

An Exegetical Outline of

Hebrews

“The Superiority of Christ and His Covenant”

Hebrews Overview

Author

Unknown. Hebrews was included in the earliest known collection of Paul's letters, and although questioned by some in the early church, this assumption held until the Reformation. Modern scholarship has abandoned Pauline authorship but has not been able to offer an undisputed replacement. Suggestions include names like Barnabas, Luke and Apollos.

Audience

Unknown. Rome seems the most likely location of the audience (13:24). Other suggestions include: Jerusalem, Samaria, Alexandria, and Spain.

Date

AD 60–100. Most likely the mid-60s before the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.

Reason for the Letter

The audience had recently gone through a time of persecution (10:32–24). Many of them were discouraged (12:12–13) and in danger of falling away from faith in Christ (2:1; 3:12; 10:35).

Purpose of the Letter

- To warn his readers of the danger of unbelief.
- To show how the New Covenant inaugurated by Christ is superior to the First Covenant.
- To encourage his readers to endure to the end by faith and not to abandon their commitment to Christ.

Method of Persuasion

The writer of Hebrews sought to convince his readers by:

1. Citing OT passages concerning the Messiah and interpreting them in the light of Jesus and His ministry.
2. Using the Exodus generation as an example of what can happen when you have a heart of unbelief.
3. Pointing out the inherent weaknesses of the First Covenant.
4. Demonstrating the superiority of Christ's New Covenant.
5. Encouraging his readers to imitate those who endured to the end by faith.

Introduction

1) Author.

A) Hebrews differs from most NT epistles in that it does not begin with the typical salutation and naming of the author. This has, of course, fostered much curiosity over the years.¹ Early suggestions included such noteworthy people as Paul, Luke, Clement of Rome² and Barnabas. More recent proposals set forth Priscilla, Apollos and Silas (a.k.a. Silvanus).

B) Internal evidence.

- (1) The author referred to himself in the masculine, though this is not apparent in an English translation (the pronoun “me” is qualified by a participle in the masculine gender: *diegoumenon*) (Heb 11:32). This argues against the theory that Priscilla authored the letter.³
- (2) The author was not an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry; rather, he received the gospel from those who were (Heb 2:3–4). This argues against Paul as author, since Paul maintained that he received the gospel directly from Christ (cf. Gal 1:12; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8). Also, every other Pauline letter in the NT begins with Paul naming himself as the author, and it seems unlikely that he would break from that precedent (1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17). Further, Paul’s letters contain intensely personal and autobiographical statements that are absent from Hebrews (cf. Gal 1–2; Phil 3).
- (3) The author implied that he had been previously associated with his readers, that he was now in a different location, and that he was, for the present, prevented from coming to them, though he hoped to be able to do so soon (Heb 13:19).⁴
- (4) The author knew Timothy (presumably the same Timothy of Lystra that was Paul’s friend, cf. Acts 16:1–2) and of his recent release from imprisonment. The author also planned to visit his readers with Timothy—“If he [Timothy] comes soon, he will be with me when I see you” (Heb 13:23).
- (5) The author was friends with some Italians who were known to his readers. The Greek phrase *apo tes Italias* is ambiguous but the single parallel in Acts 18:2 favors a translation of “Those from Italy greet you.”⁵ This supports the notion that the author is writing to readers in Italy and that he was currently in another country (Heb 13:24).

¹ George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” *NIV Application Commentary*, 23.

² Third bishop of Rome after Peter. Some believe him to have been a pupil of the apostle Paul (Phil 4:3), but this conclusion is disputed.

³ Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 507.

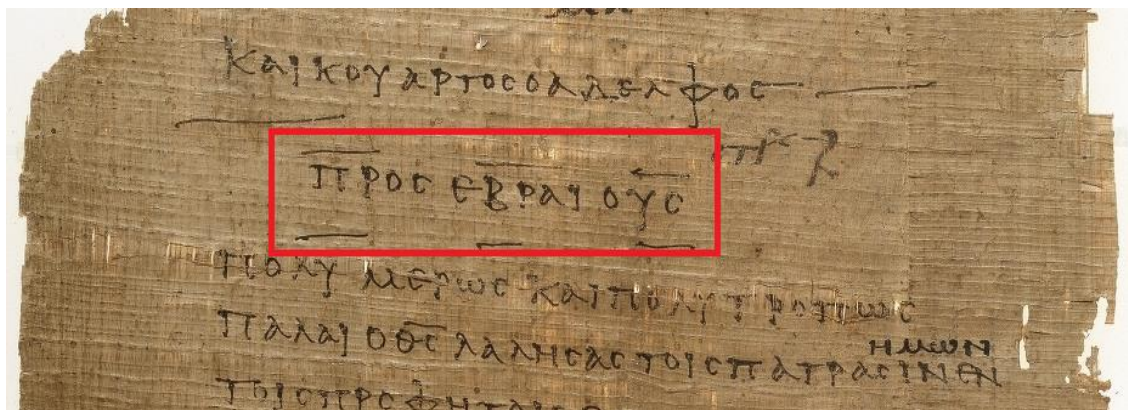
⁴ Hughes, 588.

⁵ William L. Lane, “Hebrews 1–8,” *Word Biblical Commentary* Vol. 47a, lviii.

- (6) The author was an eloquent and dynamic preacher. Hebrews has numerous affinities with ancient sermons associated with the Greek-speaking synagogues of the day. In 13:22 the author himself calls the letter a “word of exhortation” (*tou logou tes parakleseos*), a designation used elsewhere to refer to a sermon (cf. Paul’s sermon in Acts 13:14–15, *logos parakleseos*).
- (7) The author was thoroughly grounded in the OT and its interpretation. Hebrews is filled with allusions to and quotations of the OT. We must remember that the “Bible” our author had available was, at best, a collection of scrolls. At worst, he was writing from memory. His copious use of the OT reveals a mind saturated with God’s Word.
- (8) The author was highly educated. In the ancient world, when students pursued advanced education, they studied rhetoric—the art and skill of using language, both oral and written, to communicate and persuade. In the first four verses of Hebrews, which one commentator has called the most perfect Greek sentence in the NT, the author used: periodic style (a crafted configuration of clauses and phrases that concludes with a majestic ending), effectiveness, compactness, contrast, poetic structure, omissions, figures, repetition (alliteration) and rhythm—all features extolled in the rhetoric handbooks of the day. His use of the Greek language ranks at the top of NT authors; his rich vocabulary reveals the background of one widely read.⁶

C) External evidence.⁷

- (1) The earliest manuscript tradition of Hebrews comes from Papyrus 46 (P⁴⁶), which is a collection of Pauline letters (c. 175–225). In this collection, Hebrews, titled “to the Hebrews”, is sandwiched between Paul’s letters to the Romans and the Corinthians. This positioning reflected the long-standing belief in the East that Paul authored Hebrews.



⁶ Guthrie, 25.

⁷ Sheila Griffith, “The Epistle to the Hebrews in Modern Interpretation,” *Review and Expositor* 102.2 (Spring 2005): 237.

- (2) Despite the widespread attribution to Paul, and the correspondingly ready acceptance of Hebrews into the Eastern canon, many Eastern Christians such as Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215) and Origen (185–253) recognized that Hebrews differed significantly from the other Pauline letters, particularly in terms of style. To resolve the apparent discrepancy, proponents of Pauline authorship theorized that Paul used an amanuensis⁸, or scribal secretary, who penned the letter based on notes and/or memory rather than on direct dictation from Paul. Multiple candidates for the amanuensis were proposed, including Luke (as per Clement of Alexandria), Clement of Rome, and an unknown student of Paul (as per Origen).
- (3) In the West, Pauline authorship was not accepted, and Hebrews was not admitted into the canon until much later, although it was quoted widely. The Muratorian Canon, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus all agree that Paul was not the author. Only Tertullian (c. 155–220), however, provided an alternative hypothesis. Based on the connection with Timothy in Heb 13:23, Tertullian suggested that Barnabas authored Hebrews.⁹ When Eusebius wrote in c. 325, many in Rome still rejected Pauline authorship. Nevertheless, by the fifth century, the persuasion of the influential Western church leaders Augustine (c. 340–420) and Jerome (354–430) had decided the opinion of the West in favor of Pauline authorship.¹⁰
- (4) By the Sixth Synod of Carthage in 419, Hebrews was ascribed to Paul as one of the fourteen Pauline epistles. While this opinion generally continued to hold in the West, “most learned commentators raise[d] caveats,” usually falling back on the theory of an amanuensis.¹¹ Fred Craddock observed that Pauline authorship is clearly reflected in the heading to Hebrews found in the 1611 KJV: “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.” This heading intentionally and pointedly supplemented the title “to the Hebrews” found in P⁴⁶.¹²
- (5) The hard-won consensus of Pauline authorship remained essentially unchallenged until the Reformation, when many ancient traditions were reexamined. While John Calvin argued that either Clement of Rome or Luke was the author, Martin Luther proposed Apollos (cf. Acts 18:24–19:1; 1 Cor 3; 4:6; 16:12; Tit 3:13), a suggestion

⁸ “Amanuensis” is a Latin word for certain persons performing a function by hand, either writing down the words of another or performing manual labor.

⁹ Tertullian *On Modesty* 20, as cited in D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 395.

¹⁰ Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 1–2.

¹¹ Carson, Moo, and Morris, *Introduction*, 395. Thomas Aquinas, for example, held that Luke translated Hebrews into excellent Greek.

¹² Fred B. Craddock, “Hebrews,” in *The Letter to the Hebrews, the Letter of James, the First and Second Letters of Peter, the First, Second, and Third Letters of John, the Letter of Jude, the Book of Revelation*, The New Interpreter’s Bible, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. XII (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 6.

that continues to have supporters today (including me).¹³

- (6) Among modern scholars, Pauline authorship has been almost universally abandoned.¹⁴ Since then, a scholarly consensus has emerged: Paul did not write Hebrews. The arguments against Pauline authorship relate to both style and content:
 - (a) On the stylistic front, there are enough differences between Hebrews and the accepted Pauline letters that even early proponents of Pauline authorship like Clement and Origen advanced theories of scribal amanuenses.
 - (b) With respect to content, scholars generally point to two factors that militate against Pauline authorship. First, the author of Hebrews is presented as a secondhand recipient of the gospel (Heb 2:3–4). Second, many scholars view the theological perspectives and many of the cultic and other images as distinctly non-Pauline.

D) Summary.

- (1) On the question of who wrote Hebrews there is no consensus among modern scholars. The problem plaguing the various theories is the lack of evidence concerning the proposed authors—basically, we do not know enough about most of the other candidates for authorship to make an argument that can be validated from the available evidence.

2) Audience.¹⁵

A) Internal evidence.

- (1) The traditional title “to the Hebrews,” which gives the impression that Hebrews was written as a general treatise intended for a broad audience, is misleading. Most commentators agree that Hebrews was written to a specific local group of people. They are distinguished from their leaders (13:17) and from other believers (13:24) with whom they form a Christian presence in their social setting. They have also experienced specific instances of persecution (10:32–34) which are mentioned by the author.

¹³ For a good overview of Apollos as author, see Kevin L. Anderson “Hebrews: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition,” *New Beacon Bible Commentary* (Beacon Hill Press, 2013), 37–38.

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Leicester/Grand Rapids, MI: Apollos/Zondervan, 1994), 305. One of the last full-scale defenses of Pauline authorship was put forward in 1939 by Leonard [William Leonard, *The Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews: Critical Problem and Use of the Old Testament* (Rome: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1939)]. Recently, however, there has been an attempt to revive consideration of Pauline authorship. See Eta Linnemann, “A Call for a Retrial in the Case of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Faith and Mission*, 19.2 (2002): 19–59 and Richard A. Thiele, “A Reexamination of the Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews.” Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2008.

¹⁵ Lane, 1:l iii–iv.

- (2) It is reasonable to conclude that this group lived in an urban setting (13:14). The range and focus of the commands in 13:1–6 support this assumption (i.e., hospitality to strangers, remembering those imprisoned, sanctity of marriage, avoidance of greed and materialism).
- (3) Since the early church normally met in people's homes, it is reasonable to assume a house church setting for this group of believers. Some commentators feel that the author's use of the house figure to describe the church (3:6b; 10:21) supports this assumption. The audience was likely one of several house churches that were scattered throughout the city. It numbered, perhaps, no more than fifteen or twenty people. The total had once been higher but had been reduced by defections (10:25).
- (4) The readers had come to faith indirectly through those who were eyewitnesses of Christ's ministry (2:3–4). They were not new believers since sufficient time had elapsed that they should have been teachers in their own right (5:12). Another possible indication of the length of time involved is the implied death of those who had originally led them—probably the same individuals who had first preached the gospel in their area (13:7).¹⁶
- (5) The audience had a rich background in Jewish worship and thought. The text points to the conclusion that they had likely been part of a Greek-speaking synagogue:
 - (a) Their Bible was almost certainly the Greek translation of the OT (known as the Septuagint and abbreviated as LXX). There are thirty-five quotations from this translation and thirty-four more textual allusions that work to support the development of the author's argument. This version of the OT was common in Hellenistic¹⁷ synagogues around the Roman empire.
 - (b) The author uses theological concepts that were popular in the Greek-speaking synagogues of the first century.¹⁸ These include a veneration of Moses as one having special access to God (3:1–6) and a belief that angels were mediators of the First Covenant¹⁹ (2:2; cf. Acts 7:53).

¹⁶ Rodney J. Decker, "The Original Readers of Hebrews," *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 3.2 (Fall 1999): 1–3.

¹⁷ "Hellenistic" means characteristic of or relating to the Greek civilization in the Mediterranean world, especially from the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC) to the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra (30 BC).

¹⁸ Guthrie, 19.

¹⁹ "There is no indication in Exodus 19 and 20 that angels were present at the giving of the law. In Deuteronomy 33:2, however, Moses declares that God came with 'myriads of holy ones,' and the LXX adds, 'angels were with him at his right hand (cf. Ps 68:17).'" Lane, 1:liv.

B) External evidence.

- (1) The traditional title “to the Hebrews” reflects the ancient assumption that the original recipients were primarily Jewish Christians (with the addition of some Gentiles who had been drawn to the Jewish religion).²⁰ The text lends itself to this conclusion: the author’s repeated calls to persevere in the faith and warnings about the danger of leaving the Christian community are coupled with strong arguments for the superiority of Christ to Mosaic sacrifices and rituals (Heb 3–10). Scholars are not united on this issue, but it seems likely that the early church was correct to assert that Jewish Christians were the primary audience for this letter (cf. 1:1 “our fathers”).
- (2) Although a number of locations have been suggested (Jerusalem, Samaria, Alexandria, even Spain), Rome seems the most likely. Scholars estimate that Rome had a population of around one million in the 1st Century (it is difficult to say with accuracy as slaves and some women were not included in the census counts still extant).
 - (a) In Hebrews 13:24 the author told the audience, “Those from Italy send you their greetings.” As mentioned earlier, this phrase is ambiguous. However, the same phrase “from Italy” also occurs in Acts 18:2, referring to Aquila and Priscilla. This husband and wife team was residing in Corinth with other Jews who had been expelled “from Italy” (i.e., Rome) at the decree of Claudius in AD 49. Therefore, a possible interpretation of Hebrews 13:24 is that people from Rome, now residing elsewhere, were sending greetings back to the believers in Rome via the letter we know as Hebrews.²¹
 - (b) The allusions to the generosity of the audience in supporting other Christians in Hebrews 6:10–11 and 10:33–34 agree with the history of Christianity in Rome as known from other sources (cf. Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans*, Salutation; Dionysius of Corinth [cited by Eusebius, *Church History* 4.23.10]).²²
 - (c) The description of the early sufferings endured by the audience in Hebrews 10:32–34 is congruent with what happened to the Jews who were expelled by Claudius.
 - (d) The term used for the “leaders” of the community, *hegoumenoi* (13:7, 17, 24), is found in Christian literature associated with Rome (1 Clem 36:1–6; Hermas, *Visions* 2.2.6; 3.9.7).
 - (e) Hebrews was first known and used in Rome. Clement of Rome, in his pastoral letter to Corinth, provides indisputable evidence of the circulation of Hebrews

²⁰ cf. Decker, “The Original Readers of Hebrews.”

²¹ Guthrie, 21.

²² Lane, 1:lix.

among the churches of Rome.

C) Summary.

- (1) The audience of Hebrews was most likely a group of believers in Rome who had endured persecution at the hands of the Romans, but had not yet faced martyrdom.

3) Date.

A) Internal Evidence.

- (1) The audience had come to faith indirectly through those who were eyewitnesses of Christ's ministry (2:3–4). The exhortation to remember those who first led them and "spoke the word of God" to them implies that some of their leaders had died (13:7). The expectation that "by this time [they] ought to be teachers" (5:12) indicates additional time had passed. The earliest date that could account for these factors would seem to be AD 60 (some 27 years after Christ's resurrection).²³
- (2) According to 10:32–34, the audience had persevered in a time of persecution in the past. They had not yet faced martyrdom (12:4), but a more severe time of trial was coming (11:35–12:3; 12:7; 13:3, 12–13) and some had begun to abandon group meetings (10:25). The situation indicated by the data above suggests a date in the mid-60s AD, just prior to the extreme persecution of the Roman church under Nero. At this point the Roman church had been in existence for about three decades. The expulsion of the Jews by Claudius (Acts 18:2) in AD 49 would account for the earlier time of testing experienced by this community. Also, Nero's rising threat to the church accounts for the fear of death and the warning of commitment indicated in Hebrews.²⁴
- (3) The allusion to "Timothy" in Hebrews 13:23 leads to the assumption that this Timothy is the same person known to us through Paul's letters. Although the exact span of Timothy's life is not known (he joined Paul in ministry in the summer of AD 49; Acts 16:1–5), it could scarcely have outlasted the century. If Hebrews was written within Timothy's lifetime, it could not be dated later than AD 100.²⁵
- (4) It has been argued that an upper limit of the date for Hebrews can be set confidently at AD 70, the year in which the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. The basis for this confidence is that the writer of Hebrews refers to cultic²⁶ activity in

²³ Lane, 1:lxii.

²⁴ Guthrie, 22–23.

²⁵ Merrill C. Tenney, "A New Approach to the Book of Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:491 (Jul 66): 231.

²⁶ The term "cult" stems from the Latin word *cultus*, which carried the meaning of worship or praise-adoration. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines it, among other ways, as "a system of religious worship especially as expressed in ceremonies; devotion to or homage to a person or thing." It is often used in theological and religious scholarship to refer to the sacrificial system and ceremonies that were part of the Mosaic Covenant.

the present tense (e.g., 7:27–28; 8:3–5; 9:7–8, 25; 10:1–3, 8; 13:10–11), presumably reflecting contemporary cultic practice in Jerusalem.²⁷ This argument, however, fails to consider four key observations:²⁸

- (a) The focus of the author's comparisons with the sacrificial work of Christ is not the Jewish temple but the Israelite tabernacle.
- (b) Present tense indicative in the Greek does not necessarily refer to present time (recall the "historic present" in Greek).
- (c) Skilled rhetoricians frequently use the present tense as a literary device designed to persuade their audiences by emphasizing the timeless nature of their subjects.
- (d) Other authors, including Josephus and Clement of Rome, use the present tense to discuss the tabernacle long after the destruction of the temple.

B) External Evidence.

- (1) An upper limit in the range for a date is established by the fact that Hebrews was already being appropriated without explicit quotation in *1 Clement* (cf. *1 Clem* 17:1 with Heb 11:37; *1 Clem* 36:2–6 with Heb 1:3–5,7; *1 Clem* 36:3 with Heb 1:7). Although some argue that Hebrews and *1 Clement* simply share a common tradition, it is broadly recognized that Clement was, in fact, literarily dependent upon Hebrews. A conventional date of AD 95–96 has been assigned to *1 Clement*, but on insufficient grounds. Internal evidence and external attestation indicate *1 Clement* was composed at some point between AD 80 and 140.²⁹

C) Summary.

- (1) Most contemporary scholars date Hebrews somewhere between AD 60 and 100, and are unwilling to try to pinpoint the date more precisely. I personally favor c. 63–64 AD.

²⁷ Lane, 1:lxiii.

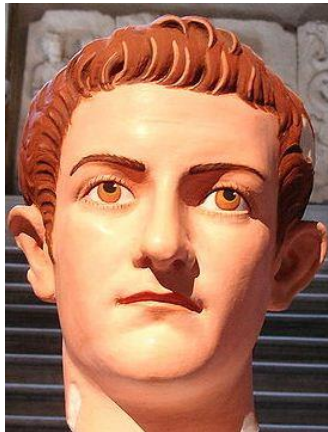
²⁸ Griffith, 240.

²⁹ Lane, 1:lxii.

4) Historical Background.³⁰

A) Caligula (AD 12 – AD 41); Reigned (AD 37 – AD 41); 3rd Emperor of Rome.

- (1) Caligula (“little-boot”) had a very popular start as emperor. His courteous and generous manner pleased both the people and the senate. He consolidated and unified the imperial family and announced a return to the glory of expansion with big plans to attack both Parthia (north-eastern Iran) and Britain. Things were very upbeat. Then he became ill and almost died. Caligula emerged from his illness a crazed megalomaniac. Determined to prove that he was immortal, Caligula exalted himself as a god in the manner of an Egyptian pharaoh. He sat in temples, dressed as one of the gods, and engaged the gods in conversation. He appointed his favorite horse to the senate. He squandered the surplus that Tiberius had accumulated until he had to raise taxes. He became cruel and vicious, eagerly witnessing the tortures and executions of those who suffered punishment. The atmosphere in Rome was one of terror as Romans of every class were being executed to satisfy Caligula’s growing paranoia.



- (2) We come to the year AD 41 (eight years after Christ’s death in AD 33). Paul was preaching in the regions of Syria and Cilicia (he had not yet taken his first missionary journey). Caligula was 28 years old and now in his 4th year as Princeps (First Citizen). A well-knit conspiracy was begun within the Praetorian Guard.³¹ It was January 24th when they finally struck. Caligula had been attending a play at the palace theatre. At the close of the play, Caligula announced that he would make his public debut on the stage that very evening. He then left for lunch via a covered passageway which connected the theatre with the rest of the palace. As he walked, he was met by

³⁰ This section is sourced from Maier’s *Pontius Pilate*. Although a fictionalized account, it is nevertheless an excellent presentation of the Roman history of this period (Paul L. Maier, *Pontius Pilate*, 326–328). Julius Caesar ruled from 49 BC to 44 BC. After his assassination, there was civil war from 44 BC to 27 BC. Augustus ruled from 27 BC to AD 14 (when Jesus was about 15). Tiberius ruled from AD 14 to AD 37. Tiberius was the stepson of Augustus, great-uncle of Caligula, paternal uncle of Claudius, and great-great uncle of Nero.

³¹ The Praetorian Guard was a force of bodyguards used by Roman Emperors.

centurion³² Cassius Chaerea and tribune³³ Sabinus.

- (3) Cassius struck first, driving his sword into Caligula's neck. Caligula screamed for his personal German bodyguards but to no avail. Sabinus stabbed him in the chest with his dagger. Praetorians and magistrates who were in on the plot now came running toward Caligula from both ends of the portico, brandishing daggers. They clustered about the emperor to share in the honor of his assassination. The bodyguards came dashing up to Caligula's rescue but too late—he was dead, his body torn by some thirty wounds.
- (4) Caligula's corpse was hauled outside the palace. There it was spat upon and ridiculed by the rejoicing populace. His statues were toppled. Cries of "Liberty!" "Restore the Republic!" rent the air. It was a tyrant's typical end.

B) Claudius (10 BC – AD 54); Reigned (AD 41 – AD 54); 4th Emperor of Rome.

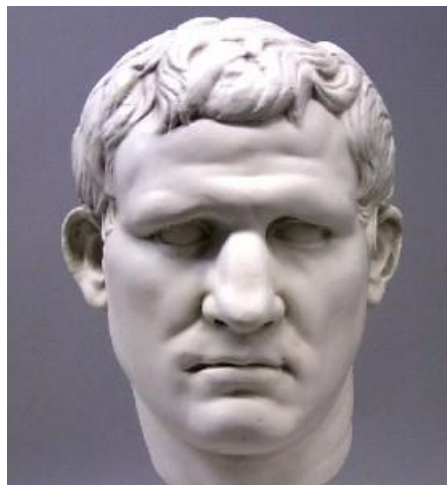
- (1) So it was that the forgotten man of Roman politics, Caligula's uncle Claudius, was called to the center stage of history. He had spent fifty years of his life, not really waiting in the wings, but acting out a ludicrous sideshow of his own. Spindly-legged and wobbly from a childhood paralysis, Claudius had other handicaps, including mental blocks and a speech defect which made him stammer and appear simple-minded. Tiberius had named his nephew "Clau-Clau-Claudius" and given him no serious consideration as his successor, since the imperial family thought him merely a biological embarrassment. Caligula had treated him as court buffoon, a role that Claudius was only too happy to play, for otherwise he would have been put to death as a rival to the throne. But, in fact, Claudius was no fool. His personal impediments had driven him into the seclusion of scholarly pursuits, and, tutored by the great Livy, he wrote important works on Etruscan and Carthaginian history, as well as Roman law.



³² A centurion was a professional officer of the Roman army. Most centurions commanded 83 men despite the commonly assumed 100, but senior centurions commanded cohorts, or took senior staff roles in their legion.

³³ Tribune was a title shared by elected officials in the Roman Republic. Tribunes had the power to convene the Plebeian Council and to act as its president, which also gave them the right to propose legislation before it. They were sacrosanct, in the sense that any assault on their person was prohibited.

- (2) Claudius did not think he would not survive Caligula's assassination. During the bloody turmoil that day, he fled into the palace and hid. Later, when the praetorians were ransacking the palace, they chanced to notice two feet sticking out beneath a curtain in an upstairs alcove. The feet, of course, belonged to Claudius, who expected instant death. Instead, the troops whisked him off to the praetorian barracks and hailed him as the new emperor. The Praetorian Guard was supported by many in the populace who feared that a democratic republic would only return Rome to bloody civil war.
- (3) But the Senate would not back down at a time of unparalleled opportunity. They dispatched two tribunes to the barracks, who advised Claudius not to assume the principate but yield to the Senate, which would stop him by military force if he had not learned his lesson from Caligula's fate. Claudius wavered, but since he was safe with the praetorians, he temporized for the moment.
- (4) Enter King Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great (Matt 2:1), and the man who later killed James the brother of John with the sword and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12).³⁴ He had grown up in Rome and received a Roman education with the princes of the ruling dynasty. Among his companions were Caligula and Claudius. When Agrippa learned that Claudius was at the barracks, he hurried over to join him. Claudius was by then at the point of yielding to the Senate; Agrippa urged him not to let power slip through his hands. He then left the barracks and visited the Senate, taking care to perfume his hair to conceal his recent meeting with Claudius.



- (5) The Senate asked for his advice in this precarious situation and Agrippa was only too happy to provide it. He took a pro-Senate tone and ended his remarks with the suggestion to send a delegation to Claudius to negotiate their differences. The Senate agreed and Agrippa was chosen as one of the members of the delegation. Once at the barracks, he got a private moment with Claudius and told him to stand firm. Claudius, taking Agrippa's cue, promised the delegation that he would be

³⁴ Paul later stood before his son, Herod Agrippa II, and witnessed to him concerning the gospel (Acts 26).

princeps in name only and to fully involve the Senate in governing Rome. The Senate now wavered; many feared civil war. Support for the republican cause began to slip away. By the end of the next day, Claudius was hailed as the new emperor of Rome. One of his first official acts was to reward the man who was so instrumental in raising him to princeps—Herod Agrippa. Agrippa received back all the territory his grandfather had once ruled and returned to Jerusalem in triumph. Not three years later he was dead (Acts 12).

- (6) To the relief of Rome, Claudius turned out to be a decent and surprisingly able emperor. He did involve the Senate in governing and he introduced much-needed centralization and administrative efficiency in the imperial government. Even his foreign policy was successful and two years after his accession, he made a swift conquest of Britain.
- (7) Skip ahead eight years to AD 49. Paul had completed his first missionary journey and was ministering in Syrian Antioch. News came to him from the churches he had founded and he wrote the letter to the Galatians, calling them back from a false gospel. In Rome, the rising influence of the Christians began to trigger disturbances in the Jewish quarters. The Jewish converts were preaching that the crucified Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. The community was thrown into violent debate that soon attracted the attention of the imperial authorities. Claudius issued a decree of expulsion against all Jews in Rome that had been involved in the disturbances.³⁵ Acts 18:1–3 reveals that Aquila and Priscilla were among those who were forced to leave Rome. They arrived in Corinth and were met by Paul who stayed and worked with them as they were all of the same trade—tentmakers. The hardship experienced from this expulsion matches the description of the suffering endured in Hebrews 10:32–34. Insult, public abuse and especially loss of property were normal under the conditions of an edict of expulsion.³⁶
- (8) We turn now to Julia Agrippina, great-granddaughter of Augustus, sister of Caligula and niece of Claudius. She was an ambitious woman—scheming, ruthless and domineering. Some years earlier (AD 39) she had been involved in a plot to assassinate Caligula and was exiled to the Pontine Islands. After Caligula's death, Claudius ordered his niece returned from exile. For some time she kept a low profile. Then, Claudius' third wife Messalina conspired to overthrow him and when the plot failed, she was found out and executed. Claudius now needed a new wife. About this time, Agrippina became the mistress to one of Claudius' advisers Pallas. When the time came to discuss another marriage with his advisers, Pallas advocated Agrippina. And so it was that Claudius and Agrippina were married. She immediately set to work on him and it wasn't long until she convinced him into adopting her son from her first marriage and having him declared his successor. So it was that Lucius was adopted in AD 50 and his name changed to Nero.

³⁵ Paul L. Maier, *The Flames of Rome*, 76–77.

³⁶ Lane, 1:lxv–lxvi.

- (9) Agrippina was obsessed with making sure that her son Nero would become the next emperor. She removed or killed anyone she thought might be a threat to that goal. Only a few years later, Claudius was sorry about marrying her and began to favor his own son Britannicus. When Claudius began preparing him for the throne, Agrippina acted quickly. On October 13, 54, she gave Claudius a plate of poisoned mushrooms. He died in agony later that night. Nero had finally come to the throne (at the age of 16).

C) Nero (AD 37 – AD 68); Reigned (AD 54 – AD 68); 5th Emperor of Rome.

- (1) In the first months of Nero's reign Agrippina controlled her son and the empire. She lost control over him when he began to have an affair with the freedwoman Claudia. Agrippina strongly disapproved of Claudia and scolded Nero. When he would not relent, Agrippina reached out to Britannicus and began to befriend him. Suspecting that Agrippina was plotting to overthrow him, Nero had Britannicus poisoned during a banquet in February of 55. The power struggle between Agrippina and her son had begun.



- (2) Later that same year, Agrippina was forced out of the palace. Nero deprived his mother of all honors and powers, and even removed her Roman and German bodyguards. Eventually, he decided that his mother was too dangerous to live. He constructed a ship in which the cabin was rigged to collapse, killing Agrippina and sinking the ship. After a mock reconciliation, he sent her off in the boat. When the ceiling crashed down, the high sides of a couch saved Agrippina and her maid. When the maid panicked and tried to save herself by calling out that she was Agrippina, the sailors clubbed her to death and started to sink the boat. Agrippina slipped off the boat and swam to safety at a nearby villa. News of Agrippina's survival reached the angry Nero and determined to be rid of her, he sent three assassins to finish her off. When they arrived, her last words were "Strike here!" as she pointed to her womb.

- (3) During the initial years of Nero's reign, when events were relatively peaceful (AD 55–60), Jews and Christians who had been expelled from the city were able to return. This is evidenced in Paul's letter to the Romans in AD 59 (Aquila and Priscilla had returned to Rome according to Romans 16:3). But things were not to remain this way for long.
- (4) On the night of July 18, 64, a great fire started in Rome. The extent of the fire is uncertain. According to Tacitus, who was nine at the time of the fire, it spread quickly and burned for over five days. It completely destroyed three of fourteen Roman districts and severely damaged seven. The population searched for a scapegoat and rumors held Nero responsible. To deflect blame, Nero targeted the Christians.
- (5) Tacitus described the event: "Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired."³⁷
- (6) It was against this background that Hebrews was most likely written. It makes sense now why neither the writer nor the readers are identified in the letter. Were the letter to come into the wrong hands, it would immediately result in a series of arrests. The recipients would have recognized the writer from the incipient clues in the letter even if the letter were not personally delivered by the writer's messenger. Exactly where in this period (which continued at its worst until Nero's suicide in June of AD 68) Hebrews is to be located is uncertain. It was perhaps near the beginning when Nero's plans were becoming evident but had not yet been fully implemented. The particular house church to which it was addressed had not yet suffered directly, but were very fearful of what was to come. Some had ceased to identify with the Christians, hoping perhaps to avoid persecution. Others were wrestling with thoughts of doing the same.

³⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

Exegetical Outline

Introduction (1:1–4)

1) Introduction—God has spoken through His Son (1:1–4).¹

A) Superiority of the Son to the prophets (1:1–2a).

(1) God’s spokesmen “long ago” (1:1).²

- (a) “Long ago” refers to the period of time from creation to Jesus’ birth. God spoke “at many times and in many ways.” God’s past revelation did not come all at once but progressively at different times. His method varied as well—an audible voice, visions, dreams, angelic messengers, etc.
- (b) God spoke “to our fathers by the prophets.” “Our fathers” refers to Israel of the past, the ancestors of the Jews. “The prophets” refers to those men who were selected by God to convey His message to the people (e.g. Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel; not limited to the “prophetic” books). These men were ordinary human beings through whom the Holy Spirit spoke (2 Pet 1:21). Many times the prophets did not understand their own predictions (1 Pet 1:10–11); sometimes they had to confess ignorance over their own visions (Dan 8:27; 12:8; Zech 4:1–6). Their prophecies were also tested to verify their authenticity (Deut 18:20–22).
- (c) God is there and He is not silent. He reaches out to mankind and makes His will known to us. He communicated His message through many different individuals in the past, but now He speaks to us through His Son.

(2) God’s Spokesman “in these last days” (1:2a).

- (a) “These last days” refers to the period of time from Jesus’ birth to His second coming. Peter said that the Son was revealed “in the last times” (1 Pet 1:20) and John said that we are living in the “last hour” (1 John 2:18).
- (b) God has spoken “to us by His Son.” God sent His own Son to speak for Him. Consider the story in Luke 20:9–18: “I will send my beloved Son.” What in the past was fragmented and incomplete is now whole and complete in the person of Christ. The story of divine revelation is a story of progression to the Son. Implied is the finality of God’s message—God has spoken for the last time

¹ The first four verses of Hebrews are a single sentence in Greek. For an excellent analysis of these verses, see David A. Black, “Hebrews 1:1–4: A Study in Discourse Analysis,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 175–194.

² Note the rhythmic Greek which incorporates alliteration: *Polymerōs kai polytropōs palai ho theos lalēsas tois patrasin en tois prophētais.*

through His Son (Mark 9:7).

- (c) As wonderful as the prophets were, how can they compare to God's own Son? Consider Matthew 12:41–42: "The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here" (Matt 12:41–42).

B) The excellence of God's superior Spokesman (1:2b–3).

- (1) The Son is the appointed heir of all things (1:2b). The Son naturally inherits all that belongs to the Father. All things belong to the Son on the basis of two facts: first they belong to Him by right of creatorship (Col 1:16–17); second, they belong to Him by right of redemption (1 Cor 7:23; Acts 20:28).
 - (a) The appointment of the Son as heir of all things can be understood in both an eternal and temporal sense. Jesus is eternally the Son of God and thus His heirship is also eternal (cf. John 3:35; Matt 11:27). But His resurrection and exaltation form the basis for the temporal realization of that eternal truth (cf. Eph 1:20–22; Phil 2:5–9; 1 Pet 3:22).
 - (b) There is a close connection between this verse and Psalm 2:7 which is quoted later in the text. The Son is coming again to establish His earthly kingdom and to rule over the nations. At that time, He will "inherit" what is rightfully His.
- (2) The Son is the agent through whom God created the world (1:2c). It was through the Son that God created the universe. All things were created "by Him" (He is the Creator) and "for Him" (He is the rightful heir).
- (3) The Son is the radiance of God's glory (1:3a). The word "radiance" refers to the brightness that shines out from a source of light. As John wrote, "...we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (cf. Col 1:15; John 1:14; 14:9). When we behold the Son, we see a manifestation of the glory of God.
- (4) The Son is the exact representation of God's nature (1:3b). The word "representation" (*charaktēr*) is used only here in the NT. It originally referred to an instrument used for engraving, and later to the impression made by such an instrument. Just as the surface of a coin exactly corresponds to the engraving on the die, so the Son of God "bears the very stamp of His nature."³ This is why Jesus could say to Thomas: "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him" (John 14:7) and to Philip: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

³ David L. Allen, *The New American Commentary: Hebrews*, 117.

- (5) The Son sustains the universe by His powerful word (1:3c). The existence, order and arrangement of the entire created world continues in its present form at His command. If Jesus chose to remove His power, every created thing would collapse into chaos or simply disappear into nothingness (Col 1:17). The Son's word has tremendous power and authority. It is the greatest force in the universe. Consider the storm on the Sea of Galilee—Jesus said, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:35–41). Therefore, we should listen when He speaks.
- (6) The Son provides final and complete cleansing for our sins (1:3d). This is a clear reference to His death on the cross. This speaks to His role as our Redeemer, a theme that will be prominent later in the letter (cf. Heb 9:15). The Son sits enthroned at the right hand of God in heaven (1:3). The description of the Son as being seated signifies the completion of the work of purification, conveying the idea of rest after the fulfillment of a mission (cf. Ps 110:1).⁴ No Levitical high priest was ever able to sit down in the sanctuary, for his work was never finished. This priest, however, has finished His work (cf. Heb 10:11–12).
- (7) Summary—the Son is the superior spokesman of God. He is the one through whom God has spoken in these last days. He is the high priest who has accomplished a perfect work of cleansing for His people's sins. He is the king who sits enthroned in the place of chief honor beside the Majesty on high.

C) The Son's superior name (1:4).

- (1) The word "better" (*kreittōn*) is the author's favorite way of describing the preeminence of Christ and the New Covenant (NC). Christ is a better priest (7:7), Christ's followers have a better hope (7:19) because they are part of the Son's better covenant (7:22; 8:6), which is based on better promises (8:6); Christ made a better sacrifice (9:23; 12:24); therefore, believers have a better possession (10:34), a better country (11:16), a better resurrection (11:35) and a better privilege (11:40).
- (2) What is the name that the Son inherited? The answer is found in v. 5, where the author quotes Psalm 2:7b, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." The superior name which distinguishes Christ from the angels is that of "Son." The name "Son" is not merely a title or designation. It reveals the true essence of who and what Christ is—God's only begotten Son.
- (3) When did the Son become superior to the angels? As God, the Son has always been superior to the angels. Indeed He is their infinitely superior creator (Col 1:16). But when He became a man at His incarnation, Jesus assumed a position inferior to that of the angels (Heb 2:9). At His exaltation, He obtained a higher position and a more excellent name than the angels (cf. Eph 1:20–22; Phil 2:9–10; Rom 1:4). Thus the word "became" in 1:4 refers to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, the God-

⁴ Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 47.

man.⁵

(4) The temporal nature of the statements made in Hebrews 1:4–5 have caused some to question the eternal Sonship of Christ and infer the incarnational Sonship of Christ. The following is a brief overview of this debate:

- (a) The doctrine of eternal Sonship affirms that the second Person of the triune Godhead has eternally existed as the Son. There was never a time when He was not the Son of God, and there has always been a Father/Son relationship within the Godhead. This doctrine recognizes that the idea of Sonship is not merely a title or role that Christ assumed at some specific point in history, but that it is the essential identity of the second Person of the Godhead. According to this doctrine, Christ is and always has been the Son of God.⁶
 - (i) There are many reasons that can be given as to why this is the correct understanding of Christ's Sonship.⁷ The NT teaches that the Father "sent" the Son into the world (John 3:16–17; Rom 8:3–4; Gal 4:4; 1 John 4:9–10). This means that Jesus was God's Son before He came to earth.⁸
- (b) Those who deny the doctrine of eternal Sonship hold to a view that is often referred to as 'Incarnational Sonship,' which teaches that while Christ preexisted, He was not always the Son of God. They believe that Christ became the Son of God at some point in history, with the most common view being that Christ became the Son at His incarnation. However, there are others who believe Christ did not become the Son until sometime after His incarnation, such as at His baptism, His resurrection, or His exaltation.
 - (i) It is important to realize that those who deny the eternal Sonship of Christ still recognize and affirm His deity and His eternity. Some examples include Ralph Wardlaw, Adam Clarke, Albert Barnes, Finis J. Dake, Walter Martin, and at one time John MacArthur (several years ago John MacArthur changed his position on this doctrine, and he now affirms the doctrine of eternal Sonship).⁹

⁵ George W. Zeller and Renald E. Showers, *The Eternal Sonship of Christ*, 72.

⁶ *What is the doctrine of eternal Sonship and is it Biblical?*, <http://www.gotquestions.org/eternal-sonship.html>.

⁷ Zeller and Showers, 41.

⁸ "The Son was presumably the Son before God sent Him" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 195). One might argue that these verses use the term "son" proleptically, i.e., with reference to what He was to become when born into the world. 1 John 4:14 ("the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world") rules this out. In this text "He who was already the Son became the Savior, so that there is no room for doubt that the preexistent Lord was already the Son." cf. F. Büchsel, "μονογενής," *TDNT*, 4:741, n. 16.

⁹ John MacArthur, *Reexamining the Eternal Sonship of Christ*, <http://www.gty.org/resources/print/articles/593>.

Exposition (1:5–14)

OT Citations: Ps 2:7b; 2 Sam 7:14a; Deut 32:43b (LXX); Ps 104:4 (LXX); Ps 45:6–7 (LXX); Ps 102:25–27; Ps 110:1

2) Superiority of the Son of God to the angels (1:5–14).

A) Why does the author contrast the Son with the angels?

- (1) Angels played a prominent part in Jewish history. They assisted in the giving of the Mosaic Law (Deut 33:2; Ps 68:17; Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19) and they appeared to many of the prophets and leaders of Israel. In the NT, angels continued to have an active ministry. Gabriel appeared and spoke to Zechariah (Luke 1:13–20) and to Mary (Luke 1:26–28). Angels also spoke to Philip (Acts 8:26), Cornelius (Acts 10:3–7), Peter (Acts 11:13; 12:7–11) and Paul (Acts 27:23).
- (2) The NT records that some began to teach that angels should be worshipped. In Colossians 2:18, Paul warns them to avoid the teachings of those who insisted on the “worship of angels.” It may be that the audience of Hebrews was being taught something similar. The apostle John, who received revelation about future events from an angel, fell on his face to worship, but the angel quickly told John, “No, don’t worship me. For I am a servant of God just like you...Worship God” (Rev 19:10; 22:9).
- (3) Jewish apocalyptic literature in the Second Temple period was filled with speculation regarding the angels. There seems to have been a growing conviction that angels were going to help defeat Israel’s enemies and usher in the promised era of peace. Along with this was a widespread reliance upon angels for personal protection and health. It is possible that the author of Hebrews was concerned with calling his audience back to a proper focus on Jesus and His role as Savior-King and away from angels, who are only servants of the King.¹⁰
- (4) Angels are popular in our own culture today. Bookstores are filled with books discussing angels. TV shows and movies depict angels working in our lives (e.g., “Highway to Heaven,” “Touched By an Angel,” “The Preacher’s Wife,” “It’s a Wonderful Life,” etc.). Even though most Christians aren’t tempted to worship angels, there can be a fascination with them that draws our attention away from Christ.

B) OT support for the Son’s superiority (1:5–14).

- (1) The author cited seven different OT passages to support his assertion of the Son’s supremacy over the angels. These seven citations are arranged into three groups.¹¹ Each group begins with a reference to angels and then a contrast between the

¹⁰ Randall C. Gleason, “Angels and the Eschatology of Hebrews 1–2.” *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003): 90–107.

¹¹ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. D. A. Hubbard and G. W. Barker, vol. 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991), p. 22.

angels and the Son:

- (a) The first group (vv. 5–6) begins with the question “To which of the angels did God ever say...?” Three quotations are given—the first two provide evidence for Jesus’ divine Sonship (Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14) and the third asserts His right to be worshipped (Deut 32:43). The contrast is one of name—the Messiah was declared to be God’s “Son” while no angel ever received such a declaration.
 - (b) The second group (vv. 7–12) begins with “Of the angels he says...” Three quotations are given—the first one declares the angels to be the servants of God who are changed into whatever form best suits His purpose (Ps 104:4), while the second and third show that Christ is the anointed King and the uncreated Creator (Ps 45:6–7; 102:25–27). The contrast is one of position—the Son is King and Creator while the angels are merely servants.
 - (c) The third and last group (vv. 13–14) begins with the question “To which of the angels has he ever said...?” A single quotation is given and it shows the supremacy of Christ who reigns as King at the right hand of the Father (Ps 110:1) while the angels are sent out to serve. The contrast is one of role—the Son rules while the angels serve.
 - (d) The author accomplished the task of proving Christ’s supremacy over angels using only Deuteronomy, 2 Samuel and Psalms.¹² The foundational assumption behind the author’s reasoning is as follows: Jesus is the Messiah therefore whatever the OT says concerning the Messiah is true of Jesus.
- (2) Citation Group #1 – Jesus’ superior name (1:5–6).
- (a) Psalm 2:7b: “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You” (1:5b).
 - (i) Psalm 2 is a royal psalm which speaks of the enthronement of the Messiah (the Lord’s Anointed). In this psalm, David tells us that the Father identified the Messiah as His “Son” and emphasized the Messiah’s standing as begotten of the Father.
 - (ii) This verse appears to say that Christ *became* the Son of God at some point in history and therefore is not eternally the Son of God. When was Christ “begotten”? The answer to this question is found by examining Paul’s quote of Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33. Paul said that God’s Psalm 2:7 decree concerning the Messiah was fulfilled when Jesus rose from the dead and was exalted at God’s right hand.¹³

¹² The Greek Psalter was often used as a hymnbook in the synagogue and the Church, and so it is safe to assume that the readers were already familiar with the passages from Psalms (Lane, 32). A Psalter is a volume containing the Book of Psalms, often with other devotional material bound in as well.

¹³ Zeller and Showers, Chapter 8.

- (1) In what sense did God beget Christ on His resurrection day? It should be noted that the Hebrew word that is translated “begotten” is Psalm 2:7 does not always mean “beget” in the sense of conception. Its more frequent meaning is to “bear, bring forth” in the sense of giving birth (1 Kgs 3:17–18; 2 Kgs 19:3).¹⁴ Just as a baby is hidden from sight in his mother’s womb until he is brought forth on the day of his birth, so Christ after His death was hidden from sight in the womb of the earth until God brought Him forth on the day of His resurrection. Thus the Father begot Christ in the sense of bringing Him forth alive from the grave.¹⁵
- (2) In what sense is Christ’s being the Son of God related to His resurrection? In Acts 17:31 Paul declared that by raising Jesus from the dead God gave proof to all men that Jesus is the man whom He has ordained to have authority over the world. Paul asserted that Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:3–4; cf. Acts 13:22–23, 30–34). In other words, on the day of Jesus’ resurrection, God showed Israel that Christ was the Son of God, the nation’s deliverer.¹⁶
- (iii) The author of Hebrews used this psalm to show that Jesus, the Messiah, was declared to be God’s “Son.” No angel can claim such a name.
- (b) 2 Samuel 7:14a: “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me” (1:5c).
- (i) The context here is the prophet Nathan conveying God’s response to David who desired to build Him a house. God told David that He did not desire a house of cedar and then promised David that his royal line would never fail. After David’s death, his son and successor would build a house for God, and his throne would endure forever.¹⁷
- (ii) This passage has immediate reference to David’s son Solomon, who did indeed build a temple for God (the phrase “when he commits iniquity” can only be applied to Solomon), but the divine promise made to David regarding his son and heir were not exhausted in Solomon. It also had prophetic application to the Messiah who would be a descendant of David and inherit his throne.
- (1) Indeed, the LXX encourages this messianic interpretation by the phrase in v. 12 that precedes the promise of Sonship, “I will raise up seed.” The allusion to 2 Samuel 7:12 in John 7:42 confirms that this passage was

¹⁴ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, “*yalad*,” *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), p. 408 (hereafter BDB).

¹⁵ Zeller and Showers, 60.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed. (NICNT), p. 55.

understood in a distinctively Messianic sense (“Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring [seed] of David?”).¹⁸

- (iii) The author prefaced these quotations with the question, “To which of the angels did God ever say...?” No angel is ever called “My Son” by God the Father (1:5). Angels are sometimes designated as “sons of God” in a generic sense (e.g., Ps 29:1; 89:7; Job 1:6), but Jesus alone is declared by the Father to be “My Son” (cf. John 3:16).¹⁹ This truth not only demonstrates Jesus’ superiority to the angels, it also proves that Jesus Himself is *not* an angel.
- (c) “And again, when He brings His firstborn into the world, He says” (1:6a).
 - (i) There is some debate as to the translation of v. 6a—should “again” go with the verb *says* (“he says again” cf. ESV) or with the verb *brings* (“when he brings again” cf. NASB)? If the ESV is correct, the word “again” simply introduces a new quotation. If the NASB is correct, the reference would be to the incarnation of the Son (cf. Hughes for a detailed discussion).²⁰ In this case, the ESV translation is best.
 - (ii) The term “firstborn” continues the idea of Sonship. Jesus is called the firstborn because He existed eternally with the Father *before* all creation (priority in time) and because He is preeminent *over* all creation (priority in rank).²¹
 - (iii) God brought His firstborn into “the world.” This appears to be a reference to Christ’s incarnation—His entrance into humanity and the earthly world (and indeed many commentators argue for this understanding). However, Christ’s incarnation meant that He would be “for a little while lower than the angels,” and that He would suffer the humiliation and pain of a death on the cross. It seems better, therefore, to understand this as referring to Christ’s resurrection. On that day the Father raised His Son up in power and glory, and then exalted Him to a throne at His right hand. This seems the better explanation for the setting in which the angels were called to worship.
- (d) Deuteronomy 32:43b: “Let all God’s angels worship him” (1:6b).
 - (i) The KJV, NIV, NASB and HCSB do not contain the text that is cited in Hebrews 1:6. This is because the author of Hebrews is quoting from the longer LXX form of this verse; the MT, on which our English translations are based, does not have the added phrase. Some translations, like the ESV, have the longer wording, making a note that it is a textual variant.

¹⁸ Lane, 1:25.

¹⁹ Lane, 1:26.

²⁰ Hughes, 57–59.

²¹ Bruce, 56.

