

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF **HEBREWS**

The identity of the author of **Hebrews** is not known to us. Paul is the most oft-mentioned possible author. Whoever this writer was, he was not necessarily wishing to be anonymous, speaking of a visit to them and prayer for him by them. For this see 13:18, 19.

The book was written to Jewish believers who lived in a time of persecution, both from their unconverted Jewish brethren and from the Roman Empire. While persecution often fertilizes the church, helping it to grow, it can also tempt believers to muzzle themselves and avoid the fight, stunting their growth in Christ. These Hebrew Christians were challenged to “press on” (6:1, NASB) and not quit. So its purposes included to encourage them not to neglect their salvation (2:3), nor to harden their hearts in doubt (3:7 ff.), but rather to press on to maturity (6:1), and to avoid deliberate sin (10:26), and by all means not to refuse the God Who speaks (1:1-3 and 12:25). Whatever options they may be considering other than faithful obedience to Christ, He is superior to them all. The overriding theme of the book is summed up thus, “Christ is better than...” The word translated “better” is used about 19 times in the NT, 13 of them in the book of **Hebrews**.

The time of its writing can be narrowed down to a fairly small window of years. James, pastor of the church in Jerusalem, died about A.D. 62. No one else would have presumed to write so powerful an epistle to his scattered flock while he was alive. So the book was probably written after that date. The second Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, and the writer refers to current sacrifices (8:3,4 and 10:11), so the writing most likely happened between 62 and 70.

Wonderful texts for memorization or at least great familiarity:

1:1, 2a	God has spoken in the Word and in His Son!
2:3,4	Don't neglect this Word spoken by the Lord, authenticated by miracles, signs...
2:9	Jesus tasted death for every man, being made lower than the angels for a time
4:12, 15, 16	Character of the Word, sympathetic priesthood of Jesus, boldness to pray
6:1	Let us press on to maturity
7:25	He is able to save to the uttermost because He ever lives to make intercession
9:24-28	Christ's 3 appearances: past (redemption), present (representation), future (return)
10:12,17,18	A once-for-all sacrifice, and He sat down! Sins forgotten, sacrifice finished!
11:1, 6	Essence of faith, necessity of faith
12:1,2	Witnesses, run the race, look unto Jesus
13:5, 8	I will never leave you or forsake you; Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today, forever

Interesting features: First is the relentless logic of the writer's very orderly mind in making his argument for the superiority of Christ. Also fascinating is that Melchizedek, mentioned only briefly in 2 passages in the Hebrew Scriptures, forms the foundation of an argument that covers a lot of ground in **Hebrews**. The practical implications of **Hebrews** for their generation and any other generation are immense - we are to “Go out to Him, outside the camp,” and to “Press on” with Christ in the face of adversity, for it doesn't get any better than Jesus. The contents of **Hebrews** are clearly very Jewish, relying on many quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures to prove arguments. The primary readers are Jewish, but we don't know where they were located (though probably not in Jerusalem; 2:3 implies they had not personally heard Christ; 6:10 and 10:34 imply some wealth and charity, while the Jerusalem saints had to be supported by giving from churches abroad (Romans 15:26). Also, 12:4 says these believers had not experienced martyrdom, but in Jerusalem several saints had died for their faith - notably Stephen and James).

Let's enjoy this study that ties the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament together in an unusual way, while setting them apart as well. We will be the richer for the study, I am sure.

Hebrew Scripture Quotations in Hebrews

Hebrews Verse	Hebrew Scripture Reference	Hebrews Verse	Hebrew Scripture Reference
1:5	Psalms 2:7	8:5	Exodus 25:40
1:5	2 Sam 7:14, 1 Chron 17:13	8:8-12	Jeremiah 31:31-34
1:6	Deut 32:43, Psalm 97:7	9:20	Exodus 24:8
1:7	Psalms 104:4	10:5-7	Psalms 40:6-8
1:8	Psalms 45:6	10:8, 9	Psalms 40:6-8
1:9	Psalms 45:7	10:12, 13	Psalms 110:1
1:9b	Isaiah 61:1,3	10:16, 17	Jeremiah 31:33, 34
1:10	Psalms 102:25	10:27	Isaiah 26:11
1:11a	Psalms 102:26	10:30	Deuteronomy 32:35, 36
1:11b	Isaiah 51:6	10:37, 38	Habakkuk 2:3, 4
1:12	Psalms 102:26, 27	11:12	Genesis 15:5, 22:17, 32:12
1:13	Psalms 110:1	11:18	Genesis 21:12
2:6-8	Psalms 8:4-6	12:5, 6	Proverbs 3:11, 12
2:12	Psalms 22:22	12:20	Exodus 19:12
2:13	Isaiah 8:17, 18	12:21	Deuteronomy 9:19
3:7-11	Psalms 95:7-11	12:26	Haggai 2:6
3:15	Psalms 95:7, 8	13:5	Deuteronomy 31:6, 8
4:3	Psalms 95:11		Joshua 1:5
4:4	Genesis 2:2	13:6	Psalms 118:6
4:5	Psalms 95:11	This may not be an exhaustive list of quotations, but it should be most (if not all) of them. There are many other references to the Hebrew Scriptures that are not direct quotations, for instance the entire 11th chapter, with a multitude of allusions to the history of Israel.	
4:7	Psalms 95:7, 8		
5:5	Psalms 2:7		
5:6	Psalms 110:4		
6:14	Genesis 22:17		
7:17	Psalms 110:4		
7:21	Psalms 110:4		

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST

Book of Evaluation - Look at Christ - He's Better

Book of Exhortation - 5 Warnings → → → → →

Book of Examination - Let's look at ourselves!

Book of Expectation - Lots of looking forward, too!

Book of Exaltation - Christ's Person and Work

FIVE WARNING PASSAGES

Drifting from the Word—2:1-4 (neglect)

Doubting the Word—3:7-4:13 (hard heart)

Dullness toward the Word—5:11-6:20 (sluggishness)

Despising the Word—10:26-39 (willfulness)

Defying the Word—12:14-29 (refusing to hear)

1:1-3 Introduction - God spoke

1:1 Past Speech - The Prophets

1:1) Here are 2 Biblical axioms: 1] God is. 2] God has communicated with man. God's communication of truth to man prior to the arrival of Jesus in this world is bound up in the Hebrew Scriptures. God gave it to the prophets in dreams, visions, spoken word, handwriting, angelic speech, and more. We believe in the verbal (word for word), plenary (every word) inspiration of Scripture. *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God"* (2 Tim 3:16).

1:2 Present Speech - The Son

2) The New Testament era and beyond are the "last days." In these last days God has spoken to us in the Person of His Son, Jesus. John referred to Jesus as the "Word," the "message" of God. This Son received all things, and He was the active Agent of Creation. God spoke earlier in symbol, shadow, and type. His later, fuller message was revealed in His Son - the symbol's reality, shadow's bright light, and the type's antitype. Natural revelation (creation) shines; special revelation (Scripture) shines brighter; but Jesus the Son shines brightest of all!

1:3 Perfect Speech - "Exact representation"

3) Here are thoughts about His person and work. When Jesus shines forth from the Father, He represents Him perfectly. Jesus provided cleansing from sins by shedding His blood on the cross. His work completed, Jesus sat down in the highest at the place of glory and honor - the Father's right hand! His work done, He now could rest.

1:4-14 Christ is Better than the Angels; he bolsters his assertion with 7 Hebrew Scripture quotations.

Argument 1, quotations 1,2

1:4,5 Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 - Jesus has a superior relationship as the unique Son of God.

4) Jesus is compared with angels, being better than angels in the name that He inherited. While angels are sometimes called "sons of God," He is uniquely **the Son of God**. His name is by inheritance from within the Divine family; theirs is by creation, from without. The writer argues the superiority of Christ because He is Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. Surely He is greater than the created angels who only serve God as His messengers.

5) To illustrate and confirm his point, the writer quotes a pair of passages from the Hebrew Scriptures. Psalm 2:7 speaks of Christ's resurrection - no angel was ever resurrected. This is clearly a vote for Jesus as better. 2 Samuel 7:14, describing Solomon sitting on David's throne, predicts that David will ever have sons on Israel's throne, including his greater Son, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. No angel can claim such a relation of privilege.

Argument 2, quotation 3

1:6 Deut 32:43 (Septuagint, also much like Ps 97:7) - Jesus receives worship; angels give worship.

6) The superiority of Jesus over the angels is seen in the fact that **they** worship **Him**; angels render worship, but they never receive worship. The writer here seems to quote from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the *Septuagint*. He quotes from Psalm 97:7. A study of the book of Revelation shows us many occasions where angels bowed down before and worshiped the Lamb. Rev. 5:13 shows praise for God and for Christ from all created things in heaven and earth, including the angels. Again, they give, but do not receive, worship.

Argument 3, quotations 4,5,6

1:7-12 All these have to do with Angels being **created servants**, Christ, the **creating Sovereign**.

1:7 Psalm 104:4 *"He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire."*

1:8, 9 Psalm 45:6, 7 Throne (eternal) Scepter (righteousness)

Christ Loves righteousness, Hates wickedness therefore He is exalted and anointed.

7),8),9) Here is a great contrast made between angels and Jesus. The elevation of Jesus over the angels is summarized thus, "Angels are servants and Jesus is sovereign; therefore, Jesus, the Creator, is far superior to these created beings." He Who sits on the throne is superior to him who carries out His commands. Two Hebrew Scripture passages are quoted to further convince these Jewish readers of the truth of the author's theme - **Christ is better**. These Jewish readers were thoroughly familiar with angelic ministry. They had read of an angel with a flaming sword guarding the entrance to the

garden of Eden. They knew of the angels who rescued Lot from Sodom. There were the golden cherubim over the mercy seat, symbolizing angelic observance of the atonement before God. Daniel had experienced angelic visitation, sharing with him great truths about the future of Israel. In short, they knew the truth of Psalm 104:4, that angels were created as servants of God. The writer adds a quotation from Psalm 45:6,7. Two major things are here about Christ: 1) His kingdom is to be *in perpetuity* because of His righteousness (He loves righteousness and hates wickedness), and 2) He is raised above others in His anointing. Priests and kings were so elevated in Old Testament times by similar anointings. He leaves no doubt as to Who is the superior; it is clearly the righteous, sovereign Lord Jesus. When God anointed Jesus (Isa 61:1), Jesus became Israel's Messiah ("Anointed One"). The Greek is *Christos*, Christ.

1:10-12 Psalm 102:25-27 Again, Jesus is the Creator

(sub-plot: the eternal, immutable Christ is also better than His temporal, changeable creation)

10), 11), 12) This quotation from Psalm 102:25-27 is clearly set in the context of the Father's address to the Son, as is seen by looking at verses 8 and 9 and the beginning of 10. Earth's foundations were laid by Jesus, and the splendor of heavens is the work of hands that would one day be nail-scarred. This great earth and the greater heaven will both one day perish by fire in the regeneration of all things. While the creation perishes, the Creator will endure. One poet said this, "*Change and decay in all around I see; O, Thou Who changest not, Abide with me.*" The time of this writing included dark days for the people of God. They were under the thumb of a pernicious and cruel empire that was bent on destroying the faith of Christ. For people living in such peril, many things could change in a day. How much this truth must have encouraged their souls! To know that the God in Whom they trusted, the Christ Who was the Object of their faith, was not subject to change. What an anchor for the soul that sails like a ship on storm-tossed seas. The unchanging Christ - He is superior indeed!

Argument 4, quotation 7

1:13 Psalm 110:1 "*Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.*"

1:14 Again, angels are servants; in this case he mentions that **they serve us**, the heirs of salvation!

13), 14) The Savior sits awaiting His enemies becoming His footstool; the angels worship God and serve those who will share in Christ's conquest. God says to the angels, "**Go, and Do!**" Their work is perpetual. To the conquering, risen Jesus He says, "**Sit, and wait while I wrap things up.**" The superiority of Jesus shines clearly here. As will be seen often in this epistle, the writer quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures - Psalm 110:1, to make his point. His Hebrew readers will sit up and listen to these annotations from their long-loved Bible!

Angels were generally held in high esteem by Jews (Sadducees excepted), and rightly so.

Look at their historic ministries to saints of old!

Notice also that they were in some degree involved in God's revelation to men in His Word.

Yet Jesus is clearly superior to the angels, a theme returned to in chapter 2. See you there!

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 2

*Theme of the Book: "**Christ is better...**" Challenge of the Book: "**Press on with Christ.**"*

*Chapter 1 tells us that "**Christ is better than the angels.**" Why is that important? Why mention it?*

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways (including through angels), but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (1:1,2)...We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard (2:1)."

The parenthesis of 2:1-4 puts chaps 1 and 2 in perspective, explaining the importance of Christ's superiority over angels. It has to do with revelation, God giving new truth to man. The writer to the Hebrews several times in his epistle interjected parenthetical warnings and exhortations. This is #1.

2:1-4 - DON'T DRIFT FROM CHRIST BY NEGLECT OF THE WORD HE GAVE

2:1 Caution - "Pay attention to Christ's teachings."

1) This warning is about "not drifting." Used only here in the NT, this word for "drift" has the idea of missing something because of a passive "floating along" instead of intentional sailing with rudder in hand. God has a course for our lives, and we will drift off course if we do not pay attention to the things God has told us. God's Word is what is meant here, and for most of them, all they knew of that volume was the Hebrew Scriptures - again, their long-loved Bible! Of course, by now the teachings of Christ were becoming known, and all of the gospels had likely been written except John's.

2:2,3 Comparison - "Angelic revelation versus Christ's revelation:

Angels were somehow involved in transmission of the Law - Deut 33:2; Acts 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19

2), 3) Now a comparison is made between the law of Moses and the teachings of Jesus. Let me say up front that these were never in conflict with each other - the gospel was the natural outgrowth of the law and the prophets. It was of Jesus that these things were written so long before! That said, his point is that if men could not neglect the law with impunity (every violation had a commensurate punishment), how much more does the gospel require something from us. And if we neglect this great salvation, spoken of by Jesus and confirmed to later hearers by those who heard Him, how can we escape dread consequences, as well?!! Conclusion: hear and heed the words of Christ (and the Apostles).

2:4 Confirmation - Miracles were authentication of the messengers and their message.

This was true in the 3 great waves of miracles (Moses/Joshua [Exodus 4:1-5, Josh 3:7-17];

Elijah/Elisha [1 Kings 17:17-24]; Christ/Apostles [Mark 16:20]).

4) The writer now addresses a favorite truth of mine - that the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles had as their primary aim to be credentials that these were God's men with God's message! This is also especially true of those early-church sign gifts of the Holy Spirit to authenticate this new message of Christ, the Cross, and the Church!

Our next verses from *Hebrews* point up again the superiority of Christ over angels. Angels are ministering spirits, not having flesh and blood as do we. While they have done many wonderful things for humans - bringing messages from heaven, fighting battles for outnumbered armies, mediating portions of the Word of God, ministering to Jesus after the temptation, and more - they cannot die for us, and they cannot represent us to God. One would have to become one of the human race to die for our sins, and enter this vale of tears to understand our heartaches and be a sympathetic priest.

