

A Study of Hebrews

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Dedication:

To those who have discovered that Jesus is Better.

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Introductory comments:

Once more a book of the Bible has reached out to me with a challenge. The letter to the Hebrews seems so far above us, yet careful examination of this and every one of God's messages finally yields the fruit of knowledge plus joy.

I shall use a Q & A method in this mini-commentary, and quote several times from my own 2017 work that included Hebrews, *Q & A Through the Bible, 2017*.

My Biblical source is the *New American Standard Bible, 1995*, the Lockman Foundation. But for the most part you will need your own Bible to read that source, for in this work I have not included the actual text of Hebrews.

Other sources will be found on the *Bible Hub* app. Concordance, Interlinear, commentaries, parallel texts, are all available on that marvelous application.

I also referred to John MacArthur's commentary from time to time.

All praise to God for His marvelous Word and the leading He gives to His people to understand His revelation.

Some things you'll want to know about Hebrews

1. Who wrote the letter?

We cannot get very far in our study before someone will want to know who was the author of these thirteen chapters.

Paul?

I say, Paul. But I will say just as quickly, I do not know, and neither does anyone. However, I have some strong suspicions. Let me explain.

KJV says so.

The translators of the King James Version were so convinced that Paul was the author that they gave the letter a title that said so:

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.

Read it. That's what it says. Did they know something we don't know? Maybe.

Ancient texts, lists and fathers.

It seems to be common knowledge that

The Chester Beatty Papyrus No. 2 (P46) (of about 200 C.E.) contains Hebrews among nine of Paul's letters

and

Hebrews is listed among "fourteen letters of Paul the apostle" in "The Canon of Athanasius," of the fourth century C.E.

First, in the earliest manuscript editions of the New Testament books, Hebrews is included after Romans among the books written by the apostle Paul. This was taken as evidence that Paul had written it, and some Eastern churches accepted Hebrews as canonical earlier than in the West.

Church fathers Augustine, Jerome, Eusebius, Origen, and Athanasius all agree that Paul was the author. Seems fairly conclusive, yes?

“Italy”.

13:24 of the letter points to Italy, as in Rome, for the place of writing, a location that Paul knew well. He had been imprisoned there from 59-61.

Timothy.

Oh, and let’s not forget Timothy, also mentioned in the letter, a companion of Paul mentioned in the so-called “prison epistles.” Seems that Timothy was following in Paul’s footsteps, had been imprisoned himself, and was now released, says the writer of Hebrews (13:23). Sounds increasingly like Paul.

Timothy was on his way to Italy, or Rome, to meet with Paul, perhaps after his first imprisonment, and Paul was hoping to travel with his young disciple to Jerusalem... if indeed Jerusalem was the intended audience and Paul was the writer.

Closing.

Also, "Grace be with you all" (Hebrews 13:25), is the same closing found in each of Paul’s letters.

Peter’s confirmation.

And, someone put together this line of reasoning. First, Peter, the apostle to the Jews, wrote to these Hebrew people, specifically the dispersion mentioned in 1 Peter 1:1. Second, Peter said

"...just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him" (2 Peter 3:15). Therefore, Peter is confirming that Paul had also written a letter to the Hebrews! And if this line of thought is true, the following verse of Peter (3:16) about the difficulty of some of Paul's writings, certainly matches the mysteries of the letter before us!

Theology.

Another argument in favor of Paul's authorship has to do with the content of his material. Consider these comparisons:

Hebrews 1:3 speaks of the fact that everything is sustained by the word of Jesus. So does Colossians 1:15-17,

The Son is the image of the invisible God. . . . For in him all things were created . . . and in him all things hold together.

Hebrews 2:4 talks of the Spirit's distribution of gifts. As does 1 Corinthians 12:11,

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Hebrews 2:14–17 tells us that Jesus shared in our humanity. So does Philippians 2:7-8.

Being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Hebrews 8:6 informs us about the New Covenant, and compares it to the old, as does 2 Corinthians 3:6,

He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Hebrews and Romans and Galatians all speak of Abraham as a spiritual father to all of us.

Paul preached salvation by faith alone in places like Ephesians 2:8, 9. Chapters 4, 6, 10, and 11 of Hebrews communicate a similar message.

There are other ways in which a Pauline theology shines in Hebrews, but these examples are probably sufficient.

So, definitely Paul? No so fast... there are nay-sayers. I have listed their reasoning, with a quick rebuttal. Here's what they say:

Anonymity.

Paul didn't sign his name for goodness' sake! But then, neither did Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, or the author of Acts or 1, 2 and 3 John. But we've managed to figure out who these authors were, and excused them for not putting their autograph on their writing. John did indeed identify himself in Revelation but not in four other of his writings. So why not allow Paul the privilege of one un-signed book? Anonymity is not an argument. We assume the author had a reason for not identifying himself. Would his name endanger saints in Rome, if he was freshly out of prison and trying to remain hidden? Are his teachings so offensive and unacceptable under his actual name to some who have turned against the prisoner?

The style.

I am not conversant in these matters. Paul was educated, multi-lingual, and informed of Judaism above his peers. But suppose he dictated this to Luke and Luke did some editing to disguise the author? This theory has been submitted to explain the “highly literary and very ornate Greek” of the letter. Paul, the ghost-writer of Hebrews?

Deniers.

As early as the fourth century, and well into the days of the reformers, there were scholars who questioned Pauline authorship. Calvin and Luther, for example.

But Church fathers and church leaders have been on both sides of most every argument concerning things Christian from the beginning.

Masoretic vs Septuagint.

Perhaps the strongest “red flag” to Paul being the author is the fact that the quotations in the letter, from the Old Testament, are all from the *Septuagint* (the Greek Old Testament), a practice Paul did not use in his other writings. There, it was always the original Masoretic Hebrew text invoked.

Arguing from the unknown is difficult. Could there have been a reason, in terms of a particular audience, that Paul shifted gears here? Could Luke, or another penman, have taken Paul’s ideas and used only Septuagint sources? Were the Hebrew scrolls unavailable?

Of course, we don’t want to rule out the possibility that Paul had nothing to do with this letter. But from all of the above evidence, I’d prefer to explain the few problems involved rather than change the author altogether.

The main objection, Hebrews 2:3.

I call it the main objection, but not at all the most convincing one. That last point was to me the most convincing. Upon analysis Hebrews 2:3 seems to prove nothing, but is hailed by many as the end of the argument.

Consider the verse and its surroundings:

*...how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first spoken through the Lord, **it was confirmed to us by those who heard**, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders, and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*

One commenter on this text is typical of those who espouse this possibility:

“This sounds as if the author didn’t place himself among the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry or the members of the apostolic circle... The reference to the author at 2:3 sounds more like Luke, or Apollos (Martin Luther’s suggestion), or another one of Paul’s close followers, who were not eyewitnesses but had heard the gospel preached to them by one or several of the apostles...It seems unlikely that Paul here in 2:3 would refer to himself as simply someone who received the gospel from those who had heard the Lord.”

May I be so bold as to speak against the accumulated wisdom of these latter-day scholars by suggesting the following reading of Hebrews 2:3.

First take a look at the pronouns in verse 3: *we, we, us*. First person plural. The author is talking about a group of people that includes himself and his readers.

Would it be so heretical to suggest that those pronouns apply, as they do in the rest of the book, to the Hebrew people, the Jews, Israel? Let's read the passage with this in mind:

v. 3: How shall the Jews escape if the Jews neglect their salvation? That salvation was spoken personally by the Lord, and then later was confirmed to the Jews by those who heard His words (namely His chosen apostles). V. 4 God bore witness to their testimony with miracles etc.

We, the Jews, have heard from God! We the Jews are responsible for that word and will not escape if we neglect it. God spoke through Jesus, then through His chosen men, to Israel. The ball is now in our court.

Can that verse now be used as a proof text to exclude Paul from writing the letter? I think not. Paul is simply making a point about the way the Gospel came in power to the nation of Israel. That avenue was twelve chosen apostles that were in office before Saul of Tarsus came along.