- (1) This quotation bears a general resemblance to Psalm 97:7b (LXX 96:7). But most scholars agree that this quote comes from the longer LXX Deuteronomy 32:43b. Recent Qumran discoveries have yielded a Hebrew text (4QDeut^q) which does contain the clauses found in the LXX (which are absent from the MT), making it more probable that the Greek form of the passage is based on a genuine Hebrew tradition.
- (ii) Deuteronomy 32 is known as the “Hymn of Moses.”²² This song occurs twice in the LXX—it appears in its normal place in the book of Deuteronomy and it appears again as the second Ode attached to the book of Psalm (the Greek Psalter).²³ The reappearance of this passage as an Ode most likely reflects its use in the liturgy of the synagogue and Church. In fact, the author quotes it exactly as it appeared in the Ode: “Let all the angels of God worship Him.”²⁴
- (iii) The author of Hebrews understood this text as a prophetic oracle concerning the Son at His resurrection and exaltation. It is because of the surpassing superiority of the Son that the angels were commanded to worship Him (cf. Phil 2:9–11). It goes without saying that the one who is worshipped is greater than the worshiper.
- (3) Citation Group #2 – Jesus’ superior position (1:7–12).
- (a) Psalm 104:4: “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire” (1:7).
- (i) Psalm 104 is a psalm of praise that celebrates God’s creation and how He provides for and sustains that creation. It speaks of God’s stretching out the heavens in light, His sovereign control of the deep and His adorning the earth as a dwelling place for man.
- (ii) The author of Hebrews used this psalm to show that the angels are servants of God—they are changed by Him into whatever form is best suited for them to accomplish His divine purpose. Thus the contrast between them and the Son is one of position—the Son is King and Creator (Heb 1:8–12) while the angels are servants under His command.²⁵
- (1) Lane thinks this verse “offers a striking example of the writer’s dependence upon the Greek Bible, for the text was useful to him only in

²² At the end of his life, Moses gathered the tribal elders and scribes together and recited the words to a song. The central theme of the song was a warning of Israel’s future apostasy and the consequence of God’s divine judgment (Deut 31:28–30; 32). Moses urged the people to take the message of the song to heart and to teach it to their children (Deut 32:46).

²³ Gareth L. Cockerill, “Hebrews 1:6: Source and Significance,” *Bulletin for Biblical Review* 9 (1999): 52.

²⁴ Lane, 1:28.

²⁵ Hughes, 62–63.

this form.”²⁶ However, Swinson does a good job of showing that the LXX is as faithful a rendering of the original Hebrew as is the MT.²⁷

- (b) Psalm 45:6–7: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions” (1:8–9).
 - (i) Psalm 45 is a hymn celebrating a royal wedding; as the title says, it is a “love song.” It is also clearly Messianic in nature, celebrating the coming union of Christ and His bride.
 - (ii) The author of Hebrews used this psalm to underscore the fact that Jesus is both God and King (note the interplay between Father and Son where both are called God). Jesus is the anointed King who will reign forever and ever. By contrast, the angels are merely servants.
- (c) Psalm 102:25–27: “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end” (1:10–12).
 - (i) Psalm 102 is titled “A Prayer of One Afflicted.” It relates the prayer of someone who pours out their heart to God and asks for His help. It concludes with the person contrasting their own short life with the eternity of the Creator and praising Him for the fact that He will hear and rescue His people.
 - (ii) The author of Hebrews used this psalm to underscore the fact that Jesus is the Creator. He is separate and distinct from His creation—it will pass away but He remains forever.
- (4) Citation Group #3 – Jesus’ superior role (1:13–14).
 - (a) Psalm 110:1: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (1:13).
 - (i) Psalm 110 is one of the most important Messianic psalms. It is quoted or alluded to more than any other psalm in the NT, and it is a key psalm in Hebrews, for Psalm 110:4 declares Christ to be a priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (cf. Heb 5:6; 7:21). In this psalm, the Father (Yahweh) speaks to the Son (Adonai), whom David acknowledged as “my Lord,” and says, “Sit at

²⁶ Lane, 1:28–29.

²⁷ L. Timothy Swinson, ““Wind” and “Fire” in Hebrews 1:7 A Reflection Upon the Use of Psalm 104 (103),” *Trinity Journal* 28:2 (Fall 2007): 216–228.

my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool” (110:1). This means that the Messiah is both Son of God and King of kings (cf. Matt 22:41–46).

- (ii) The author of Hebrews used this psalm to show the supremacy of Christ who reigns as King at the right hand of the Father. Even though there are still hostile forces who resist His rule, the Father’s promise to defeat His enemies demonstrates that His triumph will prove to be final and complete.
- (b) The author concludes by contrasting Jesus’ superior role as King with the angels’ role as servants. Angels are sent out at the King’s command to “serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation” (1:14).
- (5) Summary—the Son, Jesus Christ, is superior to the angels. This is seen in the following contrasts:
 - (a) A contrast of name—the Messiah was declared to be God’s “Son” while no angel ever received such a designation (1:5–6).
 - (b) A contrast of position—the Son is King and Creator while the angels are merely servants (1:7–12).
 - (c) A contrast of role—the Son rules in power and authority while the angels minister to the saints at His command (1:13–14).

Exhortation (2:1–4) — First Warning

3) First warning—the danger of drifting (2:1–4).

A) The warning to pay attention (2:1).

- (1) This is the first of five “warning passages” in the book of Hebrews (cf. 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:8; 10:26–31; 12:15–29). The fact that the author is writing to Christians²⁸ makes these warnings all the more sobering. The danger of apostasy is something we must take seriously.
- (2) In this passage, the author warns his readers that there is a clear and present danger—they can “drift away from” and “neglect” their “great salvation.” If they do, they will not escape unpunished. Thus they should pay exceedingly great attention to what the Son of God has said.
- (3) “Therefore” calls the reader’s attention to what has just been said (2:1a). Earlier, the author stated that in the past God spoke through the prophets. Now, in these last days, God has spoken by His Son. Christ is the superior Spokesman of God, and He is greater than the angels who act as His servants. It follows that if God has spoken to us through such a person as His Son, we should pay close attention to what the Son has said (cf. Mark 9:7)!
- (4) How much attention should we pay to what we have heard? Abundant attention (2:1b). The word used here, *perissoteros*, is also used to describe Paul’s zeal for the traditions of his fathers (“extremely zealous” in Gal 1:14) and Paul’s eagerness to see the Thessalonians again (“more eagerly” in 1 Thess 2:17).
- (5) What will happen if we don’t pay attention? We will “drift away from” the gospel like a ship that is slipping away from its moorings (2:1c). There are great currents at work in our lives, pulling us away from Christ and His love. If we don’t remain firmly anchored to the truth of the gospel, we will drift away and be ship-wrecked on the reefs and shoals of sin. How do we remain anchored? By walking each day in the Spirit (Gal 5:16).

B) The motivation to avoid drifting (2:2–3a)

- (1) What happens to those who drift away? Their disobedience will end in judgment. The author drives this point home by reminding his readers of what happened to the Israelites when they neglected God’s law. His argument is one of reasoning from the lesser to the greater and it is given in the form of “Since...then” in vv. 2–3:
 - (a) Since what was spoken by God through the angels proved valid (the giving of the Mosaic Law to Israel), and every infringement and disobedience received the

²⁸ See 3:1, 6, 14; 4:14; 6:9–10; 10:23; 12:22, 24.

appropriate punishment (when Israel disobeyed, they were punished)... (2:2).

(b) Then how will we escape if we neglect what was spoken by God through His Son—our great salvation? (2:3a).

(2) “If we neglect” (2:3b). The word “neglect” (*ameleo*) was used by Paul when he told Timothy, “Do not neglect the gift you have” (1 Tim 4:14). In Timothy’s case, the opposite of neglect was to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching,” and to “practice these things, immerse yourself in them” (1 Tim 4:13, 15). Paul’s advice to Timothy is in harmony with the author’s warning in this passage—if we don’t purposefully appropriate the truth, keep focused on Jesus, and guard against the currents of the world, we will neglect our great salvation and drift away from the gospel.

(3) Our “great salvation” (2:3). What kind of salvation? A “so great” salvation. The word used here, *telikautes*, was also used in James 3:4 to describe great ships: “Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.” This salvation frees us from the kingdom of darkness and brings us into the kingdom of light. It provides forgiveness for sin and unites us spiritually with Christ. It gives us a clear conscience. It saves us from the fear of hell and offers us the glorious hope of an eternity with God. It is indeed a “great salvation.”

C) The certainty of the message (2:3b–4).

(1) It was “declared first by the Lord” (2:3b).

(a) The greatness of this salvation is measured by the One who first gave it—none other than the Son of God. This message was proclaimed “by” the Lord, where the preposition *dia* parallels its use in v. 2, “by angels.” Just as the angels were agents, so the Son is God’s agent.²⁹

(b) The OT prophesied the coming of the Messiah, but it was Jesus who announced: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Preaching the good news of salvation characterized Jesus’ ministry (Matt 4:17; 9:35; 19:28; Luke 12:31–32; 22:29–30).³⁰

(2) It was “attested to us by those who heard” (2:3c). The word “attested,” *ebebaiotē*, means “guaranteed” and conveys the idea of confirmation by an outside party. The words “to us” imply that neither the author nor the audience had directly heard Jesus preach the message of salvation; they were “second generation” Christians,

²⁹ Allen, 195.

³⁰ An interesting suggestion by Hughes: “...it may be inferred that among the letter’s recipients some had been saying in effect: ‘Our forefathers received the law through angels; we received the Gospel only through men,’ and were accordingly disposed to suggest that the gospel was inferior to the law” (Hughes, 77).

having received the gospel from others (this argues against Pauline authorship). “Those who heard” refers to those who had the privilege of witnessing Jesus’ words and ministry first-hand.³¹ The truth and accuracy of the gospel message had been confirmed to the audience by eye-witnesses of the Lord’s life.

- (3) While “God also bore witness” (2:4). The word used here, *sunepimartuountos*, is found only here in the NT and does not occur in the LXX. The meaning is “to bear witness at the same time together with,” and in this context it refers to God joining with the eye-witnesses and offering further confirmation of Jesus’ gospel message.³²
- (a) Four words are used to describe God’s joint witness. “Signs” (*semeiois*) refers to a miracle with the focus not on the miracle itself but on the meaning of the miracle. “Wonders” (*teras*) refers to something that cannot be explained by natural means and generates astonishment. “Miracles” (*dunamesin*) indicates a mighty deed, an act of power by God. The word is qualified by the adjective “various” indicating variety and diversity. “Gifts” (*merismois*) refers to distribution of gifts. The word was used to indicate the distribution of various things.³³
- (b) “Signs and wonders” was a traditional way of speaking of the exodus miracles (Exod 7:3, 9; 11:9–10; Deut 4:34; 6:22). “Signs and wonders” were also associated in the OT with true prophecy (Isa 8:18; 20:3), and in the NT with the works of Jesus (John 20:29–31; Acts 2:19, 22), together with the ministry of the apostles, including Paul, as well as some closely associated with them (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 14:3; 15:12; and here in Heb 2:3–4).³⁴

³¹ Attridge, 67; Grässer, 1:106–107; and Koester, 206–207, think that it is the message of salvation which was heard, while Lane, 1:39; and Ellingworth, 141 (together with, e.g., NIV, NRSV, and TNIV), assert that the message was confirmed by those who heard the Lord.

³² Allen, 196.

³³ Allen, 197.

³⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, (PNTC), 90.

*Exposition (2:5–3:6)**OT Citations: Ps 8:4–5, 6b; 22:22; Isa 8:17b–18**OT Allusions: Num 12:7; Isa 41:8–10; 1 Sam 2:35; 1 Chr 17:14a*

4) Superiority of the Son of Man to the angels (2:5–18).

A) Jesus has authority over the angels (2:5–9).

(1) Jesus rules the world to come, not angels (2:5).

- (a) In v. 5 the author continues the argument that was begun in chapter one (the Son is superior to the angels) by stating that God has not subjected “the world to come” to the angels (2:5). Ancient Judaism held to the belief that angels had been placed by God over the nations of the world. The basis for this belief goes back to the Song of Moses: “When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he established boundaries for the nations according to the number of the angels of God” (LXX Deut 32:8). Later, in Daniel 10:20–21; 12:1, angels are designated as the “prince of Persia” and “prince of Greece,” and Michael is referred to as “the great prince” who watches over God’s people, Israel. As in the New Testament (e.g., Eph 6:12), some of the principalities in Daniel are depicted as evil, opposing the will and work of God (Dan 10:20–21). Yet angels, whether good or bad, will hold no position of government in the coming age.³⁵
- (b) The final OT citation group in chapter one (1:13–14) quoted Psalm 110:1 and pointed out that Jesus’ enemies, although not currently subjected to Him, would one day be put under His feet. God never said that to any angel—only to the Son. When will this take place? In the “world to come” (2:5). This refers to the future time when Christ will establish His earthly kingdom, and rule and reign over the world.³⁶ This future world where the Son triumphs over His enemies is not subject to the angels. They will play a part in bringing Christ’s kingdom into fruition, but they will not be in positions of authority over the nations.³⁷
- (c) The function of v. 5 is to link two chains of OT citations. The first (1:5–13) develops the superiority of Jesus to the angels. The second (2:6–16) refutes any objections that could be raised against that superiority on the ground that the Son assumed a condition inferior to that of the angels and submitted to death (v. 9).³⁸

³⁵ O’Brien, 93; George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*, 97.

³⁶ Lane, 1:46.

³⁷ “Some branches of Judaism believed Michael and his angels would rule over it [the world to come].” Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:283–84.

³⁸ Lane, 1:46.

(2) OT support for Jesus' supreme authority (2:6–8a; Ps 8:4–5, 6b).³⁹

- (a) Psalm 8 is a song that proclaims God's glory and the dignity of human beings. The section that Hebrews quotes expresses wonder at God's dealings with humanity for whom He has ordained a special role in the created order. In v. 4, a question is posed in synonymous parallelism, in essence asking, "Why do you even spare a thought for people?" The term for humanity here is used most often to focus on "human frailty, weakness, and mortality," the earthbound nature of the creature under God's heavens. Yet, mystery of mysteries, God thinks of and cares for people (2:6).⁴⁰
- (i) Should Psalm 8:4–6 be understood as referring to mankind, to the Messiah or both? The Jews did not normally interpret Psalm 8 as referring to the Messiah.⁴¹ But it is clear from Hebrews 2:9 that the author sees Jesus as the fulfillment of Psalm 8:4–5, 6b. Since Jesus is the "God-man," this psalm can be understood as referring to both mankind and the Messiah, with Jesus as the final and supreme human in which the prophecy finds its true realization. In the NT, Psalm 8 is repeatedly applied to Christ (Matt 21:16; 1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22; it is also interpreted in the light of Ps 110:1).
- (ii) Is the phrase "son of man" in Psalm 8:4 a reference to the Christological title Jesus used for Himself (Luke 19:10)? With his question, "What is man?" the psalmist was evidently referring to humanity in general (*anthrōpos* is a collective noun), while the next line, "or the son of man?" is in synonymous parallelism, and asks the same question ("son of man" points to a single individual who is a member of the human race; cf. Ps 144:3). While the phrase certainly could be applied to Jesus as a member of the human race, it is not clear whether there is a direct connection between this phrase and Jesus' title "son of man" (more likely it comes from Dan 7:13–14).
- (iii) When does the word "him" in Hebrews 2:5–9 refer to Christ? Some commentators, such as Craig Blomberg, deny any Christological overtones until v. 9, and argue for a purely anthropological interpretation of Psalm 8:4–5, 6b.⁴² The TNIV goes out of its way to present this view. Others argue that the writer of Hebrews was not interested in the psalm for what it says about humanity's rule, but rather in the inaugurated rule of the "Son of Man," Jesus

³⁹ "The vagueness of the formula of quotation is consistent with the strong emphasis throughout Hebrews on the oracular character of Scripture. Precisely because it is God who speaks in the OT, the identity of the person through whom he uttered his word is relatively unimportant. A vague allusion is sufficient. It is the substantial authority of what is said, not its source, which is of primary importance to the argument (cf. 4:4)." Lane, 46.

⁴⁰ George H. Guthrie and Russell D. Quinn, "A Discourse Analysis of the Use of Psalm 8:4–6 in Hebrews 2:5–9", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (June 2006): 235–46.

⁴¹ So noted by Kistemaker, *Psalm Citations in Hebrews*, 29.

⁴² Craig Blomberg, "'But We See Jesus': The Relationship Between the Son of Man in Hebrews 2:6 and 2:9 and the Implications for English Translation," in *A Cloud of Witnesses*, 98.

Christ.⁴³ In light of v. 9a, it seems best to understand vv. 7–8 as referring to Christ, and possibly v. 6 as well.⁴⁴

- (b) “You made him for a little while lower than the angels” (2:7a). The phrase “for a little while” (*brachy ti*), can indicate degree (“a little bit” or “somewhat”) or time (“a little while” or “a short time”)—an ambiguity difficult to capture in English.⁴⁵ The context of the chapter supports a temporal sense as translated by the HCSB: “made lower than the angels for a short time,” i.e., while on earth. The word “lower” (*elattosas*) means “to cause something to have less status or rank.” While on earth, Jesus “made himself nothing” and took the form of a “servant” (Phil 2:7). He exercised no authority over the affairs of the nations and made no attempt to establish an earthly kingdom. This condition, however, was temporary—it was necessary but not permanent (Heb 2:10).
 - (c) “You have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet” (2:7b–8a). After the “little while” of being “lower than the angels,” the Son, and in Him mankind is “crowned with glory and honor.” Being one with Christ, His redeemed share in the glory of His reign (2 Tim 2:12; Rom 8:17; Rev 22:5). In Christ the dominion for which man was originally created is everlastingly established. The motif of *humiliation-redemption-glorification-sovereignty* is a recurrent theme in Hebrews (cf. 1:3f., 13; 2:7ff.; 4:14; 5:9f.; 7:27f.; 8:1; 9:12, 24; 10:12f.; 12:2).⁴⁶
- (3) The full experience of Jesus’ supreme authority is yet future (2:8b–9).
- (a) The logic may be obvious, but the author takes pains to explain that, if *everything* is subject to the rule of Christ, then there is *nothing*, not even angels, which is outside his control (2:8b).
 - (i) There is one obvious and logical exception to this conclusion, as Paul observes when making a similar application of Psalm 8 to Christ, namely, that “when it says, ‘all things are put in subjection’, it is plain that He is excepted who put all things in subjection under him” (1 Cor 15:27). In other words, God the Father, who does the subjecting, is not Himself subjected and plainly cannot be included in the totality of things that are subjected to Christ. From this it is clear that the designation “everything” refers to the whole created order of things and not to the Creator Himself, and also that it is specifically

⁴³ Barry Joslin, “‘son of Man’ or ‘Human Beings’? Hebrews 2:5–9 and a Response to Craig Blomberg,” *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 14.2 (2009): 41–50.

⁴⁴ “Though the earth was made subject to man, due to the entrance of sin into the world, such dominion has never occurred. Rather, what is seen is a fallen world and the deplorable effects of sin. Yet, this psalm is consistently applied in the New Testament to Christ (Matt 21:16; 1 Cor 15:25–27; Eph 1:22; cf. 1 Pet 3:22; Phil 3:21). What our author means is that it is only Christ, as the true representative of humanity, who can fulfill this psalm. Christ has come to restore what man has lost.” Joslin, 44.

⁴⁵ Allen, 206.

⁴⁶ Hughes, 85.

the incarnate Son that God places on the seat of authority.⁴⁷

- (b) The writer concludes v. 8 by addressing an apparent inconsistency: we do not currently experience the subjection of all things to Christ. The explanation for the disparity between the psalm's prediction and present reality is found in the word "not yet" (*oupo*)—there will be a delay, but what has been promised will finally be realized. We, along with Christ, must wait "until" God the Father places all enemies underfoot (Ps 110:1).
- (i) This is an example of the *present-yet-future* nature of many spiritual truths, including salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18 with Rom 5:9–10).⁴⁸ This tension between the "now" and the "not yet," between what is present reality but not yet seen, expresses what may be referred to as "the inaugurated rule of Christ." That is, the reign of Christ and the reality of Christian experience have begun, but will not be fully actualized until a final consummation at the end of the age. The Son's rule is already a reality; that reality, however, must be confessed by faith until we see its full impact at the end of the age.⁴⁹
- (c) Even though we do not yet see all things in subjection to Christ, we *do* now see Jesus "crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death" (2:9a). This verse emphasizes the author's Messianic interpretation of Psalm 8:4–5, 6b. While the psalm speaks of mankind in general, it finds its ultimate realization in the person of Jesus Christ. When the author says we "see" Jesus, he anticipates exhortations to "consider" him later in the book (3:1; 12:1–2). These exhortations focus both on Jesus' earthly obedience to the Father and his subsequent exaltation. To "see Jesus," therefore, does not mean a physical perception, but rather a spiritual perception, recognizing both the witness of his earthly endurance and his present exalted position.⁵⁰ "Crowned with glory and honor" refers to the exaltation of Christ (Phil 2:9–11; Eph 1:20; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 1 Pet 3:22). The reason for this exaltation is Christ's obedience to the death of the cross (cf. Heb 5:8–9 with 2:10, 14, 17).
- (d) The final phrase of v. 9, "so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone," acts as a transition to the next unit (2:10–18) which deals with the Son's suffering on behalf of mankind. It also expresses the purpose of the sequence of preceding events, i.e., the humiliation, passion and glory of Christ.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Hughes, 85.

⁴⁸ See especially Andrew T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special Reference to His Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

⁴⁹ Guthrie, 98.

⁵⁰ Guthrie, 99.

⁵¹ "The position of the clause might suggest that the crowning took place 'so that Jesus might taste death'. But the crowning, that is, his exaltation, occurred after Christ's death. 'The clause thus relates to the whole of what precedes and indicates the basic purpose of the savior's mission that culminates in his death and exaltation' (Attridge, 76; similarly, Bruce, 76; and Ellingworth, 155, among others)." O'Brien, 100.

The humiliation of Jesus in suffering death was a necessary prelude to His glorification (Heb 12:2; Phil 2:9). “Tasting” death is an idiom meaning to experience death fully. “For everyone” (*hyper pantos*), is emphatic by word order (before “tasted death”). Although *hyper*, “for,” could be taken here in the sense of “on behalf of,” it probably means “instead of” (cf. John 11:50, 2 Cor 5:15; Gal 3:13), indicating that the atonement was substitutionary in nature.⁵² The preposition’s object being “everyone” points to the universal nature of the atonement: Christ died for the sins of all people.⁵³

- (e) The fact that Jesus was temporarily “lower than the angels” could be misunderstood as implying that Jesus is not superior to the angels. The author of Hebrews uses Psalm 8:4–5, 6b as support for his assertion that everything, including the angels, was put in subjection to Christ. Although angels may appear to be superior now, and still have authority over this present world (Eph 2:2), they will not be in authority in the “world to come.” In that world, Christ will rule over everything and everyone (Ps 110:1).

B) Jesus helps humanity not the angels (2:10–18).

(1) Salvation was accomplished through the suffering of Jesus (2:10).

- (a) Why did Jesus need to “taste death for everyone”? It was “fitting” (*eprepen*) or “appropriate” (cf. Luke 24:26). The sufferings of Jesus were appropriate to the goal to be attained and were experienced in accordance with God’s fixed purpose.⁵⁴ The “he” in 2:10a refers to God the Father, “for whom and by whom all things exist.”
- (b) What was the goal? To bring “many sons to glory” (*pollous huious eis doxan*). According to Psalm 8, God created people for “glory and honor” (2:7). But we do not at present experience this glory. Our author insists, however, that when God exalted Christ, God showed that He remained firm in His purpose to bring many “sons” into the glory for which He created them. Since He created people for glory, it is fitting that He should provide a way for them to reach this end.⁵⁵ The “many” who are brought to glory refers to all those who are in Christ; it does *not* imply the restriction “many, but not all.”
- (c) How did God achieve His goal? By making the “founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.” The word “founder” (*archegos*) occurs only three other times in the NT (Heb 12:2; Acts 3:15; 5:31). It is always applied to Jesus, and is used in contexts which point to his death, resurrection or exaltation. Its most common uses were for a “leader” and a “founder.” The rendering “pioneer” reflects both

⁵² See M. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 2:814; Robertson, *GGNT* 630–31.

⁵³ Allen, 210.

⁵⁴ Lane, 1:56.

⁵⁵ O’Brien, 104.

aspects of meaning.⁵⁶ Jesus was made “perfect” (*teleiosai*) in the sense that He was made fully qualified and equipped for His office of high priest (cf. 2:17; 5:8–9; 7:28).⁵⁷ The means by which this was accomplished was through “suffering” (*pathematon*) This refers both to the suffering endured during temptation as well as His final suffering of death on the cross.⁵⁸

(2) Excursus—“perfection” in Hebrews.⁵⁹

- (a) What the author of Hebrews means when he speaks about “perfection” is one of the many complicated issues in interpreting the letter. The author speaks of Jesus being made “perfect” (2:10; 5:9; 7:28), of Jesus making believers “perfect” (10:14; 12:23), and of Jesus being the “perfector of our faith” (Heb 12:2). He talks about the inability of the Law and the Levitical priesthood to “perfect” worshipers in regard to their conscience (7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1). He tells his readers that solid food is for the “perfect” and urges them to go on to “perfection” (5:14; 6:1). He speaks about the OT people of faith being made “perfect” with us (11:40).
- (b) The modern reader typically understands perfection as referring to a state which cannot be improved upon, completely free from fault or defect (e.g., you can’t get any better than perfect). But perfection, both inside and outside the NT (1st century lit.), is used to refer to something or someone coming (or being restored) to their complete (or intended) state. Very often, this involves a process in which the incomplete state transitions to the complete state. The “perfect” is that which has arrived at its full excellence—the process is complete and the destination has been reached (thus Aristotle *Metaph.* 4.16 [1021b]). It can denote “adult” as opposed to “child,” for the adult is the “perfect” or “completed” state of the child (as is the butterfly of the caterpillar). A seed is “perfected” when it becomes a tree—its intended final form. This sense of perfection—“to complete,” “to bring something to its goal”—provides a consistent framework with which to interpret the various uses of “perfection” within Hebrews.
- (c) Jesus was “made perfect” in the sense that He was “brought to His goal” of being High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.⁶⁰ This “perfecting,” this process of being fully qualified for His intended role, occurred “through suffering” (2:10; 5:8–9; 7:28). Christ’s sufferings refer to the breadth of His incarnation, culminating in

⁵⁶ O’Brien, 105.

⁵⁷ Lane, 1:58.

⁵⁸ This passage of Scripture is a powerful answer to Islam’s rejection of the death of Jesus. Far from being a story of the triumph of His executioners, it is a story of Jesus’ triumph over the devil (2:14).

⁵⁹ David A. deSilva, “Hebrews,” *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: John, Hebrews-Revelation*, 223–4; *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews,”* 194–205.

⁶⁰ A Levitical priest was “perfected” as he passed through the rite of ordination (see the frequent use of “perfection” language in LXX Exodus 29; LXX Lev 4:5; 8:33; 16:32).

His sacrificial death on the cross. In this way He fully experienced the human situation (with the exception that He did not sin, 4:15).

- (d) Believers are “perfected” in the sense that their conscience is cleansed from sin, thus effecting the restoration of their conscience to its intended or “perfect” state (10:14). This cleansing allows them to enter the Most Holy Place—not the second section of the earthly, man-made tabernacle but the true, heavenly sanctuary in heaven. This is something which the law, being only a shadow of the true form of Christ, could never achieve (7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1).
 - (i) The author also urges his readers to be “mature/perfect” rather than “immature” (their resistance to the truth was preventing them from maturing/perfecting, 5:11). Here the focus is on the process of perfection—a child is supposed to mature into an adult. In the same way, if the readers would allow God’s grace free reign in their lives (cf. passive verb in 6:1), they would “go on to maturity/perfection”—the intended goal of all believers.⁶¹
 - (e) There is also an eschatological dimension to perfection in Hebrews. Those in the OT who finished their race by faith “did not receive what was promised” (they did not live to see Christ and His covenant), and thus were not “made perfect” apart from us (11:40). That is, God intended the OT saints and NT believers to be united together as one in order to present them as a bride to Christ (OT saints are presently waiting in heaven for us and others to be added to the kingdom). Then all of us will, so to speak, cross the finish line together and so reach the final goal of our faith—full Christlikeness, a resurrected body, and enjoyment of the heavenly city called the New Jerusalem and the glorious kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- (3) The Son became one with the “sons” (2:11a).
- (a) Jesus the Son is the one “who sanctifies,” and those who believe in Him are the ones “who are [being] sanctified” (2:11a). The word “sanctify” (*hagiazō*) is the verb form of “holy,” and in this context means to be set apart to God by purification of sins and to begin the process of being transformed into the likeness of Christ (Heb 10:10, 14, 29).⁶²
 - (i) In the OT, sanctification is an activity regularly ascribed to God. In the Pentateuch He identifies Himself with the formula, “I am the Lord who sanctifies you” (Exod 31:13; Lev 20:8; 21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32; Ezek 20:12; 37:28). Sometimes sanctification is done through other agents, like Moses (Exod 19:14; 29:1; Lev 8:11–12).

⁶¹ See notes on Hebrews 5:12–6:3 for further detail.

⁶² Allen, 215.

- (ii) Here it is Jesus who exercises the divine prerogative of sanctifying: He makes “God’s people his very own, by bringing them into [a] vital relationship with himself.”⁶³ The full meaning of sanctification is not developed in Hebrews until 9:13–14, where it signifies being brought into the presence of God through Christ’s sacrifice. For the author, sanctification is linked with the establishment of new covenant relations between God and man (note especially “the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified,” 10:29; note 10:10, 14 in the light of vv. 15–18).⁶⁴
- (b) Both the Son as sanctifier and the sons who are sanctified “have one source” (*ex henos pantes*; lit. “all from one”). The phrase is ambiguous and its meaning is debated. On balance, it seems best to understand *henos* as having primary reference to spiritual oneness in God and secondary reference to physical oneness in human nature.⁶⁵
- (4) OT support for Jesus’ solidarity with humanity (2:11b–13; Ps 22:22; Isa 8:17b–18).
- (a) The Son and the sons are “one”—primarily in God and secondarily in Adam. Because of this Christ is not “ashamed to call them brothers” (2:11b). Though He had every cause to be ashamed of us, Jesus lowered Himself in order that we might be raised with Him to glory (Phil 2:5ff.; 2 Cor 8:9). With Him, and through Him, who is “the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29), we are now able to address God as “our Father.”⁶⁶
- (b) Psalm 22:22: “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation (*ekklesias*) I will sing your praise” (2:12).
- (i) Psalm 22 was recognized by the early church as being Messianic. It begins with the words of anguish Jesus spoke on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1; cf. Matt 27:46). In Psalm 22:7–8 the righteous one is taunted with such phrases as “He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him”—words that mirror the ridicule of the religious leaders around the cross (Matt 27:43). Psalm 22:16–18 speaks specifically of the piercing of the righteous one’s hands and feet, the wholeness of his bones, and the parceling out his garments through casting lots (Matt 27:35; John 19:23, 31–36). With v. 22 the psalm turns to a declaration of trust, in which the righteous one expresses joy and praise for God’s attention to his cry for help.⁶⁷

⁶³ Moffatt, 32; D. G. Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection*, 59.

⁶⁴ O’Brien, 108.

⁶⁵ Guthrie, 108.

⁶⁶ Hughes, 105.

⁶⁷ Guthrie, 109.

- (ii) This quote supports the author's proclamation of solidarity between Jesus and the people of God in two ways: (1) He sees in its reference to "my brothers" the establishment of a spiritual family relationship by the Son's sacrificial death. (2) The phrase "in the midst of the congregation" places emphasis on Jesus' location in our midst on earth, where we are "lower than the angels." Thus Psalm 22 offers a rich backdrop for a discussion of the Son's incarnation, suffering, and spiritual unity with those who He sanctifies.
- (c) Isaiah 8:17b–18: "I will put my trust in him" and "Behold, I and the children God has given me" (2:13).
- (i) The political background of Isaiah 8 is the Assyrian crisis that took place in Judah during the reign of Ahaz (735–716 B.C.). The northern kingdom, Israel, had allied itself with Syria in an attempt to rebel against Assyria. Ahaz refused to join this alliance, and Israel and Syria (Pekah and Rezin) attacked Judah so they could put their own king on the throne (Isa 7:6). Instead of trusting Yahweh, Ahaz, in his fear, made an alliance with Assyria (his piety in Isa 7:12 is feigned; cf. 2 Kgs 16:7–9).
 - (ii) In Isaiah 8:14, the Lord of hosts is described as "a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel." These words were applied to Christ by NT authors (Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:8; cf. Luke 2:34). Paul points to the crucifixion as that part of Jesus' experience that causes stumbling (1 Cor 1:23).⁶⁸ This, combined with Hebrews' quotes of Isaiah 8:17b–18, leads to the conclusion that Isaiah 8:14–18 has secondary reference to the Messiah.
 - (iii) "I will put my trust in him" (2:13a; Isa 8:17b). In its original context this statement of faith in Yahweh's deliverance was spoken by Isaiah in the face of an imminent Assyrian attack. The author of Hebrews understands Isaiah 8:17b to have secondary reference to the Messiah's trust in the Father, perhaps specifically during His time of suffering death on the cross.
 - (iv) "Behold, I and the children God has given me" (2:13b; Isa 8:18). In its original context this statement refers to Isaiah and his children, Shear-jashub ("a remnant shall return") and Maher-shalal-hash-baz ("speeding to the spoil"). The writer of Hebrews understands Isaiah 8:18 to have secondary reference to Christ. It demonstrates that Jesus is in a familial relationship with other "children." The children are those who have believed in Him.
- (d) The OT citations given in vv. 12–13 support the assertion that Jesus, the Son of God, became "one" with the "sons." They clearly show that Christ is part of a larger family with brothers and sisters. Further, they clarify what sonship means: it is "not a matter determined only by nature, but by God's salvific act and the

⁶⁸ Guthrie, 109.

human response to it.”⁶⁹

(5) Jesus shares our human nature in order to free us (2:14–15).

- (a) Since the children are human, Jesus became human [parallel symmetry] (2:14a). This phrase speaks to the necessity of the incarnation. Since death was necessary to achieve God’s purpose, the Son needed to die. For the Son to die, He must become human. This is, for our author, the logic of the Incarnation.⁷⁰
- (b) Through death, Jesus destroyed the one who has the “power” of death (the devil) [concentric symmetry] (2:14b).
 - (i) In what sense does the devil have the “power” (*kratos*) of death? God is both the author and sustainer of life (Acts 17:25, 28; 1 Tim 6:13). Satan cannot kill anyone without God’s permission (Job 2:6). However, death entered the world because of sin, and Satan introduced sin to the human race. Thus Satan is described as a “murderer” from the beginning (John 8:44).
 - (ii) Since sin is the ultimate cause of death, the devil is described as having the “power” of death, i.e., he works in people’s lives in order to lead them into sin and so murder them. The word “destroy” (*katargese*) has the basic idea of “to render inoperative, abolish.” What is the answer to the problem of sin? The substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. His death paid the penalty for our sin, and breaks the power the devil exercises over us.
- (c) Jesus’ goal was to liberate those who were in “lifelong slavery” [concentric symmetry] (2:15). Paul tells us in Romans that when we yield to sin, we become slaves to sin (Rom 6:16). When Adam and Eve sinned, they became the servants of sin, and all of their children were born into that slavery. The master of such slavery is Satan. Humanity lived in fear of death until Jesus liberated us and took away the sting of death (1 Cor 15:55–56).

(6) Jesus shared the human condition in order to become a high priest (2:16–18).

- (a) Paraphrase: “One would agree, I am sure, it is not angels He takes hold of but the seed of Abraham” (2:16). The verb used to describe Christ’s action, *epilambanomai*, basically means “to seize, to lay hold of” something. In this context it is used in its literal sense and depicts Christ as taking hold of His people and leading them out of slavery.
- (i) In Hebrews 8:9, God recalls how He “took hold” of Israel by the hand and brought them out of Egypt (Jer 31:32). The description of the readers as the “seed of Abraham” is an allusion to Isaiah 41:8–10. In Isaiah, the phrase

⁶⁹ O’Brien, 113.

⁷⁰ Guthrie, 110.

“seed of Abraham” refers to Israel. In Hebrews, the phrase refers not only to the Jews but also to the Christian community, i.e., both believing Jews and Gentiles (Heb 11:39–40; Gal 3:29; Rom 4:13, 16). They are the “children” (2:12–13) whom Christ leads to glory, the numerous descendants promised to Abraham (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8), and “heirs of the promise” (6:12–17) which is embodied in the New Covenant (8:6).⁷¹

- (b) Jesus shared the human condition in order to become a high priest who could make “propitiation” for the sins of the people (2:17).
 - (i) Jesus was “made like his brothers in every respect” (2:17a). This refers to Jesus sharing with His people in all the experiences of life (the exception being that He did not sin, cf. Heb 4:15; 7:26) The writer states that this was necessary so that “he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God” (2:17b). A priest is someone who acts as an intermediary between God and man. Every high priest is chosen from among men (5:1; Exod 28:1), thus Jesus needed to become a man.
 - (1) Nowhere in the OT are priests or high priests said to be merciful. But the OT again and again asserts that Yahweh is merciful (cf. Exod 34:6), and Jesus is the exact *charakter* of His nature (1:3). The phrase “faithful high priest” is an allusion to 1 Samuel 2:27–36 (specifically v. 35). Eli was an example of a high priest who was not faithful, and because of this, a man of God was sent to Eli to prophesy of the coming death of his two sons.⁷²
 - (ii) As high priest, Jesus could make “propitiation” (*hilaskesthai*) for the sins of the people (2:17c). The proper translation of *hilaskesthai* has been a matter of debate. In a full and balanced treatment of the subject, Leon Morris has demonstrated that “to make propitiation” (“to appease, to avert divine wrath”) is to be preferred rather than “to make expiation,” (“to atone, to make amends”) because this is the usual meaning of the verb and its cognates not only in secular usage but in the LXX.⁷³ However, the concept of expiation is certainly part of Christ’s sacrifice for sin.
- (c) Jesus suffered when tempted, therefore He is able to help those who are tempted (2:18). This concept is explored in greater depth in 4:15–5:10. Jesus was tempted in both the neutral (“tested”) and negative sense (“tempted”). And He suffered during those times just as we do. Because of this, He is able to help those being tempted—in the sense of understanding and empathy as well as in showing us how to overcome and persevere.

⁷¹ O’Brien, 117.

⁷² The language of 1 Samuel 2:35 is used by the author in 3:1–6, where the concept of the “house” and God as the “builder” is coupled with the faithfulness of the Son.

⁷³ Lane, 1:66; Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 125–60.

(7) Summary.

- (a) This passage (vv. 10–18) presents the incarnation of the Son of God as the prerequisite for His identification with and suffering for humanity. The author of Hebrews uses “exodus” language to describe God’s intention to bring His people to glory through the death of His Son, the pioneer of their salvation (v. 10, 16). The OT quotes given (Ps 22:22; Isa 8:17b–18) show an exalted Christ addressing His family and point to His solidarity with them (vv. 11–13).
- (b) Since these children share a common humanity, it was necessary for the Son to assume the same human nature. The purpose of His incarnation, then, was that through His death He might be victorious over the great adversary who has the power of death (v. 14), namely, the devil, and liberate those who had been paralyzed by the fear of death all their lives (v. 15).
- (c) Jesus shared a full human existence, and His purpose in doing this was to become a merciful and faithful high priest, in order to make propitiation for the sins of His people (vv. 17–18). Because Christ Himself suffered, He is able to come to the aid of His brothers and sisters who themselves are tempted. This is a powerful reply against any objection to the suffering and death of the Son.⁷⁴

5) Superiority of Jesus to Moses (3:1–6).

A) Jesus was faithful to Him who appointed Him (3:1–2; Num 12:7).

- (1) The author considered his readers to be Christians and called them “holy brothers” (*adelphoi hagioi*). This language is based on the sanctifying work of Christ mentioned in the previous chapter (2:11, 17). The audience also shared in a “heavenly calling” (*kleseos epouraniou*). God’s “call” is both a command and an invitation—it conveys God will and purpose for our lives (Matt 22:1–14). We are called to salvation⁷⁵ (1 Pet 2:9; Rom 1:6; 8:30; 1 Cor 1:9), to live godly lives (1 Pet 2:21; 3:9; Rom 1:7; 8:28; 2 Tim 1:9), and to specific tasks which God wants us to perform (Acts 13:2; Rom 1:1).
- (2) Jesus is the “apostle” (*apostolon*) and “high priest” (*archiereia*) of our “confession” (*tes homologias*). These two titles are found only in Hebrews. Jesus is the apostle, the “one who is sent”—Jesus was sent by God with authority to speak for God and represent God to mankind.⁷⁶ Jesus is also the high priest—the one who makes propitiation for sin (2:17–18). The “confession” mentioned in v. 1 refers not so much to the act of confessing, but to the content of what is confessed (cf. 2:3).
- (a) Assertions such as “Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:42; 9:22), “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5), and “Jesus is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20; Rom 1:3–4)

⁷⁴ O’Brien, 123.⁷⁵ God’s grace in drawing us to Himself is part of the call to salvation (John 6:44, 65).⁷⁶ Allen, 239.

summarized early Christian doctrine and probably became the central core of what converts believed. Notice that in the two key passages that frame the central section of Hebrews (4:14–16; 10:19–23), where the author speaks of the readers’ “confession” (*homologia*, 4:14; 10:23), Jesus is spoken of as “high priest” (4:14; “great priest”, 10:21) and “Son of God” (4:14).⁷⁷

- (3) The author urged his readers to “consider” (*katanoesate*; cf. Luke 12:24, 27) that Jesus was “faithful” (*piston*) to Him who appointed Him. The emphasis on “him who appointed him” suggests that *piston* here implies that Jesus was faithful to God in the office of high priest (cf. 2:17). The introduction of the theme of faithfulness prepares the reader for the comparison between Jesus and Moses: “just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house.”
- (a) Most commentators agree that the argument is based on an exposition of Numbers 12:7—it is alluded to in vv. 2 and 5. The author takes up each part of the quotation in turn. Moses was faithful to God despite opposition from others, including Israel who wanted to return to Egypt because they lacked food and water (Num 11:4–6), as well as Miriam and Aaron who challenged his leadership (Num 12:1–2). Against this opposition God replies: “Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house” (12:7). The “house” of Numbers 12:7 in which Moses served so faithfully was not the tent of meeting but the people of Israel, the family of God.⁷⁸
- (b) “House,” though not a technical term, should be identified as equivalent to the phrase “people of God.” Not only are both familial analogies, but the scope is the same: the house over which Moses was faithful was the covenant nation of Israel; the house over which Jesus is faithful includes both Israel and the readers of Hebrews. Assuming that the author addresses his readers as Christians, it could be said that the “house” includes both Israel and the church—two corporate entities in covenant relationship with God (based on the old and new covenants, respectively).⁷⁹
- (4) Why does the author introduce a comparison between Jesus and Moses? At first glance, comparing Jesus to Moses seems anticlimactic after the author of Hebrews established Jesus’ superiority to the angels (1:5–14; 2:5–18). “It would seem to go without saying that he [Jesus] is greater than Moses.”⁸⁰ However, in first-century Jewish thought Moses was held in almost God-like esteem, even higher than the angels. Thus contrasting Jesus to Moses is a step beyond the angels, not a step backward.⁸¹

⁷⁷ O’Brien, 129.

⁷⁸ O’Brien, 131.

⁷⁹ Rodney J. Decker, “The Warnings of Hebrews Three and Four,” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 5 (2001): 5–16.

⁸⁰ Ellingworth, 194.

⁸¹ Brett R. Scott, “Jesus’ Superiority over Moses in Hebrews 3:1–6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (Apr 1998): 202–11. See also M. Rose D’Angelo, *Moses in the Letter to the Hebrews*, 95–149; Lane, 73; Allen, 236.

- (a) Other passages that confirm Moses' status as a unique and superlative prophet are found in Exodus 33:11 and Deuteronomy 34:10. In the second-Temple period, Ben Sira, in the *Wisdom of Sirach*, said: "From his descendants the Lord brought forth a man of mercy [Moses], who found favor in the sight of all flesh and was beloved by God and man, Moses, whose memory is blessed. He made him equal in glory to the holy ones, and made him great in the fears of his enemies" (45:1–2).⁸²
- B) Jesus is superior to Moses (3:3–6).
- (1) Both Jesus and Moses were faithful in their service to God (the author's comparison does not imply any criticism of Moses). But Jesus has been "counted worthy" (*exiōtai*; cf. 2 Thess 1:11; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 10:29) of more glory than Moses. How could Jesus deserve more glory than Moses, the man to whom God spoke face to face, the man who was privileged to see "the form of the Lord" (Num 12:8) so that his face radiated the divine glory (Exod 34:29–30, 35; 2 Cor 3:12–18)?
- (a) Jesus is the builder (3:3b–4). The writer considers it common sense that the builder is worthy of greater honor and glory than the building. Numbers 12 highlights the fact that Moses was greater than anyone else within the house of God (the covenant people of Israel). But he was still part of God's house. If God is the builder of all things (3:4b), and Jesus is the implied builder of God's house (3:3b), then Jesus and God are one and the same. It follows that Jesus, the builder of the house of Israel, is worthy of more glory than Moses, the greatest within the building.
- (b) Jesus is the Son (3:5–6a). The contrast here is one of roles: Moses was faithful as a *servant* in God's house, but Christ was faithful as a *Son* over God's house (1 Sam 2:35; 1 Chr 17:14a). An important aspect of Moses' office, and the one emphasized here, was "to testify to the things that were to be spoken later," (3:5b) a reference to the revelation mediated through the Son in "these last days" (1:2a). Indeed, Moses himself said that God would "raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—" (Deut 18:15), thus prophesying the coming of Jesus the Messiah (Acts 3:22; 7:37; cf. 1 Pet 1:10–12). Note that the title "Christ" is used here for the first time in Hebrews.
- (2) We are God's house *if* we hold fast and remain faithful as Jesus and Moses were faithful (3:6b). The people of Israel were called God's "house" (Exod 16:31; Hos 8:1; Heb 8:8), and the term was also used of Jesus' followers (1 Tim 3:15). Thus "house" refers to believers, whether Jew or Gentile (cf. 1 Pet 2:5; Eph 2:20). Being part of God's house is conditional—we must remain faithful to the end just as Jesus and Moses did (John 8:31; Matt 24:13; Heb 3:14). The fact that the author goes on to

⁸² Barry D. Smith, "Letter to the Hebrews." No pages. Cited 11 June 2012. Online: <http://www.abu.nb.ca/courses/newtestament/hebrews/3-1-6.htm>. Ben Sira was a second century BC Jewish scribe and sage from Jerusalem.

give an example of those who were not faithful (Ps 95) underscores the significance of this warning.

*Exhortation (3:7–4:13) — Second Warning**OT Citations: Ps 95:7b–11; Gen 2:2–3**OT Allusions: Num 14:9–11*

6) Second warning—the danger of unbelief (3:7–4:13).

A) An example of unfaithfulness (3:7–11; Ps 95:7b–11).

- (1) Psalm 95 can be divided into two parts: the first (vv. 1–7a) consists of praise to God for His greatness and a call to worship Him as our Creator, while the second (vv. 7b–11) is a warning against disobeying Him. The second section uses the Exodus generation as an example of unbelief and the consequences of rebellion. The quotation essentially follows the LXX. The text of the psalm is introduced as something said by the Holy Spirit, whom Hebrews identifies as the ultimate source of the Scriptures (9:8; 10:15).⁸³
- (2) The author cites Psalm 95:7b–11 to give an example of those who did *not* remain faithful (3:7–11).⁸⁴ Just as the exhortation in 3:6b to *remain* faithful makes sense only if the readers had true faith (a condition confirmed by the author—Heb 3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22), in the same way, the use of the Exodus generation as an example of *not* remaining faithful makes sense only if that generation *began* with true faith (Ps 95:7b–11). The biblical data support the premise that the Exodus generation had exercised genuine, saving faith (salvation is by grace through faith, both in OT and NT).⁸⁵
 - (a) When Moses and Aaron first reported the words of the Lord to the people and performed Yahweh’s signs, “the people believed” and “they bowed their heads and worshiped” (Exod 4:30–31). The word translated “believed,” means “to have faith, to trust (in),” and was used in the Old Testament to express full confidence and genuine faith in Yahweh.
 - (b) The people’s faith subsequently showed itself in their obedience to the commands regarding the preparation of the Passover sacrifice (Exod 12:27b, 28, 50; cf. Heb 11:28).
 - (c) After God’s deliverance from Pharaoh’s army, the text states, “they believed in the Lord” (Exod 14:30–31). The same form of the word is also used of Abraham who “believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). The genuineness of their faith is noted elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps 106:12).

⁸³ O’Brien, 142.⁸⁴ Rodney J. Decker, “The Warnings of Hebrews Three and Four,” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 5 (2001): 5–16.⁸⁵ Randall C. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7–4:11,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157.627 (2000): 281–303.

- (d) In Hebrews 11 the author confirms the initial faith of the Exodus generation. With the events of Exodus 14:30–31 in mind, he commends them for their faith, declaring, “By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land” (Heb 11:29). Thus the author includes the Exodus generation among those who were “commended through their faith” (v. 39).
- (e) The establishment of the Sinai Covenant with the Exodus generation presupposed faith and was given to a holy people. In response to God’s appearance, the people believed His voice and obeyed His commands. They also committed themselves to keeping His covenant (Exod 19:3–8, 14; 24:1–9).
- (3) Why did the author use Psalm 95:7b–11 as his scripture of choice instead of Numbers 14 (the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea) or Numbers 17 (the quarrel at Massah and Meribah)? There are several reasons:
- (a) Psalm 95 was used liturgically as a preamble to synagogue services in the first-century.⁸⁶ Thus the readers would have been intimately familiar with its language.
- (b) Psalm 95 provides a brief yet poignant summation of the 40 years God spent working with the Exodus generation (see Ps 95:9–10a). What is God’s conclusion? “They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways” (Ps 95:10b).⁸⁷ The Exodus generation went to their wilderness graves persisting in their unbelief (God “loathed” them to the very end—Ps 95:10a; 78:17–20).
- (i) Note that v. 10 is *not* describing a group of people who struggled with the occasional lapse into disobedience. Rather, it is describing a group of people who began in faith, quickly “forgot” God (Ps 106:13), disobeyed His commands, and persisted in unbelief (note how the author makes good use of the LXX’s transliteration of “Meribah” and “Massah” so that the emphasis is on Israel’s continued disobedience and not on the specific geographical locations—Ps 95:8 vs. Heb 3:8).
- (c) Psalm 95 begins its warning with the word “Today” (Ps 95:7b). This implies, as the author of Hebrews argues in 4:7–8, that its message is relevant to: a) the original audience of the psalm (who lived many hundreds of years after the events being described took place), b) the readers of Hebrews (who lived more than a thousand years later), and c) us today (over three thousand years later). Thus Psalm 95’s warning is timeless and has implications for us “today.”

⁸⁶ Allen, 256; Lane, 1:85.

⁸⁷ See the following references for a list of the Exodus generation’s disobedience: Exod 14:10–12; 15:22–24; 16:1–3, 20, 27; 17:1–3; 32:1–6; Num 11:1, 4–6; 14:1–4, 44–45; 16:1–3, 41; 17:5; 20:2–5; 21:4–5; 25:1–2.