2:5-9 CHRIST'S HUMANITY DOES NOT CONTRADICT HIS SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS

2:5 Contrast with angels

5) The dominion of the world in the age to come is not to be placed in angels' hands. There will be a theocracy, which means that God will rule; and He will execute that rule through the Person of His Son. The Scriptures often speak of the Messiah sitting on the throne of His father, David. **Man** will rule man - the God-Man, Jesus.

2:6,7 Condescension below angels

6) Here we are referred back to the Psalm 8. In that majestic poem God's visitation to man is foretold. The Psalmist was puzzled as to why Almighty God would take interest in puny little, insignificant man. And yet God did set His mind and heart on man; He was and is concerned about the human race. He did set about to devise an inscrutable plan for our redemption. Why? The only answer is the limitless love of God. *"God so loved the..."*

7) Here we see the status of man, created lower than the angels, but with potential the angels never dreamed of. Man is the head of the earth-bound creation. Made in God's image, with powers of reason, emotion, and volition man is over the rest of creation (angels excepted). He is indeed the crown of creation, made last and best.

2:8,9 Crowning of the Son of God

8) This verse moves from man as a race to the last Adam, the perfect and complete Man, the Man, Christ Jesus. While man is the head of creation, he still cowers before the tornado, the hurricane, the earthquake, and other such acts of God in nature. Man's dominion cannot prevent drought and famine, and such headship is yet lacking.

9) Enter Jesus, He becomes a member of the family of man. In Him, headship problems are solved, for He can feed many with little, or calm the raging sea. All things bow before Him Who created them. The greater problem of sin's dominion over man was solved in His redemptive sacrifice on the cross. Note, He died for ALL men.

2:10-18 CHRIST'S SUFFERING DOES NOT CONTRADICT HIS SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS

2:10-13 His suffering enhanced His identification with us.

10) In His death and resurrection, Jesus made it so that many could live. He will bring many to glory by redemptive work. We need a sympathetic High Priest, and by His own suffering (which could only be accomplished in the flesh), Jesus was made complete and qualified Himself to be that Priest. No angel could fill that role for us.

11) The beginning of man's restoration to the estate that he lost in the garden is seen here. We, by faith in Christ, are made members of the Divine family. He Who made us holy, and we who are made holy are brothers! It is an amazing thing that Deity and Holiness would call humanity and sinfulness "brother." Forgiven, there we stand.

12) Here Jesus sings! What a beautiful voice must be His, and perfect pitch, too! Having redeemed us, He openly claims us as siblings. **To** us and/or **with** us He sings the praises of our Father's name. See Psalm 22:22 here.

13) Two more Hebrew Scripture quotations follow from Isa 8:17, 18, as Jesus takes words from the OT and makes them His. Peter told us that Jesus, while He was on the cross, trusted God (1 Pet 2:23). Here is added that Jesus presents the family members gained by His cross work to His Father, "the children God has given me."

2:14-16 His suffering annulled the power of Satan over the redeemed.

14), 15) Man has an innate, sin-induced, fear of death. One cult, Christian Science, tries to teach that death does not exist. We shelter children from exposure to the so-called "horrors" of death. In funeral preparation, we try to take the appearance of death away from the corpse. This fear of death is a power Satan held over men. By becoming a flesh-and-blood man and dying for men, Jesus rendered Satan's power over us inoperative - that is for us who believe. No longer enslaved by this fear, we who know Christ see death as a welcome friend that ushers us into His presence. In the words of Dr. McQuaid's poem, Death speaks to Father Time and says, *"Oh, I'm a lowly servant now; there's little time to roam. I just push open this old gate and help the saints go home."*

16) God's mercy is only extended to those who need it. Since angels are a company and not a race, redemption for them would have of necessity been individual, angel by angel. Since all men are related in Adam, one death would do for all, and it was for **men** that Jesus, having become a Child of Abraham, provided salvation.

2:17,18 By His suffering He qualified as a merciful High Priest.

17), 18) It was necessary that Christ become flesh for the mercy of God to come to man in two very important ways. 1. Ever since the garden of Eden, animal sacrifices had been made for human sins, but no such sacrifice was sufficient - that's why they were repeated. A final sacrifice for sins would have to be a member of the human race, and Christ became that Sacrifice. His was a satisfactory sacrifice, improperly translated here in some versions "atonement." 2. In addition, His humanity allowed Him to experience misunderstanding, mistreatment, hunger, pain, fatigue, temptation, and such to make Him a High Priest with feeling for hurting men. He was and is Savior and Sympathizer!

*Jesus was made like us in our weakness, that we might partake of His power.
He took part in our sorrow, that we might participate in His joy.
We can share in His triumph over temptation because He went through it as we do.
Bring Him your fears, griefs, burdens, sins - He will banish, assuage, bear and forgive them all.*

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 3

*In all of Hebrew history, few, if any, stand taller in the Jews' eyes than Moses, the man of God.
He was the great emancipator (the Abraham Lincoln of Jewish history!) - leading the nation forged in Egypt's iron furnace from slavery to freedom. He was the great lawgiver - the document on which the nation cut its teeth came from God through Moses! Moses is mentioned in Scripture 848 times (768 in the Hebrew Scriptures; 80 in the New Testament) over 3 times as often as Father Abraham!
I can hear the cry of the non-Messianic Jews to their Christian brothers, "Come back to Moses!"
But our author says, "Press on with Jesus, He is better!" And then he makes his argument.*

3:1-6 Jesus is Better Than Moses

3:1, 2 - Both were faithful to God.

3:1), 2) Another contrast is being introduced to follow the one between Jesus and the angels. Hebrew believers highly esteemed Moses, and now the writer tells them that Yeshua, Jesus, is superior to their great lawgiver, Moshe, Moses. He calls these Hebrew Christians "holy brothers" - people born of the same womb and set apart to God. He calls Jesus the "High Priest" of our confession, something Moses never was. God appointed both Moses and Jesus, and each one was faithful to their calling.

3:3, 4 - Jesus built the house; Moses was only a part of the house.

3), 4) The author will make a claim here for the fact that Jesus is God - watch it. He says Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses. This is because Moses was *in the house*, but Jesus *built the house*! He then goes on to say that God is the Builder of all things - thus, he equates Jesus with God! This is Messianic language, and O, that our Jewish friends would see Jesus as their Messiah! Jesus stands on a higher plane than any man, even one so great and highly revered as this man, Moses.

3:5, 6 - Jesus is Son over the house; Moses was only a servant in the house.

5), 6) Now the superlative position of Jesus is clearly set forth. Both He and Moses were faithful, but there is more, much more. Moses was **in his house**; Jesus was **over the house**. Moses was a **servant** (the Holy Spirit chose a word used only here in the NT; it is a servant with dignity and honor, but a servant nonetheless); Jesus was **the Son**. With regard to Christ's house, that is what and who we are! It is incumbent upon us, therefore, to cling to our confidence and our boast of hope in Christ. Slipping back into the trappings of the old covenant is inappropriate for believers in the new covenant.

3:7-4:7 (and 4:11-13) The 2nd Warning Passage - "Don't doubt the Word and have a hard heart."

3:7-11- Israel's wilderness experience.

7), 8) The book's first warning came at the outset of chapter 2; now begins the second warning, in which the writer references again Israel's familiar history. Here he goes to the wilderness wanderings as sung about in Psalm 95:7-11. Notice the Divine authorship of Scripture, "the Holy Spirit says." There is urgency in the warning - "today." The wilderness Jews wanted to go back to something God had brought them out of; these 1st century Jewish Christians were tempted to do the same. To go back on Jesus, returning to the sacrificial system of the Temple, would be a hardening of their hearts.

9), 10), 11) The Pentateuch (1st five books of the Bible) records the sorry saga of Israel in the wilderness. For four decades they tested God in His patience. The very fact of the length of the wandering came about because they refused to enter and claim the land - a case where faith lost out to fear. A whole generation suffered the consequences of that huge mistake, every man over 20 years of age dying in the wilderness (except, of course, Joshua and Caleb). God was very angry with that generation, one commentator translated it "disgusted." It wasn't just the actions of the wilderness generation of Jews that incensed God, it was the hearts and minds behind the actions. Their hearts were continually departing from the Lord; this must have been true in part due to their lack of understanding of the ways of God. Their attitude and actions prevented their entering the land.

3:12-19 - Warning against unbelief.

12) Having just rehearsed Israel's history of unfaithfulness to God in the wilderness, the author calls on his readers to make sure that the sin of unbelief does not overcome **their** hearts. Unbelief will cause a man to "turn away" (the original gives us our word "apostasy") from the only living God. Unbelief is a sin that grieves God; it may not make a man stagger as drink does, or break up a home as adultery can; but it is serious sin, nonetheless.

13) Much is here. 1st, the family of God called the church is a great source of accountability and encouragement. Those who are wise find strength in that family. 2nd, procrastination is a great foe; we must act "while it is called today." Finally, sin entertained in the life of a Christian is very deceitful and destructive. It will harden the heart of him who is so careless and unsuspecting. Sin promises delights, but it delivers destruction instead.

14) To be **in Christ** is a wonderful privilege. It is all of grace that sinners, creatures could partake of the holy Creator and confidently hold on to Him. And we are called upon not to stop short, but rather to cling to Him until the end. Finishing well is much to be preferred over a good start that doesn't make it through until the end.

15) In writing to Hebrew readers, the author often appeals to the Hebrew Scriptures to bolster a point he is making. He here

refers to Psalm 95:7,8, reminding them of their national history of unbelief. The historical setting is the wandering in the wilderness - a dark chapter in Israel's history. They heard God's voice, but hardened their hearts. Such great opportunity and privilege were responded to with such callousness and indifference.

16) When Israel heard God's voice, they should have pursued Him with all that they possessed. Rather, they rebelled at His pleadings! This was the very people that God by blood and power had rescued from the long slavery in Egypt. He even gave them a great leader, Moses, one of the Hebrew Scriptures' shining lights!

17) God's attitude toward sin is clearly seen in His actions toward the sinning people. Over the next forty years, there were over a million graves in the wilderness - graves of people who could have followed Joshua and Caleb and entered the land of promise. The sin of unbelief cost them an untold price.

18) Canaan was to be a land of blessing, flowing with milk and honey, bursting with juice from the grapes of Eshcol. It was also to be a land of rest from the slavery of Egypt, the whip of the taskmaster, the toil that enriched others, leaving the workman in poverty. Disobedience prevented their entering that rest.

19) So near, and yet so far! When one views a map of the Middle East, it is clear that the wandering of the Israelites was just outside their future promised inheritance! Why did they not set a straight course for the land and go home? It was because they did not believe God! Unbelief was the undoing of so many.

The respect of Jewry for Moses is beyond measure. He symbolizes all they would return to if the pressures of first century persecution led them to abandon Christ. The author here does not mean to disrespect Moses; in fact he builds him up. But there is clearly no comparison when it comes to Jesus - the Savior wins hands down. Jesus is better than Moses - and He is superior to anyone else, also.

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 4

The theme of "rest" was introduced in Hebrews 3:11 and 18. It is mentioned 10 times in Ch 4 in five different ways: (1) God's Sabbath rest of Gen. 2:2 and Heb. 4:4, 10; (2) Canaan, the rest for Israel after wandering for forty years (3:11, etc.); (3) the believer's present salvation rest in Christ (4:3, 10); (4) the overcomer's present rest of victory (4:11); and (5) the future eternal rest in heaven (4:9).

The chapter also has 4 exhortations - "Let us..." in verses 1, 11, 14, 16 that challenge our living for Christ.

I. LET US THEREFORE FEAR (1-8)

4:1) Matt 11:28, 29 relates the words of Jesus calling men to rest. All who labor and carry heavy burdens are called, in the words of the gospel song, "leave your heavy burden at the cross." I see John Bunyan's **Christian** losing his burden of sin as he looked upon the cross of Christ (in *Pilgrim's Progress*).

2) When does the gospel lose its value? When men choose not to believe it. God's message in any dispensation requires that men believe Him. Progressive revelation increased the content of the message to be believed until the Bible was completed, but the common denominator was always faith.

3) For the emancipated slaves of Egypt, "rest" meant now being free to toil for myself and my family. For us who believe in Christ, that rest is one of finding peace and joy, forgiveness and more, in Christ, not in human effort. This has actually been God's way of salvation from the very beginning.

4), 5) Once again in issuing a warning to Jewish believers, the writer calls on the Hebrew Scriptures to bolster his point. The warning is not to miss the rest that God has for us by failing to believe Him. The first reference is from Genesis 2:2, referring to God's cessation of creative activity as "rest." The second OT passage is from the 95th Psalm, used frequently in this section of *Hebrews*. It relates God's refusal to allow those who disbelieved to enter into the Canaan rest. My dear friend, God has a rest for each of us if we will only receive it and enter into it by faith.

6), 7) God has always had rest available for His people, and He has made it available to us. He always has a remnant, and while one generation may largely miss His rest, another will come along to enter into it. The writer then refers back again to Psalm 95 to indicate that the present is the time for his readers to enter God's blessing of rest. The offer of rest was good for Moses' day, David's day (Psalm 95), and it was still a valid offer in the first century. The 21st century is no exception, either. Heed Christ's call to "Come unto me and I will give you rest."

8) Joshua, the namesake of Jesus (the words are the same), led Israel across the Jordan and into Canaan. He led them in the conquest and settling of the land among the tribes. But the work was far from over! If that had been the end-all for the people of God, there would not have been any mention of a day of rest yet to come. Several "rests" are considered in this study; do not confuse them as all being one.

II. LET US THEREFORE BE DILIGENT (9-13)

9) Blessed is the rest found in Christ. It is in man to think that he can work his way into the favor and heart of God. How wrong to think such a thing; how far from the truth of God's grace to us. When I met Jesus, I found the work was already done. I heard Him cry, "It is finished!" My soul thrilled to take rest in Him.

10) The idea here is not that God was weary - that He needed a break. It was rather that His creation work was now done, finished, complete! For me to think that any works of mine enter into my salvation is to miss the truth that Jesus finished redemption's work on the cross. I insult Him to suggest that I need add anything else.

11) This is almost a play on words, nearly an oxymoron - a self-contradictory statement. "Let us make every effort to enter into that rest." The steps we take are steps of faith. The work we do is to receive God's purchased gift with the hands of

trust. The effort we expend is to stop expending effort and begin trusting the One Who did the work.

12) From where does this faith come? In what are we to trust? So many voices call out to us; which ones are we then to believe? **The Word of God!** This book is alive; it is powerful, and sharp! It cuts to the heart of the matter. It reveals the sinfulness of our hearts, and then it directs us to Him Who can take away our sin. Believe the Book! "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom 10:17).

13) "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro, throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." No deed we do is outside His surveillance; this is at one and the same time comforting and disquieting. We will give an account to this all-seeing God.

III. LET US HOLD FAST OUR CONFESSION (14)

14) Some Jewish believers were struggling with holding to the unseen Christ or returning to the visible Temple and its priesthood. It is easier to walk by sight than by faith. The writer tells them of the superiority of Christ as Priest in that He is now in heaven to speak to God for us. He is also related to God - His Son. Aaron and his descendants were high priests. Jesus is a GREAT High Priest. So let's hold on to Him in faith, not going back to sight religion.