Paul received a special revelation from God, later, though I am not forgetting that he was in regular contact with the rest of the apostles, who confirmed to him his calling and ministry and the truths he preached. Paul was not the Lone Ranger, and the book of Acts spells out his cooperation with the other apostles.

If not Paul, who?

It gets almost humorous from here, as men speculate that persons such as Luke, Apollos, Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Timothy, Epaphras, Silas, Philip, and even Mary the mother of Jesus – ! – may have written this mysterious epistle.

I'll leave it there. It's not a critical issue, but nearly everyone is curious about it. What's truly important is what the author said, not who he is.

I found much of this information online at sites such as Ligonier.com, Gotquestions.org, quora.com, and Zondervanacademic.com. You may want to continue investigating.

2. When and where was the letter written?

After dealing in a roundabout way with that first question, these other preliminary queries will be pretty straightforward. We've even hinted at the answers in the above discussion.

If the present-tense usage of Temple ceremonies (for example 13:10-11) is to be taken as a clue, and since the Temple was destroyed finally in A.D. 70, we must conclude that the letter was written sometime before that date.

Nero's persecution of the church from 64 and following, would have included Timothy, mentioned as having just been released, and Paul, who was in Roman prisons at least twice during this time. Most scholarship, I believe, places the letter at the middle to later part of the 60's.

"They of Italy" of chapter 13 seems clearly to point to Rome as the location of the sender when the letter was composed, a point I mentioned in suggesting strongly that Paul is the author.

These items are inconsequential to most, but worthy of at least a small section of this present study.

Of more import is the next question:

3. Why was Hebrews written, and to whom?

It would seem that, although this epistle may have been sent to a particular congregation of Jewish believers, it was meant to have been circulated wherever Hebrew Christians met and worshiped.

The author is passionate about Jews remaining with Christ. Overtones of Galatians here. The Galatians, and evidently many of the readers of Hebrews, were leaving Christianity. Too much Roman persecution. Too much Jewish persecution. They had not counted on such a heavy cross. Maybe Moses wasn't so bad after all. Life was a little more peaceful then. The old traditions of the Torah began to look good. The religion of their childhood rang truer and truer.

The writer, like Paul if not Paul himself, says *No!* Don't do it. Jesus is better. Jesus is greater. Hang in there, wonderful things are coming. Don't risk the awful judgment that will come on those who have fallen away from Christ.

A detailed description comparing Christ to Judaism serves as the backbone of the book, with Christ shining above it all, even the angels of the Old Covenant. Interspersed with serious warnings, the letter elevates Jesus in the eyes of those considering a move away from the Kingdom that God has established.

4. When and why was Hebrews accepted as canonical?

To be considered a part of the list of those books sent by God, inspired by the Spirit, a writing had to be, first and foremost, apostolic.

Matthew, the writings of John, and all the epistles of Paul and Peter, have this sacred mark on them.

But what of Mark, Luke, Acts, James, Jude, and this present epistle?

Mark and Luke are said to have received their status from associating with Peter and Paul, respectively. James and Jude were half-brothers of the Lord Himself, and leaders in the early Jerusalem church.

But what of Hebrews? If we were assured of Pauline authorship, there would be no question whatever of its canonicity. But those who raise the question must prove its approval in other ways.

Hebrews, 2 Peter, James, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation are among the “disputed” books in the formation of the New Testament. That is, although the other books were known to be from the Lord by 100 A.D., these six took a little longer to gain the confidence of the church. Apostolic considerations were added to the problem of forged letters written by men looking for prominence in the early church.

This slowness of acceptance has also to do with circulation, fragmented lists, as the incomplete *Muratorian Canon* whose missing pages give rise to speculation as to whether these books were listed or not, and other factors known to the scholars which I cannot debate here.

Suffice it to say that Hebrews and the others were eventually accepted by those who did the research – and we must say, the praying – to discern what was from God and what was not. We will of course assume in this study that God breathed on the man who wrote these words, and that the truths presented are in perfect harmony with all other truths of the Holy Scriptures.

The text awaits us and is filled with wonders and mysteries which God will give us the grace to comprehend, upon request.

So get your Bible out. That's right, as stated, I have not included the text of Hebrews in this commentary. All references to it are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

Ready?

The letter
to the HEBREWS (NASB)

a.k.a.

The epistle of Paul the apostle
to the HEBREWS (KJV)

Preface

The letter to the Hebrews is packed full of doctrine and mystery. I have tried to outline it, and I have read the outlines of others, but there is a flow of information that is hard to capture. Certain features stand out, though.

1. The superiority of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Greater than angels. Greater than Moses and all his injunctions. The perfect fulfillment of all Moses wrote about.
2. The clear danger of leaving Jesus and returning to one's former plan of salvation.
3. The new way of Christ is accessible by faith in Him and what He did.

Look for Jesus in this letter and you will never be without moorings, regardless of how turbulent the waves of information blow about your study place.

Chapter 1.

1:1. Who were the fathers that God spoke to and through whom did He speak to them?

Here we have a general statement about how the word of God first came to the chosen people, Israel. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must be excluded here, for at their time, Israel was but a promise and a small family. No prophet spoke to them, although God Himself and angelic messengers certainly did.

No, we must begin with Israel as the nation that developed in the land of Egypt, to whom the first of the prophets, the mighty Moses, appeared and spoke and directed. A long line of prophets followed, including Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, and the whole string of men whose names we know by the books that round out the Old Testament of our Bible. Yahweh spoke often and clearly to His people through these men, with greater and lesser results.

1:1. What does “sundry times” and “divers manners” mean? (KJV) What does “many portions” and “many ways” mean? (NASB)

New translations don't solve all problems. The NASB gives us a more modern reading but we still don't know exactly what is being said without a little digging through the prophecies.

The writer is telling us that, though the common denominator of all the messages was simply men, the ones mentioned above, the ways that those prophets communicated and the timing of their words, were widely varied.

Moses first appeared with a message of deliverance and great power in Egypt. Then he was the Lawgiver from a mountaintop. He

spoke often to the people in personal judgments, warnings, rebukes, over the course of their stay in the wilderness.

Samuel the prophet spoke as the kingmaker in Israel. His life spoke of righteous behavior.

Elijah was the champion of true worship and fought idolatry in Israel. Elisha prophesied to Gentile kings as well as Israel's disobedient leaders.

Isaiah spoke of the coming Kingdom, and its king. Jeremiah wept as he saw the ruin of Judah imminent. Ezekiel was called to street corners and heavenly visions. Daniel was a statesman who spoke to Emperors and envisioned the final world setting.

And so on and on. The prophets had a variety of methods and messages. But the true ones heard from Almighty God, and it was through them that God was able to speak His heart to His people. Prophets could cry and shout and love and hate, showing the various portions of the personality of the Master Who sent them.

But it was not enough. Israel eventually silenced all these voices, God's response being, first, four hundred years of silence, and then...

1:2. Are we in the last days?

It is a question that has been on the lips of God's people from the beginning, I suspect. And the answer is a clear affirmative. The writer in 1:2 speaks of "these" last days as being the time when the final message is being spoken.

The prophet Joel corroborates this idea. Acts 2 and Joel 2 both say that in the last days God will pour out His Spirit on all mankind.

Peter believed He was seeing that last days outpouring on the day of Pentecost, first century Jerusalem.

At some time before the writing of this letter God spoke to Israel once again. This time the messenger was not a merely human prophet, though Jesus was a prophet indeed. This prophet was the Godman, the very Son of God.

Israel, God has spoken again to us, says this Hebrew writer. We do not deny that the entire world is somehow involved in this message, but it is important to keep our focus on the Hebrew people. That was the intent of the writer, after all. This is a Jewish letter to Jewish people about the Jewish Messiah and his replacing of the Jewish priesthood.

