God chs. 1—2
 - A. The agent of God's final revelation 1:1-4
 - B. The superiority of the Son 1:5-14
 - C. The danger of negligence (the first warning) 2:1-4
 - D. The humiliation and glory of God's Son 2:5-9
 - E. The Son's solidarity with humanity 2:10-18
- II. The high priestly character of the Son 3:1—5:10
 - A. The faithfulness of the Son 3:1-6
 - B. The danger of disbelief (the second warning) 3:7-19
 - C. The possibility of rest for God's people 4:1-14
 - D. The compassion of the Son 4:15—5:10
- III. The high priestly office of the Son 5:11—10:39
 - A. The danger of immaturity (the third warning) 5:11—6:12
 1. The readers' condition 5:11-14
 2. The needed remedy 6:1-3
 3. The dreadful alternative 6:4-8
 4. The encouraging prospect 6:9-12
 - B. The basis for confidence and steadfastness 6:13-20
 - C. The Son's high priestly ministry 7:1—10:18
 1. The person of our high priest ch. 7
 2. The work of our high priest chs. 8—9
 3. The accomplishment of our high priest 10:1-18
 - D. The danger of willful sinning (the fourth warning) 10:19-39
 1. The threefold admonition 10:19-25
 2. The warning of judgment 10:26-31
 3. The encouragement to persevere 10:32-39
- IV. The proper response 11:1—12:13
 - A. Perseverance in faith ch. 11

²⁵Ibid., p. xxii.

²⁶For an evaluation of three views of the structure of Hebrews, the traditional (doctrinal followed by practical sections), that of Albert Vanhoye (chiastic structure), and "patchwork," see David Alan Black, "The Problem of the Literary Structure of Hebrews: An Evaluation and a Proposal," *Grace Theological Journal* 7:2 (Fall 1986):163-77. See also Lane, pp. lxxxv-cxv; Trotter, pp. 81-94; and Ellingworth, pp. 50-62.

1. Faith in the antediluvian era 11:1-7
 2. Faith in the patriarchal era 11:8-22
 3. Faith in the Mosaic era 11:23-31
 4. Faith in subsequent eras 11:32-40
- B. Demonstrating necessary endurance 12:1-13
1. The example of Jesus 12:1-3
 2. The proper view of trials 12:4-11
 3. The need for greater strength 12:12-13
- V. Life in a hostile world 12:14—13:25
- A. The danger of unresponsiveness (the fifth warning) 12:14-29
1. The goal of peace 12:14-17
 2. The superiority of the New Covenant 12:18-24
 3. The consequences of apostasy 12:25-29
- B. Life within the church ch. 13
1. Pastoral reminders 13:1-21
 2. Personal explanations 13:22-25

MESSAGE

I would summarize the message of this epistle in the following words: We will only realize our full eternal reward as believers, if we appreciate the greatness of Jesus Christ, and continue to trust God, rather than turning away from Him in this life.

The ultimate goal that the writer had in view was our full eternal reward as believers. I do not believe that it was the conversion of the unsaved members of his audience. He addressed his readers consistently as believers. He wrote to encourage Christians to persevere faithfully, so that they will receive all that God wants to give them at the judgment seat of Christ. Our *rewards* are at issue in this letter, not our salvation. The writer did not want us to suffer loss, but to enter into our full inheritance, our full rest, the fullness of our salvation.

To accomplish this, he wrote that we must know one thing and do two things, one positive and one negative.

We must know, and appreciate, the greatness of Jesus Christ. In this epistle, the writer presented Him as the greatest revelation that God has given humankind. God's revelation in His Son is superior to all other revelations that He has given, in three respects.

First, it supersedes all other revelations: God's revelation through angels (the Mosaic Law), His revelation through humans (the prophets), and His revelation through rituals (the Old Covenant). When Jesus Christ came to reveal God, He brought revelation that superseded what had preceded Him. The revelation that He brought was similar to that of a spotlight, compared to previous candle-like revelations.

Second, God's revelation in His Son is sufficient to meet every basic human need. God spoke through His Son, so the need for a prophet (a revealer of God) no longer exists. He established a New Covenant, so the need for a priest (a mediator for man) no longer exists. And He exalted His Son to His right hand, so the need for a king (a righteous ruler) no longer exists.

Third, God's revelation in His Son ensures final victory in every basic sphere of life. The individual (the human order) attains perfection through the Son. Society (the social order) will experience perfection through the Son. And the universe (the cosmic order) will reach perfection through the Son.

This is what we need to know, objectively, to do, subjectively, what is necessary to gain our full reward as believers. All Christians will go to heaven and receive many blessings (Eph. 1; 1 Pet. 1). But faithful Christians will receive additional rewards (the crowns, reigning with Christ, etc.; cf. 2 Tim. 2:12).

What we must do is continue to trust God. Hebrews places great emphasis on the importance of *living by faith*. It teaches us three things about faith (ch. 11):

First, Hebrews defines faith. "Faith" is volitional surrender and obedience to God, regardless of appearances. It is not just intellectual conviction. It is the action of the will that expresses intellectual conviction. This epistle regards unbelief as disobedience, as does all of Scripture. People in the past who lived by faith made decisions and acted because they believed God, in spite of appearances (ch. 11).

Second, Hebrews also illustrates faith. It describes faith as doing, as suffering, and as waiting. These are the primary activities of faith that the writer of Hebrews emphasized. They are progressively more difficult. It is harder to suffer persecution for our faith than it is to obey God when obedience does not involve suffering. It is most difficult to keep on trusting God when suffering does not end. Waiting for God to fulfill His promises is hardest of all when our hopes do not materialize (e.g., Christ's return).

Third, in addition, Hebrews vindicates faith. It assures us of the ultimate triumph of faith. People in the past, who acted in faith, achieved. People who suffered for their faith triumphed. People who waited in faith received their reward. There are examples of all three types of people in Hebrews.

On the positive side, then, we need to continue to trust God in order to realize our full reward as believers. What we must *not* do is turn away from God. This is the negative responsibility that the letter also stresses. If we apostatize, we will lose our full reward. Hebrews teaches us three things about apostasy, as it does about faith.

First, this epistle defines apostasy descriptively. Apostasy is the opposite of faith. It consists of disobedience because of appearances (e.g., the 10 Israelite spies; cf. Jude). Apostasy for a Christian is turning away from faith, having previously embraced faith. An apostate, however, can be a believer or an unbeliever.

Second, Hebrews also illustrates apostasy in the same three ways as it illustrates faith. Apostasy acts. It involves a deliberate turning away. It also suffers, not now, but in the future, because of what the apostate loses. It also waits, even though it lives for the present, rather than for the future.

Third, Hebrews condemns apostasy. It assures us of the ultimate tragedy of apostasy. Apostates may achieve what they want in the present, for example, success, but they will lose what is far more valuable in the future. They may avoid suffering now, but later they will be sorry. They may not want to wait for their reward now, but they will wait forever for it later and not get it.

This is the central message of the epistle: We will only realize our full eternal reward as believers if we appreciate the greatness of Jesus Christ and continue to trust God, rather than turning away from Him.

The writer urged his readers to persevere in faith by using two appeals: one negative, and one positive.

The first appeal is negative: the warning passages. There are five warning passages in Hebrews. Each one warns of the danger of apostasy from a different angle.

The first passage (2:1-4) warns of the danger of *drifting away* from the truth (2:1). It pictures a ship dragging its anchor. The tides of our age can draw us away from our moorings. We need to keep standing firm in the faith (cf. Col. 1:23).

The second passage (3:7-19) warns of the danger of *disbelief* (3:12). Disbelief results in heart-hardening (3:13). We need to keep on believing, rather than ceasing to believe (cf. Luke 17:3).

The third passage (5:11—6:12) warns of the danger of *immaturity* (5:12). When we do not put truth into practice, we do not just remain in the same spiritual state. We regress. Therefore we need to keep on growing (cf. 2 Pet. 3:18).

The fourth passage (10:19-39) warns of the danger of *willful sinning* (10:26-27). If we abandon confidence in the efficacy of Jesus Christ's sacrifice, there is no other sacrifice that can protect us from God's judgment on us as believers. We need to keep submitting to God (cf. Rom. 6:16).

The fifth passage (12:14-29) warns of the danger of *unresponsiveness* (12:25). The message of this letter demands positive response. If we do not respond positively, we will lose part of our reward (12:17). We need to keep on obeying God (cf. Titus 3:8).

The second appeal is positive: the encouragement passages. Accompanying each of the warning passages is at least one word of encouragement. The writer balanced his negative warnings with positive words of encouragement.

The first passage (2:1-4) encourages the readers with a reminder of God confirming His promises with miracles in the apostolic age (2:3b-4).

The second passage (3:7-19) encourages by reminding us of Jesus' example of faithfulness (3:1-6) and our resources as believers (4:12-16).

The third passage (5:11—6:12) encourages with a reminder of the readers' past faithfulness (6:9-12) and God's firm promises (6:13-20).

The fourth passage (10:19-39) also encourages with a reminder of the readers' past perseverance (10:32-39).

The fifth passage (12:14-29) encourages by reminding us of Jesus' example of perseverance (12:1-2) and the reason for divine discipline (12:3-11).

By way of application, I would like to make three observations based on three major revelations in the epistle:

First, appreciation for Jesus Christ is foundational to faithful perseverance. The reason many Christians turn away from the Lord is that they do not appreciate His greatness. Many church congregations get very little preaching and teaching on who Jesus Christ is, and the many-sided splendor of His person. Isaac Watts once wrote a 12-stanza hymn ("Join All the Glorious Names") in which he included 17 different names of Jesus Christ. Just singing this one hymn helps one appreciate the greatness of the Savior. Many people who are now members of cults were once in Christian churches. But they left them because the cult promised a deeper understanding of the truth, which they felt they were not getting in their church, because all they ever heard was the simple gospel message.

Second, Christian leaders need to emphasize the Christian's hope more in their ministries. We live in a present-oriented culture that values immediate self-gratification. Many Christians are apostatizing because they do not appreciate the reward that they will receive, if they remain faithful to the Lord. This life is preparation for the next. Prophecy conferences stress our hope. Baby boomers, especially, are searching for hope.

Third, we need to realize that God will judge Christians who apostatize. They will not lose their salvation, but they will lose much that they will wish they had never given up, if they stop walking by faith (cf. Rom. 8:18). It is hard to finish well, but it is possible (cf. Jude 24; Heb. 12:1-3). Our motivation should include a combination of the fear of God and the love of God, like the two wings on an airplane.²⁷

²⁷Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:2:107-21.

Exposition

I. THE CULMINATING REVELATION OF GOD CHS. 1—2

The writer of Hebrews customarily began with a brief statement that presented the theme of each major section of his discourse. The first such statement appears in 1:1-4, and introduces the theme of the culminating revelation of God, which continues through 2:18.

"The final disclosure of God's mind and purpose has been made in his Son, who is far superior to the angels; beware then of taking it casually and carelessly (1¹—2⁴)."²⁸

A. THE AGENT OF GOD'S FINAL REVELATION 1:1-4

The writer began his epistle with an affirmation of *Jesus Christ's greatness* to introduce his readers to his subject. This section is one sentence in the Greek text. It contrasts God's old revelation with the new, specifically by presenting God's Son as *superior* to all other previous modes of revelation.

"The aim of the writer is to prove that the old Covenant through which God had dealt with the Hebrews is superseded by the New; and this aim he accomplishes in the first place by exhibiting the superiority of the mediator of the new Covenant to all previous mediators."²⁹

"It would be misleading to think of vv. 1-4 as stating a thesis to be proved, or as giving a précis of the following argument. The author proceeds rather by an interweaving of themes, as in musical composition."³⁰

"The literary structure of the exordium [vv. 1-4] exhibits a concentric symmetry (A [vv. 1-2a] B [v. 2b] C [v. 2c] C' [v. 3a-b] B' [v. 3c] A' [v. 4]): the conceptual correspondence of vv 1 and 4 serves to frame the several statements concerning the Son in vv 2 and 3 . . ."

"The core of the exordium (B C C' B') describes Jesus in an arresting way as the royal Son, divine Wisdom, and the royal Priest."³¹

"This is the most sonorous piece of Greek in the whole New Testament. It is a passage that any classical Greek orator would have been proud to write. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews has brought to it every artifice of word and rhythm that the beautiful and flexible Greek language could provide. . . . The man who wrote his letter must have been trained in Greek oratory."³²

²⁸Moffatt, p. 1.

²⁹Marcus Dods, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 4:247.

³⁰Ellingworth, p. 90.

³¹Lane, pp. 6, 7. Cf. pp. cxxxix-cxl.

³²Barclay, p. 1.

1:1-2a "It is significant that the subject of the first verb is 'God,' for God is constantly before the author; he uses the word sixty-eight times, an average of about once every seventy-three words all through his epistle. Few NT books speak of God so often."³³

God gave many revelations of Himself to Old Testament believers, "fathers" being a shorthand way of referring to them (cf. v. 2). Ellingworth suggested that the writer may have referred to them as "the" fathers, rather than as "our" fathers, because some of his readers were Gentiles.³⁴ Another possibility is that "the" gives more honor than "our." God gave these revelations in many periods of history. He did this by various means and in various ways ("in many portions and in many ways"). Another rendering of this phrase is "different modes . . . and . . . different occasions."³⁵ For example, His "means" included visions, dreams, signs, parables, events, and face-to-face visitations (cf. Num. 12:6-8). His "ways" included supernatural interventions into history, as well as natural phenomena such as storms, plagues, and other historical events. They also included people, namely, "the prophets," through whom He spoke (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). The writer probably used the Greek words *polymeros* ("portions") and *polytropos* ("ways") partially for their alliterative value. Moffatt captured this alliteration in English by translating the first part of verse 1: "Many were the forms and fashions in which God spoke . . ."³⁶

"The earlier revelations were the preparation for the later but were distinguished from it in four particulars—in the time, in the recipients, in the agents, in the manner."³⁷

God's most recent revelation had come through "His [own] Son."³⁸ The writer was not denying divine revelation to the apostles. He was stressing the culminating character of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, compared with what He had given the Old Testament prophets. His statement establishes the fact of progressive revelation, and strongly suggests the cessation of revelation in the apostolic age.³⁹ God's final revelation through His Son came *first* as Jesus conducted His earthly ministry, but then it continued after Jesus ascended to heaven, from where He gave

³³Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 12.

³⁴Ellingworth, p. 92.

³⁵Guthrie, p. 62.

³⁶Moffatt, p. 2.

³⁷Dods, 4:247.

³⁸See Nathan D. Holsteen, "The Trinity in the Book of Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):334-46; and Gareth Lee Cockerill, "The Truthfulness and Perennial Relevance of God's Word in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:686 (April-June 2015):190-202.

³⁹See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4:8:7; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 3.

further revelation through the apostles (cf. Acts 1:1-2). Man has not taken the initiative to discover God, but God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself to man.

The translators have supplied the word "His" (v. 2a). Its absence in the Greek text (along with the absence of the definite article "the") stresses the character of "Son" as a vehicle of revelation.⁴⁰ God's own Son is a superior revelation compared to "the prophets" (v. 1). There are seven references to Jesus Christ as "the Son" in Hebrews (1:2, 5, 8; 3:6; 4:14; 5:8; 6:6; 7:28; 10:29), plus others in some of the Old Testament passages the writer quoted.⁴¹

1:2b-3 Seven facts in these verses stress the Son's unique greatness and the culminating character of His revelation. For the writer's original Jewish readers, the number *seven* connoted a complete work of God, as in the Creation.

First, He is the "heir of all things." *All things* will fall under His authority. While Jesus Christ is presently in authority over "all things," in the future God the Father will subject "all things" to Him in a more direct sense, than the way in which they are now subject to Him (cf. Phil. 2:9-11). The writer introduced the concept of *inheritance* here, and proceeded to develop it in this epistle (cf. Ps. 2:8; Heb. 2:5-9). The believer's inheritance is a major theme in Hebrews.

"Christ is the heir of *all* things precisely because God has only *one* Son and *one* Heir. Christians, it is true, are also called sons and heirs of God, but they are so not in their own right but solely by virtue of their incorporation into the only-begotten Son with whom alone God is well pleased (Mt. 3:17; 17:5; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-7; 1 Pet. 1:3f.)."⁴²

Second, the Son "made the world" (Gr. *aiones*, lit. "ages," i.e., the whole created universe of time, matter, and space). The Son was God's agent in creation (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). He created both matter and history; both ideas are in view here.⁴³ However, the emphasis is on the various dispensations through which the world has passed, is passing, and will pass.⁴⁴ Jesus Christ is not a created being, as Jehovah's Witnesses and some others claim. He is the Creator of all.

⁴⁰See C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek*, p. 114.

⁴¹See Mikael C. Parsons, "Son and High Priest: A Study in the Christology of Hebrews," *Evangelical Quarterly* 60:3 (July 1988):192-215.

⁴²Hughes, p. 39.

⁴³Bruce, p. 4.

⁴⁴W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary*, p. 22.

"Thus the writer of Hebrews, in a single term (*aionas*), unites the idea of the world existing in space with the idea of the world moving through time—no mean accomplishment."⁴⁵

Third, the Son is "the radiance of His [God's] glory." The Greek word *apaugasma*, translated "radiance," refers to what shines out from the source of light. Jesus Christ revealed the glory of God in a veiled way during His incarnation. Peter, James, and John saw that radiance revealed more directly on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-2).

Fourth, the Son is "the exact representation of His [God's] nature." The Greek word *charakter*, translated "representation," occurs only here in the New Testament. Greek writers used it to describe the emperor's picture on Roman coins, and the clear-cut impression made by a seal (a facsimile). It did not express a general likeness, but an exact duplication of the original. Jesus Christ let humankind know exactly what the nature of God—whom no one has seen—is like, during His earthly ministry (cf. John 14:9).

"The apostle, calling the Son of God 'the stamp of the Father's hypostasis' ['nature,' Heb. 1:3], doubtless assigns some subsistence to the Father wherein he differs from the Son."⁴⁶

Fifth, the Son "upholds all things by the word of His power" (i.e., His mighty, enabling word). The idea is not so much that Jesus upholds the universe as a dead weight, similar to Atlas shouldering the world. Rather, He carries all things *forward* (Gr. *pheron*) on their appointed course (Col. 1:17).⁴⁷ Jesus Christ's "word" has tremendous power and authority. It is the greatest force in the universe (cf. Gen. 1:3; et al.).

Sixth, the Son "made purification of sins" as no one else could. He did so by His own sacrifice on the Cross, and by His work as the ultimate priest. The Greek word *katharismos*, translated "purification," means both removal and cleansing (cf. Mark 1:44; 2 Pet. 1:9). "Sin" (*hamartia*) is a very common word in Hebrews, occurring 25 times. The only other New Testament book in which it appears more frequently is Romans, where Paul used it 48 times.

"Hebrews views sins and their remedy in cultic [formal Israelite worship] terms. The purification of sins by Christ's sacrifice is related, on the one hand, to the establishment of a new order of relationships between God and mankind,

⁴⁵Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 32.

⁴⁶Calvin, 1:13:2.

⁴⁷Hughes, p. 45.

and on the other hand to obedience (10:1-18, especially vv. 8-10) and moral effort (12:1-4). Apart from passing references to adultery and the love of money (13:4f.), Hebrews says little about individual sins, and contains no list of vices comparable to Rom. 1:29-31; Gal. 5:19-21; or 1 Pet. 4:3. The fundamental sin for Hebrews is that of unfaithfulness to God, which may superficially appear as neglect or lassitude (*amelesantes*, 2:3; or *nothroi*, 5:11), but which in essence is rebellion against God's will, and more specifically apostasy (2:1-4; 3:7-19; 6:4-6; 10:26-31)."⁴⁸

Seventh, the Son "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" when He returned to heaven after His ascension. He took the choice place of honor and authority in relation to God the Father (cf. Eph. 4:10; Phil. 2:9; Luke 22:69). Here the writer introduced his key text, Psalm 110, which he proceeded to expound in the chapters to follow.

The writer referred to the place where Jesus now sits—*ruling*—at the Father's "right hand" (side) in heaven. This is not the same as the Davidic throne, which will be on earth in the future (Isa. 9:6-7; Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14; et al.). Jesus will begin His rule over Israel, on earth as the Davidic Messiah, after He returns to the earth at His second advent (Rev. 20:1-6). Presently He rules over the church and the angelic host in heaven (Eph. 4:15; Col. 1:18; 2:10).⁴⁹

"Nor should it be imagined that the author of our epistle intended such expressions as 'sat down,' 'on the right hand,' and 'on high' in a crassly literalistic sense. . . . Herveus, for example, explains that 'he sat down' denotes that he is resting and reigning and judging supremely, that 'on the right hand' denotes a position of equality and honor, and that 'on high' denotes above every creature."⁵⁰

"That no literal location is intended was as well understood by Christians in the apostolic age as it is by us: they knew that God has no physical right hand or material throne where the ascended Christ sits beside Him; to them the language denoted the exaltation and supremacy of Christ as it does to us."⁵¹

⁴⁸Ellingworth, p. 102.

⁴⁹See Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):81-82.

⁵⁰Hughes, p. 48.

⁵¹Bruce, p. 7.

Each one of these seven actions points to the full deity of Jesus Christ. The original Jewish audience, faced with the temptation to abandon discipleship of Jesus for return to Judaism, received a strong reminder of His deity at the very outset of this epistle. The writer also presented Him as Creator, Prophet, Priest, and King in these verses. He would say much more about Jesus as the *Priest-King* in the following chapters.

1:4 These seven facts also clearly reveal the Son's superiority to any other of God's messengers, even the "angels." This superiority is clear, too, in the fact that His name is "Son" (singular) rather than "sons" (collectively). The Old Testament writers called the angels "sons of God" (e.g., Job 2:1; 38:7). Jesus Christ "inherited" the name "Son" before creation (v. 2, cf. 5:8). Within the Trinity, God the Son carried out the will of God the Father in a way that corresponds to the way in which sons in biblical culture carried out the wills of their fathers. In another sense, Jesus became God's Son at His ascension, by taking His seat at the Father's right hand, with a view to returning to the earth and ruling over it (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 2:7).

This is the first of the writer's 13 uses of the word "better" (Gr. *kreitton*), all of which contrast Jesus Christ and His order with what preceded Him in Judaism (6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 [twice]; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24). This word appears only six times elsewhere in the New Testament. The writer used many comparatives (e.g., "more excellent," "lesser," "better," "more," "greater," et al.) to support his argument that the new Christian order is superior to the old Jewish order. This is also a "signpost passage," in which a brief statement (in this case "much better than the angels") identifies a main subject that the writer proceeded to develop later (cf. 2:17; 5:9-10; 10:36-39; 12:11?).⁵² "Angel" (Gr. *angelos*) is another of this writer's favorite words. It appears 13 times in Hebrews.

"Opinions differ as to what is meant here by 'the name.' Some take this to mean that in his whole character and personality Christ was superior to any angel. Others think the reference is simply to the name 'Son,' which is a better name than 'angel' because it denotes superiority in character and personality. Either interpretation is possible."⁵³

The Hebrews writer introduced several concepts in the prologue that he later developed more fully. These include: the distinctive quality of the Son's revelation, the superiority of His sacrifice, His sovereignty, and His greatness compared with the angels.⁵⁴

⁵²See David J. MacLeod, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146:582 (April-June 1989):187.

⁵³Morris, p. 16.

⁵⁴For another exposition of verses 1-4, see David J. MacLeod, "The Finality of Christ: An Exposition of Hebrews 1:1-4," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:646 (April-June 2005):210-30.

"The basic idea of this whole letter is that Jesus Christ alone brings to men the full revelation of God, and that He alone enables men to enter into the very presence of God."⁵⁵

The differences between the beginning of this epistle and the beginnings of other New Testament epistles are striking. There is no introduction of the writer, no mention of the original readers, and no benediction, all of which were common features of letters in the first century. The writer obviously wanted his readers to give their full attention to the greatness of Jesus Christ. Some students of Hebrews have concluded that the writer did not identify himself or his readers deliberately, because he wanted to make Jesus Christ *primary* in the readers' thinking throughout this epistle. I think this is very likely.

"In 1:1-4 the writer gave christological precision to a cluster of ideas derived from hellenistic Judaism. He boldly applied the categories of Wisdom to a historical figure, Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews was a creative theologian who brought together wisdom motifs and priestly motifs in a tightly formulated statement concerning the dignity and achievement of the Son of God. The opening paragraph establishes a firm christological foundation for all that the writer has to say concerning the character and demands of the revelation mediated by the Son. The joining together of wisdom and priestly notes in the carefully orchestrated presentation of the Son provides the readers with the assurance of Jesus' sustained concern for them and his ability to strengthen and vindicate the people of God when they become objects of contempt in a hostile world."⁵⁶

B. THE SUPERIORITY OF GOD'S SON 1:5-14

The writer proceeded to explain the exaltation of Jesus Christ, to help his readers appreciate the fact that He *perfectly* fulfilled Old Testament prophecy concerning the Son of David. He also did this so they would appreciate Christ properly, and not overemphasize the importance of *angels*. "Angels" were very important in Judaism, primarily because multitudes of them assisted God in giving the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai (cf. Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). They also appeared occasionally to make very important announcements (e.g., Gen. 16:9; 31:11; Exod. 3:2; et al.).

"The internal structure of the first major segment of the address (1:5—2:18) exhibits the writer's customary style of alternating between two types of literary genre, exposition and exhortation. The chain of OT passages demonstrating the superiority of the Son to angels (1:5-13) is expository in character and lays the foundation for the solemn appeal in 2:1-4."⁵⁷

⁵⁵Barclay, p. 2.

⁵⁶Lane, p. 19.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 22.

The "hook-word" that connects these two sections of the epistle (1:1-4 and 1:5-14) is "angels." Lane provided the following helpful comparisons.⁵⁸

PARALLELS BETWEEN 1:1-4 AND 1:5-13	
1:1-4	1:5-13
A Appointment as royal heir (2b)	A' Appointment as royal Son and heir (5-9)
B Mediator of the creation (2c)	B' Mediator of the creation (10)
C Eternal nature and pre-existent glory (3a-b)	C' Unchanging, eternal nature (11-12)
D Exaltation to God's right hand (3c)	D' Exaltation to God's right hand (13)

"Christology is the central focus in all the theology of Hebrews, and two titles of Christ are central to its Christology: Son of God and High Priest. Around these two focal points all the major ideas in Hebrews concerning Christ's person and work can be located. Christ as High Priest is actually the more distinctive and important idea in the theology of the book, but Christ as Son of God is foundational."⁵⁹

Bibliology (specifically the writer's uses of the Old Testament), eschatology, and soteriology (specifically progressive sanctification and perseverance) are also major theological emphases in Hebrews.⁶⁰

The writer cited seven Old Testament passages to prove Jesus' superiority over the angels (v. 4). As mentioned previously, the number seven was especially significant to the Jews as representing the completeness of something (e.g., the work of creation, etc.). Probably the writer used *seven* facts in verses 2b-3, and *seven* passages in verses 5-13, to strongly impress *completeness* on his original readers.

"The author has an unusual method of citation; he almost always neglects the human author of his OT quotations (exceptions are 4:7; 9:19-20), though throughout the rest of the NT the human author is often noted. Instead, without actually saying 'God says,' he normally ascribes the passage he quotes to God, except, of course, where God is addressed, as in 2:6. Twice he attributes words in the OT to Christ (2:11-12; 10:5ff.) and twice to the Holy Spirit (3:7; 10:15). No other NT writer shares this way of quoting the OT. . . . The effect is to emphasize the divine authorship of the whole OT."⁶¹

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Buist M. Fanning, "A Theology of Hebrews," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 370.

⁶⁰Trotter, pp. 185-222.

⁶¹Morris, p. 7.

"Unlike Paul, who shows a preference for the introductory formula *kathos gegraptai* ["as it is written"], the writer of Hebrews never introduces a quotation from the OT with a form of the verb *graphein*, 'to write.' His preference is for the verb *legein*, 'to say,' especially in the form of the present participle *legon*, 'saying.' The text of the OT is presented dynamically. The writer is persuaded that God continues to speak today in the biblical passages that are cited. . . ."62

The writer's contrast of Jesus Christ's authority and name, with that of the angels, suggests that his original readers may have regarded the angels too highly. This was true of certain first-century sects within Judaism, one of which was the Essene community that lived at Qumran. The Dead Sea Scrolls have revealed that this group had a highly developed angelology, and that they regarded angels with more veneration than they should have. Nevertheless, all the Jews regarded angels highly because God had given the Mosaic Law and other special information to them through angelic mediation (cf. Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2).⁶³

What the writer said here about angelic mediators applies especially to those who claim to mediate knowledge concerning God and the after-life to humankind. Such self-proclaimed mediators today include leaders of some cults, some New Age proponents, Shirley MacLaine, and other advocates of reincarnation. Finding one's spiritual "guide" and "channeling" to the unseen world—through that *being*—is popular in some circles. This also applies to people who claim to reveal how human beings can find God and secure His acceptance, these "teachers" at the same time denying biblical revelation on these subjects.

1:5 The phrase "to which of the angels" opens and closes this section of the text (cf. v. 13). This literary device (an *inclusio*) marks off a literary unit by using the same word or phrase both at the beginning and ending of a discussion (cf. 2:5-16; 3:1—4:14; 5:1-10; 5:11—6:12; 7:1-10; 12:14—13:20).

David prophetically referred to Jesus Christ as God's Son in Psalm 2:7, the verse the writer quoted first.⁶⁴ The Old Testament writers referred to angels collectively as the "sons of God" (Job. 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Ps. 29:1) to emphasize their greatness, but they did not refer to any one of them as "the Son of God." "Son of God" is a title that referred to the Davidic kings (2 Sam. 7:14), and specifically to Jesus Christ: *God the Son* (Mark 1:11; Luke 1:32). "Today" evidently refers to the occasion of Jesus Christ's entrance into heaven. This happened after His resurrection and at His ascension.

⁶²Lane, p. cxvii. See also his discussion of the writer's use of the Old Testament, pp. cxii-cxxiv.

⁶³See *ibid.*, p. liv.

⁶⁴See Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:95-97.

The eternal Son of God ". . . entered into the full exercise of all the prerogatives implied by His Sonship when, after His suffering had proved the completeness of His obedience, He was raised to the Father's right hand."⁶⁵

"In other words, resurrection, ascension, and glorification should be viewed as forming a unity, each one contributing to the exaltation of the Son to transcendental heights of power and dignity."⁶⁶

Another, but less probable view, I think, is that *this* "day" ("Today") was only the day of Jesus' resurrection.⁶⁷

"The writer is clearly more concerned to demonstrate the significance of the begetting in terms of the Son's status, rather than to tie it down to a specific occasion."⁶⁸

The second quotation, from 2 Samuel 7:14 or 1 Chronicles 17:13, like the first, ties in with the Davidic Covenant and advances the previous point. Not only is Jesus the Son of God, He is also the *promised son of David* (Luke 1:32-33, 68-69; Rom. 1:3). Even though Jesus Christ was *always* God's eternal Son (in eternity past), in human history He *became* the Son prophesied to rule over David's house. He received permission to rule the whole earth after His ascension (cf. Ps. 2:8).

To summarize, the title "Son" refers to Jesus in three separate respects: He was always the *pre-existent* Son (v. 3a-b; cf. 5:8), He became the *incarnate* Son at His birth (v. 2a), and He became the *exalted* Son when He returned to heaven.⁶⁹

Note the chiasmic style of the quotations, which begin and end with references to the Son surrounding references to the Father. This has the effect of stressing the Father but uniting the Son closely with Him.

1:6 We can see the superiority of the Son, also, in the third quotation, from Deuteronomy 32:43 (in the Septuagint), in that "the angels . . . worship Him" as Yahweh. "Again" may go with "brings," implying Jesus Christ's second advent.⁷⁰ On the other hand, it may go with "says," implying the first advent.⁷¹ In the latter case, it would simply separate this quotation

⁶⁵Bruce, p. 13. Cf. v. 3.

⁶⁶Hughes, p. 55.

⁶⁷Pentecost, p. 48.

⁶⁸Guthrie, p. 73.

⁶⁹See Lane, pp. 25-26.

⁷⁰Westcott, p. 22.

⁷¹Bruce, p. 15.

from the former one. The word order in the Greek text favors the first option, but the sense of the context favors the second. Many translators and interpreters support both views."⁷² The point is that the angels, who are inferior to the Son (v. 5), *worship* the Son. The angels worshiped Jesus at His first advent (Luke 2:13-14), and they will undoubtedly worship Him at His second advent.

The title "firstborn" reflects the sovereignty, uniqueness, and superiority of Messiah (Ps. 89:27). It does not always mean "born first *chronologically*." Solomon exercised the sovereignty of the Davidic house as Israel's king, even though he was the *tenth* son of David chronologically (1 Chron. 3:1-5). The title describes rank and honor here. The firstborn received special blessings (inheritance) from his father.

"The context requires that *oikoumene* ["world"] be understood as the heavenly world of eschatological salvation into which the Son entered at his ascension [cf. 2:5] . . ."⁷³

1:7 Instead of being sovereign, the angels are servants ("ministers"). The fourth quotation is from Psalm 104:4. By describing the angels as "winds," the psalmist was drawing attention to: their spirit nature, invisibility, power, and role as servants of a higher Power. As "flame[s] of fire," they are God's agents of judgment and illumination. *Wind* and *fire* were also symbols of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. They were appropriate designations of both the Holy Spirit and angels, because both served the Father in similar ways as His servants. Even though the angels are as swift as wind and as powerful as fire, they are inferior to the Son.

1:8-9 By contrast, the Son's ministry is to rule, not to serve as angels do. His "throne" is both *eternal*, not ending, and *immutable*, not changing. This is a reference to the *throne of God*, at whose right hand Jesus now sits (cf. 12:2).⁷⁴ This fifth quotation, from Psalm 45:6-7, describes the final triumph of David's Son, the Messiah, who is also God. The Son is also superior to angels because *He is God*.

"This and the following quotation (vv. 10-12) are used to show that the Son is addressed in scripture both as God and as Lord. . . . The point of v. 8b, for the author of Hebrews, seems to be that the Son exercises royal power, whereas the angels are mere *leitourgoi* ("ministers" v. 7)."⁷⁵

⁷²See Hughes, p. 57-59.

⁷³Lane, p. 27.

⁷⁴McClain, p. 436.

⁷⁵Ellingworth, p. 122.

"Jesus' deity is more powerfully asserted in Hebrews than in any other New Testament writing, with the exception of the Gospel of John."⁷⁶

The prophets predicted that Messiah would be "righteous." Jesus Christ demonstrated this quality perfectly during His earthly ministry (cf. John 8:46). It is His love of righteousness, manifested in His earthly life, that entitles Him to sovereignty.⁷⁷ The *anointing* to which the writer referred probably took place after His ascension. Even though Messiah is "God," yet "God" (the Father) "anointed" *Him*.

"The anointing of the Son is not to be thought of in connection with coronation rites, but as symbolizing the joy of festival occasions, when the practice of anointing was followed."⁷⁸

The "companions" probably include all other righteous beings, angelic and human, including faithful Christians (cf. 2:10-11; 3:1, 14; 12:8). Part of the quotation in this verse does not argue the superiority of Christ over the angels. The writer probably included it because it makes a statement he developed later in this epistle. The term "companions" describes those who have intimate, not just superficial, association with Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 5:7).⁷⁹ The NASB translators rendered the Greek word, *metochos*, as "partakers"—everywhere else it occurs in Hebrews (i.e., 3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8).

1:10-12 Psalm 102:25-27, the sixth quotation, also referred to Messiah. The Son is also *Creator* (cf. v. 2). This verse looks back to the past. "Lord" means "Master" (Gr. *kurie*), and refers to *God* in the passage the writer quoted.

This quotation is also important to the writer's argument because it reveals the *immutability* of the Son. After God burns up the present earth and heavens, He will create "new heavens and a new earth" (2 Peter 3:10-12; Rev. 21—22). Many people in the Greco-Roman world believed that the world and the universe were indestructible.⁸⁰ Even though "the earth" as we know it will end, the Son's rule will continue eternally, and along with it His *joy* ("gladness," v. 9). The millennial kingdom will only be the first phase of Messiah's endless earthly rule.

Note that the quotations tied together with "and" (vv. 8-9 and 10-12) begin and end with the Son's eternal nature (vv. 8, 12).

⁷⁶Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, p. 305.

⁷⁷Dods, 4:256.

⁷⁸Guthrie, p. 77.

⁷⁹See John Soden, "The Use of Psalm 45:7-8 (6-7) in Hebrews 1:8-9," *Exegesis and Exposition* 2:1 (Summer 1987):51-70.

⁸⁰J. Héring, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, p. 8, cited by Guthrie, p. 78.

"The attribute of permanence in the Creator corresponds to the durability of his throne and serves to reinforce the contrast between the mutability of the angels and the stable, abiding character of the Son."⁸¹

1:13 The seventh and last quotation in this series is from Psalm 110:1. Angels *stand* and *serve*, but the Son *sits* and *rules* (cf. v. 3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; Matt. 22:43-44; 26:64; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33-34; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:22). The *vindication* predicted here ("make Your enemies a footstool") will take place when Jesus Christ returns at His second advent, and at the various judgments of God's enemies that will follow that return (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15; et al.). Jesus Christ's present rule, on His Father's throne over the church, is not the same as His rule on David's throne over David's earthly kingdom (cf. v. 3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).⁸² Eventually *every* knee shall bow to Him (Phil. 2:10-11).

One writer identified a chiasm in the quotations in verses 3-13:

"A The Son's status as royal King (Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14) (Heb 1:5)
 B The Son's status as Divine Wisdom (Deut 32:43; Ps 104:4) (Heb 1:6-7)
 C The Son's status as royal King and Divine Wisdom (Ps 45:6-7) (Heb 1:8-9)
 B' The Son's status as Divine Wisdom (Ps 102:26-28) (Heb 1:10-12)
 A' The Son's status as royal King (Ps 110:1) (Heb 1:13)"⁸³

1:14 God revealed a primary purpose and ministry of the angels ("ministering spirits") in this verse. It is to assist ("render service for") human beings toward reaching their final deliverance over their spiritual enemies. This includes bringing us to conversion. However, it also involves protecting and strengthening us who are believers, so that we may one day obtain our full inheritance with Christ in glory. This ministry of service is obviously inferior to Jesus Christ's ministry of ruling.

Was the writer speaking of all Christians, or only of faithful Christians, when he wrote of "those who will inherit salvation"? The word "salvation" (Gr. *soteria*) occurs seven times in Hebrews, more than in any other book of the New Testament.⁸⁴ In some of his other uses of "inheritance" and

⁸¹Lane, p. 30.

⁸²See Rogers, pp. 81-82.

⁸³Herbert W. Bateman, IV, "Two First-Century Messianic Uses of the OT: Heb 1:5-13 and 4QFlor 1.1-19," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:1 (March 1995):26.

⁸⁴For a study of salvation in Hebrews, see Brenda B. Colijn, "Let Us Approach: Soteriology in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:4 (December 1996):571-86.

"inherit," he referred to *all* Christians as inheriting from God (e.g., 9:15; cf. 11:8). At other times, he apparently meant only faithful Christians (e.g., 6:12; cf. 11:17). I think he was probably speaking of all Christians here, in view of what he just said about the ministry of angels. There is no other Scripture that limits the angels' ministry to faithful Christians, or which indicates that angels have a special ministry to faithful Christians (cf. Matt. 18:10).

"'Inherit' is often used in the NT in senses other than the strict one of obtaining something by a will. It can mean 'obtain possession of' without regard to the means. It is used of possessing the earth (Matt 5:5), the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10), eternal life (Mark 10:17), the promises (Heb 6:12), incorruption (1 Cor. 15:50), blessing (Heb 12:17), a more excellent name (v. 4, . . .)."85

The Hebrews writer spoke of the inheritance of Christians the same way the Old Testament writers spoke of the inheritance of the Israelites. *Our* inheritance as Christians refers to all that God wants to give His people. We will inevitably receive some of that (cf. 1 Per. 1:3-9). However, we can forfeit part of our inheritance through unfaithfulness, as Esau did (12:16), and as the generation of Israelites did, who died in the wilderness (3:7—4:11).86

"In contrast with the first part of this verse, the last three words ["will inherit salvation"] are all major concepts in Hebrews."87

Thus this section closes with a positive encouragement for the readers. The writer's array of Old Testament quotations, in this pericope, presents one of the most glorious Christologies in Scripture. He placed special emphasis on Jesus' future reign as God's King, who is at the same time David's Son. In summary, the Son is "superior to (better than) the angels" in *seven* respects:

1. He is the Son of God (v. 5a).
2. He is the promised son of David (v. 5b).
3. He is the sovereign (supreme authority) whom angels worship as Yahweh (v. 6).
4. His ministry is not that of a temporary servant like the angels (v. 7).
5. His ministry is that of the eternal Ruler and King (vv. 8-9).
6. He is the immutable Creator (vv. 10-12).
7. He is the sovereign (supreme authority) who will rule as Victor over all His enemies (v. 13).