IV. LET US THEREFORE DRAW NEAR (TO THE THRONE OF GRACE) (15,16)

15) But if Jesus is God, and is in heaven, how can He understand the trials and sufferings of a man on earth? Great question! He feels our pain like no one who has ever lived does. He is man, having been born into the human family. He lived here and was tested in every area of life - lust of the flesh and eyes, and the pride of life. As sinless deity, He could not yield to sin; as human, He could feel the full power of the test. He understands.

16) Amazing truth - this. In the OT economy, only the high priest could approach God at the mercy seat, and he only once a year. Now there is a better than the mercy seat, there is a throne of grace. And we all who know Christ may boldly approach it at any time. There we are promised to find mercy for our sins and grace for our needs. There is no contest between old and new?! Christ is best! Flee to and cling to Him. Leave Him not!

Verse 12 - the "Word of God"

Verse 13 - the awareness of God

Verses 14, 15 - A High Priest with God

Verse 16 - the Throne of God

*With so much to aid us, we need not, dare not, MUST NOT fall! **We must Press On!***

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 5

Chapters 1,2 show the superiority of Jesus over prophets and angels. Chapters 3,4 Show that He is greater than Moses - quite a statement to his Jewish readers! Now the writer takes up the matter of Aaron and his descendants as compared to Jesus. Jesus wins again! The text of 4:14 - 7:28 describes the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus over that of the sons of Aaron. Verse 1-10 of Ch 5 compare and contrast the priesthoods of Aaron and Jesus (Melchizedek) Verses 11-14 then bemoan the immature status of those who would consider abandoning Christ for Aaron.

I. THE CALL AND WORK OF THE HIGH PRIESTS (1-4)

5:1) Basic qualifications for priesthood are now discussed. These things refer to Aaron's priesthood as established in the OT (Ex 28). The priest must come from the race of men - no animal or angel could fill the position. The job description is to face God on behalf of men, as the prophet faced men on behalf of God. His representation for men includes offering gifts and sacrifices to God for men's sins. Do you see Jesus here?

2) Does it sound strange to say that weakness is an ability? And yet for the earthly priest, being weak helped him deal gently with those who were ignorant and wayward. If I am prone to wander, I can't be too harsh with those who have wanderlust themselves. Here is one case where weakness is a strength. Let's remember.

3) Lev 16:6 begins, "Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering..." The down side of the weakness and sinfulness of the priest as a man is that before he can minister in that office for the people, he has to make an offering for his own sins. The contrast here is that Jesus was sinless and could enter immediately upon doing business for us, needing to offer no sacrifice for Himself. Weakness and humanity, yes; sinfulness, no!

4) Three OT men show the folly of presuming to assume priestly duties without a divine call. Korah lost his life, Saul lost his kingdom, and Uzziah became a leper until his death. And so the writer says that men do not take this honor upon themselves, but must be called of God to it as was Aaron. The Psalmist said that promotion comes from the Lord; He places men where He wills. Divine appointment is essential in priests.

II. THE CALL AND WORK OF CHRIST, THE HIGH PRIEST (5-10)

5), 6) This text provides a smooth transition from the aspect of Christ's divine calling into the priesthood, which He did have, and the durability of His priesthood, which is eternal. First, Jesus did not aspire to be a priest - God called Him a priest, and a special kind of priest, at that. Aaron and his descendants had limited terms of office - they all died and had to be replaced. The reference to Psalm 2 is said by Paul in Acts 13:33 to speak of Christ's resurrection. We have a High Priest Who will live now forever, never needing a successor. He is further, a priest forever, like Melchizedek. Jesus could not be of the order of Aaron, for He was not from Levi's tribe. This is not a problem for God. He just placed Jesus in Melchizedek's order. Check out Gen 14:17-24 for the mysterious Bible character who was a priest before Aaron was born. Was this a preincarnate appearance of Christ?

7) The preparations and qualifications for the priestly ministry of Jesus are addressed again. Dr. Wiersbe says, "From birth to death, our Lord experienced the sinless infirmities of the human nature." He knew what it was to be hungry and tired and tempted and mistreated and misunderstood. He experienced disappointment in men, and grief for His people Israel; and when He cried out to God in affliction, God heard His reverent Son.

8), 9), 10) When any child of God suffers in this world because of their obedience to the Savior, they have Someone in heaven acting as their Intercessor Who fully understands that issue. His obedience to the Father's will brought Him into such suffering as the world has never known. Our own suffering helps us understand that of others. It is a mystery how Deity could be made perfect, yet as the Son of Man, Jesus grew and learned, and added to the divine the experience of the human. In doing so, He could provide for us the complete package. That package included an eternal salvation purchased by His death on the cross and confirmed by His resurrection. This deliverance from sin and its penalty brought us into the family of God by a faith that produces obedience. The writer implies again the superiority of Christ as a priest over Aaron's priesthood in an effort to prevent believing Jews from looking back to the inferior past and drifting from their faith in Christ. What was true then is true now - we must keep our focus on Christ, never letting anything draw us away from Him. Our Great High Priest is all we need. Fulfillment is in Christ. The full gospel is in Christ. "What a Friend we have in Jesus!"

III. THE CALAMITY OF IMMATURITY (11-14)

11) The writer wants his readers to learn more about the priesthood of Christ, but are they ready to hear it? Those who wish to hold on to the visible, not progressing to the invisible, show their dullness to learn. This is a trait of spiritual immaturity - dullness in the Word of God. The Holy Spirit can enable us to grow and to learn.

12) A 2nd mark of immaturity is being spoon-fed when we should be feeding others. I remember a kindergarten girl who helped her fellow students learn to tie their shoes. Instead of taking the new members class over, young believers could teach still younger believers what they have already learned. That would be growth in both!

13), 14) He uses here the illustration of milk vs. solid food, applying it to the Christian's life and diet. If the A.B.C.'s of Christianity are as far as we have progressed, we are infants, though we may have been saved a long time. We all need to go forward in our experience of God's righteousness. God has no need to teach us new things until we are putting into practice the things we already know. This takes spiritual exercise, "working out" the soul in practicing the Christian life. In so doing, we learn to discern the good from the bad, becoming eligible to move up the table from the milk to the solid food.

Where are you in this growth process? Growing, I hope!

How wonderful it is that we do not have to stand a sinners before a holy God without a priest! Our wonderful Savior is our Great High Priest, and He stands to make intercession for the weak, as well as to act as Advocate for the sinning saint. Hallelujah, What A Savior!

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 6

The issue of the superiority of Christ's priesthood is interrupted and resumed in Chapter 7.

Here find one of Scripture's most difficult passages to interpret, Hebrews 6:4-6.

Be sure to interpret the passage in its context, or you may fall prey to misinterpretation.

I. CONCLUSION OF THE APPEAL (1-3) Appeal began in 5:11-14, "Grow up, go forward."

1), 2) When the Bible tells us to "leave" the basics, it doesn't mean to abandon them, but to progress beyond them, using them as a foundation on which to build. He mentions 6 of the basics as a sample of what he is talking about. To constantly have to repent suggests a wavering in our attitude about sin. Faith in God should be settled in our hearts. Baptism, our identification with Christ, and laying on of hands, man's identification with us, are single acts, not needing repetition. Future resurrection and eternal judgement are matters associated with coming to Christ in salvation - we gain the one and escape the other. Done! Now, let's move on higher - grow!

3) Several blessed truths about this progress are seen in these short words: 1] the preacher leads by example; 2] his and their growth requires the enablement of God; 3] We should always seek God's will in our planning.

II. CAUTION AGAINST APOSTASY (4 - 8) Abandoning Christ is "Christian high treason."

4), 5), 6) Here is a most difficult passage (See the section appended after chapter six, giving a fuller explanation). He challenges men who are considering abandoning their faith in Christ to return to Judaism. We are clearly looking at believers here. In parallel constructions, he describes people who have been down a certain path, deciding to turn back. They: 1] were enlightened, this is conversion; 2] tasted God's gift (as Christ "tasted" death in 2:9); 3] shared the Holy Spirit, "sharers" is used twice else (3:1, 14) to speak of conversion; 4] received God's Word; 5] experienced His power. All this clearly speaks of entering the family of God. Verse six does not now introduce an "if" clause, but rather a sixth parallel trait, 6] they fell away, they willingly defected from the faith, as the readers were in danger of doing. Summary: don't leave Christ for the sacrificial system; if you make that choice, you will become hardened against faith and take a stand that is like crucifying Jesus all over again. This isn't the loss of salvation, but rather settling into a bitter, hardened state as a believer. It isn't time to **go back on** your faith. It's time to **grow up in it**!

7), 8) Land is cultivated to produce a crop. When rainfall is received, there should be a crop. The blessings of God in vss 4,5 are the rainfall; walking with Christ is the crop. But should God give all that spiritual rainfall into the field of one's life, and they turn their back on Him in favor of something or someone else, the field produces only weeds. Such a field must be purged with fire to remove its useless crop of thorns and thistles. One is reminded of I Corinthians 3, where an unfaithful

believer suffers loss in the judgement, "but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." A sad progression: saved, spurning, set aside. Yet with Christ in the end.

III. **CERTAINTY OF ASSURANCE** (9 - 20) Drifting does not negate our salvation!

9) Such a stern warning is rightly followed with a word of encouragement. While some did not continue to represent Christ well, he expected others to go on with Christ, bearing fruit. The fruit of witness and the fruit of the Spirit.

10) The hard side of God's dealing is seen in setting aside from useful service of believers who spurn Him. The other side is displayed in God remembering the faithfulness of those who do go on to maturity with Him. Their love and labor are seen in their ministering to the saints. The church needs us to minister to one another in love.

11) Desire - "we want each of you..." The writer and his companions had a heart for these believers. Diligence - they wanted them to strive to the very end. Design - this striving will make their hope sure; they'll have assurance.

12) The word translated "lazy" is used only here and in 5:11 in the NT. It was stretching their mind to move forward in this new faith in Christ. It would be easier to just go back to what was familiar. They and we should look back at those who in faith and patience moved forward with God - Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Ruth, and others.

13), 14) Here is a brief time-line of Abraham's life: received God's promise at age 75, fathered Ishmael at 87, fathered Isaac at 100, had grandsons Esau and Jacob at 160, died at 175. Look at Romans 4:18 here. Father Abraham is selected to illustrate that hope + faith + obedience = "inherit the promises." Kistemaker well says here that "Faith gives birth to hope, and hope in turn strengthens faith." His faith was not perfect, but God "counted it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6). God swore to Abraham by the highest thing in the universe - Himself - when He made the promise to him. That was like us putting up the greatest imaginable collateral for a loan! He repeated the promise on the mountain where Abraham offered Isaac to God in faith (Genesis 22). There Jesus (the angel of the LORD) swore by Himself and said, "Blessing, I will bless you, and multiplying, I will multiply you." God heaps up terms to make His point. When God threatened to destroy Israel, Moses reminded Him of His oath (Exodus 32:9-13).

15) In our present age, we don't like to wait for anything! We want televisions to come on immediately; microwave ovens must heat up our coffee NOW! Quick returns on investments are eagerly sought, and so on. Abraham waited 25 years for God's promise of a son to be completed! Another 60 years passed before 2 grandsons came into the picture. His patience was rewarded, and the nation of Israel is the fulfillment of that promise - as was Jesus, the real Blessor!

16) Once upon a time, men swore an oath verbally on an agreement, and their word was expected to be kept. Today we have complicated contracts, written often by attorneys, signed before notaries, and again we hope for men to keep their word. Disputes are best avoided when things are done in a way where both parties know each other's intent, and when there are assurances they will do as they say. In ancient times, again, this was done by swearing an oath.

17) God often does things "anthropomorphically," accommodating Himself to man so man can understand Him. He does that here, swearing an oath as men would do about what He promised Abraham. We, too, can consider ourselves as "heirs of the promises," since the world being blessed by Abraham's seed, Jesus, includes our salvation today.

18), 19), 20) Many Jews had been completed by receiving Jesus as the Christ (Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word for Messiah). They were tempted to return to the **forms** of Judaism from the **faith** in Christ, possibly because they wanted something substantial to see and cling too. God gave them two unchangeable things to cling to - a promise and an oath. God's words are enough, for He can never lie, but when He makes a promise and seals it with an oath, that is substantial enough for anyone. It gives a hope that is easily clung too. The soul doesn't need to cling to the Temple and its liturgy; "*one greater than the Temple is here*" (Mt 12:6). This Anchor, this High Priest takes us where others could not - behind the veil. Aaron could only go there and come back; our Priest after the order of Melchizedek invites us to join Him in the Holy of Holies! Don't abandon the Greater for the lesser.

Never let a difficult passage be seen to contradict a clear passage. Let Scripture interpret Scripture.

Never let anyone rob you of the joy of your eternal security in the Lord Jesus Christ - He keeps you!

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER SIX - MORE DEALING WITH VERSES 4 - 6

Several observations that will help in the beginning:

* Never let a difficult passage (like this) seem to say something that contradicts the plain teaching of a clear, easily understood passage.

* Good people have differing opinions as to the meaning of this passage; few are heretical.

* Matthew Henry reminds us that there is a practical aspect to this thorny passage, "...*spiritual growth is the surest way to prevent that dreadful sin of apostasy from the faith.*"

* Harper's Commentary says the author reminds his readers that "*if they do not 'progress toward maturity,' they could be heading toward danger.*"

* The main part of the sentence is: "*It is impossible... to renew again to repentance...*" Though in the text those phrases are separated by quite a distance in words describing the person who cannot be renewed to repentance.

* There is no "if" in verse 6. The "*falling away*" is not hypothetical, but it is rather another descriptive of the people he

discusses, parallel in form to the previous descriptives.

* The author is dealing with saved people, as the several participles describing them make clear. They are not “almost saved,” “nearly saved,” or “close but not in.” Dr. McGee says, “*I believe he is describing saved people.*” They are true children of God! Let’s take a look at the way he describes them.

After “*It is impossible...*” come 5 participles that in 6 ways describe the people in question.

1) They have “*once been enlightened.*” To pass from darkness to light is to be saved (Jn 12:46, Acts 26:18). Paul (2 Cor 4:6) spoke of Christians as those into whose hearts God had shined the light.

2) They have “*tasted the heavenly gift.*” “*The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” Do not use the 21st century idea of “taste” as somehow sampling but not consuming. In 2:9, he wrote that Christ “*tasted death for all.*” This was fully experiencing, not sampling, God’s gift of life.

3) They have “*become sharers of the Holy Spirit.*” The word “*sharers*” is the same as “*companions*” or as “*fellows*” (KJV) describing the associates of Messiah, and in 3:1, 14 for “*sharers, partakers*” of the heavenly calling and of Christ. This must be people who are saved and possess the Spirit.

4) Again he says they have “*tasted*” something (2 somethings): the “*good word of God.*” The life-giving Scriptures have been consumed by faith and produced salvation. Also “*tasted*” were the “*powers of the coming age.*” This (“*powers*”) is the word translated “*miracles*” in 2:4. The changed life in a believer is a great miracle of God, one that only happens when one is truly saved.