I mention in passing for now that the term "Son" as referring to Jesus Christ, is mentioned at least thirteen times in Hebrews. It is this Son that is in view here, the One breaking the silence barrier as He introduced the final days of earth's history.

1:2 How did Jesus speak to Israel in these last days?

I will try to take nothing for granted in this study. This question is harmless enough, but do you know the answer?

At Jesus' birth angels spoke to some of Israel's shepherds. The Spirit spoke to Anna and Simeon. Jesus spoke by words and miracles and healings to multiplied thousands throughout Jewry.

He spoke to many who followed Him to the cross and beyond. His message was clear: the Law is finished, grace has arrived. Forgiveness is in His blood. Though many denied, many also believed. A powerful message was sent to Israel and has been available to Israelites and Gentiles alike ever since. Oh, He has spoken!

1:2. Why is the Creator of the Universe needing appointment as the heir?

An inheritance is not just about someone dying and leaving you a fortune. The primary definition of the word inherit, says my dictionary, is to “come into possession of... as a right or divine portion.”

One facet of the Lord’s sacrifice we don’t hear much about is the ceding of the territory known as earth over to the Enemy of our souls. Yes, Satan had a “right” to promise Jesus the kingdoms of this world. Sin by all of earth’s inhabitants had left him in control.

Jesus gave up all possible counter-rights to the possession when He died. Satan had won full control. But by the meekness and surrender of the Son to death, the Father was able to step in and reverse the outcome. He raised Jesus from the dead, and appointed Him the heir of all things.

The Creator had to die to win back His own creation. An amazing chain of events. The writer of the epistle brings this out for us in two contrasting statements: *Jesus was appointed heir of everything, but Jesus was the One the Father used to create everything.*

The apostle John is in agreement here, stating in his first chapter that *apart from [Jesus] nothing came into being that has come into being.*”

He Created. He Surrendered, to save man from sin, trusting that His Father would make it all right. Then He was appointed heir, when God raised Him from the dead.

Jesus could have come in all His glory and taken over the world, theoretically. Or He could have prevented sin from the beginning, theoretically. Oh so many things “could have” happened, but the

plan of salvation working itself out in this book and the entire set of books, is what it is, a Masterpiece of love. The Son who made the worlds put aside His right to them for a time, so that he could humble Himself to death, death on the cross. But God would not allow that situation to remain unanswered.

1:2. Was Jesus always “the Son”?

Please be reminded that it was through *the Son* that God did all of this. The Son existed at creation, not just at His birth and later death and resurrection. He has always been the Son and always will be. We will deal with this more in a few verses.

1:3. How is Jesus the “radiance” of God’s glory?

Radiance is *brightness* in other versions. An extreme shining. Glowing. Reflecting beams of light.

The apostle John seems to have spoken of this glorious light the most:

John 1:4-5. “In Him was life and the life was the Light of men. The Light *shines in the darkness*, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

John 1:14. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His *glory, glory* as of the only begotten from the Father...”

They saw it. John and the others. They saw it on the mountain of transfiguration. They saw it at the resurrection. The radiance of God’s glory, veiled most of the time, but not all of the time. They knew.

Paul saw it on the road to Damascus. The Light so bright that he needed hands laid on him to receive his sight after it had blinded him.

Jesus referred to this glory in the prayer of John 17:

17:1. "Father, glorify your Son."

17:5. "Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory I had with You before the world was."

God shines in Jesus. God's glory and Jesus' brightness are one and the same. When God wanted His glory to be seen on earth, He sent Jesus.

A flashlight does not shine if there is no power source inside of it. Jesus shone with the very glory-power of God within.

Jesus the Son is the very radiance of the Father's glory.

1:3. How is Jesus the "exact representation" of God's nature?

Translators are in basic agreement, but note their diversity also:

"The express image of His person." (KJV)

"The figure of His substance." (Rheims)

"The very [exact] imprint of His [God's very] being." (NAB)

"The exact representation of His being." (NIV)

"The perfect imprint and very image of God's nature." (AMP)

"The exact expression of His substance." (*Textus Receptus* Greek)

Two Greek words contain the mystery here, one on either side of "His", meaning God's, or the Father's.

The first is *kharaktare*. It is the word for the engraver's tool, or the engraver himself. By extension, it can mean an engraving, a figure stamped, an exact copy. Hold that thought. Jesus is an exact copy of what?

The second Greek word will also sound familiar to students of the Bible. It is *hupostasis*. A setting under. A support. The essence. The substance. We will see this word again in Hebrews 11:1, where "faith is the *substance* of things hoped for." When you desire something of God and ask in faith, you are asking for the thing itself to materialize, and it does. One minute, hope; the next, reality.

Briefly: God the Father has a specific nature, a specific substance. And whatever that reality is, Jesus is an exact copy of it.

He is a "stamp," a perfect likeness. Paul says essentially the same thing in Colossians 1:15, where he calls Jesus the "image" of the invisible God. A different Greek word (*eikon*) but the same basic idea.

If you have seen Jesus, He Himself said, you have seen the Father. God has stamped His own "character" on the Son, to the extent that that character is God Almighty, of the same substance as the One who does the stamping.

These are poor ways to describe a mysterious truth. Jesus did not manifest this God-ness very often, but when He did (transfiguration, resurrection etc.) it was clear that He and the Father are one.

1:3. How is it that Jesus "upholds all things"?

Science teaches us the *what* of the Universe. Only God's Word explains the *why* and the *how*. There is a force that holds all the molecules that make up the earth's substances, together. That is

observable fact. But what is that force? Why do atoms not disperse from one another and create gigantic chaos?

The answer here is clear. The word of the One Who said, Let there be this or that, is an abiding word. It cannot be changed. Light must be just as it is. Water must be just as it is. Earth and the things on it must be exactly as decreed until the One Who made the decree says otherwise.

Most translators have Colossians 1:17, from the pen of Paul, saying the same thing: "In [Jesus] all things hold together."

1:3. What is meant by "purification of sins"?

The writer is attempting to show the superiority of Christ in all things, including the sacrifices offered constantly in the Jewish religious system. The Jews were told to offer bulls and goats and grains in an attempt to cover sin. We know now that none of these things can take away sin, but rather that they pointed ahead to the time when Christ Himself would offer the only true sacrifice for sins. This was the purification that God accepted.

There is a minor difference in the Greek texts here. The older texts which form the later translations do not have the words for "by himself" and "our," as in the KJV. But these concepts will shine brightly enough in later passages.

1:4. What is the significance of the fact that Jesus "sat down" after His work on the cross?

The Benson commentary helps us here:

The Jewish priests stood while they ministered: Christ's being said to sit down, therefore, denotes the consummation of his sacrifice:

We sit down when our work is finished. Jesus' work was finished when He cried out that very proclamation from the cross. The Father accepted the sacrifice, raised Him from the dead, raised Him back to glory, and had Him sit at His right hand.

But even though we rejoice in His victory, some are uneasy with the idea that Jesus might have some subordinate place to the Father. It is as though the Prince sits next to the King. Both are great, but one is greater.

And this is what Jesus taught at one point in His stay here: "My Father is greater than I." How reconcile this with "I and My Father are one"?

These are great mysteries. But both ideas are true. Jesus the Godman who came to earth and ascended to Heaven, is in some way subordinate to the Father. Jesus the eternal Word is what John says He is: "The Word was God."

God eternally. But the Word became flesh... One of us. He is all God. And all man. Who can define all of this? Surely not me. But let us follow the author's exaltation of this Son of God.

1:4. Was Jesus always better than the angels? Why does the writer suggest that this was a new development?

The difficult word here is *genomenos*. The KJV translates it as "being made." A better rendering is the NASB "having become." But the question remains, why does the author tell us that Jesus was once lower than the angels, but became greater than them due to God's exaltation of Him at the resurrection and beyond?

The answer is not difficult at all. There is abundant evidence of His Deity and superiority in every way, before the world began. But the Word became human flesh, which itself is lower than the angels. He

lived our life for thirty-three years, was humiliated as a man, then was exalted to His original place far above all powers and glories of Heaven.