- (i) The phrase “if you hear his voice” refers to hearing the word of God—in context it is an allusion to the message of the Son (1:1–2; 2:1–3) and how we should respond when we hear God’s word.
- (4) Psalm 95 concludes with the statement: “Therefore I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest’” (Ps 95:11). It is important to note that “my rest” does *not* refer to the rest in Canaan. The oath recorded in v. 11 is very similar to God’s reaction to the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea (Num 14:21–25, 27–35; Deut 1:35). Of the full-grown men who came out of Egypt (over 600,000), only Caleb and Joshua survived to enter Canaan (Deut 2:14). Because of the similarity in wording, it is easy to mistake “my rest” for the promised life of ease and blessing in Canaan. However, the author of Hebrews argues in 4:7–8 that the word “Today” (Ps 95:7b) indicates that the rest Joshua gave the people of Israel in Canaan (cf. Josh 1:13–15 with Josh 21:44; 22:4) was not the “my rest” of Psalm 95:11.⁸⁸
- B) “Take care”—unbelief leads to apostasy (3:12–19).
- (1) Examine your heart (3:12–14).
- (a) The command to “Take care” (*blepete*; cf. Gal 5:15; Eph 5:15; Phil 3:2; Col 2:8; Heb 10:25; 2 John 1:8) indicates that there was a clear and present danger for the author’s readers. The danger was that there might be in any of them an “evil heart of unbelief” (3:12a).
 - (i) The exhortation to search their hearts for unbelief is an allusion to Number 14:11, “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?’” (cf. Deut 1:26–36; Ps 78:17–22; 106:24). God specifically told Israel through Moses that He would fight for them and give them victory over the Canaanites (Deut 1:29–31). “Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the Lord your God” (Deut 1:32). This was not doubt or uncertainty on Israel’s part—this was a defiant unbelief in God’s ability to lead them to victory.
 - (b) What is the outcome of a heart of unbelief? The author warns his readers that such a heart would lead them “fall away” (*apostenai*) from the “living God” (3:12b).
 - (i) This statement is an allusion to LXX Numbers 14:9: “Only do not rebel against the Lord.” The word “rebel” (*timrodu*) is translated by the LXX as *apostatai*. In the context of the Exodus generation, apostasy is defined as the blatant refusal to believe what God says and to respond in obedience to what He commands. The theological implications are staggering—it is possible to turn away from the “living God” (cf. 3:14). The verb “living,” *zontos*, underscores

⁸⁸ O’Brien, 144.

that apostasy means turning away from the source of life; what else is left but death (2 Pet 2:15, 20–21; Heb 10:26)?

- (c) What can the readers of Hebrews do to combat this danger? They are commanded to “exhort one another every day” (3:13a). The verb “exhort,” *parakaleite*, means to “encourage or admonish,” (cf. 13:22) and it is a present imperative, calling for continuing action: “exhort and keep on exhorting.” The author believes that mutual admonition is a key part of guarding the heart against unbelief. We have a responsibility to be warning and encouraging each other. This activity should be taking place “every day” as long as it is called “Today” (3:13a). The word “Today” refers to the present (emphasizing the importance of now) and extends until death or the coming of Jesus Christ (as long as “Today” lasts).⁸⁹
- (d) The mutual exhortation which the author urges is so “that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (3:13b). Sin tries to enter our hearts through deception (Gen 3:1–4, 13; 2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:14; Eph 6:11), and at the core of every temptation is a lie (John 8:44; 2 Cor 2:11). If we don’t learn to discern Satan’s lies and guard our hearts from sin’s deceptions, we will inevitably become hardened by sin and filled with unbelief.
- (e) What are the consequences of turning away from God? We forfeit the blessing of being partners with Christ (3:14a).⁹⁰ Verse 14 begins with a statement of the reader’s condition and concludes with a conditional clause that qualifies that condition.
- (i) The adjective translated “share” in the ESV is *metochoi*—it was used in the general sense of “one who shares with someone else as an associate or partner”⁹¹ (e.g., James and John were partners in Peter’s fishing business, Luke 5:7). As believers, we have become partners with Christ. This probably means that Christians share (with one another) in Christ Himself, that is, they “experience a relationship with a companion, namely, Christ—to be part of His ‘house’ (3:6).”⁹²
- (ii) This condition, however, is not unalterable—it can, as mentioned in v. 12, be turned away from. Because of this, the writer reminds his readers to “hold”

⁸⁹ Lane, 1:87.

⁹⁰ Following Lane’s translation—Lane, 1:83.

⁹¹ Hence, a “companion, partner” (Louw and Nida §34.8). Apart from this example in Luke 5:7, all the other instances of the word in the New Testament occur in Hebrews: at 1:9 the term was used of the companions of the Son of God, a reference to the “many sons” (2:10), whom the firstborn Son is not ashamed to call his brothers and sisters (2:11), rather than angels. At 3:1, they are “sharers of a heavenly calling”, “sharers of the Holy Spirit” (6:4), and “sharers in suffering” (12:8). O’Brien, 149.

⁹² So Guthrie, 130; and Ellingworth, 227. This is the view of most older commentators, including Luther, Westcott, P. E. Hughes, and H. Braun, as well as some modern scholars. For example, Weiss, 264, feels that it points to those who are participants in him, the one who is the Pioneer of salvation and who leads them to glory.

(*kataschomen*) their “original confidence” (*archen tes hypostaseos*) “firm” (*bebaian*) “to the end” (3:14b). The best illustration that conveys the sense of this phrase is that of a runner, who having begun the race, continues on until he reaches the end.

(2) Examine the text (3:15–19).

- (a) The writer repeats the theme verse from Psalm 95:7b–8 to prepare his readers to think carefully about the details of the story under consideration (3:15).
- (b) Focus question: who heard and yet rebelled? Answer: those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses (3:16). Significance: these were the same people who began in faith (Exod 14:31). They had an “original confidence”; they had begun the race, so to speak, and were headed toward the finish line—God’s rest. But they “forgot” God and ended their lives in unbelief.
- (c) Focus question: who provoked God for forty years? Answer: those who sinned and later died in the wilderness (3:17). Significance: the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea was not an isolated event. That same generation continued to disobey God all during the years of the wilderness wandering (Num 14:44–45; 16:1–3, 41; 17:5; 20:2–5; 21:4–5; 25:1–2). There is no indication they ever genuinely repented of their unbelief and followed after God with all their heart (cf. Ps 95:10; Heb 10:26–27).
- (d) Focus question: who did God swear would not enter His rest? Answer: only those who were disobedient (3:18). Significance: the exclusion from “my rest” applied only to those who disobeyed (cf. Heb 4:6; Joshua and Caleb were the two exceptions). Those who were disqualified had no one to blame but themselves. God’s refusal to allow them into “my rest” was in response to their hard-hearted disobedience.⁹³ Had they believed and obeyed, they would have entered Canaan, conquered the land, enjoyed rest from their enemies, and eventually joined God in “my [God’s] rest” (Gen 2:2; Ps 95:11; Heb 4:2).

(3) Unbelief will keep you from entering God’s rest (3:19).

- (a) Some commentators understand this verse as introducing “the notion of the impossibility of a second repentance following apostasy.”⁹⁴ This understanding, however, does not make the best sense of the biblical data. Apostasy is not the crossing of an invisible line of no return; rather, it is a persistent, stubborn resistance to believe God (compare Ps 95:10 with Heb 10:26). Israel’s unbelief was not limited to a single occurrence at Kadesh-barnea. It was not as though they had one chance to believe God and after that there was no chance for repentance. Scripture indicates that generation persisted in unbelief and never

⁹³ Hughes, 155.

⁹⁴ O’Brien, 154.

truly repented of their disobedience (Ps 95:10).

- (i) A close look at Numbers 14:40–45 and Deuteronomy 1:41–46 reveals that Israel’s “repentance” involved direct disobedience of God’s command (Num 14:41; Deut 1:43). Such repentance was not genuine, but was like Saul telling Samuel, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel” (1 Sam 15:24–31), and like Esau desperately pleading with Isaac to change his mind and give him the blessing (Gen 27:34, 38, 41–42; 28:8–9; Heb 12:16–17).⁹⁵
- (b) The exclusion of the Exodus generation from “my rest” was *not* the penalty for their rebellion at Kadesh-barnea. Rather, it was the penalty for their persistent unbelief.
 - (i) After the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea and the people’s attempt to stone Moses, God told Moses that He was going to kill that entire generation (Num 14:11–12). Moses interceded out of concern for God’s reputation, and God “pardoned” the Israelites (this was not forgiveness for their unbelief—which they never repented of—but pardon from the penalty of immediate death).
 - (ii) God then stated the consequences for their sin: a) that generation would not enter Canaan, and b) that generation would wander in the wilderness until their death. These consequences were the penalty for the rebellion and they were unalterable, just as Moses’ punishment for striking the rock could not be changed (Num 20:11–12, 24; Deut 3:23–27).
 - (iii) However, as we have already established above, “my rest” does not refer to the rest in Canaan. Thus that generation’s exclusion from “my rest” was not unchangeable. Over the next 38 years, they had many chances to repent of their disobedience—but they never did. God swore they would never enter “my rest” not because of the incident at Kadesh-barnea, but because they persisted for the rest of their lives in a hardened state of unbelief (Ps 95:10).
- C) “Let us fear”—it is possible to miss God’s rest (4:1–10).
 - (1) The “promise of entering his [God’s] rest still stands” (4:1a).
 - (a) The concept of “rest” was introduced in Hebrews 3:11 (quoting Ps 95:11b) in the context of the Exodus generation. Recall that God promised the Israelites rest from their enemies in the land of Canaan (cf. Exod 33:14; Deut 3:20; 12:9–10; 25:17–19; Josh 1:13–15). The book of Joshua records that this was fulfilled at the end of the conquest (Josh 21:44; 22:4; 23:1). How then can the writer of

⁹⁵ Esau’s crying and weeping did not come from a repentant heart; rather, it came from a heart angry and sorrowful over not getting what it wanted. Hebrews 12:16–17 should be understood as Esau’s desperate attempts to get Isaac to change his mind (“repent”) and not as his own repentance—so the NIV: “He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.”

Hebrews claim that the promise of entering God's rest still stands? The answer is that "my rest" in Psalm 95:11 refers to something other than rest in Canaan. The author will go on to prove this in vv. 3b–9.

(2) It is possible to miss God's rest (4:1b–2).

(a) The word "seem" (*doke*) is best understood in a forensic sense as "to be found, to be judged to be."⁹⁶ The word "failed to reach" (*hysterekenai*) has the idea of "coming short, missing out, being excluded" (Matt 19:20; Rom 3:23; Heb 12:15).⁹⁷ Why should the readers be afraid? Because the "good news" was preached to them, just as it was to Israel (originally in Exod 3:14–17; 4:27–31; 6:6–9 and again in Num 13:30; 14:7–9; Deut 1:29–31). Yet the message did not benefit Israel. Why not? Because Israel did not believe.⁹⁸ The point is that unbelief will prevent a believer from entering God's rest (4:1b–2).

(3) We who have believed are entering that rest (4:3a).

(a) Since the promise of entering God's rest applies only to those who believe (3:19), v. 3a is another way of saying what the author said previously in v. 1a. In light of the context (2:1–3; 3:1), the aorist participle "have believed," *hoi pisteusantes*, is best rendered by a past tense. The present tense verb "enter," *eiserchometha*, is placed emphatically at the beginning of the sentence, and is a key interpretive issue in this passage.

(b) When do we as believers "enter" God's rest? This question is not easily answered due to the apparent discrepancy of tenses within 4:1–11. On the one hand, the future aspect of the "rest" is underscored by its character as a "promise" (v. 1) that can be missed by the readers (10:36, 39). The audience is exhorted to "strive to enter that rest" (v. 11), as if they have not yet entered it but may in the future. On the other hand, the author says that we who "have believed enter that rest" (v. 3) and "whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works" (v. 10).⁹⁹

(c) The best solution is to understand v. 3 as referring to progressive or continuous action, "we who have believed are entering that rest,"¹⁰⁰ and to understand v. 10

⁹⁶ So Moffatt, 50; Attridge, 124; Michel, 191; Grasser, 1:201–2; Weiss, 275; and O'Brien, 161.

⁹⁷ Allen, 273; Lane, 1:94; O'Brien, 160.

⁹⁸ The MSS preserve a variety of readings. Some have the participle "united" agreeing with "message" yielding the translation "those who heard did not combine it [the message] with faith" (NIV). The UBSGNT has the participle agreeing with "they" yielding the translation "they were not united by faith with those who listened [believed]" (ESV). This last translation agrees best with 10:39. See O'Brien, 162 and Lane, 94.

⁹⁹ David A. deSilva, "Entering God's Rest: Eschatology and the Socio-Rhetorical Strategy of Hebrews," *Trinity Journal* 21:1 (Spring 2000), 30–31.

¹⁰⁰ "The journey of the wilderness generation is over. They could not enter in (3:19) is the conclusion of their story. Our journey, however, is in progress. We are in the process of entering rest." Cockerill, 205. Also Attridge, 126.

as referring to those who have died in faith¹⁰¹ and so have “entered God’s rest” (cf. Rev 14:13). Thus we have a continuum—we are entering God’s rest by faith in the present and will enjoy it fully in the future (similar to how we are presently being saved and yet will be saved in the future; cf. 1 Cor. 1:18 with Rom 5:9–10).¹⁰²

- (d) This understanding preserves the true force of v. 11: we must “strive to enter that rest” because as long as we are in this present world, it is possible to turn away from God into destruction. The author of Hebrews consistently places his readers on the doorstep of entering their great reward (cf. 10:19–23, 35–39). He assures them of its present reality, but warns them that its final fulfillment is conditioned on their continuing commitment to Christ.¹⁰³ Our earthly life is the process of crossing the eternal threshold into a “better country” (11:16).

(4) Definition of “my rest” (4:3b–4).

- (a) The author prefaces his definition of “rest” by quoting Psalm 95:11 (4:3b). His intent is for the readers to focus on the word “my” in the phrase “They shall not enter my rest.” The pronoun “my” uniquely identifies the “rest” as belonging to and enjoyed by God Himself. This means that the rest we are entering (4:3a) is God’s own rest.
- (b) What is God’s rest? It is a rest: 1) enjoyed by God in the past (it is described as “my rest” in the time of the Exodus generation and the psalmist), 2) currently enjoyed by God (it is offered “Today,” that is “now”), and 3) enjoyed by God into eternity.¹⁰⁴
- (c) The only “rest” that meets the criteria above is the rest described in Genesis 2:2–3: “And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”¹⁰⁵ Thus the author of Hebrews defines “my rest” as the rest God has been enjoying since the creation of the world—long before the time of the Exodus and David (4:3c–4). It is amazing to think that God offers us the opportunity to share with Him in a rest that will last for eternity.

¹⁰¹ So Cockerill, 210–11; O’Brien, 172; Hughes, 161.

¹⁰² Guthrie, 152. Also Andrew T. Lincoln, “Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, edited by D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 211.

¹⁰³ deSilva, 33.

¹⁰⁴ Hughes, 159.

¹⁰⁵ “The association is intrinsic: if one wanted to understand what God meant when he said ‘my rest,’ one must go to the place in Scripture that describes God’s resting.” Cockerill, 207.

(5) It remains for some to enter it [God's rest] (4:5–8).

- (a) Having defined “my rest” as the rest God entered after the end of His creative work, the author again quotes Psalm 95:11b (4:5). His focus in v. 5 is on the word “They” in the phrase “They shall not enter my rest.” God’s oath of exclusion applied only to the generation of the Exodus—it follows that there must be others to whom the exclusion does not apply.¹⁰⁶ Thus the author says, “it remains for some to enter it” (4:6a).
- (b) The author continues by reminding his readers why the Exodus generation was excluded from God’s rest: “because of disobedience” (4:6b). But there is good news! The Holy Spirit revealed in Psalm 95:7b that the opportunity of entering God’s rest is “Today” (4:7). The logic is as follows: if the Holy Spirit warned people during the time of David¹⁰⁷ about the danger of not entering God’s rest, then the possibility of entering God’s rest was not limited to the Exodus generation. That generation’s persistent rebellion prevented *them* from entering God’s rest, but the opportunity did not end with them—it is available “Today” (4:6b–7).
- (c) But doesn’t the rest mentioned in Psalm 95:11 refer to the rest of Canaan? The author responds to this unspoken question in v. 8: if Joshua had given Israel the “rest” mentioned in Psalm 95:11 (and he did give them rest from their enemies—Josh 21:44), then “God would not have spoken of another day later on” (4:8). What day was spoken of later on by God? It is the “Today” of Psalm 95:7b. “Today” is a moving “now,” so to speak—a present availability that continues for each person until their death or the return of Jesus Christ.

(6) There remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God (4:9–10).

- (a) The author concludes this section by restating that the promise of entering God’s rest remains open to the present day, and will continue to remain open as long as it is called “Today” (cf. 3:13).
- (b) Up to now, the author has used the word *katapausis* for the word “rest.” In v. 9 he introduces a new word—“Sabbath-rest,” *sabbatismos*.¹⁰⁸ Why did the author do this? Verse 10 gives us a contextual answer: he wanted to emphasize what *kind of rest* remains for “the people of God”—it is a rest from their “works” (4:10). What better way to invoke the concept of resting from your “works” than the word *sabbatismos*? *Sabbatismos* allowed the author to encapsulate the data related to God’s rest (Gen 2:2–3; Exod 20:8–11) in a single word.

¹⁰⁶ Lane, 1:100.

¹⁰⁷ The psalm itself has no mark of authorship; the writer of Hebrews credits David as author.

¹⁰⁸ The word occurs only here in the NT, and this is the earliest occurrence of the word in extant Greek literature. Lane, 1:101.

(c) As mentioned previously, it is best to understand v. 10 as referring to those who have died in the faith and so have entered fully and completely into God's rest (something which believers are entering now but cannot completely experience in this earthly life).¹⁰⁹ What "works" are they resting from? In Hebrews, when the author uses the word "works," *ergon*, in reference to the activities of believers, it means loving service to God and others (Heb 6:10; 10:24; cf. Eph 2:10). Since our works are not limited to this world (we will also spend eternity in active service to God—2 Tim 2:12; Rev 5:10; 20:6; 22:5), it seems best to understand these works as those done while here on this present earth (cf. Rev 14:13).

(d) How does resting from our works correspond to God resting from His "works"? The relation is not one of equivalence—God is resting from His *creative* work, something unique to Him as Creator. Also, God's rest is not one of inactivity—He continues to be active in the world today (John 5:17).¹¹⁰ Rather, God rests from His creative work in the sense that it is finished and complete—He enjoys the celebratory completion of a specific, worthy endeavor.¹¹¹ This corresponds to the believer who rests from his labor in Christ. His work is finished, and he enjoys the satisfaction and pride of a job well done.

(7) God's rest is a rest:

- that God entered upon the completion of His creative work (Heb 4:3c–4, 10; Gen 2:2–3).
- that the Exodus generation was excluded from because of their unbelief (Heb 3:19; 4:2, 6; Ps 95:11).
- that Moses and Joshua did not provide (Heb 4:8; Ps 95:7b).
- that the Holy Spirit said is offered "Today" (Heb 4:1, 9; Ps 95:7b).
- that believers are entering by faith in the present (Heb 4:1b, 3a).
- whose complete fulfillment is yet future (Heb 4:1, 11; 10:36, 39).
- from our labor for Christ in this present world (Heb 4:9–10; Rev 14:13).
- that we should fear falling short of (Heb 4:1).
- that we should strive to enter (Heb 4:11).

D) Let us "strive" to enter God's rest (4:11–13).

(1) In light of the fact that it is possible to turn away from God and be excluded from His rest, the author urges his readers to "strive," *spoudasomen*, to enter that rest (4:11a). The word "strive" means to "make every possible effort."¹¹² If all the readers do this, none of them will "fall by the same sort of disobedience" (4:11b).

¹⁰⁹ Cockerill, 211–12.

¹¹⁰ Hughes, 161.

¹¹¹ Ernst Kasemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville and Irving L. Sandberg (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House), 1984, 108.

¹¹² Allen, 283; Lane, 94; O'Brien, 172.

- (2) The motivation for the readers' zealous effort¹¹³ is given in vv. 12–13: the Word of God is able to see into their souls—it can discern their true motives and intentions, and they cannot hide anything from Him “to whom we must give account” (4:12–13).

¹¹³ O'Brien, 174.

*Exposition (4:14–5:10)**OT Citations: Ps 2:7; 110:4*

7) Jesus is our “great high priest” (4:14–5:10).

A) Christ—our empathetic high priest (4:14–16).

- (1) The writer of Hebrews begins the transitional section of 4:14–16 with a series of statements about Christ: 1) Jesus is a great high priest, 2) Jesus has passed through the heavens into the presence of God, 3) Jesus is the Son of God. These statements form the basis for the first exhortation—“let us hold fast our confession” (4:14). This is a challenge to remain committed to the core of the gospel, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The verb *krateo* can refer to the grasping of a person, such as when Jesus grasped the hand of a sick person (Mark 1:31; 9:27). Here the word refers to remaining true to the faith, to not letting go of what is believed. The noun *homologia* refers to the content of the faith, specific statements that summarize the truth of the gospel (e.g. “Jesus is the Son of God”).
- (2) Jesus’ exalted position in heaven at the right hand of God may tempt us to see Him as distant from the troubles and trials of this earthly life (4:15). But not so!
 - (a) Jesus is not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. The verb *sumpatheo* means “to feel with” someone. The same word is used in 10:34 of the readers showing compassion (sympathy) to those in prison. This word means more than a mere understanding of another’s feelings—it implies entering into their emotions, experiencing their struggles and giving them encouragement and help.¹¹⁴
 - (i) The noun *astheneia* refers to the normal limits and frailties of our current physical existence: we get hungry without food, tired without sleep, cold without clothing, stressed without relaxation, etc. Jesus knows what it is to be human because He became one of us (cf. 5:2; not in same sense as 7:28). Jesus had normal desires for food, sleep, love, etc. He knew what it felt like to lose a friend. He knew how it felt to be betrayed by someone close to Him. He experienced being attracted to the opposite sex. He understood the fear of physical pain. Indeed, it’s amazing to think that our great high priest who now sits enthroned in majesty knows what it’s like to be hot, sweaty and dusty, and longing for a bath.
 - (b) Jesus was in every respect tempted as we are. The devil loves to take advantage of our physical existence. He tempted Jesus in the same way he tempts us—to satisfy our desires by violating the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

¹¹⁴ Lane, 1:108.

- (i) Matthew 4 records three examples of Jesus being tempted in this manner: 1) Satan tempted Jesus to satisfy His hunger by acting on His own initiative and power when the Spirit was leading Him to fast, 2) Satan tempted Jesus to save His lost sheep by performing a sign that would cause Israel to believe in Him when the Spirit was leading Him to preach in parables (Matt 13:11–15), 3) Satan tempted Jesus to avoid the pain and agony of the cross by bowing down in worship when the Spirit was leading Him to suffer at the hands of the Jews. These examples point to the fact that Jesus experienced the same kinds of temptations faced by all of us (it should be noted that Jesus was not born a sinner by nature as we are, and thus He experienced no inner bent or tendency to sin).

- (c) Jesus' only difference from us is found in His response—He did not sin (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). This statement is not meant to remind us of our failures. It is meant to encourage us to imitate Christ. Jesus can give us the grace and strength we need to overcome temptation.
 - (i) This particular verse often comes up in the theological discussion of the peccability/impeccability of Christ. The word “peccability” comes from the Latin, *posit non peccare* which means “able not to sin.” The word “impeccability” comes from the Latin, *non posit peccare* which means “not able to sin.” Since this verse states that Jesus was tempted but did not sin, the question naturally arises, “Could Jesus really have sinned?”

 - (ii) It is important to distinguish between Jesus' humanity and Jesus' divinity. God cannot get tired (Isa 40:28), but Jesus got tired (John 4:6). God cannot be tempted (Jam 1:13), but Jesus was tempted (Heb 4:15). This means that what is true of God cannot be applied without qualification to Christ.

 - (iii) Jesus Christ is the God-Man. This uniqueness creates difficulties for our minds, which tend to focus on one nature of Christ's person to the exclusion of the other. Jesus could have sinned, but he chose not to sin. This choice was made through the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, not through the power of His divinity. Christ lived a life of dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit in order to set an example for how we should live (cf. 1 Pet 2:21; 1 John 2:6; John 13:15).

- (3) The empathy of Christ forms the basis (“therefore”) for the second exhortation—“let us come with confidence to the throne of grace” (4:16). The force of the present tense of *proserchomai* could be rendered, “let us come again and again to the throne of grace.” We now enjoy immediate and direct access to the presence of God through the person of Jesus Christ. We do not need to come in fear or uncertainty; rather, we can come with *parresia*, with confidence. *Parresia* (from *pan* + *resia* = full story) in ancient Greece denoted the right of a full citizen to speak his mind on any

subject in the town assembly—a right that the slave did not have.¹¹⁵ And what is God’s response? He extends us mercy and provides us with the grace we need to endure in time of need.

B) Christ—qualified for and appointed by God as high priest (5:1–5:10).

- (1) Qualifications for the position of high priest (5:1–4). The two qualifications mentioned here are: a) solidarity with humanity (5:1–3) and b) divine appointment (5:4).
 - (a) Chosen from among men (5:1). Only a man is qualified to serve as the representative of mankind before God. No angel, for example, would be capable of assuming such an office (cf. 2:14). This verse continues the theme of 2:10–18: the Son of God became a man so that He might be like us “in every respect” (2:17).
 - (b) Appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, especially through offering gifts and sacrifices for sins (5:1). The high priest shared in the general responsibilities of all the priests (Exod 29:1–46; Lev 1–6). However, the high priest alone offered the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:1–25).¹¹⁶ The phrase “gifts and sacrifices” is most likely a reference to this special day, when the high priest was the central functionary and when both vegetable and animal sacrifices were offered.¹¹⁷
 - (c) Deals gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness (5:2). The word “deal gently” (*metriopathein*) denotes a happy medium between two extremes. The high priest could respond in either harsh anger or indulgence toward those who are “ignorant and erring” (*agnoousin kai planomenois*). But the high priest was able to maintain a balanced response to the people’s sin because he himself was subject to the same “weakness” (*astheneiar*). The addition of temptation to such weakness often resulted in sin (contra the emphasis of 4:15—“yet without sin” in Jesus’ case). Even Aaron, the first high priest, succumbed to the pressure of the people and created the golden calf for them to worship (Exod 32:1–6).
 - (d) Offers sacrifices for his own sins just as he does for the people’s sins (5:3). Human weakness combined with temptation often results in sin—this is the backdrop of verse three. Because of this, “for this reason,” the high priest must offer a special sacrifice for himself and his household before he can offer the goat sacrifices on behalf of the people (Lev 16:11). Once this was complete, two goats and a ram were selected from among the Israelites (Lev 16:5). After casting lots for the goats, the high priest slaughtered one of them as a sin offering “for

¹¹⁵ Neil R. Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today: A Commentary on Hebrews*, p. 101.

¹¹⁶ Guthrie, 187.

¹¹⁷ Lightfoot, 106.

the people” (Lev 16:15), and the other goat was brought forth alive from the tent. The high priest laid his hands on the head of the “scapegoat,” confessing all the sins of the people before the Lord, then sent the goat away into the desert (Lev 16:20–22). By carrying out this part of God’s instructions for the Day of Atonement, the high priest acted before God as a representative on behalf of the people, making atonement for their sins.¹¹⁸

- (e) Does not take the office for himself, but is chosen by God (5:4). The office of high priest was not something which men could aspire to hold. Only God could confer that honor. A high priest was God-appointed, not self-appointed. Aaron, as first high priest, is the principle example of this truth. Even Aaron’s descendants could not assume the office based on heredity—God appointed Eleazar and Phinehas just as He had appointed Aaron (Num 20:23–29; 25:10–13). In the lifetime of Aaron, Korah and his followers were destroyed precisely because they sought to usurp the Aaronic privilege of burning incense to the Lord (Num 16; cf. Saul in 1 Sam 13:8–14 and Uzziah in 2 Chr 26:16–21).
- (2) Jesus Christ meets the qualifications for high priest (5:5–10). Jesus meets the two qualifications given in the previous verses: divine appointment and solidarity with humanity (presented in reverse order so that 5:1–10 forms a chiasm with 5:1–4 mirrored by 5:5–10).
 - (a) Christ did not exalt Himself as High Priest, but was chosen by God (5:5–6). Just as Aaron did not take the office of high priest for himself, so also Christ did not assume the office of high priest on his own initiative—He “did not glorify Himself” (cf. John 8:54). Rather, Jesus was glorified by the Father who said to Him, “You are My Son” and “You are a priest forever.” The author quotes Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4 as evidence of the divine appointment of the Messiah as high priest.
 - (i) The question has been raised: why quote Psalm 2:7 when Psalm 110:4 seems sufficient to support the author’s argument? The answer seems to lie in the fact that the author desired to bring together in one person (Messiah) the concepts of king and priest. These two concepts are the heart of the Christology of Hebrews. Psalm 2:7–9 and Psalm 110:1 (cf. 1:13) predicted the Messiah’s reign. Psalm 110:4 predicted the Messiah’s priesthood. The same God who appointed Jesus as “My Son” also appointed Him a “high priest forever” (cf. 6:20; 7:17, 21, 24, 28). We have a great high priest, Jesus the Son of God, and it is as the Son that He carries out His vocation of high priest.¹¹⁹ No other NT writer refers to Psalm 110:4, but the author of Hebrews quotes it three times (cf. 7:17, 21) and alludes to it eight more times (in ch. 5–7).

¹¹⁸ Guthrie, 187.

¹¹⁹ James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 64.

- (b) While here on earth, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications (5:7). The phrase “in the days of His flesh” (*sarx*) refers to Christ’s earthly ministry, and some have suggested that verses 7–8 hint at a specific event: the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus offered (*prosenenkas*, a mirror of 5:3) up “prayers and supplications” (*deeseis te kai hiketerias*) with “loud cries and tears” (*krauges ischyras kai dakryon*). While Jesus certainly prayed many times over the course of His earthly ministry, the most emotional time of prayer recorded in the Gospels is Jesus’ agony in the Garden (Matt 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:40–46; see John 12:27–28).
- (i) What is the parallel between Jesus’ “prayers and supplications” and the “gifts and sacrifices” of the high priest? While the high priest offered up something other than himself, Jesus was, in a very literal sense, offering up Himself—His body, His blood, His prayers, His very emotions.
- (ii) If Jesus prayed to the One able “to save Him from death” and He was “heard,” then how do we explain Jesus’ death? Being saved “from death” does not necessarily mean being saved “from dying.” It can signify being saved “out of (the state or realm) of death.” It was God’s will for Jesus to suffer death on the cross, but God did not leave Jesus in the grave—God saved Him from death by resurrecting Him from the tomb.¹²⁰
- (iii) Why was Jesus heard? Because of His “fear” (*eulabeia*). The NIV renders this as “reverent submission.” The author is speaking of Jesus’ reverent attitude toward God and His humble submission to God’s will. It was for this reason that His prayer was heard (contrast with Esau, who wept at the loss of his birthright but whose cry was not heard; cf. Heb 12:17; note Matt 8:12; 22:13).¹²¹
- (c) Although He was God’s Son, Jesus “learned” (*emathen*) obedience through what he “suffered” (*epathen*; 5:8; note the Greek wordplay, similar to our “No pain, no gain”¹²²). How could Jesus, who was always obedient to the will of the Father, learn obedience through suffering? This verse does not imply that Jesus had previously been disobedient and needed to learn what it meant to obey. Instead, it means that Jesus’ inner attitude of submission to God had to be put to the test in order for Him to demonstrate true obedience (cf. God’s reaction to Abraham’s obedience in Gen 22:12). While Jesus suffered at various times during His earthly ministry, the context of this verse is that of His final suffering of death on the cross.
- (d) Jesus was “made perfect” and became the “source of eternal salvation” (5:9). This verse echoes 2:10. Jesus was made “perfect” (*teleiotheis*) in the sense that

¹²⁰ O’Brien, 198.

¹²¹ O’Brien, 198.

¹²² David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Hebrews in Social-Scientific Perspective*, 11.

He was “brought to His goal”—He was made fully qualified and equipped for His office of high priest (cf. 2:17; 7:28). It was through the experience of a sacrificial death that Jesus was able to become the “source” (*aitios*) of eternal salvation to all who “obey Him.” “There is something appropriate in the fact that the salvation which was procured by the obedience of the Redeemer should be made available to the obedience of the redeemed.”¹²³

- (e) Jesus was called by God a high priest in the order of Melchizedek (5:10). When did Jesus become high priest? The context of the passage, including the important juxtaposition of Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4, points to the resurrection of Christ as the time when Jesus was called a “priest” (the fact that Jesus is “high priest” is implied but not explained until Hebrews 7). “We thus conclude that Jesus entered into the high priestly office upon completion of the atonement made by his death on the cross and his resurrection/ascension/exaltation to the right hand of God.”¹²⁴
- (f) “The application to Christ of what has been said in vv. 1–4 about priests in general now ends. This section (vv. 5–10) of the paragraph closes as it began, with a reaffirmation of God’s appointment of Christ as high priest (vv. 5–6). The final comment about a high priest in the order of Melchizedek, while climaxing the initial development of the priestly theme (4:14–5:10), ends on a rather enigmatic note. Melchizedek is an obscure figure. How Jesus resembles him and what it means to be a priest ‘in the order of Melchizedek’ are not explained. This reference in v. 10 anticipates the full explanation which chapter 7 will provide, but only after the powerful exhortatory section of 5:11–6:20. Apparently, the author is building a dramatic tension into the development of his theme, arousing the hearers’ curiosity about what is to come. This is powerful rhetorically, since it helps to hold the attention of those who are sluggish in their hearing (5:11).”¹²⁵

¹²³ Bruce, 133.

¹²⁴ Allen, 331.

¹²⁵ O’Brien, 202.

Exhortation (5:11–6:8) — Third Warning

8) Third warning—the danger of apostasy (5:11–6:8).

A) Confrontation—you have become “dull of hearing” (5:11–14).

(1) The reader’s condition (5:11–12b).

- (a) “About this” (*peri hou*) the author has “much to say” (5:11a). If the pronoun *hou* is taken as masculine, then the reference is to Melchizedek; if taken as neuter, then the reference is to the priesthood of Christ in its totality.¹²⁶ The expression “much to say” was a common idiom used when a writer wished to draw attention to the importance of the topic to be discussed.
- (b) But it is “hard to explain” (*dysermeneutos*). The word occurs only here in the NT. It was normally used in Hellenistic literature to describe the complexity of the subject matter being discussed rather than a lack of skill in the writer or his audience. However, the next clause “since you have become dull of hearing,” indicates that the difficulty is not only caused by the topic being addressed, but by the condition of the readers.
- (c) The word “dull” (*nothroi*), meant “sluggish, lazy or negligent.” It was used in extrabiblical literature, for example, of 1) a slave with ears “stopped up” by laziness, who was not instantly obedient to the call of his master; 2) an athletic competitor who was out of shape and sluggish; 3) a man who was called “negligent” for not carrying out a task which was his responsibility.¹²⁷ Thus the word connotes culpable negligence or laziness in some aspect of life. This is clarified by the indirect object “hearing” (*akoais*). The author is telling his readers that their hearing (i.e., their responsiveness to what they heard) has become sluggish. They were no longer responding in immediate obedience to the truth of God’s Word (cf. 2:1–4; 3:7–19; 4:12–13).
- (d) Indeed, by this time “you ought” (*opheilontes*) to be “teachers” (*didaskaloi*) (5:12a). The word *opheilontes* conveys the notion of duty. There is an expectation that with the passage of time, Christians should be growing and maturing in the faith. This spiritual growth will naturally develop into our becoming “teachers.” The word *didaskaloi* refers to the capacity to teach others, not necessarily the office or gift of teaching.¹²⁸ The implication is that the audience should be able to instruct other less mature believers. This is not an unusual expectation—it is normal.

¹²⁶ Lane, 1:136.¹²⁷ Guthrie, 202.¹²⁸ Allen, 335.

- (i) What exactly should mature believers be able to teach to younger Christians? The “basic truths of God’s Word” (*ta stoicheia tes arches ton logion tou theou*). The noun, *stoicheion*, means “elementary concept, basic or fundamental principle,” and can be used of the letters of the alphabet—hence the NEB translation: “the ABCs of God’s oracles” (see 6:1–2 for examples).
- (ii) Is the author serious when he tells his audience: you “need someone to teach you again” these basic truths? Probably not. This is most likely said for the purpose of irony and with a touch of sarcasm. The writer is trying to provoke a response from his “sluggish” audience.¹²⁹

(2) A contrasting illustration (5:12c-14).

- (a) The author continues this provocation by stating that they need “milk” not “solid food” (5:12c). In the educational system of the ancient world, the distinction between those at an elementary stage of instruction and those who had attained an advanced stage was commonly expressed with the comparison of infants who require a diet of milk and adults who can enjoy solid food.¹³⁰
- (b) The writer expands on his previous statement by explaining the spiritual sense of the metaphors “milk” and “solid food” (5:13–14). Those who partake of milk are infants—they are “unskilled in the word of righteousness.” Those who partake of solid food are mature/perfect—they have “their powers of discernment trained by constant practice (*hexin ta gegymnasmata*) to distinguish (*diakrisin*) good from evil.”
 - (i) Ellingworth and Nida paraphrase the meaning of vv. 13–14 as: “Anyone who lives on milk is a baby who does not know by experience what is right. But mature people, on the other hand, can take solid food, because they have learned by practice and training to be sensitive to the difference between good and evil.”¹³¹ For the author of Hebrews, “good” has primary reference to theological truth—the supremacy of Christ and His covenant. The “evil” would refer to any theology that would turn the believer away from Christ.
 - (ii) Milk is a predigested food. Someone else has taken in solid food and converted it into a substance that is more easily eaten by the very young. This is necessary because babies don’t have the capacity (i.e. teeth) to nourish themselves. In the same way, new converts don’t have the capacity (i.e. knowledge-base and experience) to take in God’s Word and apply it in the discernment of good and evil (cf. 5:14). They need help in understanding what God’s Word means and guidance in how to apply it in their daily lives.

¹²⁹ Lane, 1:138; Cockerill, 257–58.

¹³⁰ Lane, 1:138.

¹³¹ Paul Ellingworth and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 105.

As time passes, their knowledge of the truth will grow and their experience in discernment will develop.

(3) Summary.

(a) The writer is confronting his audience over their unresponsiveness to the truth. In order to provoke them to action, he paints a contrast between the immature (spiritual babies) and the mature (spiritual adults). The who are immature: 1) need to be taught the ABCs of God's Word, 2) are unskilled in discerning good from evil. Those who are mature: 1) are able to teach others, 2) have trained themselves through practice to distinguish good from evil. The author prods his readers by telling them that their "sluggishness" in obeying the truth will cause them to regress into immaturity. The implication is that unless we are maturing, we will inevitably begin to slip back into immaturity.

B) Challenge—allow the Spirit to carry you forward to maturity! (6:1–3).

(1) The verse begins with "Therefore let us" rather than "Nevertheless" (6:1a) The writer did not consider his audience to be actual spiritual infants. (If so, he would not have chastised them; he would have paused and dealt with the primary instruction they needed.) Rather the author believes his audience to be capable of more, and he is provoking and encouraging them to continue in spiritual growth and maturity. The fact that he goes on to give them "solid food" in the following chapters is a clear indication of what he thought them truly capable of receiving.¹³²

(a) Throughout his exhortations, the author includes himself by using the plural pronouns "we" and "us" (6:1b). The switch back and forth between "you/I" and "we/us" was common to the style of preaching found in the Greek speaking Jewish synagogues of the period.¹³³

(2) Leave the elementary teachings of Christ (6:1c). They are not to abandon these teachings, but rather build on them like a builder constructing a building. Most commentators agree that verses 6:1b–2 contain some (but not all) of what the author terms "elementary teachings of Christ."

(3) Be carried forward to maturity/perfection (6:1d). The verb rendered "go on" (*pherometha*) is from the word meaning "bring" or "carry" (*phero*). Here it appears in the passive voice and pictures the believer being carried forward to maturity. There is nothing of self-effort here; we are not to be struggling to gain maturity on our own. "The author is saying, as it were, 'lift your sails and allow yourselves to be borne along to maturity by the Holy Spirit of God.' This same idea of being carried forward by God is found in Romans 8:14, where Paul declares that "all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God," and in 2 Peter 1:21, where Peter, using the

¹³² Lane, 1:140, points out what happens exegetically when we fail to appreciate the irony of 5:11–14.

¹³³ Guthrie, 204.

same Greek verb as our author uses here, asserts that the prophets “were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” It is the power of the Holy Spirit that is the true dynamic of Christian growth!”¹³⁴

- (4) Not laying again a foundation of (6:1e)¹³⁵: What is interesting about the list that follows in 6:1b–2 is how little that is specifically Christian it appears to contain. There is no mention of Christ, even in connection with faith. Other items on the list, such as the laying on of hands, are characteristically Jewish; and when the author speaks of washings, one thinks at once of the many ritual cleansings required in the OT. Because of this some have argued that the entire exhortation must be seen as an attempt by the writer to move his readers beyond matters that are basically Jewish to the distinctive truths of Christianity.¹³⁶ But this is not necessary. The items in the list are characteristic of the evangelistic preaching and practice of the apostles as recounted in Acts and are well illustrated by the content of Peter’s address to a Jewish audience on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22ff.). This message evoked the response of repentance, faith and baptism. After that, “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42).¹³⁷

(a) Repentance from dead works and faith toward God (6:1f).

- (i) Dead works (6:1f). Faith without works is dead (Jam 2:14–26). The opposite is also true: works without faith is dead. Indeed, everything we do in an unregenerate state is tainted by self and sin, and a sinner’s “righteousness” is as “filthy rags” before God (Isa 64:6). The first part of the phrase marks a turning *from* sin, while the second part marks a turning *to* God.
- (ii) Faith toward God (6:1f). This is saving faith—faith that believes what God has said and obeys what God has commanded.

(b) Instructions about washings and laying on of hands (6:2a):

- (i) Washings (6:2a). The word here is *baptismon*. It is a plural form of *baptismos*, a term which in its other NT usages refers to ceremonial washings practiced by the Jews (cf. 9:10; Mark 7:4; the word *baptisma* is ordinarily used to denote Christian baptism).¹³⁸ One would expect the usage of the word in this passage to refer to the ritual of baptism following conversion and so the

¹³⁴ David A. Black, “On Pressing On,” Article concerning the translation of the ISV. Online: <http://isvbible.com/musings/musing03.htm>.

¹³⁵ “The genitive case has the majority of witnesses, but a number of scholars take it in the accusative case. All things considered, it seems best to categorize the statements into three groups of pairs arranged perhaps temporally with the first pair focusing on the past, the second pair focusing on the present, and the third pair focusing on the future.” Allen, 341.

¹³⁶ Lightfoot, 120.

¹³⁷ Hughes, 195–6.

¹³⁸ Lightfoot, 121.

plural form is puzzling. From an exegetical standpoint, it seems best to remember that a single person could conceivably have undergone, in sequence, a pagan baptism, a Jewish-proselyte baptism, circumcision, the baptism of John and finally the baptism of Christ. An instruction concerning baptisms, therefore, could well involve helping a believer understand the distinctions between other washings and baptism into Christ (cf. Acts 19:1–7).¹³⁹

(ii) Laying on of hands (6:2a).

(1) In the OT, laying on of hands was associated with:

- (A) Blessing (Gen 48:14, 17–20).
- (B) Sacrifices (transference of guilt; identification with; implied consecration) (Lev 3:1–2, 8, 13; 4:4; 8:14, 22; 16:21; Num 8:12).
- (C) Ordaining for service (Num 27:18–23; Deut 34:9).
- (D) Judgment (Lev 24:14).

(2) In the Gospels, laying on of hands was associated with:

- (A) Blessing (Matt 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17).
- (B) Healing (Matt 9:18, 25; Mark 6:5; Luke 4:40; Luke 13:13).

(3) In the early church, laying on of hands was associated with:

- (A) Healing (Mark 16:15–20; Acts 5:12; 9:12, 17; 28:8).
- (B) The Holy Spirit and Spirit-given gifts (Acts 8:14–17; 9:17; 19:6; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6).
- (C) Appointment for service (Acts 6:1–6; 13:1–3; 1 Tim 5:19–22).

(4) In Acts, baptism and the laying on of hands were closely connected with each other. Generally, baptism preceded laying on of hands (cf. Acts 8:16ff.; 19:5f.) but at least on one occasion this order was reversed (Acts 9:17ff.). The conferring of the Holy Spirit was associated with the laying on of hands in these particular instances; but the reception of the Holy Spirit could take place before baptism and without laying on of hands (Acts 10:44, 47ff.). Indeed, the laying on of hands does not seem to have been an invariable practice: there is no mention of it, for example, in the accounts of the conversions of the three thousand on the Day of Pentecost or of Lydia or of the Philippian jailer (Acts 2:41; 16:15, 33).¹⁴⁰

(c) Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment (6:2b).

¹³⁹ Luke T. Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, (NTL), p. 159.

¹⁴⁰ Hughes, 203.

(i) Resurrection (6:2b). Resurrection was taught in the OT (Dan 12:2), and, as Jesus pointed out, it was implied when God, who is the God of the living, not of the dead, proclaimed himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:6; Mark 12:26–27). Here in 6:2 the word “dead” is plural, so that the phrase points to the future resurrection of many (13:20).¹⁴¹

(ii) Eternal judgment (6:2b).

(5) And this we will do if God permits (6:3). The author underscores our dependence on God to attain the goal of spiritual maturity.

C) Warning—you are in danger of apostasy! (6:4–8).

(1) “For [...] it is impossible to renew them again to repentance” (6:4a, 6b). The transition here from first person (“us” in v.1 and “we” in v.3) to third person (“those” in v.4 and “them” in v.6) suggests that the author does not wish to directly equate his readers with the person(s) he is about to describe.¹⁴² This is because he “feel[s] sure of better things” in the case of his audience (6:9).

(2) Who is impossible to restore? Those who [aorist tense] (6:4):

(a) Have once¹⁴³ been enlightened (6:4). This is the illumination (*photisthentas*) that results in a believing heart when it hears the preaching of the gospel. The same word occurs in Hebrews 10:32 with reference to the readers’ conversion.

(b) Have tasted the heavenly gift and (6:4). “Tasting” is a common metaphor for experiencing something—in this case, salvation. The same word is used in v. 5 and indicates a complete experience, not merely a superficial participation (there is no connotation in the word itself of tasting but not swallowing). This can be seen from the usage in Hebrews 2:9 where Jesus “tasted” death for everyone, meaning he experienced the full force of physical death.¹⁴⁴

(c) Have shared in the Holy Spirit and (6:4) To become a “partaker” of the Holy Spirit indicates primarily “participation in” and denotes a close association with the Holy Spirit, implying reception of the Him into one’s life. It may also refer to the reception of spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit (2:4), as Hughes suggests.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ O’Brien, 216.

¹⁴² Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (NIGTC), p. 318.

¹⁴³ “Once” modifies the first of the four participles in vv.4–5 and several commentators understand it to be modifying all four. It should be understood as once in the sense of “previously, at one time (as opposed to now),” although some have seen it as a reference to the completeness of their conversion, “once-for-all” (cf. Heb 9:26 where it is used of the complete, never to be repeated sacrifice of Christ).

¹⁴⁴ Allen, 349.

¹⁴⁵ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 210.

- (d) Have tasted the goodness of God’s word and the powers of the coming age and (6:5). The first part of the phrase speaks of the person’s exposure to the word of God (often called “good”: Ps 19:10; 34:8; 119:103). They had experienced that it was “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). The second part of the phrase likely refers to the “signs and wonders and various miracles” that accompanied the announcement of the gospel, and by which the saving message was verified to many in the early church, including the writer’s audience (2:3–4).¹⁴⁶
- (e) This description leads to the conclusion that it is referring to a person who is regenerate. It is difficult to image the author using such terminology to describe apparent or pseudo-believers. Grudem argues against this conclusion but not convincingly.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, there is a growing consensus across the Calvinist/Arminian divide that the language of Heb 6:4–6 describes genuine believers.¹⁴⁸ David Armistead stated, “if one follows the standard exegetical methodology of looking first at the pericope itself, honesty demands that Hebrews 6:4–8 speaks of a true Christian.”¹⁴⁹
- (i) Luther took this position, as did Arminius.¹⁵⁰ John Wesley was clear on the matter: “Must not every unprejudiced person see, the expressions here used are so strong and clear, that they cannot, without gross and palpable wrestling, be understood of any but true believers?”¹⁵¹
- (ii) For further confirmation, consider the parallel between this passage and Hebrews 10:26–29 (cf. v. 26: “after receiving the knowledge of the truth” and v. 29: “has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified”).
- (f) Have fallen away (6:6a).
- (i) The correct translation follows the previous four statements: “and [then] have fallen away” (ESV, NAS, NET, HCSB). It should not be translated “if they fall away” (KJV, NKJV, NIV84).¹⁵² There also seems to be a concessive sense to

¹⁴⁶ O’Brien, 224.

¹⁴⁷ Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints,” 139, 152 (cf. Allen, 351). He believes these entail exposure to God’s grace in a Christian setting but not conversion. See also Roger Nicole, “Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4–6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of God with the Saints”; and McKnight’s response, “Warning Passages of Hebrews,” 49–53.

¹⁴⁸ Allen, 354.

¹⁴⁹ D. Armistead, “The ‘Believer’ Who Falls Away: Heb 6:4–8 and the Perseverance of the Saints,” *Stulos Theological Journal* 4.2 (1996): 144.

¹⁵⁰ Luther, LW 29:182; J. Arminius, *A Letter on the Sin Against the Holy Spirit*, in WJA 2:511–38. Arminius takes Heb 6:6 to be an example of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as did Calvin (WJA 2:512–13).

¹⁵¹ J. Wesley, “Predestination Calmly Considered,” in *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 10:248.

¹⁵² For an excellent discussion of this issue see Fred Von Kamecke, “Implications for the Rendering of Παράπτοντας in Hebrews 6:4–6,” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 2004). His

the word: “and after all this have fallen away.”¹⁵³

- (ii) What does it mean to “fall away” (*parapesontas*)? The word occurs only here in the NT. It does occur a few times in the LXX, and is used to translate the Hebrew words *hata* (“to sin”) and *ma’al* (“to act unfaithfully”).¹⁵⁴ In extra-Biblical literature, it is used literally for missing a road and metaphorically for missing the truth.¹⁵⁵
- (iii) If we look within Hebrews itself, we find that the cognate *piptō*, meaning “to fall,” is also used in the letter. In Hebrews 4:11, the author warns of the necessity to be diligent to enter the rest, lest anyone “fall” (*piptō*). We also note the semantic connection between 6:6; 4:11 and 3:12, where the author speaks of someone who “turns away from the living God.” In 3:12 the verb is *apostenai* (“apostasy”), but the usage indicates the two verbs are conceptually related.¹⁵⁶
- (iv) Because of the link between “fall away” (*parapesontas*) and “turn away” (*apostenai*), many commentators understand *parapesontas* as referring to “apostasy.”¹⁵⁷ The common English meaning of “apostasy”¹⁵⁸ fits contextually with what is being described in Hebrews 6:4–8. However, the theological definition which sees apostasy as “an act of unpardonable rebellion against God and his truth”¹⁵⁹ carries too much of an interpretive bias.
- (v) We can define the nature of this disobedience contextually:
 - (1) It is a present tense condition—this is someone who is actively rejecting God’s gracious gift of salvation. This is not someone who is sorry for denying Christ and earnestly seeking for repentance (cf. Luke 22:62) (6:6c).

argument is summarized in his paper, “The Rendering of Παράπεσοντας in Hebrews 6:4–6,” given at the ETS Conference in San Antonio, Texas on November 18, 2004.

¹⁵³ Ellingworth, 324.

¹⁵⁴ There are eight occurrences of *parapiptō* in the LXX: Esth 6:10; Ezek 14:13; 15:8; 18:24; 20:27; 22:4 (Apocrypha: Wisdom 6:9; 12:2). Ezekiel uses *parapiptō* in the general sense of “to sin.” With the exception of Ezekiel 22:4, *parapiptō* is the equivalent for the Hebrew *ma’al*, which means “to act unfaithfully.” In fact, *parapiptō* is used in Ezekiel 14:13 and 18:24 in conjunction with the most common Hebrew verb meaning “to sin,” *hata*. Allen, 361.