5) The last participle is the one that the NIV, KJV, & NKJV precede with an “if.” In reality, it is just another parallel construction participle describing the same folks. He says they “*have fallen away.*” He cannot mean that they lost their salvation; it rather seems that he is describing defection from the faith, abandoning their Christian profession. A line was drawn in the sand earlier, and they bravely crossed it to stand with the crucified Christ. By retreating across the line, they affirm the Jews’ idea that Jesus died justly because of His “false” Messianic claims, in a sense “putting Jesus to shame” through this fresh crucifying of him again (a similar word [as “putting to shame”] is used of Joseph not wanting to disgrace Mary).

I believe the writer is describing a case in which a person goes completely back on his Christian confession. How or when this takes place is known only to God, but the Christian concerned becomes like the one in 1 Corinthians 3:15, whose works were burned up in the fires of judgment; “*...he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*” Conversion cannot be reversed that he might be lost again, but now neither can his hardened state be reversed to return to his previous commitment. Peter repented of his denials, Jonah, of his running from God, and David, of his adultery, murder, and cover-up; but this Christian who sins against so much light, with a completed Bible, and having the indwelling Holy Spirit to help him, **cannot** repent after so disastrous and intentional a fall. He would live out his time on earth as a miserable person, too saved to enjoy sin, and too sinful to enjoy his salvation. He would be placed on a shelf and be no good to God, man, nor himself! **Jesus is better**, so **press on** and don’t look or go back!

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 7

*The issue of the superiority of Christ’s priesthood over Aaron’s, just interrupted, is now resumed in Chapter 7. Here in Ch 7, see that Christ’s priesthood is **superior in its order**; in Ch 8, it has **a better covenant**; Ch 9 says Christ has **a better sanctuary**; Ch 10 argues that Christ offered **a better sacrifice**! The name “Melchizedek” occurs 10 times in Scripture: 1 in Genesis (14:18), 1 in Psalms (110:4), 8 in Hebrews (5,6,7). God had charged the sons of Aaron with the duties of the priesthood (Exodus 29:5-9); He had charged the Levites with the service of the sanctuary [the Tabernacle, later, the Temple] (Num 18:1-7). God had separated the Priesthood (Levi) and the Throne (Judah), yet Christ-the priest was from Judah’s tribe! Here follows the explanation of the **propriety** and **priority** of the Christ-the-King’s priesthood.*

I. THE SUPERIORITY OF MELCHIZEDEK, EVEN OVER ABRAHAM! (1-10)

1), 2) The superiority of Jesus over all, including Aaron and Abraham, gets additional confirmation here. You will recall that under Moses’ law a man could not be a priest and a king. These offices came from two different tribes, priests from Levi, and kings from Judah. Two kings who intruded into the priests’ office suffered greatly for it - Saul lost his dynasty, and Uzziah finished out his life a leper. Meet Melchizedek, a contradiction to that prohibition - for he was a king and a priest! He was “King of Salem,” which means “king of peace.” And his name is a Hebrew compound which means “king of righteousness.” “Melech” = “king.” “Tzedek” = “righteousness.” This was the Stranger Whom Abraham met after he rescued Lot from the kings who had kidnaped him and stolen all that was his. Abraham and the armed men with him had taken the spoils of battle from the wicked kings, and he paid a tithe of all the spoil to this Melchizedek. It is my conviction that this Melchizedek was none other than Jesus Himself, in a pre-incarnate physical appearance we call a Christophany. He appears on the page of Scripture without introduction, and He disappears just as unceremoniously. I believe the encounter was at Jerusalem.

3) Another interesting feature of Melchizedek is the absence of any recorded ancestry, and there is no record of His death. What this does is to make Him a perpetual Priest. This is vital as a precedent for the priesthood of Jesus, Who is also a “Priest-In-Perpetuity.” Later (verse 25) our author will speak of this endless priesthood of Jesus. The priests of the line of

Aaron were in constant need of successors, since they were mortal and died. Jesus, having conquered death, lives forever to intercede for us. And, while Mary and Joseph raised Him, He was before them both in His life!

4) Abraham's greatness as the first-father of Israel is never questioned. Yet he encountered a greater in Melchizedek. "Observe how great this man was..." so great that the "Patriarch," the "Friend of God," the recipient of God's covenant promises, paid Him tithes! I will wonder until I reach heaven if when Abraham got there himself and saw Jesus, he recognized Him as Melchizedek! By the way, here is an interesting thought on giving - the tithe predates the law of Moses. In fact, a little later in Genesis, we find Jacob (who also preceded Moses and the law) promising to give God a tenth, as well.

5) Levites, as among other things, tithe-collectors, were in some ways elevated above the people, all of whom descended from Abraham. The Mosaic Law gave them this authority, and they executed it throughout their generations. Abraham the Patriarch is above Levi, and Melchizedek, receiving tithes from Abraham, is above him. As great as were Abraham, Levi, Aaron, Moses, Jesus is greater still. He is the Highest of the High ones: King of kings, Lord of lords.

6), 7) It is first here stated that Melchizedek does not descend from Father Abraham. He was in that sense an outsider to the Jews, yet He had a certain ascendancy over them. Two things here show the greatness of Melchizedek: 1. He collected tithes from Abraham, and, 2. He blessed Abraham. As with collecting tithes, blessing someone shows that the One doing the blessing is greater than the one receiving it. Isaac (the greater) blessed Jacob (the lesser). Jacob (the greater) blessed Joseph's sons (the lesser). Melchizedek (the Greatest) blessed the "Daddy fo them all!" Verse seven states it plainly, "Without any dispute, the lesser is blessed by the greater." Again, the commentator Kistemaker says so profoundly of Melchizedek, "He stood alone in all His grandeur as King of Salem and Priest of the Most High God." In few places does the theme of Christ's superiority ring any louder or clearer than it does here.

8), 9), 10) The Jews to whom this author wrote knew what it was to pay tithes to the Levites. They had known them as neighbors, friends, and ministers. They had doubtless had the normal affairs of life interrupted to attend the occasional funeral of a Levite. There was no doubt that these "tithe-receivers" were mortal men, just like themselves. By great contrast, Abraham paid tithes to a Man of Whom there is no death record! Two thousand years after the brief record of Melchizedek in Genesis, it is here said of Him that "**He keeps on living!**" Now here is a wonderful deduction based on the Biblical record, and now included in the Bible itself. Levi, the father of all the esteemed "tithe-receivers" of many generations, in a sense paid tithes to Melchizedek "in Abraham," for Levi was "in the loins of his father" when he encountered Melchizedek. Levi wasn't born until over 100 years after Abraham met Melchizedek, but there is a real "seminal" sense in which Levi was at the meeting! While it is an aside, and not to the point of this text, let me ask the reader to apply this principal to Romans 5:12. "Wherefore as by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so death passed upon all men because **all sinned**." Is it not fair to say that though I was not born until 6,000 years after Adam sinned in the garden, that I was there - in the loins of my first-father? I think it is more than fair.

II. THE SETTING ASIDE OF THE OLD PRIESTHOOD (11-19)

11) One of Israel's glories was the priesthood. The work of these men was to make men acceptable to God, to represent men before God. **Yom Kippur**, the "Day of Atonement," was one of Israel's highest holy days - a day when the priests shone as at no other time. But that priesthood was not the "end-all." It was imperfect. It clearly pointed to the need for a Redeemer like Jesus. That is why this second priesthood, "after the order of Melchizedek," arose.

12) When Jesus came, there was of necessity a change in the Law. Until now, the Law was a shadow, a sign, pointing to the substance that would be the Messianic appearance. Now Jesus had appeared, and the law had been fulfilled! Hope had become reality; faith had become sight! The Law was not "thrown away" as would be an old newspaper when the new one arrived. But its primary purpose had been fulfilled - "to point to Jesus!" The prophecies were fulfilled!

13), 14) The author returns to the issue of the priesthood belonging to the tribe of Levi and Jesus being from the tribe of Judah. No one from Judah ever properly served as a priest at the altar, though several had tried. But Jesus was and is a priest - a different kind of Priest from those of Levi's tribe and Aaron's family. Had Jesus attempted to minister as a priest in the Temple, He would have transgressed the Law of Moses, but He never did that. His different kind of priesthood is in heaven, in the sanctuary after whose pattern Moses made the earthly sanctuary, the Tabernacle. Christ's priesthood "succeeded" that of Aaron in the sense that it came after it. It not only "succeeded" (followed) it, but Christ's ministry as a Priest "exceeded" that of Aaron in so many ways! The remainder of this chapter will talk about some of the ways in which Christ's priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, was superior to that of Aaron.

15), 16) The lineage of Jesus was the tribe of Judah. Since Israel's priests came from Levi, the author must address this. In the Levitical priesthood, there was the physical requirement of being descended from Levi through Aaron. The priesthood of the Messiah was of a different order, that of Melchizedek. "Another" in verse 15 is "another of a different kind," the Greek word being "heteros" (as in "heterosexual" meaning of different sexes). Abraham paid tithes to this ancient priest, of whom there is no record of birth or death; so Christ has the power of an unending and indestructible life.

17) Once again the author appeals to the Hebrew Scriptures to persuade his Hebrew readers of the superiority of Jesus to the things they now consider embracing again. Psalm 110:4 relates God's oath to His Son that He is a Priest forevermore, following not Aaron, but the order of Melchizedek.

18), 19) Israel's priesthood was strictly of the tribe of Levi; if Christ, from Judah, is to have any kind of priesthood, the relation of the law to the people must change. As their rigid rule of life, it must be set aside, an annulment. It still serves to

show men their sin and point them to Christ, but no longer limits them to having priests from Levi's tribe and from Aaron's family. Romans 8:3 and Galatians 4:9 should be read here. The weakness of the law is in man's inability to keep it. Christ changes all that. **JESUS IS A SUPERIOR PRIEST!**

The writer to the Hebrews has, by universal agreement, argued the superiority of Christ. Hebrew Christians in this era, after the crucifixion and resurrection, and before the Temple's destruction, were under pressure from two directions. First, their own former faith was ostracizing them for following this "Christ," Whom they considered a false Messiah. Second, Rome, the authority and power of the day, had outlawed Christianity in favor of Emperor-worship. The pressure was great to abandon Jesus and His church, but our writer asks, "Where will you go? Every alternative is inferior to Christ! He is better than the angels, than Moses, than Aaron in His priesthood (and on goes the list). So why would you abandon Him for lesser things?" The passage before us deals specifically with the superiority of Christ's priesthood over that of the past priests of Israel, priests after the order of Aaron, made priests by Moses' law.

III. THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW PRIESTHOOD (20-28)

HIS DESIGNATION AS PRIEST IS SUPERIOR - IT IS BY OATH, NOT BY LAW

20), 21), 22) The opening line of verse 20 and all of verse 22 make up a single statement. It goes like this, "(Vs. 20) To the degree that Jesus became a Priest by an oath... (Vs. 22) to that degree He is the Security, the Guarantor of a covenant which is superior to the one under which the Levitical priesthood operated." Here is the author's repeated theme that "Christ is better." He has taken upon Himself the responsibility to see that the obligations of this covenant will be carried out. As the God-Man, Jesus is able to represent both of the parties involved. The end of verse 20 and all of verse 21 form a parenthesis explaining the difference. It goes like this: "Aaron's descendants were not made priests by an oath sworn by God, but rather by God's decree and by their being born to their father, Aaron. Nowhere did God promise them a perpetual priesthood, but He did promise Jesus that His priesthood would last perpetually." To prove this, he again quotes Psalm 110:4, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever'" Earlier in this chapter, the writer had argued from the latter part of the quotation, including that Christ's priesthood was of "the order of Melchizedek." And he will argue again the verses 23 - 25 about the longevity of that office. Here, however, the emphasis is on the oath by which God placed Jesus as a Priest. God's immutable oath confirms the priesthood of Jesus, and it makes His a superior priesthood to that of Aaron's line. **Christ is better!**

HIS DURATION AS A PRIEST IS SUPERIOR - HE EVER LIVES!

23), 24), 25) Now the author addresses another facet of Christ's priesthood - its longevity. The descendants of Aaron had to transfer the garments and responsibilities of priesthood to the following generation because they were mortal - they each would die! So, he states, there were many such priests, one after the other. For fourteen hundred years high priests had died and been replaced in office and task by a successor. Their ministries were each after the other interrupted by death. Not so with Messiah-the-Priest; following His resurrection, He lives forevermore. Listen to Christ's own words in Revelation 1:18, "*I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.*" By virtue of His immortality His priesthood can never be interrupted, and therefore will never need to be transferred to another. In eternity past, He had no predecessor, and in time or eternity future, he will have no successor! His provision of salvation is complete in that He lives forever to make intercession for the needs of His weak children. I miss the wise counsel and freely-given love of my grandparents and my parents, but I will never have to say that about my Great High Priest, Jesus Christ! In the days of His flesh, Jesus lived as the "Lamb without spot or blemish." In His death, He made the great sacrifice all of human history had awaited. In His ascension, He presented the perfect offering of blood to the Father, and then He sat at the Father's right hand, His high-priestly work being done! And all of this great work split history into two parts, B.C. and A.D. Even our calendar reminds us of that. **Christ is better!**

HIS DOINGS AND DESTINATION AS A PRIEST ARE BETTER - THE FATHER'S RIGHT HAND

26), 27) Here our author extols five additional superlatives related to Jesus. Four are about His Person, and the fifth is His position, into which He was placed by God (see Philippians 2:9): His piety (acting always with regard for God's requirements), the fact that He is guileless (morally pure, upright), and He is undefiled (morally unstained); He has been set apart from sinners in at least two ways: 1) His sinless nature led to a life absolutely without any act of sin; 2) by virtue of the fact that He is in heaven with the Father today, He is ("exalted above the heavens") out of the company of those who are defiled (though He walked among and ministered to the vilest of men while He was on earth). He was so healthy that when sick people came near Him they "caught health!" He is so holy, that sinners can "catch sanctification" from Him if they will. His superiority as a Priest includes that He has no need to offer a sacrifice for His sin, for He has none. Nor does He need to offer repeated sacrifices for us because His sacrifice was perfect and complete.

28) God's plan for man was not revealed in a moment, nor was it implemented all at one time. He has progressively made known and put in place a developing plan. The plan of God for Israel was perfect, but those who carried out the plan were imperfect. That's why the law required the Aaronic priests to offer sacrifices for their own sins before offering for the people. The law was succeeded by the oath, and the imperfect priests by the Perfect One. The readers (and we) are challenged to abide in our faith in God's Son. **Christ is better!**

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 8

Jesus has been shown superior to the prophets, the angels, Moses, Joshua, and Aaron.

*In his outline, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan titles this chapter "The Better Covenant."
Now our author (8:1 - 10:18) shows us the superiority of Christ's ministry.
He is a better Priest, in a better place, with a ministry based on better promises.
Theme: Christ is Better! Challenge: Press On!*

I. CLIMAX CONSIDERED (8:1-6)

BETTER SANCTUARY

8:1), 2) The writer has been extolling the superlatives of the Messiah as compared with earthly priests of the line of Aaron. He summarizes here, listing two of the superiorities of Christ: they are 1] since the sacrificial aspect of this Priest's work is done ("it is finished" John 19:30), He has sat down at the Father's right hand. No earthly priest could do so, since there was no chair in the Tabernacle or Temple. This seating is mentioned 3 more times {1:3, 10:12, 12:2}. 2] He ministers in the heavenly sanctuary, built by God, not man.