1:4. How much better is Jesus than the angels?

The construction of this verse is not picked up in older translations of the Bible. Perhaps the NIV makes clear the comparison that is being made in verse 4:

So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

And what name is it that Jesus has been given by the Father? He is the Son, the Firstborn, God, Lord. Any one of these titles is vastly superior in rank to Ministers, Spirits, Messengers, Fire.

The rest of the chapter is an elaboration on these names, taken from a number of Old Testament passages.

For reference, a similar construction is found in 3:3, comparing Jesus to Moses. We will of course discuss that comparison there. For now, the writer has decided to convince his readers from their own Bibles that Jesus is better than the angels.

1:5-13. What verses from the Old Testament are brought in as proof that Jesus is better than angels?

1:5. Psalm 2:7.

1:6. Deuteronomy 32:43 (Septuagint rendering). (Psalm 97:7)

1:7. Psalm 104:4

1:8 & 9a. Psalm 45:6-7

1:9b. Isaiah 61:1, 3

1:10-12. Psalm 102:25-27

1:13. Psalm 110.1

In these verses the writer proves that Jesus is begotten, not made; the object of worship, not a worshiper ; King over all; Creator vs created; unchanging forever; a victor vs a servant.

We'll want to look a little closer at what is being said. But first a serious consideration about translations.

1:5-13. What translation of the Old Testament is being used by the writer of Hebrews?

Dr. Stephen Cook has this to say to those who tell us that most if not all of the New Testament writers quoted from a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible called "the Septuagint." Notice he has Septuagint in the plural, for, he says, there were several Greek translations.

A careful analysis of the NT quotations of the OT reveals that practically every quotation has at least minor variants from the Septuagints (or major ones) and is never verbatim. That is significant. Either the NT writers were using different Greek manuscripts to the extant [available in that day] versions of the Septuagints or something else was happening. If the Greek Jewish Scriptures were regarded so highly by the NT writers why do they appear to be so careless in quoting it (if they were indeed quoting it) so as to have so many variants? There isn't a single quote in the entire New Testament which quotes verbatim from any Septuagint manuscripts that we have. I think the current scholarly consensus is that for at least the first two centuries of Christianity the church used a variety of Greek translations as well as Hebrew manuscripts. Some New Testament quotations of the Old Testament appear to be

translations directly from a Hebrew text, while others are paraphrases, possibly from memory...

There are differences to this opinion of the learned doctor. Perhaps closer to the truth:

There are in all 283 direct quotations from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) in the New Testament. In about 90 instances, the Septuagint is quoted literally. In around 80 further instances, the quote is altered in some way.

There are fifteen direct quotes from the Septuagint in Hebrews. And why does it matter to us?

For one thing, as you are trying to find these quotes in your Bible, whatever the translation, you will find some serious differences, and wonder why they are there. They are there because the Septuagint and the Hebrew aren't a perfect match. Going from Hebrew to Greek is not that easy to begin with, and the scholars will tell you many more reasons the match-up is difficult.

The only conclusion I can make for our purposes is that God communicated His message through imperfect men and imperfect means. No problem. What is important is still there.

Which leads to another comment I must make. Those who insist that a "perfect" translation must emerge that will settle all doctrinal differences must deal with the fact that apostles who wrote the truth for us, quite often used a most imperfect rendering. But the church, the truth, your salvation, your eternal destiny, are not changed one whit.

Now let's look at those references one at a time to see how they are being used to prove that Jesus is better than the angels.

1:5. How is Jesus better than the angels in terms of relationship?

Psalm 2:7 is a verse fraught with difficulty but well worth the investigating. Jesus is better, says the author here, because He alone is the Son. No angel ever wore this title, nor ever shall. Jesus is the only begotten of the Father. His one and only Son. John 3:16. Simple, you say.

Yes, but we love to make things difficult, don't we? And admittedly, there is a problem when we pose the question, When?

"Today," you answer.

But, explain your use of "today." Ah, there it is. There's the issue. Not the meaning of "Son." The meaning of "today."

Today is used in the famous invitation. "*Today* if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." *Today*. That was written by a Psalmist (95). And quoted by our present author (ch. 3). Hundreds and hundreds of years ago. Does it mean that on those particular days in bygone history we are not to harden our hearts? *Today* is an eternal word. This very day, as I write this in 2021, the command is current. If you can hear his voice *today*, do not harden your heart.

But already this writing is old as you read it. Another *today* has arrived and will keep arriving.

Then to Psalm 2. Commentators of a wide variety of opinions can nail *today* to a certain event in Jesus' life, and find Scriptural documentation for their assumption.

The most obvious place to find the begetting of a child is in the mother's womb. Though the word *today* does not appear there, Luke 1:35 gives us the words of an angel who tells us that the

reason this Child to come will be called the Son of God is that the Holy Spirit will come upon Mary.

“Today.” **That day, Jesus was begotten.** But there’s more.

Luke goes on to tell of the **baptism** of Jesus, and a Voice that spoke from Heaven: “You are My beloved Son...” And there are those who call this the actual begetting. And that’s not the end of it.

Luke’s Acts, in 13:33, has this possibility to add to the mix:

“...He [God] raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘You are My Son; today I have begotten You.’”

Paul is preaching here. The same Paul that may have written Hebrews, using the same text as he does twice in that letter, telling us that the begetting of the Son has something to do with His **resurrection!**

Hebrews 5:5 says that somehow Jesus’ **calling as a high priest** was related to this “begetting” passage of the Psalms.

And is it not literally true that Psalm 2:7, taken in context, speaks of the installation of the Son of God as the **King over all the earth** at the beginning of the Millennium? I believe so.

Born, baptized, resurrected, made High Priest, installed as King. Which is the begetting time? Which is the day called “today”?

Who can understand the mind of the Lord? Is it not possible that this “day” is like all “today’s” of all time? The Son is the begotten of God eternally. The day He was begotten was in that eternal day that only God understands.

Jesus is the only begotten Son, says John 3:16. Our most treasured verse becomes our greatest mystery. Begotten, not made. Oh we

can define that for sure. But when begotten? When did Jesus “become” the Son of God? I dare not define the time, for the Bible does not. It only tells us that in God’s Today, the Son was begotten. And in God’s Today, the eternal one, He is still the Son. Always was. Always will be. By eternal decree (the rest of Psalm 2:7, Jesus speaking):

“I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You...”

We have to leave it there. But the verse goes on to quote another troublesome passage.

1:5. What descendant of David was to build a house for God, and an eternal kingdom?

2nd Samuel 7 tells the story of how David’s offer to build a House for God was rejected. Nathan the prophet is God’s spokesman, and his words seem to go in two different directions. Yet the writer of Hebrews quotes Nathan as an example of Jesus’ superiority over angels.

Let’s listen in to that 3000-year-old prophecy given to King David. Here are the verses that apply to our discussion... verses 5-16, in part.

[God speaking to Nathan, who spoke it all to David] *Go and say to My servant David, ‘This is what the LORD says: “Should you build Me a house for My dwelling? For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; rather, I have been moving about in a tent, that is, in a dwelling place... I will establish a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again...The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a*

house for you. When your days are finished and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he does wrong, I will discipline him with a rod of men and with strokes of sons of mankind, but My favor shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.”

This prophecy has sent many fine heads spinning over the years. Do you understand the difficulty? Do you understand the context?

David wants to build a house for God. God says no. And note that the first offer God makes (v. 11) is that He, God, will make a house for David! Then He says that a descendant of David will build that house (v.13)!

So what descendant of David was actually God, Who has been building a house for God and His people? Of course, Jesus. Notice also the latter part of the prophecy that indicates that God’s mercy and love will not be removed from this descendant, as He had to remove it from Saul (v. 15). This house, says God will be established *forever*, and the Throne of the Kingdom as well (v. 16).