⁸⁵Morris, p. 20.

⁸⁶See the Appendix, at the end of these notes, for a chart that clarifies what all believers will inherit and what faithful believers will additionally inherit.

⁸⁷Ellingworth, p. 133.

"The writer of Hebrews uses seven eschatological passages in Hebrews 1:5-14 to demonstrate Jesus' right to rule in the coming millennial kingdom. Because of this extensive quoting from six psalms and 2 Samuel 7, the term *soteria* ('salvation') in Hebrews 1:14 is best understood in the Old Testament sense as deliverance from the enemies of Yahweh and participation in His kingdom."⁸⁸

C. THE DANGER OF NEGLIGENCE (THE FIRST WARNING) 2:1-4

Having just encouraged his readers with a reminder of God's help for the faithful (1:14), the writer next urged his readers to be faithful. He did this as a warning to them of the possibility of retrogressing spiritually, and consequently losing part of their inheritance. Jacob's sons—Reuben, Simeon, and Levi—had done this.

BELIEVERS' FUTURE INHERITANCE	
<u>What <i>all</i> believers will inherit</u>	<u>What <i>faithful</i> believers will <i>additionally</i> inherit</u>
Entrance into God's kingdom John 3:3, 5; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5	Abundant eternal life James 1:12; Rev. 2:10
Eternal life John 3:16, 36; et al.	Reigning with Christ Luke 19:17, 19; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27
Acceptance by God Rom. 5:1; 8:31-39	Praise from God Matt. 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17; John 12:26; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:7; 5:4
No condemnation Rom. 5:9; 8:1; 1 Thess. 1:10	Intimacy with Christ John 15:14
Resurrection or translation 1 Cor. 15:53-57; 1 Thess. 4:13-17 Glorification 1 Pet. 1:9	Various rewards: Matt. 5:12, 46; 6:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18; 10:41-42; 16:27; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:23, 35; 1 Cor. 3:8, 14; 9:16-18, 25, 27; 2 Cor. 5:9-11; Phil. 4:1; Col. 3:24; 1 Thess. 2:19; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:18; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:8; Heb. 11:6; 1 Pet. 5:4; 2 John 8; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:5, 11, 12, 21; 11:18; 22:12

"The second step in the argument for Jesus' superiority shows him to be infinitely great because of the nature of the salvation he won. . . . The author precedes the development of this thought with a brief section in which he exhorts his readers to attend to what has been said, a feature we shall notice elsewhere (e.g., 3:7-11; 5:11-14)."⁸⁹

"The author uses doctrine as a basis for exhorting believers."⁹⁰

⁸⁸T. Kem Oberholtzer, "The Warning Passages in Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:577 (January-March 1988):96-97.

⁸⁹Morris, p. 21.

⁹⁰Pentecost, p. 24. Cf. 3:1, 8, 12, 13, 15; 4:1, 11, 14, 16; 6:1, 11, 12; 10:22, 23, 24, 25, 32, 35; 12:1, 3, 12, 14, 15, 25, 28; 13:1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 13, 15, 17, 18, 22, 24.

"The number of unusual words and idioms and the avoidance of the vocabulary of the LXX suggest that in this paragraph it was the writer's intention to confront the thought and life of his readers in a more arresting way than reliance upon familiar words and phrases would foster."⁹¹

2:1 The meaning of "For this reason" is that, since Jesus Christ is greater than the angels, we should take the revelation that has come through Him seriously. If the Israelites received severe punishment, whenever they disobeyed the Mosaic Law that God gave them *through the angels*, the punishment for disregarding what God has given us *through His Son* will be even more severe.⁹² Later in this epistle, we learn that the original readers were slow to respond to Scriptural imperatives (5:11-12). They had not grown as Christians as they should have. The writer took this opportunity to exhort them to "pay much closer attention" (Gr. *prosechein*) to what their teachers had taught them, and to what they had read in the Scriptures. This Greek word means not only to turn the mind to something, but also to *act* upon what one perceives and has "heard" (cf. Acts 8:6; 16:14). The readers were apparently regarding these things too lightly.

"God's speaking is the basis for the writer's own 'word of exhortation' (13:22)."⁹³

The writer illustrated their position. It is as though they were in a boat on a river or at sea. He pictured them moored at a dock or anchored. If they continued to neglect their attachment to the truth that does not change, the currents of their age might carry them away from it. They might "drift away" from the truth that they had heard (though not from their eternal salvation, cf. 6:19). "What we have heard" is the antecedent of "it." This is a warning against apostatizing, departing from truth once held. All the warnings in the Bible against following false teachers are similar to this one in their intent. If we do not diligently remain in the truth—and to do so we must know it and remember it—we will depart from it. We live in a world that is striving to separate us from it. Satan also wants us to abandon it (cf. Gen. 3; Matt. 4).

". . . the [five warning] passages in question are concerned with the danger of apostasy."⁹⁴

The writer just quoted, however, believed the apostates were all unbelievers.

⁹¹Lane, p. 35.

⁹²Ellingworth, p. 137.

⁹³Ibid., p. 134.

⁹⁴Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Eschatology of the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews," *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (1982):67-68.

". . . apostasy . . . [is] the central concern of the entire epistle."⁹⁵

"That church's experience 2,000 years ago intersects our lives in this way: *drifting is the besetting sin of our day*. And as the metaphor suggests, it is not so much intentional as from unconcern. Christians neglect their anchor—Christ—and begin to quietly drift away. There is no friction, no dramatic sense of departure. But when the winds of trouble come, the things of Christ are left far behind, even out of sight."⁹⁶

". . . if you examined a hundred people who had lost their faith in Christianity, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have been reasoned out of it by honest argument? Do not most people simply drift away?"⁹⁷

2:2-3a

The writer proceeded to argue from the lesser to the greater. "The word spoken through angels" refers to the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Deut 33:2 LXX; Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19).⁹⁸ For the Jews, it was the Law under which they lived. For *them*, the will of God was "unalterable." It required obedience. Under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant, the connection between sin and punishment was clear and direct. Even more so, the readers could count on the New Covenant that had come, not through angels, but through God's Son, to involve *severe* punishment for sinners. This is especially true if that sin involves failing to give attention to all of our responsibilities *as Christians* who have received such a "great salvation"! "Transgression" refers to overstepping bounds, and "disobedience" to the violation of God's will more generally. Another, less probable view, is that "transgression" refers to sins of commission, and "disobedience" to sins of omission.⁹⁹ The writer did not specify the punishment, but it cannot be loss of salvation, since Scripture specifically states that Christians will not lose their salvation (John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:31-39; Eph. 1:11-14; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; et al.). In view of the context (1:8-14), the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, as well as their own glorification and rewards, seem to be what the readers were in danger of forgetting.

"The neglected salvation is not our final deliverance from hell, that is not the salvation 'about which we are speaking.' Rather, it is the opportunity to enter into the final destiny of

⁹⁵George E. Rice, "Apostasy As a Motif and Its Effect on the Structure of Hebrews," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23:1 (Spring 1985):33.

⁹⁶R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews*, 1:48.

⁹⁷C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 124.

⁹⁸See Moffatt, p. 18.

⁹⁹Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:282.

man, to reign with Christ over the works of God's hands (Heb. 2:8-9)."¹⁰⁰

"Salvation includes far more than moral and bodily regeneration, for it embraces the covenanted kingdom of God, the inheritance of David's Son, the joint-heirship and reign with Christ."¹⁰¹

Note that the writer himself could have been negligent. He said, "How shall *we* escape?" not "How shall *you* escape?" (cf. v. 1). The most natural conclusion is that genuine Christians are in view in this warning, not simply unsaved, professing Christians.¹⁰² The writer gave us no clues in the text that he had in mind unsaved professing Christians. Furthermore, everything he said can be and has been true of genuine believers.

"Unlike most modern congregations the early Christian church was an integrated community centered around the worship of God and the advancement of his kingdom. Economically it was a commonwealth, which meant that its members were not being pulled apart from one another by the pursuit of individual goals of success; they were devoting everything they were and owned to the strengthening of one another and the cause of Christ. Worshiping and eating together, the members were in constant communication [cf. Acts 2:42]. . . . Little time or distance separated the members of this body, so there was an unhindered communication of the gifts and graces of each one to the others."¹⁰³

"It is emphatically NOT the same situation a Baptist preacher in the twentieth century faces when he climbs into the pulpit before eight thousand professing Christians. We are therefore fully justified in concluding that, when a New Testament writer uses a term like 'brethren,' he is not thinking that some may and some may not really be brothers, but he assumes and believes that all his readers are in fact born again.

"Since the [epistolary] writers themselves never explicitly say that they feel their audience is a mixture and since they everywhere make statements to the effect that they are talking to genuine Christians, we have no warrant for

¹⁰⁰Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 131.

¹⁰¹George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, 3:451.

¹⁰²See McGee, 5:514.

¹⁰³Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*, p. 161.

reading into their otherwise clear statements qualifications which they themselves never make."¹⁰⁴

The warning is against neglecting, not rejecting, salvation (cf. 6:19). "Neglecting" assumes that one has something, whereas "rejecting" assumes that one does not have it.

"He [the writer] is not encouraging sinners to become Christians; rather, he is encouraging Christians to pay attention to the great salvation they have received from the Lord.

"More spiritual problems are caused by neglect than perhaps by any other failure on our part. We neglect God's Word, prayer, worship with God's people (see Heb. 10:25), and other opportunities for spiritual growth, and as a result, we start to drift."¹⁰⁵

"For most of us the threat of life is not so much that we should plunge into disaster, but that we should drift into sin. There are few people who deliberately and in a moment turn their backs on God; there are many who day by day drift farther and farther away from Him."¹⁰⁶

Chapter 1 glorifies the *person* of our great Savior, and chapter 2 exalts the *work* of our great Savior: our "great salvation."

2:3b-4 Jesus Christ spoke of salvation during His earthly ministry (e.g., Matt. 4:17; 19:28; Luke 12:31-32; 22:29-30). The apostles taught the same truth, and by doing so, "confirmed" His word. This is the gospel, in its widest meaning.

"By speaking of 'the hearers' (*ton akousanton*), all interest is concentrated on the message, not the office, of those who had brought the word of redemption to the community . . ."¹⁰⁷

God testified to His approval of Christ's preaching, and the apostles' preaching about Christ, by providing authenticating "miracles" that showed God was with them (cf. Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6, 13; 14:3; 15:12; 2 Cor. 12:12). "Signs" emphasizes that the miracles signify something. "Wonders" emphasizes the reaction of awe that the miracles

¹⁰⁴Dillow, p. 241.

¹⁰⁵Wiersbe, 2:282. Cf. pp. 276, 277, 278.

¹⁰⁶Barclay, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷Lane, p. 39.

produced in those who observed them. "Miracles" emphasizes their supernatural origin, and "gifts" the graciousness of God in providing them. "Gifts of the Holy Spirit" refers to the gifts of prophecy, tongues, faith, etc. The writer intended that his reference to these miracles would bolster the readers' confidence in the gospel that they had received.

This statement does not force us to date the epistle after the apostles had died.

"It is too much to read into this verse that the writer and his readers belonged to a second generation of Christians . . . , though 5:12 shows that they were not new converts . . ."108

The original readers seem to have been people who had heard the apostles' preaching and had observed the miracles that accompanied that preaching. Guthrie believed that the writer had not heard Jesus firsthand.¹⁰⁹ This verse does not say that the signs and wonders had already ceased. They may have, but this statement does not say that. The prediction that they would *cease* occurs in 1 Corinthians 13:8. Ephesians 2:20 implies the temporary duration of apostolic ministry, that *included* signs and wonders.¹¹⁰

"Hebrews' references to the Holy Spirit are generally incidental; much of the space occupied in Paul's theology by the Spirit is filled in Hebrews by the exalted Christ."¹¹¹

I think signs and wonders are less common in developed countries, today, because most of these countries have the complete Word of God. God *now* typically validates the gospel through His Word (cf. Rom. 8:16; 1 John 5:1-13). Occasionally we hear reports of miracles that validate the gospel, but they are usually in places where the Word of God is not as available.

This is the first of five warnings in Hebrews (cf. 3:1—4:16; 5:11—6:20; 10:19-39; 12:1-29). It is the shortest and mildest one. These five warnings deal with drifting from the gospel, disbelieving the gospel, dullness toward the gospel, despising the gospel, and defying the gospel.

"The warning of Hebrews 2:1-5 is linked by *dia touto* ('for this reason') with the entire argument of Hebrews 1. Because of the Son's superiority to angels (1:1-5), the angels' worship of and service to Him at His coming (1:6-7), His future rule and sharing of joy with His companions (1:8-9),

¹⁰⁸Ellingworth, p. 141. Cf. Robertson, 5:343.

¹⁰⁹Guthrie, p. 82.

¹¹⁰See J. Lanier Burns, "A Reemphasis on the Purpose of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:527 (July-September 1975):245-46; Morris, p. 22.

¹¹¹Ellingworth, p. 143.

and His future subjugation of His enemies (1:10-14), the readers would do well to heed these eschatological teachings. Neglect of this eschatological salvation (cf. 1:4; 2:3, 5) may result in individual temporal discipline similar to that experienced under the Old Covenant (2:2). The 'salvation' of 2:3 is the same as that in 1:4. Hebrews 2:5 clarifies that the *soteria* under discussion is eschatological."¹¹²

"One of the greatest dangers of the Christian life is losing interest in what is familiar (8:9; Matt. 22:5). The entire Epistle lays stress on steadfastness at almost every stage, and this is one of the essential marks of the true, growing, deepening Christian life (3:14; 4:2, 12, 13; 6:1, 19; 10:26; 12:27, 28; 13:8)."¹¹³

". . . the doctrines the epistle presents, the warnings it delivers, and the exhortations it gives all were intended to prevent regression and to encourage continuous dynamic development toward spiritual maturity."¹¹⁴

D. THE HUMILIATION AND GLORY OF GOD'S SON 2:5-9

Verses 5-18 present eight reasons for the incarnation of the Son: (1) to fulfill God's purpose for man (vv. 5-9a), (2) to taste death for all (v. 9b), and (3) to bring many sons to glory (vv. 10-13). He also came (4) to destroy the devil (v. 14), (5) to deliver those in bondage (v. 15), (6) to become a priest for men (vv. 16-17a), (7) to make propitiation for sins (v. 17b), and (8) to provide help for those tested (v. 18).¹¹⁵

Some of the original Jewish readers of Hebrews felt inclined to abandon the Christian faith because of Jesus' humanity. The writer stressed His deity first, in chapter 1, because some Jews failed to appreciate that. In chapter 2, he shows why Jesus was not inferior because He was a man. Jesus' humanity enabled Him to regain man's lost dominion (vv. 5-9) and to bring many sons to glory (vv. 10-13). It also equipped Him to disarm Satan and deliver us from death (vv. 14-16), and to be a sympathetic High Priest to His people (vv. 17-18).¹¹⁶

The writer returned to his main argument (ch. 1). He did this to develop the destiny of Jesus Christ more fully, so that his readers would strengthen their commitment to continue following Him.

2:5 "The world to come" refers to the inhabited earth under Jesus Christ's reign (during the Millennium and from then on; cf. 1:8-9, 11-13).¹¹⁷ Some branches of Judaism believed that Michael (the archangel) and his angels

¹¹²Oberholtzer, p. 97.

¹¹³Thomas, p. 29.

¹¹⁴Pentecost, p. 31.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 58-68.

¹¹⁶Wiersbe, 2:283-84.

¹¹⁷Dods, 4:261.

would rule over it.¹¹⁸ The "angels" administer the present world (Deut. 32:8; Dan. 10:20-21; 12:1), but the Son will administer the world to come.

"This will occur at His second advent when He returns to this earth to sit as David's Son on David's throne and rule over David's kingdom in fulfillment of God's covenants and promises."¹¹⁹

In this respect, too, Jesus is superior to the angels. The phrase "concerning which we are speaking" indicates that the writer was resuming his exposition and continuing his thought from 1:5-14.

2:6-8a The writer interpreted this passage (Ps. 8:4-6) as messianic.¹²⁰ There is some evidence that most of the Jews of the late first century did not consider Psalm 8 to be messianic.¹²¹ "Son of Man" is a messianic title (Dan. 7:13-14). However, in Hebrew "son of man" always means *a man*.¹²²

"It is characteristic of our author . . . that he is not concerned to provide a precise identification of the sources from which he quotes. It is sufficient for him that he is quoting from Holy Scripture, whose inspiration and authority he accepts without question."¹²³

As a man, Jesus was temporarily lower than the angels during His earthly ministry. His crowning took place at His ascension, as did His receiving authority from the Father over all creation. The time when "all things" now under His authority will *bow* to that authority (be put "under His feet") awaits Jesus' return to earth, at His second advent, and the judgments that will follow His coming.

2:8b-9 Even though believers "do not yet see" Jesus glorified on earth, we *do* see Him—with the eye of faith—glorified *in heaven*. God has "crowned" Jesus "with glory and honor" because He endured death.¹²⁴ He "*suffered* death" because it was God's will for Him to "taste death for every person

¹¹⁸Zane C. Hodges, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 783.

¹¹⁹Pentecost, p. 57.

¹²⁰See Donald R. Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p. 44.

¹²¹Guthrie, p. 84. See also Martin Pickup, "New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament: The Theological Rationale of Midrashic Exegesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:2 (June 2008):353-81.

¹²²Barclay, p. 16.

¹²³P. E. Hughes, p. 83.

¹²⁴See Moffatt, p. 24.

(everyone)." "Suffering," introduced here, becomes a dominant theme in this epistle.¹²⁵ This was God's purpose in the Incarnation.¹²⁶

Jesus Christ's "death" was "for everyone" in that: by dying, He *paid the penalty* for the sins of *every* human being—elect and non-elect (cf. 1 John 2:2; 2 Peter 2:1; John 3:16). His death was *sufficient* for all, but it is *efficient* only for those who rest their confidence in it as what satisfied God.

To summarize, the writer made three main points in verses 5 through 9: (1) God created man to have mastery over the earth, (2) man through his sin failed to obtain the mastery, and (3) Jesus came to enable man to do what he was created to do.¹²⁷

"There is a profound note of anticipation in the OT teaching about humanity. The words of the psalmist look forward into the future, and that future is inextricably bound up with the person and work of Jesus. His condescension to be made for a brief while 'lower than the angels' set in motion a sequence of events in which abasement and humiliation were the necessary prelude to exaltation. His coronation investiture with priestly glory and splendor provide [*sic* provides] assurance that the power of sin and death has been nullified and that humanity will yet be led to the full realization of their intended glory. In Jesus the hearers are to find the pledge of their own entrance into the imperial destiny intended by God for them."¹²⁸

E. THE SON'S SOLIDARITY WITH HUMANITY 2:10-18

The Hebrews writer next emphasized the future glory that the Son will experience, in order to heighten his readers' appreciation—both for Him and for their own future with Him. He did this by reflecting on Psalm 8. He wanted his readers to appreciate these things, so that they would continue to live by faith, rather than departing from God's will (cf. James 1; 1 Pet. 1). This section concludes the first major part of the writer's address and prepares his audience for the next one (3:1—5:10).

"The three thoughts quickly made in Hebrews 2:9 are . . . filled in by further theological reflection in 2:10-18. They are not taken up in distinct sections but are interwoven in the argument of the paragraph. . . .

"The first theme . . . is that Jesus as God's Son came to earth to share fully in our humanity and thus to establish His solidarity [unity, identity] with all people. . . .

¹²⁵See James E. Allman, "Suffering in the Non-Pauline Epistles," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*, pp. 195-205.

¹²⁶On the variant textual reading "apart from God" in place of "by the grace of God" (v. 9), see Paul A. Hartog, "The Text of Hebrews 2:9 in Its Patristic Reception," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:681 (January-March 2014):52-71.

¹²⁷Cf. Barclay, p. 17.

¹²⁸Lane, p. 50.

"The second theme . . . is that in God's plan Jesus had to undergo suffering and death in order to provide salvation for humankind. . . .

"The third theme . . . is that because of His obedience in carrying out God's redemptive plan despite severe temptation, Jesus has been exalted to the honored position in God's very presence as the believers' perfected High Priest."¹²⁹

2:10 The writer proceeded to give a commentary on the last clause of verse 9, particularly on the phrase "by the grace of God."

The Son of Man is not the only One God intends to glorify (v. 6). All of His sons, believers, will experience glorification. "Him" is God the Father. "Author" is Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. The unusual title "author" (Gr. *archegos*) describes Jesus as a file leader, pioneer, pathfinder, and captain of a company of followers (cf. 12:2; Acts 3:15; 5:31).¹³⁰ It describes someone who begins something so that others may enter into it.¹³¹

"He is the strong swimmer who carries the rope ashore and so not only secures His own position but makes rescue for all who will follow."¹³²

However, it also views Him as originator or personal source.¹³³ God *perfected* Jesus by charting His path to glory through "sufferings," and He does the same for Jesus' followers. We must go through suffering before we get to glory. By having experienced suffering, Jesus can more perfectly help us as we suffer (v. 18). He was "perfected" in this sense. "To perfect" (Gr. *teleioo*) is another favorite word of this writer, who used it nine times, more frequently than it occurs in any other New Testament book. The Greek word means that the thing described fully carries out the purpose or plan for which it was designed and intended.¹³⁴

"Since His sinlessness is an accepted fact, it is clear that the perfection is viewed as a fitness for the fulfilling of the office assigned to Him."¹³⁵

"This representation of the achievement of Jesus was calculated to recall one of the more famous labors of Hercules, his wrestling with Death, 'the dark-robed lord of

¹²⁹Fanning, pp. 379, 381, 382.

¹³⁰See J. Julius Scott Jr., "Archegos in the Salvation History of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29:1 (March 1986):47-54.

¹³¹Barclay, p. 18.

¹³²Dods, 4:265.

¹³³Moffatt, p. 31.

¹³⁴Barclay, p. 19.

¹³⁵Everett F. Harrison, "The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121:484 (October-December 1964):338.

the dead' (Euripides, *Alcestis*, II. 843, 844 . . .). The designation of Jesus as *archegos* in a context depicting him as protagonist suggests that the writer intended to present Jesus to his hearers in language that drew freely upon the Hercules tradition in popular Hellenism . . ."136

2:11 "He" is probably Jesus Christ. There is great solidarity between Jesus Christ and believers. The Old Testament taught this solidarity in Psalm 22:22 (v. 12), Isaiah 8:17 (v. 13a), and Isaiah 8:18 (v. 13b). Jesus will "not" feel "ashamed" (embarrassed or disappointed) to call sanctified believers His "brethren" when He leads them to glory (vv. 5, 10). "Not ashamed" is a *litotes* meaning that God is, quite to the contrary, *willing* and *happy* "to call them brethren" (cf. 11:16).

"He might have been expected to shrink from those who had so belied their high origin, or at the best to move among them with the kindly superior professionalism of a surgeon who enters the ward of an hospital solely to heal, not to live there; but He claims men as his kin and on this bases His action (cf. xi. 16)."137

2:12-13 These quotations illustrate that Jesus will not blush to identify with the people of God. The emphasis in the first quotation is on the character ("name"; reputation) that Jesus Christ and believers share. His death has made us *holy* (set us apart; cf. 10:10, 14). Consequently we can have intimate fellowship with Jesus who dwells among us (by His Spirit; cf. Exod 25:8; 29:46).

The point of the second quotation is that Jesus, as well as His followers, *trusted* God. This is the basis for intimate fellowship. Daily trust in God characterized Jesus, and it characterizes Christians who continue to follow God faithfully. Such daily "trust" results in intimate fellowship with God. The point of the third quotation is that believers are Jesus Christ's spiritual "children." As such, He will provide for us and prepare us for the future—as a loving parent who has had greater experience traveling the same path (cf. John 14:1-3).

"The description of Christians as the 'children' or 'sons' of Christ is peculiar to this epistle among the New Testament writings . . ."138

This relationship stresses intimacy and tenderness as well as solidarity.

¹³⁶Lane, p. 57. Cf. W. Manson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Historical and Theological Reconsideration*, pp. 103-4.

¹³⁷Dods, 4:266.

¹³⁸Bruce, p. 48. Cf. Isa. 8:18; 53:10.

2:14 We children "share in flesh and blood" with one another; we share the limitations of humanity. To free us from these limitations, the Son had to assume the same limitations, which He did at the Incarnation. Jesus Christ broke Satan's "power" over believers by His "death." Obviously Satan still exercises great "power," but Jesus Christ broke his power (rendered him "powerless") to enslave believers (cf. Rom. 6:1-14). Furthermore Jesus Christ defeated Satan in the area of his greatest strength: his "power [to inflict] death."

2:15 The "fear of death" enslaves unbelievers, in that this fear leads them to behave in ways that please Satan (e.g., selfishly, living for the present, etc.). A believer need not have the same fear of death as an unbeliever (cf. Luke 11:21-22). Consequently we need not feel compelled to live for the present (e.g., put self first, do anything to save our lives, etc.) as unbelievers do. The *fear of death* tyrannizes many people, both consciously and subconsciously.

"It is ironical that human beings, destined to rule over the creation (Ps 8:5-7 LXX, cited in vv 6-8), should find themselves in the posture of a slave, paralyzed through the fear of death (Kögel, *Sohn*, 80). Hopeless subjection to death characterizes earthly existence apart from the intervention of God . . ."139

2:16 Here "the seed of Abraham" probably refers primarily to believers, the spiritual descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:29), rather than to Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham (cf. Isa. 41:8-10). The original readers, saved Jews, were both the physical and spiritual descendants of Abraham. The contrast is between angelic and human believers in the context. Jesus Christ "does not give help to angels" in the same way He gives help to Christians. He helps us *uniquely* as an elder brother, as a parent (vv. 11-15), and as a fellow human being.

2:17 "All things" means in every way, specifically by experiencing human life and by suffering. Jesus Christ's identification with us made possible His ministry as "high priest," in which He would be "merciful" to us and "faithful" to God. Eli is an example of a high priest who was neither faithful nor merciful (cf. 1 Sam. 2:27-36). The basis for this ministry was Jesus making satisfaction ("propitiation," by atonement) for sin by His own sacrifice.

". . . the concept of high priesthood, as applied to Christ, expresses both Christ's unity [solidarity] with mankind in a particular historical tradition (5:1) and his leadership of God's pilgrim people into the heavenly sanctuary."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹Lane, p. 61.

¹⁴⁰Ellingworth, p. 186.

"*O laos* ["The people"] is Hebrews' preferred term for the people of God."¹⁴¹

In His first advent, Jesus functioned as a prophet, declaring the Word of God to people. Between His first and second advents, He functions as a priest, serving as an advocate and intercessor for us with the Father. After His second advent, He will function as a king, ruling over the entire earth as its sovereign.

2:18 As our priest, Jesus Christ can help us, because He has undergone the same trials we experience (in body, mind, and emotions), and has emerged victorious. The testing in view is the temptation to depart from God's will, specifically apostasy (cf. 5:8; Matt. 4:8-11; 16:22-23; 26:39; Luke 22:44). The picture is of an older brother helping his younger brothers navigate the pitfalls of growing up successfully. That is the role that a priest plays.

"Think of it this way—which bridge has undergone the greatest stress, the one that collapses under its first load of traffic, or the one that bears the same traffic morning and evening, year after year?"¹⁴²

"Some have objected that only by the experience of sin could Christ have evinced full fellow feeling with fallen mankind; but for the incarnate Son to have succumbed to temptation, while it would certainly have meant his becoming a fellow sinner, would also have meant his failure and defeat, with the consequence that he would have been disqualified for the fulfillment of his high-priestly office (cf. Heb. 5:8-10) and unable to come to our aid and lead us in the way of victory."¹⁴³

The writer developed these ideas more fully later. He only introduced them here.

"It is a characteristic of this Epistle just to touch upon a truth, and then to dismiss it for a time, taking it up later for full treatment."¹⁴⁴

". . . the writer composes like a musician intertwining one theme with another."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁴²R. K. Hughes, 1:86.

¹⁴³P. E. Hughes, p. 123.

¹⁴⁴Thomas, p. 36.

¹⁴⁵John Bligh, "The Structure of Hebrews," *Heythrop Journal* 5 (April 1964):171.

The emphasis in 2:5-18 has been on Jesus Christ's present ministry, whereas that of 1:5-14 was on His future ministry. In both sections, however, there is a looking forward to the time when all things will be subject to Him. The writer focused on the *future*, so as to encourage his readers to persevere faithfully in the *present*, rather than apostatizing.

"With vv 17-18 the writer prepares to lead his hearers directly into the body of the discourse devoted to the exposition of Jesus as priest and sacrifice. Common to the concepts both of champion and of high priest are the elements of representation and solidarity with a particular people. The presentation of Jesus in 2:10-18 provided assurance that the exalted Son continues to identify himself with the oppressed people of God exposed to humiliation and testing in a hostile world."¹⁴⁶

II. THE HIGH PRIESTLY CHARACTER OF THE SON 3:1—5:10

The writer proceeded to take up the terms "merciful" and "faithful" from 2:17, and to expound them in reverse order. He spoke of the faithfulness of Jesus (3:1-6, exposition) and the need for his hearers to remain faithful as well (3:7—4:14, exhortation). He then encouraged his audience with a reminder of Jesus' compassion as a merciful High Priest in the service of God (4:15—5:10, exposition).

A. THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE SON 3:1-6

"The author steadily develops his argument that Jesus is supremely great. He is greater than the angels, the author of a great salvation, and great enough to become man to accomplish it. Now the author turns his attention to Moses, regarded by the Jews as the greatest of men. . . . The writer does nothing to belittle Moses. Nor does he criticize him. He accepts Moses' greatness but shows that as great as he was, Jesus was greater by far."¹⁴⁷

It was important to convince the Jewish readers that Jesus Christ is greater than Moses, because the entire Jewish religion came through Moses. Christianity came through Christ.

"Observing the grammatical markers supplied by the writer, we submit that the development of the author's thought reflects the following scheme:

- vv 1-2 introduction of the comparison between Jesus and Moses;
- v 3 assertion of Jesus' superiority to Moses;
- vv 4-6a explanation for this assertion;
- v 6b relevance for the congregation."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶Lane, p. 67.

¹⁴⁷Morris, p. 31.

¹⁴⁸Lane, p. 72.

3:1 The writer now made his first appeal to his readers. We should give careful attention to Jesus because of our solidarity as brothers, and our holy calling as participants in His future reign and joy (2:10-12). Our calling as Christians is not just earthly but also heavenly.

Jesus Christ is the "Apostle" (lit. "delegate," "messenger," "one sent forth with orders") in that: He is the One God sent to reveal the Father to humankind (cf. 1:1-2; John 1:14; 3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; et al.). Furthermore He is the "High Priest," in that He is the One God anointed to represent human beings to Himself (2:17-18). Two great revelations in the Book of Hebrews are: (1) Jesus Christ reveals God to man, and (2) He represents man before God. Our "confession" is that for which we take a public stand in water baptism, namely, *Christianity* (cf. 4:14; 10:23).

"These Hebrew Christians had confessed Jesus as their Apostle and High Priest."¹⁴⁹

"The term *brethren* which the author uses to address the recipients of his letter shows that, though they are in need of correction and admonition, he has not ceased to regard them as his fellow Christians and companions in the faith. . . . The description of the brethren as 'holy' does not imply that they are holy in themselves, but rather 'sanctified' or 'consecrated' as those who have been chosen and set apart by God (cf. 'those who are sanctified' in 2:11 . . .)"¹⁵⁰

3:2 We should probably translate this verse to tie it in directly to verse 1, rather than making it a separate statement. The idea is that Jesus Christ *is now* "faithful," not that He "was" in the past. He is faithful *now*, just as Moses was in the past. We can see Moses' faithfulness in how he served regarding God's "house," the tabernacle, and regarding God's "household," Israel. He served exactly as God instructed him (cf. Num. 12:7; 1 Sam. 2:35; 1 Chron. 17:14). The Greek word *oikos* can mean "house" or "household."

3:3-4 We can see the difference between Jesus Christ's *superiority* and Moses', by comparing the builder of a building with the building itself. No matter how grand a building may be, its creator (architect) always gets "more glory" than the building itself. Whereas Moses served faithfully in the system of worship the tabernacle represented, Jesus Christ designed that system of worship. These verses are a powerful testimony to the deity of Jesus Christ: If (Since) God built everything, and Jesus Christ built God's house: *Jesus Christ is God*.

¹⁴⁹Robertson, 5:353.

¹⁵⁰P. E. Hughes, p. 125.

3:5-6a

"There are two main points of comparison, namely, that Moses *as a servant* was faithful *in* God's house, whereas Christ *as a son* was faithful *over* God's house."¹⁵¹

Moses functioned as a "servant" (Gr. *therapon*, one who freely renders personal service), preparing something ("those things") that would serve as a model for a "later" time. The tabernacle was only a model (or prototype) of the real temple, from which Jesus Christ will reign eventually (cf. 1:8-13; 2:8), first in the Millennium and then in the new heavens and new earth. The temple will be a spiritual building, in contrast with the physical tabernacle. Messiah's rule over the earth was a revelation about which the prophets who followed Moses spoke more fully. Jesus Christ will not serve; He will reign. He is no longer God's Servant, but God's Son. As such, He sits; He does not stand like a servant. He is the Possessor (Owner) of all things, not one who makes preparation for things, as Moses did.

"By defining Moses' service in this way, the writer indicates that Moses' status as servant corresponds to that of the angels, who are servants to the heirs of salvation (see . . . 1:14)."¹⁵²

God's "house," over which Jesus Christ sits in authority, represents the whole system of worship that our Lord inaugurated with the New Covenant. He sits in God's place, the Holy of Holies of this house. The tabernacle foreshadowed this final system of worship in which Jesus will rule as King-Priest. The tabernacle was a microcosm of God's greater house. Moses served in the model (prototype) faithfully. Jesus rules over the larger house faithfully, not as a servant, but as God's Son with full authority.

"In some sections of Jewish Christianity Christ's role was envisaged as primarily that of a second Moses; here He is presented as being much more than that."¹⁵³

3:6b

God's household ("house") consists of people—not boards, bars, and curtains. The writer was thinking of priestly functions, as is clear from the context. His concern was that his readers might not remain faithful to God (cf. Mark 4:5-6, 16-17; John 8:31). This would result in their losing their privilege as priests, which included intimate fellowship with God, and the opportunity to represent God before people and people before God. This is what the Israelites (as a whole) lost, when they turned away from the Lord and built the golden calf at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 32). Instead of *all* the

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁵²Lane, p. 78.

¹⁵³Bruce, p. 58.

Israelites being priests (Exod. 19:6), God limited this privilege to the *Levites*, who remained faithful when the other Israelites apostatized (Exod. 32:26-29; cf. Num. 3:12-13). Just so today, it is possible for us to forfeit the privilege of functioning as a priest in the future (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5). The writer shifted from using "house," to refer to the place where priestly functions take place, to using "house" to refer to the people engaged in those activities, namely, a *household*.

The writer's point in this pericope, was that his readers should follow the example of faithfulness to God that Moses and Jesus set—or they could lose their privilege as priests! Essentially priests represent people to God. They exercise leadership of people *Godward*. The writer had previously warned his readers that unfaithfulness could result in their drifting away from God's truth (2:1-4). Moreover, by contrasting Jesus and Moses, he helped his Jewish readers appreciate the superiority of Jesus over Moses, and so discouraged them from departing from Christianity and returning to Judaism.¹⁵⁴

"When we withdraw from the exercise of our priestly New Testament worship, we are no longer fellowshipping with the other believers. But this does not mean we are not saved or that we had salvation and lost it."¹⁵⁵

B. THE DANGER OF DISBELIEF (THE SECOND WARNING) 3:7-19

"The comparison between Christ and Moses leads to one between their followers. The writer uses the conduct of the Israelites as a means of challenging his readers to a closer walk with God."¹⁵⁶

The Hebrews writer next reminded his readers of the fate of the Israelites when they failed to continue believing God at Kadesh Barnea. His purpose was to help them realize the serious consequences of that behavior, and to motivate them to faithfully persevere in the apostles' teaching. This exhortation is really a commentary on Psalm 95:7b-11, in which the writer assumed a correspondence between the successive generations of God's people and the consistency in God's character.¹⁵⁷ In verse 6, the writer warned of losing our privilege of serving as priests in the present. Now he warned of losing some of our privileges as heirs in the future.

3:7-11 "Today" stresses the urgency of immediate action. This writer used it eight times in Hebrews. The context of the words quoted (Psalm 95:7b-11) is very significant. The verses immediately preceding those quoted (Ps. 95:6-7a) are a call to bow down and worship the Lord. That was the writer to the Hebrews' desire for his readers as well. The words he quoted urge avoidance of Israel's sin. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ initiated a new *exodus*.

¹⁵⁴See Brett R. Scott, "Jesus' Superiority over Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):201-10.

¹⁵⁵Dillow, p. 458.

¹⁵⁶Morris, p. 33.

¹⁵⁷Lane, p. 83.

". . . the writer of Hebrews appeals to his recipients not to become discontented because of their suffering, and not to let discontentment give way to open rebellion—lest they, like their forefathers, lose the blessings of the privileges that now were available to them as believers."¹⁵⁸

"The grand and terrible lesson of Israel's history is that *it is possible to begin well and end poorly*. In fact, this tragic human tendency dominates much human spiritual experience."¹⁵⁹

"Rest' (*katapausis*), as used here, points to a place of blessing where there is no more striving but only relaxation in the presence of God and in the certainty that there is no cause for fear."¹⁶⁰

"Rest" is another of the writer's favorite words. For Israel, "rest" meant the enjoyment of all that God had promised the nation when they entered the Promised Land, not just entering into the Promised Land. The next generation of Israelites *did* enter the Promised Land, and experienced rest there because they chose to trust and obey God (cf. Num. 14:22-23; Josh. 1:13, 15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1). For the Christian, "rest" is the enjoyment of all that God has promised us, not just getting to heaven. This includes the full enjoyment of rewards that can be ours if we follow the Lord faithfully. All Christians will go to heaven and receive many blessings (Eph. 1; 1 Pet. 1), but some blessings are reserved for believers who continue to trust and obey God when faced with temptations to apostatize.¹⁶¹ The crown of righteousness, the crown of life, the crown of glory, etc., are such rewards. Much confusion has resulted because Christians have interpreted "rest" in this passage simply as reaching "Canaan" and "heaven." In chapter 4, the writer spoke of "Sabbath rest," which is something different.

USES OF THE TERM "REST" IN HEBREWS 3 AND 4	
The Israelites' rest in Canaan	3:11, 18; 4:3b, 5, 8
The Christian's rest in all that God has promised for us in heaven	4:1, 3a, 6, 9, 10a, 11
God's rest following the Creation	4:4, 10b

¹⁵⁸Pentecost, p. 76.

¹⁵⁹R. K. Hughes, 1:98.

¹⁶⁰Morris, p. 35. Cf. P. E. Hughes, p. 143.

¹⁶¹See the Appendix at the end of these notes.

"This way of using a word in two or three different ways, of teasing at it until the last drop of meaning was extracted from it, was typical of cultured, academic thought in the days when the writer to the Hebrews wrote his letter."¹⁶²

3:12 Here is an exhortation to apply this lesson from the past (cf. 1 Cor. 10:6-11). Note again that those to whom the writer addressed this epistle were believers: "brethren." Their danger was apostasy, departure from God, *not* failure to come to God in saving faith.¹⁶³

"The rebellion he warns against consists of departing from a living, dynamic person, not from some dead doctrine. Jews might retort that they served the same God as the Christians so that they would not be departing from God if they went back to Judaism. But to reject God's highest revelation is to depart from God, no matter how many preliminary revelations are retained."¹⁶⁴

"*Apistias* is more than mere unbelief, here rather disbelief, refusal to believe, genitive case describing the evil heart marked by disbelief which is no mark of intelligence then or now."¹⁶⁵

The Greek words translated "to apostatize" (lit. "to stand away," *aphistemi*) and "apostasy" ("defection," *apostasia*) do not by themselves indicate whether believers or unbelievers are in view. The reader must determine this from the context. Here believers seem to be in view (as in Luke 8:13; Acts 15:38; 1 Tim. 4:1; cf. 2 Tim. 2:12b; 4:4), since the writer called them "brethren." Some people refer to Christian apostates as "backsliders." However, the apostates in view here were not average backsliders, but very serious backsliders. In other contexts, unsaved apostates are in view (e.g., Luke 13:27; cf. 2 Thess. 2:11). In still other passages, there is not sufficient information to pass judgment on their salvation (e.g., 2 Thess. 2:3; cf. Titus 1:14).