BETTER SACRIFICE

3) Among the responsibilities of priests is the task of offering "gifts and sacrifices." The writer has mentioned this already in 5:1, but it bears repeating here, and the repetition is a great teaching tool. What a contrast between the 1,500-year-long succession of priests from Aaron until Annas and Caiaphas and beyond and the singular High Priest, Jesus! The comparison is that "they offered" and "He must offer." Yet even here is a stark contrast in the nature of the offerings!

4) The mention here of an active priesthood makes it clear the Temple is still standing, and this dates the writing to pre-AD 70. The priesthood of Jesus had to await His ascension - earthly priests had to be of the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron. Jesus was neither, but He could serve as Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. Our next verse will show again the superiority of Christ's priesthood as it relates to that location - the heavenly sanctuary.

BETTER SERVICE

5) When Moses was instructed in the matter of erecting the wilderness Tabernacle (on which floor plan the later Temple was based), he was shown the original, the model, the true sanctuary where Jesus ministers today in heaven! As wonderful and blessed as the earthly location and its ministry were, they were mere copies of the perfect one.

Our continued thoughts in Hebrews are of the theme that "Christ is better." He is better than anything with which He might be compared. In the present text, the comparison is between the covenants, old and new, the latter of which had Jesus as its Mediator. The words of Romans 8:3 and 4 serve well to introduce this study: *"For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."* Here Paul contrasts the old and new covenants, pointing out that Jesus coming into the world made up what was lacking in the law as a covenant between God and men. Our passage goes on to deal with this subject in somewhat greater detail.

6) Paul wrote to Timothy that *"There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus."* As Mediator, Jesus deals with man according to a better covenant than those who stood between God and man did in the previous dispensation, the priests and the prophets. Remember, the priests represented man to God, and the prophets represented God to man. Jesus was and is both Prophet and Priest. In performing their duties, the Aaronic priests were inferior to Jesus, Who acts as our Great High Priest of the superior new covenant. As blessed as OT Israel was, we are more blessed to have Jesus.

II. COVENANTS CONTRASTED (8:7-13)

PROBLEM OF THE OLD

7) God's law was a good law (Rom 7:12, 1 Tim 1:8). It had no flaw as a document, and it served its purposes of setting Israel apart as a showcase nation (Ex 19:5,6), showing men their sin (Rom 3:20), and pointing sinners to the Savior (Gal 3:24). With all of that going for it, God had planned from the beginning to set the law aside in favor of another arrangement between Himself and mankind. Jeremiah 31:31-34 gave the promise of a new covenant. The earlier covenant was preparatory, and did its job well. But it couldn't do what the new covenant was designed to do, so it had to be followed up with a superior, replacement covenant.

8) The problem with the law was that sinners could not keep it! God saw that and promised a new covenant that didn't depend on people. Because there was something seriously wrong with man, preventing him from full obedience to God's law, God was forthcoming with a new covenant that provided a remedy for sin, not just a revelation of it. Jesus would come into the human family, a thing long-predicted in God's progressive revelation. When He came, He would perfectly fulfill the law's righteous demands. Then He would go a step further and become the Sacrifice that the law required, the final One, removing sin (forgiveness) rather than covering it (atonement).

9) This covenant was going to be different from the one that God used to shape Israel into a nation after He brought them out of Egypt's slavery. That covenant required that they walk with Him, and when they did not, it also required that He turn away from them. If they were not faithful, God could not bless them. It is strange that the Jews look so heavily to the Exodus, the time when God rescued them by blood and by power. For it was then that they were at their worst - murmuring, complaining, wishing to return to Egypt, the land of their slavery!

PROMISE OF THE NEW

10) Notice a characteristic of this promised covenant: the prominent use of the phrase "I will." Depending upon which

version you check, it is repeated 5 or 6 times. This is God's declaration of His sovereignty in the work of bringing men to Himself. It is not what **man** will do, but rather what **God** will do. Moses' law was one of externals. The new covenant will be based on internals - God will work in the minds and hearts of men. It is an "inside-out" faith: it starts on the inside, and then it works its way out. That is a genuine religion, by faith.

11) Under the old covenant, neighbors and family members who were without the knowledge of God had to be taught about Him by those who had been "initiated" into the mysteries. The priests were an elite group to whom all looked for enlightenment and instruction. Under the new covenant, the New Testament, we are all believer-priests, indwelt by the Author of Scripture, the Holy Spirit. We each have an anointing (1 John 2:27) from God that enables us to learn and grow, even though we can also be helped by gifted and prepared Bible teachers. The knowledge of God and the truth of His blessed Word is now more widespread than in any previous dispensation

12) The old covenant made a provision for sin called "atonement." The word meant a "covering," putting out of sight. Each year the blood of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, reminded men that sin was never very far away. The blood of bulls and goats could not remove sins, but when God's final Lamb came along, His herald (John the Baptist, John 1:29) said that He was the One Who would "take away" the sins of the world. "Forgiveness," not atonement. It is better to have sins removed, carried away, than to have them atoned for, or covered up. **Christ is better.**

PASSING OF THE OLD

13) The writer to the Hebrews often quoted from the old covenant to make his point about the superiority of the new covenant and its Mediator, Jesus Christ. Once again he does so here, quoting a lengthy passage from Jeremiah 31. Then he draws this reasoned conclusion in vs 13. Soon the Temple would be destroyed, and the sacrifices of the old covenant would end. This was proper because the covenant itself was aging, and it was ready to be replaced by a new and better one. Don't return from the superior faith covenant to the inferior sight covenant.

Israel once crossed the Red Sea and the Jordan River by a miraculous opening. Today we use boats, bridges. Israel once fed daily on Manna from heaven - when in their land, they planted and lived off crops. God doesn't always do what he always did. His workings with men go through phases of change. This can happen even while He remains unchanged.

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 9

Key figures in the old economy were **Prophet** - who spoke to men for God, **Priest** - who spoke to God for men, and **King** - who ruled over men for God. These describe Jesus in His past, present, and future (9:23-28). God is offended by man's sin, and a priest is required to come before God with blood to **propitiate** God. Aaron's priests served in an earthly worship center, with blood of animals as temporary propitiation. Christ, our Priest, serves in a heavenly worship center, having shed His own blood for permanent propitiation.

Theme: Christ is Better! Challenge: Press On!

What a temptation existed for Jewish Christians to return to the things they knew all their lives, things that reminded them of God and His work for them. "You ask me to leave the visible, the tangible, the **real**, and follow the invisible, the intangible?" The answer is "Yes" and "no." "Yes, you should leave the old and follow the new; no, it is not the old that is real, but the **new**." While visible and tangible, the things of the old were **symbols** (verse 9, *παραβολή*, "parables"), and the new, while unseen and untouched, is the **reality** of which those things were merely symbols!

1. ARRANGEMENTS OF THE TABERNACLE'S FURNISHINGS (9:1-5)

1) The "first covenant," referred to here is the Law of Moses, given on Sinai. This covenant provided guidelines for and place of worship. The word for "worship" or "service" is akin to our word "liturgy." The word "ordinances" or "regulations" indicates that God wants to be worshiped properly. While there may be great variety in proper worship, there are some things that are improper in worship. While the place of worship was the tabernacle, and altar, the Temple, Jesus indicated that there was coming (and has now come) a time when worship would have no geographical limits (John 4:21).

2), 3), 4), 5) The writer now briefly describes the tabernacle furnishings. He writes of them as things "prepared," the same word Jesus used in Matt 11:10 to speak of the "Elijah-like" prophet who would "prepare" men to have the Lord come to them. Conversely, here, the preparation is for men to come to God through the service of the tabernacle. First he tells about the outer sanctuary, often called the "holy place." He mentions the 7-branched lampstand, today called the "*menorah*," and the table containing the bread that was set forth (holy, set apart for special use). Here were pictures of Jesus, the "Light of the world" and the "Bread of life." He then takes us deeper into God's great OT symbol of redemption by approaching the "Holy of Holies." These two compartments of the tabernacle were separated by a curtain, most often called the "veil." Ex 26:31-33 details the making of the veil, and it suggests something quite beautiful. We have a problem here as the text seems to place the altar of incense inside the veil, in the Most Holy Place, whereas the clear location from Moses (Ex 30 and 40) was outside the veil in the Holy Place. 1 Kings 6:22 speaks of the altar being in the inner sanctuary in Solomon's Temple, but Zacharias' experience in Luke 1 suggests in that time that it was back in the outer sanctuary. It seems best to think of the altar as **positioned** just outside the veil, but in its **function** of filling the inner sanctuary with smoke of incense as an emblem of prayer and worship, as **belonging to the inner sanctuary**. The author then is describing more the liturgical function than the physical location. The gold-clad ark of the covenant, with its ancient contents, was the single furnishing of the Holy of Holies. In it were the pot of manna (Ex 16:33), the rod of Aaron (Num 17:10), and the law-tables (1 Ki 8:9). Above it were the golden cherubim, looking down upon the mercy seat, the place of propitiation. Of course, Jesus

became our propitiation, satisfying God with His sacrifice (1 John 2:2, 4:10).

II. APPROACH INTO THE TABERNACLE BY AARON'S PRIESTS (9:6-10)

6), 7) Having given us in 1-5 the **furniture of the place**, now in 6-10 he shares the **function of the priests**. There is a contrast shown between frequent, daily activity of the priests in the outer sanctuary and the once-a-year entrance of the high priest into the inner sanctuary. Lev 16 instructs concerning the latter, the blood of the sacrifice being taken into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled on the mercy seat. Of course, there is the taking of coals from the altar of incense into a censer, placing incense on them, and going into the Most Holy Place with that censer in one hand and the vessel of blood in the other. The lesser priests were (daily) to burn incense on the altar and trim the lamps on the lampstand, and they were (weekly) to replace the bread on the table of showbread. A great truth here is that God has given man a way of dealing with sin, temporary and repeated, but a way, nonetheless. Thankfully, when God Himself dealt with our sin in Jesus at Calvary, it was permanent and final! *"Tis done, 'tis done - the great transaction's done!"*

8), 9), 10) These verses bring to mind words like "external," "temporary," "symbolic," and "ineffective." Notice the author's confirmation of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the revelation of God in Scripture. First he tells us that the Holy Spirit intended us to understand that the very presence of the symbols meant that the reality of which they spoke had not yet come to be. But notice in verse 10 the word "until." The symbols sufficed "until." The tabernacle was God's way "until." The way was not open "until." Once Messiah - the Reality - came, the symbols became obsolete. Yet here are men still embracing the sacrifices when **the Sacrifice** has come! They are slaughtering lambs even after **the Lamb of God** has died to take away the sins of the world! They depend upon priests while **the Great High Priest**, Jesus, is seated for them at the Father's right hand! When Messiah died, the veil of the Temple was torn by God's hand into two pieces (Matt 27:51). No longer were men restricted from God's presence by the veil, but rather allowed free access to Him through Jesus. The old (Law) economy had one Temple and many sacrifices; the new (Church) economy has one Sacrifice and many temples - we are individually temples where God's Spirit resides and manifests His presence.

III. ASCENSION OF CHRIST TO THE HEAVENLY TABERNACLE (9:11-14)

11) The theme of Christ's superiority over corresponding things of the old covenant continues. The tabernacle in the wilderness was patterned after the one in heaven. Through that heavenly one Christ entered His present ministry as our Great high Priest. This one is better than the one built by Bezaleel, Aholiab, and their workers.

12) Not only a superior place is His, but also a better offering. The blood of goats and calves is transcended by the blood of Christ. He took not the blood of others, but that which was His own, into the sanctuary. Instead of repeated annual atonement (covering) for sins, Christ made eternal redemption by His "once-for-all" sacrifice.

13), 14) In the old economy, God ordained a temporal sanctification for men by the sprinkling of the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer. This cleansing was not only temporal, it was also primarily ceremonial and external. These forms were effective for their users, as long as they were done in faith, from hearts that saw a holy God requiring cleansing from sins. Even then, as indicated in verse 9, there was no cleansing of the conscience. However, there is a signal superiority in the sanctification for the believer in the new economy. Animal sacrifices were to be without blemish, but that was purely physical. Christ's lack of blemish was moral, spiritual. He was able to deal with our sins because He had absolutely none of His own! His blood is able to cleanse our very inner conscience - enabling us to leave the "works of death" and worship the "God of life."

IV. ADVENT OF A BETTER COVENANT MEDIATED BY CHRIST (9:15-22)

15) Aaron's priests mediated a covenant - Moses' Law. Christ mediates a new covenant, one of grace. Even those who sinned under the old covenant were affected by His death, for they were set free in fact by his blood. God accepted those who believed, but their sins (and ours) were not in fact dealt with until Jesus went to the cross.

16), 17), 18) On three occasions I have been named as executor of wills. In two, my job has begun and ended because the "will-makers" died. Then the work began in earnest, but only then. One "will-maker" yet lives, and so my work in executing their will has not begun. When God made a covenant with Abraham, there was the shedding of blood. The early verses of Exodus 24 indicate the sealing of the Mosaic covenant with blood. This new covenant is the last will and testament of Jesus Christ. It would never have gone into effect without the cross and the shedding of His own blood. God declared that "the wages of sin is death." Our Savior paid those wages, suffered that death in our place. The forgiveness of the new covenant was purchased with the same blood that sealed the covenant - Christ's blood. Some view Christianity as a "bloody religion" - meant in a deprecating way. We agree that the blood is essential, and we decry those who fail to declare the same! There is no shame in that blood! It is in that cross that we exult! **Thank God for the blood!**

19), 20), 21) The word "blood" occurs 6 times in verses 18-22. The original gives us the English prefix to the "hemo" words, "hematology," "hemoglobin," "hemophilia," "hemo-dialysis." One cannot overstate the importance of blood in the Scriptures, as it is the means of "atonement" under the old covenant, and the means of "redemption" and "forgiveness" under the new covenant. If Israel obeyed the Lord under the Law, there must have been rivers of blood flowing from the sacrifices. Yet all that blood could not suffice to do what the blood of Jesus did. Not only did it seal the new covenant, but it cleanses the believing sinner, allowing him to become a child of God. Then it "keeps on cleansing us from all sin" as we keep short accounts of confession before God.

22) The phrase "almost all things" leaves room at least for the exception of a poor person who could not afford an animal for

sacrifice (Lev 5:11-13). The principle remains: atonement (then) or forgiveness (now) is by blood. The innocent must die for the guilty, Jesus for us. From the gates of Eden to the cross, "it is by blood."

V. APPEARINGS OF CHRIST, OUR SUPERIOR PRIEST - TIMES 3 (9:23-28)

23) As you read in the Pentateuch about the building and consecrating of the Tabernacle, including the consecration of the priests, you read about blood. This blood was from animals, and it sufficed for the purifying and dedicating of earthly things, but a nobler blood was needed for the heavenly sanctuary - it required Christ's blood.