Problem. We skipped over something. Back in verse 14. The KJV “if” has been rendered in the NASB as “when,” sadly, and the verse demands that this descendant of David will commit iniquity and be corrected by men.

Oh my. Jesus corrected? Jesus a sinner? God forbid!

So this must be Solomon? But Solomon's descendants inherited no throne after the disastrous reigns of the family of Josiah. No king was ever to reign from Judah after that. We trace the line of Jesus through David's son Nathan, not Solomon.

And for Solomon, though he committed iniquity, there is no record of punishment by men, rather we see in his later writings the inner emptiness of a soul turned from God.

Then Nathan is meant? But Nathan did not build a temple for God.

We're forced back to Jesus as the fulfillment, and that is exactly what the writer of Hebrews concluded. But in believing that, he is at odds with David, who received the prophecy.

Have patience with me. We must look at 1 Chronicles 22, where David is explaining to his son Solomon what God said to him:

Then he [David] called for his son Solomon, and commanded him to build a house for the LORD God of Israel. David said to Solomon, "My son, I had intended to build a house for the name of the LORD my God. But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood and have waged great wars; you shall not build a house to My name, because you have shed so much blood on the earth before Me. Behold, a son will be born to you, who shall be a man of rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side; for his name will be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son and I will be his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.'"

David genuinely believed that the prophecy referred to Solomon. Though David in his prophetic gift often spoke of the One we know to be Messiah Jesus, in the Psalms, he was not clear as to all the

implications of the future of God's people. He sincerely offered to his son the interpretation that made sense... the very one that seems to make sense to us.

But as we follow the history of Solomon and the Kingdom, we know now that Nathan the prophet, likewise "in the dark" about fulfillments pointing to Jesus, had in mind more than a mere man building a mere building. The writer of Hebrews picks up on that greater issue and uses Nathan's word as a reference to the Christ of God.

As for the "iniquity" of verse 14, we can look at all of this as a "dual" prophecy, some referring to Jesus, some to Solomon. Or we can stay with the KJV "if," an "if" that never came to pass. Or we can look at the Son of God Who bore the iniquities of man, and was indeed punished for those sins by the cruelty of Jews and Gentiles on a hill called Calvary.

Bottom line, from the letter to the Hebrews standpoint: Never to an angel did God say, "I will be a Father to him, and he shall be a son to me." Never.

Verse 6 talks about angels worshiping the firstborn. More mysteries to be uncovered.

1:6. What does the term "firstborn" mean?

In all but a few passage in the Bible, the term means nothing more than the obvious: the child or animal that is born first of a particular mother.

One Old Testament passage is worthy of note here, for it will help us understand the word before us in Hebrews. It's found in Psalm 89:27,

[God speaking through Ethan the Psalmist] *"I will also make him My firstborn, The highest of the kings of the earth."*

The "him" is David, or one of David's descendants. MacArthur points out that "a person could be elevated to the level of firstborn sonship," giving him the rights and privileges that pertain to that position. He offers the nation Israel as one example. Surely Israel was not the first nation ever born, but Israel was God's "firstborn" (Exodus 4:22).

Another firstborn who was not first born: Ephraim (Genesis 48:13-20). And, David, in this Psalm, though *last born* in his family, was God's *firstborn* as far as the kings of Israel are concerned.

What about Jesus? Of course, He was the firstborn of Mary. But another use of the word in regard to the Son of God is in Romans 8:29,

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers.

Once more we are drawn to Paul, and his usage of the same terminology as in Hebrews. Paul says that there is a group of people in the world foreknown by the Father. This select group will be conformed to the Son in such a way that the Son of God will be the first among many sons.

Mary does not seem to be in view here, but a status placed upon Jesus in the church that implies the privileges of a firstborn son, regardless of the birth order of the ones who will be present on that day. Certainly Abraham, Samuel, David, Elijah, etc. were born physically before Mary gave birth to Jesus, but Jesus, because of His

connection to, and the decree of, the Father, is the unquestioned *firstborn*.

In Colossians 1:15, Jesus is called the *firstborn* of all creation, not just of the elect. Three verses later, He is the *firstborn* from the dead! Not the first person ever resurrected, or “born” from death, but the One selected by His Father to be the preeminent figure of all the resurrected.

And what does the writer of Hebrews mean in 12:23 when he further speaks of the *church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven*?

Now it seems that all God’s people are being granted the special honors of a first-born child, because of the Person and work of their Superior Brother, the true firstborn.

1:6. What is the significance of the “again” in the NASB, as opposed to the same word in the KJV?

Is the writer simply adding another bullet-point to his list, or is this a second time the firstborn is brought into the world?

Commentator Ellicott says,

The position of “again” (in the Greek) shows that it does not indicate a new step in the argument, but must be joined with “leadeth.” [“brings,” NASB]

Commentator Barnes disagrees:

The proper construction of this sentence probably is, “But when, moreover, he brings in,” etc. The word “again” refers not to the fact that the Son of God is brought “again” into the world, implying that he had been introduced before; but it refers to the course of the

apostle's argument, or to the declaration which is made about the Messiah in another place.

The translations are evenly split over this matter. Even the New King James splits with the Old on this one. The word *palin* in the Greek is indeed translated “again” for the most part, and even more than once in this series of quotes. I would imagine Barnes is correct here.

If Ellicott and others have it right, we must go searching for the time when Jesus was brought into the world before the Incarnation, or look for it at His second coming. But does the passage quoted fit with such an interpretation? I think not. I'll go with Barnes.

Speaking of that translation, when you look up Deuteronomy 32:43, you will be amazed at just how different the Septuagint can be from the Masoretic Hebrew. Nevertheless, imperfect translations are what we have to work with, and what the apostles had also. A refreshing and instructive thought for those who try to push a “perfect” once-for-all translation of the Holy Scriptures.

Still, the Septuagint may have been on to something. Steve Rudd shares:

*Most Christians believe this quote [Hebrews 1:6] came from Ps 97:7 and have no idea it actually comes from Deuteronomy 32:43 because the **entire phrase is missing from all modern Bibles, including the NASB, KJV, NIV and RSV.***

“let all the angels of God worship Him” is quoted almost exactly in four ancient sources: Dead Sea scroll 4Q44, Septuagint, Odes 2:43 Apocrypha LXX and Justin Martyr.

Given the huge weight of archeological and literary evidence, the newer translations after the discovery of 4Q44 in 1947 AD in Cave 4

at Qumran, should have followed the key phrase now lacking in modern Bibles.

[The Septuagint rendering:]

*"Delight, O heavens, with him and worship him, you sons of God. Delight, O nations, with his people and prevail with him, **all you angels of God.**" (Deuteronomy 32:43, LXX)*

For anyone not convinced that Jesus should be worshiped, and is worshiped, by angels, take a look at Revelation 5. Is there any living being that does not worship Jesus? Not one!

Then I looked, and I heard the voices of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing." And I heard every created thing which is in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, or on the sea, and all the things in them, saying, "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures were saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Angels worship the Lamb Jesus. Point made.

1:7. How would one describe an angel?

Humans have interacted with angels now and then. Some, unaware, but some, overwhelmed. We hear much talk in our day of this or that person who has had an angelic encounter. We question many of these stories and remind ourselves that there is a certain amount of danger in getting obsessed with such meetings, as our enemy can be transformed into an angel at will.

But how does the Lord describe them? Winds. Fire. Oh, they are visible enough in an awesome display of power and beauty if they want to be or if they need to be. That is, when God sends them on an errand here, as He did Gabriel. Gabriel came to Daniel and Mary, and he was quite obvious to them.

But their general nature can be defined as quick as the wind, as intense as fire. See one in his glory and you will think you have seen God. Such was the case with more than one recipient of an angelic message.

One of these angels was created with such beauty and power that he decided he would be God. But that's another story.

With what awe and wonder we should approach the possibility of angels around us, not only in trouble, but ready to aid us in a hundred ways, could we but see them.