Other Scripture seems to reveal, quite clearly, that genuine Christians can renounce their faith (Matt. 10:33; Mark 8:32; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:8). Experience confirms this conclusion. False teachers have deceived many Christians into believing that the truth that they formerly believed is not true, even truth about Jesus Christ. For example, many young people abandon their Christian faith because some respected university professor convinces them that what they formerly believed is not true. The cults are full of people who formerly professed belief in the cardinal doctrines of

¹⁶²Barclay, p. 30.

¹⁶³See Hodges, p. 787; P. E. Hughes, p. 145.

¹⁶⁴Morris, p. 36.

¹⁶⁵Robertson, 5:358.

the Christian faith, but who no longer do so. However, this does not mean that genuine Christians who become deceived will lose their salvation (John 10:28; 2 Tim. 2:13).¹⁶⁶ They will not. We are not saved by our good works, and we do not lose our salvation by our bad works (i.e., failing to persevere faithfully in the faith). "Justification" is a *legal verdict* that God renders, in which He declares the believing sinner forgiven, and He never rescinds that verdict.

"No believer today, Jew or Gentile, could go back into the Mosaic legal system since the temple is gone and there is no priesthood. But every believer is tempted to give up his confession of Christ and go back into the world system's life of compromise and bondage."¹⁶⁷

As often occurs elsewhere in Hebrews, references to God as "living" imply that He is the "Giver of Life."¹⁶⁸

3:13

If a sinner continues in his or her "sin," he or she may conclude that sin does not matter, as the Israelites at Kadesh-barnea did. Their unbelief there was the tenth instance of unbelief from the time they left Egypt (cf. Num. 14:22). This is sin's "deceitfulness": they may think that because God does not punish the sinner immediately, sin does not *really* matter. Sin matters very much. The writer counseled his readers to "encourage" each other to continue to walk with God. He did this to help them avoid the rationalizing that people can get into when they do not confess and forsake their sins. Meeting regularly with other Christians for mutual encouragement can be a great help to any Christian, being reminded from the Word that failing to continue to trust God will bring bad consequences. Mutual encouragement in godliness is something we all need frequently so that we do not become "hardened" to sin.

"A hardened attitude is not a sudden aberration, but a habitual state of mind."¹⁶⁹

We need to get started "today," while there is still opportunity.

"One of the best ways of keeping ourselves true is to help other people, and the duty is here set forth of exhorting one another. There is scarcely anything more striking in Christian experience than the fact that in helping others we often help ourselves."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*aphistemi, apostasia, dichostasia*," by Heinrich Schlier, 1:512-13.

¹⁶⁷Wiersbe, 2:288.

¹⁶⁸Ellingworth, p. 654.

¹⁶⁹Guthrie, p. 107.

¹⁷⁰Thomas, p. 44.

3:14 Even though we are already "partakers" of a heavenly calling (v. 1), we can *only* partake of *all* that God wants us to enjoy—in the future with the Messiah—by persevering. Conversely, we can lose the privilege of partaking with Christ fully if we stop trusting and obeying God. By the same token, we can lose the privilege of serving as priests, to the extent that we could potentially serve as priests, by proving unfaithful (v. 6; cf. Luke 19:11-27; 2 Tim. 2:12). The condition the writer stated here is the same as in verse 6. We must continue to walk by faith, and to trust and obey God daily, just as we began the Christian life by faith ("hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end").

". . . A son who leaves home ceases to be an active partner in the home, though he does not thereby cease to be a son!"¹⁷¹

"To begin well is good, but it is not enough, it is only those who stay the course and finish the race that have any hope of gaining the prize."¹⁷²

3:15 We see the example of failure in Israel's unbelief at Kadesh-barnea ("as when they provoked Me"), which the writer repeated for emphasis. Much misinterpretation of the warnings in Hebrews has arisen because of failure to appreciate that this writer was drawing parallels between the behavior of God's people in the past (Israel) and the behavior of God's people in the present (the church). Christians face the same kinds of temptations that the Israelites did, and they should learn from their mistakes (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-22).

"The allusions to Num 14 are significant because they indicate that unbelief is not a lack of faith or trust. It is the refusal to believe God. It leads inevitably to a turning away from God in a deliberate act of rejection."¹⁷³

3:16-19 These verses constitute an exposition of the passage quoted (Ps. 95:7b-11). The questions indicate the diatribe style of rhetoric, in which the speaker raises questions and provides answers. The Israelites who died in the wilderness were mostly redeemed believers (cf. Exod. 14:31).¹⁷⁴ They died *as believers*; thus they did not lose their salvation. However, they failed "to enter" into the blessings that could have been theirs, because they refused to believe that God would defeat their enemies and bring them into rest in the Promised Land. If we fail to believe that Jesus has

¹⁷¹Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 76.

¹⁷²Bruce, p. 68. Cf. 12:1-2.

¹⁷³Lane, p. 86.

¹⁷⁴See Randall C. Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7—4:11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:627 (July-September 2000):288.

defeated and will continue to defeat our enemies (1:13-14), we too will fail "to enter" into *all the blessing* that can be ours in heaven. We need to *continue* to trust and obey, just as the Israelites should have done.

"By saying *So we see that* [v. 19], the writer assumes that his reasoning will be self-evident."¹⁷⁵

"The conclusion thus introduces the motif of the impossibility of a second repentance after apostasy, in anticipation of a fuller treatment later in the sermon (6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:16-17 . . .). The hearers are left with the overwhelming impression that unbelief would expose them to the same precarious situation as Israel at Kadesh."¹⁷⁶

The apostate generation of Israelites failed to enter the Promised Land when they hardened their hearts and provoked God by their disbelief. Is the implication that Christians who do the same will not enter heaven? Many interpreters have taken this view. However, the New Testament elsewhere teaches that all who believe in Jesus Christ will go to heaven, because their simple faith in Christ is what saves them (e.g., Eph. 2:8-9). God has promised to complete the work of salvation that He began in us (cf. John 10:27-28; Rom. 8:30; Phil. 1:6; et al.). He will glorify us, just as He justified us, and just as He is sanctifying us. He will do this despite our subsequent unbelief (cf. 2 Tim. 2:13). If our subsequent unbelief resulted in our loss of salvation, then the condition for being saved would have to be *faith plus faithfulness*, which it is not. Remember, "rest" does not equal the "Promised Land" (for the Israelites, or "heaven" for Christians), but rather it equals "obtaining all the inheritance" that God wants to give believers in the Promised Land (or heaven).

C. THE POSSIBILITY OF REST FOR GOD'S PEOPLE 4:1-14

The writer returned again from exhortation to exposition. He now posed the alternatives of rest and peril that confronted the new people of God: Christians. It seems that this section ends with 4:14, rather than 4:15, since 4:14 contains the end of an *inclusio* that begins in 3:1. The writer warned his readers lest they should fail to enter into their rest (cf. 1 Cor. 10:12).

"Since Moses was unable to lead the Israelites into Canaan, the writer reflects on the position of Joshua, who did lead them in. But he shows that even Joshua did not secure for his people true rest. Joshua failed for the same reason as Moses, that is, through the people's unbelief."¹⁷⁷

4:1 The writer expressed concern in this verse that some of his readers might conclude that they had missed "entering [into] their (His) rest" (i.e., their full spiritual inheritance). Apparently some of the original readers had

¹⁷⁵Guthrie, p. 110.

¹⁷⁶Lane, p. 89.

¹⁷⁷Guthrie, p. 110.

doubts because the Lord had not yet returned. They expected Him to return very soon after He ascended into heaven (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 2:1-12). Later the writer urged his readers to wait patiently (have "endurance") for the Lord to return (10:36-37). None of the original readers had failed to enter their rest (inheritance) because they had missed the Lord's return.

Five views of the "rest" in Hebrews
1. Heaven
2. Present rest in (enjoyment of) our riches in Christ
3. Future (eschatological) enjoyment of <i>all</i> that God wants us to enjoy (i.e., our <i>full</i> inheritance)
4. Some particular blessing in the eschatological future
5. A peaceful life now as Christians

Some people interpret this verse to mean that the readers should fear that they would not go to heaven if they proved unfaithful. This cannot be the meaning, because God has promised heaven to *every* believer—regardless of their faithfulness to Him (Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Thess. 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:3-6; et al.)!

"To equate the inheritance [only] with heaven [cf. Matt. 11:28] results in a glaring inconsistency. It would mean that believers, by entering the church, are already heirs of the kingdom. Why then are they uniformly exhorted to become heirs by faithful labor when they are already heirs?"¹⁷⁸

Teachings that compare crossing the Jordan with the believer's death have clouded divine revelation concerning the Christian's future rest (e.g., the hymn, "I'm Just a Poor Wayfaring Stranger"). Crossing the Jordan marked the beginning of God's testing of the new Israelite generation. He had previously tested the former generation during the wilderness wanderings. Each succeeding generation throughout the history of Israel faced its own tests. The people's responses to these tests determined the amount of rest they experienced. Likewise, the Christian's responses to His testings (whether he will trust and obey God faithfully or depart from God's will) will determine how much rest he or she will enjoy.

Another view is that "rest" refers to the present life of the believer who rests in the Lord: the "faith rest" life.¹⁷⁹ Having been saved, we enter into our rest as believers by surrendering our lives to Him and enjoying peace

¹⁷⁸Dillow, p. 83.

¹⁷⁹Pentecost, pp. 80-81; Wiersbe, 2:289.

with God. This view seems unlikely because of how the writer equated "rest" and "inheritance" after the pattern of Old Testament usage, namely: as a *future possession*. Furthermore, if "rest" equals "enjoying our spiritual blessings now," the writer should have at this point warned his readers about *losing* their rest if they departed from God (3:12). After all, the writer himself could have lost his own "rest" if he departed—if this was the danger. Instead he warned them about failing *to enter into* their rest.

The writer used the term "rest" as Moses did, as an equivalent to entering into all the inheritance that God promised His people (Deut. 3:18-20; 12:9-11; cf. Heb. 1:14; 3:11, 18; 4:3-5, 10-11; 6:12, 17). For the Christian, this inheritance is everything that God desires to bestow on us when we see Him.¹⁸⁰ It is an eschatological rest, not a present rest. We enter into our rest after we cease from our labors in this life. We then enter into our "Sabbath rest," the rest that follows a full period of work (i.e., a lifetime; cf. vv. 9-11). I believe this is the correct view.

"An eschatological understanding of 'my rest' in Ps 95:11 is presupposed in v 1 and is fundamental to the exhortation to diligence to enter God's rest in 4:1-11."¹⁸¹

The readers might fail to enter their rest, in the sense of losing part of their inheritance, if they apostatized. *Losing part of one's inheritance* probably involves losing the privilege of reigning with Christ, in a position of significant responsibility in the future, at least (cf. Matt. 25:14-30). As it is possible to receive a greater or a lesser inheritance (reward), it is also possible to enter into more or less rest. The generation of Israelites that crossed the Jordan with Joshua only entered into *partial rest* in the land, due to their failure to trust and obey God completely. Israel's compromises with the Canaanites mitigated their rest. Subsequent generations of Israelites experienced the same partial rest, as the Book of Judges reveals. They apostatized, God disciplined them, they repented, and then they experienced rest until they (usually the next generation) apostatized again.

It also seems better to identify "rest" with our *full future inheritance*, rather than solely with participation in the Millennium,¹⁸² or with our "heavenly husband,"¹⁸³ or with some other particular blessing in the future. One writer assumed this meant the right to worship before the personal presence of Yahweh.¹⁸⁴ God has assured *all* Christians of enjoying the millennial kingdom and our "heavenly husband" (i.e., Jesus Christ). The New Testament links receiving other particular blessings

¹⁸⁰See Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, p. 84.

¹⁸¹Lane, p. 98. Cf. Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 788.

¹⁸²G. H. Lang, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 73.

¹⁸³Bruce, p. 78.

¹⁸⁴Gleason, p. 297.

(crowns, various rewards) with specified conditions (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:25; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11).

This passage is not talking about living a peaceful life here and now, either. That is not "the rest" that is in view. This should be clear from the context. Throughout this epistle, the writer used the terms "rest" and "inheritance" as the Old Testament used them, when speaking of what the Israelites in the wilderness anticipated. These terms refer to *blessings* that God's people could anticipate in the *next stage* of their lives, if they followed Him faithfully in the *present stage* of their lives. For the Israelites in the wilderness, this meant enjoying the peace and prosperity of the Promised Land to the full. For Christians, it means enjoying all the blessings—that God has promised that faithful believers will experience—in heaven.

- 4:2 What is the "good news" that both the Israelites and the original readers of this epistle had heard preached to them? It was probably the news about their *inheritance* and the possibility of entering into their "rest." This seems clear from the context. This is not a reference to the gospel message. The *good news* the Israelites heard "did not profit them," because they refused to trust God and rebelled against Him. Likewise, the good news of our inheritance and rest may not profit us, if we fail to trust God and turn from Him in unbelief. By *inheritance*, Moses and this writer meant all that God wanted and wants to give His people. We will all receive many blessings even if we apostatize, because we are God's children whom He has promised to glorify (1 Pet. 1:3-9). Nevertheless we will not enter into *full rest*, or experience *all* we could inherit, if we depart from God.
- 4:3 A better translation of "we who have believed" would be "we who believe" (Gr. *pisteusantes*, aorist active participle). The writer was not looking back to *initial* faith, that resulted in justification, but to *present* faith, that would result in entering into rest (inheritance). The quotation from Psalm 95:11 emphasizes the *impossibility* of entering without faith ("I swore . . . they shall not enter"). The writer added that this was true even though God had planned rest for His people when He created ("although His works were finished from the foundation of") the world. God's purpose and provision did not guarantee that His people would experience it. These things also depended on their faith. Even Moses failed to enter rest in the Promised Land because he failed to trust God at Meribah (Num. 20:12).
- 4:4-5 The writer here evidently introduced the idea of God *resting* "on the seventh day" (cf. v. 3), because it illustrates the fact that rest follows work. The *work* God called the Israelites in the wilderness to do, was trusting and obeying Him. This would have resulted in *rest* from wandering in the wilderness, and *rest* in the land, if they had carried this work out. The work He calls us believers to do is also to continue to trust and obey Him.

If we do this, we can look forward to receiving our full inheritance (rest) when we see the Lord, but if we turn from God, we cannot. The writer stated the positive prospect in verse 4, and the negative possibility in verse 5.

- 4:6-7 Not all of the descendants of Abraham lost the opportunity to receive God's inheritance ("failed to enter") because the generation of Israelites living during the wilderness wanderings failed God. In David's day, God re-extended His offer of entering rest, and his generation had to respond for itself. The title of Psalm 95 in the Septuagint credited David with writing it. They had their "today" of opportunity also. Each and every generation of believers needs to continue to trust and obey in order to enter into their rest (inheritance).

"Tinas ["Some"] is generally explained as implying a warning that not all the readers are certain to receive what God promises (cf. . . ., 3:12; also v. 13; 4:1, 11 . . .)."185

- 4:8 The prospect of "rest" for the Israelites, specifically the possession of the Promised Land and full blessing in it, did not end when "Joshua" defeated the Canaanites. Each succeeding generation had to continue, for itself, to trust and obey God, in order to assure its own rest in the land.

"What our author is saying is that God's promise of rest did not and does not have a merely earthly fulfillment, but is rather eschatological in purport, and therefore still awaits the people of God in all its fulness [*sic*]."186

- 4:9 The "Sabbath rest" in view is the rest (inheritance) that every generation of believers, and every individual believer, enters into when he or she—like God—faithfully finishes his or her work. That work involves continuing to trust and obey God (i.e., walking by faith daily as opposed to apostatizing). We who are Christians will enter into our rest, if we have persevered in faith, when we receive our inheritance from Jesus Christ at His judgment seat (1 Cor. 4:1-5; 2 Cor. 5:9-10).

Millennial rest in the Promised Land will be the portion of Israel in the future. Walter Kaiser also interpreted the rest as future. He believed that first Israel, and then all believers, would fulfill this promise by possessing the Promised Land in the Millennium.¹⁸⁷ However, this passage seems to be referring to eternal rest for all believers, of which the Millennium is just the beginning. Israel will be the primary people God blesses and makes a blessing in the Millennium. Neither is this "Sabbath rest" the present rest

¹⁸⁵Ellingworth, p. 250.

¹⁸⁶P. E. Hughes, p. 160.

¹⁸⁷Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:518 (April-June 1973):149-50.

that Christians enjoy, because God has finished His work of providing salvation for us in Christ, and we have entered into it by faith. That should be clear because "the rest" in view is still future for us (cf. vv. 1, 6, 9, 11).

4:10 When we enter that rest, we can cease walking by faith, because then we will experience what we now only hope for (11:1; cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). We will cease from our work "as God did from His." The Hebrew word translated "rested" in Genesis 2:2 literally means "ceased." God's work of creating did not exhaust Him, since He never tires (Ps. 121:4; Isa. 40:28). He simply stopped creating on the seventh day.

4:11 In the meantime, we need to follow Jesus' and Moses' examples of *faithfulness to God*. We need to carry out the work He has given us to do (i.e., to continue to trust and obey, rather than turning from Him; 3:2, 6, 14). Note again that the writer said he faced the same danger as his readers: "Let us" (cf. v. 16).

"We enter into rest only when we persevere in faith to the end of life. When we do this, we will obtain a share in the inheritance, the millennial land of Canaan, and will rule with Christ as one of His *metochoi* [partners] there. Rest is not just the land itself; it also includes the state or condition of 'finished work,' of final perseverance, into which the faithful Christian will enter. God has not set aside His promises to Israel. The promise of the inheritance, the land, is eternally valid, and those Christians who remain faithful to their Lord to the end of life will share in that inheritance along with the Old Testament saints."¹⁸⁸

Christians need to "be diligent to enter that rest." If the "rest" were just getting to heaven, we would not have to exercise diligence, because God has promised that all believers will go to heaven (John 10:27-28; Rom. 8:30; Phil. 1:6; et al.). Or, if the "rest" were just the *rest* we presently enjoy, because God has forgiven our sins, we would not have to be diligent to enter *it*, either—because we already have entered into *that rest*.

"*That rest* of which the author has been speaking is not something to be trifled with; it calls for full seriousness and intensity of application on the part of those who wish to *enter* into its enjoyment. The issue is eternal in its consequences, for the sole alternative to entry is exclusion. Hence the need to be serious and, like the apostle Paul, to stretch out for what lies ahead and press toward the goal of God's heavenly rest (Phil. 3:13f.)."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸Dillow, p. 109.

¹⁸⁹P. E. Hughes, p. 162.

"There are many different kinds of hearing in this world. There is indifferent hearing; there is disinterested hearing; there is critical hearing; there is skeptical hearing; there is cynical and mocking hearing. The hearing that matters is the hearing that listens eagerly, and then believes and then acts. The promises of God are not merely beautiful pieces of literature; they are not merely sweet sayings which mean nothing; they are promises on which a man is meant to stake his life and by which he is meant to dominate his action."¹⁹⁰

4:12 After we die, or experience the Rapture, God will do a spiritual postmortem on us at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). He will examine our innermost attitudes ("thoughts") and motives ("intentions"). The "scalpel" He will use is His Word. The Word of God is "living" because it is the word of the *living God* (3:12), and it is "active" (energetic, powerful).

The "two-edged sword" in view (Gr. *machairan*) was originally a small one, like a boning knife that cooks used to cut up meat. In its double-edged form, it was a symbol for judges and magistrates in the Roman world. It illustrated the power of those officials to turn both ways to get to the bottom of a case. However, it is possible that by the time Hebrews was written, *machaira* (sword) had come to mean a sword of any size, long or short.¹⁹¹ The writer pictured this sword as a devouring beast (cf. 2 Sam. 11:25).¹⁹²

The Word of God can express (bring out) and distinguish between what is "soulish" (natural) and what is spiritual, in our motivation and actions. It can do so even when those elements are as close to each other as our "joints and marrow." It is even able to expose our "thoughts" (attitudes) and "intentions" (motives; cf. 1 Cor. 4:5).

"The Jew always regarded a word, not as a sound, but as a power."¹⁹³

"What the author is saying is that God's Word can reach to the innermost recesses of our being. We must not think that we can bluff our way out of anything, for there are no secrets hidden from God. We cannot keep our thoughts to ourselves."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰Barclay, p. 33.

¹⁹¹Moffatt, p. 56.

¹⁹²Dods, 4:281.

¹⁹³Barclay, p. 34.

¹⁹⁴Morris, p. 44.

Many Christians use this verse to show that God will judge unbelievers with His piercing Word, but in the context it refers to God judging believers to determine rewards (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

4:13 Our Lord will examine every Christian; not one ("no creature") can avoid His judgment seat. This prospect should motivate every Christian to remain faithful to God until we see Him. We should "fear" (anticipate seriously, v. 1) as we prepare for it (cf. 1 John 2:28). Will God find us faithful when we see Him?

4:14 Our "great High Priest" (2:17) has already proved faithful through suffering, and is now in God's presence where He intercedes for us (cf. Rom. 8:34). Compare our "great salvation" (2:3). He is not just a priest serving on earth, like Israel's high priests. He is our "file leader" (2:10), and we will follow Him "through the heavens" one day. This great High Priest is none other than Jesus, not an angel (1:4-14) or Moses (3:2-6). He is the Son of God (1:2).

"The picture of Jesus Christ as High Priest is the most distinctive theme of Hebrews, and it is central to the theology of the book."¹⁹⁵

Notice that this verse does not say that since we have such a High Priest, we *will inevitably* hold fast our confession. Perseverance in faith and good works is not inevitable, though perseverance in salvation is (2 Tim. 2:12-13). Since we have such a High Priest, we must *be careful to* "hold fast our confession." This verse concludes the exhortation to "enter [into] our (His) rest," that began in 3:12.

"The warning in Hebrews 3:1-4:13 is inextricably related to the Exodus generation and the concept of rest. By referring to Moses' and Christ's faithfulness in the house of God, the writer exhorted his readers to remain faithful to their worship function in God's house as believer-priests (Heb. 3:1-6).

"The generation in the wilderness is an example of those who failed to be faithful and as a result experienced both temporal discipline and eschatological loss. A royal enthronement psalm (Ps. 95), with its past and present perspectives, was used as the basis for explaining Israel's failure.

"Hebrews 4 begins with an application to the present readers. Four times the text says that the promise of rest remains [i.e., is future] (4:1, 6, 9, 11).

"The concept of rest in Hebrews 3:1-4:13 includes (a) a historical sense related to the Exodus generation and Joshua (Ps. 95; Josh. 21:44); (b) an eschatological sense related to the Exodus (Ps. 95); and (c) the sabbath

¹⁹⁵Fanning, p. 388.

rest related to the readers with its eschatological perspective (Gen. 2:2-3; Heb. 4:9).

"The readers' entrance into this eschatological rest depends on their faithfulness in doing good works. As *metochoi* ('companions') of Christ they must be diligent to receive eschatological reward (4:11-13) at the judgment seat of Christ. Failure to persevere may result in temporal discipline (12:4-11) along with the loss of future rewards and authority to rule with Jesus in the millennium."¹⁹⁶

"The reference to Jesus in his office as high priest in v 14 is not an afterthought, but the intended conclusion of the entire argument. The crucial issue for the community is whether they will maintain their Christian stance. The issue was posed conditionally in 3:6b, and more pointedly in 3:14. It was raised again forcefully in v 14 in the exhortation to hold fast to the confession that identified Christians as those who had responded to the message they had heard with faith (cf. v 2). The ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary as a faithful high priest in the service of God gives certainty to the promise that God's people will celebrate the Sabbath in his presence if they hold fast their initial confidence."¹⁹⁷

D. THE COMPASSION OF THE SON 4:15—5:10

Having explored the concept of Jesus as a *faithful* high priest (3:1—4:14), the writer proceeded next to develop the idea that Jesus is a *merciful* high priest in the service of God (cf. 2:17). A high priest must be faithful to God and compassionate with people. This section is entirely exposition, except for 4:16, which is an exhortation to pray. Verses 15 and 16 of chapter 4 announce the perspectives that the writer developed in 5:1-10.

- "A The old office of high priest (5:1)
- B The solidarity of the high priest with the people (5:2-3)
- C The humility of the high priest (5:4)
- C' The humility of Christ (5:5-6)
- B' The solidarity of Christ with the people (5:7-8)
- A' The new office of high priest (5:9-10) . . .

"As a unit 4:15—5:10 lays the foundation for the great central exposition of Jesus' priesthood in 7:1—10:18, where the emphasis will be placed on his dissimilarity to the Levitical priesthood."¹⁹⁸

4:15 Jesus experienced temptation in every area of His life ("in all things"), as we do. Obviously He did not experience temptation to waste His time by watching too much television, for example. However, He experienced the

¹⁹⁶Oberholtzer, 578:196.

¹⁹⁷Lane, p. 105.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 111.

temptation to waste His time in other ways, and to do or not do things contrary to God's will. His temptations did not come from a sinful nature, as many of ours do. He was never tempted by an inward desire for sin. He had no sinful nature, but He suffered temptation as we do because He was fully human. Since He endured every temptation successfully, He experienced temptations more thoroughly than we do when we yield to them before they pass. Consequently He can "sympathize" (feel and suffer) with us when we experience temptation. The writer's point was that Jesus understands us, He sympathizes with us, and He overcame temptation Himself.

"The Stoics argued that the very essence of God's being and nature was that God was beyond all feeling. . . . The Epicureans held that the gods lived in perfect happiness and blessedness [detached from and unaware of the world]. . . . The Jews had their *different* [holy] God [which attribute of God led them to think that He could not really sympathize with them]. And into that world of thought there comes the Christian religion with its completely incredible conception of a God who has deliberately undergone every human experience."¹⁹⁹

As an illustration of the thoroughness of Jesus' temptations, imagine a large boulder on the seacoast. Since it does not move, it experiences the full force of every wave that beats against it. Smaller pebbles that the waves move around do not receive the full force, because they yield to the force of the waves. Similarly, Jesus' temptations were greater than ours, because He never yielded to them. By the same principle, a prizefighter (Jesus) who defeats the champion (Satan) endures more punishment than other contenders, who throw in the towel or are knocked out before the end of the fight.

". . . in this epistle as high a Christology as is conceivable is combined with an emphasis on the real humanity of Jesus. Nobody insists on the limitations of Jesus' human frame as does the writer of Hebrews."²⁰⁰

"The best person to give you advice and help on a journey is someone who has travelled the road before you. The best person to help you through an illness is someone who has come through it."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹Barclay, pp. 39-40.

²⁰⁰Morris, p. 17.

²⁰¹Barclay, p. 41.

4:16 Since we have such a High Priest to intercede for us with God, we can approach ("draw near to") God *confidently* in prayer (cf. 3:6; 10:19, 35). Every Christian can come right up to God's heavenly "throne," not just the high priests of Judaism. The high priests of Judaism could only approach God at His earthly throne, in the holy of holies in the tabernacle or temple, once a year. God's throne of judgment (for the Israelites) has now become a "throne of grace" (undeserved help) for us. Our Sovereign will be *merciful* (not giving us what we deserve) and *gracious* (giving us what we do not deserve). This verse again contrasts the superiority of Christianity over Judaism.

"The problem with those to whom our author is writing is that instead of drawing near they are in danger of drawing back (cf. 10:35). In the face of opposition they are showing signs of a loss of confidence and even of turning away from the faith into apostasy."²⁰²

5:1 To qualify for the high priesthood in Israel, one had to be, first, a man. The "high priest" appointee would be expected to stand between "God" and "people" as their representative *before* Him. His services would also include presenting "gifts" (offerings) of worship and "sacrifices for sin."

"Although it would be natural to distinguish between *dora*, 'gifts' (i.e., peace and cereal offerings), and *thysiai*, 'sacrifices' (i.e., the sin and trespass offerings), in later statements in the OT all sacrifices pertain to the procuring of atonement and the removal of sin (cf. Ezek 45:15-17). The bloody offerings for the Day of Atonement are in the foreground of the discussion of the sacrificial ministry of the Levitical high priest here and elsewhere in Hebrews (cf. 7:27; 10:4, 12, 26)."²⁰³

Exodus 28:1, 3; 29:1 stressed that the high priest was appointed *for God*, but in this verse the writer said that he was "appointed for men (the people)." Both statements are true.

"A. J. Gossip used to tell his students how he felt when he was ordained to the ministry. It was as if the people said to him: 'We are for ever involved in the dust and the heat of the day; we have to spend our time getting and spending; we have to serve at the counter, to toil at the desk, to make the wheels of industry go round. We want you to be set apart so that you can go in to the secret place of God and come back every Sunday with a word from God to us.'"²⁰⁴

²⁰²P. E. Hughes, p. 174.

²⁰³Lane, p. 116. Cf. P. E. Hughes, p. 175.

²⁰⁴Barclay, p. 42.

5:2-3 A high priest also had to be, second, a compassionate person. This grew out of his own consciousness of being a sinner himself ("he is also subject to weakness"). In other words, he needed not only to carry out his duties acceptably, but he also needed to do so with the proper attitudes and feelings. "Deal gently with" (Gr. *metriopathein*) means neither indifferent to moral lapses nor harsh.

"Although nothing is said in the Old Testament about moral qualities [such as compassion], the writer has deduced this quality of gentle understanding from the basic fact that the high priest is essentially a man among men."²⁰⁵

The evidence of Israel's high priest's sinfulness was the fact that he had to offer sacrifices "for his own sins (himself) as well as for [those of] the people." Since Jesus Christ was sinless, He did not need to do this (4:15; 7:27). However, Jesus Christ's compassion far exceeded that of other high priests.

5:4 Third and finally, a man could attain the high priesthood only by divine appointment.

"The essential nature of a high priest is that he should be chosen by God to act for his fellows in offering sacrifices related to the removal of sin."²⁰⁶

Only those whom *God* chose ("called") served in this office. These high priest appointees were primarily "Aaron" and his successors. This ceased to be true after Israel lost her sovereignty as a nation, beginning with the Babylonian Captivity. Then the high priesthood became a political appointment. However, the writer was speaking of Israel as a sovereign nation. Disaster befell those individuals who took it upon themselves ("no one takes this honor on himself") to perform high priestly duties without divine authorization (Korah, Num. 16; Saul, 1 Sam. 13:8-14; Uzziah, 2 Chron. 26:16-21). The writer stressed the essential *humility* of the high priest, who stood in his privileged position only by divine appointment. He was not stressing the dignity of his office or the grandeur of his call to his office.²⁰⁷

5:5-6 God appointed Christ as King-Priest when He sat down at the right hand of God following His ascension (1:5). The title "Christ" ("Anointed One") stresses our Lord's humility. As the *Anointed of God*, Jesus (cf. 4:14) "did not exalt Himself" as He might well have done.²⁰⁸ These two offices and

²⁰⁵Guthrie, p. 125.

²⁰⁶Ellingworth, p. 272.

²⁰⁷Lane, p. 117.

²⁰⁸Guthrie, p. 127.

functions (*king* and *priest*) were primary in the writer's argument in this epistle. Psalm 2:7-9 and Psalm 110:1 (cf. 1:13) predicted Messiah's reign as king. Psalm 110:4 also predicted His priesthood. The same God who appointed Jesus as His "Son" also appointed Him as "high priest" *forever* (cf. 6:20; 7:17, 21, 24, 28). We have a Great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, and it is while He is *Son* that He carries out His vocation of *high priest*.²⁰⁹ No other New Testament writer referred to Psalm 110:4, but this writer quoted it three times (cf. 7:17, 21) and alluded to it eight more times (in chs. 5—7).²¹⁰

"The appeal to Melchizedek, who as the first priest mentioned in Scripture is the archetype of all priesthood, validates Jesus' priesthood as different from and superior to the Levitical priesthood."²¹¹

"When . . . Jerusalem fell into David's hands and became his capital city (II Sam. 5:6ff.), he and his heirs became successors to Melchizedek's kingship, and probably also (in a titular capacity at least) to the priesthood of God Most High."²¹²

"All that a priest does in offering sacrifice for men Christ does. But whereas they do it only symbolically, he really effects atonement.

"There was no succession of priests from Melchizedek and thus no 'order.' Jesus, however, was a priest of this kind—not like Aaron and his successors."²¹³

5:7 The phrase "days of his flesh [Gr. *sarx*]" draws attention to the weakness that characterized Jesus' life during His earthly sojourn. Jesus' offerings to God (cf. v. 1) included His "prayers" and petitions ("appeals"). Specifically, Jesus' "prayers" from Gethsemane and the cross—that were part of His offering of worship and expiation to God—illustrate this (cf. Ps. 22:22-24; Heb. 2:12). However, Jesus' entire passion ministry is probably in view here.²¹⁴ God heard and granted Jesus' prayers, the evidence of which was Jesus' resurrection (cf. Ps. 22:22-31). "Piety" means reverent submission, godly fear, and trust. Jesus' "prayers," specifically, demonstrated His ability to sympathize and identify with those He represents (vv. 2-3; cf. John 17). The writer of Hebrews said

²⁰⁹Moffatt, p. 64.

²¹⁰See D. M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, pp. 46-47.

²¹¹Lane, p. 123.

²¹²Bruce, pp. 95-96.

²¹³Morris, p. 49.

²¹⁴Lane, p. 120.

more about Jesus' priestly ministry than any other New Testament writer.²¹⁵

Most students of Scripture believe that Jesus prayed that, if it was the Father's will, Jesus would not have to endure the Cross (Luke 22:42). A few have understood Him to mean that He wanted the Father to prevent Satan from killing Him in the Garden of Gethsemane.²¹⁶

Scripture records Jesus weeping on three separate occasions: at the tomb of Lazarus, over the city of Jerusalem, and in the Garden of Gethsemane.

5:8 Even as *God the Son* ("though He was God's Son"), and as such perfect in one sense, Jesus gained something through His sufferings. He *gained* experiential *knowledge* of what being a human involves. Similarly, Jesus *grew* in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). He "learned obedience" in the sense that He learned to obey His Father's will—as a *human*—"through what He suffered." For Jesus, God's will involved suffering (cf. Phil. 2:6-8).

"It is when the child is told to do something which pains him, and which he shrinks from, that he learns obedience, learns to submit to another will."²¹⁷

"Innocence is life untested, but virtue is innocence tested and triumphant."²¹⁸

"Here the remarkable thing is that Jesus had to suffer, not because but although he was *huios* [son], which shows that Jesus is Son in a unique sense; as applied to Jesus *huios* means something special. As divine *huios* in the sense of 1:1f [i.e., 1:1-2], it might have been expected that he would be exempt from such a discipline."²¹⁹

5:9 This experience "perfected" Jesus Christ, in the sense that it *completed* Him as our Great High Priest, by giving Him experiential knowledge of what human beings must endure. *Obeying* God in this verse means *trusting* Him (cf. John 6:29; Acts 6:7; Rom. 10:16; 1 Pet. 1:22). Jesus is, of course, the source of "eternal," not just temporal, "salvation" to all who initially believe on Him. However, in view of the writer's emphasis, it may be that he was also referring here to the ultimate aspect of our salvation, our *eternal inheritance* (1:14; 9:15). We obtain *this* to the extent that we

²¹⁵See Manson, pp. 109-10.

²¹⁶E.g., McGee, 5:540.

²¹⁷Dods, 4:289.

²¹⁸Thomas, p. 64.

²¹⁹Moffatt, p. 66.

"obey" God, and obey Him through suffering as Jesus did (cf. Mark 8:34-35).²²⁰ A major reason that early Jewish Christians suffered was because they chose to follow Christ. Likewise today, all Christians face the temptation to play down their commitment to Christ in the face of persecution of various kinds. Jesus Christ is the "source" (cause) of our inheritance, not only because it comes from Him, but also because as our "file leader" (Pioneer), He has blazed a trail through suffering for us (2:10). He is also the "source" of our inheritance because, as our High Priest, He provides what we need to live obediently to God.

"It is a nice touch that he who learned to obey brought salvation to those who obey."²²¹

5:10 It was for this purpose, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest, in order to help us in our obedience and sanctification, that God appointed Jesus as our High Priest. The writer developed the subject of "the order of Melchizedek" later (ch. 7).

Jesus Christ is not only superior to angels (1:5-14) and to Moses (3:1-6), but also to Aaron (5:1-10).

"The orientation given to the exposition is intensely practical. The solidarity of the heavenly high priest with the community in its weakness provides a strong motivation for earnest prayer. The demand to draw near to the one who is thoroughly familiar with the human condition, who suffers with their suffering, and who is therefore qualified to mediate renewed strength (4:15-16) is an appeal to recognize the importance of prayer in the rhythm of Christian life."²²²

III. THE HIGH PRIESTLY OFFICE OF THE SON 5:11—10:39

The transition from exposition (4:15—5:10) to exhortation (5:11—6:20) marks the beginning of a new division in this "sermon" (see the Genre section in the Introduction). The structure of this division is as follows.²²³

- a** Preliminary exhortation (5:11—6:20)
 - A** The priest who is like Melchizedek (7:1-28)
 - B** The single, personal sacrifice for sins (8:1—9:28)
 - C** The achievement of eternal salvation (10:1-18)
- a'** Concluding exhortation (10:19-39)

²²⁰Cf. Dillow, p. 132.

²²¹Morris, p. 50.

²²²Lane, p. 123.

²²³Ibid., p. 128.

A major theme of Hebrews, redemptive sacrifice, now comes into prominence in this section of the text.

A. THE DANGER OF IMMATURITY (THE THIRD WARNING) 5:11—6:12

"Dull of hearing" (5:11) and "sluggish" (6:12, Gr. *nothroi* in both cases) form an *inclusio* that frames this pericope, and sets it off as a distinct textual segment. This Greek word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The first two warnings in Hebrews were against drifting (2:1-4) and disbelief (3:7-19). All of the warning passages in Hebrews involve actions in relation to the Word of God.

"It is commonly assumed on the basis of 5:11—6:3 that the community addressed had failed to mature in faith and understanding, and consequently required rudimentary instruction rather than the advanced exposition of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice presented in 7:1—10:18. The problem with this reconstruction of the situation is that it is not supported by the detail of the text. The biblical interpretation and the presentation of christology in 1:1—5:10 presuppose advanced Christian instruction and a level of understanding that corresponds to the adult consumption of solid food and not to a diet of milk. In addition, the writer shows no inclination to review with his hearers the foundational elements of the Christian faith [6:1]. He clearly regarded the hearers as mature. He reminds them that they have ingested over a considerable period of time the instruction that qualified them to be the teachers of others (5:12). Consequently, the portrayal of them as infants who have to be nurtured with milk is not an actual description of some or all of the members of the community. It is irony, calculated to shame them and to recall them to the stance of conviction and boldness consonant with their experience (6:4-5, 10) and hope (6:9-12). The community has deviated from its earlier course (cf. 10:32-34) by becoming sluggish in understanding (5:12). Their regression to infancy must represent a quite recent development. It was apparently an attempt to sidestep their responsibility in a world that persecuted them and held them in contempt, but it threatened their integrity. The purpose of 5:11—6:12 is to preserve the community from such aberration by reminding them of what they have experienced and what they possess through the gospel . . ."224

"If you keep in mind that the emphasis in this section is on *making spiritual progress*, you will steer safely through misinterpretations that could create problems."225

²²⁴Lane, p. 135. For defense of the view that Jesus is the object of faith in this passage, and not just our model and enabler of faith, see Victor (Sung-Yul) Rhee, "Christology and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 5:11—6:20," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 2000):83-96.

²²⁵Wiersbe, 2:294.

1. The readers' condition 5:11-14

5:11 "Him" (or "this") refers to Melchizedek (v. 10; cf. 6:20—10:18). Evidently the original readers had begun to let their minds wander as they heard the same things repeatedly. Rather than listening carefully, hearing completely, and comprehending clearly, they had become mentally and spiritually dull in their hearing. They were not slow learners, but had allowed themselves to grow "lazy." A spiritual *callus* was growing over their ears.

"Deafness or dullness in receptivity is a dangerous condition for those who have been called to radical obedience. The importance of responsible listening has been stressed repeatedly in the sermon (2:1 . . .; cf. 3:7b-8a, 15; 4:1-2, 7b)."²²⁶

"One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression, or backsliding, is a dullness toward the Bible. Sunday School class is dull, the preaching is dull, anything spiritual is dull. The problem is usually not with the Sunday School teacher or the pastor, but with the believer himself."²²⁷

5:12 Every Christian becomes capable of instructing others when he or she learns (has a mature grasp of) the elementary truths of the faith. This is true whether one has the gift of teaching (i.e., the ability to communicate with unusual clarity and effectiveness) or not. However, when we fail to pass on what we know, we begin to lose what we know. Eventually, we may need to relearn the most basic teachings of Scripture. When we stop growing, we start shrinking. We do not simply stay the same.