24), 25), 26), 27), 28) We do well to consider these five verses together because of their 3-fold presentation of Christ's work. First we see His PRESENT APPEARING before the very throne of God on our behalf. This is in heaven itself, and it only needed to occur once. *Yom Kippur*, the "day of atonement," is celebrated every year, the high priest repeating his entrance into the holy of holies over and over. It is far better that Jesus offered His blood only once, a perfect sacrifice to end all sacrifices. This finished work of Christ is why He could be seated and not standing all this time in heaven. Notice the contrast in the wording between "suffer often" and "once." This suffering once and for all for our sins occurred when Jesus made His PAST APPEARING at the incarnation. Note also that the sacrifice was not like that offered by the earthly priests in the "blood of others." He could "put away" sin rather than "cover" it (atonement) because the blood was His own. What wonderful truth is found next - man only dies once (no transmigration of the soul - no reincarnation). We see also that judgement follows death, not further chances for any redemption. There is no limbo or purgatory taught in Scripture. Our chances to gain heaven by faith in Christ end at the grave. Finally, we see the PROMISED APPEARING of Christ; He is coming again! His next appearing will bring the consummation of our salvation, the time when we will drop off our sin nature and be glorified like Jesus. O, what a day!

Few passages have the richness of detail about the ministry of Jesus as these last half dozen verses. Become familiar with their location, contents, and meaning. Use them to share your faith about Jesus. Understand His threefold ministry of the past, the present, and the future as set forth here!

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 10 THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST!

The New Covenant's sacrifices are superior to those of the Old Covenant (God's law given through Moses). This chapter examines some of the superiorities, indicating them by way of contrast.

Theme: Christ is Better! Challenge: Press On!

I. THE SUPERIORITY OF THE NEW COVENANT (1-18)

REMEMBRANCE OF SINS

1), 2) The Hebrew readers were again considering reverting to law obedience as opposed to faith in the unseen Christ. The author says the law was not a substance, but only a shadow of the coming blessings. The often repeated sacrifices were inadequate to make worshipers complete, rid of their guilt and free from sin's power. Men are seeking peace of mind, a closure with sin; OT sacrifices fell short here. The OT sacrifices provided what we call "atonement." The word means a "covering" of sin. This is indeed far short of the cleansing that our sinful hearts need. If these sacrifices could cleanse finally and completely, they would not have been repeated over and over. Their continuation was proof of their ineffectiveness.

REMOVAL OF SINS

3), 4) Earlier we saw cleansing as superior to covering; now the writer argues that removal (remission) of sins is better than reminders of those sins. On *Yom Kippur* the high priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat at the ark of the covenant, he was reminding the people that they were sinners, that death by shedding of blood was the price for sins. Using animal sacrifices and animal blood, he could only cover sins; he could not remove them. This removal we call remission, or forgiveness. If atonement by animal blood were sufficient, such sacrifices would not have continued past God's slaying those first animals to clothe Adam and Eve. But they continued for 4,000 years! How sad that sin requires death; how sad that animal death is not enough. The clear need is for the death of a Man for men.

5), 6) Now comes the incarnation - Christ coming into the world from heaven, entering the human family in a body by being born of Mary. At least 3 things make this body a superior sacrifice to the animal sacrifices: 1] it was of the same human nature as we have; 2] it, being the body of a Man, was of infinitely higher value than animals; 3] animals can't willingly choose to become sacrifices, but the man can. God had instituted the sacrificial system, and yet here we read that He did not desire sacrifices, nor was he pleased with sin offerings and sacrifices. What gives? 1] Samuel told Saul that to obey was better than to sacrifice. Israel had substituted an outward ritual for an inward relationship. God did not want this. 2] The incomplete nature of the sacrifices could not satisfy God as could the perfect sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. So in a body, Jesus would willingly sacrifice Himself for our sins.

7) *"Here the apostle raises up and exalts the Lord Jesus Christ, as high as he had laid the Levitical priesthood low."* So says Matthew Henry. He quotes often from the OT to convince these Jewish Christians that Christ is **not a challenge to** but **a continuation and completion of the truth** revealed in Moses. From the Psalms he cites Jesus saying that he entered this realm to accomplish the Father's will. With this God would be pleased with this, we would be perfected

8) Isaiah (1:11) presents God as saying, "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats... Stop bringing meaningless offerings!" The Isaiah passage then calls on the Israelites to come to God in faith and then to clean up their act. This is what God wants, heartfelt obedience and confidence in Him. Through Christ alone we can have these things.

9) To those thinking of leaving Christ and returning to the sacrificial system, the writer says that with the advent of Christ into the world, the old system is no longer necessary. With the sacrifice of Messiah accomplished, animal sacrifices have no use or meaning. And all this is the will of the Father, fulfilling the OT pictures.

10) There is a direct correlation between the repetition of sacrifices and the repetition of sanctification. OT sacrifices were repeated again and again. OT saints had to be sanctified again and again; neither the sacrifices nor the sanctification were final. In contrast, Christ's once-for-all sacrifice provides for those who are believing in Him a once-for-all sanctification. This is one reason why His sacrifice is superior to that of OT priests, and why He needed a body.

REPETITION OF SACRIFICES VERSUS A REDEEMER WHO IS SEATED

11) He notes several things about Aaronic priests and their sacrifices. 1] Repetition - day after day; again and again; 2] plurality - every priest; 3] posture - stands; 4] incompleteness - sacrifices that can never take away sins. It was alright for Israel back then, but a better has come now, and the old just pales by comparison.

12) Here is Christ's contrast: 1] No repetition - He offered once; 2] singularity: one Priest, Jesus; 3] posture: He is seated at the Father's right hand, His work is finished; 4] finality: for all time one sacrifice for sins. He could say from the cross before He dismissed His spirit, "It is finished!" Why would anyone leave this Priest?!

13), 14) Redemption's work is done; Christ is the Conqueror. He rests from that labor at the Father's right hand, where He is our Advocate when we sin and our intercessor when we are weak. So what else does He do? He waits for the complete subjugation of all enemies. The writer here refers to the OT again, showing that the fathers wrote this about Jesus. Psalm 110:1: "*Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.*" So He and we await the fulfillment of this subduing. His sacrifice complete, He turns the work of salvation over to the Holy Spirit. Since we're saved, perfected forever, we shall not be named among those enemies that Christ will subdue. His sacrifice is the best, it was all for us.

REMISSION OF SINS

15), 16) Often the writer of Hebrews bolsters his arguments with the Hebrew Scriptures, an authority that his Hebrew readers will acknowledge. He claims divine authorship of the OT by saying that it was the Holy Spirit Who testified these words. He specifically quotes a passage from Jer 31, which we call the "new covenant." As opposed to laws written on stone or parchment, the Spirit says He will inscribe His word on the hearts and minds of men. Clearly there is a superiority of the internal writing to the external alone, which a man might or might not internalize. When a man changes inwardly, a change in the heart, it is far better than just rote obedience to a legal code. Christ brings about this inward change.

17), 18) The old covenant, with its oft-repeated sacrifices, brought remembrance of sins with every sacrifice. Jer 31 is again referred to, now verse 34, to show that the provision for sins in the new covenant is superior in its far-reaching effectiveness. Because of the perfection of Christ's sacrifice, God is able to put away our sins and never remember them against us again. My college roommate had to pay his way through, and every payment was a tough one. When he made his final payment each semester, he would ask the clerk to stamp "Paid in Full" on his receipt. As far as that semester was concerned, the college had no more claim against him. So it is with our sins; Jesus has paid for them in full, and they are fully and finally remitted. That being the wonderful case, no more payment is called for. God has renounced His claim.

II. THE SUMMONS TO A NEW CONDUCT (19-39)

[Practical section begins here]

PULL CLOSE TO CHRIST

19) Under the law of Moses, entrance into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies was restricted to the high priest, and to him the opportunity came only annually on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. He must enter there with the blood of the sacrificial lamb. Today, because the Lamb of God has shed His blood, all believers are privileged to boldly come into God's presence. Do you take advantage of that privilege in worship and prayer? We should!

20) There is a freshness about our access to God that the old way lacked. Our Sacrifice is now alive through the resurrection! Yet, when He died, when His body was rent for us, God rent the veil of the Temple. Some say it was to show that the way was now open to all. I say it was also to show God had changed locations, from the Temple of stone to the temples made of flesh and blood. I, as a believer in Jesus Christ, am the place, the temple, where God lives!

21) We have confidence, we have access, and we have a great High Priest - even Jesus. And He is the superior Priest, better than Aaron. And He is over the house of God, as Sovereign Lord of all. All these things are superior privileges for the believer in Christ, things we lose if we go back to the old ways. So we must not drift from Christ

22) Now begin a series of exhortations to the believer, each expressed by the words "let us." First we are not to stand off from God, but draw near to Him. And why not - our hearts have been cleansed by Christ's blood! There is no more guilt or shame for those in Christ! We witnessed to that publicly in the waters of believer's baptism.

PULL CLOSE TO ONE ANOTHER

23) The second encouragement from the writer is to hold on to our hope, which is in Christ. The readers were in danger of loosing from that anchor and being set adrift on the seas of uncertainty. Satan cannot rob us of our salvation, but he would take from us the joy that comes through our blessed hope in Christ. Let's hold on to what we have.

24), 25) The final exhortation here involves helping each other out by a mutual "stirring up" (KJV "provoke") of each other. Believers were not meant to be isolated from one another like monks in a monastery. We need each other for fellowship, accountability, teaching, burden-sharing, and more. We can help each other to be more loving and active in good works, one life challenging another to come on alongside. It is therefore important for us to keep on getting together in small and large groups to encourage each other. Many try to go it alone, and fail. I know my small group meeting each week with two

godly men is a great help to my spiritual life and growth. Try it.

PRESS ON IN FAITH

26), 27) This passage is similar to 6:4-6; it is assumed that the one who has reached out and grabbed the knowledge of the truth (surely such a one is saved) goes on sinning (there is no "if"). This is a Christian Jew before us here; if he thinks he can abandon the cross to return to the Temple, he will find that there is no other effective sacrifice for sins. Christ's alone was once and for all. Those old repeated sacrifices all looked forward to the one unrepeated sacrifice. When a believer renounces his profession of faith in Christ, he is treading on thin ice. He will be saved, but a consuming fire will render worthless any reward he might have anticipated. His existence before heaven will be a miserable one.

28), 29) Under Moses' law (to which the readers were considering a return), incorrigible offenders were executed. There was no sacrifice that could be made to set aside the punishment of one who had "set aside the law." And it was only a law! He argues that those who despise grace are worthy of more severe punishment than those who scorn the law. We must not insult the Spirit of grace. To reject the Son of God is a much greater offense than to reject the law. The blood must not be trampled underfoot.

30), 31) The writer continues his habit of supporting his arguments with these Hebrew Christians by citing references from the Hebrew Scriptures - this time from Deut 32:35, 36, the second also matching words in Ps 135:14. It seems the author himself was Jewish, for he groups himself with his readers, "We know Him Who..." None had more opportunity to know God than Israel. They had His Word; they had seen many of His works. The words he quotes mean that men who reject God place themselves under His judgment. His punishment for sins is a thing that men should dread as they do no other thing. David, as God's child, had preferred falling into God's hands than men's. Being His makes all the difference.

32) The difficulties endured by Christians in the early church were by no means small. These readers had stood their ground, they had persevered in the face of extreme hardships. They are now reminded of that in an effort to persuade them to not turn their backs on Christ and take the easy path during sufferings. Repeat your past; keep on enduring the hardships!

33) The author reminds them of their courage in being made a public spectacle, enduring insult and tribulations. He adds that at times they themselves were not suffering, but exposed themselves to danger by identifying with those who were. What courage and sympathy! What a Christlike spirit! Such boldness shouldn't be abandoned.

34) He concludes the history of their past endurance with two strokes: 1] they had been unashamed even to identify with those who were imprisoned for their faith (a bold stand), 2] they had consciously chosen to accept the seizure of their goods with a joyful attitude. How? Why? Because they knew that their possessions in Christ were not only superior in quality, but more lasting in duration. "Incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away," as Peter puts it.

35) The Jewish believers had not yet cast off their confidence in Christ, and he urges them not to ever do it. This is a negative way of stating the positive, "hold fast," which he has done so often in this book. He reminds them of the coming day when wrongs will be righted, and confidence in Christ, now persecuted, will then be rewarded.

36) God promised to reward those who diligently seek Him (He 11:6). These believers were wearying under the pressure of the battle into which being a Christian placed them. They had a need to remain steadfast, to "hang in there," as the youth would say. Doing the right thing will always pay off in the end. God is no man's Debtor.

37) Waiting for the promises of God has never been easy. That's why Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham, and why we have the Middle East conflict today. By the 1st century, it hadn't gotten any better. Roman oppression made believers wish for the return of Christ. Impatient Jewish Christians were thinking of returning to Judaism, but the writer refers to Isa 26:21 and Hab 2:3 to encourage them not to lose heart. Paul said, "In due season we shall reap if we faint not..."

38) One of the 3 NT quotes from Hab 2:4 comes here (the other 2 in Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11). Weary of faith and longing for sight, these frail ones were about to give up. The writer urges holding on to faith, "without which it is impossible to please Him" (Heb 11:6). "The just shall live by faith" would become the battle cry of the 16th century Protestant Reformation.

39) Joining his Hebrew brethren in argument, the writer says WE (emphatic!) are not ones who live by sight and shrink back at the sign of trouble, thereby wasting our lives spiritually. Rather we by faith in the unseen Christ persevere unto the possessing of the promises that He gave. Though the way is hard, **"Don't be a quitter!"**

The finality of our salvation when we trust Jesus is predicated upon the finality of His work on the cross for us. "It is finished!" This is the battle cry of our eternal security! Unlike the old economy priests, Jesus was able to offer one sacrifice for sins forever, making the job completely done for us for all time. We can now rest in Him forever, not appear again next year, waiting for the sacrifice!

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 11 FAITH'S HALL OF FAME

In chapter 10 we read:

22 Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;

24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds..."

*Chapter 11 expands the theme of faith

*Chapter 12 expands the theme of hope

*Chapter 13 expands the theme of love

Habakkuk 2:4 has three NT quotations, with these (**bolded**) emphases:

*Rom 1:17 "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written,
The **just** shall live by faith."

*Gal 3:11 "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for,
The just shall live by **faith**."

* Heb 10:38 "Now the just **shall live** by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

About FAITH:

"...the inward conviction from God that what He has promised, He will perform." "True Bible faith is confident obedience to God's Word in spite of circumstances and consequences."

"Faith enables us to understand what God does.

Faith enables us to see what others cannot see.

As a result, faith enables us to do what others cannot do!" Wiersbe

"Faith is always a response to a divine revelation." W.H. Griffith Thomas

"The essence of faith is in accepting God's Word as true and acting on it, even though we cannot see the road ahead." RLP
*The Jewish Christians were flirting with leaving **faith** (Christ) and returning to **sight** (Moses, law, priesthood...). Chapter 11 lays out the excellence of faith - documenting it with examples from the Hebrew Scriptures. This has properly been called the "Hall of Fame of Faith." Here are chronicled summaries of some of the Hebrew Scriptures' great exploits of faith. Let's walk down the hall...*

Theme: Christ is Better! Challenge: Press On!