No question. Angels are awesome. But not as awesome as the Son.

1:8-9. How would one describe the Son?

Using images from Psalm 45 and Isaiah 61, the author here describes the Son as eternal, righteous, royal, holy, anointed, exalted... and God.

What could be clearer than verse 8 in the declaration of Scripture that Jesus is not merely the Son of God, but God the Son? The Psalm is indeed quoted properly and in context. One of the "sons of Korah" addresses a song to "the King" (45:1). He says that God has blessed this King (45:2). Then he addresses the King as God (45:6). The very human things this King is involved in lets us know that this God is also a man. A good man. A righteous man, a man favored of God the Father.

Angels are fiery winds. But the power behind them is the King who rules over all.

1:10-13. What works belong exclusively to the Son?

From description, the author moves to function. He attributes to the Son, the creation of the world, as does John in the first verses of his Gospel,

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. **All things came into being through Him**, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being.*

But the writer does not refer to John, whose Gospel may not have been written at this time. He refers to a Psalm, quite possibly of David, that speaks of the Lord. How is it that our writer believes that David, in Spirit, was talking of the Son, and not the Father?

Ellicott's commentary deals with this issue,

The only point of any difficulty in these verses is that the writer discovers a testimony to the supremacy of the Son in words which, as they stand in the Psalm, would appear to be directly addressed to God as Creator. If, however, the Psalm be examined, it will be found (see Hebrews 1:13-14) to contain the expression of hopes which in reality were inseparably united with the fulfilment of the Messianic promise. 'The Lord shall appear to build up Zion:' this is the Psalmist's theme, and it is to the same Lord that he addresses the words which are quoted here. As in Jesus the Christian Jew saw Him who fulfilled all these promises of God to His people, the application of the words of adoration to the same Lord would at once be recognized as true.

The Pulpit Commentary agrees:

The prayed-for and expected deliverance, portrayed in verses 16-24 [of Psalm 102], corresponds so closely, both in thought and expression, with that pictured in the latter chapters of Isaiah (beginning at chapter 40), that we cannot hesitate in assigning the same meaning to both.

The bottom line of all the commentators seems to be that, yes, at first sight, Psalm 102 seems to be addressed to God the Father, further analysis makes it a Messianic writing, a fact which the Jewish readers of Hebrews would have understood.

So, Jesus is Creator. What else?

Though Jesus has made a perfect world, He will one day be its destroyer. Perhaps Peter had this in mind when he wrote in 2 Peter 3:7, 10,

*But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly people... the **heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be discovered.***

John speaks of the actual fact in Revelation 20:11, 21:1,

*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence **earth and heaven fled, and no place was found for them...** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the **first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.***

And then verse 13 quotes Psalm 110:1, a passage used by Jesus to confound His adversaries. Jesus shall conquer, not only the uninhabitable planet, but every soul that lives on it. Those who

have opposed Him will be defeated once and for all. This is the message of John's Revelation, throughout, for... [19:16]

He has a name written: "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Total control has Jesus over the Universe and all its inhabitants. Our Son, God's Son. No angel comes near the Son in terms of function.

1:14. What work belongs exclusively to the angels?

Ministers. Servants. Messengers. All of them working for the sake of God's people. Even when they are sent to people outside the covenant, their mission is related to our salvation.

They are in the background of the history of the Bible, as they are intended to be, but that background is not just decoration. Consider the ministry of these created servants:

Genesis: Twice sent to Hagar. Accompanies the Lord in a visit to Abraham. Accompanies Abraham's servant in the wife-search trip. Teaches Jacob how to multiply livestock for himself.

Exodus: Appears at the call of Moses. Travels with the people of Israel to the Promised Land.

Numbers: Stands in Balaam's way.

Judges: Rebukes Israel. Visits Gideon. Appears to Samson's parents.

2 Samuel: Used to judge Israel following David's census. David himself says in the Psalms, *The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.*

1 Kings: Encourages Elijah when he flees from Jezebel.

Daniel: Visits Daniel in a den of lions.

Zechariah: Interacts with Zechariah the prophet.

The Gospels: Appears to Zacharias. Appears to Mary. Appears to Joseph three times. Appears to shepherds in a field. Comforts Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Rolls away the stone from the tomb. Announces the resurrection to some women.

Acts: Releases apostles from prison. Directs Philip to the eunuch. Puts Peter and Cornelius together by separate messages. Releases Peter from prison. Comforts Paul on that disastrous trip to Rome.

Revelation: Seen around the Throne. Invites anyone to open the Book. Sound seven trumpets. Guards the bottomless pit. Pours out vials of judgment. Various announcements made, as the destruction of Babylon for example. Sent by God to deliver all of the Revelation to John.

And that's not all. There were passages I left out. And there are millions and millions of other activities of these creations over the centuries, doing the work of God unseen and unknown. One day we will look in amazement at the way angelic activity was interwoven with the progress and regress of humanity.

SUMMARY, CHAPTER 1

God spoke to the Jews by selected prophets from Moses to Malachi. But now, Jesus, the heir of all things, is the message and the messenger.

He is greater than those prophets. Greater than the angels that assisted those prophets. He is God's Son, the Firstborn, God Himself, the eternal King, the Creator, the Judge.

All of this leads to a conclusion that begins in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

2:1. To what “reason” is the author referring in 2:1?

There is a chapter break here, but no thought break. Jesus is better than angels. If angels demand our attention, Jesus more. As for the “we” and “us” of this chapter, and for that matter, the entire letter, remember that this is the book of Hebrews. It is addressed to Jewish believers who are considering leaving the Jesus thing and going back to Moses.

Don't do it, says the author. Pay attention to the One Who is speaking to you in these last days, the One Who is far greater than anyone who has ever spoken to us before.

2:2. What is the “word spoken through angels”?

How did the subject of angels even enter the letter? The writer begins by saying that God spoke to the fathers via prophets. But then he adds, “in many portions and in many ways.”

The prophet Moses was first visited by an angel. And Deacon Stephen, in his dying sermon to the Jews surrounding him with stones, declared that the Law of Moses came via the *instrumentality*, or *ordination*, or *disposition*, or *arrangement*, of angels. I offer several possibilities for this word, because the Greek and the various translators do so.

Just how angels participated in the giving of the law to Moses and thence to the people is not revealed to us. But they certainly were a part of the process. Paul, who may well have written this letter, uses the same concept in Galatians 3:19, where he says that the Law was “ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator...”

Many would read these two passages as confirming the thought that angels were an intricate part of what happened on Mt. Sinai on that dreadful day of the revealing of the power of God along with a holy Law telling of a holy God:

Deuteronomy 33:2,

The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone from Mount Paran, And He came from the midst of myriads of holy ones; At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.

And Psalm 68:17,

The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness.

The Lord Himself was present on that day, and as I have indicated, the angels take a back seat when in His presence. They are not even mentioned in Exodus. But what a glorious background. Never must they be brought to the fore, but never must they be forgotten in the spiritual scheme of things.

2:2. If the Law of Moses is “unalterable,” how can it be superseded by the salvation through Christ?

The writer who speaks here of the “word spoken through angels” is in fact identifying the Law of Moses. That Law never changed, to this day. Jesus confirmed this many years later by saying that not one small part of the Law shall pass away until all is fulfilled.

The death of Christ and the offer of free salvation without the keeping of the Law by God’s people did not change the Law. It did not add to it or subtract from it. All that changed was that the Law was nailed to the cross of Christ, and Christ paid the penalty exacted by the Law, for all of us.

The rest of verse two informs us that “every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty.” This cannot mean that every sin that was sinned, received an immediate response from a holy God. In fact, Paul elsewhere (Romans 3:21 ff) informs us that God deliberately passed over a multitude of sins, so as to demonstrate His righteousness, His true justice, at the cross.