"Christians who have really progressed in the faith ought to be able to instruct others (as 1 Peter 3:15 shows; cf. Rom. 2:21)."²²⁸

5:13 Immature babies consume only "milk." They cannot chew and assimilate solid food because they are immature. Comparing milk and solid food was very common in Greek ethical philosophy.²²⁹ Thus the readers would have had no question about the writer's meaning. Similarly, immature ("inexperienced") Christians take in only the basics of the gospel, because they cannot receive and assimilate the more advanced aspects of the faith. They cannot do this because they have not tried repeatedly (practiced) to understand and apply these more advanced truths. This is a picture of

²²⁶Lane, p. 136.

²²⁷Wiersbe, 2:294.

²²⁸Morris, p. 51.

²²⁹Moffatt, pp. 70-71.

Christians who have been content to know and practice only the most elementary lessons of their faith. They are too lazy to do what is necessary to grow. Of course, even mature adults continue to need milk, which is pre-digested food, but they can also eat solid food.

5:14 The writer's point in these verses is not just that spiritual babies lack information, which they do, but that they lack experience. A person becomes a "mature" Christian, not only by gaining information, though that is foundational, but by using that information to make decisions that are in harmony with God's will. "The word (message) of righteousness" (v. 13) is the "solid food" (v. 14) that results in righteous behavior. In this present context, the "solid food" must refer to instruction about the high priestly office of Jesus Christ (cf. 7:1—10:18). Practice is essential for maturity. Consequently, a brand new Christian cannot be "mature" by this definition, even if he or she follows the leading of the Spirit (i.e., is "spiritual," cf. 1 Cor. 2:14—3:3).

"Spiritual maturity comes neither from isolated events nor from a great spiritual burst. It comes from a steady application of spiritual discipline."²³⁰

The readers were in danger of not comprehending what the writer had to tell them, because they had not put into practice, in their lives, what they *did* understand. Instead, they were thinking of departing from the truth.

"As we grow in the Word, we learn to use it in daily life. As we apply the Word, we exercise our 'spiritual senses' and develop spiritual discernment. It is a characteristic of little children that they lack discernment. A baby will put anything into its mouth. An immature believer will listen to any preacher on the radio or television and not be able to identify whether or not he is true to the Scriptures."²³¹

This section gives four marks of spiritual immaturity: laziness (dullness) toward the Word (v. 11), inability to teach the Word to others (v. 12), a diet of only elementary truths in the Word (vv. 12-13), and lack of skill in applying the Word (v. 14). As with the muscles in our bodies, if we do not use what we have gained spiritually, we will lose it (cf. 2 Pet. 3:18).

2. The needed remedy 6:1-3

The writer proceeded to explain what the community of Christians whom he addressed should do to change their dangerous condition.

²³⁰Guthrie, p. 136.

²³¹Wiersbe, 2:295.

6:1 Since they needed stretching *spiritually* they should, with the writer, "press on to maturity." That is, they should not be content with their present condition. In this context, spiritual maturity involves: receiving and responding appropriately to revealed truth (5:14), zeal for the realization of hope (v. 11), and unwavering faith and steadfast endurance (v. 12).²³²

"It is a moral duty to grow up, and the duty involves an effort."²³³

The verb translated "let us press on" (*pherometha*) is in the passive voice. We could render it, "Let us be carried on" (i.e., by God's Spirit). Spiritual maturity does not come merely by striving with self-effort, but by cooperating with God as we do His will, while depending on His help. It comes as we follow the Holy Spirit who leads and empowers us (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16).

". . . they are saved. They are genuine believers. Thus their need is not knowledge; rather, they need to use the knowledge they possess."²³⁴

The writer proposed that his readers leave "elementary teaching about the Messiah" in the past. They did not need to learn that again, presumably by catechetical instruction.²³⁵ They did not need further instruction about abandoning confidence in works for salvation ("repentance from dead works": either in the form of works that bring death, defiling works, now meaningless Levitical rituals, or of legalism) and turning to God in "faith." This too was foundational truth they did not need to learn again.

6:2 Neither did they need further instruction in four other subjects: "Washings" evidently refers to the doctrine of spiritual cleansing. The Greek word translated "washings" is *baptismos*, which refers to Jewish ceremonial washings whenever it occurs in the New Testament (Mark 7:4, 8; Heb. 9:10). A different Greek word (*baptisma*) describes Christian baptism. This means that the writer was not referring to baptism here, but to spiritual cleansing.

The "laying on of hands" in Judaism was part of the sacrificial ritual (Lev. 1:4; 3:2; 4:4; 8:14; 16:21; et al.), transferring a blessing (Gen. 48:14-15; et al.), and commissioning for public office (Num. 27:18, 23; Deut. 34:9; cf. Acts 6:6; 13:3). In the early church, the imparting of the Holy Spirit sometimes accompanied this practice (Acts 8:17-18; 19:6; cf. v. 4, 2:4; 10:29).

²³²Lane, p. 140.

²³³Moffatt, p. 72. Cf. 2 Peter 3:18.

²³⁴Pentecost, p. 103.

²³⁵Bruce, p. 112.

The Old Testament taught "the resurrection of the dead" (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2) and "eternal judgment" (Gen. 18:25; Isa. 33:22).

"We are responsible people, and one day we shall rise from the dead and give account of ourselves to God. This must have been of importance to new converts in a time when many people thought of death as the end of everything."²³⁶

The writer presented the six foundational teachings in verses 1 and 2 in three pairs: (1) repentance from dead works, and faith toward God (v. 1), (2) instruction about washings, and laying on of hands (v. 2a), and (3) instruction about the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (v. 2b). The structure of this sentence in Greek suggests that the last two pairs explain the first pair. Laying the foundation of repentance and faith consists of instruction regarding washings, sortilege (laying on hands), resurrection, and judgment. The first pair points God-ward, the second man-ward, and the third forward into the future.

Each of these teachings was foundational in Judaism as well as in Christianity. Most of the original readers would have come to believe these truths even before they became Christians. They are very basic.

6:3 We will press on to maturity "if God permits." The writer again (v. 1) acknowledged dependence on God for spiritual growth. We can continue to grow only as He enables us to do so.

"It seems that the apostle here addresses true Christians, as non-Christians cannot grow in their ability to experientially apply the word of righteousness to daily life and have their spiritual senses trained in spiritual discernment."²³⁷

What does a stagnant, sour believer need? He or she needs to mature. How does growth toward maturity take place? It happens when, by God's grace, the believer responds positively to further revelation beyond the basics. We see examples of the danger the writer warned his readers about all around us. Many Christians attend churches where they only hear the basics repeatedly. Their ears become dull, they stop growing, and many of them turn away from the faith. Some of these people follow cultic leaders who claim to offer deeper spiritual truth. Those who put themselves under the challenge of more advanced sound teaching, and respond properly to it, grow more mature.

3. The dreadful alternative 6:4-8

The writer pointed out in these verses the consequences of not pressing on to maturity, in order to motivate his readers to *diligently* pursue spiritual growth (cf. 2 Pet. 1:5; 3:8).

²³⁶Morris, p. 54.

²³⁷Dillow, p. 434. His whole nineteenth chapter, pp. 433-55, deals with Hebrews 6.

Christians have interpreted this passage in many different ways. Some believe that those who fall away (v. 6) are believers who lose their salvation.²³⁸ Others hold that those who fall away are people who have professed to be believers but really are not.²³⁹ Still others take the whole situation as hypothetical. They believe that if a Christian could lose his salvation, which he cannot, it would be impossible for him to be saved again.²⁴⁰ A fourth view is that only Hebrew Christians, living before the destruction of the temple (A.D. 70), could have committed this sin, whatever it is. The view that I believe harmonizes best with the writer's emphasis is that those who fall away are believers who turn away from God's truth and embrace error (i.e., apostates). The majority of scholars view these people as genuine believers.²⁴¹

"The transition from the first person (vv. 1-3) to the third person suggests that the author does not wish explicitly to identify the people described with the readers of the epistle. This may be partly out of tact; it is certainly (cf. v. 9) in part because he believes that his readers can still avoid apostasy."²⁴²

6:4 The writer could describe Christians fairly as those who were once "enlightened" (cf. 10:32; 2 Cor. 4:3-6). The "heavenly gift" of which they have "tasted" (cf. 2:9) at conversion seems to refer to salvation (cf. John 4:10; Rom. 6:23; James 1:17-18). Any attempt to interpret tasting as only partial appropriation (i.e., the idea that they tasted it but did not swallow it) is not credible.²⁴³

"This is not to explain Scripture, [but] to explain it away in favour of some preconceived doctrine."²⁴⁴

Elsewhere the same Greek word translated "tasted" refers to complete appropriation (e.g., Jesus Christ "tasted death" for everyone, 2:9; cf. 1 Pet. 2:1-3). This is an Old Testament usage as well (cf. Ps. 34:8).²⁴⁵ Christians become "partakers" (cf. 1:9, "companions"; and 3:1, 14, "partakers") of the Holy Spirit through Spirit-baptism.

²³⁸E.g., Westcott, pp. 148-53; Moffatt, pp. 76-82; I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God*; and other Arminian writers.

²³⁹E.g. Bruce, pp. 118-25; P. E. Hughes, pp. 206-24; Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, pp. 298-320; E. Schuyler English, *Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 160-68; Homer A. Kent Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 107-15; R. K. Hughes, 1:156-57; and *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1315.

²⁴⁰E.g., Guthrie, pp. 140-46; Thomas Hewett, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 106-11; Thomas, pp. 72-75; Kenneth S. Wuest, "Hebrews Six in the Greek New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:473 (January 1962):45-53; Wiersbe, 2:297; and *The Ryrie Study Bible: New Testament. King James Version*, p. 404.

²⁴¹Marshall, p. 142.

²⁴²Ellingworth, p. 318.

²⁴³E.g., John MacArthur, *Hebrews*, p. 143.

²⁴⁴F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, p. 82.

²⁴⁵Guthrie, p. 141.

6:5 Every true Christian has "tasted" the Word of God and found it to be "good" to some extent. The original readers had also tasted the "powers (lit. 'miracles') of the [messianic] age to come." They had observed the apostles perform miracles (cf. 2:3-4). The five events listed in verses 4 and 5 view salvation as involving different aspects; they do not present a succession of salvific events.²⁴⁶

"Together, the clauses describe vividly the reality of the experience of personal salvation enjoyed by the Christians addressed."²⁴⁷

"These are all given as actual spiritual experiences."²⁴⁸

"The warnings are clearly not addressed to nominal Christians, but to those who have shared, as fully as it is possible to share in the present time, in the blessings which accompany and follow entry into the Christian life (6:4f.)."²⁴⁹

6:6 Earlier in this letter, the writer had warned his Christian readers about drifting away from the truth through negligence (2:1-4). He had also warned them about failing to continue trusting God and walking by faith (3:7-19). Now he referred to the same apostasy as "falling away."

"The aorist tense indicates a decisive moment of commitment to apostasy. In the LXX, the term *parapiptein* has reference to the expression of a total attitude reflecting deliberate and calculated renunciation of God (Ezek 20:27; 22:4; Wis 6:9; 12:2; cf. Michaelis, *TDNT* 6:171 . . .).²⁵⁰ In Hebrews it is equivalent to the expression *apostenai apo theou zontos*, 'to fall away from the living God,' in 3:12. Apostasy entailed a decisive rejection of God's gifts, similar to the rejection of the divine promise by the Exodus generation at Kadesh (3:7—4:2 . . .). . . . What is visualized by the expressions in v 6 is every form of departure from faith in the crucified Son of God. This could entail a return to Jewish convictions and practices as well as the public denial of faith in Christ under pressure from a magistrate or a hostile crowd, simply for personal advantage (cf. Mark 8:34-38 . . .)."²⁵¹

²⁴⁶Philip E. Hughes, "Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Peril of Apostasy," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 (1973):143.

²⁴⁷Lane, p. 141.

²⁴⁸Robertson, 5:375.

²⁴⁹Ellingworth, p. 75.

²⁵⁰Cf. P. E. Hughes, "Hebrews 6 . . .," pp. 146-50.

²⁵¹Lane, p. 142. Cf. J. C. McCullough, "The Impossibility of a Second Repentance in Hebrews," *Biblical Theology* 20 (1974):2-3.

Falling away from the truth is not a hypothetical possibility, but a tragic reality in too many cases, among believers (cf. Num. 14:27-32; Gen. 25:29-34; Heb. 3:7-19; 10:23-25, 35-39).²⁵² Christians departed from the faith in the first century (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:17-18), and they also do so today (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1).

"The author repeatedly urges his readers to maintain their Christian profession and confidence (cf. 3:6, 12-15; 6:11, 12; 10:23-25). The man who falls away is evidently the one who casts that confidence, and its attendant reward, aside (10:25)."²⁵³

To what is it "impossible" for an apostate to be *renewed*? The writer said it is "repentance," not forgiveness or salvation. Immediately the question arises whether this explanation is realistic, since some believers—who have departed from the truth—have repented and returned to the fold of the faithful. I believe the writer meant that in the case of apostates, the really hard cases who are persistently hostile to Christ, it is impossible to restore such people to repentance (cf. vv. 1, 3, 7-8). The word "apostate" refers to extreme cases of departure from the truth. We usually refer to less serious departure as "backsliding." This inability to repent is the result of sin's hardening effect, about which the writer had sounded a warning earlier (3:13). It is also the result of divine judgment (cf. Pharaoh, Exod. 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17).

Some people, who earlier in their lives have given evidence of being true Christians, have later renounced their belief in Christianity, and even in the deity of Christ. Does this mean they were never saved in the first place? Possibly. But it may mean that they were believers and were misled by false teaching. If such a person persists in his or her departure from the truth, this verse warns that he or she might not be able to return to the truth.

The Hebrews writer also wrote about three other "impossible" things: It is impossible for God to lie (v. 18), for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (10:4), and for someone to please God without faith (11:6).

"God has pledged Himself to pardon all who truly repent, but Scripture and experience alike suggest that it is possible for human beings to arrive at a state of heart and life where they can no longer repent."²⁵⁴

"That certain persons could not repent of their sins was, e.g., an idea admitted in rabbinic Judaism."²⁵⁵

²⁵²Lane, p. 141.

²⁵³Hodges, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 70-71. Cf. McGee, 5:546.

²⁵⁴Bruce, p. 124.

²⁵⁵Moffatt, p. 77.

Even God cannot renew these apostates to repentance, because He has chosen not to do so.

"... the author does recognize the possibility that one may have regressed so far that it is impossible to again make progress toward maturity. He therefore states in verses 4-6 that it may be impossible to renew certain believers so that they can progress toward maturity."²⁵⁶

Would it not glorify God more for apostates to repent? Evidently, by making it impossible for them to repent, God will bring greater glory to Himself than if they did repent. Consider the glory that came to God because the Pharaoh of the Exodus did not repent. One might ask the same question in regard to everyone being saved? Would it not glorify God more for everyone to be saved than for some to perish eternally?

God allows this hard condition, because, by repudiating Jesus Christ, these apostates dishonor Him. The writer spoke of this dishonor ("open shame") in terms of taking the side of Jesus' enemies who crucified Him ("they again crucify to themselves the Son of God") and publicly humiliated Him ("put Him to open shame"). The apostates in view *recrucify* Him, in the sense of passing judgment against Him again, by repudiating Him and His work, as those who literally crucified Jesus did. Evidently these "hard cases" are not those who turn away from just any aspect of God's will, but specifically the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

"The meaning of the vivid phrase ["they again crucify to themselves the Son of God"] is that they put Jesus out of their life, they break off all connexion [*sic*] with him; he is dead to them."²⁵⁷

"Anyone who turned back from Christianity to Judaism would be identifying himself not only with Jewish unbelief, but with that malice which led to the crucifixion of Jesus."²⁵⁸

"... once Christ and his sacrifice have been rejected, there is nowhere else to turn. . . . The 'impossibility' of a second repentance is thus not psychological or more generally related to the human condition; it is in the strict sense theological, related to God's saving action in Christ."²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶Pentecost, pp. 105-6.

²⁵⁷Moffatt, p. 80.

²⁵⁸Guthrie, p. 144.

²⁵⁹Ellingworth, p. 323.

"Just as the Hebrew spies who returned from their expedition carrying visible tokens of the good land of Canaan nevertheless failed to enter the land because of their unbelief, so those who had come to know the blessings of the new covenant might nevertheless in a spiritual sense turn back in heart to Egypt and so forfeit the saints' everlasting rest."²⁶⁰

Not only did the 10 spies fail to enter the Promised Land through unbelief, but so did the whole adult generation of Israelites who left Egypt with Moses (Num. 14). It was "impossible" for them to repent, in the sense that, even though they confessed their sin of unbelief (Num. 14:40), God would not permit them to enter the land (Num. 14:41-45). Two New Testament examples of these "hard cases" may be Hymenaeus and Alexander. Paul said he had turned them over to Satan so that they might learn not to blaspheme—because they had apostatized (1 Tim. 1:18-20).

6:7

"A double illustration forms a transition between the negative and positive realities described in vv. 4-6 and vv. 9-12:

vv. 4-6	v. 7	v. 8	vv. 9-12
negative reality	positive image	negative image	positive reality" ²⁶¹

In the illustration in this verse, the "ground" represents believers who drink in the water ("rain") of God's Word, and bear fruit as a result. This kind of response leads to God bestowing a blessing on those individuals who, by their fruit-bearing, have become a blessing to others (cf. Matt. 13:23).

6:8

If no good fruit results, however, but only dangerous and destructive "thorns and thistles," God will bring judgment on this ground rather than blessing it (cf. John 15:2, 6).

"Worthless" literally means disapproved (Gr. *adokimos*). It does not mean totally rejected, but rather failing to gain God's blessing (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27). It is "in danger of (close to) being cursed," but is not "cursed" like unbelievers are. "Burned" does not mean burned *in hell* (cf. 1 Cor. 3:13-15). In ancient times, as well as today, farmers often burned their fields to remove unwanted vegetation, not to destroy the field itself. This is evidently a judgment on a believer that God allows because of his or her apostasy (cf. Isa. 9:18-19; 10:17; John 15:6; Heb. 10:17). The judgment might result in premature death in some cases (cf. 1 John 5:16-17).

²⁶⁰Bruce, pp. 119-20. Cf. 3:7-11. See also Lang, pp. 98-107.

²⁶¹Ellingworth, p. 325.

However, the text does not warrant concluding that this fate will befall every apostate. Some "fields," once burned, turn out to be more productive in the future, and that might be what God's judgment would lead to in the case of some apostates (cf. 1 Tim. 1:19-20). The purpose of the burning (chastening) is restoration to fruitfulness (cf. 13:1-9, 18-23).²⁶²

The history of the interpretation I have offered in this passage, and in Hebrews generally, is as follows. Robert Govett was one of the earliest modern authors who wrote on the theme of the Christian's rewards.²⁶³ He was also a leading figure in the school of thought that took the warnings of Hebrews as being addressed to Christians who were eternally saved and secure. However, some in this school also believed that unfaithful Christians would miss the Millennium, and spend 1,000 years in a kind of "purgatory." Those in this school include G. H. Lang,²⁶⁴ R. E. Neighbor,²⁶⁵ and probably Philip Mauro.²⁶⁶

Among the standard commentators, B. F. Westcott, James Moffatt, and I. Howard Marshall, as well as most others, took the view that the writer addressed true Christians in the warning passages. These three men took what we would call an Arminian stance, believing true Christians can lose their salvation, but they believed the writer addressed Christians in these passages.

Students of this passage sometimes assume that the view that the writer addressed only false professors (i.e., not genuine Christians) is the majority view, but it is not. It is, however, the most popular Calvinistic interpretation.

Another modern writer who takes this passage as I do is R. T. Kendall.²⁶⁷ He also discussed briefly the history of this interpretation in the church fathers.²⁶⁸ Hodges also held this view²⁶⁹ as did Oberholtzer,²⁷⁰ Dillow,²⁷¹ Gleason,²⁷² McGee,²⁷³ and others.

4. The encouraging prospect 6:9-12

Even though the danger his readers faced was great, the writer believed they could avoid it. Consequently he concluded this warning, as he did the ones in 2:1-4 and 3:1—4:16, with a word of hope to encourage his audience.

²⁶²See Charles C. Bing, "Does Fire in Hebrews refer to Hell?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:667 (July-September 2010):342-57.

²⁶³See Robert Govett, *Entrance Into the Kingdom*.

²⁶⁴G. H. Lang, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 106-7.

²⁶⁵R. E. Neighbor, *If They Shall Fall Away*.

²⁶⁶Philip Mauro, *God's Pilgrims*.

²⁶⁷R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved*, pp. 175-99, and 219-28. Kendall succeeded D. Martin Lloyd-Jones as minister of Westminster Chapel, London, England.

²⁶⁸Kendall, pp. 224-25.

²⁶⁹Hodges, "Hebrews"; and *The Gospel . . .*

²⁷⁰Oberholtzer, "The Warning . . .," 145:319-28.

²⁷¹Dillow, pp. 433-55.

²⁷²Randall C. Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:617 (January-March 1998):62-91.

²⁷³McGee, 5:546-49.

6:9 The "better things" in view reflect the writer's confidence that his readers would not turn away from the truth. He based his confidence on their realizing the dreadful consequences of apostasy—that he had just explained—and avoiding it. "Salvation" refers to the full salvation ahead of them, about which he had been speaking throughout this epistle (cf. 1:14).

"The things to which he refers are defined in the following verses (6:10-12): work and love, diligence to the end, and faith and patience. Salvation is the victorious participation with Christ in the coming kingdom as it is in Heb. 1:14, which only those who persevere as companions of the King will inherit. The writer obviously expects that his readers will persevere to the end, enter into rest, and obtain these blessings."²⁷⁴

This is the only place in the epistle where the writer referred to his readers as "beloved" (dear friends). This affectionate term softens the severity of the warning just given (vv. 4-8). Verses 9-12 provide strong evidence, I believe, that genuine Christians are in view throughout this warning passage.

6:10 God had taken note of ("not unjust so as to forget") the readers' commendable Christian conduct ("your work and the love which you have shown"), and would justly reward them for it. Therefore they should persevere in it ("show the same diligence . . . until the end"; "continue to serve," HCSB) and not turn aside from it (i.e., apostatize). "Not unjust" is understatement; God is, of course, eminently and perfectly just. This is also *litotes*, a figure of speech that sets forth a positive idea by stating its negative opposite (cf. Acts 12:18; 15:2; 17:4, 12; 19:24; 27:20; et al.).²⁷⁵

6:11-12 "Hope is important. Probably no movement has ever gripped the hearts of people if it did not give them hope."²⁷⁶

Earlier the writer had described his readers as being "sluggish" (lit. "lazy," 5:11). Now he urged them to be diligent and to stop being lazy (v. 12; cf. Prov. 24:30-34; 2 Pet. 1:5, 10). The same Greek word (*nothroi*) occurs in both places. He wanted them to remain *faithful* to God, while waiting *patiently* for Him to fulfill His promises to them regarding their future inheritance (be "imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises").

²⁷⁴Dillow, p. 132.

²⁷⁵For further discussion of rhetorical elements in Hebrews, see Trotter, pp. 164-77.

²⁷⁶Morris, p. 58.

"The theme of imitation recurs in 13:7, and in both instances faith is seen as steadfast persistence that pursues the divine promise . . ." ²⁷⁷

"In the arid times, the best thing to do is to go on with the habits and the routine of the Christian life and the life of the Church. If we do, we can be sure that the sun will shine again." ²⁷⁸

Some commentators have used this verse to support the unbiblical idea that believers should look to their *good works* as evidence of their election and as the basis for their *assurance of salvation* ("show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope"). This verse is not saying that. The Greek word *plerophoria* always means "fullness" in the passive sense, not "fulfilling." The writer meant that we need to be diligent regarding something we have already obtained, not to obtain something, namely: "assurance." ²⁷⁹

Note the linking of "love" (v. 10), "hope" (v. 11), and "faith" (v.12) here (cf. 10:22-24). This triad occurs often in the New Testament epistles (cf. Rom. 5:2-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6; Col. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:21-22).

B. THE BASIS FOR CONFIDENCE AND STEADFASTNESS 6:13-20

Again the change in genre, this time from exhortation to exposition, signals a new literary unit within the epistle. Here the writer proceeded to expound the reliability of God's promise to Christians through Jesus Christ's high priestly ministry. Notice the repetition of key words introduced in 6:12 as the exposition unfolds. This pericope contains a strong argument for the believer's eternal security, so it is unlikely that we should understand the earlier part of the chapter as saying that we can lose our salvation.

6:13-15 The writer offered "Abraham" as an encouraging and supreme example of one who continued strong in faith and patience.

"There is in Hebrews a sustained interest in Abraham (2:16; 6:13-15; 7:4-5; 11:8-19). The appeal to Abraham as a prototype of faithful endurance in vv 13-15 gives specific content to the exhortation in v 12." ²⁸⁰

"The promise" to which the writer referred here was the one God gave Abraham after he had obeyed God by offering up Isaac (cf. James 2:21). Abraham was still trusting God to fulfill His former promise regarding his

²⁷⁷Lane, p. 145.

²⁷⁸Barclay, p. 61.

²⁷⁹See Dillow, pp. 293-95.

²⁸⁰Lane, p. 150.

descendants by expecting Him to raise Isaac from the dead (Gen. 22:16-17). The writer was calling his readers to do what God called Abraham to do when He instructed him to go to Mt. Moriah. They too needed to continue to trust and obey, as they had done in the past, even though circumstances appeared as if their perseverance would result in tragedy. Having "patiently waited" and remained steadfast in the face of trying circumstances, Abraham qualified to receive everything God wanted to give him ("he obtained the promise"; cf. Col. 1:11; Heb. 12:1-3, 7; James 5:11).

6:16-18 When a person wants to end an argument, one way to do so is to appeal to a higher authority with an oath. For example, some people do this by saying, "I am telling the truth so help me God." *Even God* used "an oath" to guarantee His promise to bless Abraham greatly (Gen. 22:16; cf. Exod. 32:13; Isa. 45:23; Jer. 22:5; 49:13). "God [swearing] by Himself" signifies that He binds His word to His character. Thus God gave Abraham *double assurance* that He would indeed deliver what He had promised. He gave him: (1) the assurance of the promise of the God who does not lie, and (2) the assurance that God specially guaranteed that particular promise. The "two unchangeable things" are God's *promise* and His *oath*. God's *doubly-strong promise* to Abraham, then, can be a "great (doubly-strong) encouragement" to us, now, because God has also promised *us* future blessings. Specifically, He has promised that we will receive rewards when we see Him if we persevere faithfully now (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12).

The figure that closes verse 18 is an Old Testament one. In our times of temptation to apostatize, we can flee to ("take refuge" in) the promises of God. We can "take hold of" them, just as a fearful person in Israel could flee to the altar of burnt offerings, take hold of its horns, and be safe from his assailants. The *cities of refuge* also provided safety for the Israelites (Num. 35:9-15; Josh. 20). We have a *better* "Refuge" (our sure salvation and security in Christ: His Person, presence, and coming again for us; our "blessed hope") than the Israelites did in Judaism.

"In Hebrews, the word 'hope' never describes a subjective attitude (i.e., 'our hope,' or 'hopefulness') but always denotes the objective content of hope, consisting of present and future salvation . . ." ²⁸¹

6:19-20 These verses provide another illustration of our security. When Jesus Christ entered heaven at His ascension, He took our "hope" of future reward (glorification, inheritance, and full salvation) with Him. In the first century, sailors would carry their ship's *anchor* in a small boat and deposit it on the shore, so that the ship would not drift away as waves beat against it (cf. Acts 27:29-30).

²⁸¹Ibid., p. 153.

"The Greek word for *forerunner* was used in the second century A.D. of the smaller boats sent into the harbor by larger ships unable to enter due to the buffeting of the weather. These smaller boats carried the anchor through the breakers inside the harbor and dropped it there, securing the larger ship."²⁸²

In the same way, the "hope" that Jesus Christ has planted firmly in heaven should serve as an "anchor" for our storm-tossed souls. It should keep us from drifting away from God (cf. 2:1). The anchor was a symbol of hope in the ancient world.²⁸³ Our anchor rests firmly in the Holy of Holies ("within the veil"), in God's presence in heaven, with Jesus. According to Wiersbe, at least 66 pictures of anchors appear in the catacombs under Rome, indicating its popularity as a Christian symbol of Jesus Christ.²⁸⁴

"The author is not saying simply that hope secures the 'spiritual' aspect of man. He is affirming that hope forms an anchor for the whole of life. The person with a living hope has a steadying anchor in all he does."²⁸⁵

The writer returned here to his view of the *universe* (God's heavenly realm, and specifically, the heavenly temple) as the true tabernacle of God (3:1-6). He also returned to the thought of Jesus Christ as our High Priest after the "order of Melchizedek" (5:10).

The writer of Hebrews was now ready to proceed to serve the "solid food" he had mentioned previously, that said his readers needed to eat (5:14—6:1). This *spiritual meat* was specifically the exposition concerning the present high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ.

C. THE SON'S HIGH PRIESTLY MINISTRY 7:1—10:18

The great resource of Christians, when tempted to apostatize, is our high priest: Jesus Christ. The writer, therefore, spent considerable time and space expounding His high priesthood, to enable his readers to benefit from their resource. This section of the book continues to glorify Jesus Christ, so that the readers might appreciate Him sufficiently and not turn from Him. The priesthood of Melchizedek provided an analogy, for the writer, of Jesus' priesthood.

"Here begins the longest single expository passage in the epistle. Its very length suggests its importance. Its theme is the core theme of Hebrews. The real resource of the readership, in the midst of their pressures, is the

²⁸²*The Nelson Study Bible*, pp. 2085-86.

²⁸³Barclay, p. 63.

²⁸⁴Wiersbe, 2:298.

²⁸⁵Morris, p. 61.

high priesthood of Christ. They must realize the greatness of that priesthood, its superiority to the Levitical institutions, and the perfect access they have to it on the basis of Christ's death."²⁸⁶

"In Hebrews 7, the writer argued that Christ's priesthood, like Melchizedek's, is superior in its *order*. In Hebrews 8, the emphasis is on Christ's better *covenant*; in Hebrews 9, it is His better *sanctuary*; and Hebrews 10 concludes the section by arguing for Christ's better *sacrifice*."²⁸⁷

1. The person of our high priest ch. 7

"For the Jews of his day, it would have been axiomatic that there was no priesthood other than the Aaronic. We are now shown that the Law itself proves that there is a higher priesthood than that."²⁸⁸

The significance of Melchizedek 7:1-10

The writer began by explaining the significance of Melchizedek, since understanding *him* is foundational to appreciating Jesus Christ's high priestly ministry.²⁸⁹

"The dominant text in 7:1-10 is Gen 14:17-20, but in chap. 7 as a whole Gen 14:17-20 is subordinated to Ps 110:4 . . .

"The limits of the first section are confirmed literarily by an *inclusio* established between vv 1 and 10 by the repeated statement that Melchizedek met Abraham."²⁹⁰

The particulars of Melchizedek's significance 7:1-3

7:1-2 The writer referred to "Melchizedek" (lit. "Righteous King," probably a title rather than a proper name) as the head of a priestly order ("priest of the Most High God"). He called Melchizedek "King of Peace" because that was his realm, "Salem" being the name of his city-state. The order is significant: righteousness necessarily precedes peace.

It was not uncommon for one individual to combine the roles of "priest" and "king" in antiquity.²⁹¹ Aaron was also the head of a priestly order. The writer explained that Jesus Christ was a member of Melchizedek's order, not Aaron's (6:20). Melchizedek was a prototype of Jesus Christ in two

²⁸⁶Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 797.

²⁸⁷Wiersbe, 2:299.

²⁸⁸Morris, p. 62.

²⁸⁹See James Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," *Biblica* 55 (1974):333-48.

²⁹⁰Lane, p. 159.

²⁹¹Morris, pp. 62-63.

respects: (1) He was both a "king" and a "priest," and (2) what characterized him was "righteousness" and "peace" (cf. 12:10-11; Ps. 85:10; Isa. 32:17; Rom. 5:1; James 3:17-18).²⁹²

The fact that Melchizedek was a "priest" is clear from two facts: he "blessed" Abraham, and Abraham paid tithes ("apportioned a tenth part") to him "of all" the spoils that he had taken in war (v. 4; cf. Gen. 14:23-24). According to Moffatt, the Jews under the Mosaic Covenant did not pay tithes from the spoils of war.²⁹³ This was a pagan custom.

"It was common [in Abram's day] to offer a tenth of the spoils to the gods."²⁹⁴

These verses point out four important facts about Melchizedek: (1) he was a king-priest, (2) he was a blessing, (3) he received tithes, and (4) he had a significant name.

7:3 A literal interpretation of this verse might lead one to conclude that Melchizedek was an angelic being, and the Qumran Community evidently regarded Melchizedek as an angel.²⁹⁵ But there is no indication elsewhere in Scripture that he was anything but a human being. Neither should we conclude that Melchizedek was the pre-incarnate Christ, since the writer wrote that he was "made *like* the Son of God." Consequently most commentators have adopted a metaphorical interpretation of what the writer said of Melchizedek here.

Limiting our knowledge of Melchizedek to what Moses specifically stated, this first priest mentioned in Scripture had no *known* parents ("without father, without mother") or children ("without genealogy"), and no *known* birth ("beginning of days") or death ("end of life"). In this, too, Melchizedek represented the eternal "Son of God." It was essential that the Levitical priests be able to prove their ancestry (cf. Ezra 2:61-63; Neh. 7:63-65).

Since Moses did not record Melchizedek's death, this writer could say that he continued as a "priest" *forever* ("perpetually"), another respect in which he was like Jesus Christ. It is remarkable that in the record of Melchizedek in the Book of Genesis, which is full of genealogies, the genealogy of Melchizedek is absent.

²⁹²For more information about types and typology, see Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, ch. 9: "The Interpretation of Types"; and Roy B Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, ch. 8: "Testing the Types and Sensing the Symbols."

²⁹³Moffatt, p. 91.

²⁹⁴Robertson, 5:380.

²⁹⁵Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 798.

"When nothing is recorded of the parentage of this man, it is not necessarily to be assumed that he had no parents but simply that the absence of the record is significant.

"What was true of Melchizedek simply as a matter of record was true of Christ in a fuller and more literal sense. So the silence of the Scripture points to an important theological truth. . . . Thus it is not that Melchizedek sets the pattern and Jesus follows it. Rather, the record about Melchizedek is so arranged that it brings out certain truths, that apply far more fully to Jesus than they do to Melchizedek. With the latter, these truths are simply a matter of record; but with Jesus they are not only historically true, they also have significant spiritual dimensions."²⁹⁶

"It is when the writer bases his exposition on the silence of Scripture that his method of exegesis seems strangest to modern readers.

"The idea of basing exegesis on silence is familiar in Philo's writings and would not in itself have seemed strange to Jewish readers."²⁹⁷

In contrast with Melchizedek's *lack* of genealogy, the Aaronic priesthood depended *entirely* on genealogy. Unless a man could trace his genealogy back to Aaron, he could not serve as a priest (cf. Ezra 2:61-63; Neh. 7:63-65). His personal qualifications had nothing to do with becoming a priest. Everything depended on his physical ancestry: the blood line that he inherited. Melchizedek's (and Christ's) qualifications were, on the other hand, completely personal.

This verse highlights a fifth important fact about Melchizedek: he had a significant (unusual and unknown) family history, according to the biblical record.

The exposition of Melchizedek's significance 7:4-10

In these straightforward verses, which expound verses 1-3, the writer explained further how Melchizedek was superior to Abraham, the ancestor of Levi, the head of the priestly tribe under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant. He said more about three of the facts mentioned above: Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham, he blessed Abraham, and he lived longer than Abraham.

²⁹⁶Morris, pp. 63, 64. See also Charles P. Baylis, "The Author of Hebrews' Use of Melchizedek from the Context of Genesis," (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1989); Robertson, 5:381; and Lane, pp. 164, 166.

²⁹⁷Guthrie, pp. 156, 157. See also Barclay, pp. 69-70.

- 7:4 The writer's purpose was to show "how great" Melchizedek was compared to the venerated patriarch Abraham.
- 7:5-6a The descendants of Abraham paid tithes ("a tenth") to their priests, the sons of Levi, but Abraham himself paid tithes ("a tenth") to Melchizedek. The writer was really contrasting *Aaron* and Melchizedek more than Abraham and Melchizedek in this section. The writer implied that the one to whom Abraham paid tithes (Melchizedek) was superior to the one to whom Abraham's descendants paid tithes (the Levitical priests).
- 7:6b-7 Greater people *bless* lesser people, so the fact that Melchizedek blessed Abraham shows his superiority over Abraham in a second way, in addition to the fact that he received tithes from Abraham.
- 7:8 The sons of Levi, who received tithes from their brethren, died, but Melchizedek, who received tithes from Abraham, lived on. Melchizedek was immortal ("lives on") as far as the specific revelation of Scripture states. In contrast, Moses wrote that Abraham, Levi, and the Aaronic priests, all "mortal men," died.
- 7:9-10 In a sense, "even Levi" himself "paid tithes" to Melchizedek, since he "was still in the loins" of Abraham ("his father") when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. In the ancient Near Eastern view of things, people regarded a descendant as in one sense participating in the actions of his ancestors (Gen. 25:23; Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:11-13). This is true to reality in certain respects (cf. Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22), though we are responsible for our own actions, too (Ezek. 18:20). Levi, the head of the priestly tribe in Israel, had not yet begun his independent existence, but he was involved, in this sense, in everything that Abraham did.²⁹⁸

Barclay summarized the writer's arguments for the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood over the Levitical priesthood:

"(i) The Levites receive tithes from the people, and that is a right that only the Levites enjoy. Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham, and he was not a member of the tribe of Levi. . . . (ii) The Levites tithe their brother Israelites; but Melchizedek was not an Israelite; he was a stranger; and it was no ordinary Israelite from who he received tithes; it was from no less a person than Abraham, the founder of the nation. (iii) It was due to a legal enactment that the Levites had the right to exact tithes; but Melchizedek received tithes for the sake of what he was personally, and not because of any legal enactment. He had such an essential and personal greatness that he needed no legal enactment to entitle him to receive tithes. (iv) The Levites receive tithes as dying men; but Melchizedek lives for ever. (v) . . . Levi was a direct descendant of Abraham and Levi was the only man

²⁹⁸See Ellingworth, p. 369. Cf. Rom. 5:12-21.

legally entitled to receive tithes. Now, if Levi was a direct descendant of Abraham it means that Levi was already in Abraham's body. It was Abraham who begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Levi; therefore it can be argued that even at this time Levi was potentially in Abraham's body. Therefore when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, Levi also paid them, because he was included in Abraham's body; therefore Levi, the one man who was entitled to receive tithes, actually paid tithes to Melchizedek . . ."299

The superior priesthood of Jesus 7:11-25

Having shown the superiority of Melchizedek to Abraham and Levi, the writer proceeded to point out the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood and Jesus' priesthood. He did so to clarify for his readers the inferiority of the Mosaic Covenant and its priesthood. Not only was Melchizedek *greater* than Aaron; Melchizedek, though he preceded Aaron in time, also *replaced* Aaron.

"Within the structure of the homily, 7:1-28 is clearly defined as a literary unit. The reference to 'the Son of God' in v 3 prepares for the climactic reference to the 'Son' in v 28. The entire chapter is concerned with the Son as priest, or high priest, 'like Melchizedek,' who is superior to the Levitical priests. The fact that v 28 summarizes and concludes the comparison of Jesus as Son with the Levitical priesthood, a subject that occupies the writer in a preparatory way in 7:1-10 and directly in 7:11-28, is of special importance . . ."300

Genesis 14:17-20 now falls into the background, and Psalm 110:4 becomes dominant.³⁰¹ Note also the keywords "perfection" (v. 11) and "perfect" (vv. 19, 28). These two words not only form an *inclusio*, but they begin and end the argument of the pericope. *Perfection* did not come through the Old Covenant priests, but through "the Son"—the New Covenant Priest. Why would God replace the Levitical priesthood? Four reasons follow.

The imperfection of the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic Law 7:11-14

7:11 The writer's point was, that since God promised in Psalm 110:4 that the coming Messiah would be a priest after Melchizedek's order, He intended to terminate and replace the "Levitical priesthood" because it was inadequate. If the Levitical priesthood had been adequate, the Messiah would have functioned as a Levitical priest.

7:12 The priesthood was such a major part of the whole Mosaic Covenant, that this predicted change in the priesthood signaled a change in the whole Covenant ("the Law"). This verse is one of the clearest single statements

²⁹⁹Barclay, pp. 80-81.

³⁰⁰Lane, p. 177.

³⁰¹Cf. Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Melchizedek Christology in Heb. 7:1-28*, pp. 16-20.

in the New Testament indicating that God had terminated the Mosaic Law (Covenant; cf. Rom. 10:4). Paul went on to say that Christians, therefore, are not under it (Rom. 6:14-15; Gal. 3:24-25; 5:1; 6:2; 2 Cor. 3:7-11). That is, the Law is not what God has given to regulate the lives of Christians.