¹⁵⁵ Polybius’s *History* 12.12.2 and 8.11.8. Johnson, *Hebrews*, 161.

¹⁵⁶ Lane, 1:142. The same Hebrew word, *ma’al*, often translated in the LXX by *parapiptō*, is translated with *aphistēmi* (*apostēnai*) in 2 Chronicles 26:18. The verb *parapiptō* appears interchangeable with *apostēnai* in 2 Chronicles 26:18; 28:19; 29:6; and 30:7. Hohenstein, “A Study of Hebrews 6:4–8,” 537.

¹⁵⁷ Allen, 361. For a complete discussion of whether or not this is justified see David Allen’s NAC volume on Hebrews.

¹⁵⁸ “A renunciation of a religious faith; abandonment of a previous loyalty.” Merriam-Webster.

¹⁵⁹ Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology.

- (2) This is someone who publicly accepted the Son of God and now is openly rejecting Him. Their rejection is equivalent to participating in His state execution. When they deny Him openly, they are holding Him up for public ridicule (6:6c).
- (3) This is someone who had the rain of God's grace and mercy fall on their lives and rather than bearing righteous fruit, they are instead producing thorns and thistles (6:7–8).
- (4) This is someone who continues to sin knowingly, deliberately, refusing to repent when God's Spirit speaks to their heart. When they do this, they are trampling the Son of God underfoot, profaning the blood of the covenant by which they were at one time sanctified and are outraging the Spirit of grace (10:26, 29).
- (5) This is someone who has an evil, unbelieving heart and is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. This person is just like those who rebelled against Moses and whose bodies fell in the wilderness (3:12–13).

(vi) How could this happen to someone who was once a believer?

- (1) Consider those who were led out of Egypt by the mighty hand of God. How could anyone experience such miracles (plagues, Red Sea, etc.) and yet still harden their hearts in unbelief? Sin is deceitful. It begins with what seems to be a justified complaint, but its end is unbelief and rebellion. Satan tempted the Israelites to doubt God's goodness and question His purpose (1 Cor 10:1–12). The author warns that it can happen to us just as it did with them (3:12).

(3) What is impossible? To “renew them again to repentance” (6:6b):

- (a) There is no avenue for repentance other than what is provided by God through Jesus Christ. If a person is rejecting the only basis upon which forgiveness can be extended, then their restoration is impossible. To repudiate Christ is to embrace the “impossible.”¹⁶⁰

(4) Why is it impossible? While they are to their loss: (6:6c).

- (a) The person(s) spoken of in 6:4–5 are genuinely saved.¹⁶¹ The danger in view in Hebrews 6 is the real possibility that one can “fall away” from salvation by deliberately (not accidentally or in a moment of weakness) rejecting Christ and His grace and persisting in unbelief (1 Tim 1:19).¹⁶² What is the state of grace of such

¹⁶⁰ Lane, 1:142.

¹⁶¹ See Herbert Bateman, *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*.

¹⁶² See I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away*.

a person? Such a person is not in grace, and is on their way to a fiery judgment in hell (Heb 10:26–27).

- (b) Hebrews 6:4–6 seems to be saying that it is impossible to restore such a person to a state of repentance.¹⁶³ However, Romans 11:17–24¹⁶⁴ specifically states that “even they [Israelite branches broken off], if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted [back] in, for God has the power to graft them in again.”¹⁶⁵ Israel apostatized often, and was brought back, through God’s judgment, to repentance. Thus, these two passages seem to be in conflict with each other.
- (i) Other passages that also conflict with the notion of apostasy without remedy include: (1) Paul and the Galatians: contrast Gal 5:2, 4 with 5:10, (2) Paul and the Corinthians: contrast 1 Cor 5:1ff with 5:5 and 2 Cor 2:5–11, (3) Paul and the Corinthians: contrast 2 Cor 12:21; 13:2 with 13:9, (4) Hymenaeus and Alexander: compare 1 Tim 1:19–20 with 1 Cor 5:5.
- (c) John K. Elliott, in his paper titled “Is Post-Baptismal Sin Unforgiveable?”¹⁶⁶, suggests that the two participles which follow the word “repentance” should be taken in a temporal sense (“while”) rather than a causal sense (“since” or “because”). This renders the following translation: “it is impossible [...] to restore them to repentance while they are to their loss crucifying [again] the Son of God and exposing [Him] to public shame.”¹⁶⁷ This translation is to be commended. It preserves the force of “it is impossible” while also reconciling the passage with Romans 11:17–24. The “while they are” (6:6) thus corresponds to “if they do not continue” (Rom 11:23) and “if we go on sinning deliberately” (Heb 10:26).¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Indeed, that is the “Classical Arminian” position as written by Grant R. Osborne in *Four Views*.

¹⁶⁴ In context, this passage does seem to have corporate application: Gentiles as a people group are being grafted into nation of Israel. But if vv. 17–24 are understood *only* in a corporate sense, Paul would be threatening the Gentiles as a group of expulsion from the people of God if they (corporately) do not stand firm in their faith. This contradicts everything Paul said previously about the inclusion of the Gentiles as the culmination of God’s plan of salvation and negates Paul’s own stress on the necessity of individual faith.

¹⁶⁵ “Contrary to the assumptions of some, Romans 11:20–23 does not concern Israel and the Gentiles corporately, but Jews and Gentiles as individuals.” Robert Shank, *Life in the Son*, 312. See also his Appendix C: “The Significance of Romans 9–11”, pp. 340–344.

¹⁶⁶ John K. Elliott, “Is Post-Baptismal Sin Forgivable?” *Bible Translator* 28 (1977): 330–32.

¹⁶⁷ “This makes sense of the dramatic change to the present participles after the sequence of aorists. It also agrees with the use of the present participle elsewhere in Hebrews (1:3–4; 5:8; 6:7; 11:17; 13:21)”, Elliott, 330.

¹⁶⁸ I found Robert Shank’s chapter entitled “Is Apostasy Without Remedy?” in *Life in the Son*, 309–329 to be very helpful. Also useful was Robert L. Hamilton’s article entitled “Does Hebrews 6:6 Teach that Apostasy in Without Remedy?”. See also Christopher Wordsworth, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, In the Original Greek, Vol.3 – St. Paul’s Epistles*, 396; Brooke F. Westcott, *Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text*, 167–169.

(i) The translation mentioned above is not favored by modern versions who follow Moulton (Grammar, 1:230; cf. RSV, NEB, TEV, NIV, ESV, NASB95).¹⁶⁹ Also, modern commentators follow F. F. Bruce who thinks that it renders the phrase a “truism hardly worth putting into words.”¹⁷⁰ However, Heb 10:26 is just such a “truism” and the parallel between 6:4–6 and 10:26–29 is too strong to ignore (Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 292). This line of reasoning leads to the conclusion that repentance is impossible only if the person in question will not turn from their rebellion.¹⁷¹

(d) By way of analogy, consider a plane departing from a Texas airport. The original destination of the flight is Los Angeles, CA. An hour into the flight, the pilot decides to change course, turns the plane around, and begins flying toward Miami, FL. An observer might say of the pilot, “Well, it’s impossible for him to make it to Los Angeles.” The observer is not saying that it is a physical impossibility (e.g., that the pilot is unable to change course); he is pointing out that unless there is a deliberate change of heart by the pilot, the plane’s present course will not be altered and he will never reach California.

(e) Crucifying [again]¹⁷² the Son of God and (6:6c)

(i) Those who are rejecting Christ and His saving grace are placing themselves in the very company of those who shouted “Crucify Him!”

(f) Exposing¹⁷³ [Him] to public shame (6:6c).

(i) When Jesus was crucified, his adversaries derided him (Heb. 12:2–3; 13:13).¹⁷⁴ Apostates cause “the shame of the cross to be re-enacted.”¹⁷⁵ They not only show their contempt for Jesus, but they also make him contemptible in the eyes of others, deterring them from coming to faith.¹⁷⁶

(5) Illustration. The author now invokes a vivid agricultural image that depicts two

¹⁶⁹ Exceptions include the HCSB 6:6 footnote “Or *while*,” the NASB 6:6 footnote “or while,” and the NIV84 footnote “Or repentance while.”

¹⁷⁰ Bruce, 124.

¹⁷¹ Contra Osborne who writes for the “Classical Arminian” view and Cockerill who writes for the “Wesleyan Arminian” view in *Four Views*.

¹⁷² The verb *anastaurountas* is frequently synonymous with the simple form of the verb and means “crucify,” in the sense of nailing someone “up” (*ana*) on a cross. A number of commentators and versions (RSV, REB, JB) have adopted this meaning. However, many early fathers, Luther, Calvin, and some modern commentators, along with some recent versions (TNIV, NRSV, NJB, NASB), render it “crucify again.”

¹⁷³ The verb *paradeigmatizontas* was used for public punishments that made an example out of the victim (Num 25:4; Ezek 28:17; also 3 Macc 7:14).

¹⁷⁴ See Matt 26:67–68; 27:27–31, 38–44, and parallels.

¹⁷⁵ Ellingworth, 325.

¹⁷⁶ O’Brien, 227.

different responses to God's saving grace (6:7–8).

- (a) Initial Condition (6:7): land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it (a well-watered field). This beginning carries with it the expectation that a useful crop will be produced. And indeed, that is the first result described. But it also sets the stage for consternation and anger at the second result.
- (b) Result #1 (6:7): the land produces a useful crop to those for whose sake it is cultivated. This is imagery for good soil that receives God's word and responds in obedience, bringing forth a crop of good works.
 - (i) Consequence (6:7): God's blessing is on such people.
- (c) Result #2 (6:8): the land produces only thorns and thistles. This is reminiscent of Isaiah 5:1–7 where God describes Judah in terms of a vineyard – “he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.” This is a poignant picture of apostasy, and the writer wants his readers to appreciate just how repugnant it was to turn from Christ and His great salvation.
 - (i) Consequence (6:8) First, such people are rejected (*adokimos*)¹⁷⁷. Second, they are near to being cursed. And finally, their end is to be burned. Shank notes: “It awaits eventual burning; but that fate as yet is only in prospect. Perhaps it may be averted. The branch pruned away from the vine (John 15:6) immediately withers, because it is severed from the source of life; but it is not immediately gathered and cast into the fire to be burned.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Same form: 1 Cor 9:27. Cognates: Rom 1:28; 2 Cor 13:5–7; 2 Tim 3:8; Tit 1:16.

¹⁷⁸ Robert Shank, *Life in the Son*, 319.

*Exhortation (6:9–20)**OT Citations: Gen 22:17*

9) God's promise and oath are a sure and steadfast hope (6:9–20).

A) Confidence in the audience (6:9).

- (1) The author expresses his confidence (“we remain sure”) that his readers will not be like the person who “falls away” but will be like the land that produces a useful crop. Note that he calls his audience *agapetoi*, “dear friends,” the only place in the epistle where this term occurs. The author’s stern warning only underscores the fact that they are true believers (12:5–8). What are the “things” that the writer remains sure of? Things which “accompany salvation.”¹⁷⁹

B) Reason for the confidence (6:10)

- (1) The author’s confidence is founded two things: God’s righteous character and the readers’ previous love and good works—actions they continue to perform even now (“as you still do”). God is not unjust so that He would forget all they had done. “Your work” is likely connected with 10:32–34: a) they endured great persecution and public reproach, b) they showed sympathy for the abused and imprisoned, c) they joyfully accepted the loss of their property. “Your love” is connected with “serving the saints” (Matt 25:40).

C) Continue to the end (6:11–12)

- (1) The author desired that his readers would continue to show the same diligence in the future that has been true of their behavior in the past. This is necessary “in order to make their hope sure” (NIV), and to avoid becoming *nothroi* (“lazy, sluggish”; 5:11). Instead, they are to “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises [of God].” Faith is how believers deal with the unseen (as though it were visible) and the future (as though it were present). Patience, better translated “steadfast endurance,”¹⁸⁰ waits with longsuffering for the fulfillment of the promises.
- (2) What are “the promises” spoken of in v. 12? Contextually, the “promises” are those made by God to Abraham—they form what is commonly called the Abrahamic Covenant. That covenant is unconditional—it is still in force and God will fulfill what He promised (cf. Gal 3:16–18). However, participation in the covenant *is* conditional (Rom 11:17–20). “Those who...inherit the promises” refers to all who believe God’s word and respond in repentance and obedience. This includes the physical descendants of Abraham (e.g., Isaac, Jacob, Joseph) who believed (cf. Rom 9:27; 11:5; Gal 3:9, 29), and also everyone who believes in Christ—they are united

¹⁷⁹ Lane, 1:144.¹⁸⁰ Lane, 1:130.

spiritually with Jesus and thus become “heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:29).

D) The certainty of God’s promise (6:13–20)

- (1) The oath (6:13–14). God’s promises to Abraham are first recorded in Genesis 12. They are repeated in several places in the early chapters of Genesis: 13, 15, 17, 18 and 21. But the quote in 6:13–14 does not refer to any of these passages; rather, it is from Genesis 22:17. The narrative of Genesis 22 recounts that this was a test for Abraham; and such was his faith that Hebrews 11:19 declares that he believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill His promise. At the last moment, God stopped Abraham from killing his son. After Abraham sacrificed the ram that was caught in the nearby thicket, God not only reiterated His promises, but swore an oath to fulfill them—it is this oath that the author refers to in 6:13–14. When God speaks, there is no one greater to whom He can appeal, so in reaffirming His promise to Abraham, He swore by Himself.
- (2) The promise obtained (6:15). Abraham’s patient waiting refers to the long period of time in which he and Sarah remained childless (25 years after the first promise). Isaac’s birth marked the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promises, and his salvation from death in Genesis 22 marks another fulfillment of the promise (figuratively speaking, cf. 11:19). Abraham lived to see the birth of Jacob and Esau, as well as the birth of Ishmael’s twelve sons¹⁸¹ (Gen 25:13–17). He died at the age of 175—Isaac was 75 and Jacob was 15 (Gen 25:8).
 - (a) The author of Hebrews tells us that Abraham “obtained the promise” (6:15) but later says that Abraham died, “not having received the things promised” (11:13). How can this be? God’s promises to Abraham were temporally complex. From our vantage point we can see that they were fulfilled in the past, are being fulfilled in the present, and will be finally fulfilled in the future. Abraham fathered a son Isaac, who became the great nation of Israel. That nation did suffer in Egypt and was led by God into the promised land of Canaan. All these things can be said to have been “obtained.” However, Abraham’s “seed” Jesus Christ was the one through whom God intended to bless the world. (Gal 3:8; Heb 11:39–40). This means that the promises have present and future fulfillment through Christ—all those who believe in Him become heirs of the promised inheritance of righteousness (Gal 3:8–9), and one day Jesus will return to earth and establish His eternal kingdom.
- (3) Legal proof (6:16–17). The function of an oath is twofold: it confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument.¹⁸² Oaths were used in OT disputes in the expectation that God would punish the guilty party and vindicate the righteous (1 Kgs 8:31–32). If the truth of a matter can be confirmed in courts of law in this way, it is even more

¹⁸¹ Genesis is not clear on how many of Ishmael’s sons were born by the time Abraham died.

¹⁸² “The language employed here is common Hellenistic legal terminology and is paralleled in Philo’s discussion of oaths: so the terms ‘oath’, ‘swear’, ‘confirm’, and ‘legal dispute’ (as well as ‘furnish a guarantee’, ‘give proof’, ‘unchanging’ in v. 17) all come from this milieu.” O’Brien, 238.

certain when God Himself swears an oath (argument from lesser to greater). When God desired to “show” (in this context ‘prove’; a sworn affidavit as it were)¹⁸³ to the “heirs of the promise” (not just Abraham but all who would be in Christ; cf. Gal 3:29) the unchangeable nature of His purpose (which finds its fulfillment in the person of Christ), He guaranteed it with an oath.

- (4) An anchor for the soul (6:18–20). God’s guarantee consists of two unchangeable things: a) His promise, and b) His oath in confirmation of His promise. The writer of Hebrews continues to explain why God did this—in order that we, who have fled for refuge in Him, might have strong encouragement to seize (grab and hold on tightly) the hope set before us. In whom do we take refuge? In whom is our hope? It is in Christ the Saviour! Our hope is no mere wishful thinking; it is a settled certainty which acts as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. It is a hope¹⁸⁴ (7:19) that enters into the Holy of Holies (behind the curtain). We may enter this once forbidden place because Jesus has gone before us (not in the earthly tabernacle but in the heavenly) as a forerunner (precursor) on our behalf, “having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

¹⁸³ “Again our author uses legal terminology to underscore his point. The verb rendered ‘make clear’ usually has the sense of ‘show’, but in this legal context it conveys the idea of giving proof, while the comparative adverb makes the point that this verification is given even more clearly.” O’Brien, 238.

¹⁸⁴ “The objective content of the promised hope is the assurance that with the consummation of redemption the community may draw near to God in priestly service.” Lane, 154.

*Exposition (7:1–10:18)**OT Citations: Ps 40:6–8; 110:1, 4; Exod 24:8; 25:40; Jer 31:31–34*

10) Superiority of Jesus to the Levitical priesthood (7:1–28).

A) Melchizedekian priesthood superior to Levitical priesthood (7:1–10).

(1) Biblical data on Melchizedek (7:1–3).

- (a) Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 are the only texts that contain any data on the man called Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews summarizes what is known about him from the account of Abraham's defeat of the Chedorlaomer alliance (7:1–2a):
 - (i) King of Salem. Most likely a reference to Jerusalem (cf. Ps 76:2).
 - (ii) Priest of God Most High (*le'el 'elyon*). Clearly a reference to Yahweh.
 - (iii) Blessor of Abraham (Gen 14:19). Implied in the text is the notion that Abraham acknowledged Melchizedek's superior status by accepting his blessing.
 - (iv) Receiver of a tithe from Abraham. The king of Sodom did not object when Abraham gave the tithe. Melchizedek must have been recognized as a great king by the other kings of the land.
- (b) The writer of Hebrews now considers the meaning of Melchizedek's name: "King of" (*malki*) "righteousness" (*sedeq*). Next, Melchizedek is also, by title, king of "peace" (*shalem*) (7:2b).
- (c) Melchizedek is a type of the Son of God (7:3).
 - (i) Scripture is silent concerning Melchizedek's genealogy (7:3a). Lane translates the phrase: "His father, mother, and line of descent are unknown."¹⁸⁵ The words do not mean that he literally had no father or mother.
 - (ii) Scripture is silent concerning Melchizedek's birth and death (7:3b). The intent is not to suggest that Melchizedek was divine (dual eternal priesthoods doesn't make sense), but rather to invoke the sense of eternity—an eternity that is typified in Melchizedek but realized in Christ. Christ has always been (John 1:1) and always will be. In this way, Melchizedek is a type of Christ.
 - (iii) Scripture is silent concerning the end of Melchizedek's ministry as priest (7:3c). This typifies the never-ending High Priestly role of Christ. Again, the author is not saying that Melchizedek is still alive and functioning as a priest, but rather that Scripture's silence gives the impression of continuous

¹⁸⁵ Lane, 1:157.

ministry.

(d) Summary—Melchizedek, as described by Scripture, is a type of Jesus Christ. His genealogy has no bearing on his ability to function as priest (contra the Levitical order where direct descent was required). His existence has the ring of eternity (no mention of birth or death). His ministry is portrayed as continuing without end (just as Jesus Christ’s ministry as High Priest will never cease). Consider C. Bird’s comment that the author is “harvesting exegetical fruit from a typological tree” that was planted in the Old Testament.¹⁸⁶ It is fascinating that here we have a case of the text’s silence actually being intentional and intended to convey typology.

(2) Case for Melchizedekian superiority (7:4–10).

- (a) This section starts with an attention grabber: see how great Melchizedek was—Abraham, the patriarch [of Israel], gave him a tenth of the spoils! The author is making the case for the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levitical priesthood. The logic is as follows:
- (i) Descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office are authorized to take tithes from their brothers who are also descendants of Abraham (7:5). The point being that all the tribes are children of Abraham and thus are on equal footing with each other. Only the law provides the Levites (priests) with the authority to require their own brothers to pay tithes to them.
 - (ii) Melchizedek is not a descendant of Levi and has no authority, as specified in the law, to require others to pay tithes. Yet Abraham, the patriarch of Israel (and clearly greater than his own descendants, Levi included), paid him a tithe of the spoils (7:6a).
 - (iii) Melchizedek not only received a tithe from Abraham (who was the recipient of the promises of God), he also blessed him! It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. Thus, Melchizedek is superior to Abraham (and also Levi) (7:6b–7).
 - (iv) In the case of tithes paid to the Levites, the tithes are received by mortal men (they all died and Scripture records the passing of the priestly ministry from generation to generation). In the case of the tithe paid to Melchizedek by Abraham, it was received by one who, as far as Scripture records, is still living (that is, Scripture is silent concerning both his death and the end of his ministry) (7:8).
 - (v) In a manner of speaking, you might say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid

¹⁸⁶ C. Bird, “Typological Interpretation within the Old Testament: Melchizedekian Typology,” *Concordia Journal* 26 (2000): 48.

the tenth through Abraham.¹⁸⁷ For when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was there, figuratively speaking, in Abraham's body (the corporate solidarity that bound Israel to the patriarch implied that Levi was fully represented in Abraham's action¹⁸⁸) (7:9).

B) Melchizedekian Messiah implies the need for a change of law (7:11–19).

- (1) The question (7:11). If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for the people received regulations concerning it [the Levitical priesthood]¹⁸⁹), why then was there still a need for a different kind of priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?
 - (a) The perfection spoken of in 7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1–4, 11 has primary reference to the conscience being cleansed from sin, thus effecting the restoration of the conscience to its intended or “perfect” state (10:14). The priestly functions and the associated sacrifices were in-and-of-themselves unable to cleanse the people of their sin. It also has secondary reference to God's goal of reconciling the world to Himself. The priesthood and the covenantal stipulations that governed it could not achieve the desired goal of bringing sinful man into a right relationship with God.
- (2) The implication (7:12). The fact that Psalm 110:4 proclaimed the appointment of a different kind of priest implied an essential weakness in the existing Levitical priesthood. When there is a change in the priesthood (as instituted by Ps 110:4 and realized in Jesus), there has to be a corresponding change in the regulations that govern it.
- (3) The difference (7:13–17). The author now highlights the essential differences between the Messiah and the covenantal stipulations concerning the Levitical priesthood.
 - (a) Jesus descends from Judah, not Levi (7:13–14). The Mosaic Law clearly mandates that the priesthood would be made up of those who were direct physical descendants of Aaron (Exod 28:1; 29:9; 40:12–15). No one from another tribe or even a different Levitical family group was ever permitted to serve at the altar (Num 16). Yet Messianic prophecy is clear on two things: (a) the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10; Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5; Mic 5:2), (b) the Messiah would function as high priest (Ps 110). The fact that Jesus is Messiah is

¹⁸⁷ The author deftly makes the point by playing on the noun translated “tenth” and the verb translated “collect,” the same root word in Greek used first as an active participle (“who collects the tenth”) then as a perfect passive verb. The meaning could be rendered “One might even say that Levi, who collects the tithe, was through Abraham ‘tithed’ or ‘collected from’ by Melchizedek.” Allen, 417–18.

¹⁸⁸ Lane, 1:169.

¹⁸⁹ There is debate over the meaning and translation of this parenthetical clause. My comment is based on Joslin's translation. Barry C. Joslin, *Hebrews, Christ, and the Law: The Theology of the Mosaic Law in Hebrews 7:1–10:18*, p. 143.

assumed by the writer of Hebrews—thus logic demands that when Messiah (Jesus) comes, the Levitical priesthood would cease to function and the laws regulating it would be set aside.

- (b) Jesus assumes His office by resurrection, not legal requirement (7:15–17). It is still more obvious that Jesus does not assume the priesthood by virtue of a legal requirement concerning His physical descent; rather, He assumes the priesthood by virtue of the power of an indestructible life—the Scripture testifies of Him: “You are a priest [who lives] forever like Melchizedek.” Note the connection between the resurrection and Jesus’ designation as High Priest (Heb 2:9–10; 5:8–9; 9:26).
- (4) The conclusion (7:18–19). On the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope (Jesus Christ) is introduced, through which we draw near to God.
 - (a) Former commandment (7:18). The author does not cite a specific text. Contextually, the primary reference is to the legislation establishing the Aaronic priesthood and its functions. It is natural to ask at this point, How does the annulment of the covenantal stipulations concerning the priesthood affect the Mosaic Covenant as a whole? The author does not address this issue here. However, he does state later that the Mosaic Covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant (NC) which is mediated by Jesus Christ Himself (7:22; 8:13; 9:15; 10:9). The Mosaic Covenant, with its associated laws and stipulations, was a single unit—a unified whole made up of various parts. It was not something that could be broken up into separate pieces that could stand on their own. Logically, therefore, when you annul a whole section of the covenant, you are calling for the abrogation of the covenant in its entirety.
 - (i) A holistic view of the Mosaic Covenant, with all its laws and regulations, is central to the theology of Paul. It forms the basis for Paul’s argument in Galatians 3:10. The false gospel agitators (“all who rely on works of the law”) were insisting that circumcision, the entrance criteria of the Mosaic Covenant, was necessary for justification. Yet they themselves were not keeping the entirety of the law (Gal 6:13). Paul points out that all who do this are under the law’s curse. Why? Because Deuteronomy 27:26 states that all the law must be obeyed. You cannot pick and choose which commands and stipulations should be kept—you must obey them all (cf. Gal 5:3; Jam 2:10–11). Any attempt to make a part of the Mosaic Covenant necessary for salvation violates the nature of the covenant itself (as well as implying that Christ’s work is insufficient for justification).
 - (ii) To avoid an imbalance in our understanding, it should be noted that the concepts of “priest” and “law” have not been done away with. There is law in the NC: the Law of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2; John 15:12; Matt 22:36–40;

Rom 13:8–11; Gal 5:14; Jam 2:8). The NC law of loving God and others finds its practical outworking in the stipulations and commands of the Mosaic Law (they tell us *how* to love God and others). There is also a priesthood in the NC: Jesus is High Priest and we, united spiritually with Him, are a holy priesthood (cf. 1 Pet 2:5,9; Rev 1:6).

- (b) Set aside (7:18). The word used here is *athetesis*, and it is stronger than the word “change” (*metatithemenes*) used in v.12. This word was used for an official annulment of a decree, the cancellation of a debt, or the abrogation of a will. Its usage here as a legal term is appropriate to the author’s argument about a change in the priesthood necessitating an annulling of the associated law.¹⁹⁰
 - (c) Weakness and uselessness (7:19). Again, we should understand the “weakness” and “uselessness” of the Law as referring to its inability to remove sin: it could not redeem the sinner or cleanse the wicked (cf. 10:1–4). The Law could find you guilty as a law-breaker, condemn you to death and imprison you in sin (2 Cor 3:6–7; Gal 3:22; Rom 7), but it could not forgive your sin or pardon your iniquity. Only through the saving blood of Jesus are we able to draw near to God.
- C) Contrasts between Jesus and the Levitical priesthood (7:20–28).
- (1) Jesus became a priest with an oath; the Levite priests did not (7:20–22).
 - (a) The use of a divine oath signifies permanence and surety. The contrast here is not one of degree (lesser vs. greater) but of kind (permanent vs. temporary).¹⁹¹ Recall the earlier mention of oaths in Hebrews: a) when God swore that Moses’ generation would not enter the promised land, he kept the oath, and they perished in the wilderness (3:11, 16–19) and b) when God swore to Abraham that he would give him many descendants, he kept his oath so that the listeners could count themselves among Abraham’s many children (2:16; 6:13–20). We can be sure that when God makes an oath, he will be faithful to keep it. There is also a strong connection between the concepts of “oath” and “covenant” (Ezek 17:13, 18–19). It may be that the author understands Psalm 110:4 as speaking of the establishment of a covenant (hence 7:22).
 - (b) The author’s use of the word “guarantor” occurs only here in the NT. In the papyri it can denote a bond, a collateral, or some form of material guarantee that a debt will be paid or a promise fulfilled. But it may also refer to an individual who offers his own life as the guarantor of another person (see especially Sir 29:15–17). In this personal sense, the “guarantor” stakes his person and his life on his word (cf. Michel, 275). God’s plan of salvation, which had its beginning in the proclamation of Jesus (2:3), will necessarily be followed by its completion. Jesus has become the “guarantor” who offers himself as the pledge

¹⁹⁰ O’Brien, 265.

¹⁹¹ Michel, 274; Cockerill, *Melchizedek Christology*, 127–28.

that this obligation will be fulfilled.¹⁹²

- (c) The NC can be described as “better” because it will never be changed or broken—it is a permanent covenant (cf. Heb 8:7).
- (2) Jesus continues in His priestly role forever; the Levite priests died (7:21b, 23–25).
- (a) The continuity of the Levitical priesthood was repeatedly disrupted by the death of the priests. And since the priesthood could only be perpetuated by direct descent, it was in continual danger of being broken or ended due to physical infirmity. Jesus, by contrast, exercises an eternal and final priesthood. Death has no power over Him and His ministry cannot be threatened. This means that He is able to mediate an eternal and ultimate salvation.
 - (b) One of the main functions of the high priest was to intercede on behalf of the people, especially on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). This was symbolically expressed in the garments worn by the high priest. The ephod had two onyx stones attached to the shoulder piece, one on each side. Upon each stone were engraved the names of six of the twelve tribes of Israel (Exod 28:9–10). In addition, there were twelve stones on the breastplate the high priest wore, each containing the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. This notion of Jesus’ intercessory ministry is closely paralleled in Romans 8:34.
- (3) Jesus is without sin; the Levite priests were sinful (7:26–27).
- (a) Such a high priest was exactly what we needed (appropriate). He was (synonyms): a) holy – “devout, pious, pleasing to God,” b) innocent – “blameless, free from guilt,” c) unstained – “pure, undefiled.” Taken together, the three adjectives clearly describe the sinlessness of Jesus. The phrase “separated from sinners” can be understood as connected to the preceding adjectives (i.e. Jesus was morally different than sinners) or as connected to the next phrase (i.e. Jesus was physically separated from sinners into heaven). In either case, Jesus is depicted as being apart from sinners. As high priest, Jesus now enjoys direct, unhindered access to God, which enables Him to fulfill his high priestly ministry on behalf of His people.¹⁹³
- (4) Jesus offered Himself once; the Levite priests offered many times (7:27).
- (a) The Levite priests offered sacrifices each day—their repetition was a sign of their inherent ineffectiveness. By contrast, Jesus offered Himself only once. The Levite priests had to offer sacrifices for themselves first (they also sinned) and then for the people (Lev 4:3; 16:6, 11). Jesus did not make an offering *for* Himself but of

¹⁹² Lane, 1:188.

¹⁹³ Lane, 1:193.

Himself for the sake of others.¹⁹⁴

- (b) The basis for the comparison between Jesus and the Levitical high priests is the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:6–10). Only on this day is it said that the high priest first offered a sacrifice for his own sin and then for the people. However, the double sacrifice was not offered “daily” but once each year (Exod 20:30; Lev 16:1–33). The most likely solution is that the procedure on the Day of Atonement has been generalized, so that the writer has interpreted all of the daily sacrifices in the light of the atonement ritual.¹⁹⁵

(5) Concluding contrast (7:28).

- (a) The last verse is a concluding contrast summarizing the argument of the entire chapter:

- (i) The Levitical priesthood was appointed by “the law,” but the new priesthood was appointed by “the word of the sworn oath.”
- (ii) The law which appointed men was superseded by the oath which was given after the law.
- (iii) The Levitical priesthood consisted of “men,” but the new priest is “the Son.”
- (iv) The Levitical priests are characterized as having “weakness,” but the Son has been made “perfect forever.”

11) Superiority of Christ’s ministry to the Levitical priests’ ministry (8:1–6a).

A) Christ’s heavenly ministry in the “true tent” (8:1–2).

- (1) The author argued that Jesus, the Son of God, was appointed by God as High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1–17). The author also gave several differences between the Levitical priesthood and Christ to show that Christ is the superior High Priest (7:18–28). Now the author gives the final and climactic difference between Jesus and the Levitical priesthood (the main point¹⁹⁶ of this section): Jesus, our High Priest, entered into heaven and is the minister of the heavenly tabernacle.

- (2) Jesus is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Father (“the Majesty”) in

¹⁹⁴ O’Brien, 281.

¹⁹⁵ See Lane, 1:194 for a discussion of various interpretations.

¹⁹⁶ O’Brien comments: Gk. κεφάλαιον can mean: (a) “summary,” and some have taken it here as indicating that Heb 8:1–2 summarize the argument relating to Christ’s high priesthood (Bruce, 180 n. 1; A. Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests*, 173). But a summary would include other elements from 5:1–7:28, and Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is a new topic. (b) “crowning affirmation,” indicating the point to which other points are subordinate (R. Williamson, Philo, 123–129; Lane, 1:204). However, the comment leads into the next section rather than completes what has already been said. (c) “main point” or “main idea,” that is, of the section (not the whole of Hebrews). This best fits the immediate and wider contexts of Hebrews. So BDAG, 541; Louw and Nida §33.12; Attridge, 217; Ellingworth, 400; Bénétreau, 2:52; Guthrie, 279; Koester, 374–375; Johnson, 197.

heaven (8:1). The author reintroduces Psalm 110:1, a verse already alluded to in Hebrews 1:3 and quoted in 1:13 (cf. Zech 6:13). His intention was for the readers to focus on the words “in heaven”—this is the location of the Son’s ministry. As discussed previously, Jesus’ position at the Father’s right hand is a mark of His exalted status. The fact that He is seated indicates His work (the offering of Himself) is complete (Heb 10:11–12; note that His ministry is not limited to the single, atoning offering of His body/blood—Heb 7:25).

(3) Jesus is “minister” (*leitourgos*)¹⁹⁷, of the “holy places” (*hagion*) and the “true tent”¹⁹⁸ (*skenes tes alethines*) which the Lord “pitched”, not man (8:2).

(a) Jesus is identified as a “minister” in the heavenly sanctuary (8:2a), a term common for priests in the LXX and in Jewish literature (Isa 61:6).¹⁹⁹

(b) There is debate as to the distinction between “holy places” and “true tent.” Some understand the words as terms for a single sanctuary while others understand “holy places” as referring to the Most Holy Place within the “true tent” (such a distinction seems warranted at least in Heb 9:11–12).²⁰⁰

(c) The nature of the heavenly tabernacle is also debated. Some have argued that the heavenly tabernacle should be interpreted allegorically as referring to the church (Rev 3:12; 13:6) or the body of Christ (Heb 10:20).²⁰¹ However, the biblical data argues against this notion:²⁰²

(i) In Hebrews we learn: Jesus has gone into the “inner place behind the curtain”—the Most Holy Place (5:19–20); Jesus is minister of the “holy places” and the “true tent” (8:2); the Mosaic tabernacle was a “copy and shadow of the heavenly things” and was built from a “pattern” (8:5); Jesus went through the “greater and more perfect tent” and entered the Most Holy Place (9:11–12); Jesus “purified” the “heavenly things themselves” (9:23); Jesus entered, not into the earthly tabernacle but into “heaven itself” (9:24).

¹⁹⁷ O’Brien, 289: Gk. λειτουργός (“minister”) is used for God’s heavenly attendants (Heb 1:7; see v. 14) and for priests (Isa 61:1; Neh 10:39; Sirach 7:30; note Jer 33:21; Rom 15:16; also Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.135; *On Dreams* 2.31). BDAG, 591–592; C. Spicq, *TLNT* 2:378–384, esp. 383; Koester, 375.

¹⁹⁸ It is the “true” tent in the sense that it is the heavenly reality which served as the “pattern” for the earthly copies.

¹⁹⁹ O’Brien, 288.

²⁰⁰ Lane, 1:201; Allen, 441.

²⁰¹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s, 2006), Book 14, Section 300, 382, 127; Calvin, *Hebrews*, 105, 120. Westcott, *Hebrews*, 214, combined the two ideas.

²⁰² It is true that God dwells within and among His people (Rev 3:12; 13:6; our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit—1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21–22; Jesus described His body as the “temple”—John 2:19; Heb 10:20). But the data goes beyond this and points to the existence of actual structures within heaven (e.g., the New Jerusalem).

- (ii) In Revelation we learn: the throne of God is in God's temple (7:15; 16:17); the temple or "tent of the testimony" is in heaven (14:17; 15:5); angels are said to come "out of the sanctuary" in heaven (15:6); the heavenly sanctuary is said to fill with "smoke from the glory of God" (15:8); the New Jerusalem is said to be the "tabernacle" of God (21:1–3); God's temple is in heaven and the "ark of His covenant" is inside the temple (11:19); there is a "golden altar" with "four horns" before the throne of God (8:3; 9:13).
- (iii) In the OT we learn: Isaiah saw Yahweh seated on His throne in the heavenly temple (Isa 6:1–2); David says that from His temple, Yahweh heard his voice (2 Sam 22:7; Ps 18:6; cf. Ps 11:4); Habakkuk proclaimed that Yahweh was in His holy temple (Hab 2:20); Micah refers to Yahweh as coming from His holy temple (Mic 1:2).
- (iv) Summary. God is a spirit and is not limited by space. He is said to be everywhere present—omnipresent (Ps 139:7–12; Amos 9:2–3; Jer 23:23–24). However, God has chosen to manifest Himself in specific, physical locations. These locations are referred to by Scripture as God's "dwelling" (Rev 21:3) or "temple" (Rev 16:17). On earth, the tabernacle and the temple were the places where God manifested Himself. In heaven, God manifests Himself within the New Jerusalem in an area described as the throne room of God. There the Father is revealed to be sitting on a throne (Rev 4:2–3). This heavenly throne room may appropriately be thought of as the Most Holy Place. Thus there is a correspondence between the earthly tabernacle and the true, heavenly reality.²⁰³ This correspondence is complex:
- (1) Direct correspondence. The golden altar of incense inside the Mosaic tabernacle seems to be an exact copy of the golden altar with four horns that is before the Father's throne (Exod 30:1–10; 37:25–28; Rev 8:3; 9:13). The ark of the covenant also appears to be a copy of the ark in the throne room of God (Exod 25:10–22; 37:1–9; Rev 11:19).
 - (2) Material correspondence. The tent of the Mosaic tabernacle (Exod 26:1–14) seem to correspond to the physical city of New Jerusalem and perhaps the actual room containing God's throne (Rev 14:17; 15:5–6). The Most Holy Place of the tabernacle seems to correspond to the throne area of God in the New Jerusalem (Exod 26:33–34; Rev 7:15; 16:17). There is no distinct temple building in the New Jerusalem, for its "temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev 21:22).
 - (3) Inanimate correspondence. The curtain separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place is said to correspond to Jesus' body (Exod 26:31–33; Heb 10:20). When Jesus died, the curtain in the earthly temple was "torn in two, from top to bottom," symbolizing the destruction of Christ's

²⁰³ See especially "Excursus II: The Meaning of 'The True Tent' in Hebrews 8:2 and 'The Greater and More Perfect Tent' in Hebrews 9:11" in Hughes, *Hebrews*, 283–90.

physical body (Matt 27:50–51). The golden lampstand within the Holy Place may correspond to the seven spirits of God before the throne (Exod 25:31–40; 37:17–24; Rev 1:4; 4:5; 5:6).

B) Inferiority of the Levitical priest's earthly ministry (8:3–6a).

- (1) A high priest, as stated earlier (5:1), is appointed to “offer gifts and sacrifices for sins”; since this function is mandatory, Jesus must also have something to offer (8:3).²⁰⁴ The nature of Jesus' offering is described in detail in 9:14 (although it was mentioned previously in 7:27)—Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins. After making this offering, Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father (1:3). Jesus' ministry continues, not with the offering of sacrifices, but with continuous intercession to the Father on our behalf (7:25). He also waits for the time when the Father will make His enemies His “footstool” (1:13; 10:13).
- (2) Why is the location of Jesus' ministry as High Priest important? Because if He were on earth, He could not function as high priest (8:4a). Why not? Because there is no tabernacle in which He could carry out His ministry. Why couldn't He use the temple? Because the earthly tabernacle/temple was designed and intended only for the ministry of the Levitical priesthood (“according to the law”—8:4b).
- (3) How does the author highlight the inferiority of the Levitical priest's earthly ministry? By pointing out that the priests serve a “copy and shadow” (*hypodeigmati kai skia*), of “the heavenly things” (8:5a). The tabernacle/temple was a man-made, earthly structure that was destined to pass away (1 Cor 7:31; 2 Pet 3:11–12). It pointed to and anticipated something greater. How does the author support his assertion? By citing Exodus 25:40, “See that you make everything according to the pattern (*typos*) that was shown you on the mountain” (8:5b; also Exod 25:9; 26:30; 27:8; Num 8:4). This supports the fact that the tabernacle was based on a heavenly reality that is perfect—a God-made, heavenly place that is eternal.
- (4) The “but now” of 8:6a corresponds to the “now if” of 8:4a. In contrast to the Levitical priesthood, who served according to the law in an earthly man-made copy of the heavenly reality, Jesus has obtained, through His death on the cross, a superior ministry in the God-made, heavenly place that is eternal. Verse 6 is transitional, finishing the thought of vv. 1–6 and beginning the thought of vv. 6–13.

12) Superiority of Christ's covenant to the First Covenant (8:6b–13).

A) Jesus is mediator of a better covenant (8:6b).

- (1) What is a mediator? A mediator is someone who acts on behalf of two parties—they function as a go-between and help bring the two parties together (cf. Gal 3:19–20; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 9:15; 12:24). How does Christ mediate the NC? Jesus mediates the NC

²⁰⁴ Bruce, 182; the tense of “to offer,” *prosenenke*, is the aorist, pointing to a single sacrifice (7:27).

in that His blood secures our eternal redemption (Heb 9:11–15) and reconciles us to God (Col 1:20).

- (2) What are the “better promises” that establish the NC? The FC was enacted on God’s promises to Israel (cf. Exod 6:7; 29:45; Lev 26:12). The “better promises” on which the NC is established are found in Jeremiah 31:31–34, which is quoted in vv. 8–12. These “promises” include: 1) God implanting His laws in the people’s hearts (v. 10), which implies their receiving a new heart (Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:26–27), 2) the knowledge of God as a matter of personal experience (v. 11), 3) an announcement that the Lord will forgive His people’s sins (v. 12).²⁰⁵ These promises are “better” in that they point to the saving sacrifice of Christ which “has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:14). The law had a “shadow of the good things to come” but it could never “make perfect those who draw near” (Heb 10:1).

B) Finding fault with the FC (8:7–13).

- (1) The author uses a *modus tollens* to demonstrate that the FC was not faultless. A *modus tollens* (mode that denies) is a valid argument form which states that if the consequent of a conditional is false, then the antecedent must also be false. It is also known as an indirect proof or a proof by contrapositive. It may be written as follows: if P then Q. Q is false, therefore P is false.²⁰⁶ For example, if P [a log is burning] then Q [there is smoke]. Q is false [there is no smoke], therefore P [a log is burning] is false.
- (a) If P... (8:7a). The conditional P is given in the first part of v. 7: If the first covenant between God and Israel had been “faultless” (*amemptos*). The word “faultless” is used by Paul to describe his righteousness under the law (Phil 3:6) and Zechariah/Elizabeth who walked “blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord” (Luke 1:6). The term suggests that if the thing or person in question was placed under examination, nothing would be found that was deficient or worthy of fault.
- (b) ...then Q (8:7b). The consequent Q is given in the last part of v. 7: then “there would have been no occasion to look for a second [covenant].” The author’s point is that a “faultless” covenant needs no replacement.
- (c) Q is false... (8:8–12). The writer now proceeds to establish that the consequent Q is false. He does this by quoting Jeremiah 31:31–34 (this is the longest OT quote in the NT²⁰⁷). Jeremiah prophesied that God would make a NC with Israel and Judah. This means that a place *was* found to look for a second covenant (Q is false).

²⁰⁵ O’Brien, 293.

²⁰⁶ University of North Carolina, Philosophy Department, Logic Glossary. Cited 13 July 2012. Online: <http://www.philosophy.uncc.edu/mleldrid/Logic/logiglos.html#modustollens>.

²⁰⁷ Ellingworth, 414.

- (i) Why does the author quote such a large passage of the OT and then offer little commentary (cf. v. 13)? The primary purpose of the quote is to support the premise that the NC is “enacted on better promises” and to demonstrate that the consequent Q is false²⁰⁸ (8:7b). The secondary purpose of the quote is to introduce the NC into the discussion. The author will comment in more detail on the nature of the NC in chapters nine and ten (cf. 10:15–18).
- (d) ...therefore P is false. Logically, since Q is false (a second covenant was given), P is false—the FC was *not* faultless. The author does not specify the nature of the fault. This is because he has already done so (7:18–19, 23) and will continue to do so (9:25; 10:1, 4, 11).
- (i) The FC, with its associated laws and stipulations, played a temporary role in the history of the nation of Israel (Gal 3:19–25).
 - (1) It had many positive aspects: a) it exposed the sinfulness of man, b) it served to restrain men from evil, c) it revealed the holiness of Yahweh, d) it formed the basis of Israel’s walk with and worship of Yahweh, e) it unified and distinguished Israel as a nation-state, f) it served as a evangelistic message to the surrounding pagan nations, g) it anticipated and prefigured Jesus Christ.
 - (2) But it also had weaknesses: a) it instituted a sacrificial system which could not take away the people’s sins (Heb 10:4), b) it operated on the principle of observance, not faith, and so could not give spiritual life to those who kept it (Gal 3:11–12), c) it established a human priestly line which could not continue forever (Heb 7:23), d) it was tailored for a specific people in a specific area of land under specific agricultural and political circumstances.²⁰⁹
- (ii) There is a translation issue in v. 8a that has bearing on the logic used by the author—how do you translate “them” (*autous*)?
 - (1) The MS tradition is evenly divided between the word having the accusative case (*autous*; “For he finds fault with them [Israel] when he says”; ESV, NAU, NIV, KJV, NLT) and the dative case (*autois*; “But showing its [the covenant’s] fault, God says to them”; NET). If the dative is original—and it has the earliest MS support—then the text means that

²⁰⁸ Lane, 1:208.

²⁰⁹ The description of the laws and stipulations of the first covenant as “perfect” in Psalm 19 simply means that they were well suited to their original purpose—much like the Articles of Confederation which were replaced by the Constitution at the end of the Revolutionary War. Much of the content of the Articles was preserved, but the form changed significantly. God found fault with the first covenant in that He pointed out the inherent weakness in a temporary covenant which was destined to be replaced regardless of Israel’s obedience or disobedience (Gal 3:19).

God found fault with the covenant (continuing the thought of v. 7) and said “to them” (i.e., the people).

(2) Which case makes the most sense in this context? Although Israel was certainly at fault (they “did not continue in my covenant”), the dative case best fits the author’s intention to show the inferiority of the first covenant and the superiority of the NC.²¹⁰ If disobedience on Israel’s part had been the only fault with the FC, God could have brought them to repentance or even raised up a new nation with which to covenant (Exod 32:10; Num 14:12). The author quotes Jeremiah 31:31–34 in order to show that God found fault not only with Israel, but also with the FC itself.

(2) When Jeremiah prophesied the future NC, that meant that the FC was in the process of being superseded—it was growing old (nearing the end of its intended lifespan) and ready to vanish away (a shadow that disappears as the true form is revealed, cf. Matt 5:17–18). The FC was unable in-and-of-itself to “perfect those who draw near” (Heb 10:1; cf. 7:18–19; 9:9). This was by design—“if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.” Instead the “Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Gal 3:21a–22).²¹¹

C) Excursus—Jeremiah’s prophecy of a NC (8:8b–12; Jer 31:31–34).

(1) Historical background of Jeremiah 31.²¹²

(a) Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah—the last kings of Judah. His ministry stretched from 627/26 BC until at least the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Jeremiah received His call as a prophet to the nations in the 13th year of Josiah’s reign (Jer 1:2), just five years before the book of the Law was discovered in the Temple (2 Kgs 22:8). Jeremiah witnessed the sweeping reforms instituted by Josiah as well as the spiritual degradation caused by Josiah’s sons.

(b) The great NC prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31–34 is found in the “Book of Comfort” (30–33), the second of three books (sections). It is preceded by oracles of doom against Judah (1:1–25:13), and followed by oracles of doom against the Gentile nations (46–51). The Book of Comfort is the heart of a chiasm consisting of five oracles (23–26, 27–29, 30–34, 35–37, 38–40).²¹³ The

²¹⁰ So Lane, 1:202 n. s; Weiss, 444 n. 61; Guthrie, 971. O’Brien, 296.

²¹¹ Joslin, 183–184.

²¹² Much of the material in this section is sourced from Jason Dulle’s article entitled “The Nature of the New Covenant and its Implications for the Church Today.” Cited 9 July 2012. Online: <http://www.onenesspentecostal.com/newcovenant.htm>.

²¹³ Pamela J. Scalise, *Jeremiah 26–52*, Word Biblical Commentary, David Hubbard, Glenn Barker, John Watts, eds., vol. 25, p. 126.

genre of the Book of Comfort is divided. Chapters 30–31 are mainly written in poetry, while chapters 32–33 are mainly prose. The famous new covenant passage, Jeremiah 31:31–34, however, is in prose.

- (c) After prophesying God’s judgment on Judah for her sins, and her utter destruction by Babylon, Jeremiah turned His attention towards Judah’s future restoration. God would not always discipline His people, for they would one day return to the land of their fathers and possess it (30:3), serve Yahweh again (30:9), and be under Davidic kingship (30:9). While Yahweh had wounded Judah with the wound of an enemy for all her sins (30:14), He would bring future healing and glory to her in the land (30:18–20). At that time Judah will be God’s people and Yahweh will be their God (30:22; 31:1). This future relationship is rooted in God’s eternal love for His covenant people (31:3).

(2) The New Covenant.

- (a) The opening words of the quotation “the days are coming” are a common prophetic phrase in Jeremiah (Jer 7:32; 9:25; 16:14; 23:5, 7). The author of Hebrews’ use of this passage implies that the days spoken of by Jeremiah have begun.²¹⁴ However, it is important to recognize that the NC promises given here have an eschatological dimension.²¹⁵ Christ inaugurated the NC, but the full realization of what Jeremiah prophesied has not yet taken place: 1) national, ethnic Israel and Judah have not been reconciled and joined together as God’s people (northern Israel never returned from exile), 2) universal knowledge of the Lord is not presently enjoyed, and 3) Israel and Judah are not yet without sin (cf. Jer 50:20). Thus the contrast set forth in Jeremiah 31:31–34 is between the FC and the final eschatological fullness of the NC (the present realization of the NC is a prelude to the coming millennial reality).
- (b) “I will establish”—God is always the initiator of covenant relations with mankind. While there are several OT passages alluding to or describing the NC (Deut 30:6; Jer 24:7; 32:39; Ezek 11:19; 36:26–27), the term “new covenant” appears only in Jeremiah 31:31. It is “new” in the sense that it: a) replaces the first (old) covenant and b) is a different kind of covenant. Note that God intended to establish the covenant with both Judah *and* Israel (8:8).
- (c) The description of the NC begins with God telling Jeremiah what it is not—it is not like the FC (8:9a). God used the FC as a foil²¹⁶ for the NC. In what way is the NC not like the FC? “They [the Exodus generation] did not continue in my covenant” (8:9b). The FC was a covenant that was not continued in—it was broken by Israel again and again. In response to the refusal of the Exodus

²¹⁴ O’Brien, 297.

²¹⁵ Allen, 447.