Yes, God is “just” to forgive us our sins now, because the price has been paid, and it would be unjust for us to be punished for [confessed] sins. “Double indemnity” they call it now. Being charged with a crime for which the guilt has already been cleared.

So we have established that the penalty of the unchangeable Law has been paid once for all. This Law came through the angels. The payment came through the Son. The Son is greater than the angels. So the Hebrew subjects of this letter are left with a serious decision to make. Shall they go back to Moses, and the inferior angels who brought the Law into the world, a Law that condemns?

Or shall they accept the deliverance available through the Conquering Son? This is the setup for the warning of the next verse.

2:3. What does it mean to “neglect” Christ’s salvation?

We all know the meaning of the word, but it does not apply here as some would have it. The author is not speaking of Christians who forget to pray or read their Bible. He is saying that Jesus stands before them ready to forgive all their sins. And so does angel-backed Moses, ready to condemn them to hell because of their inability to keep the Law. How can we neglect the offer Jesus is making and expect to be saved?

2:3. When was the salvation of Christ spoken through the Lord?

One could go to the prophets for many examples of predictions of the coming salvation. But more than likely the reference here is to the earthly ministry of the Lord God in the person of Jesus, as He invited the Jews to come to Him. His first mission here was to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, the very people to whom this letter is sent.

2:3. Who is the “we” and “us” of this verse?

We covered this in the introductory matters, but I believe it bears repeating that the context throughout the letter is the Hebrew/Jewish nation. How will the Jews escape if the Jews neglect so great a salvation? The message spoken to the Jews through the Lord, was confirmed to the Jews by those who heard.

That is, Jesus preached to Israel. The apostles who heard passed it on to the rest of the Jewish people.

The apostle Paul is obviously not included in either of these groups. He is not one of the original hearers of the preached word, the “12.” Nor did he receive his revelations from the apostles. He received it from the Lord Himself.

But if the “us” is Israel, the Jews, what difference does it make? Paul, if Paul is the author, is simply giving a concise history lesson. Jesus preached to us Jews. Twelve of us Jews passed it to other Jews.

None of that excludes Paul from being the writer of this epistle, right?

2:4. How did the apostles have their message of a resurrected Jesus confirmed?

Of course, the writer here refers to the miraculous entrance of the Spirit into the infant church on Pentecost, and the subsequent miracle display seen in apostles Peter and John, recorded in the first chapters of Acts. The writer could well know of miracles performed by other apostles, for not everything that happened in those early days was recorded by Luke. But the subject of this verse is at the end of verse 3, “those who heard” the Lord when He was here, namely the original apostles.

2:5. Why is “the world to come” introduced into the discussion here?

Actually, the world to come was introduced earlier. The eternal Throne of the eternal King is brought in, in 1:8 and 1:12-13. The “inheritance” of 1:14 implies the fullness of our salvation in Christ.

Though the angels may minister to those who will inherit eternal life, they will not be the ones who will bring that life to us or reign over us in that day.

By suggesting that angels were not authorized by God to rule in the next life, the writer goes on to prove that they do have a measure of rule in this life. He brings in yet another proof text.

2:6-8. What does Psalm 8:4-6 prove to the Hebrews?

The one who has testified is David. The “somewhere” is the book of Psalms. Why the indefinite reference here? For one, the Hebrew readers knew their Bibles, as did the writer, and would know immediately where to find this text.

The words of David through the Spirit are meant to teach the present order of things. Angels over man and man over the creation.

Notice in verse 7, a difference in more modern translations of the usage of “little.” The underlying Greek is the same whatever the version, but translators realized that because of the form of the Greek word here, “for a little time” is a perfectly valid way to render it.

For a little while, temporarily, humanity is under the angels. This is how things are now, but the world to come is not going to be subject to angelic beings. The rest of verse 8, not quoted but the words of the author, makes that clear.

2:8. What will be subject to “man” eventually?

One day everything will be subject to the human race. “The works of your hands” will all be under man, through the Man Jesus. This includes the angels, for they are indeed creations of God.

At present, we do not see this order, for angels were instrumental in bringing in the Law, and angels by their very nature are superior to humans. But it shall not always be. Jesus told those who asked Him about marriage in the next life, that the resurrected saints will be like the angels in nature, and here we find, through the Psalmist, that in power, we shall be ahead of them.

Hence the argument of chapter 1 is reconfirmed: Jesus is better.

2:9. Is Jesus lower than the angels?

That is not the reading of the text. *For a little while*, He was made lower than the angels. Or if you like, He was made a *little lower* than the angels. The meaning is the same. Becoming man placed

Him for a brief time in an inferior *position*, as opposed to *an inferior nature*, to the angelic beings, and the Father Himself. Hence, He could say at one point, “My Father is greater than I.”

2:9. How is it that humans will be elevated over angels?

That I can answer in one word: Jesus. True it is, says the writer, that angels are superior to mankind at present. True it is that Jesus became a part of the human race, and thus placed Himself in the human category, an inferior order of creation. But that was only “for a little while.” He was crowned with glory and honor, and we who follow Him now will follow Him into glory and honor one day.

Eventually God raised Christ, humanly speaking, to the pinnacle of the creation (not that He was created!). Angels and all who dwell in Heaven bow to Him now. And in terms of His God-ness, that too was restored to manifestation level, back to the time when it was said of Him, “and the Word was God.”

The exaltation of Jesus after His death is stated by the apostle Paul – yet another connection – in Philippians 2:8-10,

...He [Jesus] humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross. For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow...

2:10. Did Jesus die for everyone?

The argument of the centuries is touched on here, and I will not attempt a solution. The text states plainly that Jesus suffered death, by God’s grace, for everyone. Here the “whosoever will” of Scripture shouts at us. The fact that most will reject and end in Hell does not change the fact that when we preach the Gospel to every

man, we tell every man that Christ's blood will avail for them. Do we lie in so preaching?

In the plan of God only a few will respond positively, and so to only a few will the blood be applied, but the blood was shed for all. It is a maddening train of thought, actually. Could Hitler have been saved? Yes, but that would only prove that Jesus saw Hitler as one of His own from the foundation of the world, that is, Hitler would have to have been *elected*.

As far as we know, Hitler was not a saved man. But he "could" have been. The blood was there for all men.

The question of the efficacy of the death of Jesus is pursued a bit by the author in the next verse.

2:10. Will God bring all people to glory one day?

Here the "argument" shifts to the other side, by stating that no, God will not bring everyone to glory, but that He will bring "many sons." The author, whoever He was, was filled with the Spirit, and the Spirit would not allow him to say that God will one day bring everyone to glory.

But there is a thornier question in this verse.

2:10. Why was it necessary for our salvation that Jesus be perfected "through sufferings"?

First we must deal with the logic of this sentence, and see how it fits into the case the author is making. What is the nature of that case so far?

- Jesus is better than angels.

- One proof of His superiority: He, not only as God, but as a to-be-exalted human, will rule the world.
- For now, humans have not reached the exaltation that Jesus did. Jesus Himself experienced a time when He was lower than the angels.
- Jesus had to suffer during this time to win the elevation of all His human brothers and sisters.

I do not believe this verse is talking of the virtues of suffering in general. If all sufferers obtain exaltation from Christ, then Heaven will be filled with most every human who ever lived. Suffering is universal.

I believe the writer is speaking of the particular sufferings of Jesus that led to His bloody death on a Roman cross. The plan was made before the foundation of the world. If Jesus would suffer and die, not only would God exalt Him, but God would bring many other sons to glory through this vicarious death.

Here is a case where a verse must be interpreted in the light of other teachings of Scripture, rather than just the explaining of each word in the text. We know what the author is talking about because we know that the death of Christ is the reason for our salvation.

Now that other issue.

2:10 (and 5:9). Was not Jesus “perfect” all along?

This topic is explored by the author more fully in chapter 5, verses 8-10. Jesus learned obedience. Jesus was made perfect. These are difficult concepts for us who know that this same Jesus is God Almighty. God “learn” obedience? God becoming perfect?