"If Christ is our high priest today, then there has to be a change in the law, since He could not qualify as a priest under the Levitical arrangement (being of the tribe of Judah). If the law has not been done away today, then neither has the Levitical priesthood; but if Christ is our high priest, we cannot be under the law. Every prayer offered in the name of Christ is an affirmation of the end of the law."³⁰²

"So by his own independent line of argument our author reaches the same conclusion as Paul: the law was a temporary provision, 'our tutor to bring us unto Christ . . . but now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor' (Gal. 3:24f.)."³⁰³

"The problem of the old system was twofold. First, all, priests and people alike, were breakers of the law, and the fact that the priests of the levitical order were themselves sinners incapacitated them for offering up an adequate and perfect sacrifice; indeed, they had first to offer sacrifice for their own sins before presenting an offering for the sins of the people (see v. 27 below; 5:3). Second, no unwilling and uncomprehending animal, such as was offered under the old system, was competent to serve as a true substitute for the human sinner."³⁰⁴

7:13-14 Further confirmation of this change were the prophecies that Messiah would come from the tribe of "Judah," not from the priestly tribe of Levi (Gen. 49:10; Mic. 5:2; Isa. 11:1).

The need for a better replacement 7:15-19

7:15-17 A third proof that God made a change in the priesthood, is that God predicted that Messiah would live "forever" (Ps. 110:4). Jesus Christ did not become a priest because He met a "physical requirement," namely, was born into the priestly tribe, and was thus qualified by His descent to

³⁰²Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):244. Cf. Morris, p. 67; and Hal Harless, "The Cessation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):349-66.

³⁰³Bruce, p. 145.

³⁰⁴P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, pp. 256-57.

serve as high priest. He became a *permanent* high priest after His ascension, because He would never die again. In this, He showed Himself to be a member of Melchizedek's "order," since Melchizedek appears from the scriptural record to have lived forever. Jesus is a "priest forever" because of His resurrection and ascension.³⁰⁵

". . . every single regulation that governed the old priesthood had to do with the priest's physical body. . . . Every single item in the whole ceremony is a physical thing, affecting the priest's body. . . . Christ's priesthood depends not on physical things, but on His character, His personality, His being, what He was in Himself. Here was a revolution; it is no longer outward ceremonies and observances that make a priest; it is inward worth."³⁰⁶

7:18-19 These verses summarize the argument that God has *superseded* the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic Law (Covenant). He has replaced the old system ("former commandment") with a "better," new system that can do what the old one could not do, namely, bring us into intimate relationship with God ("through which we draw near to God").

"The term *athetesis*, 'annulment,' is a stronger term than *metathesis*, 'alteration' (v 12)."³⁰⁷

The "better hope" we have is the assurance that this special, eternal, and intimate relationship is now possible for us to experience, thanks to our Great High Priest.

The inviolability of God's oath 7:20-22

Verses 20-25 draw out the pastoral implications of the conclusion that the writer reached in verses 18-19.

7:20-21 Another "oath" from God (cf. to Abraham, 6:16-18; Ps. 110:4) launched Messiah's priesthood. The Levitical priesthood had no such origin ("they indeed became priests without an oath"); this was another indication of its inferiority.

7:22 Because God promised on oath to install Messiah permanently as our priest, the writer could say that Jesus is "the guarantee of a better covenant." Since the old priesthood was the heart of the Old Covenant, and God terminated both of them, the new priesthood must be connected to a "New Covenant" that is superior to the Old Covenant. Since the new

³⁰⁵See Manson, p. 116.

³⁰⁶Barclay, p. 83.

³⁰⁷Lane, p. 185.

Priest has come, so must the New Covenant have come (cf. Luke 22:20). This is the first mention in the epistle of the word "covenant," which will play a major role in the writer's argument to follow.

"Hebrews develops the theme of the new covenant more fully than any other NT writer, the epistle accounting for just over half the occurrences of *diatheke* ["covenant"] in the NT."³⁰⁸

The writer used this word (Gr. *diatheke*) 17 times, far more than it occurs in any other New Testament book. He preferred this word to the more common *syntheke* ("covenant"), evidently because *syntheke* suggests an agreement made on relatively equal terms. *Diatheke* has the idea of a more absolute will, such as a "last will and testament."

The mortality of the Levitical priests 7:23-25

7:23-24 The Levitical ("former") "priests" had to succeed one another, "in greater numbers," because they kept dying, but Jesus Christ needs no successor ("holds His priesthood permanently") because He will not die. Josephus wrote that there were 83 different high priests between Aaron and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.³⁰⁹

7:25 The fact that Christ will not die and need replacement by another priest ("always lives to make intercession"), means that He can see His work of delivering ("He is able . . . to save") His people through to the end. He can deliver ("save") "completely" (better than "forever," v. 25), in the sense of seeing us through to the realization of our *full salvation*, our "rest" (inheritance) in God's presence (cf. 1:14).

"Here the author is not referring to His saving work as the salvation of sinners from judgment and death, but rather using the words *to save* in the sense of 'to bring to God's desired end' . . ."³¹⁰

(The writer just quoted viewed God's goal for every Christian to be spiritual maturity in this life, rather than the attainment of a full reward in the future.)

Our trials and temptations need not separate us from our inheritance, since Jesus Christ can continue to support us by providing mercy and grace (4:14-16)—all the way to our ultimate reward! What a comfort and assurance it is to realize that Jesus Christ Himself is praying for us constantly!

³⁰⁸Ellingworth, p. 386.

³⁰⁹Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:10:1.

³¹⁰Pentecost, p. 126.

This verse is not talking about eternal security, but about remaining faithful to the Lord, and, as a result, receiving our full reward. Our eternal security does rest on the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ, but that was not the writer's point here (cf. Rom. 8:33-34).

"It is important to emphasize this, for the character of our Lord's intercession has at times been grotesquely misrepresented in popular Christian thought. He is not to be thought of 'as an orante, *standing* ever before the Father with outstretched arms, like the figures in the mosaics of the catacombs, and with strong crying and tears pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God; but as a *throned* Priest-King, asking what He will from a Father who always hears and grants His request.'"³¹¹

"Despite these exhortations to faithfulness and warnings against unfaithfulness [in 6:4-6], Hebrews does not base the believer's assurance on works. The basis of ongoing assurance is Christ's high-priestly work of intercession."³¹²

"In Hebrews 'salvation' is presented as a future eschatological inheritance (1:14; 5:9; 9:28). There is, nevertheless, a definite sense in which the community has already begun to participate in salvation as a result of the obedience and sacrificial death of Christ and his subsequent exaltation (cf. 2:3-4; 6:4-5, 9)."³¹³

"Just as Christ's priesthood is permanent, so is the salvation which he makes possible."³¹⁴

The summary conclusion concerning Christ's superiority as a person 7:26-28

7:26 In view of His superior ministry, it is only fitting that our High Priest should be a superior Person. "Holy" (Gr. *hosios*) stresses blamelessness. (Another word translated "holy," *hagios*, stresses separateness.) "Innocent" means without guile or malice. "Undefined" looks at His absolute purity. "Separated from sinners" probably refers to His being in a different class from sinful people.³¹⁵

"The point, then, is that Christ, who is 'holy, blameless, unstained,' is *ipso facto* 'separated from sinners.'"³¹⁶

³¹¹Bruce, p. 155. His quotation is from H. B. Swete, *The Ascended Christ*, p. 95.

³¹²Colijn, p. 585.

³¹³Lane, p. 189.

³¹⁴Ellingworth, p. 391.

³¹⁵Manson, pp. 116-17.

³¹⁶P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 274.

Jesus was not only inherently pure, but He remains pure in all His contacts with sinners.³¹⁷ Another view is that Christ's separation from sinners refers to His exaltation.³¹⁸ "Exalted above the heavens" stresses His greatness, authority, majesty, and rule over all of the universe.

"The exposition is brought to a conclusion in vv 26-28 with a majestic statement concerning Jesus' character, achievement, and status as high priest."³¹⁹

7:27 In Israel's daily sacrifices, the priest had to "offer" a sacrifice "for his own sins" before he could offer one for the sins of others (Exod. 29:38-46; Lev. 4:3-12). Also, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would offer a sin offering for expiation for himself, and then another one for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:6-10).

". . . our author is speaking both generally and particularly in this verse, in such a way that when he says 'daily' he has in mind the complex daily sacrificial routine performed by high priest as well as priests, whereas when he says 'first for his own sins and then for those of the people' his thought is moving from the general to the particular, and is in fact beginning to focus on that great festival which was the annual consummation of the whole sacrificial system."³²⁰

Jesus Christ "does not need" to offer up periodic sacrifices to atone for sin, either for His own sins or for those of His people. His one ("once for all" [time and eternity]) sacrifice, of both worship and expiation on the cross, completely satisfied God. No subsequent sacrifices are necessary for that purpose. The writer proceeded to develop this thought more fully in 9:11-14 and 10:1-15, after introducing it initially here.

7:28 "The profound difference between the two priesthoods is detailed in a concluding contrast summarizing the argument of the entire chapter."³²¹

Jesus Christ is superior because He is "a Son" (i.e., *the* Son of God), rather than a mere man, because God appointed Him more recently than He appointed the Levitical priests, and because God appointed Him with an oath (v. 21). He is "perfect" because He offered one sacrifice for sin that was adequate to satisfy God completely (cf. 2:10; 5:8-10; 7:28; 12:2;

³¹⁷Guthrie, p. 168.

³¹⁸Robertson, 5:387.

³¹⁹Lane, p. 191.

³²⁰P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 277.

³²¹Lane, p. 194.

1 John 2:2). Because He is *perfect*, He can intercede effectively for us. Consequently we can go to Him confidently (cf. 4:16), any time we need His help for overcoming trials and temptations, specifically those trials that might result in our apostatizing. "Perfect forever" has the idea of not being subject to defects. He will never fail us, and another high priest will never replace Him.

To summarize, the superiority of Jesus' high priesthood is clear from four facts: (1) Jesus' priesthood did not depend on His ancestors but on Himself alone, (2) Jesus lives forever and never dies, (3) Jesus is sinless and never needs to offer a sacrifice for His own sins, and (4) Jesus offered a perfect and adequate sacrifice.³²²

In view of the superior order of priesthood that Melchizedek foreshadowed, and that Jesus Christ fulfilled, why would anyone want to go back to the old Aaronic order? The Person of our high priest is superior. The order of His priesthood is superior. Christ is completely adequate in His Person, and preeminent in His order. We should worship His Person, and rely on His intercession in view because of His order. And we should not abandon Him.³²³

"One of the most distinctive themes in the theology of Hebrews is the change from old to new in God's dealings with humankind. In Jesus Christ a decisive shift in salvation-history has occurred according to God's plan. What was provisional and ineffective has been superseded by the final and full salvation in the Son of God, a change anticipated in the Old Testament itself."³²⁴

2. The work of our high priest chs. 8—9

The writer developed, in this new section of the text, topics that he had announced thematically in 7:26-28.

"The unit introduced in 8:1-2 consists entirely of exposition. Its limits are indicated by an *inclusio*: corresponding to the statement in 8:3 that every high priest is appointed to offer (*prospherein*) gifts and sacrifices is the complementary declaration that Christ was offered (*prosenechtheis*) once to take away the sins of the people in 9:28. These limits are confirmed by the observation that the theme of Christ's entrance into the heavenly sanctuary, which is announced in 8:1-2, is actually developed in 9:11-28. The new unit extends from 8:1—9:28 and constitutes the central section within the compositional structure of the sermon. Its place at the center indicates the importance that the writer ascribed to this facet of his message . . ."³²⁵

³²²Cf. Barclay, p. 74.

³²³See also David J. MacLeod, "Christ, the Believer's High Priest: An Exposition of Hebrews 7:26-28," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:647 (July-September 2005):331-43.

³²⁴Fanning, p. 398.

³²⁵Lane, p. 202.

"As the writer has already discoursed at some length about Christ as high priest, it might be wondered what is still left to be expounded. But so far he has not explained how our high priest carries out his duties. This really forms the theme of the next two and a half chapters (to 10:18), but another important matter, the new covenant, is introduced in the course of the discussion. In the present chapter the ministry of Jesus and the need for a new covenant are linked together."³²⁶

The ministry of Jesus Christ as our High Priest involves a particular kind of *service*, which includes a covenant, a sanctuary, and a sacrifice. The writer here explained the service that Jesus Christ renders, in order to help his readers understand His adequacy as our High Priest. The writer moved on, from explaining the *person* of our Great High Priest, to expounding His *work*. In all of this, he was contrasting the superiority of Christianity with the inferiority of Judaism.

One writer observed a chiasmic structure in 8:1—9:28, that emphasizes the contrast between worship under the Old Covenant and under the New Covenant.³²⁷

- A The old worship, earthly and figurative (8:1-6)
- B The first covenant, imperfect and provisioned (8:7-13)
- C The old and powerless institution of worship (9:1-10)
- C' The new, efficacious institutions (9:11-14)
- B' The new covenant (9:15-23)
- A' The entrance to heaven (9:24-28)

The new ministry and covenant ch. 8

The writer's discussion of the new ministry and the New Covenant, in chapter 8, introduces his fuller development of those themes in chapter 9. His flow of thought proceeded as follows.

- A. Christ, the ministering priest (8:1-5)
 - 1. A new ministry (8:1-2)
 - 2. which is set in opposition to the old (8:3-5)
- B. Christ, the mediator of the new covenant (8:6-13)
 - 1. The new ministry is associated with a better covenant (8:6)
 - 2. which is set in opposition to the old (8:7-13)³²⁸

³²⁶Guthrie, p. 170.

³²⁷Albert Vanhoye, *A Structural Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 4, 20-23.

³²⁸M. Gourgues, "Lecture christologique du Psaume CX et fête de la Pentecôte," *Revue Biblique* 83 (1976):31.

"In 7:11-28 the writer drew attention to certain deficiencies in the Levitical arrangement. Among these were the mortality of the ministering priests (7:23) and the necessity of repeating sacrifices for sins, both of the priests and the people (7:27). Two further weaknesses of the Levitical arrangement are demonstrated on the basis of Scripture in 8:1-13. First, the contrast between the heavenly and earthly tabernacle is introduced to supplement the distinction between the new and the old. Levitical priests serve only a shadowy suggestion of the heavenly sanctuary in which Christ exercises his ministry. To the degree that the earthly sanctuary with its ministry only imperfectly corresponds to the ministry conducted in the presence of God, it is marked by deficiency. Secondly, the covenant under which the Levitical arrangement was instituted has been treated by God as obsolete. The mediation of the new covenant demonstrates the eschatological superiority of Christ's ministry and the divine intention to replace the old arrangement with another that is eschatologically new."³²⁹

Christ's better ministry 8:1-5

In this section the writer first stated (vv. 1-2), and then explained (vv. 3-5), Jesus Christ's better ministry. It is superior in three respects: (1) He serves as a *seated* priest, having finished His work of offering a final sacrifice for sins (v. 1). (2) He is an *enthroned* priest, having taken His place at the right hand of God the Father (v. 1). And (3) He is a *heavenly* priest, having entered the true sanctuary where He now ministers (vv. 1-2).

8:1-2 "What has been said" (v. 1) refers to chapter 7. This is a transitional statement. The writer now moved on to explain Jesus Christ's majesty and ministry more fully. Chapter 7 was in a sense introductory and foundational to what follows.

". . . the doctrine of Christ's high priesthood and the pilgrimage of God's people dominate the expository and paraenetic [i.e., exhortation] sections [of the epistle]. The theme of Christ as High Priest, however, is central to the epistle as a whole."³³⁰

The writer again referred to "the heavens," where God abides and where Jesus Christ now serves in the "real (true) tabernacle," the only one that does not imitate something better than itself. In particular, the Holy of Holies is in view. This is not a reference to the human nature of Christ, but to a different heavenly sanctuary (cf. 9:11).³³¹ These verses summarize what follows in chapter 8.³³²

³²⁹Lane, p. 204.

³³⁰David J. MacLeod, "The Doctrinal Center of the Book of Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146:583 (July-September 1989):300.

³³¹See P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, pp. 283-90.

³³²See idem, "The Blood of Jesus and His Heavenly Priesthood in Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:520 (October-December 1973):305-14.

"The throne He occupies and from which He ministers is not David's throne, which He will one day occupy here on earth as the promised Messiah (Matt. 25:31). Rather, He was identified with the throne of 'the Majesty in the heavens.' The authority assigned to the One so enthroned was to be 'a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle' (Heb. 8:2). Thus He was not appointed to be a king in an earthly domain, but rather He was appointed to function as a High priest in a new sanctuary. And the appointment as High Priest, according to Psalm 110:4, follows the enthronement of Christ at His Father's right hand."³³³

". . . the supreme function of any priest is to open the way to God for men."³³⁴

We not only have a High Priest, who has majestically taken His seat at the Father's right hand (v. 1), but we have One who now ministers as a priest in the heavenly sanctuary (v. 2; cf. Ps. 110:1).

"There are other sons beside the Son (2:10), but no other priests subordinated to Christ as high priest."³³⁵

8:3-5 Verse 4 sounds as though the Jewish priests were presenting offerings in Herod's Temple when the writer wrote. This understanding of the text has led some students of the book to date its writing before the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70.³³⁶ However, it is more likely that we should take these present tenses as timeless.³³⁷ The writer was describing what had been done in Judaism as though it was still going on, for the sake of vividness (cf. 7:27-28; 9:7-8, 25; 10:1-3, 8; 13:10-11). Nevertheless it seems likely that the epistle does indeed date from before A.D. 70.³³⁸

God had explained to Moses the fact that the tabernacle was a prototype of another temple, "the heavenly" one, when He gave him the directions for the construction of "the tabernacle" (Exod. 25:40; cf. Rev. 4:5-6; 6:9-11; 8:3-5; 11:19; 21:22). Moses may have received a vision of God's heavenly dwelling place then (cf. 1 Chron. 28:19).

"Probably the conception of the *tabhanith*, the 'model' (Exodus 25:9), also goes back ultimately to the idea that the

³³³Pentecost, pp. 131-32.

³³⁴Barclay, p. 94.

³³⁵Ellingworth, p. 403.

³³⁶E.g., P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 292.

³³⁷See Lane, p. lxiii.

³³⁸See my discussion of the date in the introduction section of these notes.

earthly sanctuary is the counterpart of the heavenly dwelling of a deity [in ancient Near Eastern thought]."³³⁹

Plato advanced the theory that physical things on earth are only shadows and copies of realities that exist in heaven. So what the writer to the Hebrews wrote here would have made sense to Platonic Greeks.

The writer's point was that Jesus' priesthood was not an earthly priesthood, but one that operated in the realm of heaven. Jesus could have functioned as a priest on earth after the order of Melchizedek, but His *real* priestly ministry of sacrifice and intercession began when He entered heaven. Jesus interceded for others during His earthly ministry (e.g., Luke 22:32; John 17), but His ministry as our *King-Priest* began with His ascension.

"The contrast developed is not simply between an earthly copy and a heavenly archetype but between a historical situation in the past and one that succeeded it *in time*. During the former situation, marked by the ministry of the Levitical priests, there was no entrance into the real, heavenly presence of God; full entrance into the eternal presence of God was made possible only with the life and redemptive accomplishment of Jesus."³⁴⁰

"In 8:1-5 the primitive Christian confession of Jesus as the one who has taken his seat at God's right hand is reinterpreted in the light of the theme of heavenly sanctuary and liturgy. The development of this theme, which dominates the argument in 8:1—9:28, is clearly the central and most distinctive aspect of the writer's interpretation of the saving work of Christ. . . . By means of a typological interpretation of the OT, the writer asserts that Christ has achieved what the sacrificial action of the high priest on the great Day of Atonement only foreshadowed. His entrance into the heavenly sanctuary, which is the true tabernacle where he has unrestricted access to the eternal presence of God, demonstrates the eschatological superiority of his priestly service to the ministry of the Levitical high priests. The priestly ministry of Christ in the celestial sanctuary is of capital importance in the thought of Hebrews."³⁴¹

³³⁹Frank M. Cross, "The Tabernacle," *Biblical Archaeologist* 10:3 (September 1947):62. Cf. G. Ernest Wright, "The Significance of the Temple in the Ancient Near East. Part III: The Temple in Palestine-Syria," *Biblical Archaeologist* 7:4 (December 1944):66.

³⁴⁰Lane, p. 207.

³⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 210.

The better covenant 8:6-13

The writer proceeded to explain the superiority of the New Covenant that Jesus Christ ratified with His blood (death), which is better than the Old Mosaic Covenant that He terminated when He died. He first explained the reason for the change in covenants (vv. 6-9), then he quoted the four superior promises of the New Covenant (vv. 10-12), and finally he underlined the certainty of the change (v. 13).

8:6 The superiority of Jesus' ministry as our High Priest rests, also, on the superiority of the ("better") "covenant" that forms the basis of that ministry. That covenant, in turn, rests on superior ("better") "promises," compared with the Mosaic Covenant promises, and on a superior "mediator," namely, Jesus Christ, compared with the angels and Moses (Gal. 3:19).

"Here we have a summary of the five points of superiority of Jesus as high priest (8:1-6). He is himself a better priest than Aaron (*toioutos* ["such a"] in 8:1 such as shown in 4:16 to 7:28); he works in a better sanctuary (8:2, 5); he offers a better sacrifice (8:3f.); he is mediator of a better covenant (8:6); his work rests on better promises (8:6); hence he has obtained a better ministry as a whole (8:6)."³⁴²

8:7 As with the priesthood (7:11-12), so it is with the covenant and its promises. Had the first been adequate ("faultless"), God would not have promised a second. Add "*and its promises*" after the word "covenant," which the translators have supplied in this verse, since "them" in verse 8 is plural.

8:8-12 God gave the promise of a *new covenant* because the people of Israel had failed Him. He also did so because the Old Mosaic Covenant did not have the *power* to enable them to remain faithful to God. The New Covenant includes the *power* whereby God's people may remain faithful, namely: *the presence of God* living within the believer (i.e., the Holy Spirit). This is one way in which it differs from the Old Covenant (v. 9).³⁴³

The writer used the Greek word *kainos* to describe this covenant. *Kainos* means different in quality as well as new in time, as opposed to simply new in point of time, which the Greek word *neos* describes. The New Covenant has not only been given more recently than the Old Covenant, but it is of a different, superior quality.

³⁴²Robertson, 5:388.

³⁴³For a helpful essays on the new covenant, see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, pp. 164-77; John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, pp. 176-91; and Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 68-97.

God promised that the New Covenant would enable *the Israelites* to do four things: They would (1) know and desire to do God's will ("I will put My laws into their minds, and . . . write them on their hearts"; v. 10b), (2) enjoy a privileged, unique relationship with God ("I will be their God, and they shall be My people"; v. 10c), (3) "know" God ("the Lord") directly (v. 11), and (4) experience permanent forgiveness of their sins ("I will be merciful . . . and . . . remember their sins no more"; v. 12). (A double negative in the Greek text of verse 12 [*ou me*] heightens this promise: "I will never, ever remember their sins.") These are the "better [i.e., unconditional] promises" the writer referred to earlier (v. 6).

". . . new covenant promises are not yet fully realized. The promises in Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel describe a people who have the law written in their hearts, who walk in the way of the Lord, fully under the control of the Holy Spirit. These same promises look to a people who are raised from the dead [cf. Ezek. 37], enjoying the blessings of an eternal inheritance with God dwelling with them and in them forever."³⁴⁴

Amillennial interpreters take the reference to "the house of Israel" and "the house of Judah" as "symbolical of the healing of every human breach and the reconciliation of all nations and persons in Christ, the seed of Abraham in whom all the peoples of the earth are blessed and united . . ."³⁴⁵ Premillennialists see no warrant, in the texts involved, to take these references as anything but literal.

8:13 The writer contrasted the New Covenant with the Old Covenant, namely, the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant is now "obsolete," and, even as the writer wrote the Book of Hebrews, it was also "growing old." It virtually disappeared in A.D. 70—when the Romans destroyed the temple, terminated its ritual and officiants, and scattered the Jews throughout the world (cf. Matt. 24:1-2). Some interpreters believe that, if the writer had written this book after A.D. 70, he would have written "has disappeared," rather than "is ready to disappear."³⁴⁶

"Now *aphanismos* ["ready to disappear"] is the word that is used for wiping out a city, obliterating an inscription, or completely abolishing a law. It indicates a complete obliteration or wiping out."³⁴⁷

³⁴⁴Craig A. Blasing, "The Fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, pp. 208, 209.

³⁴⁵P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 300.

³⁴⁶E.g., Robertson, 5:393.

³⁴⁷Barclay, p. 100.

The New Covenant is a branch of the Abrahamic Covenant. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised Abraham a piece of real estate for his descendants, an incalculable number of descendants, and blessing for his descendants and for all people through his descendants (Gen. 12:1-7; et al.). Deuteronomy 29—30, sometimes called the Palestinian Covenant, gave more information about the land God had promised to Abraham. The Davidic Covenant gave more information about God's promises regarding descendants (2 Sam. 7). The New Covenant revealed the particulars of the promised blessing (Jer. 31). Each of these later covenants relates to the Abrahamic Covenant organically; they were outgrowths of it. In contrast, the Mosaic (Old) Covenant does not relate organically but "was added" (Gal. 3:19), as an appendage. It explained how the Israelites could maximize the benefits God had promised in the Abrahamic Covenant. Consequently, when God terminated the Old Covenant, it did not eliminate anything He had promised Abraham. Another difference is that the Mosaic Covenant was bilateral and conditional ("If you will do this, then I will do this."). The other biblical covenants are unilateral and unconditional ("I will do this."), though they sometimes contain conditional elements subsumed under the divine promises.

Dispensational commentators have taken various positions on the relationship of the New Covenant, promised in Jeremiah 31, to the New Testament references to the New Covenant. Was it the same covenant, or is a second New Covenant in view? Some believe there are *two* new covenants: one with Israel and one with the church.³⁴⁸ This position rests on the fact that the New Covenant, promised in Jeremiah 31, was *specifically* "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31). Those who hold this view take the New Covenant, under which Christians live, as a *different* "New Covenant" (2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8; 9:15). They regard Jesus' references to the "New Covenant" as to a New Covenant *with the church* (Luke 22:20; cf. 1 Cor. 11:25).

Most dispensationalists believe there is only *one* New Covenant.³⁴⁹ Most of those who hold this view believe that the church enters into the blessings of this covenant. Even though the New Covenant was "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31), many of the benefits promised extended to all believers after Jesus Christ died (cf. Isa. 19:24-25; 42:6; 49:6; Rom. 15:9-12). Christians experience the blessings referred to in a measure now, but God will fulfill the covenant completely in the Millennium, when the Jews will experience *all* the promised blessings *fully* (Rom. 11:25-32).³⁵⁰ According to this view, when Jesus said the cup at the Lord's Supper represented His blood that is the New Covenant, He meant the following: His death was the *basis* for the fulfillment of the promises that the New Covenant contained. I prefer this view, mainly because I do not believe there is adequate basis in the text for applying the term "New Covenant" to two different covenants. There are few writers today who hold the "Two New Covenants" view.

³⁴⁸E.g., L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:325; J. F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 208-20; C. C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, pp. 105-25; and John R. Master, "The New Covenant," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, pp. 93-110.

³⁴⁹E.g., J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 5:286; C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible*, new ed., p. 1297; J. D. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 116-28; and Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 800. Walvoord and Ryrie also adopted this view after publishing their books cited in the previous footnote.

³⁵⁰Thomas, p. 107.

Suppose that there was a vastly wealthy, generous philanthropist. As he prepared his will, he bequeathed millions of dollars to various charitable causes that, on his death, would benefit millions of people all over the world. But he also wrote in his will, that when his only son reached 21, his son would inherit billions of dollars. When this man died, his son was only 5, so for 16 years he did not enter into his father's inheritance. But as soon as the philanthropist died, the millions of dollars that he had bequeathed to charity went to work to help many people immediately. This illustrates how the church enters into the blessings of the New Covenant. When Christ established the Lord's Supper, it was as though He had notarized *His* legal will. It became official right around the time He said, "This cup . . . is the New Covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). As soon as He died, His "estate" was made available to those whom He chose to benefit from His will and estate. Immediately, many people around the world, Jews and Gentiles among His followers, began to benefit from the blessings of His death. But His chosen people, His "son" Israel, will not enter into his inheritance until the appointed time: the Millennium. The "will" is the New Covenant. Blessings for the *church* began almost immediately after Christ's death. But blessings for *Israel* will not begin until Christ's appointed time for that arrives, namely: the Millennium.

Covenant theologians explain how the church benefits from the New Covenant promises, by saying that the church is "spiritual Israel." These promises, they claim, belong to Abraham's *spiritual* seed, but not to his *physical* seed. It is clear from Galatians 3:13-29 that Christians are the spiritual seed of Abraham, but that is not the same as saying the church is spiritual Israel.

"Once we are permitted to make such plain words as 'Israel' and 'Judah' mean something else, there is no end to how we might interpret the Bible!"³⁵¹

The heavenly sanctuary 9:1-10

"In case any of the readers should think that the writer was underestimating the old, he now outlines some of the glories of the old tabernacle. He is impressed by the orderliness of the arrangements within the Levitical cultus, and aims to present this in order to demonstrate the greater glory of the new."³⁵²

In this pericope, the writer concentrated on the tabernacle and its provisions for cultic worship. "Cultic" refers to the rituals involved in religious service. The word "first" (Gr. *prote*) links this section with the former one (cf. 8:13). The writer introduced two subjects in the first verse: regulations of divine worship, and the earthly sanctuary. He then proceeded to expound them in reverse order, as he often did in this homily (vv. 2-5 and 6-10).

³⁵¹Wiersbe, 2:306.

³⁵²Guthrie, p. 178.

"The writer is most concerned to stress that the disposition of the tabernacle and its cultic regulations expressed symbolically the imperfect and provisional character of the old Sinaitic covenant. His description emphasizes limited access and the inadequacy of the offerings."³⁵³

"The descriptions are based, not on the author's personal involvement in worship at Jerusalem . . . , but on scripture."³⁵⁴

It was natural for the writer to use the tabernacle for his lesson, rather than the temple, because he proceeded to associate this sanctuary with the giving of the Old Covenant at Sinai (cf. 8:5). Furthermore, he had been using Israel's experiences in the wilderness to challenge his readers.

9:1-5 The "first covenant" was the Mosaic Covenant. The writer compared it first to the New Covenant that replaced it. The "outer tabernacle" (lit. "dwelling place") was "the holy place" (v. 2), and the inner ("behind the second veil") "tabernacle" was the Holy of Holies (v. 3). "The table and the sacred bread" (v. 2) is a *hendiadys* for "the table of sacred bread." A "hendiadys" is a figure of speech, in which a writer expresses a single complex idea, by joining two substantives with "and," rather than by using an adjective and a substantive.

Some readers have understood verse 4 as saying that the altar of incense was in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. This seems to contradict the Old Testament, which located this altar in the holy place (Exod. 30:6; 40:3-5, 21-27).³⁵⁵ The writer of Hebrews probably meant that the "veil," not the Holy of Holies, had the "altar of incense" and the "ark of the covenant" connected with it (v. 3; cf. 1 Kings 6:22). These pieces of furniture were on either side of the veil. Describing it this way clarified that the writer meant the veil that hung between the holy place and the Holy of Holies. "Having" (Gr. *echousa*) should be understood in the sense of "belonging to" rather than "standing within."³⁵⁶

"Because of its function, the censer was commonly associated with the Most Holy Place (see Ex. 30:6; 40:6)."³⁵⁷

A second problem is that this writer described the ark as having a golden jar of manna and Aaron's rod that budded *in* it. The Old Testament says that these items were *beside* the ark in the holy of holies (Exod. 16:32-34; Num. 17:10-11).

³⁵³William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 217.

³⁵⁴Ellingworth, p. 420.

³⁵⁵See also Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 3:6:8; and idem, *Against Apion*, 2:8.

³⁵⁶Guthrie, p. 180. Cf. P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, pp. 309-13.

³⁵⁷*The Nelson . . .*, p. 2089.

"It would at least seem reasonable to suppose that if the urn and the rod were originally placed in front of the ark, yet subsequently, for the sake of convenience (for example, when carrying the ark from one place to another), they were placed inside it."³⁵⁸

"According to the rabbis, the ark disappeared at the time of the early prophets (Mishnah, *Yoma* 5:2; *Shekalim* 6:1f.); and there was a tradition that Jeremiah hid it (2 Macc. 2:4ff.)."³⁵⁹

"With the destruction of Solomon's temple in 587 B.C. the ark disappeared from the scene, and in the second or post-exilic temple, which remained standing until the sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the holy of holies was completely empty, the former position of the ark being demarcated by a slab of stone known as 'the stone of foundation.'"³⁶⁰

The writer declined to speak of the tabernacle furnishings in more detail (v. 5), because his main purpose was to contrast the two rituals and the two covenants.

9:6-10

He now passed on to the "regulations of divine service" (v. 1) in the Old Covenant, to further show its inferiority. The "outer tabernacle" is the holy place (v. 6), and "the second" is the Holy of Holies (v. 7). The high priest entered the Holy of Holies only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to offer the special sacrifices for that day (Lev. 16:2). His offering that day covered only those sins of the people that they committed ignorantly, as opposed to those they committed in deliberate apostasy (cf. Lev. 4:1-2; 5:17-19). Some ignorance is culpable (blameworthy); sins of this kind do matter. In Israel, the punishment for deliberate rebellion against the Mosaic Covenant was death. It is about this apostasy that the writer warned his audience. He also comforted them with the assurance that their High Priest would deal gently with the misguided who sin ignorantly (cf. 5:2).

The writer clarified that the Holy Spirit intended to communicate the fact that the Levitical system did not provide access into God's presence for the ordinary believer. The "holy place" is God's throne-room in heaven, and the "outer [lit. 'first'] tabernacle" refers to the earthly tabernacle and its successors, namely, the temples in Israel (v. 8).

³⁵⁸P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 315.

³⁵⁹Morris, p. 82.

³⁶⁰P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 314.

"The 'front compartment' (*he prote skene*) becomes a spatial metaphor for the time when the 'first covenant' (*he prote diatheke*) was in force. As an illustration for the old age, which is now in process of dissolution (8:13), it symbolizes the total first covenant order with its daily and annual cultic ritual (9:6, 7). Once the first has been invalidated, the second becomes operative (see 10:9). In the figurative language of the writer, the front compartment of the tabernacle was symbolic of the present age (*ton kaipon ton enestekota*), which through the intrusion of the *kairos diorthoseos*, 'the time of correction' (v 10), has been superseded . . ." ³⁶¹

The Old Covenant system of worship did not meet the deepest need of God's people, namely, intimate personal relationship with God. Its rites and ceremonies extended mainly to external matters—until God would provide a better system at "a time of reformation" (v. 10).

This comparison should help us keep externals in their proper perspective, as *secondary* to inward reality with God. Relationship with God purifies the *conscience*. It is possible to fulfill all the outward obligations of religion and still have a conscience that is not right with God (v. 9). This is one of the tragic inadequacies of *religion* that does not involve relationship with God.

"The necessity of a cleansed conscience is insisted upon throughout the letter [9:9, 14; 10:2, 22; 13:18]. A conscience stained with sin is the one effective barrier to man's fellowship with God . . ." ³⁶²

"The word *worship* comes from the same Anglo-Saxon root word as *worth*. To worship is to give someone something of which they are worthy. The Lord Jesus Christ is worthy to receive our praise and our adoration. That is worship, and from that follows service. Real worship will always lead to service." ³⁶³

"The reason for detailing the arrangement of the tabernacle and its furnishings in 9:2-5 is manifestly to show the lack of access to God under the old cultus. This, in turn, provides a framework for the development of certain deficiencies in the cultic regulations that had been imposed under the terms of the Sinaitic covenant in 9:6-10." ³⁶⁴

³⁶¹Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 224.

³⁶²F. F. Bruce, "The Kerygma of Hebrews," *Interpretation* 23:1 (January 1969):12. See also Guthrie, p. 184.

³⁶³McGee, 5:564.

³⁶⁴Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 226.

"The greatest festival of the Jewish year paradoxically shows most clearly the limitations of the old dispensation and its high priesthood."³⁶⁵

The Old Covenant sanctuary was inferior for five reasons: (1) It was an earthly sanctuary (v. 1), (2) it was a type of something greater (its antitype; vv. 2-5), and (3) it was inaccessible to the people (vv. 6-7). Furthermore, (4) it was only temporary (v. 8), and (5) its ministry was external rather than internal (vv. 9-10).³⁶⁶ A "type" is a divinely intended illustration of something else, the *antitype*. A type may be a person (cf. Rom. 5:14), a thing (cf. Heb. 10:19-20), an event (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11), a ceremony (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7), or an institution, as here.

The final purging of sin 9:11-28

The writer now focused on the issue of sacrifice.

"The argument moves a stage further as the author turns specifically to what Christ has done. The sacrifices of the old covenant were ineffectual. But in strong contrast Christ made an offering that secures a redemption valid for all eternity. In the sacrifices, a good deal pertained to the use of blood. So in accord with this, the author considers the significance of the blood of animals and that of Christ."³⁶⁷

"Blood" in Scripture is frequently a metonym (a figure of speech in which one thing stands for another) for "death," particularly violent death involving bloodshed. There was nothing "magical" about Jesus' blood, physically, that made it a cleansing agent for sin. It was the *death* of Christ that saves us, not something physically special about His blood. However, Scripture is full of references to something special about Jesus' blood, spiritually, powerfully, and effectually, as the purchase price for our redemption (cf. Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:12-14; Rev. 1:5 et al.).

In verses 11-14 the writer introduced Christ's high priestly ministry, which climaxes in verse 15. Verses 16-22 are parenthetical, explaining verse 15. Then verses 23-28 resume the discussion of Jesus' priestly ministry in heaven.

"The conception of Christ's death as a liturgical high priestly action is developed as a major argument in 9:11-28. Prior to this point in the homily, the high priesthood tended to be linked with Christ's present activity as heavenly intercessor (cf. 2:18; 4:15-16; 7:25; 8:1-2)."³⁶⁸

The superior priestly ministry 9:11-15

9:11 A better translation might be, "He entered in connection with the greater . . . tabernacle." Jesus Christ did not "pass through heaven" (4:14) in the

³⁶⁵Ellingworth, p. 434.

³⁶⁶Wiersbe, 2:308-10.

³⁶⁷Morris, p. 85.

³⁶⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 235.

sense of going on to some other place after He arrived there. He is there now (v. 24).

9:12 "Blood" is also a symbol of life (Lev. 17:11). The point is that the lives of innocent animal substitutes ("blood of goats and calves") were sufficient only to atone for sin temporarily. However, the life of Jesus Christ, because He was a perfect human Substitute, adequately paid for the "eternal redemption" of all people forever.

"This is the great distinction between Christ as High Priest and all other high priests. They offer blood (verse 7), but he offered his own blood."³⁶⁹

A few Bible expositors have believed that, when Christ ascended into heaven, He offered His literal blood upon a literal altar there.³⁷⁰ Most expositors, though, have understood these references to be metaphorical, and I agree with them.

Having died "once for all" (7:27; 10:10), Jesus was able to enter God's presence "once for all."

"There have been expositors who, pressing the analogy of the Day of Atonement beyond the limits observed by our author, have argued that the expiatory work of Christ was not completed on the cross—not completed, indeed, until He ascended from earth and 'made atonement "for us" in the heavenly holy of holies by the presentation of His efficacious blood'.

Footnote 82: "K. M. Monroe, *EQ* [*Evangelical Quarterly*] v (1933), p. 404 (in an article 'Time Element in the Atonement', pp. 397ff., which was answered by T. Houghton, 'The Atonement', *EQ* vi [1934], pp. 137ff.). Monroe argued that our Lord, after His resurrection, ascended immediately into heaven to sprinkle His blood on 'the heavenly capporeth [mercy seat]' and therefore could not allow Mary Magdalene to hinder Him (John 20:17) until He had completed this essential stage of His atoning work. The ascension of John 20:17 is thus quite distinct from the ascension of Acts 1:9."³⁷¹

³⁶⁹Robertson, 5:399. For an extended discussion of various views concerning the blood of Jesus and His heavenly priesthood, see P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, pp. 329-54.

³⁷⁰E.g., McGee, 5:566.

³⁷¹Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, pp. 200-201. Chafer, 4:118; 5:262-63; and 7:20 also held this view. See P. E. Hughes, "The Blood . . .," 519:195-212, for refutation and further discussion.