²¹⁶ A person or thing that contrasts with and so emphasizes and enhances the qualities of another.

generation to remain faithful to the first covenant, God “showed no concern,” *emelesa*, to them (8:9c). This is the same word used in the warning of Hebrews 2:3—“how shall we escape if we *amelesantes* such a great salvation?” The NC will not be like the first; it *will* be continued in and will *not* be broken.

- (d) Having established what the NC is not—it is not like the FC which was broken again and again—God revealed the content of the NC (8:10–12):
- (i) The implanting of God’s law in His people’s hearts (8:10). This does not refer to memorization (Deut 6:6–9). Rather, it implies that God will give the people a new heart, one on which His laws can be written (their own hearts were inscribed with sin—Jer 17:1; cf. with Ezek 11:19–20; 36:26–27). Note that the writer of Hebrews can speak of the “weakness” and “uselessness” of the FC, and at the same time affirm with Jeremiah that in the NC there is a positive value ascribed to the covenant’s laws.²¹⁷ The laws and stipulations of the FC were intended to show Israel how to love God and others. As such, their principles remain eternal and binding in the hearts of NC believers.
 - (1) The concept of a spiritual transformation that results in a “new heart” is not unique to the NC. Long before Jeremiah prophesied the coming NC, David asked God to “create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps 51:10; cf. 1 Sam 10:9). Consider also the statement by David concerning the righteous, “the law of God is in his heart; his steps do not slip” (Ps 37:31). Jesus told Nicodemus that he “must be born again” (John 3:7) years before the crucifixion and Pentecost, and was surprised that as a rabbi, Nicodemus did not already “understand these things” (John 3:10; cf. Ezek 36:25–27). OT believers were regenerated by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and remained united with God through the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit in their hearts (Ps 51:11).
 - (ii) The knowledge of God as a matter of personal experience and relationship (8:11). In Israel’s past, each generation was subject to an ignorance of Yahweh (Judg 2:7–11). Hosea complained that there was “no knowledge of God in the land” (Hos 4:1, 6). Even today we are always one generation away from apostasy. The knowledge of which Jeremiah speaks is not simply the knowledge that God exists (the Exodus generation experienced God yet did not know God’s ways—Ps 95:10). Rather, this knowledge refers to a personal, saving relationship with God and a desire to love and serve Him. In the final fullness of the NC, everyone will have a personal relationship with Yahweh (8:11b).
 - (iii) The permanent forgiveness of their sins (8:12). The forgiveness of sins was not a new idea when Jeremiah proclaimed it as the essential promise of the NC. The Lord proclaimed his name to Moses as “The Lord, the Lord, a God

²¹⁷ Joslin, 174.

merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exod 34:6–7a). This passage was foundational to many later statements in the OT (Mic 7:18–19; Ps 51; Neh 9:26–32). Believers in OT times received forgiveness for their sins by casting themselves upon God and pleading for his mercy, as David did after his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah the Hittite (Ps 51; see 2 Sam 11–12). However, for David (or any other Israelite) there was no provision for the forgiveness of sins of a high hand under the FC. The penalty would be death by stoning. In fact, under the old sacrificial system there was “a reminder of sins every year” (Heb 10:3). No such calling of sins to mind operates under the NC, for God says that He will remember their sins no more. His grace has determined to forgive them because of Christ’s sacrifice offered once for all on the cross (7:27; 9:14, 26, 28; 10:10, 14).²¹⁸

- (iv) The NC was inaugurated by Christ through His death, resurrection and exaltation. It was offered first to the Jews, but it was accepted only by a remnant. It was then offered to the Gentiles (Rom 1:16), whom God had promised would share in the blessing of Abraham (Gal 3:8). In these “last days,” the church enjoys the salvific benefits of the NC. In the eschaton to come, however, national Israel will also accept the NC (new hearts) and God will implement the material blessings of the covenant: the permanence of reunited Israel and Judah in the land and an eternal Davidic king ruling in Jerusalem.²¹⁹
- (v) It is clear from Romans 11 that the church is distinct from Israel, and that national, ethnic Israel has a future in God’s plan. The church has not replaced Israel, yet the promises given to Israel in the OT have begun to be realized in the church, although their ultimate, eschatological fulfillment is yet to be realized. It is an “already, but not yet” phenomenon. While distinct from Israel, the church is part of a single unfolding plan to redeem mankind (Rom 11:17–25). The church is not an interruption or parenthesis in God’s program, or his dealings with Israel, but is an integral part of His kingdom plan (Matt 8:11–12; 19:27–29) and a sharer with the Jews in the blessing of the NC.²²⁰

13) Superiority of Christ’s sacrifice to the First Covenant’s sacrifices (9:1–10:18).

A) Inadequacy of the FC cultic system (9:1–10).

(1) Transition / Introduction (9:1).

²¹⁸ O’Brien, 300.

²¹⁹ Dulle, *Conclusion* section.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

- (a) The author shifts his focus from the superiority of the NC over the FC (8:7–13) to the inadequacy of the FC cultic system. The word “covenant” is not in the Greek text but is rightly supplied by English translators to indicate continuity with 8:13 and to provide clarity for the reader.²²¹ Two parts of the FC are introduced for our consideration—the regulations for worship (9:6–7) and the earthly tabernacle (9:2–5). These two topics are treated in reverse order.
- (b) The word “regulations” (*dikaionomata*) appears only in this section of Hebrews (vv. 1, 10). Corresponding to the first expression, “regulations for worship” (9:1), is the complementary phrase “regulations for the body” (lit. “of the flesh,” v. 10). The author’s description emphasizes limited access to God and the inadequacy of the offerings. These basic facts demonstrate that the way into the presence of God was “not yet opened” (hence, the arrangement was temporary and provisional, 9:8) and that the gifts and sacrifices offered could not “perfect the conscience of the worshipper” (hence, the arrangement was imperfect, 9:9–10).²²²
- (c) Contextually, this section (9:1–10:18) is bordered by Jeremiah 31 (8:8–12; 10:16–17). Joslin argues²²³ that: 1) the Jeremiah text serves as a broad framework for the entire section, and 2) in this section the author answers questions that were raised by the Jeremiah quotation. Questions that may have come to the mind of Hebrews’ original audience include: 1) if the NC promises the forgiveness of sins, what sacrifice is involved? 2) will the NC sacrifice be made daily or annually as regulated in the FC?
- (2) The earthly tabernacle—restricted access to God (9:2–5).
- (a) The tabernacle is described as “earthly” (*kosmikon*) not only in the sense that it was located on earth (8:4), but in that it was a man-made sanctuary. This recalls the contrast of 8:2 (“the true tent”) and anticipates the description “not made with hands” (9:24). As a man-made sanctuary, it was temporary—a shadow of the heavenly reality (8:5).²²⁴
- (b) The author describes the tabernacle as a “tent” with two sections: the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The entrance to the Holy Place was covered by a curtain. The entrance to the Most Holy Place was covered by a “second curtain,” indicating a single tent divided into two sections rather than two separate tents. Within the Holy Place were the: 1) lampstand, 2) table, and 3) “bread of the Presence.” Within the Most Holy Place were the: 1) altar of incense and 2) the ark of the covenant. Within the ark of the covenant were the: 1) golden urn of mana, 2) staff of Aaron that budded, and 3) tablets of the covenant. Above the

²²¹ Hughes, 304.

²²² Lane, 2:217–218.

²²³ Joslin, 226–227.

²²⁴ O’Brien, 307.

ark were the “cherubim of glory” overshadowing the mercy seat.

(i) It seems best to identify the *thumiaterion* as the “golden altar of incense” (9:4).²²⁵ The location of the “golden altar of incense” within the Most Holy Place is problematic because it was well known to be positioned in the Holy Place just before the second curtain (Exod 30:6; 40:26; Lev 16:12, 18). Concerning this, Tim Hegg comments: “The key to understanding our author’s words is to recognize that the golden altar of incense is always connected with the ark of the covenant, for it is said to be placed ‘in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony’ (Exod 30:6; cf. 40:5)....Earlier, in v. 2, he utilized the preposition ‘in’ (*en*) to note the location of the menorah and the table of the bread of the Presence in the outer sanctuary. But in regard to the altar of incense, he utilizes the verb ‘to have,’ (rather than the preposition ‘in’) when connecting the golden altar and ark of the covenant to the Most Holy Place. By doing so, he conveyed the language of the Tanakh which consistently connects the altar of incense with the ark of the covenant: the altar of incense *belonged* to the Most Holy Place.”²²⁶

(ii) The assertion that the ark contained a golden urn of mana and the staff of Aaron that budded is not found elsewhere. OT accounts of these objects mention them as placed “before the testimony” (Exod 16:32–34; Num 17:10–11). Only the tablets of the covenant are said to be within the ark (Exod 25:16, 21; Deut 10:1–2; cf. 1 Kgs 8:9; 2 Chr 5:10). With the destruction of Solomon’s temple in 587 B.C. the ark disappeared from history, and in the post-exilic temple, which remained standing until the sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Most Holy Place was completely empty (implied by Josephus and remarked on by Tacitus).²²⁷

(c) The design of the tabernacle, with its two divisions and strict rules of entrance, was a continual reminder of the holiness of Yahweh and the ritual impurity of the people. There was no direct access to God in the earthly tent.²²⁸ The terse conclusion, “Of these things we cannot now speak in detail,” is best understood as a conventional way of cutting short a discussion.²²⁹

(3) Regulations for worship—inadequate sacrifices (9:6–7).

(a) The tent and the objects within the tent set the stage for the priestly functions (“preparations having thus been made,” 9:6). This highlights the fact that the

²²⁵ Allen, 459.

²²⁶ Tim Hegg, “Did the Author of Hebrews Change ‘Covenant’ to ‘Last Will and Testament’? A Study of ‘Covenant’ in Hebrews 9,” Online: <http://www.torahresource.com/EnglishArticles/Heb9Covenant.pdf>.

²²⁷ Hughes, 315.

²²⁸ Barry Joslin, “Christ Bore the Sins of Many: Substitution and the Atonement in Hebrews,” *SBJT*, 11:2 (2007): 74–103.

²²⁹ Ellingworth, 431.

Levitical priesthood functioned within specific limitations regarding access to God. This recalls the logic of 8:4 where the author pointed out that Jesus could not have acted as high priest within the earthly tabernacle.

- (b) A contrast is made between the daily duties of the priests in the Holy Place (Exod 27:20–21; 29:38–42; Lev 24:8–9) and the once-a-year entrance of the high priest into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). This important sacrifice involved the offering of a bull’s blood for the high priest’s own sins and the sins of his household first, and the blood of a goat for the sins of the people second. In both cases the blood was “offered” on the ark cover and in front of it (“not without taking blood”). Here for the first time the author mentions “blood” in a cultic context. In the verses that follow, he repeatedly draws attention to blood as imperative for drawing near to God.²³⁰
 - (i) The writer departs from the usual language of the LXX to describe the high priest’s action: instead of the usual verbs “sprinkle” or “apply,” the word “offers” is chosen with reference to the application of blood in the Most Holy Place. Significantly, this same verb “offers” is employed with reference to Christ’s death (9:14, 25, 28; 10:12), and suggests that the author described the annual sprinkling of blood in the Most Holy Place in this way to prepare his readers to recognize the typological parallel between the high point of the atonement ritual under the FC and the self-offering of Christ on the cross.²³¹
 - (ii) The author of Hebrews qualifies the sin that was dealt with on the Day of Atonement as “unintentional” (*agnoematon*) (9:7c). Leviticus 16 does not qualify the type of sin being atoned. Indeed, Leviticus 16:21 says, “all their transgressions, all their sins” (cf. Lev 16:16, 22, 30, 34). At this time, I feel the qualification in Hebrews 9:7 should probably be understood as a reference to those sins which were *not* done with a high hand (cf. Num 15:30).²³²
 - (iii) The Day of Atonement involved one man, the high priest, offering sacrificial blood to make atonement for the sins of many people. It is therefore a type of the future sacrifice of one man, Jesus Christ, the true High Priest, who offered His own blood to make atonement for the sins of the world.
- (4) Excursus—the efficacy of the FC sacrificial system.
 - (a) How were sins forgiven in the OT? The OT affirms that sins were forgiven on the basis of faith, which expressed itself in repentance and obedience.

²³⁰ Guthrie, 299.

²³¹ O’Brien, 311 following Lane, 223, following Young, NTS 21 [1980–81] 207–10.

²³² See Jar Sklar, “Sin and Atonement: Lessons from the Pentateuch,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 22.4 (2012): 467–491. See Note 23 on page 476 especially.

- (i) Abraham, the NT's classic example of justification (he was justified prior to the FC), "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3–8; Gal 3:6–7). This means that Abraham's sins were forgiven apart from any sacrifice (and apart from circumcision).
 - (ii) David, a NT example of the forgiveness of sin under the FC (in his case high-handed sin for which there was no sacrifice), wrote that God forgives sin solely on the basis of a repentant heart (Ps. 32:1–5; 40:1–6; 51:1–19; Rom 4:6). Note vv. 16–17 of Psalm 51 especially—"For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Moses, Aaron and Miriam all committed sins under the FC that were intentional and yet were forgiven without mention of sacrifice (Num 12, 20).
 - (iii) Both the historical and prophetic OT texts support the truth of the forgiveness of sin apart from sacrifice: God's prescription for restoration from sin in 2 Chronicles 7:14; God's rejection of the people's sacrifices in Isaiah 1:11–20; God's invitation to the abundant life in Isaiah 55:1–7.
- (b) If sin is forgiven on the basis of faith, then why did God institute the FC sacrificial system? The FC sacrificial system was instituted for several different reasons, including, but not limited to the following:
- (i) To show the seriousness of sin. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23), and the sacrificial system, with its daily animal executions (Exod 29:38–42), vividly showed the people that sin brings death (Rom 5:12).
 - (ii) To illustrate the concept of penal substitution.²³³ The wrath of God justly falls upon those who sin, and the OT has many examples of individuals who were killed by God for their sin (Lev 10:1–3; Num 16:46; Deut 29:23). But God also graciously pardoned sinners in the OT and could do so justly because He planned to have His Son die in their place (penal substitution, Rom 3:25–26). The bloody Levitical sacrifices required the individual to place their hands on the animal's head—this was to signify that the animal took the place of the individual (Lev 1:4; 3:2, 8; 4:24, 29, 33).
 - (iii) To provide cleansing from the defilement of sin. The OT repeatedly states that sin causes physical defilement: 1) the individual who sinned was personally defiled (Lev 18:24, 30), 2) if an individual's sin involved an animal, the animal was defiled (Lev 18:23), 3) the land where sin was committed became defiled (Lev 18:25, 27–28; Num 35:33–34; Jer 2:7; 3:1; 16:18), 4) one individual could defile another through sin (Lev 18:20, 30; 19:31), 5) sin brought defilement to the tabernacle (Lev 20:3; 2 Chr 29; 36:14; Ezek 23:37–

²³³ William D. Barrick, "Penal Substitution in the Old Testament," *TMSJ* 20/2 (Fall 2009).

38). The bloody sacrifices provided atonement for and purification from the physical defilement of sin. This is why Hebrews 9:13 explains that the blood of animals was intended only to “sanctify for the purification of the flesh,” *hagiazei pros ten tes sarkos katharoteta*.

- (1) For a sin offering, a portion of the blood was put on the horns of the altar signifying a cleansing of the altar, while the rest was poured out at the base of the altar signifying a cleansing of the land (Lev 4:30). When a priest or the whole community sinned, the tabernacle itself was defiled, not merely the bronze altar, because the priests functioned within the Holy Place and the tabernacle stood in the midst of the community. In that case, blood was placed on the horns of the altar of incense inside the Holy Place and was also sprinkled on the second curtain (Lev 4).
- (iv) To restore covenant fellowship with Yahweh. The Levitical sacrificial system was instituted by God for a people He had redeemed from Egypt at the time of the Passover and brought into covenant-relationship with himself at Sinai.²³⁴ Thus to offer a sacrifice to Yahweh was not human effort seeking to obtain favor with a hostile God, but a response to Yahweh who had first given Himself to Israel in covenant-relationship. The Levitical sacrifices were instituted to restore fellowship with Yahweh whenever sin or impurity, whether moral or ceremonial, disrupted this fellowship. The individual or the nation (whichever was the case) needed to renew covenant fellowship through sacrifice, the particular sacrifice depending on the exact circumstance of the disruption.²³⁵
- (c) If the bloody Levitical sacrifices could not “take away sins” (Heb 10:4), then why does the FC state that after the sacrifice was made “he [the individual] shall be forgiven” (Lev 4:26)? A statement like Leviticus 4:26 is similar to James 2:21–24 which affirms that Abraham was justified by works. A truly repentant person, who realized they had transgressed the law, expressed their repentance through obedience to the command to offer the sin offering. Thus their sin offering was efficacious in the sense that it completed their faith. Faith is completed by obedience, and obedience signifies the reality of the faith that brings forgiveness.
- (i) God rejected the offering of anyone who was not genuinely repentant (Gen 4:1–7; Isa 1:11; Pro 21:27). Conversely, a person could not claim to be repentant and refuse to offer the sacrifice—this would have shown that their repentance was not genuine (Ps 51:19). The sacrifice of a sin offering by a repentant individual is an example of faith being completed by works.

²³⁴ F. Duane Lindsey, “Leviticus,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 164.

²³⁵ Frank DeCanio, “Analysis and Synthesis of Leviticus,” Cited 20 July 2012. Online: <http://bible.org/seriespage/analysis-and-synthesis-leviticus>.

(5) Explanation of the spiritual significance and inadequacy of the FC cultic system (9:8–10).

- (a) Given the author's long list of premises (vv. 1–7), it is best to understand "this" (9:8a) as referring to what has just been said—the writer is about to make a conclusion (so ESV, NIV). The author's conclusion is also founded on an implied premise: all the instructions related to the tabernacle and worship regulations were given to Moses by the Holy Spirit. Conclusion: the Holy Spirit's inspired "pattern" was communicating a spiritual truth: as long as the "first section is still standing," the way into the "holy places is not yet opened" (9:8).
- (i) The "first section" is best understood as referring to the outer compartment, the Holy Place, which acted as a spatial metaphor for the time when the FC was in force. It symbolized the total FC order with its daily and annual cultic ritual (9:6, 7). The curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was symbolic of the body of Christ (Heb 10:20; Matt 27:50–51). Jesus' death on the cross inaugurated the "time of reformation" (9:10b). Once the FC was superseded, the NC became operative (cf. 8:13; 10:9). Thus in the figurative language of the writer, the front compartment of the tabernacle was symbolic of the present age which has now been superseded.²³⁶
- (ii) What spiritual reality is represented by the restriction of direct, physical access to God's presence? The tabernacle and the priesthood symbolized the fact that fellowship/communion with the Father could only take place through an intermediary. In the FC, the priests were the designated intermediaries between God and the people. But they were only a temporary surrogate for the true mediator, Jesus Christ. Prior to His death on the cross, Christ did not function as High Priest. Only after His death did Christ bring us, who are united with Him spiritually, into the presence of the Father as our mediator. Thus the way into the "holy places" is now open—that is, Christ, our High Priest, is now seated at the right hand of the Father and is continually functioning as the mediator between God and man.
- (b) The author concludes this section by pointing out that the gifts and sacrifices offered under the FC were not able to "perfect the conscience of the worshipper" (9:9b). This does not mean that an OT believer could not have a clear conscience or was left feeling guilty for their sins (contra O'Brien, 315; cf. Ps 32; Isa 6:7; Rom 4:7). Rather, it means that the sacrificial system, in-and-of-itself, could not remove the guilt of sin—indeed, it was never intended to do so. As a cultic system, the sacrifices and offerings pertained only to externals—food (Lev 11; Deut 14), drink (Num 6:15, 17; 28:7–8), and various washings (Exod 29:4; Lev 8:6; 16:4)—regulations for the physical body imposed until the "time of reformation" (9:10). The word "reformation" (*diorthoseos*) means to "make straight," or "set things right." This refers to Christ—He has corrected the

²³⁶ Lane, 2:224.

inherent deficiencies in the FC (e.g. a priesthood that was subject to physical death).

- (6) Summary—this section of Hebrews 9 highlights the following aspects of the FC: 1) it restricted direct, physical access to Yahweh’s presence and enforced the use of the priesthood as an intermediary between Israel and Yahweh, 2) its sacrificial system pertained only to externals and could not, in-and-of-itself, remove the guilt of sin from the conscience of the people. This lays the foundation for the next section in which the author will present Christ as the true intermediary between God and man, and the true sacrifice which *can* remove the guilt of sin.

B) Jesus’ blood superior to the blood of sacrificial animals (9:11–28).

(1) Christ is the true form of the shadow of the Day of Atonement (9:11–14).

(a) Premise—Christ is the ultimate High Priest (9:11–12).

- (i) The “but” of 9:11 corresponds to the “now” of 9:1. Verses 1–10 covered the period of time governed by the FC, and focused on the high priestly offering of blood in the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16; 9:7). The author now presents Christ as the true form (the ultimate High Priest) of which the Levitical high priest was only a shadow.

- (ii) Consider the contrast between Christ and the high priests of the FC: a) they entered an earthly tabernacle, He entered the heavenly “holy places,” b) they entered by means of the blood of animals, He entered by means of His own blood, c) their entrance into the Most Holy Place was repeated and brief, Christ entered once for all and remains seated at the right hand of the Father, d) the result of their offering was temporary (it was repeated each year), His offering secured an eternal redemption, e) the blood of their offerings cleansed only externally, Christ’s blood cleanses and perfects the conscience. Indeed, in Christ, the “good things” have now come.²³⁷

- (1) There is no textual evidence to support the idea that Christ carried His own blood into heaven. The writer uses the word *dia*, “through, by means of,” instead of *meta*, “with,” or *en*, “in” (9:12). For a thorough treatment see Hughes, “Excursus III: The Blood of Jesus and his Heavenly Priesthood,” pp. 331–354. Jesus secured our eternal redemption by the sacrifice of His body in the “courtyard” of this world, and then, by virtue of His shed blood, passed from sight “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (9:24).²³⁸

- (iii) What was the significance of blood in the FC? Blood and life were closely

²³⁷ Joslin, *SBJT*, 85.

²³⁸ Hughes, 328.

associated under the FC (Lev 17:10–14). Yahweh stated, “the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life” (Lev 17:11). The shedding of substitutionary blood on the altar made atonement, since the blood of the innocent victim was given for the life of the one who had sinned.²³⁹

- (iv) Verse 12 marks the first occurrence in Hebrews of the concept of redemption—the restoration of personal property to the original owner through some form of payment. The LXX often uses the verb form of “redemption” to speak of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt (Exod 6:6; 13:15; 15:13; Deut 7:8; 9:26; 13:5). That first redemption was temporal in both the benefits it provided and its duration. This second redemption is “eternal” in its effectiveness, benefits, and duration. The price of “eternal redemption” was costly beyond measure, for it could be procured by nothing less than the “once-for-all” self-offering of the eternal Son of God. The writer’s great concern is that his readers avail themselves of this great provision that is theirs in Christ.²⁴⁰
- (b) Argument (*a fortiori*) to support the premise—from lesser to greater (9:13–14). These verses form an argument from lesser to greater which reasons, “If something is true in a lesser situation, it is true to an even greater degree in a greater situation.”
 - (i) The lesser situation involves the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a red heifer. In that lesser situation, such offerings sanctify “for the purification of the flesh” (9:13). The blood of sacrificial animals had a specific purpose in the FC—it was given by Yahweh to sanctify those who had become defiled or unclean. It provided for their outward, external purification, but did not provide for inner cleansing. The blood of bulls and goats alludes to the Day of Atonement, although as a general expression it can cover other sacrifices as well (Num 7:15–16, 87; Ps 50:13).
 - (1) In Numbers 19:1–21 God commanded the Israelites to bring Moses and Aaron a red heifer, perfect in body and never having been under a yoke. The heifer was taken outside the camp and slaughtered, its blood sprinkled seven times toward the front of the tabernacle. Then the animal was burned and its ashes collected for later use. When needed for ceremonial cleansing, the ashes were mixed with water and the mixture was sprinkled on the unclean person. The tabernacle also had to be sprinkled when an Israelite had touched a dead body, thus defiling the worship center.²⁴¹ The sacrifice of the heifer was described as a “sin

²³⁹ Mark F. Rooker, “Leviticus,” *The New American Commentary*, 236.

²⁴⁰ Cockerill, 395.

²⁴¹ Guthrie, 311.

offering,” but its essential purpose was to remove ceremonial defilement, and it is this external cleansing that our author emphasizes here (Num 19:11–21).²⁴² Concerning the typological significance of the red heifer, it is generally agreed that its unblemished condition symbolizes the sinlessness of Christ, the sacrificial ritual of purification the cleansing effected by the blood of Christ, and its offering outside the camp the suffering of Christ outside the gate (see 13:11f.).²⁴³

- (ii) The greater situation involves the blood of Christ. In that greater situation, such an offering is able to “purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (9:14). If the blood of animals could remove ritual defilement under the FC, how much more can Christ’s blood purify our conscience. This verse stresses the author’s contrast between the FC’s sacrificial system and the sacrifice of Christ—the cultic sacrifices, in-and-of-themselves, could only purify external defilement, while Christ’s sacrifice cleanses the inner spirit of all sin.

- (1) Apart from 4:12, the preceding references in Hebrews to “spirit” in the singular have been to the “Holy Spirit” (3:7; 6:4; 9:8; see 10:15, 29). In light of this, it seems best to identify the “eternal Spirit” as the Holy Spirit.²⁴⁴ The fact that Christ’s offering was made “through the eternal Spirit,” implies that He had been divinely empowered and sustained in His office.²⁴⁵ The word used for “without blemish” was often used to describe the “goats and bulls” of the FC as without physical blemish. Christ was faithful to do the will of the Father and was “without sin”—thus Christ offered himself without moral blemish in His final act of obedience on the cross.²⁴⁶

- (2) Christ is the true form of the shadow of the First Covenant (9:15–22).

- (a) “Therefore” through His death and shed blood, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant (9:15).

- (i) The notion of Jesus being the mediator of the NC was first expressed at the last supper—Jesus said, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20; Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; 1 Cor 11:25). This was Christ’s way of saying that the wine represented the blood that He was about to shed as He died to inaugurate the NC. Up to this point in the text, the shedding of blood has been connected with atonement for sin and redemption. The author now adds another element to our understanding of

²⁴² O’Brien, 324; Lane, 2:240.

²⁴³ Hughes, 356.

²⁴⁴ O’Brien, 324.

²⁴⁵ Lane, 2:241.

²⁴⁶ Cockerill, 399.

Christ's blood—it inaugurates and ratifies the NC (9:15a).

(1) Christ's words in the upper room allude to Moses' words in Exodus 24:8. The blood that ratified the FC was a type of the blood of Jesus which was shed to ratify the NC. It may also be that the meal with Yahweh enjoyed by Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy Israelite elders (Exod 24:9–11) was a type of the last supper Jesus enjoyed with His disciples.²⁴⁷

(ii) The purpose of the NC is “so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (9:15b). The “promised eternal inheritance” is a reference to the promise God made to Abraham (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8, 14–22). The primarily Jewish audience of this letter would likely have grown up believing they were heirs to this promise by right of birth (cf. John 8:33–47; Rom 2:28–29). But as Paul explains in Galatians 3, God's promise to Abraham was to his “seed” (singular), that is Christ. Thus only those who are in Christ by faith are able to inherit the promise. Paul also points out that the promise foretold God's plan to “justify the Gentiles by faith” (Gal 3:8). Christ is the grounds by which both Jew and Gentile inherit eternal life.

(iii) The reason the elect receive the promised eternal inheritance is because “a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant” (9:15c). Individual participation in the promised inheritance is only through the redemptive death of Jesus Christ. Christ's death is retrospective in nature—that is, it reaches back into the past and is valid for all who trusted God for the forgiveness of sins during the time of the FC. Indeed, the FC “imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise might be given to those who believe [in Jesus Christ by faith]” (Gal 3:22).

(b) General Explanation—covenants are ratified with the blood of a covenant-victim (9:16–17).

(i) There is much debate over the translation and interpretation of Hebrews 9:16–17. The controversy centers on the word *diatheke*, which is translated “will” (ESV, NET, NIV, KJV, NJB, NLT) and thus a play on the term's secular meaning, or “covenant” (NAU, YLT) as it is uniformly translated in vv. 15 and 18. There is no consensus in either scholarship or translation, and those who maintain either “will/testament” or “covenant” usually conclude that the passage is confusing if taken the other way.²⁴⁸

(1) Scholars who maintain, for various reasons and with varying levels of certainty, that *diatheke* in Heb 9:16–17 should be rendered as “testament” include: Koester, *Hebrews*, 417–18, 424–26; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 255–56; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 462–64; DeSilva, *Perseverance in*

²⁴⁷ John W. Hilber, “Theology of Worship in Exodus 24,” *JETS* 39:2 (June 1996).

²⁴⁸ Joslin, *SBJT*, 100 n. 95.

Gratitude, 308–09; P. E. Hughes, *Hebrews*, 368; Montefiore, *Hebrews*, 156–57; Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 127–28; F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 221–22; Lindars, *Theology*, 95–96; Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice*, 250–51; Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests*, 203; G. Vos, “Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diathēkē,” *PTR* 13 (1915): 587–632; and J. Swetnam, “Suggested Interpretation of Hebrews 9:15–18,” *CBQ* 27 (1965): 373–90.

- (2) Though the translation of *diatheke* as “testament/will” is still the majority view, other scholars maintain that the term should be consistently rendered as “covenant” throughout 9:15–18. For example, see Westcott, *Hebrews*, 265; Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:231, 242–43; Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 313; Alexander Nairne, *The Epistle of Priesthood* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), 140, 364–66; K. M. Campbell, “Covenant or Testament? Heb. 9:16, 17 Reconsidered,” *EvQ* 44 (1972): 106–11; G. D. Kilpatrick, “Diatheke in Hebrews,” *ZNW* 68 (1977): 263–65; Johnsson, “Defilement and Purgation,” 308–18; John J. Hughes, “Hebrews 9:15ff and Galatians 3:15ff: A Study in Covenant Practice and Procedure,” *NTS* 21 (1979): 27–96; and Scott Hahn, “A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15–22,” *CBQ* 66 (2004): 416–36.
 - (3) Scott Hahn and John Hughes have demonstrated on lexical, syntactical, semantic, and contextual levels why “testament” is inconsistent in these verses. They also argue that the “testament” rendering has no real basis in Greco-Roman legal practice. In sum, though for much of the twentieth century there was a near consensus that *diatheke* ought be rendered “testament” or “will” in 9:16–17, the more recent efforts of Hughes, Lane and Hahn make a compelling case for a consistent translation of *diatheke* as “covenant.”
- (ii) Translating *diatheke* as “covenant” does not end the interpretive debate. There are at least three different perspectives on the nature of the author’s argument:
- (1) The standard view understands the author to be speaking of the metaphorical death of the covenant maker as enacted ritually through the death of sacrificial animals: “When a covenant is being ratified, it is necessary that the death of the covenant maker be represented (by animal sacrifices); for a covenant is confirmed over dead (sacrificial animals), since it is never valid while the covenant maker is still ritually ‘alive.’”²⁴⁹
 - (2) The covenant-victim view, advanced by Adam Clarke, Albert Barnes and Robert Young (YLT), is a modification of the standard view and understands *diathemenou* (v. 16) and *diathemenos* (v. 17) to refer to the

²⁴⁹ Scott W. Hahn, “A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15–22,” *CBQ* 66 (2004): 426.

covenant-victim directly rather than the covenant maker figuratively: “For where a covenant is made, there must of necessity be the death of the covenant-victim; for a covenant is only in force over dead victims, because it is not binding as long as the covenant-victim lives” (cf. Jer 34:18–20).

- (3) Scott Hahn, pointing out that not all covenants demanded ritual sacrifice and that the standard view forces a figurative meaning onto the verses, offered his own unique view of vv. 16–17—the context is the broken FC mentioned in v. 15: “A broken covenant requires the death of the covenant maker, and it would invalidate the covenant if the covenant breaker were to remain alive.”²⁵⁰
- (c) Conclusion—having claimed that Christ, through His death and shed blood, is the mediator of the NC (vv. 14–15), the author explains that it was customary to ratify covenants using the blood of a sacrificial victim. His point is that Christ, the lamb of God, was the covenant-victim whose blood was used to ratify the NC.
- (i) Covenantal background of Hebrews 9:16–17:²⁵¹ (1) the making of covenants in the Bible and the ancient Near East customarily involved the swearing of an oath; (2) this oath was a conditional self-malediction—a curse for breaking the covenant; (3) the curse typically consisted of the covenant maker’s death; and (4) this curse of death was often enacted ritually through sacrificial animals.
 - (1) The swearing of an oath was so closely associated with biblical covenant making that the two terms, “oath” and “covenant” are sometimes used interchangeably, e.g. Ezekiel 17:13–19.
 - (2) That the oath is a conditional self-malediction is seen in the Ezekiel example (vv. 16, 19).
 - (3) That the curse for breaking a covenant oath was typically death can be seen in Ezekiel 17:16, in the covenant curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, and in other biblical passages that explicitly mention the violation of the covenant and associate it with death or mortal punishment.
 - (4) It is significant that each of the biblical covenants that concern the author of Hebrews involves a sacrificial ritual symbolizing the curse of death. The unilateral covenant with Abraham was confirmed with the bisection of animals (Gen 15:9–10; Heb 6:13), and the Sinai covenant was ratified by the sprinkling of the people with the blood of animals after their promise

²⁵⁰ Hahn, 436.

²⁵¹ Hahn, 427–29.

to obey the covenant (Exod 24:3–8; Heb 9:18–21), implying, “As was done to the animals, so may it be done to us if we fail to keep the covenant” (see also Jer 34:18–20).

- (d) Specific Example—the FC was ratified with the blood of sacrificial animals (9:18–22).
- (i) Because covenants are ratified with the blood of a covenant-victim (vv. 16–17), “not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood” (9:18). What follows in vv. 19–21 is a summary of the inauguration of the FC as recorded in Exodus 24:3–8. While the Exodus account assumes an understanding of the function of the sacrificial blood, the writer of Hebrews explains the function to be the ratification of the covenant—it bound the people to obey the commands of Yahweh.
- (1) The FC ratification ceremony was observed by both burnt offerings and peace offerings (Exod 24:5). Certain manuscripts (A* C D P) attest to the addition of “and goats” (9:19), but the original account in Exodus does not include this and an impressive combination of witnesses (P⁴⁶ A² K L ψ 181 1241 1739 syr^{p, h, pal} Origen) is without the addition. It is likely the addition was inserted by copyists under the influence of 9:12.²⁵²
- (2) The blood of the covenant-victims (the animals sacrificed for burnt and peace offerings) was collected in bowls. Moses threw half the blood against the altar he had constructed. The other half was thrown on the people who had pledged to be obedient to the *Book of the Covenant* (Exod 24:7–8). While the Exodus account indicates that Moses sprinkled nothing but blood, Hebrews states that the blood was accompanied by water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop (9:19). This is most likely an inference on the author’s part that the procedure described in Exodus 24 was done using a sprinkling implement (a cedar stick to which sprigs of hyssop were tied with crimson wool) which was dipped in blood diluted with water (cf. Exod 12:22; Lev 4:4; Num 19:18).²⁵³
- (A) The writer of Hebrews also adds that Moses sprinkled blood on the *Book of the Covenant* itself—something that is not mentioned elsewhere. He goes on to say that Moses sprinkled blood on the tabernacle and all “the vessels used in worship” (9:21).
- (3) The author concludes this section with a transitional statement: “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (9:22). This statement is a crescendo in the writer’s argument concerning the function of sacrificial

²⁵² O’Brien, 333, n. 140.

²⁵³ Lane, 2:245.

blood in the FC: it provided access to God (9:7), it made atonement for sins (9:7), it sanctified for the purification of the flesh (9:13), it inaugurated the covenant (9:18), it consecrated the people (9:19) and it purified the cultic instruments (9:21). But, in-and-of-itself, it could not cleanse the conscience or remove sin from the heart. It served only as a shadow of the true form—the blood of Jesus Christ.

(3) Christ's superior sacrifice for sins (9:23–28).

(a) The necessity of cleansing the “heavenly things themselves” (9:23–24).

- (i) The transitional statement of 9:22 brings back into focus the reality of “sins” and the need for the purification of “everything” by blood under the FC. As mentioned previously, sin causes defilement. Lane comments, “An individual assumes his part in the community through social relationships and cultic acts. Consequently, the effects of his defilement contaminate society (e.g., Lev 21:15; cf. Heb 12:15–16), the sanctuary where God met with his people (cf. Lev 16:16; 20:3; 21:23; Num 19:20), and even the inanimate vessels used in the cultus (cf. v. 21).”²⁵⁴ The fact that the sins of the people defiled both sections of the sanctuary is seen in the instructions for the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev 16:16, 19). Thus the writer of Hebrews understands the application of blood to the tabernacle and the cultic vessels as effecting their purification as well as their inauguration (9:23).
- (ii) The need for the ongoing purification of the earthly tabernacle makes sense in the light of sin's defiling effect. But the author makes a parallel statement concerning the true, heavenly sanctuary: “...it was necessary for...the heavenly things themselves [to be purified] with better sacrifices than these [sacrificial animals]” (9:23b). The idea of heaven needing to be purified is bewildering—how can this be? David MacLeod, in his article “The Cleansing of the True Tabernacle,” lists a total of nine different interpretations that have been offered by scholars and commentators to explain this verse.²⁵⁵
- (iii) Perhaps the best way to approach this thorny issue is to remember that the earthly tabernacle and the cultic system were shadows of the true, heavenly reality. So the question is, “What is the spiritual, heavenly reality that forms the basis for God instituting the earthly, physical counterpart?” Koester points out, “Christ did not purify the heavenly sanctuary because he was bound to follow the Levitical pattern; rather, the reverse is true.”²⁵⁶ When viewed from this perspective, the answer seems to lie in the fact that sin, first and foremost, causes spiritual defilement. This defilement appears to extend into heaven just as the people's defilement extended into the Most

²⁵⁴ Lane, 2:248.

²⁵⁵ David J. MacLeod, “The Cleansing of the True Tabernacle,” *BSAC* 152:605 (Jan 1995).

²⁵⁶ Koester, 427.

Holy Place (Lev 16:14–16; the priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat itself).²⁵⁷ This makes sense in light of the fact that believers occasionally sin (1 John 2:1; James 5:15, 19–20). What happens when a truly regenerate person, who enjoys spiritual fellowship with God, commits sin? It can be argued that their sin brings defilement (not sin itself) into heaven by virtue of their spiritual union with the Son (cf. 1 Cor 6:15–17). John tells us that Christ’s sacrificial blood is presently, actively cleansing us and the heavenly sanctuary from all defilement of sin (1 John 1:7; this does not imply that heaven was or is unholy—the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place were still holy even if defiled).

- (iv) Lane concludes, “The full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice of Christ purified the heavenly sanctuary from the defilement resulting from the sins of the people. The phrase ‘with better sacrifices than these,’ has reference to the death of Christ on the cross. The plural form ‘sacrifices,’ is to be explained as attraction to the plural form ‘with these rites,’ in v. 23a, with which it contrasts. The sacrificial blood with which the former covenant had been ratified and with which the tabernacle had been dedicated and its vessels purged was insufficient to remove the defilement that clung to ‘the heavenly things themselves.’ The superior sacrifice demanded was provided by the self-oblation of Christ.”²⁵⁸
- (v) Verse 24 further specifies the “heavenly things themselves” as “the true things” and “heaven itself” (9:24). In contrast with the high priest who entered the earthly tabernacle’s Most Holy Place, Christ is seen as entering into the very throne room of the Majesty on high (Rev 3:21). Jesus’ appearance in the presence of God is “on our behalf,” that is, for our sins (not His own—in contrast to the Levitical high priest). He “always lives to make intercession” for us (Heb 7:25).

(b) Christ’s sacrifice was made “once for all” (9:25–26).

- (i) In contrast with the Levitical high priest, Jesus did not offer Himself repeatedly (9:25). The Day of Atonement ritual was repeated year-after-year using blood from sacrificial animals. The author will go on to point out that this demonstrated the inherent inability of those sacrifices to effect true removal of sin (10:1–2). Christ’s death on Calvary is the spiritual reality that was typified by the Levitical high priest’s annual sprinkling of blood in the Most Holy Place.
- (ii) The writer further shows the absurdity of the notion of Christ needing to offer Himself more than once by saying that if that were true, Jesus would

²⁵⁷ Jerry M. Hullinger, “The Divine Presence, Uncleaness, and Ezekiel’s Millennial Sacrifices,” *BSAC* 163:652 (Oct 2006), 416.

²⁵⁸ Lane, 2:248.

have needed to die over and over since the beginning of the world (9:26a). This is not the case—Christ appeared “once for all at the consummation of the ages to put away sin by his sacrifice” (9:26b). Christ’s sacrifice provides provisional atonement for everyone’s sin—past, present and future (1 John 2:2; cf. John 1:29) and effective atonement for those who believe (1 Tim 4:10). The phrase “consummation of the ages” is similar to Paul’s “end of the ages” (1 Cor 10:11; cf. Gal 4:4) and Peter’s “last times” (1 Pet 1:20). Bruce comments, “It is not that Christ happened to come at the time of fulfillment but that his coming made that time the time of fulfillment.”²⁵⁹

(iii) It is interesting to note that the phrase “put away” is the same word used in 7:18 concerning the setting aside of the former commandment. Also note that “sin” is singular. It can be argued that the author is making the claim that Christ’s sacrificial offering of Himself permanently dealt with not only acts of sin, but with the principle of sin itself.

(c) Christ will return to “save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (9:27–28).

(i) The author continues the thought of the “once” offered sacrifice of Christ by using an analogy—just as human beings die once and after that the judgment, so Christ died once and after that He will return to “save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (9:28b). This verse is not speaking of all men without exception, but of all men generally (Enoch and Elijah did not die, Lazarus was raised and so died twice and those caught up in the air with the Lord will never die—1 Cor 15:51).

(ii) Verse 28 contains an allusion to Isaiah 53:12—Christ was offered once to “bear the sins of many” (9:28a; cf. Acts 8:32–35; 1 Pet 2:21–24).²⁶⁰ Seifrid is representative when he states that in 9:28, the writer of Hebrews “obviously recalls the substitutionary suffering of the Isaianic Servant (Isa 53:4–12).”²⁶¹ In the context of Isaiah 53:12 one finds that the Servant is the substitute for others, in that his undeserved sufferings deliver the people. This point comes to the fore in 53:4–12 (esp. 4–6; 10–12). The Servant does not merely suffer alongside the people, or even as a result of the sins of the people, but instead “suffers for them, and because of that, they do not need to experience the results of their sins.”²⁶²

(d) Summary—in Hebrews 9:23–28 the author has emphasized that Christ’s sacrifice provides cleansing for the heavenly sanctuary, was made “once for all” and fulfilled the Isaianic prophecy of the substitutionary death of the Suffering

²⁵⁹ Bruce, 231.

²⁶⁰ Joslin, 88.

²⁶¹ Mark Seifrid, “Death of Christ,” in *Dictionary of Later New Testament and Its Developments* (ed. R. P. Martin and Peter H. Davids; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1997), 275.

²⁶² John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 385–89.

Servant. When Jesus comes back to earth for a second time, He will not come to humble Himself to a death on a cross, but to judge the world and save those who eagerly await Him.

C) Jesus' once-for-all offering superior to Levitical sacrifices (10:1–18).

(1) The Law's repeated sacrifices cannot make perfect those who draw near (10:1–4).

(a) Previously, the author pointed out that the FC tabernacle was a “shadow” of the “heavenly things” (8:5). Now he applies the same description to the law itself, specifically the stipulations for offering sacrifices (10:1a; cf. Lev 1–7; 16). Because the law was a shadow, it could not “make perfect those who draw near” (10:1b). In-and-of-themselves, the Law's prescribed sacrifices could not cleanse the conscience of sin. The Levitical sacrifices were shadows of the “true form”—the once-for-all offering of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Those who “draw near” refers to those who wished to enjoy covenant fellowship with Yahweh (cf. Exod 16:9; 34:32; Lev 9:5; Num 10:3–4).

(b) Imagine for a moment that the Day of Atonement sacrifice had actually been able, in-and-of-itself, to perfect the conscience of the worshipers—that is, to take away their guilt and sin once-for-all, thus restoring the conscience to its perfect state. How many times would such a sacrifice need to be made? Only once—for the people would have been cleansed and their guilt removed (“no longer have any consciousness of sins,” 10:2).

(c) But, of course, this is not the case (10:3). The Day of Atonement sacrifice, although performed in obedience to God's direction, did not cleanse the people, but rather functioned as a reminder of the sins they had committed over the course of the previous year (recall that Jeremiah prophesied that the NC would bring an end to God's remembrance of Israel's sins—what does this imply?)

(d) The sacrifices were never intended to actually remove sin—indeed, it is impossible for them to do so (10:4). They were intended to be a shadow of the true form—a repeated exercise that testified to the coming once-for-all, ever-cleansing sacrifice of Christ.

(2) God's will was to sanctify us through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ (10:5–10).

(a) The focus of these verses is on the will of God as it pertains to dealing with sin. Does God want animal sacrifices for sin? No. What does He want? God wants obedience, which is an expression of genuine faith. God has always wanted this. The OT does a good job of driving this point home (cf. 1 Sam 15:22; Isa 1:10–13; 66:2–4; Jer 7:21–24; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21–27). In its original context, Psalm 40:6–

8, which is quoted by the author of Hebrews, makes this same point.²⁶³

- (b) But the author goes a step beyond simply citing the passage. He takes David's words and puts them into the mouth of Jesus Christ—"When Christ came into the world, he said..." (10:5a).²⁶⁴ When the writer does this, the phrase "I have come to do Your will" takes on new meaning. If God does not want animal sacrifices for sin, and the Messiah has come to accomplish God's will for dealing with sin, what then is the obedience that God desires? It is the obedience of the Messiah to a sacrificial death on the cross (Heb 5:8–9; Isa 53; Phil 2:8).
 - (c) Note the contrast the author emphasizes in vv. 8–9. The Messiah came to do the will of God as it pertains to dealing with sin. Did the Messiah offer animal sacrifices to accomplish God's will? No, He offered up His own body as a sacrifice for sins. Was this offering done in obedience to God's will? Yes, the Messiah makes the direct claim that His actions were sanctioned and approved by God. What does this mean, then, for the Levitical sacrifices? It means that the Messiah has done away with them in order to establish His own sacrifice as the true sacrifice for sins (10:9).
 - (d) Verse 10 summarizes the main thought—Jesus came to do God's will and that "will" was for Him to sanctify us through the offering of His body once-for-all. Note that the results of Christ's sacrificial death are described in terms of sanctification (10:14, 29), perfection (10:1, 14) and the cleansing of the conscience (9:14; 10:2).
- (3) Jesus Christ's single offering perfected for all time those who are being sanctified (10:11–14).
- (a) In these verses, the author makes two contrasts: 1) Jesus sitting vs. the Levitical priests standing, and 2) Jesus single sacrifice vs. the Levitical priests' repeated sacrifices.
 - (i) The Levitical priests never sat down in the sanctuary; they remained standing throughout the performance of their sacred duties (Deut 18:5). But Jesus, after He offered "for all time" a single sacrifice for sins, sat down at the right hand of God. The point being made is that standing indicates an ongoing activity while sitting indicates completion and finality. The phrase "for all time" modifies the single sacrifice—Christ offered a single sacrifice which is effective for all time.

²⁶³ For various views on the text vs. LXX vs. MT see Allen, 496. See also Karen H. Jobes, "The Function of Paronomasia in Hebrews 10:5–7," *Trinity Journal* 13:2 (Fall 1992). Lane comments, "He [the author] appeals to Ps 40:6–8 (39:7–9 LXX) to demonstrate that it had been prophesied in Scripture that God would accord superior status to a human body as the instrument for accomplishing his will over the sacrificial offerings prescribed by the law" 262.

²⁶⁴ This attribution was certainly done under inspiration, but it may also have been due to the author having knowledge that Jesus applied the text to Himself directly.

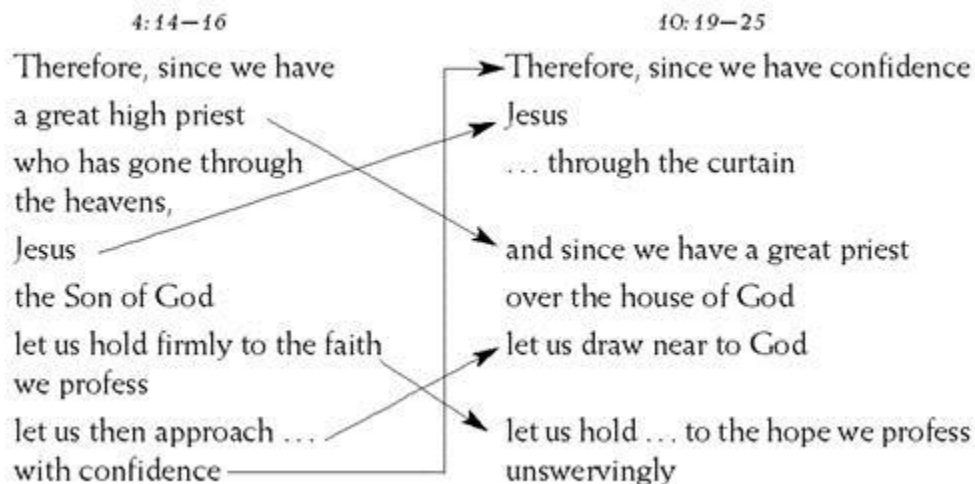
- (ii) The Levitical priests offered sacrifices on a daily basis (over and over). But Jesus offered Himself once-for-all. The point being made is that repetition of sacrifices indicates ineffectiveness while a single sacrifice indicates effectiveness.
 - (b) What the Law, with its tabernacle, priesthood and sacrifices, could not do (7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1), Jesus has done—He has brought perfection to those who are being made holy. Recall that believers are “perfected” in the sense that their conscience is cleansed from sin, thus effecting the restoration of their conscience to its intended or “perfect” state (10:14). This cleansing allows us to enter the Most Holy Place—not the second section of the earthly, man-made tabernacle but the true, heavenly sanctuary in heaven. This is something which the Law, being only a shadow of the true form of Christ, could never achieve.
- (4) Once sins are forgiven, there is no longer any need for further sacrifice (10:15–18).
- (a) The author began this section (10:1–18) with the claim that “in these sacrifices” (the annual Day of Atonement sacrifices) “there is a reminder of sins every year” (10:3). He concludes this section by again quoting Jeremiah 31:33–34 (10:16–17). The author cites this passage for a second time because he wants his readers to think critically about what v. 34 is saying. If the annual Day of Atonement sacrifices were a reminder of sins, what is implied when God says, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more”? It implies that the NC will bring an end to the reminder of sins—that is, it will bring an end to the repeated sacrifices stipulated by the Law. Once sins are forgiven (once a truly efficacious blood sacrifice has been made), there is no longer any need for further sacrifice.

Exhortation (10:19–25)

14) Hold fast the confession of our hope (10:19–25).

A) “Therefore” (10:19).

- (1) Verse 18 concludes the doctrinal section of the letter. The single long sentence of vv. 19–25 transitions the reader to the final exhortation section of the letter, and corresponds to the transitional hinge of 4:14–16, which moved the reader into the central doctrinal section. The word “therefore” indicates that a conclusion is about to be made which depends upon the material which has just been covered.