I. THE EXCELLENCE OF FAITH (1-3)

11:1) "Faith," what a wonderful word! It is what pleases God. Faith separates God's children from the rest of the world; it makes us different from them. Faith gives a present reality to hopes for the future. It enables the soul to see what the eyes cannot see. Faith gives a foundation to the Christian experience, affecting the way we think and the way we live. It comes to us from the Word of God by the work of His Spirit and centers in His Son, Jesus.

2) The writer proceeds to illustrate exploits of faith in the lives of a number of OT worthies, Some named, others only referred to. These old saints were testified about in Scripture because they believed God. The earlier ones had no written Word from God, but did have direct communication from Him. Faith made them famous.

3) It takes a great deal of faith to accept the evolutionary model of origins. It also requires faith to accept the creation model, but it is easier to believe. Matter is not eternal; it was made by God at a point in time. What we see now was not always there to see; not until God commanded it to come into existence. Do you believe that?

II. THE EXAMPLES OF FAITH (4-38)

ABEL - FAITH BRINGS A BETTER SACRIFICE

4) The first-mentioned hero of faith is Abel, Adam and Eve's 2nd son, slain by his brother, Cain. He must have been taught by his parents about the blood sacrifice God made to clothe their nakedness. He offered such a sacrifice, proving his faith-righteousness. His testimony speaks to us today, many millennia after his death.

ENOCH - FAITH BIDS THE WORLD FAREWELL

5) Enoch walked with God, and that by faith. He pleased God so much that His heavenly Father spared him the agony of death. They were walking together one day, and God just said, "Enoch, come on home with me." His translation to heaven happened because he pleased God, and he pleased God because he trusted Him.

6) A chief desire of the heart should be to please God. Our writer here tells us one of the essentials of pleasing God. It is "**faith**." He who doubts God cannot please God. We must be sure of His existence, and we must know assuredly that those who seek God in faith will not miss their payday from Him. He rewards them "who earnestly seek Him." Exercise your faith by trusting God; grow in your faith by spending time often in God's Word.

NOAH - FAITH BUILDS AN ARK

7) The next hero of faith in our text is Noah. In his day, no one had ever seen rain, and yet God told him rain was coming and to build a huge wooden box to save himself, his family, and animals to repopulate the earth after the flood. His reverence for and faith in God led him to obey and build the ark. How he must have been scorned! But in the end, faith served Noah well: righteousness, deliverance from the flood, salvation for his family - by faith!

ABRAHAM & SARAH - FAITH BEGINS A NATION

8), 9), 10) Next we meet perhaps the greatest man of faith in the OT - Abraham. As Noah had not seen rain or flood, but believed, so Abraham had never seen the land to which God called him to go, yet he believed, obeyed, and went. The essence of faith is in accepting God's Word as true and acting on it, even though we cannot see the road ahead. This is exactly what Abraham did. He pulled up stakes and left his family - not such a big deal today, but a strange and serious matter in that day! After Abraham left Ur, he never lived in a house again, but lived out his life as a nomadic tent-dweller. He

left the land and people he knew and became a stranger in a strange land - all because God called him. So great was his faith. Must we not also hear, believe, and obey God's call today? What is He calling you to do? Are you afraid? Fear no more; seize the promise of God by faith and step out to do His will. Abraham was able to do this because he fixed his eyes on the eternal city whose Builder and Maker is God. Trust the eternal Word of God yourself! Fix your eyes on things eternal, and begin to live the life of faith as you never have before. Share in the blessing of Abraham by sharing in his faith.

11), 12) Here was a couple well along in years - Abram was 99 and Sarah was 89. God told them that they would have a child, even at their advanced age. Isaac was to be the seed through which God would bless Israel and the world by sending the Messiah. This old couple believed God and received the promise. Having become a grandparent 6 times when being past 50, I know the joy of having little babies to cherish when you have matured past what you were when your own children were born. What a joy this little lad must have been to Abram and Sarah! A man whose chances of fathering a child were no better than those of a dead man became the father of the Jewish nation. Why? Because he (and his wife) believed God, counting Him faithful. And He was!

13) While Noah survived the flood, and Abraham moved into the promised land, our writer says they died in faith without receiving all the promises. Abraham believed his seed would outnumber the stars, but he died without seeing them. He believed that all nations would be blessed through him, but he died in that faith nearly 2,000 years before Messiah came to make that promise a reality. To them, believing was seeing, and not the other way around.

14) The confession of being pilgrims and strangers, as the old version called them, conveyed the knowledge that they did not belong to this world (and neither do we). A stranger is one who is away from home; a pilgrim is one who is going home. All those heroes of faith have now safely arrived at home; we are still strangers and pilgrims. Let us live in a way detached from this world that is not our home, showing that we, too, have a home somewhere...

15), 16) The Jews who left Egypt kept thinking back to the land of their captivity. They imagined it to be better than it really was, and even talked of returning there with or without Moses. The men and women of faith in this hall of fame did not think of the lands and circumstances they left. And they did not even think too much upon the land to which they came; their eyes were cast ever forward, looking for that city that they have now attained. No believer should look longingly at their past, whether sinful, or filled with religion. We must press on in faith to lands not yet conquered, to beauties not yet seen. The Hebrew Christians stood in danger of moving in reverse to things which were of lesser value than riches in Christ. Let not God need to be ashamed of us for our unbelief; rather let Him be pleased to be called our God because our faith in Him holds strong, moving ever forward.

17), 18), 19) The writer in this chapter tells us of the faith-prompted actions of the saints in Old Testament times. It becomes clear from the text that faithful father Abraham really did offer Isaac up as a sacrifice to God - in his heart! We know from the Genesis 22 account that God intervened, preventing the act. But 3 days before, when God gave the command and Abraham set out for Mt Moriah, Isaac was dead in his father's heart. Here we see a beautiful blend of faith and reason. Abraham fully trusted God. God had said that Abraham would have a multitude of descendants through his son, Isaac. Yet God has told the patriarch to slay his son. His conclusion, reached by reason and based on faith, was that God would raise Isaac from the dead. Nothing else made any sense to the man who simply believed God. So our writer states that, figuratively speaking, Abraham received Isaac back from the dead. And not only that, it was on the third day! What a marvelous figure of the third-day resurrection of Jesus!

ISAAC AND JACOB - FAITH BLESSES THEIR CHILDREN

20) Isaac, the ordinary son of an extraordinary father, and the ordinary father of an extraordinary son, is also chronicled as a man of faith. The single mention is his near-parting act of blessing his sons, said to be done in faith. Isaac believed what God had said to Abraham, and he pronounced those blessings upon his own sons.

21) Genesis 49 records for us the prophecies Jacob spoke concerning his 12 sons. Genesis 48:5 speaks of his elevating Joseph's two sons to the status of the previous generation. Instead of dividing the single share due their father, Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh each received a full share from their grandfather, Jacob. Weak in body, Jacob was strong in spirit and faith as he prophesied.

JOSEPH - FAITH AND THE BURIAL OF BONES

22) Though he gets much coverage in Genesis, Joseph receives only a single verse here, a strange one at that. God had made a promise to Abraham (Gen 15:13,14) that the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt would end, and that they would return to the promised land. No doubt passed orally from Abraham to his great-grandson, Joseph, this promise was claimed by faith, Joseph wishing his bones to be buried at his true earthly home. The chronicler here applauds that trust with us.

MOSES - FAITH BROUGHT THE JEWS OUT OF BONDAGE

23) Not mentioned by name here, Amram and Jochebed are honored in this roll call of faith. So lovely in his parents' eyes, Moses was expected to do great things for God and God's people. All that was in their faith is not known to us, but God honored their trust with a most illustrious son! How marvelous that lowly slaves feared their God more than their king (Pharaoh), and risked their own lives to save the life of a little baby. Would to God more parents would do so today, and shut down the abortion mills.

24), 25), 26) There are striking similarities between the accounts of these men of faith, Moses and Abraham. Each had spent his life in a culture, but found himself abandoning that culture on the basis of a revelation from God. Abraham left Ur, Moses left the palace (and later left Egypt). Each of them encountered hardships (because of their choice) that they would

not have encountered if they had stayed in their comfort zone. Each of them did what God calls everyone to do - they left behind lives and worlds of sin for an uncertain future, but a future ordained by the God they trusted. Each of them accepted difficulty in the short term in favor of God's reward in the long term. We know less of Abraham's pre-faith life, but Moses could have lived a luxurious life, surrounded by any pleasure his heart could conceive. Men would have bowed before him, almost worshiped him. In faith he rather chose to be an outcast, identified as a member of a hated race of people. In choosing to follow God, Moses subjected himself to the same treatment that Jesus would get, and that followers of Jesus would get. He chose reproach over riches for Jesus.

27) This statement clearly refers to Moses' departure from Egypt at age 40, when he went to Midian and shepherded sheep for 40 years. Despite Pharaoh's ire at Moses, the man of God persevered in the project of Israel's emancipation from the 4-century-long slavery. He thus showed his faith.

28) He again demonstrated his confidence in God by obeying in the matter of the Passover. Moses not only instructed the people to slay the lamb and apply the blood to the door posts and lintels, he did it himself for the salvation of his own house!

29) Moses led by faith, and the Israelites followed by faith. Believing that God would hold the watery wall in place until they were past, they marched through the Red Sea as they had walked on desert sand. The Egyptians had not faith, and their effort to pass through ended in their deaths by drowning.

JOSHUA - FAITH BRINGS DOWN THE WALLS OF JERICHO

30) For six days Joshua in faith led the army of Israel in a walk around Jericho. On the 7th day, they marched around 7 times in faith. God honored their faith by felling the mighty walls of earth's oldest city, breaching the safety of the inhabitants, and leading to the taking of the city.

RAHAB - FAITH BRAVED THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

31) Rahab, the ancestress of Christ, displayed her faith by protecting the spies and placing the scarlet cord in her window. Salvation came to her family because she trusted God. No doubt, her occupation changed, even though her name did not. Years ago in Newport News, Don, formerly called the "wine man," banned from many stores, was later welcomed by his new name, "ice cream man." Faith changed his life, as well as Rahab's, and the locals changed his name.

OTHER SAINTS - FAITH BORE SUFFERING

32) The list of Israel's heroes of faith is too long to continue - the author mentions six more greats by name, then lumps the prophets together by vocation. Four judges, the first king-maker and the first king from Judah's tribe are mentioned. We know them as men with clay feet, but of great faith also.

33), 34) Here he lists 9 achievements of faith - there were national conquests, spiritual acts, salvation from destruction by lions (Daniel) and fire (3 Hebrew children), and military exploits. The pages of the Hebrew scriptures are filled with the accurate accounts of signal accomplishments by ordinary people who had great faith in God. The readers who consider themselves ordinary people can take heart as they view what God can do with anyone who will just trust Him.

35) The ministries of Elijah (1 Ki 17:22) and Elisha (2 Ki 4:36) saw two women receive their sons back alive, when each of them had died! A third man returned from beyond the grave (2 Ki 13:21), but no reference is made to any woman receiving him back. The reference to willing torture is of uncertain connection, but the writings from the Maccabean period have stories of such exploits.

36) For their faith in God, many others were subjected to persecution of verbal and physical nature. Incarceration has been the lot of many who stood by their faith in God in circumstances where infidelity might have meant freedom and safety - but they rather chose to stand with God, even with chains and dungeons awaiting them.

37), 38) This is certainly not information for a recruiting video - the path of faith here described is a journey of suffering and deprivation! Believers were stoned (Naboth), sawn in half (Isaiah), were tempted (to deny their faith?), died by the sword (Urijah - Jer 26:23, and James - Ac 12:2), in animal skins (Elijah, John Baptist), lacking even the necessities of life, they were mistreated by those to whom they ministered (look at Paul - 1 Cor 4:9-13 and 2 Cor 11:23-27). Surely the world did not deserve the love, care, and passionate ministries of people such as these! And so it often excluded them from "polite society," leading to their homelessness and wandering.

III. FAITH'S EPILOGUE (39,40)

39) The role call of faith and the narrative of the adventures of the faithful in Heb 11 is a good report of them and their deeds. They are witnessed about here by the inspired writer, showing God's commendation of them. In spite of this glorious witness, they did not receive the promises. Messiah came after all they had died.

40) God foresaw something better for us than what they experienced, and we have in a measure received that better thing. But, just as they could not receive the perfect fulfillment of the promises without us, so can we neither without them. For when Christ comes again, we and they shall together enjoy the final and complete fulfillment of all that God has for us. "Oh, that will be glory for me...when by His grace I shall look on His face, that will be glory, be glory for me."

So great is this word, Faith, that we named our daughter "Faith." When God tests us, it is to prove and improve us. We are thus benefitted when we exercise faith in the tests. Let us be faithful to the God Who is ever faithful to us. Let us trust Him completely, relying on His Word as our faith's foundation.

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 12

The author has in chapter 11 challenged us to a life of faith by the sterling examples of our forebears in the faith. Now he

calls us to persevere in the battle, using a number of pictures like racing and wrestling. A key to success in any of the games used to illustrate the Christian life is "Discipline." An undisciplined life will be an unsuccessful life. We must discipline ourselves and accept God's discipline.

I. REMAIN STEADFAST IN YOUR STRUGGLES (1-4)

EXHORTATION TO RUN THE RACE

1) "Therefore" scans back across chapter 11 and takes in at a glance the whole roster of the faithful. These have testified to us by their examples. We are runners in the race of life. As such we need to rid ourselves of hindrances in Christ's service. What things hinder you? Are you willing to shed them? We must also cast off sins that encircle us with ease (the sins we love to commit) to slow our progress. Then we can endure in the race that Jesus has set before us.

EXAMPLE OF CHRIST IN THE RACE

2) Jesus is the goal in life's race, and we are bidden to focus on Him from the start. He went before us and charted the course. "For the joy" should be translated, "instead of the joy." Heaven's joy was set before Him, yet He came here to endure the cross **for us** instead. It was a shameful and despised thing that He took to Calvary **for us**. Not deterred by the suffering and shame, He finished the course and is now exalted at God's right hand.

3) These Hebrew Christians were growing weary. Some were about to faint and return to the old ways. Jesus is pointed out to them as a pattern of endurance in suffering at the hands of sinful men. Verse 1 said, "the OT saints did it, so can you!" Now the writer says, "If that's not enough, look at the example of Jesus. He endured more than any man, and **He** didn't quit." The readers (and we) are exhorted to remain steadfast in our walk with Christ.

4) "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen..." They had "*stood up against*" difficulty and "*antagonized*" (each word used only here in NT). But remember the next line, "Nobody knows but Jesus." He knows, for He shed His blood, something the readers had not done. Our sufferings may be great, but the cross-sufferings are greater still.