9:13-14 Old Covenant sacrifices for sin on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16; "the blood of goats and bulls") only provided temporary cleansing, but the sacrifice ("blood") of Jesus Christ provided permanent "cleansing." The author's reference to "the ashes of a heifer sprinkling" (cf. Num. 19) seems somewhat incidental to his argument. One writer explained it as follows:

"We have, then, a situation prevailing at the time when the Epistle to the Hebrews was written which would have particular point to the mention of the rite of sprinkling with the ashes of a heifer if the supposition is correct that the recipients of the letter were being enticed to imagine that the observance of this rite might be advantageous to them, Christians though they now professed themselves to be."³⁷²

The reference to "the eternal Spirit" is unique in Scripture. The Holy Spirit had empowered and sustained Jesus in His office.

"It seems that the writer has chosen this unusual way of referring to the Holy Spirit to bring out the truth that there is an eternal aspect to Christ's saving work."³⁷³

Other scholars take "the eternal Spirit" as referring to Christ's own spirit, which is eternal.³⁷⁴ While it is difficult to choose between these options, all three persons of the Trinity had a part in redemption (v. 14).

The "dead works" in view are evidently those of the Mosaic Covenant (cf. 6:1), though some commentators take them as referring to works of the flesh that result in spiritual defilement.³⁷⁵ They were "dead," in that they did not impart spiritual life, but only *covered* sin. P. E. Hughes saw them as "dead" in three ways: they proceed from him who is dead toward God, they are essentially sterile and unproductive, and they end in death.³⁷⁶

Thus there is a contrast between ceremonial and conscience cleansing, as well as between temporary and permanent cleansing, in these verses. We must not feel conscience-bound to follow the Old Covenant—in view of Jesus Christ's perfect sacrifice—but should serve God under the terms of the New Covenant. A notice on a church marquee warned: "Most people want to serve God, but only in an advisory capacity."

". . . for the author of Hebrews *syneidesis* [conscience] is the internal faculty within man that causes him to be

³⁷²Idem, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 364.

³⁷³Morris, p. 87.

³⁷⁴E.g., Robertson, 5:400.

³⁷⁵E.g., Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, pp. 206-7.

³⁷⁶P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, pp. 360-61.

painfully aware of his sinfulness and, as a result, to experience a sense of guilt."³⁷⁷

"The sacrifice that inaugurated the new covenant achieved the cleansing of the conscience that all worshipers lacked under the former covenant and that all had sought through prescribed gifts and offerings (10:1-2 . . .).³⁷⁸

"The implication (which underlies all the epistle) is that even in his earthly life Jesus possessed eternal life. Hence what took place in time upon the cross, the writer means, took place really in the eternal, absolute order. Christ sacrificed himself *ephapax* [once for all], and the single sacrifice needed no repetition, since it possessed absolute, eternal value as the action of One who belonged to the eternal order. He died—he had to die—but only once (9¹⁵—10¹⁸), for his sacrifice, by its eternal significance, accomplished at a stroke what no amount of animal sacrifices could have secured, viz. the forgiveness of sins."³⁷⁹

9:15 Since we have obtained "eternal redemption" (v. 12) through the death of our Mediator and the "eternal [Holy] Spirit" (v. 14), we can have hope in an "eternal inheritance." In contrast, believers under the Old Covenant enjoyed mainly temporary blessings, and had comparatively little understanding of eschatological rewards.

"With a play on the double meaning of *diatheke* (both 'a covenant' and 'a testament'), the author goes on to bring out the necessity for the death of Christ just as the death of the testator is required if a will is to come into force."³⁸⁰

". . . the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is retroactive. That is to say, the sacrifice of Christ is effective to wipe out the consequences of the sins of men committed under the old covenant, and to inaugurate the fellowship which is promised under the new covenant."³⁸¹

The readers should not feel guilty about abstaining from the rituals of the Old Covenant. Instead they should appreciate the accomplishments of

³⁷⁷Gary S. Selby, "The Meaning and Function of *Syneidesis* in Hebrews 9 and 10," *Restoration Quarterly* 28:3 (Third Quarter 1985/86):148.

³⁷⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 241.

³⁷⁹Moffatt, p. 124.

³⁸⁰Morris, p. 88.

³⁸¹Barclay, p. 117.

Jesus Christ's death.³⁸² They should also turn their attention to obtaining what God had promised them as a future inheritance, and continue to follow the Lord faithfully and patiently (6:12).

The New Testament revelation concerning the inheritance that believers can merit by faithful perseverance in the faith and good works is extensive. Some passages indicate that it involves participation in the "wedding banquet" at the beginning of the messianic kingdom (e.g., Matt. 25:1-13; et al.). Others present it as involving an especially "honorable resurrection" (Luke 20:35). Still other passages speak of it as "reigning with Christ" (Matt. 19:27-28; Luke 19:17-19; 22:28-30; Rom. 8:17-21), or as "treasure in heaven" (Matt. 6:19-21, 30; 19:21; Luke 12:32-33; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). It also involves receiving praise and honor from Jesus Christ and the Father (Matt. 6:1, 5, 16; 25:21; John 12:26; 1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:6-7; 2 Pet. 1:10-11). These honors are sometimes spoken of as "crowns" (Phil. 4:1; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Rev. 2:10; 4:9-10).³⁸³

The superior sacrifice for sin 9:16-28

"The author has made it clear that Christ's death has instituted a better covenant (vv. 11-15) which is superior to animal offerings (vv. 12-14). But the need for such a sacrifice has yet to be explored. So a key word in this subunit [vv. 16-28] is 'necessary' (*ananke*, vv. 16, 23). In the process of exploring this point, the author clearly underscored the measureless superiority of the sacrificial death of Christ."³⁸⁴

- 9:16-17 In certain respects the covenants God made with humankind are similar to wills. With all wills, the person who made the will must die before the beneficiaries experience any effects of the will.
- 9:18-21 The Old Covenant went into effect when the Levitical priests shed the blood of animal substitutes, and applied ("sprinkled") that "blood" to the covenant beneficiaries (on "all the people"). The beneficiaries were the Israelites (Exod. 24:6-8) and the tabernacle (cf. Exod. 40:9-15). The New Covenant went into effect along parallel lines, when Jesus Christ shed His blood, and God applied it to its beneficiaries (Christians) spiritually (cf. Matt. 26:28).

"The central thrust of the argument is that there is an intimate relationship between covenant and sacrificial blood."³⁸⁵

³⁸²See Rodney J. Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):290-305; 608 (October-December 1995):431-56.

³⁸³See Dillow, pp. 551-83.

³⁸⁴Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 802.

³⁸⁵Lane, *Hebrews* 9—13, p. 244.

9:22 The exception to which the writer alluded was God's provision for the poor in Israel. He allowed them to bring a flour offering in place of an animal, if they could not afford two doves (Lev. 5:11; cf. Num. 16:46; 31:22-23; 31:50). But as a general principle, God required the "shedding of blood" (death) for "forgiveness" under the Mosaic Law. The Israelites saw this most clearly on the Day of Atonement, but every animal sacrifice reminded them of it. The principle expressed is true of the New Covenant as well. Blood (death) is essential for decisive purgation.

9:23 Whereas animal blood adequately cleansed the prototype on earth ("copies of the things in heaven") under the Old Covenant, a "better" sacrifice was necessary to cleanse the realities in heaven (cf. 8:5; 9:24). Thus Jesus Christ's death was essential. The "heavenly things" may refer to the consciences of men and women.³⁸⁶ It seems more likely, however, that they refer to the things connected with the heavenly tabernacle. This may include angels that need cleansing (cf. Job 4:18; 15:15)³⁸⁷ and or "wickedness beyond this earth"³⁸⁸ (cf. Rom. 8:38-39; 1 Cor. 2:8; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:20; 2:15).

"As sinful pilgrims on their way to the heavenly city, God's people defile all they touch, even their 'meeting place' with God, and they need the constant efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ their High Priest to remove that defilement."³⁸⁹

9:24-26 Jesus Christ's ministry required a once-for-all, sufficient sacrifice. The "consummation" refers to the end of the Old Covenant. Jesus Christ entered the "presence" of God in "heaven itself," rather than an earthly tabernacle (v. 24). He made His offering only "once," rather than "often" and repeatedly (v. 25). Furthermore, "He put away sin(s)" *forever*, rather than removing them only temporarily (v. 26; cf. 1 Pet. 1:20).

"Copy" (v. 24) is the Greek word *typos* ("type"). The writer identified a type (a divinely intended illustration) here. "The holy place," in the tabernacle or temple, was a type of heaven.³⁹⁰ (See Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; and 1 Peter 3:21 for other New Testament identifications of types.)

"At His ascension Christ was formally installed as High Priest and began His present high priestly work. In the heavenly tabernacle today He represents His people (i.e.,

³⁸⁶Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 218.

³⁸⁷Pentecost, *A Faith . . .*, pp. 156-57.

³⁸⁸Morris, p. 91.

³⁸⁹David J. MacLeod, "The Cleansing of the True Tabernacle," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:605 (January-March 1995):71.

³⁹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 60-63. See also P. E. Hughes, "The Blood . . .," 131:521:26-33.

He secures their acceptance with God); obtains free access for them into God's presence; intercedes in prayer for them and grants them help; mediates their prayers to God and God's strength to them; anticipates His return to earth to reign; and, at the end of the present session, will bless His people by bringing them deliverance into the kingdom."³⁹¹

9:27-28 Because Jesus Christ died ("was offered once") for our sins, we do not need to fear condemnation after death (v. 27; cf. Rom. 8:1), but we can look forward to ultimate deliverance (i.e., glorification, v. 28).

"There is a finality about it [death] that is not to be disputed. But if it is the complete and final end to life on earth, it is not, as so many in the ancient world thought, the complete and final end. Death is more serious than that because it is followed by judgment. Men are accountable, and after death they will render account to God."³⁹²

"No reincarnation here."³⁹³

This is one of only two references to sin-bearing in the New Testament (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24), but the concept is common in the Old Testament (cf. Num. 14:34; Isa. 53:11-12; Ezek. 18:20).

"Reference to the 'many' is not . . . to be understood as limiting the effects of Christ's sacrifice to those who accept it in faith. The implied contrast, as in Is. 52:12; Heb. 2:10; Mk. 10:45; 14:24||, is rather between the one sacrifice and the great number of those who benefit from it."³⁹⁴

When the Lord returns at the Rapture, all Christians will enter into His presence, but only believers who have remained faithful to Him will enter into their full inheritance (cf. 1:14; 3:14; 9:15). "Those who eagerly await Him" (v. 28) evidently refers to faithful believers.³⁹⁵ Specifically, what will take place, is that at the Rapture *all* believers will go to be with Christ. However, only those who have not apostatized will receive a full reward at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:14-15; cf. 1 Thess. 5:9-10).³⁹⁶

³⁹¹David J. MacLeod, "The Present Work of Christ in Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):200.

³⁹²Morris, p. 93.

³⁹³Robertson, 5:404.

³⁹⁴Ellingworth, p. 487.

³⁹⁵Cf. Dillow, p. 129.

³⁹⁶See Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, pp. 165-77, for refutation of the partial rapture view.

" . . . his appearance will confirm that his sacrifice has been accepted and that he has secured the blessings of salvation for those whom he represented. . . . The parousia is thus the key event in the realization of salvation."³⁹⁷

"On one day of the year alone only the high priest could pass through the curtain to appear before God (9:7). That he must do so year after year indicated that the atonement he secured was merely provisional in character. The sacrifices he offered were inadequate to accomplish a decisive purgation of the defilement of sin. Against this backdrop the writer contrasts the efficacy of the unrepeatable action of Christ, whose single offering secured eschatological salvation and provided access to the inaccessible presence of God. The key to the typological exposition of salvation in 9:11-28 is that entrance into the heavenly sanctuary pertains to an eschatological and eternal order of salvation.

"The writer's primary concern in this section is with objective salvation. The exposition is focused upon the saving work of Christ in relation to God in behalf of the redeemed community rather than upon salvation realized subjectively in Christians."³⁹⁸

The New Covenant sanctuary is superior for five reasons: (1) It is heavenly (v. 11), and (2) its ministry is effective in dealing with sin (vv. 12-15). (3) Its ministry also rests on a more costly sacrifice (vv. 16-23), (4) represents fulfillment (v. 24), and (5) is final and complete (vv. 25-28).³⁹⁹

3. The accomplishment of our high priest 10:1-18

This section on the high priestly ministry of Christ (7:1—10:18) concludes with this pericope, in which the writer emphasized the perfecting effect of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on New Covenant believers. He wrote this to impress his readers further with the superiority of their condition, compared with that of Old Covenant believers.

As pointed out previously, 7:1—10:18 constitutes an exposition of distinctive features of the high priestly office of the Son. These are: its similarity to the priesthood of Melchizedek (ch. 7), the fact that it involved a single, personal sacrifice for sins (chs. 8—9), and its achievement of eternal salvation (10:1-18).

" . . . in 10:1-18 the writer elaborates the 'subjective' effects of Christ's offering for the community that enjoys the blessings of the new covenant. Christ's death is considered from the perspective of its efficacy for Christians."⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 251.

³⁹⁸Ibid.

³⁹⁹Wiersbe, 2:310-12.

⁴⁰⁰Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 258.

The argument is again chiasmic.

- A** The inadequacy of the Old Covenant: repeated sacrifices were necessary (vv. 1-4)
B The one sacrifice of Christ: supersedes the repeated sacrifices (vv. 5-10)
B' The priesthood of Christ: supersedes the Levitical priesthood (vv. 11-14)
A' The adequacy of the New Covenant: no more sacrifice for sins is necessary (vv. 15-18)
- 10:1 The very nature of the Mosaic Law made it impossible to bring believers into intimate relationship with God, since it dealt with externals.

"Both Paul and our author speak of the law as 'a shadow'; but whereas Paul in Col. 2:17 has in mind the legal restrictions of Old Testament times (food-laws and regulations about special days), our author is thinking more especially of the law prescribing matters of priesthood and sacrifice in relation to the wilderness tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple."⁴⁰¹

"The 'shadow' [Gr. *skia*] then is the preliminary outline that an artist may make before he gets to his colors, and the *eikon* [lit. image, "form"] is the finished portrait. The author is saying that the law is no more than a preliminary sketch. It shows the shape of things to come, but the solid reality is not there."⁴⁰²

"... the Old Testament dispensation had confessedly within its sanctuary no real provision for the spiritual wants to which they symbolically pointed; their removal lay outside its sanctuary and beyond its symbols. Spiritual death, as the consequence of the fall, personal sinfulness, and personal guilt lay beyond the reach of the Temple-provision, and pointed directly to Him who was to come. Every death, every case of leprosy, every Day of Atonement, was a call for His advent, as the eye, enlightened by faith, would follow the goat into the wilderness, or watch the living bird as, bearing the mingled blood and water, he winged his flight into liberty, or read in the ashes sprung from the burning of the red heifer the emblem of purification from spiritual death."⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 226.

⁴⁰²Morris, p. 95

⁴⁰³Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 350.

"Make perfect" does not mean to make sinless, but to make acceptable to (or *justified* before) God. Jesus Christ provided perfect cleansing for us by His death, as the following verses show.

"This verse (and in fact the whole chapter) continues our writer's argument regarding the superiority of the sacrifice of Christ over the Mosaic rites."⁴⁰⁴

10:2-4 The Israelites never enjoyed the extent of freedom from sin's guilt that we do. The Day of Atonement *reminded* them, yearly, that their sins needed removing so that they could continue to have fellowship with God. We do not have a yearly "reminder," since Jesus Christ's sacrifice made us perfectly acceptable to God (cf. John 13:10; Acts 15:9).

"'Take away' (*aphaireo*) is used of a literal taking off, as of Peter's cutting off the ear of the high priest's slave (Luke 22:50), or metaphorically as of the removal of reproach (Luke 1:25). It signifies the complete removal of sin so that it is no longer a factor in the situation. That is what is needed and that is what the sacrifices could not provide."⁴⁰⁵

"Some one has well said: 'The blood of animals cannot cleanse from sin because it is non-moral. The blood of sinning man cannot cleanse because it is immoral. The blood of Christ alone can cleanse because it is moral.'"⁴⁰⁶

The incompetence of the old levitical order is set forth in four particular respects in verses 1 through 4: (1) the insubstantial (shadowy) character of the Mosaic system, (2) the repetitive nature of the old sacrifices, (3) the function of the levitical sacrifices as repeated reminders of sin, and (4) the ineffectiveness of the blood of animals.⁴⁰⁷

10:5-7 This biblical writer liked to clinch his argument by appealing to Scripture.

"His argument up till now has been the negative one that the animal sacrifices of the old covenant were unavailing. Now he says positively that Christ's sacrifice, which established the new covenant, was effectual. It really put away sin. And it was foreshadowed in the same passage from Jeremiah."⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁴Jeffrey R. Sharp, "Typology and the Message of Hebrews," *East Asia Journal of Theology* 4:2 (1986):100.

⁴⁰⁵Morris, p. 96.

⁴⁰⁶Thomas, pp. 117-18.

⁴⁰⁷P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, pp. 389-92.

⁴⁰⁸Morris, p. 97.

The passage he quoted first (Ps. 40:6-8) expresses Messiah's commitment to offer His body as a sacrifice to God (at His first advent), because animal sacrifices of all types were inadequate ("sacrifice and offering You have not desired"). God's will was the perfection (i.e., thorough cleansing) of believers. Jesus was not some dumb animal that offered its life unthinkingly. He consciously, voluntarily, and deliberately offered His life in obedience to God's will.

"The psalmist's words, 'Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God,' sum up the whole tenor of our Lord's life and ministry, and express the essence of that true sacrifice which God desires."⁴⁰⁹

The "roll (scroll) of the book" is the written instruction (*torah*) of God. Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets presented Messiah as committed to doing God's will completely.

10:8-10 God took no delight in "sacrifices" *as such*, if they were not the product of a proper attitude. He "took away the first," the Mosaic Covenant and its sacrifices, "to establish the second," the New Covenant. Psalm 40 announced the abolition of the old sacrificial system. This was God's will, and it satisfied Him. The writer's view of sanctification here, as elsewhere in this epistle, is *positional* ("we have been sanctified . . . once for all"), rather than progressive. God sets aside (sanctifies) all believers to Himself at conversion. That is what is in view here.

"Indeed it can be said that sanctification in Hebrews is almost equivalent to justification in Romans, both referring to our position, not to our condition. But there is this vital difference of standpoint: that justification deals with position in relation to God as Judge, while sanctification deals with position in relation to our fellowship with God and our approach to Him in fellowship."⁴¹⁰

". . . we must be on our guard lest we read this epistle with Pauline terminology in mind."⁴¹¹

"Nothing but obedience can open the way to God."⁴¹²

10:11-14 The writer further stressed the finality of Jesus Christ's offering with the contrast in these verses.⁴¹³ The Levitical priests never sat down, but stood

⁴⁰⁹Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 234.

⁴¹⁰Thomas, p. 125. Cf. Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 804.

⁴¹¹Morris, p. 99.

⁴¹²Barclay, p. 128.

⁴¹³See William David Spencer, "Christ's Sacrifice as Apologetic: An Application of Heb 10:1-18," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (June 1997):189-97, for a response to resurgent contemporary paganism that encourages self-sacrifice and other types of blood sacrifices.

"daily" because they never finished their work, but Jesus Christ "sat down" beside His Father, because He *finished* His work.

"A seated priest is the guarantee of a finished work and an accepted sacrifice."⁴¹⁴

Jesus Christ now awaits the final destruction of His enemies. Those who "are sanctified" (v. 14) are those whom Jesus Christ has perfected and are consequently fully acceptable to God (i.e., all believers).⁴¹⁵

Jesus Christ's sacrifice has accomplished three things for us: (1) It has cleansed our consciences from guilt, (2) it has fitted us to approach God as worshippers, and (3) it has fulfilled what the Old Testament promised.

10:15-18 The "Holy Spirit" testified through Jeremiah (Jer. 31:33-34; cf. Heb. 8:8-12), and continues to testify ("testifies to us"), the writer said, that final (ultimate, complete, and permanent) "forgiveness" at the Cross meant the end of sacrifices ("no longer any offering") "for sin." God promised this forgiveness in the New Covenant. Consequently no more sacrifices for sin are necessary.

"In Ch. 8 the oracle of Jer. 31:31-34 was quoted in order to prove the obsolescence of the old economy; now it is quoted again in order to establish the permanence of the era of 'perfection' inaugurated under the new covenant. 'God has spoken in His Son'; and He has no word to speak beyond Him."⁴¹⁶

The statement that God "will remember . . . sins . . . no more" (v. 17) means that He will no longer call them back to memory, with a view to condemning the sinner (cf. Rom. 8:1). Since God is omniscient, He remembers everything, but He does not *hold* the forgiven sinner's sins against him or her. Hebrews 10:17 has been a great help to many sinners who have found it hard to believe that God really has forgiven them (cf. 1 John 2:2).

The long section on the high priestly ministry of Jesus ends here (7:1—10:18). Priestly ministry was such an important part of old Israelite worship that the writer gave it lengthy attention here. The writer showed that Jesus is a superior priest compared with the Levitical priests, and that His priesthood supersedes (has replaced) the Levitical priesthood. He also pointed out that Jesus serves under the New Covenant that is superior to the Old Covenant. Furthermore, His sacrifice is superior to the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant. Finally, Jesus' priesthood brings the believer into full acceptance with

⁴¹⁴Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 239.

⁴¹⁵See Kendall, pp. 180-82.

⁴¹⁶Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 242.

God, something the former priesthood could not do. Therefore the readers would be foolish to abandon Christianity to return to Judaism. Contemporary believers are also foolish to turn away from Christ and the gospel.

D. THE DANGER OF WILLFUL SINNING (THE FOURTH WARNING) 10:19-39

From this point on in the epistle, the writer made application from the great truths concerning Jesus Christ that he had now finished explaining. He followed his exposition of Jesus Christ's superior high priestly ministry (6:13—10:18): with exhortation, with another stern warning against apostatizing, and with an encouragement to remain faithful to the Lord (10:19-39). (Even though chapter 11 is primarily exposition, it is full of application.) The Greek word *parresia*, which appears in verse 19 ("confidence") and in verse 35 ("confidence"), frames the section and forms an *inclusio* tying the thought together.

"With 10:19-39 the great central division of the sermon (5:11—10:39) is drawn to a conclusion. Viewed from the perspective of the homiletical and literary structure of Hebrews, this concluding exhortation is symmetrical with the preliminary exhortation found in 5:11—6:20 The great exposition of Christ as priest and sacrifice is thus framed by parallel parenthetic units . . ."417

This warning passage is in a sense central to all the hortatory passages in Hebrews. Lane entitled this warning passage "The Peril of Disloyalty to Christ."⁴¹⁸ It echoes former warnings (cf. 2:1-4 and 10:28-31; and 6:4-8 and 10:26-31) and repeats characteristic expressions (cf. 3:6b and 10:23; and 3:17 and 10:26). Yet it also anticipates what is to come, by introducing the triad of Christian virtues, which the writer developed in chapters 11—13 (cf. 6:10-12). He spoke of *faith* in 10:22, and developed it in chapter 11, *hope* in 10:23, and developed it in 12:1-13, and *love* in 10:24, and developed it in 12:14—13:21.

1. The threefold admonition 10:19-25

The writer began with a three-fold admonition, which is all one sentence in the Greek text. The long sentence intensifies the writer's appeal.⁴¹⁹

"In view of all that has been accomplished for us by Christ, he says, let us confidently approach God in worship, let us maintain our Christian confession and hope, let us help one another by meeting together regularly for mutual encouragement, because the day which we await will soon be here."⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁷Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 279.

⁴¹⁸Ibid., p. 271.

⁴¹⁹Ellingworth, p. 516.

⁴²⁰Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 244.

"A loyal response to Christ is the logical correlate of the magnitude of Christ's redemptive accomplishment [cf. Rom. 12:1-2]."⁴²¹

10:19-20 "Therefore" sums up the entire argument to this point, but especially the affirmation of 8:1-2 and its exposition in 9:1—10:18. "Brethren" recalls the writer's address of his audience of believers in the earlier parenthetic units (cf. 3:1, 12; 6:9). *All* believers now have an open invitation to come into "the holy place." Under the Old Covenant, that privilege was reserved for the priesthood, only part of God's people.

There are two reasons we can and should approach God (v. 22). First, we can have "confidence to enter" God's presence now and in the future, because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

"It is striking that whenever the writer makes his most emphatic assertions concerning the saving work of Christ, he makes an explicit reference to the blood of Jesus (9:12, 14; 10:19, 29; 12:24; 13:12, 20). This fact is indicative of the importance of the cultic argument developed in 9:1—10:18, where the blood of Jesus is a graphic expression for Jesus' death viewed in its sacrificial aspect. That cultic argument is clearly presupposed here."⁴²²

We can enter God's presence through (by means of) Jesus' crucified "flesh," as though we are entering the Holy of Holies through the torn temple "veil" (Matt. 27:51). This is an example of one thing (i.e., the "veil" in the temple) being a type of another thing (i.e., Christ's "flesh").⁴²³ His sacrifice provided "a new and living way," compared with the old—and now dead—way of the Old Covenant. The "way" in this verse is not Jesus *Himself*, in the sense of John 14:6 for salvation, but the way (direct access to God) He opened for us through His death.⁴²⁴

"The way to God is both 'new' and 'living.' It is 'new' because what Jesus has done has created a completely new situation, 'living' because that way is indissolubly bound up with the Lord Jesus himself.

The "living" way also connotes the fresh, vitalizing realities of the New Covenant.⁴²⁵

⁴²¹Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 281.

⁴²²*Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁴²³See my comment on types that precedes my comments on 9:10-11 above.

⁴²⁴Guthrie, p. 211.

⁴²⁵Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 804.

"The author is saying in his own way what the Synoptists said when they spoke of the curtain of the temple as being torn when Christ died (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45)."⁴²⁶

10:21-22 Second, we can have confidence to enter God's presence because we have "a great" High "Priest" (cf. 7:1—10:18).

We should "draw near" with freedom from guilt ("our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience") and with holy conduct (cf. 4:16). This is the first of three admonitions (in vv. 22-25) that together constitute the main exhortation in the epistle.⁴²⁷ This first one refers to personal devotion.

"If the writer to the Hebrews had one text and one summons, it was: '*Let us draw near.*'"⁴²⁸

"Sincere" means true and dependable. We should approach God with the "assurance" that Jesus Christ's death has removed our guilt for sin, and has made us acceptable to God (9:13-14; Num. 8:7; Rom. 5:1; 8:1; cf. 1 John 1:9). The writer believed that we who are Christians can have "full assurance" of our "faith," since our confidence rests in the sufficiency of what Christ has done for us (cf. 1 John 5:13). God wants Christians to know for sure that they are going to heaven.

". . . the specific imagery of the 'sprinkling of the heart from a burdened conscience' has been anticipated in 9:18-22. There the writer reminded the community of the action of Moses, who sprinkled the people with blood during the ratification of the old covenant at Sinai. The thought that Christians have been made participants in the new covenant by the blood of Christ is forcefully expressed in the immediate context (v 19). This suggests that the 'sprinkling with respect to the heart' in v 22b is to be associated with Jesus' inauguration of the new covenant through his death . . ."⁴²⁹

The reference to the "washed body (bodies)" (v. 22) probably is to *water baptism* as the outward sign of inward cleansing (cf. 1 Pet. 3:21).⁴³⁰ However, the radical cleansing that water baptism symbolizes is probably also in view (cf. Ezek. 36:25; John 3:5; Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5-6).

⁴²⁶Morris, p. 103.

⁴²⁷Guthrie, p. 213.

⁴²⁸Barclay, p. xiv.

⁴²⁹Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 287.

⁴³⁰See J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, pp. 211-14.

"Possibly the mention of sprinkling and washing is an echo of the injunctions of Exod. xxix. 4, 21, xxx. 20, xl. 30, prescribing similar preparation for the priestly functions."⁴³¹

10:23-25 We should not only exercise faith (v. 22), but also hope (v. 23) and love (v. 24). The admonition to "hold fast" to "our hope" is the one the writer emphasized most strongly in this epistle. It is an exhortation to perseverance. The basis of our steadfastness is the fact that God is faithful to His promises concerning our future.

The third admonition (v. 24) moves from the vertical to the horizontal dimension of Christian living. This admonition "to love" one another—our social obligation—was also necessary, since some were abandoning the faith. The readers needed "to stimulate one another" to remain faithful to the Lord ("to love and good deeds"). This type of love is the product of communal activity; we cannot practice it in isolation from other believers.

"Any early Christian who attempted to live like a pious particle without the support of the community ran serious risks in an age when there was no public opinion to support him. His isolation, whatever its motive—fear, fastidiousness, self-conceit, or anything else—exposed him to the danger of losing his faith altogether."⁴³²

Regular attendance at church meetings facilitates love for one another, because there we receive reminders and exhortations to persevere. It is only natural for one who has abandoned or weakened in his faith to absent himself or herself from the meetings of his or her church. However, this is the very thing such a person should not do. We need each other.

"The failure of love shows itself, then, in selfish individualism, and specifically here in *the habit of some of neglecting to meet together*. Such unconcern for one's fellow believers argues unconcern for Christ himself and portends the danger of apostasy, concerning which our author is about to issue another earnest warning (vv. 26ff.)."⁴³³

"Whatever the motivation, the writer regarded the desertion of the communal meetings as utterly serious. It threatened the corporate life of the congregation and almost certainly was a prelude to apostasy on the part of those who were separating themselves from the assembly . . ."⁴³⁴

⁴³¹Dods, 4:347.

⁴³²Moffatt, p. 147. Cf. Guthrie, p. 216.

⁴³³P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 415.

⁴³⁴Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 290. Cf. Robertson, 5:412.

"The follower of Jesus cannot profess allegiance to Him and deny His Church."⁴³⁵

The writer was urging mutual accountability, since we all will have to give an account of ourselves to God. The "day" that is approaching is the day we will give an account of ourselves to God (cf. v. 37). This may have been, partially, an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 for the original readers.⁴³⁶ But it is definitely no less of an allusion to the judgment seat of Christ.

2. The warning of judgment 10:26-31

The writer turned from positive admonition to negative warning, in order to highlight the seriousness of departing from the Lord.

"Between the imperatives of vv. 22-25 and 32, 35, the author describes, more fully than in 2:2f.; 6:4-6, the nature and consequences of apostasy, previously described as 'falling away from the living God' (3:12)."⁴³⁷

10:26-27

"The word 'we' cannot refer to any other group of people than his readers and himself [cf. 2:1]."⁴³⁸

Willful sin in the context of Hebrews is deliberate apostasy, turning away from God (2:1; 3:12; 6:4-8).⁴³⁹ If an apostate rejects Jesus Christ's sacrifice, there is nothing else that can protect him or her from God's judgment (cf. 6:6; Num. 15:30-31). The "judgment" in view will take place at the judgment seat of Christ, not the Great White Throne. It is the judgment of Christians (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10), not of unbelievers (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). It will result in loss of reward, not loss of salvation. The same "fire" (divine judgment) that will test believers will also consume unbelievers. "Fire" is a frequent symbol of God and His work in Scripture (Exod. 3:2; 19:18; Deut. 4:24; Ps. 18:8-14; Isa. 33:14; Ezek. 1:4; Mal. 3:2), and it often indicates His judgment (Mal. 3:2; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).

"The motif of inescapable judgment is developed with an allusion to Isa 26:11. The imagery of 'raging fire ready to consume God's adversaries' is vividly suggestive of the prospect awaiting the person who turns away from God's gracious provision through Christ. The apostate is regarded

⁴³⁵Robert Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, p. 7. See also J. Paul Nyquist and Carson Nyquist, *The Post-Church Christian*, ch. 6: "Do I Need to Be Part of the Church to Follow Jesus?" pp. 75-86.

⁴³⁶J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Apostles' Use of Jesus' Predictions of Judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 140-41.

⁴³⁷Ellingworth, p. 530.

⁴³⁸Marshall, pp. 141-42.

⁴³⁹Dods, 4:348.

as the adversary of God. The description of judgment as a fire that devours and utterly destroys recalls the actual experience of the followers of Korah who were consumed by fire because they had shown contempt for God (Num 16:35; 26:10). The consequence of apostasy is terrifying, irrevocable judgment."⁴⁴⁰

"Knowledge" (v. 26) is full knowledge (Gr. *epignosis*).

10:28-29 The point of these verses is this: Since an Israelite who spurned the Old Covenant suffered a severe penalty, we in the Age of Grace will suffer an even greater penalty ("severer punishment") if we spurn the superior New Covenant. *Apostasy* under the New Covenant has the effect of walking roughshod over ("trampling under foot") "the Son of God" by despising (showing spite to) Him—by having publicly rejected His salvation. Also it involves despising the superior "blood" of Jesus Christ ("of the [new] covenant"), that "sanctified" the apostate (who is a Christian; cf. vv. 10, 14). Furthermore, the apostate "has insulted" the Holy Spirit ("Spirit of grace"), who graciously brought him or her to faith in Christ. These three parallel participial clauses in the Greek text stress triply the serious effects of apostasy.

"Taken cumulatively, the three clauses in v 29 define persistent sin (v 26a) as an attitude of contempt for the salvation secured through the priestly sacrifice of Christ. Nothing less than a complete rejection of the Christian faith satisfies the descriptive clauses in which the effects of the offense are sketched."⁴⁴¹

"It is an extreme case of apostasy which is being envisaged."⁴⁴²

Willful rebels under the Old Covenant only lost their lives (cf. Deut. 17:2-7; 13:8), but willful rebels under the New Covenant lose an eternal reward. Not only so, but God often begins to punish modern apostates in this life. These are two of the verses that teach degrees of punishment in the afterlife (cf. Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; Luke 12:47-48; Rom. 1:20—2:16).

"It was commonly inferred [incorrectly] in the Early Church from this and other passages in the epistle that forgiveness for all kinds of post-baptismal sin, inadvertent as well as deliberate, was ruled out."⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 293.

⁴⁴¹Ibid., p. 295.

⁴⁴²Guthrie, p. 219.

⁴⁴³Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 260.

10:30-31 In Deuteronomy 32, which the writer quoted here twice (Deut. 32:35-36, 40-41), Moses warned the Israelites against apostatizing. That was this writer's point here as well. It is a "terrifying" prospect for a believer who has renounced his or her faith, "to fall" under God's hand of chastisement ("into the hands of the living God"). Note that the writer addressed this warning to believers, though many interpreters have applied it to unbelievers.⁴⁴⁴

"Actually, Heb. 10:30, 31 forms a parallel reference to II Cor. 5:10, 11, and the preceding verses (vv. 26-29) provide additional information concerning that facet of the judgment seat associated with the 'terror of the Lord.'"⁴⁴⁵

Verse 31 is not so much a logical conclusion from what precedes, as it is a summary recalling the context of the Deuteronomy quotations.⁴⁴⁶

3. The encouragement to persevere 10:32-39

The writer concluded his warning, by reminding his readers of their former faithfulness when they were being tempted, in order to encourage them to endure their present and future tests (cf. 4:12-16; 6:9-20).

"The juxtaposition of 10:26-31 and 32-35 suggests that it may have been the experience of suffering, abuse, and loss in the world that motivated the desertion of the community acknowledged in v 25 and a general tendency to avoid contact with outsiders observed elsewhere in Hebrews (see . . . 5:11-14)."⁴⁴⁷

10:32-34 In the past, the original readers had proved faithful in severe trials of their faith. They had stood their ground ("you endured") when others had encouraged them to abandon it, and they had withstood "public" shame and persecution ("reproaches and tribulations") for their faith. They had also unashamedly supported other believers who had undergone persecution in the same way (became "sharers with those who were so treated").

"In the world of the first century the lot of prisoners was difficult. Prisoners were to be punished, not pampered. Little provision was made for them, and they were dependent on friends for their supplies [including food⁴⁴⁸]. For Christians visiting prisoners was a meritorious act (Matt 25:36). But there was some risk, for the visitors

⁴⁴⁴See Fanning, pp. 407-8.

⁴⁴⁵Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, p. 31.

⁴⁴⁶Ellingworth, p. 543.

⁴⁴⁷Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 297.

⁴⁴⁸Moffatt, p. 154. Cf. Guthrie, p. 222.

became identified with the visited. The readers of the epistle had not shrunk from this. It is not pleasant to endure ignominy, and it is not pleasant to be lumped with the ignominious. They had endured both."⁴⁴⁹

They had also been willing to suffer material loss ("accepted . . . the seizure of your property"), because they looked forward to a "better inheritance (possession)" in the future (cf. Luke 21:19). Moreover, they had done this "joyfully," not grudgingly.

"The eternal inheritance laid up for them was so real in their eyes that they could lightheartedly bid farewell to material possessions which were short-lived in any case. This attitude of mind is precisely that 'faith' of which our author goes on to speak."⁴⁵⁰

"It is a truth of life that in many ways it is easier to stand adversity than it is to stand prosperity. Ease has ruined far more men than trouble ever did."⁴⁵¹

10:35-36 Now was not the time to discard ("do not throw away") that "confidence" in a better reward (cf. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19). They needed "endurance" to persevere, to "keep on keeping on," as the saying goes. By doing this, they would do God's "will," and eventually "receive what [He] promised," namely, an eternal reward (1:14; 3:14; 9:15; Matt. 6:19).⁴⁵² This exhortation is a good summary of the whole message of Hebrews.⁴⁵³

"What they had endured for Christ's sake entitled them to a reward. Let them not throw it away. The NT does not reject the notion that Christians will receive rewards, though, of course, that is never the prime motive for service."⁴⁵⁴

"The safeguard against degeneration, isolation, and consequent failure is to make progress in the Christian life, and to proceed from point to point from an elementary to the richest, fullest, deepest experience."⁴⁵⁵

If the writer's concern had been the salvation of those readers who were unbelievers, this would have been an opportune time for him to exhort them to believe in Christ. He could have written, "For you have need of

⁴⁴⁹Morris, p. 110.

⁴⁵⁰Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 270.

⁴⁵¹Barclay, p. 142.

⁴⁵²Cf. Dillow, p. 129.

⁴⁵³Cf. Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 806.

⁴⁵⁴Morris, pp. 110-11. See also Calvin, 3:25:10; and *The Nelson . . .*, p. 2094.

⁴⁵⁵Thomas, p. 11.

regeneration." Instead, he exhorted his readers to endure rather than apostatize.

"Perseverance is one of the great unromantic virtues. Most people can start well; almost everyone can be fine in spasms. Most people have their good days. Most men have their great moments. To everyone it is sometimes given to mount up with wings as eagles; in the moment of the great effort everyone can run and not be weary; but the greatest gift of all is to walk and not to faint."⁴⁵⁶

10:37-38 After all, we will not have long to persevere. The Lord's return is near, "in a very little while" (Rev. 22:20). In the meantime, we need to keep walking "by faith." If we abandon that purpose ("shrink back"), we will not please God.

"This observation [in v. 38b] is a figure of speech called litotes in which a positive idea is expressed by negating the opposite. As the larger context makes plain, he means, 'God will be severely angered' (see verse 27)."⁴⁵⁷

The allusions made in these verses are to Isaiah 26:21 and Habakkuk 2:3-4 in the Septuagint. The writer took all of his Old Testament quotations from this version, except the one in 10:30, which he took from the Hebrew Bible. "My righteous one" refers to an individual believer. "Shrinking back" refers to apostasy.⁴⁵⁸

"Paul is concerned with the way a man comes to be accepted by God; the author [of this epistle] is concerned with the importance of holding fast to one's faith in the face of temptations to abandon it."⁴⁵⁹

10:39 The writer assumed hopefully that his Christian readers, along with himself, would not apostatize.⁴⁶⁰ "Destruction" (or ruin) could refer either to eternal damnation in hell or to temporal punishment. In view of what has preceded in the epistle, the latter alternative is probably in view (cf. Matt. 26:8; Mark 14:4; Acts 25:16). The writer did not want his readers to be the objects of God's discipline.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁶Barclay, pp. 143-44.

⁴⁵⁷Hodges, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 74.

⁴⁵⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 305; Moffatt, p. 158.

⁴⁵⁹Morris, p. 111.

⁴⁶⁰See P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 437.

⁴⁶¹See Dillow, pp. 336-37.

"I personally believe that 'waste' is the best translation for this word ["destruction"] in Hebrews 10:39. A believer who does not walk by faith goes back into the old ways and wastes his life."⁴⁶²

Likewise, the positive alternative set forth at the end of this verse is not a reference to conversion. It refers to the preservation of the faithful believer's full sanctification until he receives his full reward (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). The "preserving of the soul" is equivalent to "saving the life" (cf. James 5:20).⁴⁶³

"This meaning agrees well with the exposition of 10:32-39. The readers were to live by faith in the midst of difficult times. The result of obedience to the Word of God would be a life-preserving walk instead of temporal discipline, the loss of physical life."⁴⁶⁴

This is the most direct and severe of all the warnings in Hebrews. In view of the Son's priestly ministry (5:1—10:18), apostasy is a sin that will draw terrible consequences for the believer. It will not result in the loss of eternal salvation, but the loss of some, or possibly a major portion of, one's eternal reward.