B) Since we have (10:19–21).²⁶⁵

- (1) “Confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus” (10:19; cf. 4:16). The word “confidence” (*parresian*) can indicate boldness (subjective), but here, the better sense is that of freedom or authorization (objective). Previously, the people were not permitted to enter the second section of the tabernacle—only the high priest could enter once a year with blood. But now, Jesus’ blood has given us the privilege and freedom to enter into the Most Holy Place in the true tabernacle in heaven.
- (a) The way into the Most Holy Place was “opened” (*enekainisen*) for us by Christ, in the sense of inaugurated or put into effect. This way is further qualified as “new,” “living,” and “through the curtain.” It is new in the same way that the NC is new—it is a way that different from the old way (Levitical high priest) and did not exist until Christ’s sacrificial death. It is living in the sense that it is life-giving. It is through the curtain in the sense that is by means of the death of His physical body on the cross. Lightfoot comments, “As entrance into the inner shrine [Most Holy Place] could only be gained through the veil, so for Christ entrance before

²⁶⁵ The image is from Guthrie, 341.

God could not be had except through the veil of His flesh. His own death, so to speak, stood between Him and His way of approach to God. The cross, then, was a matter of divine necessity, and the access thus gained cost much.”²⁶⁶

- (2) “A great priest over the house of God” (10:21). This verse echoes 3:1–6 and reminds the reader that they are part of the house of God, and it is the Son who acts as their faithful and merciful mediator.

C) Let us draw near (10:22).

- (1) Verses 19–21 are the basis for three exhortations in which the author urges his readers to respond wholeheartedly to the present blessings they have through Christ. The first exhortation is a call to “draw near” (*proserchometha*) [to God]. The word used is the same as in 4:16 and the force of the present tense could be rendered, “let us come again and again.” It is used frequently in Hebrews and in the LXX, where it is used of the priests approaching God with a sacrifice for worship.
- (2) We are to draw near to God “with a true heart” and “in full assurance of faith.” A “true heart” speaks of complete trust and devotion to God (cf. 2 Chr 15:17). It is the opposite of the “evil, unbelieving heart” of 3:12 which leads the individual away from God. It is also part of the promise of the NC (cf. Ezek 36:26). “In full assurance of faith” speaks of our belief in the finished work of Jesus the Great Priest. Our trust in His sacrifice gives us the assurance of being welcomed into the direct presence of God.
- (3) How is it that we can draw near to God with a true heart and in full assurance of faith? Because our hearts have been “sprinkled clean from an evil conscience” and our bodies have been “washed with pure water.” Both phrases are best understood against the backdrop of the FC purification rituals. The two clauses are parallel in meaning and make a general connection between Christ’s work and the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36:25–26. Commentators have been too quick to see a reference to Christian baptism here.²⁶⁷

D) Let us hold fast (10:23).

- (1) The word “hold fast” (*katechomen*; the same verb used in 3:6, 14 and a synonym of *krateo*, used in 4:14) is in the present tense, indicating the need to continuing holding on until the end.²⁶⁸ What is the manner of our holding fast? It is “without wavering” (*akline*) or without swerving. What is it that we hold fast? It is the “confession of our hope,” or the “hope we profess” (NIV). This is not their confession that they have a hope, but their confession of the things that they believe in against

²⁶⁶ Lightfoot, 189.

²⁶⁷ Guthrie, 344.

²⁶⁸ Guthrie, 344.

a mocking, skeptical world.²⁶⁹ Faith and hope are closely related as they both hold as certain the truth of things that cannot be seen and are yet future. What is the basis for our hope? It is the faithfulness of Jesus Christ Himself. The NLT translates the phrase as “God can be trusted to keep his promise.”

E) Let us consider (10:24–25).

- (1) The word “consider” (*katanoomen*) conveys the idea of “directing the mind towards and reflecting on.”²⁷⁰ The author wants his readers to be thinking about ways to “stir up” (*paroxysmon*) their fellow believers to love and good works. The point is that we should be doing whatever it takes to get people to stop being “sluggish” (5:11) and to start taking obedient action (cf. 6:1). The Christian walk is not lived in isolation of other believers. We need each other and depend on mutual encouragement to endure in the faith. With the mention of love, the writer has completed the triad of faith (v. 22), hope (v. 23) and love (vv. 24–25), and has interwoven it into the exhortations of 10:19–25.²⁷¹
- (2) The primary setting for provoking other believers to right living is the local church gathering. It is important for believers to meet together on a regular basis. Verse 25 urges the reader to not “neglect” (*enkataleipontes*) to “meet together” (*episynagogen heauton*). The wording used is very strong and means to “desert” or “abandon.” The writer goes on to say that it was the “the habit of some” to do this. The implication is that some were in the habit of not attending the local church for long stretches of time (perhaps showing up and then not coming back for weeks at a time). The author’s strong opposition to this indicates that he considered this practice to be very serious (and we should also take it seriously).
 - (a) The author does not give a reason why some had abandoned the meetings. Later chapters will hint at factors that may have been at work, such as persecution (10:32ff), indifference or apathy. The warning given in the following verses implies that those who deliberately and persistently refuse to fellowship regularly with other Christians are in danger of apostasy.²⁷²
- (3) Instead of abandoning our local church gatherings (attending only when the whim or need arises), we should attend regularly and faithfully and “encourage” (*parakalountes*) each other (cf. 3:13). The author’s letter itself is an example of the

²⁶⁹ Lightfoot, 190.

²⁷⁰ O’Brien, 369.

²⁷¹ deSilva comments on his blog: “The only verb in the clause is *katanoomen*, ‘let us keep considering,’ ‘let us keep observing, noticing.’ ‘One another’ is the object of this verb: ‘a paroxysm of love and good works’ is the purpose or result of the action (taking *eis* in its purposive sense). He’s calling each Christian to notice his or her fellow disciples, to look closely at them, their struggles, their challenges, to really ‘see’ them with a result to investing in them. Really seeing is the birth of caring, which gives birth, in turn, to purposeful action to help the other bear his or her load and share in the good that God desires for him or her.” Online: <http://apocryphalwritings.wordpress.com/2012/11/04/3/>.

²⁷² O’Brien, 370.

kind of encouragement we should be giving (cf. 13:19, 22). The “Day” is best understood as referring to the “Day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor 3:13; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; Jude 1:6; Rev 6:17)—the eschatological day when Christ will return to earth in judgment.

*Exhortation (10:26–39) – Fourth Warning**OT Citations: Deut 32:35–36; Isa 26:20; Hab 2:3b–4**OT Allusions: Ps 135:14; Isa 26:11*

15) Fourth warning—the danger of rejecting Christ’s sacrifice (10:26–39).

A) Fiery judgment awaits those who reject God’s Son (10:26–31).

(1) Christ’s sacrifice is the only sacrifice for sins (10:26–27).

- (a) The message of v. 26 parallels 6:6—the phrase “if we go on sinning deliberately” (cf. Num 15:29–31; also v. 29 for the kind of sin) corresponds to “while they are crucifying...and holding” (cf. previous comment on the temporal sense of the participle). The author is speaking of a person who has been genuinely saved (“after receiving the knowledge of the truth”; cf. 6:4–5; 1 Tim 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7) and who has deliberately turned away from God in unbelief (3:12), rejecting the sacrifice of God’s Son. What sacrifice is left to someone who has turned their back on Jesus? “There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”—indeed, it cannot be otherwise, for it is impossible for the blood of sacrificial animals to take away sins (cf. 10:1–4).
- (b) What awaits those who have turned away from God? Nothing but a fearful expectation of the inevitable, fiery judgment that will consume the enemies of God (note that those who once “shared in the Holy Spirit” are now “adversaries,” *hupenantios* of God). The last part of v. 27 is an allusion to Isaiah 26:11. Guthrie comments, “The context of that Old Testament passage is suggestive since it depicts a contrast between the righteous, who walk in the ways of God and long for his presence, and the wicked, who go on doing evil in spite of God’s grace toward them. The former look forward to the judgments of God on the earth; the latter belong to the ranks of God’s enemies, for whom the fire is reserved.”²⁷³ This allusion marks the fiery judgment of v. 27 as the final, eternal punishment of the wicked and not the judgment spoken of by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:15 (contra Allen, 523).

(2) Rejecting God’s Son is worse than rejecting the Law (10:28–29).

- (a) Verses 28–29 form another argument (cf. 2:2–3; 9:13–14) from lesser to greater (*a fortiori*). If those who “set aside” (*athetesas*) Yahweh’s covenant were killed without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses, how much more punishment will fall on those who reject the Son of God? The word *athetesas* is an allusion to LXX Deuteronomy 17:2–7 where the verb refers not simply to a transgression of a specific command for which the death penalty was prescribed (cf. Num 35:30; Deut 18:20), but to the rejection of the Law as a whole.²⁷⁴ The

²⁷³ Guthrie, 355.

²⁷⁴ O’Brien, 375.

words “without mercy” are an allusion to Deuteronomy 13:8.

- (b) How serious a matter is it to reject Christ’s sacrifice for sins? The author uses three clauses to describe the nature of the apostasy. In each instance the aorist tense of the participle is culminative (or constative), i.e., it summarizes a persistent attitude.²⁷⁵
- (i) Clause 1: “trampled underfoot” (*katapatesas*) “the Son of God.” This is a picture of utter disdain and contempt.
 - (ii) Clause 2: “profaned” (*koinon hegesamenos*) “the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified.” The OT differentiates between the “holy” and the “common” (Lev 10:10; Ezek 22:26; cf. Acts 10:14). The holiness of something was due to its connection or associated with Yahweh and His presence (cf. Exod 3:5; 16:23; 28:2; 40:9). The word “profaned” means literally “to regard as common,” which would mean treating Christ’s holy blood as though it is no different than any other blood (including that of sacrificial animals).
 - (iii) Clause 3: “outraged” (*enybrisas*) “the Spirit of grace.” The word carries the connotation of insult and injury, the focus being more on the action of the person than on the reaction of the Spirit.
- (3) OT confirms that God will judge His people (10:30–31).
- (a) The next two verses continue the thought that God will not allow someone who has rejected His Son to go unpunished—they will come under His judgment and vengeance. Verse 30 consists of two OT citations from the Song of Moses (see comment on 1:6b): “Vengeance is mine; I will repay” (Deut 32:35; cf. Rom 12:19) and “The Lord will judge [vindicate] his people” (Deut 32:36). Both citations emphasize that God will judge His enemies, and that judgment will result in the vindication of his people (implied is the fact that those who reject God become His enemies).
 - (b) The author’s use of Deuteronomy 32 at first seems counter to the original context—that of judgment on Israel’s enemies. But as Bruce points out, God’s action in executing judgment on behalf of His people, “vindicating their cause against their enemies, ... carries with it the corollary that, on the same principles of impartial righteousness, he will execute judgment against them when they forsake his covenant” (note esp. Amos 3:2).²⁷⁶
 - (c) Verse 31 is a sobering conclusion to the author’s warning. The holiness of God is not to be trifled with. That is true for the ungodly. It is doubly true for those who

²⁷⁵ Lane, 2:295.

²⁷⁶ Bruce, 265. See also John Proctor, “Judgment or Vindication? Deuteronomy 32 in Hebrews 10:30,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 55:1 (2004): 66–80.

have known by personal experience the precious gift of God's Son.

Parallels Between Hebrews 6:4–8 and Hebrews 10:26–31		
Warning Section	Hebrews 6:4–8	Hebrews 10:26–31
Prior new birth experience	“enlightened” (6:4) “tasted the heavenly gift” (6:4) “shared in the Holy Spirit” (6:4) “tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” (6:5)	received the “knowledge of the truth” (10:26) sanctified by “the blood of the covenant” (10:26)
Description of the apostasy	“fallen away” (6:6) “crucifying once again the Son of God” (6:6) “holding him up to contempt” (6:6)	“sinning deliberately” (10:26) “adversary” [of God] (10:27) “trampled under foot the Son of God” (10:29) “profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified” (10:29) “outraged the Spirit of grace” (10:29)
Present reality if no repentance	“impossible...to restore them again to repentance <u>while...</u> ” (6:4, 6a)	“there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins [if we go on sinning deliberately]” (10:26)
Future judgment	“harm” (6:6) “cursed” (6:8) “burned” (6:8)	“fearful expectation of judgment” (10:27) “fury of fire” (10:27) “punishment” (10:29) “fear” (10:31)

B) Reminder of past obedience (10:32–34).

- (1) The author's stern warning (10:26–31) is followed by words of reassurance and encouragement. He asks them to “recall the former days” (v. 32). Recalling the past can help rekindle a community's commitment. It brings the realization that what has been done before can be done again, and motivates them to respond appropriately to the present crisis (cf. Gal 4:13–15; Rev 2:5).²⁷⁷
- (2) What had they experienced in the past? They “endured” (*hypemeinate*) a “hard struggle” (*athlesin*) “with sufferings” (*pathematon*) (v. 32). The verb “endured” means “to stand one's ground” or remain on the field of battle instead of fleeing.²⁷⁸ The “hard struggle” is a rare word that was originally used of the intense efforts of

²⁷⁷ O'Brien, 385.

²⁷⁸ Gk. πεμείνατε. BDAG, 1039; Louw and Nida §39.20; C. Spicq, *TLNT* 3:420 nn. 27, 29; BDF §148(1); Ellingworth, 546.

athletes in the sports arena (cf. Polybius, 5.64.6; 7.10.2–4; 27.9.7; 27.9.11). The word for “sufferings” is the same as 2:10 (cf. 1 Pet 5:1, 9; Phil 3:10).

- (3) Verses 33–34 list at least four forms of ill treatment the readers faced after they became Christians. All four are in harmony with the persecution experienced by the Jews when they were expelled from Rome under Claudius in A.D. 49.²⁷⁹
- (a) They were “publically exposed” (*theatrizomenoi*) to “reproach and affliction” (v. 33a). The verb, *theatrizo*, originally meant “to bring up on the stage,” but it soon acquired a figurative meaning, “to make a spectacle of someone” (cf. 1 Cor 4:9).²⁸⁰ The words “reproach and affliction” indicate the abuse they suffered was both verbal and physical.
 - (b) They were “partners” (*koinonoi*) “with those so treated” (v. 33b). This word expresses fellowship and solidarity—they “stood side by side” (NIV; cf. 2 Cor 1:7; 8:23; Phlm 1:17).
 - (c) They were imprisoned and had “compassion” (*synepathesate*) on “those in prison” (v. 34a). This means that when they were not in prison themselves, they sympathized with those who were as though they were still in prison with them.
 - (d) They “joyfully accepted the plundering of [their] property” (v. 34b). If these verses do refer to the expulsion from Rome, then the confiscation of property would have been part of such an eviction. How is it that they accepted their losses with joy? It was because they knew they had “a better possession and an abiding one” (v. 34c). Here, “joy” can be defined as the emotional state that comes from recognizing the transience of this present world and focusing on the infinite blessing that will be experienced in the world to come. The emotion of joy, then, is founded upon a godly perspective of life and comes from meditation on our “better possession” (cf. Jam 1:2–3, 12; Matt 5:12; Rom 5:3; 1 Pet 1:4–9; 4:12–19).

C) Call to endure by faith (10:35–39).

- (1) The author’s call to remember the “former days” is followed with a command: “do not throw away your confidence” (*parresian*) (v. 35a). The word translated “confidence” is the same word used to describe the boldness with which we as believers approach the throne of God (4:16; 10:19). Its use here, in a negative sense, corresponds with 3:6, where it is used positively (do not throw away that to which I told you to hold fast). It is best understood as referring to their original, public and courageous confession of faith. The author is urging them not to retreat from a

²⁷⁹ The juxtaposition of 10:26–31 and 32–35 suggests that it may have been the experience of suffering, abuse, and loss in the world that motivated the desertion of the community acknowledged in v 25 and a general tendency to avoid contact with outsiders observed elsewhere in Hebrews (Lane, 298).

²⁸⁰ Philo, *Against Flaccus* 72, 74, 84–85, 95, 173, where Jews were put on public display in the theater and were subjected to abuse during the pogrom of A.D. 38 (Lane, 298).

pattern of bold, public identification with Christ and His body.²⁸¹

- (2) What is the motivation for maintaining their confidence? Because it has “great reward” (*misthapodosian*) (v. 35b; cf. 11:6, 26). God has promised us eternal life (9:15) and all that goes with it—“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with Him graciously give us all things? (Rom 8:32). Implied is the question, ‘How could you treat such a precious possession so lightly?’
- (3) What is needed to hold fast our confidence? “Endurance” (*hypomones*) (v. 36a). Endurance is the ability to bear up under a heavy load—it continues to the very end and does not give up. The test of every Christian virtue is whether or not it can endure. Jesus is our example in this (cf. 12:1–3). If we do not persevere to the end, then we have not “done the will of God” (v. 36b). It is only after we have completed our “race” (12:1) that we will “receive what is promised” (v. 36c).
- (4) How much longer until Christ returns? The author takes a phrase from Isaiah 26:20 and combines it with Habakkuk 2:3b–4 to craft an OT answer: “Yet a little while,” (Isa 26:20) “and the coming one [*Christ*] will come and will not delay; but my [*Christ’s*] righteous one [*individual*] shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back [*apostasy*], my [*Christ’s*] soul has no pleasure in him [*destruction*]” (Hab 2:3b–4).
 - (a) Isaiah 26:20 is part of the “Song of Isaiah” (Isa 26:9–20). This was one of several biblical passages (cf. Deut 32) that were removed from their context and appended to the Psalter in the LXX as a collection of odes for use in the synagogue. Thus the tiny phrase cited in 10:37 (“a little while”) was sufficient to call the entire verse to mind for his readers. In context, Isaiah was encouraging his readers as they waited for their deliverance at the Day of Judgment.
 - (b) Habakkuk was deeply concerned with the timing of God’s final salvation—“O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?” (Hab 1:2). God’s answer was “though he should tarry, wait for him; for he [*Christ, the Lord*] will surely come, and will not tarry. If he [*the just*] should draw back, my soul has no pleasure in him: but the just shall live by my faith” (LXX Hab 2:3b–4).²⁸²

²⁸¹ Guthrie, 360.

²⁸² For a brief analysis of how the text of Hebrews 10:37–38 differs from the LXX, see Barry D. Smith, “Hebrews 10:32–39,” Cited 5 October 2012. Online: <http://www.abu.nb.ca/Courses/NewTestament/Hebrews/10-32-39.htm>. For a detailed analysis of how the LXX (and LXX manuscripts) differ from the MT on this passage, see Radu Gheorghita, *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews: An Investigation of Its Influence with Special Consideration to the Use of Hab 2:3–4 in Heb 10:37–38*. For a brief summary of the issue, see Cockerill, 511 and Hughes, 435.

Parallels Between Hebrews 6:9–18 and Hebrews 10:32–39		
Encouragement Section	Hebrews 6:9–18	Hebrews 10:32–39
Author's confidence	"we feel sure of better things" (6:9)	"we are not of those who shrink back" (10:39)
Remember past obedience	"your work" (6:10) "love you have shown...in serving the saints" (6:10) [you were] "earnest" (6:11)	"you endured a hard struggle with sufferings" (10:32) "exposed to reproach and affliction" (10:33) [were] "partners with those so treated" (10:33) "had compassion on those in prison" (10:33) "joyfully accepted the plundering of your property" (10:33)
Present responsibility	"show the same earnestness" [as in the past] (6:11) [do not be] "sluggish" (6:12) [be] "imitators of those who [had] faith and patience" (6:12)	"do not throw away your confidence" (10:35) [endure] (10:36) [do not] "shrink back" (10:39)
Scriptural anchor	God's promise and His oath (6:17–18)	"the coming one will come and will not delay" (10:37)
Incentive	"salvation" (6:9) "inherit the promises" (6:12)	"great reward" (10:35) "receive what is promised" (10:36) "preserve their souls" (10:39)

- (i) Note that the author of Hebrews reverses the order of the clauses in v. 38 from Habakkuk. Cockerill comments: "This change clarifies the identity of both the 'coming' one and the one who 'draws back.' It establishes a clear contrast between drawing 'back' and living 'by faith.'" ²⁸³
- (ii) Minnick comments that the emphasis in Hebrews is on the word "live" (the emphasis in Romans is on the word "faith"—Romans 1:17). Righteous people *live* this way. Surrounded by affliction, trouble, persecution, loss of goods, difficulties, and snares of many kinds, you can identify righteous people because they *live* by faith. ²⁸⁴

(5) The warning section concludes on a note of hope and optimism—"we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls" (10:39). The author is convinced that his readers are not quitters. He is confident that they will persevere by faith and be saved.

²⁸³ Cockerill, p. 510–11.

²⁸⁴ Mark Minnick, from his sermon "Cast Not Away Your Confidence" on Hebrews 11:1–3, 1993.

*Exhortation (11:1–40)**OT Citations: Gen 5:24; 21:12; 22:17**OT Allusions: LXX Exodus 2:11a*

16) OT Examples of Living by Faith (11:1–40).

A) Introduction (11:1–2).

- (1) This section of Hebrews is not an exhaustive treatment of the subject of faith; nor is it intended to provide a dictionary definition of faith. Instead, the author intended to expand on the “just shall live by faith” motif cited in 10:38 (Hab 2:4). What does it mean to “live by faith”? What effect does faith have on how a person lives?
- (2) As the author answers these questions, we gain insight into the nature of faith. The chapter begins with the following characterization²⁸⁵—faith is:
 - (a) First clause—the *hypostasis* of “things hoped for” (11:1a). This word was used previously in Hebrews: first in 1:3 to speak of Jesus being the exact imprint of God’s “nature” (objective sense—essence, being, substance), and second in 3:14 to urge the readers to hold their original “confidence” firm to the end (subjective sense—assurance, certainty). In 11:1, the subjective sense commends itself as the best sense.²⁸⁶ However, this “assurance” is *not* merely a subjective feeling. It is a confidence that is founded on the objective truth of God’s word (2:1–4). That truth provides the basis for faith’s internal subjective assurance.²⁸⁷
 - (b) Second clause—the *elenchos* of “things not seen” (11:1b). This word occurs only here in the NT. Its use here in parallel with *hypostasis* suggests that it should be understood as synonymous, hence the ESV’s “conviction” (11:1a).²⁸⁸ Faith, which is founded on the truth of God’s word, is convinced of the reality of things which the physical eye cannot presently see.
- (3) In summary, we might paraphrase v. 1 as follows: “A person who has faith lives as though things which do not yet exist will; they live as though things which cannot be seen are really there.” This kind of living demonstrates that the individual believes what God has said (cf. Jam 2:20–26), and it testifies to the reality of the spiritual realm.

²⁸⁵ S. M. Baugh, “The Cloud of Witnesses in Hebrews 11,” *WTJ* 68 (2006), 113–132. See also J. D. Smith III, “Faith as Substance or Surety: Historical Perspectives on *Hypostasis* in Hebrews 11:1,” *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God’s Word to the World. Essays in Honor of Ronald F. Youngblood*, ed. G. G. Scorgie, M. L. Strauss and S. M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 381–392.

²⁸⁶ So the ESV, NAS, NET, NIV, NLT, NRS; cf. Kistemaker, 311.

²⁸⁷ Paul uses the same word in 2 Corinthians 9:4 to speak of his confidence in the generosity of the Corinthians (he is sure enough to boast but not so sure as to take no precautions; cf. 9:3, 5). As in Hebrews 11:1, Paul’s confidence is not merely a subjective feeling—it is grounded in his past experiences with the church.

²⁸⁸ So Bruce, 278.

(4) The author goes on in v. 2 to say that this kind of living (by faith) is how the saints of old were commended (*emartyrethesan*) [by God] (11:2). The word used here meant “to bear witness” or “testify,” and in particular spoke of the witness to a person’s character.²⁸⁹ The passive voice points to God being the one who bears witness.²⁹⁰ Through their faith, the OT saints witnessed/testified (*martyreo*) to the truth of God’s word, and God, in turn, witnessed/testified to their standing before Him as righteous (cf. 11:3; Matt 23:35).

B) Examples from the pre-flood era (11:3–7).

(1) “By faith”

- (a) Verse three is the first of 18 verses that begin with the word *pistei*, “by faith” (11:3; also 4, 5, 7–9, 11, 17, 20–24, 27–31). The author uses “by faith” to introduce examples of those who lived their lives by faith, and he wants his readers to “not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb 6:12).
- (b) The verb form of faith is “believe” (cf. Rom 3:22; 4:11; Gal 3:22; Heb 11:6). Simply put, faith is “believing something” or “regarding something to be true.” However, there are two important aspects of biblical faith that distinguish it from the general sense of the word:
 - (i) Content. In the biblical context, the content of faith (that which is believed to be true) is very specific—it is the word (Rom 10:17) and acts of God (Exod 14:31). In each example given in Hebrews 11:4–32, the individual mentioned believed and acted on the promise or statement of God (sometimes communicated directly, sometimes through others), or on the basis of the acts of God (e.g., the parting of the Red Sea, etc.).
 - (ii) Results. Biblical faith demonstrates itself in action. It is not enough to simply believe that what God has said is true—we must also respond in obedience (cf. Jam 2:17–26; esp. 2:21–22 with Heb 11:17–19 and 2:25 with Heb 11:31).
- (c) Some people erroneously think that faith is having an optimistic outlook on life or a general attitude of hope. This is wrong—even lost people can have this kind of perspective on living. Others have been taught that faith is a matter of “Name it and claim it,” that is, believing that God will bring about the outcome that we think is best. This is very dangerous—it has led many into spiritual shipwreck. Biblical faith is always in harmony with the revealed will of God (cf. John 14:13–

²⁸⁹ O’Brien, 400. Compare with Acts 10:22; 16:2; also 6:3; 22:12; 1 Tim. 5:10. Koester, 473, notes that inscriptions from the Hellenistic and Roman periods frequently used this verb “attest” for public honors.

²⁹⁰ Lane, 2:330. The verb occurs seven times in Hebrews (7:8, 17; 10:15; 11:2, 4, 5, 39), and in each instance the reference is to the witness of the biblical record. The exemplars of faith to whom reference is made in the pages of the OT “enjoy the approving testimony of Scripture, and consequently of God himself, who speaks by his Spirit through the written word” (Trites, *Witness*, 221).

14; 1 John 5:14).

(2) We/you (11:3).

- (a) This verse is unique in that the subject of the verse is an implied “we.” In the other verses, the subject is a particular individual that is mentioned in the Scriptures.
- (b) By faith we understand that the “universe” (*aionas*) was “created” (*katertisthai*) by the “word” (*rhemati*) of God. The word translated “universe” could suggest multiple “worlds” since it is plural, but here, as in 1:2, it signifies the physical, material universe and is equivalent to the “things that are visible” (11:3b). The word rendered “created” means “to complete or prepare,” and invokes the Genesis 1 account of creation. The creation of the universe was accomplished by the *rhema* of God—specific words uttered by God (cf. Gen 1:3).
- (c) How is it that we understand these things? By faith. What is it that we are believing? The eyewitness account of creation as recorded in the Scriptures. God’s Word tells us that God created the material universe, and we believe that what God has said is true.
- (d) The last part of the verse offers a logical conclusion that can be reached from the creation account—“the visible has its origin in the invisible” (NET). While general revelation is enough to confirm the existence of God and the fact that He created the world (Rom 1:19–20), it does not reveal the manner in which God created. God spoke the universe into existence and thus the material universe came into being by a supernatural act of God (*ex nihilo*).

(3) Abel (11:4).

- (a) In v. 4 the author alludes to the story of Cain and Abel as recorded in Genesis 4:2b–7. His comments on the Genesis account reveal the following logic: (a) God “had regard” for Abel’s sacrifice (He accepted and was pleased with Abel’s offering), (b) God’s acceptance meant that Abel had done “well” (Gen 4:7), (c) God asked Cain “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” implying that Cain knew the right way to offer the sacrifice, (d) the fact that Cain knew there was a right way to offer the sacrifice implies that God had communicated what He wanted Cain and Abel to do, (e) living by faith means believing what God has said and acting in obedience to what He desires, (f) thus Abel offered his sacrifice “by faith” and Cain did not. The author sums up his thoughts on the story with the conclusion that God’s testimony concerning the faith of Abel was confirmation that Abel was righteous before God—Abel was living by faith.
- (b) In what way does Abel “through faith” still speak? Abel’s life of faith was recorded in Scripture and so even though Abel is now dead, his story still speaks to us today of the importance of living “by faith” (11:4c).

(4) Enoch (11:5–6).

- (a) We know little about Enoch—there are only four short verses about him in Genesis 5:21–24.²⁹¹ The MT of v. 24 says, “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him,” but the LXX says, “And Enoch was well-pleasing to God, and was not found, because God translated him.” It is the LXX to which the author alludes in Hebrews 11:5–6. God translated Enoch, and before his translation, God testified that Enoch was “well-pleasing” to Him.
- (b) What is the connection between faith and Enoch’s translation? It is the fact that Enoch pleased God. The author argues that “without faith it is impossible to please him [God],” thus Enoch must have lived a life of faith. This is in harmony with the sacrifice of Abel where faith was a prerequisite to God accepting his offering.
- (c) What is the nature of the faith that pleases God? Anyone who desires to “draw near to God must believe that”:
- (i) God exists (cf. 6:1). This is more than a belief in a higher power. This is believing that God exists as He has revealed Himself to be in the Scriptures. “So often we behave, particularly in the face of struggle or trial, as if God were different than He describes Himself to be.”²⁹²
 - (ii) God rewards those who keep on seeking Him (cf. 10:35; Gen 15:1). The reward is eternal life through a relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ (John 17:3). Our spiritual union with Christ enables us to become “fellow heirs” with Him (Rom 8:17). We will rule and reign with Christ in His coming kingdom (2 Tim 2:12).
 - (iii) Summary—“Faith is living as if God’s promise for the future is sure and his power in the present is real.”²⁹³

Correlation Between Hebrews 11:1 and 11:6		
Hebrews 11:1	Living “by faith”	Hebrews 11:6
1a “assurance of things hoped for”	Living as though things which do not yet exist will.	6c “believe that he [God] rewards those who seek him”
1b “conviction of things not seen”	Living as though things which cannot be seen are really there.	6b “believe that he [God] exists”

²⁹¹ In the NT, cf. Luke 3:37 and Jude 1:14–15. Minnick suggests that God translated Enoch to validate the reality of the message of judgment that Enoch had been preaching.

²⁹² Minnick, from his sermon “Ancient World Faith” on Hebrews 11:4–7, 1993.

²⁹³ Cockerill, 541.

(5) Noah (11:7).

- (a) Noah was a righteous man (Gen 7:1). He, like Enoch, was “well-pleasing” to God (LXX Gen 6:9; again the MT says “walked with God”). But it was not Noah’s life in general that interested the author of Hebrews. Instead, the focus is placed on Noah’s reaction to God’s warning of the impending global flood (“events as yet unseen”; cf. 11:1b). Noah is an excellent example of living as though things which do not yet exist will. Noah took God seriously—v. 7 says that he acted in “reverent fear” (*eulabetheis*; cf. Jesus’ attitude toward the Father in 5:7).
- (b) Noah’s faith is seen in his obedience: he “prepared an ark for the saving of his household” (11:7a). This obedient faith is modified by two clauses:
 - (i) By it He “condemned the world” (11:7b). How did Noah’s faith condemn the world? Noah demonstrated his faith through his actions. The building of the ark testified to his faith in God, whom the ancient world had rejected. When we live in obedience to God’s word, we bring conviction on those around us—they are condemned by our righteous living.
 - (ii) By it He “became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (11:7c). The theme of heir/inheritance is a recurring one in Hebrews: Jesus, the Son of God, is the heir of all things (1:2) and believers are described as those who “inherit salvation” (1:14) and “inherit the promises” (6:12, 17; cf. 9:15). Noah responded to God in faith and so became an heir of the righteousness God promises to give to those who trust him (Gal 3:6–9, 16–18, esp. 29).²⁹⁴

C) Examples from the patriarch era (11:8–22).

(1) Abraham (11:8–12).

- (a) The author of Hebrews devotes more attention to the life of Abraham than any other OT example of living by faith (11:8–12, 17–19; Moses is a close second).
- (b) The author begins at the start of the Abrahamic narrative recorded in Genesis 12:1. While Abraham was still in Ur (cf. Acts 7:2–3 with Gen 11:31–32; 12:1), God told him to “go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.” Abraham believed God and acted in obedience (11:8a). At first, his obedience does not seem particularly noteworthy, but the author reveals the quality of Abraham’s faith when he adds that Abraham “went out, not knowing where he was going”²⁹⁵ (11:8b). Leaving your home and friends, and setting out on a journey with an unknown destination (imagine what his friends said) is a prime example of living by faith.

²⁹⁴ Lane, 2:341.

²⁹⁵ This is an exegetical comment on “that I will show you” in Gen 12:1.

- (c) The author goes on to say that when Abraham moved from Haran to Canaan, he did not build a city and settle down (11:9). Instead he “sojourned,” (KJV) *parokesen*—he continued to live in tents and moved from place to place (Gen 20:1; 21:34; 23:4; 35:27). He lived in “the land of promise” (Gen 15:18–21; 17:8) as though he was living “in a foreign land” (11:9a). Abraham’s example was followed by his son Isaac (Gen 26:17, 25) and his grandson Jacob (Gen 25:27; 32:25, 33–34; 33:18–19; 35:21), both of whom were joint-heirs (*synkleronomon*) of the same promise (Gen 26:2–5; 28:13–15; 35:9–13).
- (d) Why did Abraham live this way? Hadn’t God promised to give him the land? The author claims that his actions were the result of living “by faith” (11:9a). What had God said that Abraham believed? Stephen’s sermon in the book of Acts sheds light on this question.
- (i) Stephen pointed out that “[God] gave him [Abraham] no inheritance in it [the land of Canaan], not even a foot’s length,” but rather “promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him” (Acts 7:5). This means that although God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham (Gen 13:14–18; 17:8), God did not intend for him to take possession of the land at that time (cf. God’s command to Isaac in Gen 26:3).
- (ii) Possession of the land was promised to the descendants of Abraham who must first be “sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years...and they shall come back here [to take possession of the land] in the fourth generation” (Gen 15:13–16; Acts 7:6–7). Thus Abraham demonstrated a life of faith by living like a stranger in his own land and not taking possession of it—all in obedience to God’s time-table.
- (e) What was Abraham living for during his sojourning in Canaan, seeing that God did not intend for him to take possession of the land? The author’s answer is a commentary on vv. 8–9: “he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (11:10). A tent has no foundation—it is mobile and impermanent. While Abraham lived in tents in a land his descendants would conquer and possess, he kept his eyes fixed on the eternal “great reward” (Gen 15:1). He understood that the reward was “yet future”—it would be realized, not in this world, but in the heavenly “city” of God (11:16; cf. 12:22).
- (f) There is debate over whether Sarah or Abraham is the subject of v. 11. Lane argues for Abraham as the subject²⁹⁶ while Cockerill argues for Sarah.²⁹⁷ Bruce mentions a compromise position: “By faith, he [Abraham] also, together with

²⁹⁶ Lane, 2:345.

²⁹⁷ Cockerill, 543–44.

barren Sarah, received power to beget..." This places primary emphasis on Abraham's faith but includes Sarah as also believing God's promise.²⁹⁸ Abraham and Sarah believed God could accomplish what was physically impossible—this belief was grounded in the fact that they "considered him faithful who had promised" (11:11b). The preface "by faith" implies that their belief in God's promise was prerequisite to them being enabled to procreate. Do we really believe that God will keep His word, even when it seems impossible?

- (g) From one man came countless descendants (11:12a; cf. Isa 51:2). From a dead man—as far as procreation was concerned—came life (11:12b). These are the results of living a life of faith in the word of God (Gen 15:5; 22:17).
- (2) Excursus—the patriarchs died in faith (11:13–16).
 - (a) "These all died in faith" (11:13a). The word "these" refers to those mentioned in vv. 8–12: Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob (the travel motif in vv. 13–16 does not fit Abel, Enoch and Noah; moreover, Enoch was not among those who "died" in faith). Each of these individuals "died in faith"—that is, they persisted in their belief of God's promises all the way to the end.
 - (b) Why does the author emphasize that they died "in faith"? Because none of them "received the things promised" (11:13b). God had promised countless descendants, a great nation who would possess of the land of Canaan, and the blessing of the entire world through Abraham's "seed" (Gal 3:16; Gen 22:18). These promises were not fulfilled in Abraham's, Isaac's or Jacob's lifetime.
 - (c) How did the patriarchs live in relation to God's promises? They saw them and greeted/welcome them from afar [in time] (11:13c). The eye of faith can see "things hoped for"; it can joyously anticipate the future reality of God's promises. Further, the patriarchs lived a life consistent with this expectation—by word (cf. Gen 23:4; 47:9) and deed they "acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (11:13d). Those who are citizens of heaven are pilgrims on earth.
 - (d) What does it mean to be a sojourner? If you claim to be a "stranger and exile" and you live that way, it shows that you are "seeking a homeland" (11:14). When you consider the country you're living in to be your home, you stop moving from place to place and you put down roots. The patriarchs did not do this and the author sees this as evidence that they were looking and living for a heavenly homeland.

²⁹⁸ Bruce, 302. Argument for Sarah: Abraham fathered Ishmael through Hagar at the age of 86, so Sarah was clearly the reason why the couple had been unable to have their own child (Gen 16). Abraham also fathered children through Keturah after Sarah's death (Gen 25:1–4). Arguments for Abraham: (a) Sarah was not portrayed as having faith (Gen 18:12–15), (b) Abraham is the subject in v. 12 so v. 11 would be a digression, (c) the Genesis narrative emphasizes Abraham's faith in God's promise while he was still childless (Gen 15:6), (d) the phrase *katabolen spermatos* refers to the father's part in procreation not the mother's.

- (e) Did the patriarchs consider their old country (Ur and Haran) to still be home? Clearly not—if they did, they simply could have returned and settled down (11:15).
 - (f) Up to this point, the flow of logic has been: 1) Abraham sojourned in the land, 2) a sojourner does not consider their current country to be home, 3) Abraham could have returned to his old country but did not, 4) therefore, Abraham did not consider his old country to be his homeland. What, then, did Abraham consider to be his homeland? The only option left is—the “heavenly country” (11:16a). Abraham and the other patriarchs were living, not for this world, but for the next. That kind of living is “by faith,” and it pleases God. “Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” (11:16b).
- (3) Abraham (11:17–19).
- (a) The author returns his focus to Abraham in these verses and gives one last example from the life of this man of faith—the offering of Isaac (11:17). Abraham’s faith was in response to two statements made by God:
 - (i) Genesis 22:2—“He [God] said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you’” (Isaac was Abraham’s “only” son in the sense that he was designated by God as the one through whom God would fulfill His promise; cf. Rom 9:7).
 - (ii) Genesis 21:12—“But God said to Abraham, ‘Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named’” (11:18).
 - (b) How did Abraham reconcile these two seemingly contradictory statements? How did he respond by faith when God’s will seemed opposed to God’s promise? The author reveals that Abraham “considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (11:19). What amazing faith!
 - (c) On what does the author base this remarkable claim as to Abraham’s thinking? It is probable that Genesis 22:5 was the source of his statement—when Abraham left his servants behind, he told them “we will return to you” (Gen 22:5). Abraham was so convinced that God would keep His word that he believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead to fulfill His promise.
- (4) Isaac (11:20).
- (a) The Greek reads (lit.), “by faith and/also concerning things coming, Isaac blessed

Jacob and Esau.” Only one blessing of Esau is recorded (Gen 27:39–40), but Jacob received two blessings: the first he obtained through deception (Gen 27:28–29) but the second was freely given by Isaac—a passing on of the blessing of Abraham (Gen 28:3–4). It seems likely that the author interpreted Isaac’s response to Jacob’s deception (Gen 27:33—“Yes, and he shall be blessed”; cf. Gen 25:23) and the subsequent nature of the blessing of Esau as an act of faith on Isaac’s part. Without question, the passing of the blessing of Abraham on to Jacob was made “by faith”—Isaac was certain of the coming fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham and himself through Jacob.

- (b) Note that Jacob is mentioned first even though Esau was firstborn. Esau, along with Ishmael, demonstrates that the blessing comes to those who have faith. Hughes comments, “The message is clear: the line of the promise is not the line of the flesh but the line of faith; the true heir is not the outward heir but the inward heir; ‘not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants’ (Rom. 2:28f.; 9:6ff.); for, in the ultimate perspective, they who are one by faith with Christ, and only they, are ‘Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise’ (Gal. 3:29)—that community of believers, in other words, who are born, ‘not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God’ (Jn. 1:12f.).”²⁹⁹

(5) Jacob (11:21).

- (a) The emphasis on living by faith all the way to the end continues with the mention of Jacob blessing Joseph’s sons (Gen 48). The author chose the blessing of Joseph’s sons rather than the blessing of Jacob’s own sons (Gen 49) for three reasons:
 - (i) First, Jacob blessed Joseph’s sons in the name of the God of Abraham (Gen 48:15–16). Second, Jacob said they would be called by his name and by the names of his fathers Abraham and Isaac (Gen 48:16b). Third, he transmitted to them the promise given to Abraham and Isaac of numerous descendants who would inherit the “land of your fathers” (Gen 48:16c, 21).³⁰⁰
 - (b) The last phrase of the verse, “bowing in worship over the head of his staff” is a reference to LXX Genesis 47:31. The two events (blessing and worship) are reversed by the author (Gen 47:31 after Gen 48) so that the reader is left with this impression: Jacob worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff. He not only did what his father Isaac had done in passing on those blessings, but at the very end of his days, he continued to worship the God of his fathers.³⁰¹

(6) Joseph (11:22).

²⁹⁹ Hughes, 488.

³⁰⁰ Cockerill, 561.

³⁰¹ Minnick, from his sermon “The Pilgrim’s Last Day—His Best Day” on Hebrews 11:17–22, 1993.

- (a) The author's last example of living by faith from the patriarch era is Joseph. While much could be said of Joseph's lifetime of faith in God (Gen 39–46), it is his final statements that interest the author—Joseph: 1) “made mention of the exodus of the Israelites” (Gen 50:24), and 2) “gave directions concerning his bones” (Gen 50:25). Joseph was so confident that God would keep His promise to Abraham (Gen 15:13–16) that he made his brothers “swear” to carry his bones with them.³⁰² And so, when Israel left Egypt, Joseph (in a sense) was right there with them (Exod 13:19).

D) Examples from the Mosaic era (11:23–29).

(1) Moses' parents (11:23).

- (a) The author continues his list of examples of those who lived by faith with the next main character in the Pentateuch narrative after Joseph—Moses. However, the first verse in this section concerns the faith of Moses' parents and not Moses himself: “by faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents [Amram and Jochebed]” (11:23a; cf. Exod 2:2³⁰³). Their action was in violation of the royal edict that all male Israelite babies were to be killed (when frustrated by Shiphrah and Puah, Pharaoh issued a second edict instructing the Egyptians themselves to throw the babies into the Nile river, cf. Exod 1:16, 22).³⁰⁴
- (b) In what sense were Moses' parents acting “by faith”? The next phrase answers this question: “because they saw that the child was beautiful” (11:23b). At first this seems confusing—Moses' parents hid him because he was a good-looking baby? How is that acting “by faith”? The word translated “beautiful” (*asteion*) is from LXX Exodus 2:2, and is quoted here in v. 23 and by Stephen in Acts 7:20 (“he [Moses] was *asteion* in God's sight,” ESV). This data suggests that Moses' physical appearance had a unique quality—in a visible way it communicated the fact that God's favor was on Moses and that God intended him for some special purpose.³⁰⁵

³⁰² Joseph died in 1806 BC, some 359 years before the exodus in 1446 BC. This is equivalent to someone who helped found the colony of North Carolina (AD 1653) making plans for his coffin to be moved in the year AD 2012.

³⁰³ According to the MT of Exodus 2:2, Moses' mother “concealed him,” but the LXX says that “they concealed him,” implying that both parents were involved. Both Philo, *On the Life of Moses* 1.9–11; and Josephus, *Antiquities* 2.217–221, follow the LXX.

³⁰⁴ Minnick comments, “The most serious thing about this situation was...the threat to the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. Stephen's sermon in Acts 7 [esp. 7:19] establishes that the oppression was primarily designed to threaten and counteract the fulfillment of the promises of given hundreds of years previously to Abraham.” From his sermon “Faith for Afflictions” on Hebrews 11:23–27, 1993.

³⁰⁵ So Lane, 2:370; O'Brien, 429; Cockerill, 566. I personally favor an emphasis on the unique quality of Moses' physical appearance—had Moses' parents received some verbal direction from God, such as Manoah and his wife in Judges 13, it is likely that it would be recorded for us somewhere in the Pentateuch.

(c) When Moses' parents recognized that he was marked by God for some future service, they responded in faith as though it were a direct command from God—they hid him and they "were not afraid of the king's edict" (11:23c). Does this mean they didn't take Pharaoh's edict seriously? No, the fact that they hid Moses demonstrates that they took the edict seriously and understood the risk to their entire family if they were discovered.³⁰⁶ Rather, the phrase is intended to show that they overcame their natural fear of Pharaoh's reprisal and obeyed the will of God rather than the will of the king (cf. Daniel 3:16–18). We show who we fear most by whom we choose to obey (cf. Matt 10:28)—Moses' parents are excellent examples of what it means to live "by faith."

(2) Moses (11:24–28).

(a) After being discovered by Pharaoh's³⁰⁷ daughter, Moses was adopted by her and brought up as her own son. Stephen said that "Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds"³⁰⁸ (Acts 7:22; cf. 1 Kgs 4:30). The phrase "when he was grown up" (11:24a) is an allusion to LXX Exodus 2:11a and corresponds to "When he was forty years old" (Acts 7:23).

(b) What is meant by "Moses...refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (11:24b)? This phrase correlates to Exodus 2:11—Moses "went out to his people" (Exodus 2:11 appears to be a condensed statement of what was probably a lengthy series of events). Traditionally, this was understood to mean that Moses made the decision to distance himself from the Egyptian Court.³⁰⁹ That Moses was serious about this decision is seen by the fact that he premeditatedly killed an Egyptian who was beating "one of his people." This action, more than any words, demonstrated that Moses rejected any connection to his step-mother and the possibility of future rule.³¹⁰

(c) In what way did Moses choose "to be mistreated with the people of God" (11:25a)? While his rejection of the royal family almost certainly led to a

³⁰⁶ Minnick comments, "Faith believes that when obedience disables us from meeting family needs that God will intervene on our family's behalf." From his sermon "Faith for Afflictions" on Hebrews 11:23–27, 1993.

³⁰⁷ By the high chronology, Amenhotep I reigned from 1546 BC to 1526 BC (the year of Moses' birth). He was followed by Thutmose I who reigned from 1526 BC to 1512 BC. When Moses was 40 (1486 BC), Thutmose III was on the throne, co-regent with Hatshepsut. Thutmose III died a few years before the Exodus (1446 BC) and was followed by Amenhotep II.

³⁰⁸ Josephus wrote (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book II, Chapter 10) that when the Ethiopians attacked Egypt and were on the verge of defeating them, the Pharaoh appointed Moses as general over the Egyptian army. Under his leadership, the Ethiopians were driven back and defeated.

³⁰⁹ Lane, 2:372. (e.g., Ezekiel the Tragedian, cited by Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 9.28: "When I reached full maturity I went out of the royal house, for anger and the cunning projects of the king drove me to works"; cf. Philo, *Moses* 1.33, 40: the forced labor that the pharaoh exacted from the Hebrew slaves angered Moses and alienated him from his prior allegiance to his adoptive parents).

³¹⁰ Philo considered Moses to be the designated heir apparent (*Moses* 1.49–51; cf. Jos., *Ant.* 2.232; *Jub.* 47:9).

backlash of mistreatment, there seems to be more implied—it may be that Moses, after renouncing his claim to a future in the royal court, went to live with his own family (Miriam and Aaron) and voluntarily joined his people in their forced servitude. After all, if he was not “Pharaoh’s daughter” then who was he? Nothing more than one of the Israelite slaves.

- (d) How would staying “Pharaoh’s daughter” have been enjoying “the fleeting pleasures of sin” (11:25b)? The implication is that God was leading Moses to identify with his own people and reject a future with the Egyptians. Thus obedience to God’s direction was at stake. Unlike Joseph, who was placed in a position of leadership in Egypt by God, Moses was being called to turn his back on such pleasures.
- (e) How can the author say that Moses’ decisions and actions were “by faith”? Stephen comments: “He [Moses] supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand” (Act 7:25). The implication is that Moses believed that God intended to use him to save his people, and his actions, although not sanctioned by God, were in accord with this belief (perhaps passed on to him by his parents).
- (f) Did Moses really understand that his decision to suffer reproach was for the sake of Christ (11:26a)? It seems doubtful—the wording is best understood as the author viewing Moses’ past actions through the lens of a present knowledge of Christ as God’s Son. Certainly Moses’ decision mirrored Christ’s in that both gave up wealth and privilege in order to suffer and identify with the people of God.
- (g) Why would Moses, raised as an Egyptian of the royal house, consider “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (11:26a)? The author of Hebrews says that Moses was “looking to the reward” (11:26b). What reward? The reward of seeing the fulfillment of God’s promises to the patriarchs (Gen 15:14) in the present, and the ultimate reward of a “heavenly city” in the future.
- (h) How can the author of Hebrews say that Moses “left Egypt” by faith when Exodus 2:14–15 states that Moses fled Egypt in order to avoid being killed by Pharaoh? Also, the phrase “[Moses] left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king” (11:27a) seems in contradiction to Exodus 2:14: “Then Moses was afraid, and thought, ‘surely the thing is known.’” These questions have raised the issue of whether the author is speaking of the first time Moses left Egypt (the flight to Midian) or to the second time (the exodus of Israel from Egypt).
- (i) In support of the first option, Hughes suggests “that it was not personal fear of Pharaoh but the awareness of his destiny as the deliverer of the covenant people that caused him [Moses] to take flight. In other words, the governing impulse of his flight from Egypt was faith, not fear, as is neatly suggested by the NEB translation: ‘By faith he left Egypt, and not because he feared the

king's anger.”³¹¹ Lane also supports this option: “Moses did express fear when he knew his violent action had become public knowledge (Exod 2:14), but by faith he overcame his fear of reprisals and left Egypt, finding in faith a substantiation of hopes as yet unrealized and events as yet unseen (v. 1).”³¹² Further, the Exodus takes place *after* the Passover sacrifice (11:28), and up until now the author has not deviated from following biblical chronology.³¹³

- (ii) In support of the second option, Cockerill comments, “[The] flight [to Midian] could hardly be what the pastor is referring to when he says that Moses ‘abandoned Egypt, not intimidated by the wrath of the king.’ Exodus 2:14 says clearly that Moses was ‘afraid.’ Throughout the whole process of deliverance from Egypt—repeated interviews with Pharaoh, invoking of the plagues, and final crossing of the Red Sea—he was in no way ‘intimidated by the wrath of the king.’ It would be artificial to constrain the pastor to a rigid chronology by insisting that this event could not be the final departure from Egypt because it preceded the establishing of the Passover in v. 28 and the crossing of the Red Sea in v. 29. Those two events are specific aspects of the whole described in v. 27. The pastor gathers all of this under the rubric of Moses’ abandoning Egypt as the most economical way to emphasize the courage of Moses expressed through this departure.” O’Brien concurs: “That ‘he left Egypt’ is then the culmination of a series of events.”³¹⁴
- (iii) Roger Hahn, who is not dogmatic about either option, comments, “There are strengths and weaknesses to both interpretations. More important than which departure is being referred to is the insight of the author of Hebrews that Moses gained the courage to go by faith and that he envisioned that which was not yet seen (11:27b). The pastoral application is clear. By faith the readers of Hebrews could gain the courage to stay true to Christ (whether they were afraid or not is less important than whether they obeyed or not). Also by faith they could begin to trust God to bring to reality help and protection that was invisible at the present.”³¹⁵
- (i) What is meant by the phrase “he endured as seeing him who is invisible” (11:27b)? This phrase is interpreted differently depending on which option (flight or Exodus) is chosen for 11:27a:
 - (i) Hughes understands the phrase “as a reference to the forty years of obscurity and inactivity (from the point of view of his vocation to national leadership), which were also years of testing and preparation for the final

³¹¹ Hughes, 498–99. Hughes presents the longest defense of the flight to Midian option.