II. RECOGNIZE CHASTISEMENT AS GOD'S PATERNAL LOVE (5-13)

EXPLANATION OF DISCIPLINE IN THE RACE

5),6) The writer reaches again to the Hebrew Scriptures to support his argument. Prov 3:11,12 is quoted to explain that God's loving hand is behind the discipline they experienced. This proves their sonship and should be a great encouragement to them. We should not look down on discipline or faint because of it. When our children step aside from the path of right, we show that they are ours and that we love them by disciplining them in love. To feel God's chastening hand is to feel secure in his love and watchcare. Who would want a father, earthly or heavenly, who never disciplined his children? Don't miss the blessing by misunderstanding purpose of discipline.

7),8) A test of membership in God's family is whether or not we receive chastening when we sin. We should resist the teaching that those who are saved and walk with God never suffer again. Many young men come to the Rescue Mission because they had no father to help them learn to live disciplined lives. Anyone who is never disciplined by God is not God's child. He is illegitimate. Matthew Henry said, "*To be suffered to go on in sin without a rebuke is a sad sign of alienation from God ;such are bastards, not sons.*" Dr. Wiersbe adds, "*If I resisted God's will and did not experience His loving chastening, I would be afraid that I was not saved!*"

9) Immature children fantasize about having parents who never discipline them, but as we grow, we understand and appreciate parents who allowed us to grow **through** the sufferings of life. I am glad I lived long enough to thank my parents for the spankings, restrictions, and other forms of discipline they used to drive foolishness from me and make me who I am today. We respect our earthly parents for chastening us, and we should thank God that His discipline is for our good, and submit to it that we may enjoy the fullness of life He has for us.

10), 11) Even the best of earthly parents are human and prone to error. Our motives in discipline may be good, but rarely pure. We want children that will reflect well on us and give us as little trouble as possible. We make mistakes in discipline, not always having all the facts. We mean well, but our discipline is affected by our limitations. God, on the other hand, is perfect in His purpose - He chastens us for our good. He wants us to be holy, the highest goal attainable by any life. When He deals with us, it is with full knowledge of every circumstance, as well as every impure motive on our part. While we may weep for a night under the chastening hand of God, joy will come in the morning of understanding that the temporary unpleasantness worked to produce a harvest of eternal fruit of righteousness - being and living right before God - and peace - having a harmonious relationship with God. Such discipline will help us run the race well and win. Praise Him.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO PERSEVERE IN THE RACE

12), 13) The Hebrew Christians written to here were tempted to return to their old religion. They were growing weary in their walk with Christ, described in hands that hang down, knees that are feeble. The writer urges them rather to be strengthened in those limbs; this strength comes from a vital walk with Christ. When the branch is in contact with the Vine, he has all he needs to live, grow and produce fruit. Not only that, but then he can reach out to those around him who are also on the verge of losing heart, strengthening **them** for **their** journey, as well. Prov 3:5,6 remind us that when we trust God, He makes our paths straight. Such paths enable the weak to find strength and make the going easier. Isa 35:3 and Prov 4:26 are used here to undergird his point.

III. RESIST APOSTASY BY PURSUING HOLINESS (14-17)

14) Here is a present tense imperative verb - "keep on pursuing peace..." As the hound pursues the prey, so must we follow hard after peaceable relations with all people. We are commanded to give the same effort to finding holiness - being

separated unto God and from sin. It is holiness that allows us to perceive the thrice holy God. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." See also 1 John 3:2,3.

15) Every believer has an overseership with every other believer. It is our responsibility to help each Christian not come short of the grace of God. Abandoning the grace way for the outward religious forms of the Judaic system is a huge mistake. We must also try to prevent men from becoming bitter in their faith, for such bitterness leads to much trouble and defilement. Eph 4:31 tells us to rid ourselves of bitterness. Simon the sorcerer was beset by bitterness; Rom 3:14 describes it as related to unbelievers, too.

16) The writer to the Hebrews warns them against " pornos," sexual impurity - any from of sexually unchaste behavior. Our generation does not have a corner on promiscuity, but we have taken it to new depths, as well as doing unspeakable things in the open. He warns against being "profane, desecrated." There is a life-philosophy called "hedonism" that is all about pleasure and the moment. Esau well illustrates this desire for immediate physical gratification at the expense of spiritual blessings for time and eternity. We do well to avoid his mistakes.

17) The deal made was a deal done; Esau regretted his decision, but could not undo it (Gen 25:29-34 and 27:30-40). Esau did not seek repentance, but he rather sought to regain the lost blessing. No one seeks repentance in vain.

IV. RECALL WHICH COVENANT IS NOW YOURS (18-24)

18), 19), 20), 21) See these Hebrew scripture passages for fuller detail here vividly described (Ex 19:9-23, Deut 9:8-19). Our writer paints for us the scene at Sinai, when and where Moses received the Law from Jehovah. His readers who are thinking of going back to this mountain as it were, need to remember the awesomeness and fear of this mount. It was a mountain of thick clouds, death, difficult to approach.

22), 23), 24) No, these Jewish believers had come to a better mount than Sinai; they had come to Mount Zion! Here at Jerusalem Jesus had died for their sins, so they need not die in their sins. They were now coming to the prospect of a heavenly city, with heavenly beings, and to the ultimate gathering of all those redeemed in Christ! This assembly will be one for the ages! What a day that will be! Why, then, go back to that which is earthbound? Why return to that which offers so little, when Jesus offers so much?! Abel's was the first blood shed in sin; Christ's was the last blood shed for sin. Leave the old and cling to the new - remember, "**Jesus is better, so press on!**"

V. RESPECT THE AWESOME POWER AND ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY OF GOD (25-29)

25) The blood of the old covenant speaks to us from earth; Christ's blood of the new covenant speaks to us from heaven. Don't say "no" to His call - don't turn back to old things, abandoning the new. The history of Israel is in part the story of men who did not escape God's judgment because they refused to hear Him as He spoke on earth. Think not for a moment that there is any chance of escape from consequences for any who refuse to hear the One Who speaks to us from heaven - there is not!

26) This section of Hebrews contrasts the old and new covenants, Moses and Christ, Sinai and Zion. At Sinai, God's voice shook the earth. He quotes Hag 2:6 to say that He will shake the earth again, and this time heaven with it! In the law, He spoke sin and judgment; in the gospel, He speaks righteousness and life. The latter is greater than the former, and we best not neglect to hear and believe His message. Rejection is sin, and it brings judgment.

27) In time to come, God will shake the universe in judgment and purification. When the shaking is done, only the spiritual will remain. John told us of the temporal nature of this world (1 Jn 2:17), and he said that the one doing God's will abides forever. Are you tied to the eternal, or hitched up to the temporal? Where is your anchor?

28), 29) Prophecy should always affect our present life. We should find in truth about the future motivation for living in the present. It is not just pie in the sky by-and-by, it is truth that is practical for the present. Knowing that we are to be heirs of an eternal, immovable kingdom, we can stand with grace in this kingdom that is passing away. Such a great promise moves us to serve the Lord faithfully, and in so doing, help others prepare for the kingdom to come. A second motivation from the future is seen here also - it is the sure and certain knowledge that the God of love and grace is also a God of burning judgment. The writer says He is a "Consuming Fire!" Such a God is not to be trifled with. Whether it is the fear of the fires of hell for the lost, or the fires of purging at the judgment seat of Christ for believers, we are motivated to live as we ought. Are you so living, Dear Friend?

HEBREWS, CHAPTER 13 SCATTERED COMMANDS

It now becomes time to wrap up this letter, and what better content for a conclusion than practical instructions based on love?! The author was ever so familiar with the dictates of the Law of Moses, and we see also in his writings the directions from the law of love. People will best recognize that we belong to Jesus when they see our love - love for God, love for each other, and love for those outside the family. All of these "scattered commands" may be connected with the virtue of love. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "The greatest of these is love."

I. SENSIBLE EXPRESSIONS OF BROTHERLY LOVE (1-6)

1) As the writer concludes his letter, he throws several quick-hitting instructions at his readers. Several have the force of imperatives, including this - "Keep on abiding in brotherly love." The days of persecution of Christians meant that Christians needed to stick together, living as a family - thus "brotherly love." It must not have an end.

2) Persecuted Christians often had to relocate, thus many traveling believers. Circuit preachers might also show up at a door in the days of poor public inns. Hospitality for these and others was commanded, with the reminder that on occasion,

God sends angels *incognito* to test this grace in His children. Remember Abraham in Mamre, where he met two angels and Jesus?

3) Many believers were punished by the state with incarceration. It could happen to anyone, so look after those in such a case as you would wish to be looked after if it were you. This sounds like Christ's Olivet discourse - "I was a stranger and you took me in; I was sick, and in prison, and you visited me." Treat others as you would Christ.

4) How this urging is needed in our culture where marriage is laughed at and "so-called" alternative lifestyles abound. The truth has not changed - God still expects marriage to be the only place for sexual activity, and that only between a man and a woman. He reserves judgment for those who violate this sacred union. Strive for sexual purity.

5), 6) He places 2 human characteristics in contrast with each other, greed and contentment. Greed says, "I want more." Contentment says, "I am satisfied with what I have." He condemns greed, and he commends contentment, reminding us that our true treasure is having Christ, Who, unlike transient riches, abides with us without end. While persecution may involve the spoiling of our goods (remember Heb 10:34?), we need not fear the men who can take "**stuff**" away from us. As the Psalmist said, "Our help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth." We are linked forever to Him Who cannot fail and will always provide our needs. He promised it.

II. SHORT SUMMARY OF SELECTED SUBJECTS (7-14)

7) It appears that those who introduced these believers to God and His Word had passed off the scene. They are called upon as witnesses of faithfulness and faith. The result of their way of life included that these present were now saved. They are instructed to consider that and imitate their faith and faithfulness. It is not time to quit - keep on!

8) Another Who persevered and perseveres is our Lord Jesus Christ. While earthly leaders die and leave us, Christ has entered that eternal state of always being the same. *Yesterday* He endured all the way to the cross for us; *Today* He ever liveth to make intercession for us; *forever* He remains the same, ... example of steadfastness.

9) Since Christ and His Word don't change, consistency for His followers is proper. There's no need to follow after many different doctrines. Some of those doctrines emphasized externals, including diet; the heart is not nurtured by food, but by grace. He puts to rest the question of growing in spirit by eating or not eating certain foods.

10) The Temple was still standing, and priests were daily offering sacrifices therein. Christians have a higher altar than the brazen altar; it is spiritual, not physical. We enjoy the spiritual realities of which the Sacrificial system included only the types. They are shadows; Christ is the substance. Calvary was the final altar in God's plan.

11), 12) On Yom Kippur, the blood of the sacrifice was carried into Israel's most holy place, the holy of holies. The carcass, however, was not consumed; it was taken to the unclean exterior of the camp (or, later, outside the city gate) and burned. So it was with Christ, Whose blood was offered for our holiness to God Who is in the holiest heaven, but His Body was shamefully impaled on the accursed tree outside the city gate. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, "He was made a curse for us." On behalf of His people, Jesus was willing to bear shame and reproach, living and dying outside the camp of acceptance by the people whom He came to save.

13) The entreaty for the Hebrew Christians is to share in Christ's suffering by remaining outside the city gate with the reproach of Christ, rather than returning to the old ways of Judaism. Don't turn your back on Christ, whether in returning to some inferior religion, or in embracing the world that has rejected Him so shamefully.

14) While Jerusalem is one of the world's oldest cities, it will end as we know it today, and be replaced with the New Jerusalem. Why, then, cling to the temporary things of this earth and this present age? Why not fix our hope on things eternal, the enduring city that we see by faith? This one perishes; that one will last forever.

III. SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES THAT PLEASE GOD (15-19)

15), 16) The day of blood sacrifices is past; Christ's was final. Believers today can, however, offer spiritual sacrifices to God, of which the writer suggests two. With Christ as our Mediator, we may resist the temptation to complain at our difficult lot in life and rather offer the sacrifice of praise, confessing the glory of His name to Him and to others, and this without ceasing. The second area of sacrifice he suggests is to be charitable with those in need. Thus when we share a bed, a meal, and clean clothes with some homeless person at the Rescue Mission, we are offering a sacrifice to God - one with which He is well-pleased. Scattered commands for suffering Christians.

17) Believers are assumed to be **in fellowship** with Christ and **in a fellowship** with each other; such a local gathering needs some organization, including leaders. The Hebrew Christians are urged to assent to the direction of their leaders, yielding any contrary opinions they may have to those of the leaders. Those leaders watch over their souls, and they will give an account for that watching. That watching (and certainly the accounting for it) can be done joyfully by the shepherd if the sheep will follow. A church member who causes a pastor to groan will not profit from his ministry.

18), 19) Here we see the writer make a sincere prayer request of his readers. The request is not for himself alone, but seems to include some associates of his in ministry. If it is Paul, we know he most often had others around him to help minister (Barnabas, Silas), to learn as apprentices (Titus, Timothy), even for medical and recording reasons (Dr. Luke). The character of this troupe must have been sterling, as they had good consciences and a strong desire to do well in all circumstances. In places where we find this today, we also find the joy of the Lord in serving Him and each other. The author had at some earlier time been present with his readers, but was now absent. He hoped by the help of their prayers to find himself restored to them *quickly* (the word gives us "*tachometer*," an instrument which tells us how quickly an engine is turning). More prayer, more humility, more acceptance of Christ's reproach produces more joy.

IV. SHEPHERD'S SALUTATION TO THE SHEEP (20-25)

20), 21) God alone can give the troubled heart peace. There is no other source of true peace for the soul. Since Jesus was the Lamb "slain before the foundations of the world," God had clearly covenanted to make His blood the payment for sin. Christ's resurrection, mentioned only here specifically in the book, proved God's acceptance of Christ's payment for sin. Jesus is here called "that great Shepherd of the sheep." Look at John 10:11 and 1 Peter 5:4 for references to Him as the "Good Shepherd" and the "Chief Shepherd." Great parallels may be drawn with Psalms 22, 23, 24, where we see Christ dying for our sin (Good Shepherd), living for and directing His sheep (Great Shepherd), and coming again for His sheep (Chief Shepherd). The author's prayer is that God will work in us and equip us to do God's will and thereby be pleasing to Him. This is through Jesus' power and to His glory.

22) The writer almost apologizes for his missive, asking the readers to bear up, put up with his "short letter." Certainly he feels he might have said much more, even though we may find the letter long.

23) An otherwise unmentioned and unknown incarceration of Timothy is referenced here. From it he now has been released, and if he and the author can get together, there is an expressed desire to come and visit the recipients of the letter.

24), 25) Personal greetings of a brief nature close the epistle. Timothy alone is named; others are mentioned in generalities. Either the writer is in Italy, or he is in the company of a group of Italian believers somewhere else. Those Christians send salutations to the Hebrew Christians. He wishes for the entire company who will receive this letter that God's grace should be theirs. Grace, the source of all good things, is a great word in Bible literature. We are saved by grace, we live by grace, we are to extend grace to others. Thank God for His marvelous, amazing grace!

The great message of the book of Hebrews is that because Jesus is better, we should never abandon Him, not even for the comfort of familiar religious surroundings. All that was good before Him was leading up to and pointing to Him. You cannot think right in the rest unless you think right in Him. Remove Jesus from any equation of life and you have chaos, calamity, and catastrophe. It was true for the first century Jewish converts, and it remains true for us today. May these few helps enable you to walk more closely with this Jesus is my prayer and aim.

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