"The nature of the writer's response to the men and women he addressed confirms the specifically pastoral character of the parenthesis, in which he closely identifies himself with his audience. The severity with which he writes of apostasy and of the destructive lifestyle of those who have deserted the house church expresses anguish and compassionate concern that Christians should not be subverted by a form of worldliness that would separate them from the life and truth they have received from Christ and from one another."⁴⁶⁵

IV. THE PROPER RESPONSE 11:1—12:13

"In chapter 10:22-25 there were three exhortations, respectively to Faith, Hope and Love. These are elaborated in turn: chapter 11 dealing with Faith; chapter 12 with Hope; chapter 13 with Love."⁴⁶⁶

In this fourth major section of the epistle, the writer concentrated on motivating his readers to persevere in their faith with steadfast endurance. He continued the idea that he introduced in 10:35-39. Some writers do not acknowledge this connection in the flow of

⁴⁶²Wiersbe, 2:317.

⁴⁶³Moffatt, p. 158.

⁴⁶⁴Oberholtzer, 145:418.

⁴⁶⁵Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 311.

⁴⁶⁶Thomas, p. 140.

the writer's argument. They view chapter 11 as a revelation of what faith will inevitably do, rather than what faith should do.⁴⁶⁷ Having introduced "faith" and "endurance" in 10:39, the writer proceeded to develop these concepts further. He celebrated the character of faith in chapter 11, and then summoned the readers to endurance in 12:1-13. The first of these sections is exposition, and the second is exhortation.

"The characteristic vocabulary of this section relates to the vital issue of enduring disciplinary sufferings. Anticipating the subsequent development in 12:1-13, the writer underscored the community's need for *hypomone*, 'endurance,' in 10:36. That note is resumed in 12:1, when the commitment required of the Christian life is reviewed under the metaphor of an athletic contest, and the key to victory is found in 'endurance.'"⁴⁶⁸

"The story of God's people includes a succession of examples of persistent, forward-looking faith. The story is not complete without us. We, in our turn, must submit to God's fatherly discipline and stand firm together in the faith."⁴⁶⁹

A. PERSEVERANCE IN FAITH CH. 11

The writer encouraged his readers in chapter 11 by reminding them of the faithful perseverance of selected Old Testament saints. The only other historical characters besides Jesus that the writer had mentioned so far were: Abraham, Melchizedek, Moses, Aaron, and Joshua. Of these, the only one mentioned in connection with faith was Abraham (6:13-15). The section is expository in form, but parenetic in function, inviting the readers to emulate the example of the heroes listed. The linking word that ties this section to what precedes is "faith" or "faithfulness," which the Habakkuk 2:4 quotation introduced (10:38-39; cf. 10:20). The Habakkuk quotation gives "faith" the nuance of "faithfulness." The writer repeated this word (Gr. *pistis*) 24 times in chapter 11. It occurs in the first and last sentences of the section, forming an *inclusio*. Classical orators and authors frequently used lists of examples to motivate their hearers and readers to strive for virtue.⁴⁷⁰ These lists also appear in Jewish and early Christian literature, indicating that this was a distinctive literary form.⁴⁷¹

"As J. W. Thompson has observed, 'a catalogue of heroes of *pistis*, introduced as patterns of imitation, is unthinkable in any Greek tradition.'⁴⁷² The reason for this is that to the formally educated person, *pistis*, 'faith,' was regarded as a state of mind characteristic of the uneducated, who believe something on hearsay without being able to give

⁴⁶⁷E.g., John MacArthur, *Faith Works*, pp. 37-54.

⁴⁶⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 313.

⁴⁶⁹Ellingworth, p. 558.

⁴⁷⁰See M. R. Cosby, "The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11 in Light of Example-lists in Antiquity" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1985), pp. 45-106.

⁴⁷¹*Ibid.*, pp. 114-61.

⁴⁷²J. W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 53.

precise reasons for their belief. The willingness of Jews and Christians to suffer for the undemonstrable astonished pagan observers.⁴⁷³ Yet this is precisely the conduct praised in Heb 11:1-40. This fact constitutes the note of offense in this section of the homily.⁴⁷⁴

Another feature of this chapter is the anaphoric use of *pistis*, "faith." "Anaphoria" is the rhetorical repetition of a key word or words, at the beginning of successive clauses, for the purpose of giving unity, rhythm, and solemnity to a discourse. *Pistis* occurs 18 times without an article (anarthrous) in verses 3-31, but nowhere else in Hebrews. This literary device serves to stress the importance of faith and to unite the chapter.⁴⁷⁵

"We will also see in this chapter that unbelief is the worst sin anyone can commit. God has a remedy for every sin but the *state* of unbelief. This does not mean that there is an unpardonable sin. There is no *act* which you could commit today that God would not forgive tomorrow. But if you continue in a state of unbelief, God has no remedy for that at all."⁴⁷⁶

This chapter is one of the strongest proofs that eschatological reward is the full, *afterlife* inheritance (rest) that the writer urged his readers not to sacrifice. The reward of these saints in the past lay beyond the grave (cf. vv. 1, 13).

1. Faith in the Antediluvian Era 11:1-7

The writer began by stating three facts about faith. These are general observations on the nature of faith, some of its significant features. He then illustrated God's approval of faith with examples from the era before the Flood.

11:1 Essentially "faith" is having the confidence ("the assurance") that *things* yet future and unseen ("hoped for") will happen as God has revealed they will. This is the basic nature of faith. Verse 1 describes faith more than defining it.

"Faith is that which enables us to treat as real the things that are unseen."⁴⁷⁷

"This word *hypostasis* ["assurance," NASB] has appeared twice already in the epistle. In Ch. 1:3 the Son was stated to be the very image of God's *hypostasis*; in Ch. 3:14 believers are said to be Christ's associates if they hold fast the beginning of their *hypostasis* firm to the end. In the former place it has the objective sense of 'substance' or 'real

⁴⁷³Cf. E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, pp. 120-22.

⁴⁷⁴Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 316.

⁴⁷⁵See also Victor (Sung Yul) Rhee, "Chiasm and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:619 (July-September 1998):327-45.

⁴⁷⁶McGee, 5:579.

⁴⁷⁷Dods, 4:352.

essence' (as opposed to what merely seems to be so). In the latter place it has the subjective sense of 'confidence' or 'assurance.' Here it is natural to take it in the same subjective sense as it bears in Ch. 3:14, and so ARV and RSV render it 'assurance.'"⁴⁷⁸

"Faith is the basis, the substructure (*hypostasis* means lit. 'that which stands under') of all that the Christian life means, all that the Christian hopes for."⁴⁷⁹

"To the writer to the Hebrews faith is a hope that is absolutely certain that what it believes is true, and that what it expects will come. It is not the hope which looks forward with wistful longing; it is the hope which looks forward with utter certainty. It is not the hope which takes refuge in a perhaps; it is the hope which is founded on a conviction."⁴⁸⁰

". . . faith celebrates *now* the reality of the *future* blessings that constitute the objective content of hope."⁴⁸¹

Someone else described faith as the "spiritual organ" that enables a person to perceive the invisible realities of life.

The faith that the writer wrote about is *not*: believing what you know is not true, or believing in something that you do not understand because it is unclear, or believing as a necessary addition to one's works, "like it is the dressing which is added to the salad of good works."⁴⁸²

11:2 God has approved such confidence, as is clear from His commendations of certain Old Testament men and women ("the men of old") who walked by faith.

11:3 However, faith is a way of viewing all of life: what lies ahead as well as what is in the past. It involves accepting God's viewpoint as He has revealed it in His Word. This extends not only to how the universe ("worlds") came into being (cf. 1:2-3), but how it will end as well.

"There are two explanations for the origin of this universe. One is speculation, and the other is revelation."⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁸Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 278.

⁴⁷⁹Morris, p. 113.

⁴⁸⁰Barclay, pp. 144-45.

⁴⁸¹Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 328.

⁴⁸²McGee, 5:580.

⁴⁸³*Ibid.*, 5:582.

One view regarding the writer's choice of *aion* ("age[s]"), rather than *cosmos* ("world[s]"), is that he referred to ages in anticipation of the list of heroes, who lived in various ages, that follows. If this is correct, verse 3 is more of a commentary on God's creation of history than it is on His creation of the cosmos. The last part of verse 3 may seem to contradict this view, but "what is seen" could refer to what is seen in history, rather than what is seen in the material world.

Another view is that *aion* is simply a synonym for cosmos here and refers to the universe of time and space. *Aion* seems to be used this way in 1:2, as well. Perhaps the writer chose *aion* here to emphasize the temporal progression of God's creation, rather than its physicality.⁴⁸⁴ Many of the commentators favor this view, as I do. They believe that the writer was looking back on the creation account in Genesis, rather than forward to what he would say in the rest of chapter 11.

"Belief in the existence of the world is not faith, nor is it faith when men hold that the world was made out of some preexisting 'stuff.' (In the first century there were people who did not believe in God but who held to some kind of 'creation.')

But when we understand that it was the Word of God ('God's command,' NIV) that produced all things, that is faith."⁴⁸⁵

Notice that the writer did not say that God created the universe out of nothing (*creation ex nihilo*), an idea that the Greeks rejected.⁴⁸⁶ He simply said that the universe did not originate from primal material or anything observable. His description does not rule out *creation ex nihilo*, but neither does it affirm it. Genesis 1:1-3 and logic seem to indicate that God did indeed create the universe, something visible ("what is seen"), out of His word, something invisible ("not . . . visible").

"Had the visible world been formed out of materials which were subject to human observation, there would have been no room for faith. Science could have traced it to its origin. Evolution only pushes the statement a stage back. There is still an unseen force that does not submit itself to experimental science, and this is the object of faith."⁴⁸⁷

11:4 The readers could identify with "Abel" because he, too, had a "better sacrifice." Those who based their hope of God's acceptance on an inferior sacrifice, as in Judaism, would experience disappointment, as "Cain" did.

⁴⁸⁴Kent, p. 218.

⁴⁸⁵Morris, p. 114.

⁴⁸⁶Guthrie, p. 227.

⁴⁸⁷Dods, 4:353.

By the way, what made Abel's offering superior to Cain's was evidently its being an offering of the "firstlings" (firstborn) and its inclusion of the "fat" (Gen. 4:4). Ancient Near Easterners commonly held that a deity deserved the *first* of whatever man, beast, or crop brought forth. The "fat," likewise, represented the best part of an animal offering. Along the same line, by offering a *blood sacrifice*, Abel offered the most precious thing that life supplies: *life itself*.⁴⁸⁸ God may have revealed which type of sacrifice to bring,⁴⁸⁹ but the text does not say so. Abel's offering shows the respect he gave God as worthy of the best, whereas Cain's offering, as Moses described it in Genesis 4, indicates that he did not so reverence God.⁴⁹⁰

"The general tenor of Scripture indicates that the superior quality of Abel's offering derived from the integrity of his heart rather than from the nature of the offering itself. This is the clear implication of Gen 4:7, where the Lord says to Cain, 'If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?'"⁴⁹¹

". . . what gave Abel's offering greater value was his faith, not the fact that it was an animal sacrifice."⁴⁹²

Faith must inspire any worship that God will accept. Even though Abel died long ago, he "still speaks" to us, through the scriptural record, and so challenges us to continue to worship (show reverence for) God by believing His promises.

- 11:5 Whereas Abel suffered murder, "Enoch" never died, yet both demonstrated faith. Enoch "was pleasing to God," and set an example of walking "by faith" *all his life*, that readers would do well to follow.⁴⁹³ The Lord may return at any time to "take" modern "Enochs" into His presence, just as He took that great saint.
- 11:6 Walking by "faith" involves not only believing that God "exists" (HCSB), but also believing that He will *reward* the faithful. The original readers faced the temptation to abandon that hope, as we do. Note that those He will reward are those who "are seeking after Him" (present tense in Greek), not believers who have stopped seeking after Him. Ultimately we know God's will by faith.

⁴⁸⁸Barclay, p. 148.

⁴⁸⁹McGee, 5:584.

⁴⁹⁰See Bruce K. Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48:2 (Fall 1986):363-72.

⁴⁹¹Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 334.

⁴⁹²Ellingworth, p. 571.

⁴⁹³See Timothy J. Cole, "Enoch, a Man Who Walked with God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:591 (July-September 1991):288-97.

"It should be noticed that our author does not attempt to offer arguments and proofs for the existence of God. Throughout the whole of Scripture the existence of God is never a matter of doubt or debate. Such reasonings as are found (for example, Ps. 19:1ff.; Rom. 1:19ff.) always start from assurance, never from uncertainty. God is not a metaphysical concept for questioning and discussion. He is the supreme reality, and the foundation and source of all created being [existence]. Hence when the reader is advised that to draw near to God he *must believe that he exists* he is not being invited to take a step in the dark but to turn to the light; he is not being encouraged to work up a blind faith but to entrust the whole of his being to him who is himself truth and light and life."⁴⁹⁴

In almost all of the following exemplars of faith that the writer cited, there is a clear and direct relationship between faith and reward.⁴⁹⁵

"The best way to grow in faith is to walk with the faithful."⁴⁹⁶

"The Reformed understanding of the New Testament doctrine of rewards is well presented by Martin Bucer, who writes: 'That the Lord rewards his people for their good works is not on the grounds of their righteousness, but purely from his free grace and for the sake of his dear Son (Rom. 11:6), in whom he chose us for eternal life before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), and created us for good works (Eph. 2:10) which through him he effects in us (Jn. 15:5) and rewards so generously (Rom. 8:10-14, 26-30).' Consequently, 'when God rewards our good works he is rewarding his works and gifts in us, rather than our own works.' Moreover, while the faith we exercise and the good works we perform proceed from our own free will, 'nevertheless it is he who produces this good will and action in us, impelling us by his Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:13)'; thus 'all the good that God does to us and the eternal life that he gives us still remain the results of his grace alone, so that no one should boast of himself, but only of the Lord (Phil. 2:13; Rom. 6:23; 11:5f., 36; 1 Cor. 1:29f.)'"⁴⁹⁷

With this understanding I totally agree.

⁴⁹⁴P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 462.

⁴⁹⁵Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 339.

⁴⁹⁶Wiersbe, 2:318.

⁴⁹⁷P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, pp. 461-62. His quotations are from Martin Bucer, *A Brief Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 10 (1548).

11:7 "Noah . . . prepared" for things to come (by building "an ark"). He did not live for the present. By continuing to believe the promises of God, even when everyone else disbelieved them, Noah inherited a new world after the Flood. The writer had promised the readers "the world to come" (2:5-8). Noah's faith led to the preservation ("salvation") of his family ("household"). Likewise, as we continue to trust God, we will encourage others to do so, and they also will enter into their inheritance—if they follow our example of faithful perseverance.

2. Faith in the Patriarchal Era 11:8-22

11:8-10 Like Abraham, we should look forward to our inheritance in the coming world, and should live as strangers and pilgrims in this world (1 Pet. 1:1).⁴⁹⁸ Abraham demonstrated faith in three phases: when God called him to leave Mesopotamia (v. 8), when he reached the Promised Land but still had to live in it as a foreigner (vv. 9-10), and when God called him to sacrifice Isaac (vv. 17-19).

"Abraham's faith accepted God's promises and acted on them even though there was nothing to indicate that they would be fulfilled."⁴⁹⁹

As Abraham later received for "an inheritance" some of the land he formerly lived in as a stranger, so we will, too. The "city" Abraham looked for was a city God would provide for him. A city with "foundations" offered a permanent, established home—in contrast to the transient existence of a tent—encampment.

"To cultured men in the first century, the city was the highest form of civilized existence."⁵⁰⁰

We look for such a habitation as well, namely, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1, 9-27).

The Hebrews writer referred to "Abraham" 10 times in total; his example is especially helpful for those tempted to abandon faith in God. Only two other books mention him more: Luke (15 times) and John (11 times).

11:11-12 "Sarah herself" believed God would fulfill His promise, and that He would provide something (a child) totally beyond the realm of natural possibility. God wants us, too, to believe the promises He has made to us. God rewarded her "faith" far beyond what she imagined ("*as many descendants*

⁴⁹⁸See Daniel J. Estes, "Looking for Abraham's City," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:588 (October-December 1990):399-413, for evidence of Abraham's pilgrim character in Genesis.

⁴⁹⁹Morris, p. 117.

⁵⁰⁰Ibid., p. 118.

as the stars of heaven"), and He will reward ours in the same way (cf. Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17-18).

11:13-16 "All these" probably refers to Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob (vv. 8-9, 11), who lived as exiled strangers, or aliens, by "faith," not all whom the writer had listed to this point. "Strangers and exiles" is probably a *hendiadys* meaning "exiled strangers." Verses 13-16 interrupt the recital of Abraham's acts of faith. Evidently the writer decided to preach a little at this point, the middle of his exposition of the patriarchs' example. He emphasized the eschatological perspective that is the point of this entire unit (vv. 8-22).

These patriarchs all continued to live by faith to the very end, and they "died" *believing* God would eventually fulfill His promises to them. They looked forward to possessing a land that God promised to give them ("welcomed [the promises] from a distance"). They did not turn back to what they had left, which might have encouraged them to apostatize.\

"Continual hankering would have found a way."⁵⁰¹

In the same way, we should not abandon our hope. God was "not ashamed" of them, because they were not ashamed to believe Him, and to remain faithful to Him. ("Not ashamed" [cf. 2:11] is a *litotes* implying that God is willing and happy "to be called their God.") Likewise, we will not shame Him if we resist the temptation to turn from Him in shame (1 Sam. 2:30; 2 Tim. 2:12). God prepared a heavenly habitation for them, and He has done the same for us (John 14:1-3).

Each example of faith that the writer has cited, so far, is a positive one, involving a believer who kept on trusting God and His promises—in spite of the temptation to stop trusting. That is what the writer was urging his readers to do throughout this epistle: Keep on trusting and do not turn back. In every case, God approved and rewarded the continuing faith of the faithful.

11:17-19 Here the writer began to develop the idea that he expressed in verse 3, that "faith" should be the way the believer looks at all of life and history. He did so to help his readers see that *continuance in faith* is the only logical and consistent attitude for a believer.

"A new movement, the author's exposition of the life of faith, begins here. In a multiplicity of varied experiences faith remains the constant factor by which these experiences are met and understood. Faith constitutes a Christian's true 'world view' (cf. v. 3)."⁵⁰²

⁵⁰¹Robertson, 5:423.

⁵⁰²Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 808.

It is the belief that God could and would "raise . . . the dead," that is the key element in these verses. From Abraham's perspective, God's promise and His command seemed to conflict.

"We are apt to see this as a conflict between Abraham's love for his son and his duty to God. But for the author the problem was Abraham's difficulty in reconciling the different revelations made to him."⁵⁰³

Abraham was willing to continue to *trust and obey* God, illustrated when he "offered up Isaac," because he believed God could even "raise" Isaac, his unique (Gr. *monogenes*) son, "from the dead" to fulfill His promises of an heir. Similarly, we need to continue to trust and obey God, even though He may have to raise us from the dead to fulfill His promises to us. Isaac's restoration was "a type" (Gr. *parabole*, parable, figure, illustration) of the fact that God will give us what He has promised—if we continue to trust and obey Him. When Isaac arose from the altar, it was just as if he had risen from the dead.

11:20-22 Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all demonstrated confidence in God's word in the ways mentioned: "blessed," "worshipped," "made mention," gave orders." They believed, "regarding things to come," that He would provide for them what He had promised. We should do the same. The faith of all three of these patriarchs affected their descendants. Ours should as well.

"With all three the significant thing was their firm conviction that death cannot frustrate God's purposes."⁵⁰⁴

3. Faith in the Mosaic Era 11:23-31

Here the writer began to focus on the way faith deals with hostility and persecution, a subject of special interest to his audience, which was facing opposition from Jewish brethren.

"Moses and Abraham hold the most prominent places in the roll of faith; and the central event of both their lives, as Hebrews presents them, is a journey."⁵⁰⁵

11:23 Faith confronted hostility in a characteristic way, that the writer began to emphasize in this verse. We see Amram and Jochebed's faith in God, in their placing His will above Pharaoh's command (they hid Moses "for three months" and "were not afraid of the king's edict"). Moses was no ordinary child, among other ways, in that his parents saved his life—even

⁵⁰³Morris, pp. 121-22.

⁵⁰⁴Ibid., p. 123.

⁵⁰⁵Ellingworth, p. 608.

though Pharaoh had ordered all Jewish male babies killed. Josephus wrote that Moses was an unusually beautiful baby.⁵⁰⁶ The writer mentioned Moses 11 times, more than in any other New Testament book except for John and Acts. Amram and Jochebed regarded God's will concerning the sanctity of life, as more important than obedience to the state, when national law *required* disobeying God's will (cf. Acts 4:19). God honored their faith.

11:24-26 Moses had a true appreciation for the promises of God. This led him to choose the reward associated with Israel's promised Messiah ("reproach of Christ") over ("greater riches than") the temporary material wealth ("passing pleasures" and "treasures") he could have enjoyed had he stayed in Egypt. He was laying up treasure in heaven.⁵⁰⁷ We ourselves should be willing to suffer temporary disgrace, reproach, and loss, as we continue to cast our lot with God's faithful disciples.

"As with Abraham and Moses of old, the decisions we make today will determine the rewards tomorrow. More than this, our decisions should be motivated by the expectation of receiving rewards. . . . The emphasis in the Epistle to the Hebrews is: 'Don't live for what the world will promise you today! Live for what God has promised you in the future! . . .'"⁵⁰⁸

"The possibility of reward is the most frequently mentioned motivation for enduring in the faith (for example, see Matt. 5:10-12; 16:24-27; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 2 Tim. 2:11-13; 1 John 2:28; Rev. 22:12)."⁵⁰⁹

11:27 Moses persevered in spite of the king's "wrath," and so should we, in spite of the wrath we may experience from ungodly opponents. Probably Moses' departure ("left Egypt") for Midian, 40 years before the exodus is in view here. This seems likely, in view of the chronological sequence the writer followed in this passage. The reference to the king's "wrath" is appropriate, because Moses left Egypt on the occasion when the Pharaoh sought to kill him (Exod. 2:15).

". . . it was not personal fear of Pharaoh but the awareness of his destiny as the deliverer of the covenant people that caused him to take flight. Had he remained [in Egypt], at that juncture, this destiny would have been thwarted, humanly speaking, by his execution; and so, impelled by

⁵⁰⁶Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 2:9:6.

⁵⁰⁷Robertson, 5:426.

⁵⁰⁸Wiersbe, 2:279.

⁵⁰⁹*The Nelson . . .*, p. 2096.

faith in the divine purpose for his life, Moses took refuge in Midian."⁵¹⁰

"The emphasis . . . falls not on endurance but on continually seeing, as it were, the unseen God . . . The reference is not to the awesome event at the burning bush . . ., as if to say that Moses saw one who is invisible, but to a fixed habit of spiritual perception. . . .

"From the pastoral perspective of the writer, the firmly entrenched habit of Moses in keeping God continually in view establishes a standard for imitation by the community in its experience of fear and governmental oppression."⁵¹¹

"The courage to abandon work on which one's heart is set, and accept inaction cheerfully as the will of God, is of the rarest and highest kind, and can be created and sustained only by the clearest spiritual vision' (Peake)."⁵¹²

11:28 Furthermore, as Moses continued to demonstrate confidence in "the blood" of the lamb that God provided, so should we. He avoided, and *we must avoid*, God's judgment by doing so.

In this verse, there is a subtle transition from emphasis on exemplary persons to exemplary events (cf. vv. 29-30, 33-38).

11:29-30 The people of Israel experienced victory over their enemies as they trusted God, and we can, too. At the "Red Sea," the Israelites willingly went forward at God's word ("passed through"), rather than turning back. Trust and obedience resulted in the Israelites' preservation ("by faith the walls of Jericho fell down"), and eventual entrance into their inheritance. The believing community that originally received this homily could identify with a group of people who persevered, not just individuals who did.

11:31 Even though "Rahab" was a Gentile sinner and a "harlot" (i.e., a secular prostitute), God spared her because of her "faith" when He destroyed all "those who were disobedient" around her. Likewise, God will preserve today's faithful, not because they are personally worthy, but because of their faith in Him.

"Although a foreigner to the covenant people, she manifested a faith that was oriented toward the future and that found specific content in the acts of the God of Israel

⁵¹⁰P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 499. Cf. Dods, 4:361.

⁵¹¹Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 376.

⁵¹²Moffatt, p. 181.

(Josh 2:11). She was prepared to assume present peril for the sake of future preservation (Josh 2:12-16)."⁵¹³

4. Faith in subsequent eras 11:32-40

11:32 The rhetorical question, "And what more shall I say?" suggests that the writer did not consider that there was much point in citing more examples.⁵¹⁴ The Old Testament is full of good models of persevering, living faith. Nevertheless, the writer selected these few additional Israelites for brief mention, along with what their faith accomplished. Each individual that the writer mentioned was less than perfect, as is every believer. Yet God approved the faith of each one.

By the way, the Greek pronoun *me*, translated "me," is qualified by a participle in the masculine gender (*diegoumenon*), which defines the pronoun as masculine. This indicates that the writer of this epistle ("me") was a man and not a woman.

This is the only New Testament reference to "Gideon," "Barak," "Samson," and "Jephthah." The writer employed the rhetorical device of *paraleipsis* here. In "paraleipsis," the speaker or writer suggests that he is not going to mention something, but then mentions it anyway. This technique stresses the suggestiveness of what he has omitted. In this case, the writer suggested that he could have cited many more examples of persevering faith.

"The order of names here may be understood if they are read as three pairs, Gideon-Barak, Samson-Jephthah, David-Samuel, the more important member of each pair being named first."⁵¹⁵

11:33-35a Joshua, Israel's judges, and David "conquered kingdoms." Daniel "shut the lions' mouths" (Dan. 6:17-22), as did Samson (Judg. 14:5-6), David (1 Sam. 17:34-37), and Benaiah (1 Chron. 11:22). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego escaped fiery deaths ("quenched the power of fire"; Dan. 3:23-27). David, Elijah, Elisha, and Jeremiah avoided execution ("escaped the edge of the sword"). Gideon, Samson, David, and Esther are all examples of people who were weak but became strong through faith. Many of Israel's judges and kings "became mighty in war" and "put foreign enemies to flight."

"Women received back their dead" because they believed God could and would do what He had promised (cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:17-37). Some commentators have seen allusions in verses 34 and 35 to

⁵¹³Ibid., p. 379.

⁵¹⁴Guthrie, p. 243.

⁵¹⁵Ellingworth, p. 623. Cf. 1 Sam. 12:11.

experiences that the Israelites underwent during the Maccabean struggle (1 Macc. 2:7; 3:15; et al.).⁵¹⁶

11:35b-38 Faith does not result in deliverance in every case, however. These verses, which would have been particularly comforting to the original distressed readers, refer to many different forms of persecution. Traditionally, Isaiah suffered death at King Manasseh's hand by being "sawn in two."⁵¹⁷

"According to . . . mutually complementary rabbinic sources, Manasseh, enraged because Isaiah had prophesied the destruction of the Temple, ordered his arrest. Isaiah fled to the hill country and hid in the trunk of a cedar tree. He was discovered when the king ordered the tree cut down. Isaiah was tortured with a saw because he had taken refuge in the trunk of a tree . . ."⁵¹⁸

Sometimes the faithful person's reward comes on the other side of the grave. Some of the original readers, and even we ourselves, might have had to or will have to endure death. Those who accept death ("not accepting their release") without apostatizing, are those "the world is not worthy" of, because they do not turn from following the Lord even under the most severe pressure.

11:39-40 Those faithful believers who died in Old Testament times have not yet entered into their inheritances. This awaits the future, probably the Second Coming when Christ will judge Old Testament saints (Dan. 12:1-2; cf. Isa. 26:19). We will have some part in their reward ("apart from us they would not be made perfect"). We will at least do so as Christ's companions who will witness their award ceremony. Their being "made perfect" refers to their entering into their final "rest" (inheritance), and it rests entirely, as ours does, on the sacrificial death of Christ (cf. 9:15).

"God's plan provided for 'something better for us.' The indefinite pronoun leaves the precise nature of the blessing undefined. The important thing is not exactly what it is but that God has not imparted it prematurely. 'Us' means 'us Christians' . . ."⁵¹⁹

Verses 39-40 summarize the chapter by relating the list of exemplary witnesses to the audience's experience, and they provide a transition to the argument of 12:1-13.

God intended this inspiring chapter to encourage us to continue to trust and obey Him in the midst of temptations to turn away from following Him faithfully. The implication is that our reward, as theirs, is eschatological.

⁵¹⁶E.g., Moffatt, pp. 186-87.

⁵¹⁷*The Martyrdom of Isaiah* 5:1-14.

⁵¹⁸Lane, *Hebrews* 9—13, p. 390.

⁵¹⁹Morris, p. 132.

" . . . it is the future, and not the past, that molds the present. . . .

"The men and women celebrated in the catalogue of attested exemplars all directed the capacity of faith to realities which for them lay in the future (cf. 11:7, 10, 13, 27, 31, 35-38). They found in faith a reliable guide to the future, even though they died without experiencing the fulfillment of God's promise (11:23, 39). . . .

"The most distinctive aspect of the exposition is the development of the relation of faith to suffering and martyrdom."⁵²⁰

B. DEMONSTRATING NECESSARY ENDURANCE 12:1-13

The writer followed up his scriptural exposition with another final exhortation (chs. 12—13). This is the pattern he followed consistently throughout this epistle. He first called on his readers to persevere faithfully, so they would not lose any of their reward. He advocated three practices to remain faithful: keep your eyes on Jesus (vv. 1-3), understand God's use of trials in your life (vv. 4-11), and grow stronger as a Christian (vv. 12-13). This section is chiasmic.

- A A call to run with endurance (vv. 1-3)
- B Explanation of the role of suffering (vv. 4-11)
- A' A call to renew commitment to endure (vv. 12-13)

"There should be no chapter division here, since 12:1-3 really is the climax in the whole argument about the better promises (10:19—12:3) with a passionate appeal for loyalty to Christ."⁵²¹

1. The example of Jesus 12:1-3

One writer observed a chiasmic structure in verses one and two.

- "Therefore we,
- [A] having *seated around about* us such a cloud of witnesses,
 - [B] *setting aside* every weight and every clinging *sin* . . .
 - [C] with *patient endurance* . . .
 - [D] let us run the race that is set before us
 - [E] *keeping our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of the faith,*
 - [D'] who for the *joy that was set before Him* . . .
 - [C'] *patiently endured* the cross . . .
 - [B'] *despising shame* . . .
 - [A'] and *is seated* at the right hand of the throne of God."⁵²²

⁵²⁰Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, pp. 394-95.

⁵²¹Robertson, 5:432.

⁵²²Estella B. Horning, "Chiasmus, Creedal Structure, and Christology in Hebrews 12:1-2," *Biblical Research* 23 (1978):41.

This structure focuses attention on the central element, Jesus, rather than on the first element, us.⁵²³

"It seems likely that here [in 12:1-2], as in 1, 3 [i.e., 1:3], the author intentionally used poetic language to highlight and emphasize the significance of his theme: Jesus Christ is 'better.' Moreover, the balance and rhythm of the language make the text more esthetically attractive and provide a high degree of emotive impact. Thus the interpretation of the discourse by the intrusion of poetic language was bound to carry considerable impact and appeal . . ."⁵²⁴

One writer argued that Hebrews 11:1—12:2 is an *encomium*—a literary work in praise of someone or something—on Jesus.⁵²⁵ Another saw this section as an encomium on faith.⁵²⁶

12:1 The "cloud of witnesses" refers to the Old Covenant saints whom the writer just mentioned (ch. 11). They are "witnesses," not just because they presently view *our* actions, as spectators, but because by their lives they bore witness to their faith in God.⁵²⁷ The description of these predecessors as a "cloud" is an interesting one, since they are presently without resurrected bodies. They await the resurrection of their bodies at the Second Coming (Dan. 12:2). The writer's main point was that we have many good examples of people who faithfully trusted God in the past. Nevertheless the word "witness" does also *imply* a spectator (cf. 10:28; 1 Tim. 6:12).

In view of this encouragement, we should "lay aside every *thing* (encumbrance)" that impedes our running the Christian race successfully (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24; 2 Tim. 4:7-8). Popular moral philosophers, who spoke on the streets of every sizeable Hellenistic community in the first century, commonly used an athletic contest as an illustration of life.⁵²⁸ "Encumbrances" are weights, that may not necessarily be sins, but nevertheless make perseverance difficult.

"Some one is recorded to have asked whether a certain thing would do a person harm, and the reply was given, 'No harm, if you do not wish to win.'"⁵²⁹

⁵²³See Ronald E. Man, "The Value of Chiasm for New Testament Interpretation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:562 (April-June 1984):149.

⁵²⁴David Alan Black, "A Note on the Structure of Hebrews 12, 1-2," *Biblica* 68:4 (1987):551.

⁵²⁵Merland Ray Millar, "What Is the Literary Form of Hebrews 11?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29:4 (December 1986):411-17.

⁵²⁶Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible*, p. 212.

⁵²⁷Dods, 4:365; Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 346; Wiersbe, 2:322.

⁵²⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 408.

⁵²⁹Thomas, p. 156.

We should also "lay aside . . . sin" of any kind. "The sin" that the writer warned his readers against especially in Hebrews is unbelief, apostasy.⁵³⁰ In view of the immediately preceding context, it might refer to "losing heart," "quitting the race," or "giving up the fight." However, many different kinds of sin can trip us up, and we should avoid *all* sin for this reason.⁵³¹

"This might have reference to the love of wealth, attachment to the world, preoccupation with earthly interests, or self-importance."⁵³²

The reason for this self-discipline is so: we can *keep on running the Christian race* effectively. Here the writer returned to the thought of 10:28: "You have need of endurance." He conceived of the Christian life as an endurance race, a marathon, not a 50-yard dash.

". . . the real test of life is the steady, normal progress of the soul—not paroxysms of effort but steady endurance."⁵³³

12:2

As a runner keeps looking toward his or her goal, so we should keep looking to ("fixing our eyes on") "Jesus," not primarily to the other witnesses (v. 1; cf. Acts 7:55-56; Phil. 3:8). When we take our *eyes of faith* off Jesus, we begin to sink, like Peter did (Matt. 14:22-33). Jesus should be our primary model when it comes to persevering. The writer used the simple personal name "Jesus" to accent our Lord's humanity, especially His endurance of pain, humiliation, and the disgrace of the cross.

"The writer now returns to the duty of *hupomone* [endurance] as the immediate exercise of *pistis* [faith] (10^{36f}), as the great Believer, who shows us what true *pistis* means, from beginning to end, in its heroic course (*ton prokeimenon hemin agona*) [the race that is set before us]."⁵³⁴

He is our "author" (lit. "file leader," "captain," "pioneer"; 2:10). It was by looking to Him in faith that we were saved. Jesus set the example of "living by faith" for us, one evidence of His faith being His prayers. Jesus *perfected* faith in the sense that He finished His course of "living by faith" successfully (cf. 2:13).

⁵³⁰Robertson, 5:433; McGee, 5:601.

⁵³¹Dods, 4:365; Guthrie, p. 249; P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 520.

⁵³²Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 409.

⁵³³Thomas, p. 156. See Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.

⁵³⁴Moffatt, p. 192.

"As the 'perfecter of faith' Jesus is the one in whom faith has reached its perfection."⁵³⁵

"He alone is the source of hope and help in their time of need. Looking to Him in faith and devotion is the central theological and practical message of Hebrews."⁵³⁶

The joy of the prospect of His reward, namely, His victory over death, glorification, inheritance, and reign motivated Him, too (1:9, 13-14; 8:1; 10:12). This is the only occurrence of "cross" outside the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles, and its presence here stresses the "shame" associated with Jesus' crucifixion. What we look forward to is very similar to what Jesus anticipated. Such a prospect—resurrection bodies, glorification, inheritance, reigning with Christ—will help us to endure suffering and despise the shame involved in living faithful to God before unbelieving critics.

12:3 The readers should think upon ("consider") Jesus, so they might not "grow tired (weary)" of persevering and "lose heart." Meditation on Jesus and the cross encourages us to continue to follow God's will faithfully. It is natural for us to overestimate the severity of our trials, and the writer did not want us to do this.

"Understanding Jesus is the key to the whole problem, the cure for doubt and hesitation."⁵³⁷

"The clear implication for the audience is that if they were to relinquish their commitment to Christ under the pressure of persistent opposition they would express active opposition against themselves (as in 6:6!), just as did Jesus' tormentors [cf. 10:38-39]."⁵³⁸

2. The proper view of trials 12:4-11

The writer put his readers' sufferings in perspective, so that they might not overestimate the difficulty they faced in remaining faithful to God.

"Suffering comes to all; it is part of life, but it is not easy to bear. Yet it is not quite so bad when it can be seen as meaningful. . . . The writer points out the importance of discipline and proceeds to show that for Christians suffering is rightly understood only when seen as God's fatherly discipline,

⁵³⁵D. G. Peterson, "An Examination of the Concept of 'Perfection' in the 'Epistle to the Hebrews'" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manchester, 1978), p. 298.

⁵³⁶Fanning, p. 415.

⁵³⁷Robertson, 5:434.

⁵³⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, pp. 416-17.

- correcting and directing us. Suffering is evidence, not that God does not love us, but that he does."⁵³⁹
- 12:4 The readers had "not yet resisted" sin to the extent that their enemies were torturing them, "shedding" their "blood," or killing them for their faith—as had been Jesus' experience. Evidently there had been no martyrs among the readers yet, though the writer and the readers undoubtedly knew of Christians elsewhere who had died for their faith (e.g., Stephen, James, et al.). Their "striving against sin" probably refers to both resisting sinful opponents and resisting inward temptations to sin in their own lives (v. 1).
- 12:5-8 We need to remember, too, that God allows us to experience some opposition to make us stronger in the faith (Deut. 8:5; Prov. 3:11-12; James 1). It is easy to become discouraged when we encounter hard times. The Israelites certainly gave evidence of this when they left Egypt following the exodus. Verses 5-11 constitute an exposition of Proverbs 3:11-12.

Another value of divine discipline is that it prepares us to reign with Christ (cf. 2:10). God's "discipline" assures us that we are His "sons." All believers are "partakers" (cf. 1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4) of discipline. The "illegitimate children" in view seem to be genuine children of God but not approved sons. (See Romans 8:14-17 for the contrast between children and sons.)

"A father would spend much care and patience on the upbringing of a true-born son whom he hoped to make a wealthy heir; and at the time such a son might have to undergo much more irksome discipline than an illegitimate child for whom no future of honor and responsibility was envisaged, and who therefore might be left more or less to please himself."⁵⁴⁰

Ishmael is an Old Testament example of an illegitimate child. He was the true child of Abraham. Yet because he was "illegitimate" (i.e., the son of Hagar rather than Sarah, Abraham's wife), he did not receive the inheritance that Isaac, the *legitimate* child, did (cf. Gen. 17:19-21; 21:12-14). Ishmael received *some* blessing because he was Abraham's son, but he did not receive the *full inheritance* because he was an illegitimate child.

The approved ("whom He receives") sons in view, here in Hebrews, are evidently those who persevere through discipline to the end of their lives, whereas the illegitimate children do not stay the course but apostatize.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁹Morris, p. 136.

⁵⁴⁰Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, pp. 357-58.

⁵⁴¹Ellingworth, p. 651; Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 810.

"In the Roman world, an 'illegitimate child' had no inheritance rights."⁵⁴²

God deals with apostate believers in judgment and *punishment*, but He deals with persevering believers in love-motivated "discipline" ("child training"; cf. 5:8). The writer seems to be saying that God disciplines *all* Christians, but when a believer apostatizes, God may let him go his own way "without" disciplining him *further*, especially if he has not responded to previous discipline but has hardened his heart. God disciplines Christians to prepare them for future service, but when they apostatize, He stops preparing them for future service. This is probably true only in extreme cases of departure from God and His truth (cf. 6:6, where we read that it is impossible to renew these apostates to repentance).

"The author does not specify what, in literal terms, would be involved in being an illegitimate member of God's family. The context does not refer, even indirectly, to 'false brethren [i.e., non-Christians] secretly brought in' (Gal. 2:4). The wider context does suggest that such illegitimate offspring are apostates such as Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, probably alluded to in v. 3; or more generally, those who do not keep faith firmly to the end (10:39)."⁵⁴³

Another view, of the terms "sons" and "illegitimate children," is that they refer to true Christians, and *only-professing* but not genuine Christians, respectively.⁵⁴⁴ The reason I do not favor this view is that, throughout this epistle, I believe the writer is urging true Christians to remain faithful and not apostatize. In other words, the larger context favors this interpretation. Moreover an illegitimate child is, after all, still a child of his father. We need to understand the legitimate and illegitimate distinction in the light of Jewish and Roman culture.