³¹² Lane, 2:375. So also Guthrie, 381 and Allen, 561.

³¹³ Eisenbaum, *Jewish Heroes*, 169.

³¹⁴ O’Brien, 433. So also Kistemaker, 339–40.

³¹⁵ Roger Hahn, “Hebrews 11:23–40” No pages. Cited 5 November 2012. Online: <http://www.crivoice.org/biblestudy/bbheb13.html>.

forty years as the deliverer of his people. This prolonged interval was indeed a period which called for great faith and endurance if he was to overcome the temptation to frustration and discouragement.”³¹⁶

(ii) Cockerill comments, “Moses was ‘seeing’ with the eyes of faith the ‘One’ who cannot be seen with physical eyes. The present tense of the participle ‘seeing’ shows that the pastor is describing the perennial habit of Moses’ life—he endured ‘as continually seeing’ by faith ‘the Unseen One.’ Only such a continuous vision of God’s presence and power will enable the faithful to persistently ‘endure’ the hardship of the present.”³¹⁷

(j) Verse 28 is the last verse to reference Moses directly. God told Moses to observe the Passover (Exod 12:1–13, 43–49, 14–20). Moses believed God and followed His instructions—he lived “by faith” (Exod 12:28).

(3) The Exodus generation (11:29).

(a) In the notes on the second warning section of Hebrews (3:7–4:13), it was argued that the Exodus generation was used by the author as an example of *not* remaining faithful—this, of course, make sense only if that generation *began* with true faith. Two of the supporting references for defending that argument were sourced from Hebrews 11:

(i) The Exodus generation believed God’s word given through Moses and followed the instructions concerning the Passover (11:28; Moses is mentioned specifically but the people joined him in his faith). In response to Moses’ direction Exodus records, “And the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. All the people of Israel did just as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.” (Exod 12:27b, 28, 50).

(ii) The Exodus generation believed God’s command given through Moses to cross through the Red Sea and they did so “by faith” (11:29). This faith—they heard God’s command and responded in obedience—is commended by the author of Hebrews (11:39).

(b) Trapped at the Red Sea, the people of Israel overcame an initial panic which could have paralyzed them (Exod 14:10–12). They listened when Moses told them, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD” (Exod 14:13), and they responded in obedience as Moses led them through the parted waters. The Exodus account further records, “Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses” (Exod 14:31).

³¹⁶ Hughes, 499; also Lane, 2:376.

³¹⁷ Cockerill, 576.

- (c) The initial faith of the Exodus generation is what makes their story so tragic, and is the reason why the author of Hebrews chooses them as an example of what can happen when you allow unbelief into your heart (3:12). If they, who witnessed the “great power” of God and His “mighty hand” (Exod 32:11), could turn away from God in unbelief, then so can we (2:1–4).
- E) Examples from the conquest of Canaan (11:30–31).
- (1) Joshua and the new generation (11:30).
- (a) The author skips over the wilderness wanderings (he has already used that time as an example of *faithlessness*; 3:16–19) and resumes with the account of the destruction of Jericho. The instructions given to Joshua by Jesus (cf. Josh 5:14–15; Joshua was permitted to worship and the ground was holy) were meant to test the faith of the new generation of Israel—would they be willing to obey God’s command when it seemed foolish. What kind of a battle plan would have grown men marching around a strong fortress for seven days, led by seven priests blowing rams’ horns? But Israel responded in obedience and persisted to the end, even though they could have given up.
- (2) Rahab (11:31).
- (a) Rahab is the last individual whose faith received detailed attention in the author’s list of examples of those who lived by faith (she is the only woman except Sarah to be mentioned by name). Her faith was unique in that it was based, not in a direct statement from God, but in the historical facts of the Exodus and the defeat of the Amorite kings, Sihon and Og (Josh 2:9–11). God’s mighty acts of power as He brought Israel closer to Canaan were intended as a last warning to the nations who had been filling up their cup of iniquity (Gen 15:16). Rahab heard of these miracles and concluded that the Israelite’s god was “God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath” (Josh 2:11b). Instead of responding only in dread (“our hearts melted”)³¹⁸, she chose to act on her belief in Yahweh—she hid the spies with great risk to herself and her family. And so, out of a city that was “devoted to destruction,” Rahab saved herself and her entire family “by faith” (Josh 6:17–18, 25).
- F) Examples from the judges, kings and prophets (11:32–38).

(1) Victorious Heroes (11:32–35a).

- (a) The author breaks off his detailed examination of the lives of those who lived by faith with an acknowledgement of the constraints of time and space—“And what

³¹⁸ The rest of Jericho was afraid, but they did not fear God enough to repent of their wickedness and cry out to Him for mercy. It is possible to experience emotional distress when confronted by the truth and still resist God’s grace in your heart (cf. 1 Sam 28:15, 20).

more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of..." (11:32a). He gives one final series of names, ending with a reference to "the prophets" (11:32b).

- (i) Gideon. Gideon was from one of the weakest clans in the tribe of West Manasseh. When commanded by God to "Go in this might of yours [the LORD is with you] and save Israel" (Judg 6:12, 14), Gideon believed God and responded in obedience to His direction. This is not to say that Gideon did not experience doubt—he struggled with unbelief (Judg 6:17, 36–40); but in the end he acted in faith and received God's commendation (11:39).
- (ii) Barak. God told Barak the Naphtalite to "Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor...and I will draw out Sisera...and I will give him into your hand" (Judg 4:6–7). Like Gideon, he wrestled with unbelief—he refused to go without being accompanied by the prophetess Deborah (Judg 4:8). And although his doubt meant that he received no glory from the battle (Judg 4:9), he acted in obedience to God's command and marched his 10,000 footmen to victory against a vastly superior force which included "900 chariots of iron" (Judg 4:13; what we might call "bringing a knife to a gun fight").
- (iii) Samson. Samson the Danite was chosen by God from birth to be a life-long Nazirite and a savior to Israel (Judg 13:5). And in spite of Samson's weakness for women, God used Samson to single-handedly wage war against the Philistines. In the incident of his wife at Timnah, the scripture reveals that Samson was acting in accordance with God's plan—"it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines" (Judg 14:4). Samson's life was marked by lapses into sin (for which he eventually paid the ultimate price), but he never wavered from his faith in God's power and from following God's command to destroy the enemy (Judg 16:28–31).
- (iv) Jephthah. Jephthah of the tribe of East Manasseh was "a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute" (Judg 11:1). This resulted in him being driven away by the legitimate heirs, and he lived the life of an adventurer. But he maintained a belief in the God of Israel, and when circumstances turned in his favor, he acknowledged that only the LORD could enable him to win victory over the Ammonites (Judg 11:9). The book of Judges states that "the Spirit of the LORD was upon" him, and although he made a rash vow³¹⁹, he obeyed the leadership of the Holy Spirit and acted in faith to win the victory (Judg 11:32–33).
- (v) David and Samuel. Both these men have large sections of the OT dedicated to telling their stories. David of Judah was remembered as Israel's greatest king—he worshipped God alone and opposed idolatry. When confronted with his sin, David repented; unlike Saul whose repentance was never more than an attempt to avoid losing face. Samuel the Levite was the last of the

³¹⁹ Jephthah was a man of his word, and although Scripture in no way approves of him sacrificing his only child, it does testify to his unswerving commitment to perform what he perceived to be his obligation to God.

judges and the first of the prophets (1 Sam 3:19–20; 19:20). His judgeship was inaugurated by the genuine repentance of Israel and the destruction of the forces of the Philistines (1 Sam 7). Samuel remained faithful to God his entire life.

- (vi) The prophets. These individuals are mentioned as a group and immediately bring to mind men like Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and many more. Faith was evident in their lives as well as in their words.
- (b) The people mentioned by the author were not superheroes—they were ordinary people who believed what God said and acted in obedience to what He commanded. Through their faith, and not in their own strength, they:
 - (i) Conquered kingdoms (11:33a). This summarizes the military victories of the judges and David. The work of the judges brought no enduring peace until David extended the borders of Israel from Egypt to the Euphrates (1 Kgs 4:20–21).
 - (ii) Enforced justice (11:33b). The judges brought justice to the people of Israel, and David in particular is said to have “administered justice and equity to all his people” (2 Sam 8:15; 1 Chr 18:14).
 - (iii) Obtained promises (11:33c). This refers, not to the promise of entering God’s rest and eternal reward (4:1; 9:15), but rather to specific earthly promises made by God to men like Gideon (Judg 6:16; 7:7), Barak (Judg 4:7, 14), Samson (Judg 13:5), and David (2 Sam 7:11).
 - (iv) Stopped the mouths of lions (11:33d). This is an allusion to Daniel, who was thrown into a den of lions because of his faith in God (Dan 6).
 - (v) Quenched the power of fire (11:34a). Daniel’s three friends, Hananiah (Shadrach), Azariah (Meshach) and Mishael (Abednego), were delivered from Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace (Dan 3).
 - (vi) Escaped the edge of the sword (11:34b). Escape from death marked the life of many in the OT: David escaped from Saul (1 Sam 17:45–47), Elijah from Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:1–3), Elisha from Jehoram (2 Kgs 6:26–32), and Jeremiah from Jehoiakim (Jer 26:7–24).
 - (vii) Were made strong out of weakness (11:34c). If physical weakness is in view then Samson’s final act of war against the Philistines certainly fits this description (Judg 16:28–30). David’s slaying of Goliath and Esther’s courageous intervention on behalf of her fellow Jews are other instances of the weak becoming strong through faith. Paul said, “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10).

(viii) Became mighty in war and put foreign armies to flight (11:34d). Lane translates the two final clauses of v. 34 together. Such were the experiences of Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, David, and even Samuel (cf. 1 Sam 7:5–14).³²⁰

(ix) Women received back their dead by resurrection (11:35a). The allusion is to the widow at Zarephath in Sidon, whose son was brought back to life through the faith of Elijah (1 Kgs 17:17–24), and to the woman at Shunem, whose son was restored to her through the faith of Elisha (2 Kgs 4:18–37). In the latter case, the mother's haste in going to Elisha on Mount Carmel despite her own deep distress, and her quiet response to inquiry, "All is well" (2 Kgs 4:22–26), were expressions of her own faith that she would indeed receive her son from the dead "by resurrection."³²¹

(2) Suffering Heroes (11:35b–38).

- (a) At this point in the chapter, one might think that a life of faith is one of triumph and victory. But the author does not want to leave us with that impression. The miracles experienced by the people mentioned in Hebrews 11 were the result of obedience to what God told them to do. It was not Barak's idea to attack the Canaanites with an outnumbered group of foot soldiers, nor was it Daniel's idea to be thrown into a den of lions. In each example, God used ordinary men and women to display His power and accomplish His purpose. The author now gives a list of examples of those for whom a life of faith meant suffering. But they did not give up—they endured to the end.
- (b) Some were "tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life" (11:35b). The word for "tortured" (*etympanisthesan*) is found only here in the NT. It is used once in the LXX to translate David's actions while feigning madness—"[he] drummed upon the doors of the city." This conveys the image of someone being beaten or crushed. The author says that those who were subjected to this treatment refused to accept release. Implied is the idea that all they had to do was reject or recant their faith in God and the torture would cease. Why would they remain steadfast in their faith? Because they knew that relief from physical pain in this life meant the loss of eternal life in the next—thus they feared God more than man (Matt 10:28).
- (c) Others "suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment" (11:36). Jeremiah the prophet was beaten and placed in stocks (Jer 20:2), and he complained bitterly that he was the object of ridicule and mockery (Jer 20:7b–8). During the reign of Zedekiah, Jeremiah was accused of deserting to the Chaldeans and was thrown into prison for "many days" (Jer 37:13–16). After his release, his enemies lowered him into an empty cistern and left him to starve to

³²⁰ Lane, 2:388.

³²¹ Lane, 2:388.

death (Jer 38:6–13). Other prophets we similarly mistreated (e.g., 1 Kgs 22:26–27 [Micaiah]; 2 Chr 16:10 [Hanani]).

- (d) They were “stoned” (11:37a). Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest, was stoned to death in the Temple courtyard by order of King Joash (2 Chr 24:20–21; cf. Luke 13:34). Legend has it that Jeremiah, who ended up being forcibly taken to Egypt, was later stoned to death by the very Jews who kidnapped him.³²²
 - (e) They were “sawn in two” (11:37b). According to tradition, King Manasseh had Isaiah killed by being sawn in two.³²³
 - (f) They were “killed with the sword” (11:37b). Not everyone who lived a life of faith “escaped the edge of the sword” (11:34). The prophet Uriah, a contemporary of Jeremiah, was hunted down by King Jehoiakim who “struck him down with the sword and dumped his dead body into the burial place of the common people” (Jer 26:20–23).
 - (g) They “went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (11:37d, 38b). When Clement of Rome urged the Christians at Corinth to emulate those described by this verse, he said, “we mean Elijah and Elisha, and moreover Ezekiel, the prophets” (1 Clem 17:1). This passage certainly is an apt summarization of the itinerant ministries of Elijah and Elisha (cf. 1 Kgs 17:2–16; 19:1–19; 2 Kgs 1:3–15; 2:23; 4:1–2, 8–12, 38–43; 8:1–2).³²⁴
 - (h) “—Of whom the world was not worthy—” (11:38a). The author could not write of these faithful individuals without inserting a parenthetical comment: the world rejected them as unworthy when in reality it was the world that was unworthy of them.
- G) Conclusion (11:39–40).
- (1) The last two verses provide a fitting conclusion to the author’s list of examples of those who lived “by faith.” A birds-eye view of Hebrews 11 reveals that it is a well-defined unit bounded by two bookends: the first consists of vv. 1–2 and the last of vv. 39–40—note the correlation of “commendation” with “commended” and “by it [faith]” with “through their faith” (11:1–2, 39–40).³²⁵ This parallel suggests that the phrase “all these” has reference to the entire chapter, not simply the previous verses (vv. 32–38).

³²² C. C. Torrey, *The Lives of the Prophets: Greek Text and Translation* 2.1, 21, 35.

³²³ *The Martyrdom of Isaiah* 5:1–14.

³²⁴ Lane, 2:391 comments, “In the LXX Elijah is identified as a man with a garment of skins with hair (δαούς, 4 Kgdms 1:8), and the word μηλωτή, ‘sheepskin,’ is used exclusively of Elijah’s coarse cloak (3 Kgdms 19:13, 19; 4 Kgdms 2:8, 13–14), which was subsequently passed on to Elisha.”

³²⁵ Lane 2:393.

- (2) In his conclusion, the author points out that although “all these” through faith received God’s testimony to their righteous standing (11:2, 4), yet they “did not receive what was promised” (11:39b). What was promised but not received? Verse 40 answers this question—the promise was “something better,” that is, Christ and His covenant (11:40).³²⁶
- (3) How is it that the author says that “apart from us [NT believers] they [OT saints] should not be made perfect”? God intended the OT saints and NT believers to be united together as one in Christ so that they may be presented as a bride to Christ (OT saints are presently waiting in heaven for us and others to be added to the kingdom). Then all of us will, so to speak, cross the finish line together and so reach the final goal of our faith—full Christlikeness, a resurrected body, and enjoyment of the heavenly city called the New Jerusalem and the glorious kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

³²⁶ The author consistently uses the word “better” (*kreitton*) to refer to Jesus Christ and the New Covenant He inaugurated (cf. Heb 1:4; 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:11, 23; 10:1, 34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24).

Exhortation (12:1–17)

OT Citations: Pro 3:11–12

OT Allusions: Isa 35:3–4; LXX Pro 4:26; Deut 29:18; Gen 25:29–34; Gen 27:30–38; Num 27:16

17) Run the race with endurance (12:1–17).

A) Running to win (12:1–3).

(1) Others have endured to the end—so can you (12:1a).

(a) In chapter ten, the author told his readers “you have need of endurance” (10:36) and “the just shall live by faith” (10:38; Hab 2:4). He then gave a list of OT saints who modeled living “by faith” (Heb 11) and who endured to the end (Heb 11:13; they “died in faith”). The author begins chapter twelve with a “therefore,” indicating the close relationship between what he has just said to what he is about to say (12:1–3).

(b) Who are the “cloud of witnesses” which surround us? The phrase “so great a cloud” (*tosouton nephos*) is a metaphor for a large amount of something, in this case people. The word “witnesses” (*martyron*) means “one who bears testimony,” and refers to the OT saints just listed in chapter eleven (note the verbal echo to 11:2, 4–5, 39).

(c) In what sense are they “witnesses” to us? The athletic imagery used in this passage has led to some commentators to understand the OT saints as spectators watching our lives from a heavenly grandstand.³²⁷ But the better interpretation is that the OT saints bear witness to us that God can help us to endure—their lives testify that it is possible to live by faith (cf. Rom 15:4).

(2) Avoid anything that will hinder you (12:1b).

(a) Athletes wear training weights to help them prepare for the races. But no athlete would leave the weights on while running their race. Instead, a good athlete will “put off” (*apothemenoi*) anything that impedes their ability to run at top speed. What are the spiritual “weights” that should be removed from our lives? Anything that hinders our ability to run our spiritual race (cf. 2 Tim 2:3–4). An athlete running to win not only has to choose between the good and the bad, but also between the good and the best.

(b) What is the sin which the author describes as “the easily entangling sin” (NASB)? While the writer does not name any specific sin, the sin which is dealt with most frequently in Hebrews is the sin of unbelief (Heb. 3:12, 19). The stark contrast between faith and unbelief is one of the main themes of Hebrews. Just as unbelief kept the Exodus generation from entering God’s rest, it is unbelief that

³²⁷ P. G. Müller, ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΡΧΗΓΟΣ, 304; see V. C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 196.

hinders us from running to win. Satan is constantly lying to us in an effort to breed unbelief in our hearts.

(3) Endure to the end (12:1c).

(a) The word “race” (*agona*) is a general term that means “struggle, fight” (cf. Phil 1:30; Col 2:1; 1 Thess 2:2; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7)—its use here in connection with the verb “run” (*trechomen*) identifies it specifically as a foot race. The author’s mention of the need for “endurance” (*hypomones*) indicates that this is not a sprint; rather, it is a long-distance race that requires persistence and determination. Moreover, the goal is to complete it successfully, not to overtake or defeat other runners. All who endure to the end are “winners.”³²⁸

(b) How do we gain the endurance necessary to run the spiritual race? James 1:3 tells us that the testing of our faith produces “endurance” (*hypomonen*) and Romans 5:3 says that suffering produces “endurance” (*hypomonen*). Both Paul and James state that we can rejoice in trials and sufferings, not because they are pleasant, but because they will produce the spiritual muscle of endurance in our lives.

(4) Don’t be distracted (12:2a).

(a) The Greek word translated “looking to” (*aphorontes*) has the sense of “looking away from everything else to”—it stresses the fact that we must avoid being distracted by the circumstances and problems around us, and fix our gaze on Christ alone (cf. Matt 14:22–31).

(b) The claim of Jesus being the “founder” (*archegon*) of the faith (the ESV translates “the” as “our”) was first mentioned in Hebrews 2:10. Previously, we noted that the word’s common uses were of a “leader” and a “founder.” In what way is Jesus the “founder of the faith”? In light of 2:10, it seems best to understand “faith” as referring to the entire Christian experience in general and salvation in particular.³²⁹ Jesus is the founder of the faith in that by His death and resurrection, He has become the “source of eternal salvation” (5:9) to those who believe.

(c) In what way is Jesus the “perfecter” (*teleiotes*) of the faith”? As noted earlier, to perfect something involves bringing it to its completed or final state (see Excursus on perfection). Jesus perfected the faith when He offered His own body as a sacrifice for our sins: “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (10:14). Our salvation, initiated by the Father when He sent His only Son into the world, was completed by Jesus’ death and

³²⁸ O’Brien, 453.

³²⁹ The alternative is to understand “faith” as referring to our own belief in God’s word (or perhaps the faith of the OT saints in Hebrews 11). But Jesus was not the first individual to have faith in God’s word. Nor was He the first to endure by faith to the end.

resurrection.

(5) Imitate Christ's example (12:2b).

- (a) Jesus left us a twofold example: 1) we should keep our hearts and minds fixed on the goal, and 2) we should count our suffering as insignificant when compared to the joy that awaits us. For Christ, the goal was to accomplish His work as High Priest and having finished His work, to sit down at the right hand of the throne of God (Ps 110:1).³³⁰ For us, the goal is to endure to the end by faith and having completed our work in this life, to join Christ in His kingdom in the next. Like Christ, we must deny ourselves in the present so that we might gain everything in the future (cf. Phil 2:5–11).

(6) Consider the suffering of Jesus (12:3).

- (a) How can we avoid growing weary and giving up as we run the spiritual race? By “considering” (*analogisasthe*) the suffering of Jesus. The verb appears only here in the NT and means “to reason with careful deliberation.”³³¹ The author calls on his readers to give serious thought and meditation to the hostility that Jesus endured from sinners. Think of the rejection He felt, the humiliation He suffered, and the physical mistreatment He endured. He was misunderstood and forsaken by his closest friends. He was mocked and belittled by his own family. And yet He endured through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit—the same Spirit that lives within the heart of all believers (2 Tim 1:14; Rom 8:9; John 14:17; 1 Cor 3:16).

B) The Lord's training (12:4–13).

(1) The “struggle against sin” (12:4).

- (a) In 12:3, the author emphasized the audience's shared experience with Jesus—both of them endured the hostility of sinners. That parallel is continued in 12:4: the readers were engaged in a “struggle against sin”—the same struggle that Jesus endured. For Christ, that struggle ended with His death (the final act of endurance). For the audience, however, the author comments that they had not “yet resisted to the point of shedding blood”—the inference being that, unlike Jesus, none of them had as yet been martyred for their faith.
- (b) What *had* the audience endured in their struggle against sin? Hebrews 10:32b–34a says, “You endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted

³³⁰ For a defense of the view that the preposition *anti*, should be translated “for” rather than “instead of,” see O'Brien, 456.

³³¹ Gk. ἀναλογίσασθε. BDAG, 67; Louw and Nida §30.10. This verb focuses more on the meditative aspect than does ἀφορμντες (‘looking at’, v. 2); so Michel, 436.

the plundering of your property.”³³²

- (c) Why does the author comment that they had not yet resisted to the point of death? First, if Jesus could endure to the end through a bloody death, then they could endure to the end through the lesser persecution they were facing. Second, if they were becoming “weary” and thinking about giving up under their current persecution, then there was cause for concern about their ability to endure if and when they did face martyrdom. For the author, it was vital that his audience undergo a mental shift in their thinking and maintain their attitude of perseverance.

(2) Remember the exhortation in Proverbs 3:11–12 (12:5–6).

- (a) Have you “forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?” (12:5a). The word for “exhortation” (*parakleseos*) is the same word that is used of the letter of Hebrews as a whole (13:22). The author’s question prompts his readers to consider Proverbs 3:11–12 as directed to them personally—just like his letter. This is an important lesson for us to consider: Scripture should be regarded as God directly addressing us through His Spirit. We should personalize Scripture and apply its truth to our lives as though it were a letter to us from God.

(b) Hebrews 12:5b–6 are a citation of LXX Proverbs 3:11–12.

- (i) MT Proverbs 3:11–12: “11 My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline (*musar*) or be weary of his reproof, 12 for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”
- (ii) LXX Proverbs 3:11–12: “11 My son, despise not the chastening (*paideias*) of the Lord; nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 12 for whom the Lord loves, he rebukes (*paideuei*), and scourges every son whom he receives.”
- (iii) Hebrews 12:5b–6: “5b My son, do not regard lightly the discipline (*paideias*) of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines (*paideuei*) the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”
- (c) The word “discipline” (Hb. *musar*; Gk. *paideia*), is at the heart of the author’s discussion in this section (cf. 12:5–11).
- (i) Throughout Proverbs, *musar* is translated as “instruction”³³³ and “discipline.”³³⁴ It is used to convey reproof for wrong behavior (e.g., “Do not withhold *musar* from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die” —

³³² The fact that the members of this church had yet to die for the faith plays a crucial role in determining the date of Hebrews.

³³³ Proverbs 1:3, 8; 4:1; 8:33; 10:17; 13:1, 18; 15:5, 32–33; 19:20, 27; 24:32.

³³⁴ Proverbs 5:12, 23; 6:23; 12:1; 13:24; 15:10; 22:15; 23:13.

Pro 23:13) as well as instruction for right behavior (e.g., “I looked [at the field of a sluggard] and received *musar*. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.”—Pro 24:32). The best word that sums up the way *musar* is used in Proverbs is “training”—as in the training of a child.

- (ii) In the NT, *paideia* is translated as “discipline” (Eph 6:4; Heb 12:5–11) and “training” (2 Tim 3:16). All uses are in harmony with the notion of training a child (esp. Eph 6:4). Such training involves instruction in proper behavior, praise for good behavior, and correction/punishment for wrong behavior.
- (iii) The background of the citation of Proverbs 3:11–12 is that of enduring to the end in the struggle against sin. This means that the author considered suffering and persecution to be part of God’s normal training regimen.
 - (1) Does this mean that the audience was suffering persecution because they had sinned? No—while it is true that suffering can be God’s punishment of sin, the fact that Jesus, who was sinless, also endured suffering tells us that not all hardship is the result of God reproofing us for sin. Rather, suffering is an integral part of how God transforms our character and perfects us.
 - (2) God used suffering to “perfect” His own Son (Heb 5:8–9). Recall that “perfect” means “to bring to the intended goal or end”—much like a tree is the intended goal of an acorn. Also, Christ “learned” obedience in the sense that He experienced what it was like to obey God in the face of resistance (“from the things which He suffered”)—something that the second Person of the Trinity could not experience apart from the incarnation. If it was appropriate for Jesus to endure suffering (all the way to the point of death), how can we expect anything less?
 - (3) Peter said, “For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:20–21).
- (iv) Conclusion: the word “discipline” does not merely refer to punishment for sin or correction for wrong-doing; rather, it encompasses the full spectrum of God’s training of His children. In this context, the focus is on that part of God’s training which involves suffering (cf. esp. 12:11). This suffering is similar to what Christ endured—it is not punishment for wrong-doing but hardship intended to refine and perfect our character.

- (3) God is treating you as He treated His own beloved Son (12:7–8).

- (a) The first part of v. 7 is translated by the ESV as, “It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons” (12:7a). This is from the Greek which literally reads: “If discipline you endure as with sons with you is dealing God” (*eis paideian hypomenete hos huiois hymin prosperetai ho theos*). The author’s point is this—the fact that you are enduring training/discipline (*paideian*) means that God is treating you as a son. “For what son is there whom his father does not discipline/train (*paideuei*)? This truth should be cause for joy in the midst of suffering: our persecution at the hands of the world is a sign that we are true sons of God.
 - (b) Having stated the positive implication of enduring suffering, the author now gives the corresponding negative implication: if you are *not* being trained/disciplined, then it shows that you are not a true son (because “all [true sons of God] have participated” in God’s training regimen)—instead you are “illegitimate” (12:8).
- (4) Submit to the training/discipline of God (12:9).
- (a) The author now presents another lesser-to-greater argument: we had fathers of the flesh who disciplined us and we respected (*enetrepometha*) them. How much more then should we be in subjection (*hypotagesometha*) to the Father of spirits and live (12:9)? This verse contains two contrasts.
 - (i) The first contrast is between “earthly fathers” and the “Father of spirits” (note the chiasmic structure of the verse). This contrast is one of kind—our earthly fathers are imperfect and temporal, while our Heavenly Father is perfect and eternal (flesh vs. spirit). This contrast of fathers provides the foundation for the second contrast.
 - (ii) The second contrast is between the responses to the discipline received—earthly fathers are “respected,” while the Heavenly Father is submitted to completely (note the intensification of the verbs). This contrast is also one of kind—limited subordination versus complete submission.
 - (b) There are several key takeaways from this argument:
 - (i) Expectation: if our earthly parents gave us training/discipline, then how much more should we expect to receive training/disciplines from our Heavenly Father?
 - (ii) Response: if we respected and obeyed our earthly parents, then how much more should we be in complete submission to the training/discipline of our Heavenly Father?
 - (iii) Benefit: if the training/discipline of our earthly parents was intended for our immediate good, then how much more is the training/discipline of our

Heavenly Father intended for our eternal good?

(5) The benefits of God's training/discipline (12:10–11).

- (a) The next two verses continue the author's thought and expand on the last part of v. 9 ("and live") which speaks of the benefits of God's training/discipline. Our earthly fathers' training/discipline lasted only for a "short time" (lit. "a few days"). This is likely a reference to the period of childhood and adolescence. Further, their instruction was "as it seemed best to them" (lit. "according to that which seemed to them"—the word "best" is inferred), which could be paraphrased as, "according to their own way of thinking." The assumption is that although our human parents generally intended our good by their discipline, they sometimes failed in either method or purpose.
- (b) "What a difference when we consider God's discipline! He never makes a mistake, always chastens in love, scourges us, and at the same time comforts us. His discipline does not end when we have reached adulthood. Throughout our earthly life he trains us; although we often disappoint him, he never forsakes us. His patience toward us seems unlimited in spite of our lack of progress."³³⁵
- (c) The goal of God's training/discipline is that we "may share his holiness" (12:10b). The word "holiness" (*hagiotēs*) occurs only here in the NT and refers to the holiness which is God's—"His transcendent separateness from all things due to the unique excellence of His being and character."³³⁶ How can we share God's holiness? Only by being disciplined—God's discipline is intended to produce in us the same excellent character that God has. (cf. 2 Pet 1:4). This is the "good" that comes from God's training/discipline; it enables us to share in God's holiness.
- (d) The author acknowledges that "for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant" (12:11a). At first glance the word "seems" appears to suggest that God's discipline, while "seeming" to be painful, in reality is not. But the suffering of Christ, which was very real and very painful, argues against this understanding (cf. Heb 4:15; 5:7). Instead, the word "seems" should be understood as referring to a short-sighted perspective on suffering in which we are focused only on the pain of the present moment ("this is all pain and no gain"). The author understands that we often struggle with this feeling and reminds us, 'Yes, God's discipline does seem to be only about pain in the short-term, but wait—it will bring about long-term good.'
- (e) To those who endure to the end and do not give up, God's training "yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (12:11b). This agricultural metaphor invokes the idea of patiently waiting for a tree to produce its fruit. The formation of our

³³⁵ Kistemaker, 378.

³³⁶ A. Philip Brown, II, "Divine Holiness & Sanctifying God: A Proposal," a self-published paper submitted to the Aldersgate Forum on October 28, 2009. Online: http://www.apbrown2.net/web/Chamberlain%20Holiness%20Lecture%201_Divine%20Holiness.pdf

character does not occur overnight. It occurs gradually, over time, and involves pain “for the moment”—but later, inevitably, righteousness and holiness will be produced.

(6) Renew your commitment to endure to the end (12:12–13).

- (a) The author concludes this unit by exhorting his readers to renew their commitment to run the race to the end. Verse 12 begins with “Therefore”—on the basis of what has just been said (i.e., Our suffering is a sign that we are God’s children; He uses suffering to perfect our character.), we should take action to stay the course.
- (b) The phrase “lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees” (12:12) is an allusion to Isaiah 35:3–4: “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.’”
 - (i) The context of Isaiah 35 is God’s final and dramatic transformation of His people and the earth during the Millennium.³³⁷ In the same way that the thought of God’s future miraculous intervention was meant to encourage Isaiah’s audience, so the thought of God’s intended transformation of their character was meant to encourage the readers of Hebrews.
 - (ii) How do we strengthen ourselves for the race? By focusing our hearts and minds on the goal—God’s glorious future for us in heaven. He intends to transform us into the image of His Son and for us to enjoy eternity with Him.
- (c) The phrase “make straight paths for your feet” (12:13a) is an allusion to LXX Proverbs 4:26—“Make straight paths for thy feet, and order thy ways aright.”
 - (i) The original proverb speaks of the importance of ordering your life in such way as to keep yourself on the path of the righteous. Note that instead of alluding to the proverb in its entirety, the author cites the first part and then adds his own conclusion: “so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed” (12:13b).
 - (ii) The word “lame” is best understood as referring to the current condition of the readers—the suffering they had endured so far had taken a serious toll on some of them and they were “limping along.” The author was concerned that if they did not remedy this condition, they would soon be “put out of joint”—incapacitated to the point that they could no longer walk (continue the race).

³³⁷ Gary V. Smith, “Isaiah 1–39,” *NAC*, 578.

(iii) What is the remedy for such a condition? The author calls his readers to strengthen themselves in the knowledge of God's ultimate plan for their lives and to renew their commitment to endure to the end. If they would do this, they would "be healed"; if they did not, they were in danger of losing the race.

C) Dos and don'ts of the race (12:14–17).

(1) What to do (12:14).

(a) Pursue peace (12:14a). The word "pursue" (*diokete*) conveys ongoing action and effort, and could be paraphrased as "be making every effort to obtain" (cf. 1 Pet 3:11; 2 Tim 2:22; 1 Cor 14:1; 1 Thess 5:15). The word "peace" (*eirenen*) is the standard word used for the state or condition in which there is an absence of hostility. The words "with everyone" modify "peace" and indicate that we are to be making every effort to live in peace with fellow believers and with the world in general (cf. Ps 34:14; Matt 5:9; Rom 12:18).

(b) Pursue holiness (12:14b). "The holiness" we are commanded to pursue refers to a life which is separated from all sin unto God (cf. 2 Cor 7:1; 1 John 3:3). This means more than simply avoiding sin—we must also "lay aside every weight," i.e., we must separate ourselves from anything that hinders our ability to run the race (cf. 1 Cor 9:24–27). This holiness is further qualified by the statement that without it "no one will see the Lord." This statement echoes similar pronouncements made by John and Paul (cf. Rev 21:27; 22:15; 1 Cor 6:9–10; Eph 5:5; Gal 5:19–21; also Matt 5:8).³³⁸

(2) What to avoid (12:15–17).

(a) "See to it": (12:15a). Verse 15 begins with the word *episkopountes* which means "take care, see to it." The same word is used by Peter in reference to "exercising oversight" of the church (1 Pet 5:2). The word conveys continuing, vigilant action: "be always on the lookout—keep watching for." It governs the three subordinate clauses which follow, each of which is introduced by the words "that no one, lest any" (*me tis*).

(i) That no one "fails to obtain" (lit. "is lacking of") the grace of God (12:15a). The word used here is *hysteron* (cf. *hysterekenai* in Heb 4:1), and means "coming short, missing out, being excluded" (Matt 19:20; Rom 3:23; 1 Cor 1:7).³³⁹ In the same way that it is possible to be missing out on God's rest, it is possible to be missing out on God's grace.

³³⁸ For a discussion of the relationship between Hebrews 12:14 and entire sanctification, see "Holiness or Hell," an article by A. Philip Brown, II in the October 2006 issue of *God's Revivalist and Bible Advocate*.

³³⁹ "To miss out on something through one's own fault"; Gk. ὕστερον. So BDAG, 1043 (1), with reference to both Heb. 4:1 and 12:15; Attridge, 368.

- (ii) That no “root of bitterness” springs up, causes trouble, and defiles others (12:15b). The last part of v. 15 is an allusion to Deuteronomy 29:18 (LXX 29:17): “Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit.” Thus “root of bitterness” is a metaphorical expression for an apostate—someone who turns away from God. That person’s sinful example is poisonous to all around them (“and by it [them] many become defiled”).³⁴⁰
- (iii) That no one is sexually immoral (*pornos*) or godless (*bebelos*) like Esau (12:16–17). The word *pornos* means “one who practices sexual immorality, a fornicator” (1 Cor 5:11; Eph 5:5; also Heb 13:4; 1 Tim 1:10; 1 Cor 6:9). The word *bebelos* means “worldly, godless, profane” (1 Tim 1:9; 4:7; 6:20; 2 Tim 2:16).³⁴¹ How should we understand these two terms in relation to Esau?³⁴²
- (1) Although the biblical account of Esau makes no explicit mention of him being sexually immoral, a broad spectrum of later Jewish tradition associated him with sexual immorality,³⁴³ especially because of his marriage to the Hittites, Judith and Basemath, who made life bitter for his parents (Gen 26:34–35). It may well be that the author of Hebrews drew on this tradition.³⁴⁴
- (2) What incident from Esau’s life does the author use to support his description of Esau’s character? The day when he “sold his birthright for a single meal” (lit. “who for a single meal gave away his birthright”; 12:16b). The stress on “for a single meal” is meant to elicit amazement and highlight the contrast with “birthright”³⁴⁵—Esau willfully, deliberately scorned a lasting inheritance for himself and his children for the

³⁴⁰ Those familiar with the law would have been very aware of how both people and objects could be defiled by that which is unclean.

³⁴¹ It is used in the LXX as the opposite of “holy” (LXX Lev 10:10; LXX Ezek 22:26; 44:23), and describes those who turn their backs on what is holy and focus on things that are worldly and godless.

³⁴² Some understand only the adjective “godless” as referring to Esau (so Attridge, 368–69; Westcott, 407–8; Lightfoot, 236; Kistemaker, 386; see *NIV* translation of v. 16). This sees the author as warning against an “immoral person” and against a “godless person” like Esau. Other commentators reject this view (O’Brien, 475; Lane, 2:455; Cockerill, 638; deSilva, 461). It leaves “immoral” hanging without further comment. The two terms “immoral” and “godless” appear elsewhere as a pair, so it would be arbitrary to separate them here without compelling reason (See Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.102; cited by Attridge, 369, n. 45, and referenced by O’Brien, 475).

³⁴³ *Jubilees* 25:1, 7–8; 26:34; 35:13–14; Philo, *On the Virtues* 208–210; *Questions on Genesis* 4.201; *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.2; *Genesis Rabbah* 65 on Gen. 26; for references see Lane, 2:454–455; Bruce, 350–351; Koester, 352.

³⁴⁴ Cockerill, 639. See Enoch in Jude 1:14–15.

³⁴⁵ The birthright was the prerogative of the firstborn son (Gen 25:33; 27:36) and speaks to Esau’s status as Isaac’s heir. The eldest son assumed a leading role in the family and, on the death of his father, was entitled to a double share of the inheritance (Gen 43:33; Deut 21:17).

immediate gratification of a bowl of lentil soup (Gen 25:29–34)! This event from Esau’s life is an excellent backdrop for comparison: if we “throw away [our] confidence” (Heb 10:35), it is like Esau giving away his birthright for a single meal.

- (3) The author of Hebrews follows the story of Esau rejecting his birthright with the story of Jacob stealing Esau’s blessing (Gen 27:30–40). When Esau “desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected” (12:17a). After Isaac realized that he had been tricked, he might have reacted very negatively toward Jacob. But instead, he refused to reverse his blessing (cf. Gen 27:33–34, 37; note v. 33 esp.). This seems to indicate that Isaac remembered the word of God to Rebekah (Gen 25:23) and perhaps saw the hand of God behind Jacob’s actions.
- (4) How are we to understand the claim that Esau “found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears” (12:17b)? This statement can be confusing because we normally understand the word “repent” with reference to a change of attitude toward sin or even conversion itself. But that is not the meaning here; the OT nowhere mentions Esau’s repentance in that sense. What Esau “sought” was a change of outcome—he wanted the blessing Isaac had given to Jacob. His “tears” did not come from a heart repenting of sin; instead they came from a heart angry and sorrowful over not getting what it wanted. But try as he might, Esau could not change what had happened. It is in this sense that there was no “chance to repent” for Esau.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁶ From Lightfoot’s excellent comments on this verse (*Jesus Christ Today*, p. 236). See also the NIV translation of v. 17—“He could bring about no change of mind [in Isaac]”; For those who see this verse as illustrating the impossibility of repentance after apostasy, it should be noted that by definition, apostasy refers to those who have been saved from sin and then afterward reject God and turn away from Him. Esau was not such a person. Indeed, all scriptural indications are that Esau was a godless man, i.e., he never had a relationship with God from which he could apostatize. Instead, Esau is mentioned here as an illustration of those who reject something truly valuable for that which is of little worth.

*Exhortation (12:18–29) — Fifth Warning**OT Citations: LXX Hag 2:6; Deut 4:24**OT Allusions: LXX Exod 19:16–22; 20:18–21; Deut 4:11–12; 5:22–27*

18) Fifth warning—do not refuse the Son (12:18–29).

A) Mount Sinai vs. Mount Zion: a contrast of two covenants (12:18–24).

(1) Mount Sinai—the First Covenant (12:18–21). *You have not come to...*

(a) What may be touched [a mountain] (12:18a).

(i) The author begins this section by contrasting the experience of the Exodus generation at Mount Sinai with the experience of his readers at Mount Zion (12:18–24). The contrast is made so the audience will recognize and appreciate how much greater the NC is than the FC. This lesser-to-greater contrast will then be used by the author as the basis for his fifth and final warning: do not refuse the Son of God (12:25–29).

(ii) The first part of v. 18 is an allusion to Exodus 19:17—the Exodus generation came to an actual mountain in the Sinai desert.³⁴⁷ The emphasis here is on the physical, tangible nature of what the Exodus generation experienced—they were standing in front of a mountain which they could reach out and touch with their hands.

(b) A blazing fire and darkness and gloom and storm (12:18b).

(i) The second part of v. 18 is an allusion to Exodus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 4:11; LXX 5:22–23. The words paint a picture for the reader of what the Exodus generation saw with their own eyes. It was an awe-inspiring and terrifying sight. Note that God remains hidden from view by darkness (no fallen human being can see God's face and live—Exod 33:20).

(c) A trumpet blast (12:19a).

(i) The first part of v. 19 is an allusion to Exodus 19:16—the visible aspects of Yahweh descending on Mount Sinai were accompanied by the deafening sound of a “trumpet” (Exod 19:19). Two silver trumpets were later commissioned by Yahweh and crafted for use in assembling the people and directing their travel. They were also sounded during alarms, times of war and at the beginning of appointed festivals and months (Num 10:1–10; cf. Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16).

(d) A voice speaking words (12:19b–20).

³⁴⁷ Note that the word “mountain” does not appear in the ESV. This is because the word is not in the Greek text; however, it is clearly implied and the NAS, NIV, KJV and NLT all include “mountain” in their translations.

- (i) The second part of v. 19 is an allusion to LXX Deuteronomy 4:12—Yahweh addressed the people in audible words. The voice was so terrifying that the people begged “that no further messages be spoken to them” (cf. Exod 20:19; Deut 5:23–29; 18:16–17).
 - (ii) The reason for the people’s request is stated in v. 20—the people genuinely believed what God said (“If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned”) and were so convinced of the danger that they begged Moses to be their intermediary with Yahweh (Deut 5:23–27).
 - (iii) Note that Yahweh did not take their request as a rejection of His words. Instead He approved of the attitude that motivated their request: “And the LORD heard your words, when you spoke to me. And the LORD said to me, ‘I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken. Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!’” (Deut 5:28–29). Yahweh’s intent was not to merely frighten the people; rather, He wanted to instill in them a reverential fear that would motivate their hearts to seek after Him and obey Him.
- (e) A terrifying sight (12:21).
- (i) The author concludes his powerful imagery of the Sinai theophany with a crescendo—even Moses, the man who had talked with Yahweh before, said, “I tremble with fear” (12:21). Neither Exodus nor Deuteronomy record the fear of Moses at the initial Sinai encounter. However, during the incident of the golden calf, Moses said, “I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the LORD bore against you” (Deut 9:19). Many commentators think that the author of Hebrews is linking this event with the initial theophany.³⁴⁸
- (2) Mount Zion—the New Covenant (12:22–24). *But you have come to...*
- (a) Mount Zion, the City of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem (12:22a).
 - (i) The scene shifts from the terrifying experience of Mount Sinai to the joyful, glorious experience of Mount Zion. The God who could not be seen or approached is now freely accessible through the blood of Christ. The FC which was weak and impermanent has been superseded by the NC which is eternal and powerful. The author’s intent is for the reader to recognize how much “better” the NC is than the FC, and to appreciate the “so great salvation” which they have “shared” and “tasted” (Heb 2:3; 6:4–5).

³⁴⁸ So O’Brien, 480; Bruce, 354–355; Lane, 2:463–464; Kistemaker, 390–391; Guthrie, 418; and Koester, 544.

- (ii) Most commentators regard the first three clauses as a single unit.³⁴⁹ The name “Zion” was used to refer to the earthly city of Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:7; 1 Kgs 8:1); however, the context here indicates that the author used “Zion” to refer to the heavenly city of Jerusalem—the dwelling place of God Himself (Ps 50:2; Rev 21:2–3, 10; cf. Heb 11:16).
 - (iii) God “descended on [Mount Sinai] in fire” (Exod 19:18), but His presence there was temporary—God dwells in the heavenly city, the “new Jerusalem,” the Mount Zion which will one day come down out of heaven to earth, and “God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev 21:1–3).
- (b) Innumerable angels in festal gathering (12:22b).
- (i) The ESV connects the phrase “festal gathering” with “innumerable angels.”³⁵⁰ The intent is to paint a picture of joyful worship and celebration in the presence of God.
- (c) The church of the firstborn who are “enrolled in heaven” (12:23a).
- (i) The word “church” (*ekklesia*) recalls the Hebrews 2:12 quote of Psalm 22:22: “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation (*ekklesias*) I will sing your praise,” and refers to the entire congregation of saints.
 - (ii) The word “firstborn” (*prototokon*) is used regularly in reference to Christ (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5). Jesus, as the Firstborn, is able to lay claim to the Father’s inheritance. We are united with Him (the Firstborn) spiritually, and thus are coheirs with Christ (Rom 8:16–17).
 - (iii) The phrase “enrolled in heaven” (*apogegrammenon en ouranois*) refers to the fact that all who make up this church have their names recorded in the Book of Life (cf. Exod 32:33; Dan 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12).³⁵¹ This shows their citizenship in the heavenly kingdom and their right to enjoy eternity with Christ, their “brother” (Heb 2:11–12).
- (d) God, the Judge of all (12:23b).³⁵²

³⁴⁹ O’Brien, 483 n. 202: “The qualifying phrase, *the city of the living God*, is introduced by the appositional καί, which should be translated as ‘even’ rather than ‘and’ since it clarifies what is meant by ‘Mount Zion’ (so Spicq, 2:404–405; Bruce, 355; Lane, 2:441 n. gg, 465–466; Ellingworth, 677; Guthrie, 419–420; K. Son, *Zion Symbolism*, 89). Among others who seek to draw a distinction between the three designations, see Westcott, 413.”

³⁵⁰ For a discussion of the various views of how vv. 22b–23a should be translated, see Cockerill, 653 n. 54 and O’Brien, 485 n. 209.

³⁵¹ The OT saints are included in this “church,” for although they are not yet perfected (Heb 11:39–40), they are a part of the bride which will be presented to Christ.

³⁵² On the rendering, “the Judge who is God of all,” (RSV) see O’Brien, 486 n. 218 and Lane 2:442 n. ll.

- (i) Lightfoot comments, “The main thought is that God is the God of all, of angels and men, of living and dead; and that as God He is the Judge to whom all must give account (cf. 4:13). The implication is that He is a God who is not to be regarded lightly.”³⁵³

(e) The spirits of the righteous made perfect (12:23c).

- (i) This phrase refers to the spirits of those who have died in faith and are now in the presence of God. Their perfection is that of a right heart with God and not the eschatological perfection spoken of in Hebrews 11:39–40. The distinction between 12:23a and 12:23c is that the “church” refers to the body of Christ in its final and complete state (the Book of Life contains the names of all believers—past, present and future) and the “spirits” refer to those believers currently present with God in heaven.³⁵⁴

(f) Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant (12:24a).

- (i) No presentation of the NC can omit mention of the mediator of that covenant—Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Heb 8:6; 9:15–22). Ellingworth calls Hebrews 9:15–22 “the closest parallel and best commentary” on v. 24 (p. 681).

(g) The sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than Abel (12:24b).

- (i) There is a necessary connection between mediating the NC (covenant ratification) and Christ’s death (sacrifice; cf. 9:15–22). But the concluding words of the verse are puzzling. Literally it says, “better speaking than of Abel” (*kreitton lalounti para ton Habel*).
- (ii) Most translations and exegetes add the word “blood”—thus Christ’s sprinkled blood “speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (ESV). If this is correct, then the contrast is between Abel’s blood, which cried out from the ground for God’s judgment and vengeance (Gen 4:10), and Christ’s blood, which inaugurated the NC and sanctifies the believer (10:10–14).³⁵⁵

B) Do not refuse the Son of God (12:25–29).

(1) Warning from lesser-to-greater (12:25).

(a) The last section of chapter 12 begins with a stern warning: “Do not refuse him

³⁵³ Lightfoot, 239.

³⁵⁴ Guthrie, 421; Gordon, 180; Cockerill, 657.

³⁵⁵ For an alternative interpretation see Gene Smillie, “‘The One Who Is Speaking’ In Hebrews 12:25,” *TynBul* 55:2 (NA 2004). Cockerill (659 n. 77) disagrees with Smillie; O’Brien (490–91) critiques the standard view and interacts with Smillie, but does not come to a firm conclusion.

who is speaking" (12:25a). Who is speaking? The "him" in v. 25a refers to Jesus. The God who spoke at Sinai is now speaking to us through His exalted Son (cf. Heb 1:2; 3:7; 4:12–13). What is being spoken? The gospel. Christ, who came from heaven, declared the gospel message (Heb 2:3). That same message is being spoken to us; everywhere the gospel is preached, the Father is speaking through the Son. How can believers "refuse him"? If we do not heed the Son's voice, obey His commands and endure to the end of the race, then we have refused to "hear" Him.

- (b) What is the basis for the author's abrupt warning? It is the contrast which he painted in 12:18–24 between the FC at Mount Sinai and the NC at Mount Zion. This contrast serves as the basis for his lesser-to-greater argument: "For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven" (12:25b).³⁵⁶ If God's voice at Sinai could not be rejected without judgment, then certainly the voice of God's Son cannot be either.

(2) Haggai's prophecy (12:26–27).

- (a) Then and now.

- (i) "At that time" refers to God speaking at Mount Sinai (cf. Exod 19:18; Judg 5:4–5; Pss 68:7–8; 77:18; 114:4, 7). At Sinai, God's voice "shook the earth" (12:26a). "But now" refers to God's promise given through Haggai (Hag 2:6, 21).³⁵⁷ In the eschaton, God will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens (12:26b).

- (b) Original Context.

- (i) On October 17, 520 BC, God spoke through Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel governor of Judah, Joshua the high priest and the remnant of Judah. Work on the post-exilic temple, begun less than two months earlier (Hag 1:14–15; August 29), had stalled due to discouragement on the part of the participants. No matter how hard they worked, the appearance of the temple gave little evidence of being a worthy successor to Solomon's temple. Some were old enough to remember the glory of the former temple and could vouch for the fact that their efforts were a meager substitute.
- (ii) In the midst of this discouragement, God encouraged the people to press on. "Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, according to my covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt" (Hag 2:4b–5a). This statement invoked the memory of the FC at Sinai where God shook the

³⁵⁶ O'Brien (492–93 n. 246) argues that the "him" in "him who warned them on earth" refers to God (not Moses or Jesus). Kistemaker (398 n. 49) argues that it refers to Moses (God spoke to Israel through Moses).

³⁵⁷ For an excellent discussion of the textual issues related to the citation, see Richard A. Taylor, "Haggai, Malachi," *NAC*, 90–91.

earth. With this image now formed in their minds, God promised: “Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with my glory...the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former...” (Hag 2:6b–7a, 9a).³⁵⁸

(c) Exegesis.

- (i) The words “once more” are the key to the author’s understanding of Haggai 2:6 (12:27a). “Once more” is not meant to convey the idea of repetition (as in “again”), but rather the idea of finality (as in “for the last time” or “only once more”; cf. Heb 9:7, 10, 26, 28). If God is going to “shake” the heavens and the earth for the last time, then that shaking must refer to the prophesied dissolution of the current created order (cf. Ps 102:25–26; Heb 1:10–12). Everything that can be “shaken” is temporary, growing old and will someday pass away. What remains is eternal and “cannot be shaken” (12:27b).
- (ii) How does Haggai 2:6 fit into the author’s argument? The author has been contrasting the FC and the NC (Mount Sinai vs. Mount Zion). He highlighted the material/physical nature of the FC (“what may be touched”) and the spiritual nature of the NC (“heavenly Jerusalem”). The citation from Haggai allows him to complete the contrast by showing that the FC is part of what will pass away, while the NC is eternal. The FC was of this world—the blood of sacrificial animals, a tabernacle of gold, bronze and wood, and a priesthood of fallen human beings, doomed to die. The NC is of the next world—the blood of God’s only-begotten Son, a “greater and more perfect tent,” and an eternal Melchizedekian priesthood. When the FC was given the earth shook; when the NC is fully realized, the earth *and* the heavens will pass away, leaving behind an unshakeable kingdom!

(3) Application of Haggai’s message (12:28–29).

- (a) Be grateful (12:28a). Since this present world is passing away, we should be grateful that we are receiving a “kingdom that cannot be shaken.” This has direct application to Hebrews 10:35—rather than throwing away our confidence, we should cling to it in gratitude for God’s “so great” salvation.
- (b) Offer well-pleasing service to God (12:28b–29). Such service (*latreuomen euarestos*) to God is the natural result of true gratitude (cf. Luke 17:15–16; Mark 10:51–52; Rom 12:1–2). O’Brien comments, “To worship or serve God *acceptably* means that believers regard every aspect of their lives as an expression of their devotion to him. Christian worship is not limited to prayer and praises in a congregational context.”³⁵⁹ Verse 29 provides the basis for our service being

³⁵⁸ The “sea” and “dry land” are omitted from the LXX Hag 2:6, hence their exclusion from Heb 12:26.

³⁵⁹ O’Brien, 500.

characterized by “reverence and awe” (*eulabeias kai deous*; cf. 5:7; 11:7)—our God is a “consuming fire” (LXX Deut 4:24). If we refuse God’s Son, what is left to us but a “fearful expectation” of fiery judgment (10:27)?

Exhortation (13:1–25)

OT Citations: Ps 118:6–7

OT Allusions: Deut 31:6, 8; Ps 50:14, 23; Hos 14:2

19) Well-pleasing service to God (13:1–25).

A) Pastoral precepts (13:1–6).

(1) Let brotherly love continue (13:1).

- (a) At the conclusion of the theological climax of Hebrews (12:14–29), the readers were commanded to be thankful and to offer well-pleasing service to God. What does such service look like? The author answers this question in chapter thirteen and gives several practical examples of how to live out this command.
- (b) The first example is that of “brotherly love” (*philadelphia*). This term, used primarily of the natural affection of siblings, is used in the NT to refer to the love that binds together members of the family of God as brothers and sisters (Rom 12:10; 1 Thess 4:9; 1 Pet 1:22; 2 Pet 1:7). The author has referred to his readers as children of God (12:7)—as such, they should be bound together spiritually by the same mutual love and affection that is found within a physical family.
- (c) The fact that the author urged his readers to let such love “continue” (*meneto*) indicates that it was characteristic of them both now and in the past (6:10; 10:33–34). However, some of the readers were “neglecting to meet together” (10:25). Such behavior could lead to coldness—hence the author’s concern that their love continue.

(2) Do not neglect hospitality (13:2).

- (a) In v. 1, the author urged his readers to continue in *philadelphia* (*philos* + *adelphos* = “loving” + “brother”). Here the author urges them to *philoxenias* (*philos* + *xenos* = “loving” + “stranger”). The term was the standard word for “hospitality,” and involved welcoming strangers into your home for lodging and refreshment (cf. Rom 12:13; Acts 10:23; 21:16; 28:7). This teaching reflects the importance of aiding the ministry of fellow believers (3 John 1:5–8) as well as Christ’s emphasis on reaching out to those who can give nothing in return (Luke 14:12–14; Matt 25:31–46).
- (b) The author was concerned that the readers might “neglect” (*epilanthanesthe*) to show hospitality. This is the same word used earlier in relation to God not forgetting or overlooking the audience’s steadfastness and love (6:10; cf. Heb 13:16; Mark 8:14; Phil 3:13; Jam 1:24). Hospitality is something that can be easily overlooked in the business of life.
- (c) The result (or basis) of showing hospitality is that “some have entertained angels

unawares" (13:2b). Most scholars see this comment as an allusion to Abraham's welcoming of the three strangers into his tent (Gen 18). Welcoming strangers carries with it a kind of excitement—we never know who we might have the honor of hosting (cf. Matt 10:40).

(3) Continue remembering those in prison and those being mistreated (13:3).

(a) Prisons in the 1st century were different from American prisons today—prisoners depended on relatives and friends to provide food, clothing and other necessities.³⁶⁰ Thus the author's command to "remember" (*mimneskesthe*) is more than simply recalling something to mind. He expects the readers to care for their imprisoned brothers and sisters "as though in prison with them" (13:3a; cf. Matt 25:35–36; Jam 2:15–16).

(i) The account which Lucian gives of the imprisonment of Peregrinus Proteus is useful in understanding v. 3. Christians sought his release, but to no avail. "Everything else that could be done for him they most devoutly did. They thought of nothing else. Orphans and ancient widows might be seen hanging about the prison from break of day. Their officials bribed the gaolers to let them sleep inside with him. Elegant dinners were conveyed in; their sacred writings were read."³⁶¹

(b) The author adds a more general statement in conclusion: remember "those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body" (13:3b). This might be paraphrased, "Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies" (NLT). Since we are still in the body (i.e., subject to the same feelings of pain, etc.), we should treat those who are suffering the way we would want to be treated if roles were reversed.

(4) Honor marriage and remain pure (13:4).

(a) The word "honor" (*timios*) stands emphatically at the beginning of the sentence (13:4a). It was used to describe the people's respect of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34) and to speak of precious stones or jewels (Rev 17:4; 18:12, 16; 21:11, 19). Peter used the term to describe the "precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet 1:19). The institution of marriage is to be treasured and prized as one would a precious gem.

(b) One of the primary ways to honor marriage is by keeping the sexual relationship pure—"the bed undefiled" (13:4b). Those who defile marriage through illicit sexual liaisons are under God's judgment (13:4c). The terms "sexually immoral" (*pornous*) and "adulterous" (*moichous*) cover the gamut of immorality—*pornous* is a more general term for sexual promiscuity outside of marriage (1 Cor 5:9; Eph 5:5) while *moichous* is used of those who are unfaithful to their marriage (Luke

³⁶⁰ Kistemaker, 409; Allen, 607; Leon Morris, "Hebrews," 146.

³⁶¹ Lucian, *The Death of Peregrinus*, in *The Works of Lucian Samosata* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1905), 4:82.

18:11; 1 Cor 6:9). The breadth of these terms show that honoring marriage is not confined to the married—those who are single honor the institution of marriage by refraining from sexual activity until they are married.

(5) Do not love money; be content with what you have (13:5–6).

- (a) “Keep your life free from love of money” (13:5a). The first part of the author’s two-part command begins with the phrase *aphilargyros ho tropos*. The word *aphilargyros*, which stands emphatically at the beginning of the sentence, is made up of *a* + *phileo* + *argyros* = “not” + “love” + “silver” (this is the third time the author has used a word with *phil*-). The word is an adjective and is used to describe a person’s *tropos*—their conduct or manner of life. Thus the author commands his readers keep their life free from love money. Paul uses this same term when describing the qualifications for bishops (1 Tim 3:3). In the sermon on the mount, Jesus told His disciples “You cannot serve God and money” (Matt 6:24; note Luke 16:14, where the Pharisees are called “lovers of money”). Jesus continued by connecting a love of money to a lack of trust in God’s care and provision (Matt. 6:25–34). The love of money and trust in God are mutually exclusive.³⁶²
- (b) “Be content with what you have” (13:5b). The second part of the author’s two-part command is *arkoumenoi tois parousin*. The word *arkoumenoi* means “to regard as sufficient or enough.” The term was used by John the Baptist when he told the Roman soldiers to be “content” with their pay (Luke 3:14). Paul used the word when describing God’s grace (“My grace is sufficient for you”; 2 Cor 12:9) and when he spoke of being content with only food and clothing (1 Tim 6:8). The word *parousin* means “what is present, what you have.” God wants us to look at our current material circumstances and respond with this conclusion—“It is enough.”
 - (i) “I will never leave you or forsake you” (13:5c). What is the basis for the author’s command to keep our lives free from the love of money and to be content with what we have? The author gives two promises to support his command. The first is a summation of several OT verses: God has promised to never leave us or forsake us (cf. Gen 28:15; Deut 31:6, 8; Josh 1:5). This means that God will provide; we do not have to worry about our needs being met (Matt 6:31–33).
 - (ii) “The Lord is my helper, I will not fear” (13:6). God has promised to help us. Thus we can say with confidence, “What can man do to me?” This passage is from Psalm 118:6–7 and asserts that the plans of the wicked will be thwarted by the provisions of God. The fact that God is our helper enables us to have peace about the future, even when men seek to do us harm.

³⁶² O’Brien, 510.

B) Shepherds and sheep (13:7–17).

(1) Imitate the faith of your past leaders (13:7–8).

- (a) The subject of v. 7 is “leaders” (*hegoumenon*). Most interpreters understand the author to be referring to church leaders who have died;³⁶³ following this reasoning the phrase “who spoke to you the word of God” is understood as a reference to the preaching of the gospel at the founding of this church. Also, the word translated “outcome” (*ekbasin*) can refer to the sum total of one’s accomplishment in life.
- (b) The author exhorts his readers to “consider” (*anatheorountes*) the outcome of their “way of life” (*anastrophes*). The word *anatheorountes* means “to look at or examine carefully” and was used by Paul to describe his observation of the objects of worship in Athens (Acts 17:23). The word *anastrophes* means “conduct, manner of living” and was used several times by Peter in reference to how people live their lives (1 Pet 1:18; 3:1; 2 Pet 2:7). The shepherds of the church who have died in the faith are worthy of our careful consideration and thought. We should be recalling to mind the way they lived and how they responded in times of crisis.
- (c) The author also urges his readers to “imitate” (*mimeisthe*) their faith (13:7b). Paul used this word when telling the Thessalonians to imitate his example (2 Thess 3:7–9), and John also used this term when commanding Gaius and the local congregation to “imitate good” (3 John 1:11). As John went on to say, “Whoever does good is from God”—therefore we should use their behavior as a model for our own.
- (d) Our earthly leaders come and go (much like the Levitical priests). But there is one leader who is eternal: Jesus Christ (13:8; cf. 1:12; 7:24). The verse literally states, “Jesus Christ, yesterday and today the same and to the ages” (13:8). The word “yesterday” connects the readers to the past: their leaders preached a gospel that was centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. 2:1–4). Circumstances and perspectives may change, but Jesus Christ and His gospel do not. The Son who created the world (1:2, 10, 12) is the same Son who offered His body as a sacrifice for sin and who now sits enthroned by the Majesty on high. His immutability is a comfort “today” and into “the ages”—we can ground our faith firmly in Him. Looking ahead, it is this constancy that will keep us anchored against the winds and tides of strange teachings.³⁶⁴

(2) Do not be carried away by strange teachings (13:9).

³⁶³ E.g., Hughes, 569; Westcott, 436; Moffatt, 230; Lane, 2:526–27; Attridge, 391–92. Guthrie agrees but also gives several arguments that can be made for understanding the leaders to still be alive (cf. Guthrie, 438 n. 17).

³⁶⁴ Allen, 612. Verse 8 is a transitional verse—it acts as a bridge between the command to imitate the faith of past leaders and the command to not be carried away by strange teachings.

(a) Having urged his readers to imitate the faith of their past leaders, the author now warns them against “diverse and strange teachings” (*didachais poikilais kai xenais*) (13:9a). There will always be competition for the hearts and minds of God’s children—the devil is active in his attempts to lead us away from sound doctrine. Knowing this, the author is concerned with the various false teachings that threatened to subvert his readers (a concern that was shared by Paul; cf. Col 2:6–8; Eph 4:14–16; 5:6).

(b) What false teachings did the author of Hebrews have in mind?

- (i) While we cannot be certain of the exact nature of these teachings, there are two clues that point us in the right direction: the word “foods” (*bromasin*) mentioned in v. 9 (same word used in 9:10) and the word “to eat” (*phagein*) mentioned in v. 10. From these words we infer that the false teachings had something to do with eating food.
- (ii) Can we do better than this vague conclusion? Yes, the author’s concluding contrast (lit. “it is good with grace to confirm the heart, not with foods, which have not benefited those who walk in them”) adds more detail to our understanding: those who advocated these false teachings believed that their dietary practices had direct spiritual benefit/effect.
- (iii) Are such teachings discussed elsewhere in the NT? Yes, the NT has much to say about the effects of food on our spiritual relationship with God:
 - (1) Paul condemned those who taught abstinence from foods (proclaiming something to be sinful when it is not; 1 Tim 4:1–3).
 - (2) Jesus taught that food does not cause spiritual defilement (thus declaring all foods clean; Mark 7:17–23).
 - (3) Paul condemned those who pass judgment on other believers regarding “questions of food and drink” (Col 2:16–17).
 - (4) Paul taught that food is intended for the physical body, not the spirit (1 Cor 6:13; Matt 15:17).
 - (5) Paul discussed those who abstained from eating meat offered to idols because of their conscience, and commanded believers to limit their liberty to avoid causing such weaker brothers to stumble (Rom 14:2–3, 15–23; 1 Cor 8:4–13; 10:25–33).
 - (6) The author of Hebrews stated that eating food cannot affect our spiritual condition (Heb 9:9b–10).

(c) The author of Hebrews flatly contradicts the idea that eating (or not eating)

certain foods is able to provide spiritual benefit. He states clearly that those who follow and advocate such teachings “have not benefited” themselves. Rather, it is God’s “grace” which is able to “strengthen” the heart. As Paul told the Corinthians, “Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do” (1 Cor 8:8; cf. Rom 14:17).

(3) We have an altar (13:10–11).

- (a) Having stated that eating physical food brings no spiritual benefit, the author declares that there is a *spiritual* food which can bring spiritual benefit—the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (13:10–14). The author begins v. 10 with “we,” a reference to believers who are part of the NC. He then states that we “have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat” (13:10). What altar is the author talking about? The context points us back to the FC:
- (i) Under the FC, the priests and the Israelites were permitted to partake of the sacrifices that were offered on the Tabernacle’s bronze altar. The priests ate portions of the sacrificial animals of the peace offering (Lev 7:28–36), the sin offering (Lev 6:26–29) and the guilt offering (Lev 7:1–6); they also ate portions of the grain offering (Lev 2:3, 10, 16–18; 7:9–10). The Israelites were allowed to eat portions of the peace offering (Lev 7:11–21).³⁶⁵
 - (ii) In the case of the sin offering, there was an explicit exception: “But no sin offering shall be eaten from which any blood is brought into the tent of meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place; it shall be burned up with fire” (Lev 6:30). The sin offerings on the Day of Atonement were covered by this stipulation: “And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire” (Lev 16:27).
 - (iii) The author references Leviticus 6:30 and 16:27 in v. 11 to explain what is meant by “from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat” (v. 10). He is referring to the sin offerings made on the Day of Atonement. The priests were not permitted to eat any portion of those sacrifices.
- (b) We now have enough data to determine what “altar” the author is talking about in 13:10—he is referring to the NC equivalent of the FC bronze altar: Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross.³⁶⁶ Thus we might paraphrase 13:10–11 as follows:

³⁶⁵ Cf. 1 Cor 9:13 and 10:18.

³⁶⁶ Some have suggested that the NC altar is the Lord’s Table (the Eucharist). But this does not make the best sense of the author’s statements. Bruce goes so far as to say, “It is remarkable how our author avoids mentioning the Eucharist when he has every opportunity to do so” (Bruce, 379). Bruce further argues: “The most that can be said is that our author may be pointing to the truth of Christian experience which is independently attested in the Eucharist—that Christ is both the sacrifice and the sustenance of his people, and that as sacrifice and as sustenance alike he is to be appropriated by faith” (p. 380). Cf. Lane, 2:538–539; and Koester, 569.

“Under the FC, the priests (and the people) had no right to eat portions of a sin offering whose blood was taken into the Tabernacle to make atonement. But as NC believers, we can. We partake of the sin offering made on the NC altar, that is, the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross.” Eating physical food has no spiritual effect, but partaking of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ *does*—it is able to save our souls.³⁶⁷

(4) Let us go to Jesus outside the camp (13:12–14).

- (a) The author continues his train of thought by connecting Jesus with the sacrificial animals slain as sin offerings on the Day of Atonement. Just as the bodies of the bull and goat were carried outside the camp and burned, so Jesus “suffered outside the gate” (13:12a). John 19:17 states that Jesus “went out [of the city of Jerusalem], bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.” The reason Jesus suffered outside the gate was so that he could “sanctify the people through his own blood” (13:12b; 10:10, 14). Jesus’ sacrificial death is the true spiritual reality which the FC type (the Day of Atonement) foreshadowed.
- (b) “Therefore” (since Jesus suffered outside the gate) we should “go to him outside the camp” (13:13a). Why should we do this? So that we can “bear the reproach he endured” (13:13b). The author’s point is that we should *identify* with Jesus. When we join Him outside the camp, we declare our solidarity with Him and His shame (cf. 1 Pet 4:13; Rom 8:17; Phil 3:10). What is “the camp”³⁶⁸ (*tes paremboles*) which we leave to join Jesus? In context, it refers to our separation from the world and all those who reject Christ and His offer of salvation. During His earthly ministry, Jesus was rejected by His own people, the Jews. As the gospel spread, believers experienced rejection by both Jews and Gentiles. Paul remarked that the notion of Christ offering Himself as a sacrifice for sin was “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23). Standing side-by-side with Christ means that we will bear the ridicule of unbelievers and the hostility of sinners.
- (c) Why is it important to separate ourselves from the world and identify with Christ? Because here we have “no lasting city”—this present world is passing away (13:14a; cf. 1 John 2:15–17). We, like Abraham in Canaan, are sojourners on earth. We too are “looking forward to the city that has foundations” (11:10), that is, we seek “the city that is to come”—the heavenly Jerusalem (13:14b). This verse calls us to a commitment to be a pilgrim people who leave behind the security of what we know in order to follow Christ and look forward to the city with foundations.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁷ Allen comments, “Christians, however, eat spiritually of the sacrifice of Christ in that they enjoy the benefits of salvation provided by Christ’s once for all offering of himself on the cross” (p. 616).

³⁶⁸ This is the same word used in LXX Lev 16:27.

³⁶⁹ O’Brien, 526.

(5) Sacrifices which are pleasing to God (13:15–16).

- (a) The FC sacrificial system foreshadowed more than Jesus' death on the cross. It was also a type of the spiritual sacrifices that we, as spiritual priests of the NC, offer to God. The OT reveals that God's plan for Israel was for them to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5–6). This plan is spiritually realized in the lives of NC believers (1 Pet 2:4–9) and will be physically realized by ethnic Israel in the Millennium (cf. Isa 61:4–6).
- (b) One of the sacrifices that we offer to God as spiritual priests of the NC is the "sacrifice of praise" (13:15a).³⁷⁰ Note that the words "Through him" stand at the beginning of the verse—it is only through our great High Priest that we can come to God and offer spiritual sacrifices. The phrase "sacrifice of praise" alludes to Psalm 50:14 (LXX Ps 49:14): "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High" (cf. Ps 107:22; 116:17).
- (c) In the FC, a thanksgiving offering (a kind of peace offering) was defined in terms of a sacrificial animal, flour and oil, and was given in gratitude to God for His forgiveness and blessing (cf. Lev 7:12ff.). What is the spiritual equivalent that constitutes a "sacrifice of praise"? The writer explains—"that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (13:15b).³⁷¹ When we praise God, publically acknowledging His good name and character, and thank Him for salvation and His many blessings in our life, we offer up to God a sacrifice of praise.
- (d) Praise is only one of the sacrifices that we offer as spiritual priests of the NC. The author also tells his readers to "do good (*eupoiias*) and to share what you have (*koinonias*)" (13:16a). The word *eupoiias* occurs only here in the NT—Hellenistic parallels show that it denotes "acts of kindness" that give tangible expression to concern for others.³⁷² The word *koinonias* was used to indicate the idea of fellowship (cf. 1 Cor 1:9; 10:16; 2 Cor 6:14; Gal 2:9; Phil 3:10; 1 John 1:7) and of sharing with others (cf. Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13).
- (e) The readers had suffered hardship and the loss of material goods (10:32–34), but the author did not want that to keep them from caring for others and being generous with what they had. Thus he urges them: "Do not neglect..."—the same wording used in 13:2 concerning hospitality. The motivation for such behavior is that "such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (13:16b).

(6) Obey the commands of your present leaders (13:17).

³⁷⁰ Other sacrifices mentioned in the NT include: Romans 12:1–2 (our body as a living burnt offering); 15:15–16 (our soul and the souls of other believers as an acceptable offering); Phil 2:17 (the expenditure of our life in ministry as a drink offering); 4:18 (our giving to other believers as a fragrant offering); Eph 5:2 (walking in love as a fragrant offering).

³⁷¹ The writer's terminology is borrowed from Hosea 14:2 (LXX Hos 14:3) and Psalm 50:23 (LXX Ps 49:23).

³⁷² Lane, 2:552.

- (a) Earlier the author told his readers to imitate the faith of their past leaders (13:7). Now he tells them to “obey” (*peithesthe*) and “submit” (*hypeikete*) to their present leaders (13:17a). The word *hypeikete* occurs only here in the NT. It originally meant “to withdraw, give way to,” and then figuratively came to mean “yielding to authority.” It is stronger than “obey” and carries with it the implication that the readers should yield when the leader’s direction is at odds with their own wishes.³⁷³
- (b) Why should the readers submit to their present leaders? Because “they are keeping watch (*agrypnousin*) over your souls” (13:17b). Spiritual leaders have a special God-given responsibility for the spiritual welfare of those under their care (cf. Acts 20:28–31; 1 Pet 5:1–4). The word *agrypnousin* conveys the idea of staying awake in watchful alertness (cf. Mark 13:33; Luke 21:36; Eph 6:18). Spiritual leaders are always on the lookout for dangers to their flock.
- (c) Why are spiritual leaders so diligent in their oversight of the flock? Because they “will have to give an account (*logon apodosontes*)” (13:17c). One day all spiritual shepherds will have to give an account to the “Chief Shepherd” of how they carried out their duties (1 Pet 5:4). Leadership is held accountable first, and the goal is that they can report of the congregation with “joy.” But if they must speak “with groaning” of disobedience and resistance, rest assured the sheep will be held accountable for their actions as well, and “that would be of no advantage to you” (13:17d).
- C) Closing (13:18–25).
- (1) Request for prayer (13:18–19).
- (a) Having mentioned that spiritual shepherds will have to give an account of their oversight of the flock, the author requests that his readers “pray for us” (13:18a). Similar requests occur frequently at the end of Paul’s letters (cf. Rom 15:30–32; Eph 6:18–20; Col 4:3–4; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1–2). The present imperative signals continuing action—“pray and keep on praying for us.” The use of the words “us” and “we” in v. 18, followed by the word “I” in v. 19, implies that the author was part of a group that was known to the audience (cf. 13:24).³⁷⁴
- (b) The grounds for the author’s request is that “we are sure (*peithometha*) that we have a clear conscience (*kalen syneidesin*)” (13:18b; cf. 2 Cor 1:11). The author can appropriately ask for the prayers of his readers since he was keeping his conscience clear (cf. Acts 24:16). Such a conscience is the result of definite action—“desiring to act honorably (*kalos anastrephesthai*) in all things” (13:18c).

³⁷³ Allen, 625.

³⁷⁴ So Lane, 2:556–57; O’Brien, 530; Koester, 572; Ellingworth, 724–25; D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 396 n. 11. Guthrie disagrees and see this as an authorial plural, “a stylistic device by which he refers to himself” (p. 442). Guthrie is followed by Attridge, 402; Bruce, 386; Johnson, 353.

We, like our spiritual leaders, should strive to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. This kind of living will enable us to have a clear conscience and be supported by the prayers of fellow believers.

- (c) The author's general request for prayer is followed by a specific appeal for them to pray that he would be quickly restored to them (13:19). The verb of entreaty ("I urge you") and the nature of the request indicate the closeness and affection the author had for his readers. The notion of his being "restored" implies that he was once part of their congregational life (cf. his intimate knowledge of them in 2:3–4; 6:9–12; 10:32–34). The passive voice of "restored" assumes that the restoration will be God's response to the prayers of the congregation (cf. Phlm 1:22).³⁷⁵

(2) Benediction and Doxology (13:20–21).

- (a) Having requested prayer for himself, the author now offers a prayer of his own for the congregation (cf. Rom 15:5–6, 13; 1 Thess 3:11–13; 2 Thess 2:16–17; 3:5).
- (i) In the ancient world benedictions were important to an address, and in the Jewish context specifically a benediction was an aspect of worship.³⁷⁶ They expressed a wish of well-being for the reader or hearer and often followed a general formula, such as our author's "may the God of peace," common in Paul's letters, and "to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (13:20–21). However, a writer could craft a benediction to address specific needs of the audience or to express a summary of his main message.³⁷⁷
- (b) "Now may the God of peace" (13:20a). This phrase occurs several times in Paul's letters (Rom 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23). God is the source and giver of peace, both spiritual and interpersonal (cf. the author's command to "pursue peace" in 12:14).
- (i) "who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus" (13:20b; cf. Rom 10:7).³⁷⁸ The Father is credited as the one who brought the Son back from among the dead. This is the only direct reference to Jesus' resurrection in Hebrews. This is because the author's focus was on Jesus's death (cf. 2:9, 14, 17; 5:8; 9:15; 10:10–14; 13:12) and exaltation at the right hand of the Father (cf. 1:3b; 1:13; 4:14; 8:1b; 10:12b; 12:2)—Jesus' resurrection is thus subsumed in His exaltation.

- (1) "the great shepherd of the sheep" (13:20c; cf. 1 Pet 5:4). This phrase

³⁷⁵ O'Brien, 532.

³⁷⁶ J. L. Wu, "Liturgical Elements," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 557–60.

³⁷⁷ Guthrie, 442.

³⁷⁸ Lane sees here an allusion to LXX Isaiah 63:11: "Then he remembered the ancient days, saying, Where is he that brought up from the sea the shepherd of the sheep? where is he that put his Holy Spirit in them?" (p. 563–4).

reminds us of Jesus' teaching that He is the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). This metaphor is equivalent to that of the high priest who offers himself as a sacrifice for his people (cf. 9:11–12). The adjective "great" echoes "great high priest" in 4:14.³⁷⁹

(ii) "by the blood of the eternal covenant" (13:20d).³⁸⁰ The Father resurrected Jesus "by" Jesus' blood in the sense that Jesus' resurrection is the demonstration that the sacrifice of His own body was accepted by God.³⁸¹ The phrase "the blood of the eternal covenant" echoes 9:20, where Moses speaks of "the blood of the [first] covenant." Jesus' sacrifice is a "once for all" sacrifice (10:10) and thus the covenant that is ratified is "eternal."

(c) "equip (*katartisai*) you with everything good that you may do his will" (13:21a). The word "equip" means "to make someone completely adequate or sufficient for something." It is only as God provides us with His grace that we are enabled to do His will (cf. Phil 2:12–13).

(d) "working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Christ Jesus" (13:21b). Our spiritual union with Christ enables the Father to transform us into the image of His Son. As mentioned earlier, one of the ways this is accomplished is through the discipline/training of suffering (12:4–13).

(e) "to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (13:21c). The doxology which concludes the prayer is likely directed to the Father, rather than the Son (cf. 1 Pet 5:10–11). The Father is the initiator of mankind's salvation, and although He accomplished this through the willing obedience of the Son (who has shared the Father's glory since the beginning—1:3), we are called to give glory to the Father through the Son (13:15).

(3) Appeal (13:22).

(a) Having finished his prayer, the author now appeals (*parakalo*) to his readers, whom he regards as believers ("brothers"; see 3:1, 12; 10:19). He asks them to "bear (*anechesthe*) with my word of exhortation (*parakleseos*), for I have written to you briefly (*bracheon*)" (13:22). As mentioned in the Introduction, the word *parakleseos* was used to describe the sermon that Paul and Barnabas were invited to give in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch after the public reading of Scripture (Acts 13:15). Since the author could not be with his readers at present, he sent them this letter so they could read what he really wanted to be saying to

³⁷⁹ Kistemaker, 430.

³⁸⁰ Lane sees here an allusion to LXX Zech 9:11: "And thou by the blood of thy covenant has sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit that has no water" (p. 563–4).

³⁸¹ Bruce, 388.

them in person.³⁸²

- (b) The characterization of Hebrews as a “word of exhortation” is apt—the author recognized the hardship the audience had endured (10:32–34), praised them for their work and love (6:10), exhorted them to endure to the end by faith (6:11–12; 12:1–3), chastised them for their disobedience (5:11–12; 6:12; 10:24–26, 35–36), warned them of the danger of apostasy (2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:8; 10:26–39; 12:18–29), and persuaded them from the Scriptures that Christ and the NC is superior to the FC (7:1–10:18).
 - (c) By appealing to his readers to “bear” with his exhortation, the author is tactfully calling on them to take his message seriously, even if it might step on their toes, as it were, or was difficult to understand because of its content. In actuality, the author had written to them only a “brief” letter (cf. 5:11; Hebrews is shorter than both Romans and 1 Corinthians).
- (4) News of Timothy’s release (13:23).
- (a) The name “Timothy” is used without qualification—this suggests that he was well known to the readers. Most scholars link this Timothy (which was a relatively common name in antiquity) to the Timothy who was the friend of Paul. Paul’s letters describe Timothy as: a “brother” in the faith (2 Cor 1:1; Col 1:1), a co-worker (Rom 16:21), a companion in missions (Acts 16:1–3; 17:14–15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4) and a trusted delegate (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; Phil 2:19; 1 Thess 3:2, 6). His close personal connection with Paul is seen by the fact that he received two letters from Paul (1 Tim 1:1–3; 2 Tim 1:1–2) and by the occurrence of his name at the beginning of six of Paul’s letters (2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; Phlm 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1).
 - (b) The author wanted his readers to be aware that Timothy “has been released” (*apolelymenon*). The natural inference is that Timothy had been imprisoned, but if so, this is the only mention of it in the NT.
 - (c) The comment “with whom I shall see you if he comes soon” reveals that the author planned to visit the readers in the very near future and could only wait for a short time. If Timothy did not arrive soon, he would travel to see them alone. This seems to underscore the idea that the author “regarded what he had written only as a substitute for his own presence.”³⁸³
- (5) Greetings (13:24).
- (a) The author sends his greeting to “your leaders and all the saints” (13:24a). He

³⁸² Which, of course, is all the better for us! Indeed, one could hypothesize that the Holy Spirit kept the author from being able to speak to his readers directly, in order that he would write his message down and it would be preserved for our benefit all these years later.

³⁸³ Lane, 2:569.

also sends greeting from “those from Italy” (*hoi apo tes Italias*) (13:24b). As mentioned in the Introduction, many scholars understand this verse to be implying that people from Italy (Rome), now residing elsewhere, were sending greetings back to the believers in Italy (Rome) via this letter. As such, it provides a significant clue as to the audience of Hebrews.

(6) Farewell (13:25).

- (a) The letter closes with a farewell that is similar to those found in Paul’s letters³⁸⁴—“Grace be with you all.” Although the expression is common, it has special weight in Hebrews because of the emphasis on the grace that shapes the readers lives and future hope. Christ’s death on their behalf arose out of God’s gracious gift (2:9, *charis*), and through this they are able boldly to approach God’s throne of grace in order to receive mercy and find grace in their time of need (4:16). Given all that God has done for them in Christ, they are urged not to fall away from his grace (12:15), but to respond with thanks (12:28) from hearts that have been made strong by grace (13:9).³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ Note the following, with several variations: Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:13; Gal 6:18; Eph 6:24; Phil 4:23; Col 4:18; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; 1 Tim 6:21; 2 Tim 4:22; Tit 3:15; Phlm 1:25.

³⁸⁵ O’Brien, 541.

Hebrews Study Questions

First Reading

1. Were you able to determine the author of Hebrews? Did you notice any verses that give clues to the author's identity? If so, which ones?
2. Why is this letter called the Letter to the Hebrews? Were you able to discern with certainty the identity of the audience?
3. When was the letter written? What verses hold clues related to the dating of the letter?
4. Why was this letter written? Why do you think the supremacy of Christ and His New Covenant was the central theme of the letter?
5. How many warnings did you notice in the text as you read? What sense did those warnings give you concerning the future destiny of the audience?
6. Did you feel encouraged spiritually after you finished reading? Why or why not?

Introduction

1. How do we know the author of Hebrews was not a woman?
2. What passage of Hebrews argues against Pauline authorship?
3. Who is assumed to be the author of Hebrews in P⁴⁶?
4. Who did Tertullian suggest was the author Hebrews?
5. When, in recent centuries, was Pauline authorship of Hebrews challenged?
6. What is the current scholarly consensus on the authorship of Hebrews?
7. How is the traditional title "To the Hebrews" misleading?
8. What kind of setting for the audience best fits the internal evidence of Hebrews?
9. Is it fair to say that Jewish Christians were the primary audience of Hebrews? Why or why not?
10. What verse suggests Rome as the location of the audience of Hebrews?
11. What event occurred in Rome (AD 49) that fits the description of the suffering of the audience of Hebrews (cf. Heb 10:32–34)?

12. List the passages in Hebrews that give us clues as to its date of writing.
13. Why is the argument for an upper bound of AD 70 for the date of Hebrews disputed?
14. What early church writing first quoted Hebrews? What does this tell us about when Hebrews was written?
15. Who was emperor of Rome when Hebrews was written?

Chapter 1

1. How does God's revelation of Himself through His Son differ from the revelation given previously through the prophets?
2. What is meant by "these last days"? (1:2)
3. When was Jesus Christ "appointed heir of all things"? (1:2)
4. What is meant by Christ being "the radiance" of God's glory? (1:3)
5. How is Christ the "exact representation" of God's nature? (1:3)
6. What is the significance of Christ sitting down at the right hand of the Father? (1:4)
7. Why does the author make such a sharp contrast between Jesus Christ and the angels?
8. What three contrasts are given between Christ and the angels to show Christ's superiority?
9. In what sense did Jesus "become" better than the angels? (1:4)
10. When did Christ inherit a "more excellent name" than the angels? (1:4) What is the name that He inherited?
11. What is the difference between "the eternal Sonship of Christ" and "the incarnational Sonship of Christ"?
12. What NT passage helps us understand the author's quotation of Psalm 2:7? To what event is Psalm 2:7 referring?
13. In what sense did God "beget" Christ on His resurrection day?
14. In what sense is Christ's being the Son of God related to His resurrection?

15. What translational issue is debated in Hebrews 1:6?
16. In what sense is Christ the “firstborn” of God? What is meant by the term “world”? (1:6)
17. Comment on the LXX’s significance to the author’s citation of Deuteronomy 32:43 and Psalm 104:4.
18. From the author’s point of view, what function/purpose do the angels serve?

Chapter 2

1. What is the reason given why we should pay “much closer attention to what we have heard”? (2:1)
2. What is meant by “the word spoken through angels”?
3. What clue to the author’s identity is given in Heb. 2:3?
4. What light does Hebrews 2:4 shed on the unique events surrounding the birth of the Church?
5. What role will angels play in “the world to come”? (2:5)
6. Does the quote of Psalm 8:4–6 refer to Christ specifically or man in general? (2:6–7)
7. Why is the issue of subjection and authority brought up as a contrast between Christ and the angels?
8. What is meant by “we do not yet see all things subjected to Him”? (2:8)
9. Why did Christ become flesh and blood? (2:9)
10. Explain how was Christ perfected through suffering and comment on the use of “perfection” terminology in Hebrews. (2:10)
11. In what way did the devil have the power of death? (2:14)
12. What was necessary before Christ could become our High Priest? (2:17)

Chapter 3

1. Why is Christ compared and contrasted with Moses? (3:1–6)
2. Why is Jesus “counted worthy” of more glory than Moses? (3:4–6a)

3. Why does the author say “we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope”? (3:6)
4. What does the author imply by using the Exodus generation as an example of unfaithfulness?
5. What does the word “Today” imply? (3:7)
6. Why is the concept of entering God’s rest introduced?
7. Does “my rest” in Psalm 95:11 refer to Israel’s rest in Canaan? (3:11)
8. What are the characteristics of an evil, unbelieving heart? (3:12)
9. In what way is sin deceitful? (3:13)
10. What bearing does this warning have on the topic of eternal security? (3:12–14)
11. How can believers combat the danger of unbelief?
12. Why does the author repeat Psalm 95:7b-8 in Hebrews 3:15?
13. What was the Exodus generation unable to enter because of unbelief? (3:19)

Chapter 4

1. What is the writer’s main premise which he subsequently defends? (4:1)
2. Why should we fear to fail to enter God’s rest? (4:2)
3. Explain the chain of logic the author uses in Hebrews 4:3b-8 to support his claim that the promise of entering God’s rest “still stands” (4:3b-8).
4. What is God’s rest? (4:3–10; esp. 4:3b-4)
5. What is the classic OT passage that shows it is possible for a believer to commit apostasy? (4:7).
6. Why does the author coin the word “Sabbath-rest”? (4:9)
7. What is the context of the famous Hebrews 4:12 verse?
8. Who is able to help us avoid the sin of unbelief? (4:14)

9. Comment on Hebrews 4:15's relation to the theological discussion of the peccability/impeccability of Christ.
10. What is the basis of our confidence to "draw near the throne of grace"?

Chapter 5

1. What are the qualifications to be high priest? (5:1–4)
2. What OT passage declares God's appointment of the Son as high priest? (5:6)
3. Why does the author quote Psalm 2:7 in Hebrews 5:5b?
4. What is the significance of Jesus offering "up prayers and supplications"? (5:7)
5. In what sense did Jesus "learn obedience through what he suffered"? (5:8)
6. How did Jesus' experiences prior to His death make him "perfect"? (5:9)
7. When did Jesus become high priest? (5:8–10)
8. Why does the author interrupt his train of thought in Hebrews 5:11?
9. What does the phrase "dull of hearing" mean? (5:11)
10. What is the normal expectation for a mature believer? (5:12)
11. Describe those who live on "milk." (5:12–14)
12. Describe those who can partake of "solid food." (5:12–14)

Chapter 6

1. What did the author consider to be "the elementary doctrine of Christ"? (6:1–2)
2. Who is impossible to restore to repentance?
3. What is the correct translation of Hebrews 6:6a?
4. What does "fallen away" mean in Hebrews 6:6a?
5. Describe the nature of the disobedience spoken of in Hebrews 6:6a.
6. What is the best translation of Hebrews 6:6c?

7. Is apostasy without remedy? Why or why not?
8. In what sense is it impossible to restore someone from apostasy?
9. How does the author of Hebrews describe the sin of apostasy? (6:6)
10. Why does the author feel confident that his readers will avoid apostasy? (6:9–10)
11. What does the author encourage his readers to do? (6:11–12)
12. How does God's promise to Abraham serve as "strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us"?

Chapter 7

1. What OT passages contain data on Melchizedek? (7:1–2)
2. Who was Melchizedek? (7:1–2)
3. Why is Scripture silent about so many details of Melchizedek's life? (7:3)
4. What proof does the author of Hebrews give for Melchizedek's greatness? (7:4–7)
5. In what sense did Levi pay tithes to Melchizedek? (7:9–10)
6. What OT passage implied a weakness in the Levitical priesthood? Explain.
7. What are the differences between Jesus and the Levitical priesthood? (7:13–17)
8. Why was the "former commandment" set aside? (7:18–19)
9. In what sense is the law weak and useless? (7:18–19)
10. What contrasts are made between Jesus and the Levitical priesthood? (7:20–28)

Chapter 8

1. Should we understand the "true tent" as a reference to the church? Why or why not?
2. What is the correspondence between the earthly tabernacle and the "true tent"?
3. Why is the location of Jesus' ministry as High Priest important? (8:4)

4. How does the author highlight the inferiority of the Levitical priest's earthly ministry?
5. What is a mediator?
6. What are the "better promises" that establish the NC? (8:6)
7. How does the author show that the FC was not faultless? (8:6–13)
8. List some of the positive and negative aspects of the FC.
9. Describe the eschatological dimensions of the NC.
10. In what way is the NC not like the FC? (8:9)

Chapter 9

1. What role did the tabernacle play with regard to access to God?
2. How were sins forgiven in the OT?
3. Why did God institute the FC sacrificial system?
4. Explain why Leviticus 4:26 states that after the sin offering was made "he shall be forgiven"?
5. What was the Holy Spirit demonstrating through the design of the tabernacle and the regulations for worship?
6. What spiritual reality is represented by the restriction of direct, physical access to God's presence?
7. Could OT believers ever have a clear conscience? Why or why not?
8. What OT regulation forms the background for the author's discussion of Christ's sacrifice?
9. List the contrasts that are made between Christ and the high priests of the FC. (9:11–12)
10. Did Christ carry His blood into heaven?
11. What was the significance of blood in the FC? Explain what the blood of animals purified.
12. What is the relation between Christ's blood and the NC? (9:15–21)

13. What is required for the forgiveness of sins? (9:23)
14. Why was it necessary for “the heavenly things” to be purified “with better sacrifices”? (9:22–24)
15. What is signified by the repetition of sacrifices under the FC? (9:25)
16. Explain how Christ’s sacrifice provides atonement “for all” (provisional vs. effective).
17. What OT passage is alluded to in Hebrews 9:28?

Chapter 10

1. How often does a truly effectual sacrifice need to be made?
2. How did the Day of Atonement serve as a “reminder of sins”?
3. Explain the author’s application of Psalm 40:6–8 to the Messiah. (10:5–7)
4. How does the Messiah’s obedience to God’s will effect the FC sacrificial system? (10:8–9)
5. What two contrasts are made in Hebrews 10:11–14?
6. What is implied by Jeremiah 31:34 when God says, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more”?
7. What does the author call on his readers to do? (10:22–25)
8. What does “neglecting to meet together” mean? (10:25)
9. What happens to those who “go on sinning deliberately”?
10. How does the author characterize the rejection of Christ’s sacrifice for sins? (10:29)
11. Describe the parallels between Hebrews 6:4–8 and 10:26–31.
12. What persecution had the audience previously endured? (10:32–24)
13. What OT passages does the author use to encourage his readers to endure?
14. What is meant by the words “shrink back”? (10:38–39)

Chapter 11

1. Should we understand Hebrews 11:1–2 to be a dictionary definition of faith? Why or why not?
2. What is the suggested paraphrase of Hebrews 11:1?
3. What are two important aspects of biblical “faith” that distinguish it from the general sense of the word?
4. How does the LXX contribute to our understanding Enoch’s faith? (11:5)
5. What is the nature of the faith that pleases God? (11:6)
6. How did Noah’s faith “condemn the world”? (11:7)
7. What made Abraham’s faith noteworthy? (11:8b)
8. Why did Abraham live as a sojourner in his own land? (11:9–10)
9. Why does the author emphasize that the patriarchs died “in faith”? (11:13)
10. Explain the author’s logic in Hebrews 11:13b–16.
11. How did Abraham respond when God’s will seemed opposed to God’s promise? (11:17–19)
12. What aspect of Joseph’s life does the author single out as an example of his faith?
13. In what sense did Moses’ parents act “by faith”?
14. How do we show who we fear most?
15. How did Moses refuse “to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter”?
16. Which verses of Hebrews 11 support the notion that the Exodus generation began with true faith?
17. What makes Rahab’s faith unique in the list of individuals mentioned in Hebrews 11?
18. Why is Samson listed as an example of someone who lived by faith?
19. Is a life of faith always marked by triumph and victory? Why or why not?
20. What did all the individuals mentioned in Hebrews 11 have in common? (11:39b)

21. Why does the author say that “apart from us they [the OT saints] should not be made perfect”?

Chapter 12

1. Who are the “cloud of witnesses” which surround us? In what sense are they “witnesses” to us?
2. What is the sin which the author describes as “the easily entangling sin” (NASB)?
3. Who is the ultimate example of living by faith?
4. In what way is Jesus the “founder of the faith”?
5. In what way is Jesus the “perfector of the faith”?
6. What is Jesus’ twofold example? (12:2b)
7. What is the significance of the author’s claim in Hebrews 12:4?
8. To whom is Proverbs 3:11–12 addressed? What does this imply?
9. What is meant by the word “discipline”? (12:5–11)
10. Does God treat us any differently than He treated Jesus? Why or why not?
11. What are the benefits of God’s discipline?
12. What is the “holiness” which we are urged to pursue? (12:14)
13. How are we to understand the claim that Esau “found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears” (12:17b)?
14. What contrast forms the basis for the author’s last warning? (12:18–29)
15. How does Haggai 2:6 fit into the author’s argument? (12:26–27)
16. What two actions should we take in light of the author’s claims? (12:28–29)

Chapter 13

1. What OT passage is alluded to in Hebrews 13:2? Explain.
2. What Greek word is used three times in Hebrews 13:1–5? Comment on each usage.

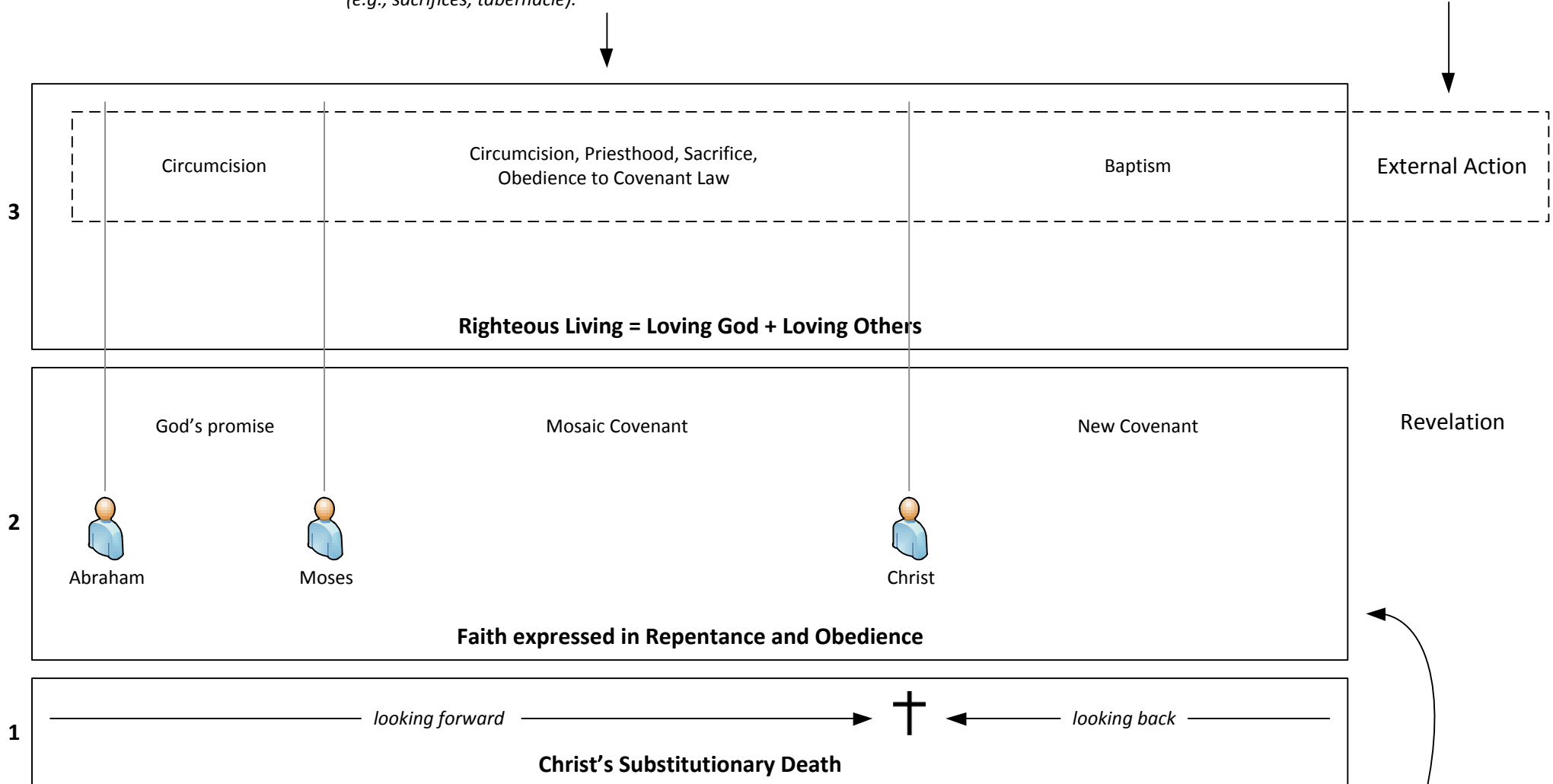
3. Describe the difference between prisons in the 1st century and American prisons today.
4. How can single people honor marriage?
5. What is the essence of contentment? (13:5)
6. What effect should spiritual leaders have on our lives? (13:7)
7. What “diverse and strange teachings” is the author concerned with in Hebrews 13:9?
8. What is the “altar” of the NC?
9. Why are we told to go to Jesus “outside the camp”?
10. Comment on the relation between the Levitical priesthood of the FC and the spiritual priesthood of the NC. (13:15–16).
11. Should we obey the spiritual leaders God that has placed over us? Why or why not?
12. Why does the author appeal to his readers to “bear with my word of exhortation”?
13. What is the significance of the name “Timothy” in Hebrews 13:23?
14. Comment of the significance of Hebrews 13:24 with regard to the identity of the audience.

Negative statements in the NT about the FC—“weak,” “useless,” “made nothing perfect,” “not faultless,” “obsolete,” “shadow and copy”—are directed at Section 3 in isolation of faith, and point out the inherent inability of physical, material rites and observances to correct a spiritual problem.

Hebrews, in particular, is concerned with showing the limitations of the FC (e.g., a human priesthood) and how it was only intended to physically illustrate greater spiritual realities (e.g., sacrifices, tabernacle).

Nothing in Section 3 is inherently (in-and-of-itself) capable of making you right with God or efficacious for removing sin.

However, this section does set forth what God expects of a person who is responding to Him in obedient faith.



The penalty for sin is death. The Father planned from the beginning of the world to offer His only Son as a substitute sacrifice to pay sin's penalty.

Salvation and the forgiveness of sin has always been by God's grace through faith in God's word. However, the amount of information in God's word concerning His plan of salvation has grown over time.