"The ancient world found it incomprehensible that a father could possibly love his child and not punish him. In fact, a real son would draw more discipline than, say, an illegitimate child for the precise reason that greater honor and responsibility were to be his."⁵⁴⁵

This probably explains why committed Christians seem to experience more difficulties than non-committed Christians. This is observable clearly in countries of the world where Christians are being persecuted. Christians in those countries, who seek to remain faithful to the Lord, draw more persecution than Christians who compromise. God is preparing committed Christians for greater honor and responsibility in the future.

⁵⁴²Ibid.

⁵⁴³Ellingworth, p. 651.

⁵⁴⁴E.g., Morris, p. 137.

⁵⁴⁵R. Kent Hughes, 2:173.

"A *father* who neglects to discipline a *son* is deficient in his capacity as father, and a son who escapes all discipline is losing out on his sonship. This is a principle which would not be recognized by all schools of thought in this modern age where permissiveness has such powerful influence. The authority of parents has been so eroded that discipline rarely if ever comes into play. It has generally ceased to be a part of sonship. It is small wonder that those brought up in such an atmosphere find genuine difficulty in understanding the discipline of God."⁵⁴⁶

12:9-11 As Christians, we need to submit to God's discipline in our lives, because it will result in *fullness of life*, and greater "holiness" and "righteousness," along with "peace" ("the peaceful fruit of righteousness").

". . . there may be an implied contrast between temporary human punishment and the permanent reward which is given to those who submit to divine discipline."⁵⁴⁷

God always designs discipline for our welfare ("good"), even though it may not be pleasant ("joyful") to endure.

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."⁵⁴⁸

The title "Father of spirits" (v. 9) occurs only here in the New Testament (cf. Num. 16:22; 27:16). It probably means something like "our spiritual Father," as some English versions translate it (TEV, NEB, JB), in contrast to our physical (earthly) fathers.

This is one of the great sections in the New Testament that clarifies the reason for the Christian's trials (cf. James 1; 1 Peter). It is essential that we view our sufferings as being the Lord's *discipline*, rather than as an indication of His displeasure, His punishment, or even worse, His *hatred* (cf. Deut. 1:26-27)—in order to persevere faithfully. There is a real, as well as a linguistic connection, between "discipline" and "disciple" and "discipleship."

"We shall cease from self-pity, from resentment and from rebellious complaint if we remember that there is no discipline of God which does not take its source in love, and which is not aimed at good."⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁶Guthrie, p. 253.

⁵⁴⁷Ellingworth, p. 654.

⁵⁴⁸Lewis, p. 81.

⁵⁴⁹Barclay, p. 204.

During some spring seasons, I used to notice that birds were building a nest in my garage. When I saw that, I moved the nest outside. It would not be safe for the birds to live in the garage, since their access to the outdoors would be greatly limited by the closed door. I am sure that they did not appreciate my moving their nest from its secure place indoors. But I had to do it for their welfare. Likewise, God sometimes moves our nests from comfortable places to locations that are better for us in the long run.

3. The need for greater strength 12:12-13

The writer next urged his readers to take specific action that would facilitate their continuance in the faith.

This word of exhortation, as well as the others, reveals that the original readers were spiritually weak. Consequently, the writer urged them to build up their strength (cf. Isa. 35:3) so they could work effectively and walk without stumbling (cf. Prov. 4:25-27). The Greek word *ektrepo*, translated "be put out of joint" (v. 13), has the technical medical sense of a foot turning and becoming dislocated.⁵⁵⁰ This power comes as we draw upon our resources for strength, namely, the Word of God and the grace of God (4:12-16). The readers also needed to level the path of discipleship ("make straight [or smooth] paths"), that they trod, by removing impediments to their progress. This might involve, for example, avoiding contact with people and materials that encourage departure from God's will. Then the "lame" among them (i.e., the very weak) might recover ("be healed") as they proceeded to walk. The writer probably intended this exhortation to include laying aside sin (v. 1), and avoid compromising associations with apostates—who might throw harmful barriers such as false teaching in the Christians' path.

This encouragement completes the thought of verses 1-13. The writer began with an exhortation, expounded the value of discipline, and ended with another exhortation.

"A depth of pastoral concern is evident throughout this section. The writer understood that faith can be eroded by constant exposure to harsh circumstances."⁵⁵¹

Over the years, God has given me the privilege of encouraging several ministers who became discouraged. I remember a conversation with one pastor who wept in my office. He told me that he knew he spent more time in sermon preparation and prayer than the other preachers in his town, but his church was declining while theirs were growing. Another man told me that he had been invited to pastor his church because its leaders wanted good Bible preaching, and they believed he was the man for the job. Yet after preaching for some time there, this brother discovered that the leaders did not really want him to preach the Bible but to reinforce their traditions. Many people had left this church, and my friend feared that he would not be able to get another opportunity to pastor elsewhere, because his congregation had declined so greatly. A third man told me he was thoroughly discouraged, because nothing that he had tried as a pastor had produced

⁵⁵⁰Ellingworth, p. 659.

⁵⁵¹Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, p. 428.

growth. In each case, I asked them to tell me what they had been doing, and in each one, the brother explained that he had been faithfully preaching the Bible, as well as doing other good things. I was able to encourage each one, because, even though, when the Bible is preached effectively, a church usually grows, this is not always what happens. The most important thing is to keep doing what is right, regardless of the immediate results. God will bless such faithfulness eventually, at the judgment seat of Christ, if not in this life.

V. LIFE IN A HOSTILE WORLD 12:14—13:25

This final major section of the book conceivably grew out of the writer's reflection on the Greek text of Proverbs 4:26-27. He specified how his readers could "make straight paths for your feet" (12:13).

"In the final division of the homily the writer provides the members of the house church with a fresh orientation for life as Christians in a hostile society. The new people of God are engaged in pilgrimage to the city of God. This world is not their home; their goal is 'a kingdom that cannot be shaken' (12:28) or 'the city that is to come' (13:14). The metaphor of the journey to the city of God characterizes men and women of committed faith as pilgrims and implies an understanding of Christian life as commitment to pilgrimage. It also implies fidelity to the covenant."⁵⁵²

The sections of this final division all contain these themes of pilgrimage and covenant privilege and obligation. As in the first division (1:1—2:18), there is much emphasis on God speaking and the importance of listening to His voice.

"The writer offers his readers advice on how to live as a community of faith, between well-founded hope and the dangers which surround them."⁵⁵³

A. THE DANGER OF UNRESPONSIVENESS (THE FIFTH WARNING) 12:14-29

The writer now turned from the hearers' responsibility as they experienced suffering (vv. 1-13), to the peril of rejecting God—who continues to speak to us through His Son, using the Scriptures. As with the preceding pericope (vv. 1-13), this one is also a chiasm.

A Exhortation (vv. 14-17)

B Exposition (vv. 18-24)

A' Exhortation (vv. 25-29)

"The synthesis of so many significant themes and motifs within a single section identifies 12:14-29 as the pastoral and theological climax of the sermon . . ."⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵²Ibid., pp. 433-34.

⁵⁵³Ellingworth, p. 661.

⁵⁵⁴Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 448.

1. The goal of peace 12:14-17

These verses summarize what the writer has said, previously, about irrevocable loss through disobedience, unbelief, apostasy, and contempt for New Covenant privileges (cf. 6:4-8). The fearful warning about Esau brings these earlier warnings to an awesome head.

12:14 We need to live *peaceably* "with all people (men)," as much as we can (cf. Matt. 5:9; Mark 9:50; Rom. 12:18; 14:19; 2 Tim. 2:22), because peaceful interpersonal relationships foster godliness (James 3:18). However, this writer's emphasis was more on the objective reality of "peace," that results from Christ's death, than on our subjective enjoyment of *peace*. Since we will one day see the Lord, and since no sin can abide in His presence (1 John 3:2), we must also pursue *holiness* in our lives now. A better translation than "sanctification" here is "holiness" (Gr. *hagiasmos*; cf. *hagiatetos* in v. 10, and *hagiasomenoi* in 10:10). In Koine Greek, nouns ending in *mos* in the nominative case describe action. As with peace, holiness is our present state, and we need to continue to manifest it by remaining faithful when tempted to depart from the Lord.

This statement may seem at first to contradict the fact that *Satan* (the unholy one) "saw" God, and appeared "in His presence" in Job 1 and 2. While Satan did, and probably still does, have access to God's presence, that will not be his permanent privilege. The writer of Hebrews spoke here of the permanent privilege of human beings.

12:15 Negatively, the writer warned against neglecting God's "grace" (help). God's "grace" enables us to persevere (cf. 3:12), but here it is almost synonymous with *the Christian faith*. This neglect would result in *unfaithfulness* spreading as a poison (of "bitterness") among God's people (cf. Deut. 29:17-18). The writer pictured departure from the truth here as a "root" that produces bitter fruit in the Christian community. It normally results in the eventual spiritual defilement of many other believers. The writer was not implying that most of his readers were in danger of apostatizing (cf. 6:9), but that the failure of only one individual can affect many other believers.

"Stubbornness, when it grows, produces the noxious fruit of apostasy, which is equivalent to excluding oneself from the grace of God. . . .

"The sin of one individual can corrupt the entire community when that sin is apostasy, because defilement is contagious. One who is defiled by unbelief and apostasy becomes a defiler of others."⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 453, 454.

"The writer has just referred to the need for helping those who are weak and failing in their faith. It would be logical that this still is in reference to them, providing a more specific instance in which some are failing. It is a failing with reference to the grace of God, especially as it relates to seeking forgiveness for failure. It is uncalled for to take this reference and make it a general designation of the plan of salvation."⁵⁵⁶

12:16-17 "Esau" is a clear example of someone who apostatized; he despised his inheritance ("birthright"; "blessing"). and forfeited ("sold") it to satisfy his immediate desires. That is precisely what the writer warned his readers not to do in this letter. Esau could not regain his inheritance later when he wanted it. His decision had permanent consequences; he could not repent (cf. 4:1; 6:4-6; 10:26).⁵⁵⁷ His inability to repent was not a matter of forgiveness, but of consequences. David is another example of a person who had to bear the consequences of his sins, even though God forgave him for those sins.

"To take a very simple example—if a young man loses his purity or a girl her virginity, nothing can ever bring it back. The choice was made and the choice stands. God can and will forgive, but God Himself cannot turn back the clock and unmake the choice or undo the consequences."⁵⁵⁸

The writer warned against two things in verse 16: "immorality" (Gr. *pornos*) and being "godless (*bebelos*) like Esau." The Old Testament makes no mention of Esau's immorality, so perhaps the writer understood this term metaphorically in the sense of "apostate."⁵⁵⁹ On the other hand, Esau married two foreign wives, so in this sense he was an immoral fornicator (Gen. 26:34-35; 27:46).⁵⁶⁰ Esau was "godless" in that he relinquished his covenant rights for the sake of immediate gratification. Some translators rendered the Greek word *bebelos* "profane," which means "before (outside) the temple." This paints Esau correctly as a man who lived his life by avoiding God. Today we might know him as a man who did not attend church. He is "the prototype of all who throw away the heavenly reality for the sake of the earthly one."⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁶Duane A. Dunham, "An Exegetical Examination of the Warnings in the Epistle to the Hebrews" (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1974), p. 227.

⁵⁵⁷See Ellingworth, pp. 668-69; and Moffatt, p. 212.

⁵⁵⁸Barclay, p. 210.

⁵⁵⁹Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 445.

⁵⁶⁰P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 540.

⁵⁶¹Thompson, p. 43.

"Whether or not Esau was saved is not relevant to this discussion. The writer uses him as an illustration of the fact that the saved can lose their firstborn inheritance rights. His example is applied to those who have come to the church of the firstborn ones (Heb. 12:23).

"True Christians fully parallel the description of Esau. We are children of God and we are firstborn sons. Because of that we possess the rights of the firstborn. We do not have to earn these rights. They are given to us through the grace of God. However, we must value and keep these rights and are warned by Esau's example regarding the possibility of not doing so. But even though we cannot forfeit eternal life, we can forfeit our firstborn rights."⁵⁶²

"Esau's willingness to give up all that was his as the firstborn son reflected a contempt for the covenant by which his rights were warranted. By descriptive analogy, he is representative of apostate persons who are ready to turn their backs on God and the divine promises, in reckless disregard of the covenant blessings secured by the sacrificial death of Jesus. The immediate reference is to the objective blessings of 'peace' and 'holiness,' specified in v 14. With the example of Esau, apostasy is further defined as a decisive rejection of God's gifts."⁵⁶³

"In Jewish history, the birthright belonged to the firstborn son in a family simply by right of birth and consisted of three things: 1) *ruler* of the household under and for the father, 2) *priest* of the family, and 3) the reception of a *double portion* of all the father's goods. Although a firstborn son did nothing whatsoever to come into possession of the birthright, he could conduct his life in such a manner so as to forfeit the birthright. He could not forfeit his *position* as firstborn in the family, but he could forfeit the *rights* of the firstborn."⁵⁶⁴

2. The superiority of the New Covenant 12:18-24

The writer proceeded to reiterate the superiority of the New Covenant by comparing it with the Old Covenant, using the figure of two mountains: Sinai and Zion.

⁵⁶²Dillow, p. 85.

⁵⁶³Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, pp. 445-46.

⁵⁶⁴Chitwood, p. 139.

"As vv. ¹⁴⁻¹⁷ recall the first warning of 6⁴⁻⁸, so he [the writer] now proceeds to reiterate the second warning of 10²⁶⁻³¹, reminding his readers that they stand in a critical position, in which any indifferences or disobedience to God will prove fatal."⁵⁶⁵

12:18-21 These verses describe the giving of the Old Covenant at Mt. Sinai (cf. 2:2-4; Exod. 19:9-23; Deut. 4:11; 9:8-19).⁵⁶⁶ The writer made Sinai and Zion metaphors (symbols of the two covenants) to show the difference in quality between people's relationship to God under the Old and New Covenants (cf. Gal. 4:24-26).⁵⁶⁷ The emphasis in this comparison is on the holiness of God, and the fearful consequences of incurring His displeasure (cf. Judg. 13:20; 1 Kings 8:12; 18:38; Nah. 1:3; Matt. 24:30-31; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16). God was far from the Israelites, and even Moses felt terror (was "full of fear and trembling"). These verses emphasize the sheer majesty of God, the absolute unapproachability of God, and the sheer fearsomeness of God.⁵⁶⁸

12:22-24 The giving of the New Covenant, and the things associated with that covenant, are more impressive because they comprise the heavenly realities. These realities include the "heavenly city (Jerusalem)" and heavenly beings (i.e., "angels" and believers ["spirits of the righteous made perfect"]). Everything about this vision encourages us to come boldly into God's presence (cf. 4:16).

The phrase "the general assembly and church of the firstborn"—the Greek construction suggests one group—probably refers to all those believers who had died but will receive their full inheritance because they followed the Lord faithfully and did not apostatize.⁵⁶⁹ Another view is that it refers to all the saints on earth and in heaven.⁵⁷⁰ Still other interpreters believe all Christians on earth are in view.⁵⁷¹ Others believe all Christians already in heaven are.⁵⁷²

"To come to the 'church of the firstborn' means to be called to the privilege of being a firstborn son. All Christians are called to be part of that assembly and by birth have a right

⁵⁶⁵Moffatt, pp. 213-14.

⁵⁶⁶See J. M. Casey, "Eschatology in Heb 12:14-29: An Exegetical Study" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of Leuven, 1977), p. 318.

⁵⁶⁷See D. G. Peterson, "The Prophecy of the New Covenant in the Argument of Hebrews," *Reformed Theological Review* 38 (1979):79-80.

⁵⁶⁸Barclay, p. 212.

⁵⁶⁹E.g., Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 811.

⁵⁷⁰E.g., Robertson, 5:440; Morris, p. 142; P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 555.

⁵⁷¹E.g., Moffatt, p. 217; I Howard Marshall, "New Wine in Old Wine-Skins: V. The Biblical Use of the Word 'Ekklesia,'" *Expository Times* 84:12 (1973):364; and Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, pp. 115-16).

⁵⁷²E.g., e.g., Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, pp. 376-77.

to be there. However, they may forfeit that right and never achieve their calling. That is the thrust of all the warnings of the book of Hebrews."⁵⁷³

The "firstborn" was the son who received the greatest amount of inheritance and honor. The "church of the firstborn" is evidently another reference to Christ's companions (1:9; 3:12) who are partakers of His glory (3:14; 6:4; 12:8), namely, those who faithfully persevere in their faith.⁵⁷⁴ Their names are on a heavenly roll (i.e., their identities or souls "are enrolled in heaven") as those who died cleaving to the Lord (cf. Exod. 32:33; Ps. 69:28; Isa. 4:3; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 20:12).

"The spirits of righteous men made perfect" evidently refers to all the glorified redeemed—faithful and unfaithful—whom Christ's sacrifice perfects eventually (glorifies; cf. 10:10, 14; 11:40).

Jesus' blood is "better" than Abel's, because Jesus' blood did not cry out for justice, retribution, and revenge as Abel's did (cf. 11:4; Gen. 4:10). It satisfied God's demands and secured God's acceptance of New Covenant believers (cf. 9:12, 26; 10:10, 14, 19). It "speaks better," because it cries out to God for mercy and pardon *on behalf of* those for whom Jesus shed it.⁵⁷⁵ Their "blood" is a metonymy for their "death." Both deaths were violent and involved the shedding of blood.

"It must be acknowledged that the reference to Abel in v. 24b is unexpected, because it does not belong to the developed comparison between Sinai and Zion. It may have been suggested by the reference in v 23b to the presence of *pneumasi dikaion*, 'the spirits of righteous persons,' in the heavenly city, since the writer had specified in 11:4 that Abel was attested by God as *dikaios*, 'righteous.' It may also have been the writer's intention to evoke the whole history of redemption, from the righteous Abel to the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus, mediator of the new covenant . . ."⁵⁷⁶

This sevenfold comparison (vv. 18-21 and 22-24) should motivate us to remain faithful, and thereby realize the superior blessings of the New Covenant.

⁵⁷³Dillow, p. 85, n. 73.

⁵⁷⁴Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 469.

⁵⁷⁵P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 552.

⁵⁷⁶Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 474. Cf. Casey, pp. 380-82.

Mt. Sinai, a mountain that may be touched	Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem
Blazing fire	Myriads of angels
Darkness	The general assembly and church of the firstborn
Gloom	God, the Judge of all
Whirlwind	The spirits of righteous men made perfect
The blast of a trumpet	Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant
The sound of words	The sprinkled blood that is better than Abel's

3. The consequences of apostasy 12:25-29

The writer shifted again from exposition to exhortation. The hook word "speak" (Gr. *lalounti* and *lalounta*) in verses 24 and 25 ties the two sections together.

12:25 The One "speaking" probably refers to God. "Him who warned them on earth" probably refers to God when He spoke from Mt. Sinai. The contrast is not primarily between the *persons* who spoke, but between the *places* from which God spoke (cf. v. 26). Another view is that the contrast is between a human oracle of God (Moses) and the divine Voice (Christ).⁵⁷⁷ This contrast would have been especially impressive to Jewish Christians. The present warning, the Book of Hebrews, came from God in heaven, and dealt with failure to continue to cleave to His Son (cf. 1:1-2; 2:2-3).

12:26-27 God's "voice shook the earth" at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19:18; Judg. 5:4-5; Ps. 68:8; 77:18; 114:4, 7). It "will shake the earth" and "the heaven[s]" at the end of the Millennium. That shaking will lead to the creation of *new heavens* and a *new earth* that will "remain" (Ps. 95:9-11; Hag. 2:6; Rev. 21:1).

"The 'shaking' is a metaphor for the judgment of God executed in history, as in the case of the fall of Babylon announced in Isa 13:1-22."⁵⁷⁸

12:28-29 Our "kingdom" that "cannot be shaken" is the millennial kingdom.

"It is not unusual for Scripture, on behalf of believers, to assert ownership regarding certain blessings even before they are possessed in Christian experience [cf. 1 Cor. 3:21-22]."⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁷Moffatt, p. 220; Barclay, p. 215.

⁵⁷⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 479.

⁵⁷⁹McClain, p. 436.

Our motive should be "gratitude." Our activity should be the "acceptable service" of God. Our attitude toward Him should be "reverence" and "awe," in view of His ability to judge the unfaithful (cf. 1 Cor. 3:14-15).

"As a consuming fire, God purifies all that is unworthy and unacceptable in those who serve Him and all that is unfit to abide in His presence."⁵⁸⁰

Many readers of Hebrews associate the figure of *God consuming* with His judging unbelievers in hell, but this figure also occurs in the Old Testament with reference to God's judgment of His people (cf. Exod. 24:17; Lev. 10:2; Num. 16:35; Deut. 4:24; 1 Cor. 3:15). The point is the character of God, not the destiny of those judged.

The reference to "fire" in verse 29 completes an *inclusio*, that began with a previous mention of fire in verse 18. This whole section enclosing the "fire" references deals with how important it is to respond properly to God.

"So the writer to the Hebrews finishes with one of these threatening quotations which he so often flings like a thunderbolt at his hearers. It is a quotation from Deuteronomy 4:24."⁵⁸¹

"The warning proper is found in 12:25-29. The readers are called to heed Yahweh, for an eschatological shaking is coming in which the earthly material order will pass away, leaving only an eternal kingdom. The faithful readers who endure will have a part in the eschatological kingdom—the millennium and the New Jerusalem as 'companions' of Jesus, the Messiah-King (1:9, 13-14). This kingdom will become an eternal kingdom. . . .

"All five warnings in the epistle have a positive thrust and a negative impetus. . . . Disobedience to God and His Word will result in a forfeiting of eschatological rewards; obedience to God and His Word will result in a gaining of eschatological rewards."⁵⁸²

Chapter 12 contains three resources that encourage and enable us to run the Christian race with endurance. They are: the example of Jesus (vv. 1-4), the assurance of the Father's love (vv. 5-13), and the enablement of God's grace (help; vv. 14-29).⁵⁸³

⁵⁸⁰Pentecost, *A Faith . . .*, p. 225.

⁵⁸¹Barclay, p. 216.

⁵⁸²Oberholtzer, 146:75.

⁵⁸³Wiersbe, 2:322-26.

B. LIFE WITHIN THE CHURCH CH. 13

The writer now concluded his written sermon, with specific exhortations, requests, and greetings, to enable his readers to continue to worship God acceptably under the New Covenant (cf. 12:28).

"The emphasis in this last section of the book is on *living by faith*. The writer presented the great *examples* of faith in Hebrews 11, and the *encouragements* to faith in Hebrews 12. In Hebrews 13, he presented the *evidences* of faith that should appear in our lives if we are really walking by faith and not by sight."⁵⁸⁴

The four evidences he identified are: enjoying spiritual fellowship (vv. 1-6), submitting to spiritual leadership (vv. 7-9, 17, 24), sharing in spiritual wisdom (vv. 10-16, 18-19), and experiencing spiritual Lordship (vv. 20-21).

"In this chapter we find exhortations apparently springing out of a desire to arrest symptoms of a tendency to hide their Christian profession disowning their teachers and fellow Christians and resenting the shame and hardship incident to the following of Christ."⁵⁸⁵

The last chapter has two parts: Verses 1-21 develop the idea of *thankfulness* expressed in service, that is motivated by the fear of God, which the writer introduced in 12:28. Verses 22-25 constitute a *personal note* to the readers, that lies quite outside the argument of the homily proper.

1. Pastoral reminders 13:1-21

This section consists of parenthesis: reminders of what the readers already knew, or were doing, or of what they knew they should avoid. As in the Mosaic Law, moral directions (vv. 1-6) precede religious instructions (vv. 7-19).

Instructions regarding morality 13:1-6

13:1 When love for Jesus Christ falters, "love for (of) the brethren" normally fades as well (cf. Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2 Pet. 1:7; 1 John 2:9).

"The Hebrew Christians to whom this letter is addressed are flagging, it seems, not only in their zeal for the race on which they have set out (12:1, 12) but also in the ardor of their love for each other."⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁴Ibid., 2:326.

⁵⁸⁵Dods, 4:375.

⁵⁸⁶P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 562.

"Somehow or other we have to combine two things—a desperate earnestness in the faith and a kindness to the man who has strayed from it."⁵⁸⁷

- 13:2 Abraham "entertained angels" when he showed them *hospitality* (Gen. 18). So did Lot (Gen. 19), Gideon (Judg. 6), and Manoah (Judg. 13). "Hospitality" (Gr. *philoxenia*, lit. "love to strangers") is a concrete expression of Christian love today, as it was in the first century (cf. 3 John 5-8).⁵⁸⁸ Abraham received a special blessing because he showed hospitality, and we may, too (cf. Matt. 25:35). All Christians should practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13), especially Christian leaders (Titus 1:8).

Have you ever entertained an angel? Since the word "angel" means "messenger," in one sense any time we entertain someone who brings a message from God (e.g., a visiting preacher or missionary), we entertain an angel. So in the sense of entertaining a "spirit being," who comes to us in human form with a message from God, perhaps some have that privilege even today.

- 13:3 The "prisoners" in view were evidently Christians who were suffering for their testimonies (cf. 10:34; Matt. 25:36, 40). Oftentimes prisoners in the Roman world had to depend on friends outside the prison to provide them with food and other necessities. The existence of a significant number of prisoners supports a date of writing after A.D. 64, when an empire-wide persecution of Christians began. In July of that year, Emperor Nero set fire to Rome and blamed the Christians, resulting in much persecution of Christians. The readers themselves might one day suffer the same fate as these prisoners, since they were still leading a mortal existence. Paul urged Timothy not to be ashamed of him when he was a prisoner (2 Tim. 1:8). All the Christians in the province of Asia had abandoned Paul at that time, except for those in Onesiphorus' household (2 Tim 1:15-18).

- 13:4 Christians also need to maintain a high regard for "marriage," and to remain sexually pure. God's judgment will follow the sexually impure (cf. 12:29). Under the Old Covenant, the Israelites were to punish fornicators and adulterers, but under the New Covenant, God *Himself* does it. "Fornicators" may refer especially to unmarried persons, and "adulterers" to the married.⁵⁸⁹

"How does God judge fornicators and adulterers? Sometimes they are judged in their own bodies (Rom. 1:24-27). Certainly they will be judged at the final judgment

⁵⁸⁷Barclay, p. 218.

⁵⁸⁸For an overview of hospitality in the early church, see J. H. Elliott, *Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter*, pp. 145-50, 165-200; and G. Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, pp. 123-93.

⁵⁸⁹Robertson, 5:444-45; P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 566.

(Rev. 21:8; 22:15). Believers who commit these sins certainly may be forgiven, but they will lose rewards in heaven (Eph. 5:5ff). David was forgiven, but he suffered the consequences of his adultery for years to come; and he suffered in the hardest way: through his own children."⁵⁹⁰

13:5-6 *Greed* has lured many believers away from a life of faithful discipleship, as has sexual temptation. We need to cultivate a spirit of *contentment* ("free from the love of money"), so that we do not apostatize. Contentment really has nothing to do with how much money we have, though the world generally thinks it does. We have the Lord, *in Him* we have all we need (cf. Luke 12:15; Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:6-10). Furthermore, He has promised never to abandon ("desert" or "forsake") us (Matt. 28:20).

"One of the results of persecution has been the loss of property (10:34). In these circumstances, the Christian response is not to grasp all the more eagerly at material wealth, but to rely quietly on God's provision, even in the face of human opposition."⁵⁹¹

"We may assume that *love of money* was another temptation to which the recipients of this letter were showing signs of giving in."⁵⁹²

Instructions regarding religious duties 13:7-19

"Within the structure of 13:7-19, vv 7-9 and vv 17-19 constitute the literary frame for the central unit of explanatory parenthesis in vv 10-16."⁵⁹³

13:7 The example of our spiritual leaders is one that we should follow or "imitate" (cf. 12:1; 13:17, 24). They, like the heroes of faith in chapter 11, set a good pattern. The outcome of the Hebrews' leaders' lives, if they had died, was that they were now with the Lord, and already beginning to enjoy some of their eternal inheritance. They may have been the founders of the church to which this letter went.⁵⁹⁴ People tend to forget or to idolize their former leaders, but we should "remember" them, "considering" their godly teachings and examples, plus "the result of their conduct"—the plenteous fruit of many lives edified (cf. 1 Thess. 5:12-13).

"The duty of the real preacher is not so much to talk to men about Christ as to show men Christ in his own life and work and being. Men listen not so much to what the man is

⁵⁹⁰Wiersbe, 2:327.

⁵⁹¹Ellingworth, p. 698.

⁵⁹²P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 567.

⁵⁹³Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 526.

⁵⁹⁴Guthrie, p. 270. Cf. v. 17.

saying as to what the man is. His life is not an argument in words but a demonstration in living."⁵⁹⁵

13:8 "Jesus Christ" is the content of the message that the leaders had preached to these hearers (cf. v. 7).⁵⁹⁶ That message and its Hero is what this writer had urged his readers not to abandon. The leaders had preached the Word of God to these readers, and that preaching culminated in Jesus Christ.

"Jesus is not the object of faith [in this verse or in Hebrews, according to this writer], but the supreme model of it."⁵⁹⁷

"'Yesterday' the original leaders preached Jesus Christ, even as the writer does now; the present time can tolerate no other approach to the grace of God (2:9). 'Forever' recalls the quality of the redemption secured by Jesus Christ (5:9; 9:12, 14-15; 13:20) and of the priesthood of Christ (7:24-25): it is 'eternal.'"⁵⁹⁸

Another, less probable interpretation of this verse, sees Jesus as the Leader who is perpetually available, in contrast to the leaders who had preached to these readers but who were now dead.⁵⁹⁹ Jesus had also died and gone to heaven (cf. 12:2). His example of faithfulness, as expounded in this epistle, should be a continuing encouragement to all believers. He is as faithful to His promises now as He ever was, and He always will be faithful to them.

13:9 We should reject "teachings" that deviate from apostolic doctrine. This, too, is a strong safeguard against apostasy. The terms "varied and strange" describe a variety of heretical positions. Rather than accepting these ideas, we should receive strength by taking in God's "grace" that comes through His Word (4:12-13; 1 Pet. 2:2). This strength comes from spiritual, rather than material, "food." Evidently one of the strange teachings, prevalent when this letter originated, was that certain foods, or abstinence from certain foods, resulted in greater godliness (cf. Col. 2:16; 1 Tim. 4:1-5). This was, of course, what Judaism taught too. Judaism taught that eating food "strengthened the heart," in the sense that when the Jews ate, they also gave thanks to God, and thus brought Him into their experience (cf. Ps. 104:14-15).⁶⁰⁰ However, Jesus' death on the cross is the source of both the saving, and the *sustaining*, "grace of God," by which we experience strengthening.

⁵⁹⁵Barclay, p. 222.

⁵⁹⁶P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, pp. 570-71.

⁵⁹⁷G. W. MacRae, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 12 (1978):194.

⁵⁹⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 530.

⁵⁹⁹Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 395.

⁶⁰⁰Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, pp. 533-36.

"This, I think, is the key message of Hebrews: 'You can be secure while everything around you is falling apart!'"⁶⁰¹

13:10 Believers under the Old Covenant ate part of what they offered to God as a peace offering (Lev. 7:15-18). However, believers under the New Covenant feed spiritually on Jesus Christ, who is *our* Peace Offering. Those still under the Old Covenant ("who serve the tabernacle") had "no right" to partake of Him for spiritual sustenance and fellowship with God, since their confidence (faith) was still in the Old Covenant.

"Christians had none of the visible apparatus which in those days was habitually associated with religion and worship—no sacred buildings, no altars, no sacrificing priests. Their pagan neighbors thought they had no God, and called them atheists; their Jewish neighbors too might criticize them for having no visible means of spiritual support."⁶⁰²

Roman Catholics have tended to see in this "altar" a reference to the mass, whereas Protestants have viewed it as a reference either to Christ Himself, or His cross, or a heavenly altar. I prefer Christ Himself, since it is through Him that we are to offer a sacrifice of praise to God (v. 15; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5).

"The point he [the writer] wishes to make is, that in connection with the Christian sacrifice there is no sacrificial meal."⁶⁰³

13:11 Far from defiling those who associated with Jesus Christ, who is *our* Sin (purification) Offering, associating with Him leads to holiness. Here the writer compared Jesus to the "sin offering" that the Jewish high priest offered on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16:27).

". . . in Hebrews the expression 'high priest' customarily signals that the field of reference is the annual atonement ritual (cf. 5:3; 7:27; 8:1-3; 9:7, 11, 12, 24-26)."⁶⁰⁴

13:12 Jesus' death "outside" Jerusalem ("the gate") fulfilled the Day of Atonement ritual (v. 12), in that the high priest "burned" the remains of the two sacrificial animals "outside" the precincts of the wilderness "camp" (v. 11). It also fulfilled the ritual of that day, in that Jesus' execution "outside" the city ("gate") involved the shame of exclusion from the sacred precincts. It therefore symbolized His rejection by the Jewish authorities.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰¹Wiersbe, 2:278.

⁶⁰²Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 400.

⁶⁰³Dods, 4:377.

⁶⁰⁴Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 540.

⁶⁰⁵Morris, p. 151.

- 13:13 "This verse may be regarded as the crux of the conclusion, a final direct appeal to the readers to identify themselves wholly with Christ."⁶⁰⁶

Christians *bear* Jesus' "reproach" when they identify with Him. He suffered reproach (insults, shame, and rejection), and so do we, but only when we identify with His name and person. This was especially true of the original Jewish recipients of this epistle. They needed to cut their emotional and religious ties to Judaism.⁶⁰⁷ Jerusalem was no longer their special city (cf. v. 14). There is nothing wrong with Jewish Christians maintaining Jewish customs, provided they do not rely on them for favor with God.

"The exhortation to leave the camp [i.e., official Judaism] and to identify fully with Jesus introduces a distinctive understanding of discipleship. Jesus' action in going 'outside the camp' (v 12) set a precedent for others to follow. The task of the community is to emulate Jesus, leaving behind the security, congeniality, and respectability of the sacred enclosure [cf. the Israelites' camp in the wilderness wanderings], risking the reproach that fell upon him. Christian identity is a matter of 'going out' now to him. It entails the costly commitment to follow him resolutely, despite suffering.

"In the context of the allusion to Golgotha in v 12, this summons to discipleship implies following Jesus on the way to the cross . . ."⁶⁰⁸

- 13:14 The "city" we seek is the *heavenly* Jerusalem. Our present habitation on earth is only temporary (cf. 11:26).
- 13:15-16 Even though God does not require periodic animal and vegetable sacrifices from us, we should offer other sacrifices to Him. These "sacrifices" include "praise" ("fruit of the lips that give thanks"; cf. Hos. 14:2), "doing good" works, and (even, especially) "sharing" what we have with others (as well as giving Him ourselves, Rom. 12:1). We should offer these sacrifices of the New Covenant "continually."

"In systems like Judaism sacrifices were offered at set times, but for Christians praise goes up all the time."⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁶Guthrie, p. 274.

⁶⁰⁷Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 403; P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, pp. 580-82.

⁶⁰⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 543. Cf. Guthrie, pp. 274-75.

⁶⁰⁹Morris, p. 151. Cf. Moffatt, pp. 236-37.

- 13:17 The "leaders" in view are church elders (pastors; cf. vv. 7, 24). These shepherds "watch over (our) souls," and will have to "give (an) account" to God, one day, for their stewardship over us. We should make their work in this life easier for them, by being obedient and submissive to them. Will the leaders of your church be able to tell God that leading you was a pleasure when they stand before Him?
- 13:18-19 The writer confessed to needing the prayers of his brothers and sisters in the faith. He faced the same pressure to depart from the Lord (apostatize) that they faced. He longed to return to ("be restored to") them again, wherever they may have been living. He believed their prayers could affect God's timing of his return to them. Hebrews was not originally anonymous, since the writer and the readers knew each other.

Doxology 13:20-21

These verses express the writer's prayerful wish for his readers.

- 13:20 Elsewhere John and Peter called Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd (John 10:14) and the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). Here He is the "Great Shepherd," greater than any in Judaism. This is another expression of Jesus' superiority over the Mosaic system.

"As the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ *died* for the sheep (John 10:11). As the Great Shepherd, He *lives* for the sheep in heaven today, working on their behalf. As the Chief Shepherd, He will *come for the sheep* at His return (1 Peter 5:4). Our Shepherd cares for His own in the past, present, and future. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever!"⁶¹⁰

Likewise, the "eternal covenant" is the New Covenant, in contrast to the *temporary* Old Covenant. Jesus' "blood" (death) in this "eternal" New Covenant was superior to *animal blood* (death) offered under the Old Covenant. This pastoral prayer brings the sermon to its conclusion. Many of the emphases expounded in the epistle come together in this benediction: peace, resurrection and ascension, shepherding, blood, covenant, Jesus, and glory.

- 13:21 "Equip" means to prepare for use (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The same Greek word, *katartidzo*, describes elsewhere a doctor setting a broken bone, a general preparing his army for battle, and a fisherman mending his net (cf. Matt. 4:21). It was the writer's concern that his readers be ready to reign with Jesus Christ. This is the purpose for remaining faithful to God throughout the epistle. Part of our full inheritance (full rest, full salvation)

⁶¹⁰Wiersbe, 2:330.

is the privilege of reigning with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). To attain this privilege, we must continue to press on toward maturity, by following Jesus Christ *faithfully*, rather than turning from Him.

2. Personal Explanations 13:22-25

The closing verses of Hebrews are an addendum to the body of this homiletical epistle. The writer added them because he felt concern for his addressees and wanted to add a few personal remarks.

13:22 The writer again urged his readers to accept ("bear with") the "word of exhortation" contained in this epistle, rather than rejecting it. It is, after all, a brief word.

"The definite expression 'the exhortation' is a synonymous designation for the sermon. It referred specifically to the exposition and application of the Scripture that had been read aloud to the assembled congregation. In a fourth-century description of the liturgy for the consecration of a bishop the homily is designated *logous parakleseos*, 'words of exhortation' (*Apost. Const.* 8.5). This appears to be a fixed expression for the sermon in early Christian circles . . ." ⁶¹¹

13:23 The writer obviously composed this epistle during the lifetime of Timothy, and after some confinement that Timothy had experienced. Evidently the writer and Timothy were close associates in the Lord's work. This is almost certainly a reference to the same "Timothy" who was known as Paul's "son in the faith," referred to elsewhere in the New Testament. This is the only Christian that the writer mentioned by name in the entire epistle.

13:24 The term "leaders" refers to local church leaders (cf. vv. 7, 17). The letter probably went to one house-church. The evidence indicates that most first-century churches had more than one leader (cf. Tit. 1:5; Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1). It would be unusual for the writer to send this letter to someone in a church who was not a leader.

"The multiplicity of house churches suggests why diversity, disunity, and a tendency toward independence were persistent problems in the early Church. Unity and organization became matters of urgent concern. The members of the several house churches in a particular center needed to keep in touch with one another. It was of

⁶¹¹Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 568. See also L. Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* 77 (1984):280 and footnote 10.

vital importance that the greetings of the writer be conveyed to 'all the saints' . . ."612

"Those from Italy" probably refers to Christians who had left Italy rather than to believers currently living there (cf. Acts 18:2).⁶¹³ If this is true, the writer probably wrote from somewhere other than Italy.

13:25 The writer closed with a final benediction and prayer that God's "grace" would "be with" his readers, in the sense that they would receive strength from it (cf. 2:9; 4:16; 10:19; 12:15; 13:9). This would happen as they persevered faithfully in the truth.

This entire last chapter is an admonition to worship God acceptably, according to the New Covenant.

⁶¹²Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 570. Cf. F. V. Filson, "Yesterday": *A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13*, p. 76.

⁶¹³Westcott, pp. 451-52. Cf. Tenney, pp. 234-35.

Appendix

BELIEVERS' FUTURE INHERITANCE	
<u>What <i>all</i> believers will inherit</u>	<u>What <i>faithful</i> believers will additionally inherit</u>
Entrance into God's kingdom John 3:3, 5; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5	Abundant eternal life James 1:12; Rev. 2:10
Eternal life John 3:16, 36; et al.	Reigning with Christ Luke 19:17, 19; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27
Acceptance by God Rom. 5:1; 8:31-39	Praise from God Matt. 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17; John 12:26; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:7; 5:4
No condemnation Rom. 5:9; 8:1; 1 Thess. 1:10	Intimacy with Christ John 15:14
Resurrection or translation 1 Cor. 15:53-57; 1 Thess. 4:13-17 Glorification 1 Pet. 1:9	Various rewards: Matt. 5:12, 46; 6:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18; 10:41-42; 16:27; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:23, 35; 1 Cor. 3:8, 14; 9:16-18, 25, 27; 2 Cor. 5:9-11; Phil. 4:1; Col. 3:24; 1 Thess. 2:19; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:18; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:8; Heb. 11:6; 1 Pet. 5:4; 2 John 8; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:5, 11, 12, 21; 11:18; 22:12

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