In chapter 5 and here, these thoughts are connected by the author to the High Priesthood of Jesus (chapters 3 and 5). The author will actually speak much of this office throughout the letter.

As a child, Jesus had to grow in every way as a man grows. He was a *perfect* child, then a *perfect* youth, then a *perfect* man. Every step of the way He listened to the Father's Voice and obeyed. He subjected Himself to the *perfecting process* so that we could see what it looks like ideally, and model our own life after His. He reminds us that regardless of what seems to be perfection today, tomorrow is another thing, with lessons to be learned, progress to be made. Many of us are perfect children in adult bodies. That is, we stopped growing. Jesus did not stop. He was perfect all the way, but would not have been if He had not read the next lesson in the Book and obeyed it.

His final test of obedience was in the Garden, when He knew clearly what was ahead of Him, and His flesh recoiled at the idea. He was perfect to that point. Had He said no, His perfection would have ended there at Gethsemane. Perfection means obedience. He obeyed. He was exalted. We are saved.

You and I will not have to go to Calvary and die. But along the way, obedience will call us to a death just made for us, a cross we must carry until the end. That is the subject of another study.

Next we speak of sanctification, His and ours.

2:11. What is sanctification and why is it brought up here?

The train of thought seems hard to follow here. Sanctification is the creation of holiness in one who is otherwise unholy. The only hint of such an act is in the last verse where the writer speaks of God [Him]

perfecting Jesus [the author of the salvation] and thus bringing us to that perfection also [bringing many sons to glory].

So God the Father is the “He who sanctifies” in this verse. Jesus and all of the other sons are “those who are sanctified.” And together, we are all one.

I am a bit concerned with the addition of *Father* in some, but not all, of the modern translations. The Greek has no such word in this text. The reading, word for word is simply, “from [or out of] one, all.”

The One Who sanctifies and all those sanctified are one. One in the Spirit. If a word needs to be added, perhaps the NIV’s “family” is the closest to the idea the writer is communicating. To add Father here is to confuse the text, for a close reading tells us that it is the Father doing the sanctifying. To say that “the Father and Jesus and the church are of one Father” is probably not the best theology, and definitely not the best grammar.

The writer is going somewhere with this idea. Let’s trace the logic again:

2:11. Why would Jesus ever have been ashamed of us, and why is He not now?

Jesus suffered and died for our sins to bring us to glory. The Father perfected, sanctified the Son in this process. We will be brought into this same perfected holiness. We are all one family.

If God made Jesus holy through this death, and is going to make us holy with Him, Jesus accepts us without question. There is much question, however, about Jesus accepting as brothers those who have not been made holy by His sacrifice and their own sanctification. We like to think that Jesus just loves everyone

equally and thinks all people are the finest additions to the Kingdom of Heaven.

No. There will be many cast into eternal hell. Many whom He would be incredibly ashamed to call brothers and sisters. Calvary, and our clinging to His blood, changes all of that for us. The writer shows that coming relationship in two more quotes from the Jewish Bible:

In verse 12, the quote is from Psalm 22:22. As we recognize Psalm 22 as a Messianic prediction, so did the writer of Hebrews. Most of that Psalm is given over to the suffering of the coming Savior, but this verse 22 introduces another note. Here the suffering one is prophesying that a day will come when the suffering will be over and He will be surrounded by an assembly of family members, with whom He will praise the Lord.

It is this allusion to a family that our writer wants to bring home. Jesus will suffer for His people, then bring them all to His side.

Verse 13 brings us to Isaiah 8:17-18, and refers to the same imagery as David. As in David, the one who is speaking in his own day of his own situation is by the Holy Spirit also speaking of Christ.

Isaiah's children, because of the special names given them that indicated historic values to Israel, were signs and wonders in Israel. But the greater Isaiah – and Isaiah means “Yahweh saves – will also have a family of very special people around him.

Whether Isaiah knew it or not, these words of his in Isaiah 8:16-18, are all about the Promised One, even though they may have a secondary meaning for himself. Such was the assignment of the prophets that quite often they knew not what they were saying.

2:14. What two things do the “children/brethren” have in common with the One Who came from heaven?

Flesh and blood bodies, and death to those bodies. Jesus was fully human and died a fully human death. He was not let down on a cloud and snatched up before something painful would come to Him. From the womb to the grave, He was every inch a man, without losing His God-ness.

2:14. How did Satan obtain the power of death? Does he still have that power? What does “power of death” entail?

The one who brought sin into the world also brought death as its punishment. Men have been dying since Adam and Eve fell from the life-giving grace in Eden. They shall continue to die until death and hell are cast into the lake of fire, along with their creator.

Jesus Himself became a voluntary subject of death, knowing that the Father would cancel that death in a mighty show of power that overwhelmed the power ceded to Satan.

2:14. How was it that the devil was “destroyed?”

The translators have veered away from “destroyed” in more modern translations. Nevertheless, it is possible to ascribe such a fate to our enemy as we look ahead in the book of Revelation and view him being cast into the lake of fire.

What is more important to us now is that Jesus has destroyed the power that Satan had to bring people to death and destruction. The victory at Calvary was complete. One day death itself will be cast into Satan’s eternity. His plans, his program of sin and death, his very person, one day all destroyed, but the death wound was opened at the cross.

2:14-15. In what sense did Jesus make Satan powerless in regard to death?

As I stated, people still die. They must continue to die until the end of history. But something has changed. Death is no longer a destination, but a highway to a better life with Christ, for those who know Him.

Satan also has taken away the fear of death that binds us. Those who do not know Christ have an ongoing uneasiness about dying that motivates their every decision. There is a consuming dread of the event itself, and what might occur after that event.

In that sense, Satan was robbed of his powerful weapon, at least for us. And the sin that produces that death has also been dealt with by the shedding of Jesus' blood. What a great victory was Calvary!

2:16. How are angels brought back into the discussion?

Chapter 1, and now we find chapter 2, are both given to a comparison of Jesus to angels. We have described that comparison – rather, that contrast – in the paragraphs above.

The present discussion along those lines begins in verse 9, where the writer mentions that Jesus temporarily, and mankind until Jesus' return, are all lower than the angels. He outlines the suffering of Jesus, then tells of His glorious victory.

That victory over sin and death did nothing for the angels, but certainly did a lot for the descendant – singular – of Abraham, namely Jesus Christ. This is my best understanding of how to put verse 16 in context.

The King James, you will note as you read it, has several italicized words in this verse. Italicized words indicate that the translators did

their best to discern the meaning of the text, and put their discernment, rather than the actual Greek, into the translation.

The Greek says that God does not “take hold of” angels, but “takes hold” of Jesus. *Takes hold* brought translators several directions. Some just left the words as they are, but as they are they don’t seem to do much in the way of meaning.

Others brought the idea a little farther by assuming that God takes hold of people to help them. They too were interpreting rather than translating. “Take hold” does not mean “help.” But the context works with that idea, so it remains.

Another translation says that God did not concern Himself with angels, but did concern Himself with Jesus... and so on.

Putting it all together, I believe the writer is simply saying again how much more important Jesus is than the angels. That is, never did God redeem an angel. Sinning angels were simply cast out. There is no plan of salvation for an angel.

But God had respect to the offering of Jesus on behalf of sinful humanity. Angels will never be saved. But many of us will be because of the “help” God gave to the seed of Abraham, Jesus.

2:17. What follows from the fact that Jesus was to be the offering from sin?

I found the word “therefore” twenty-two times in Hebrews. The writer, if not Paul, certainly has a Pauline way of making a case for all the teachings he wants to impart.

Since the ones needing a sacrifice were human, says verse 14, *therefore* the sacrifice had to be human. He had to be made like us

in every way if he was to be, not only the great High Priest Who offered the perfect offering, but a *merciful* High Priest.

So in these few verses it is established that Jesus is not only the Sacrifice, but the One Who offers the Sacrifice. That is, He offered Himself for us. No greater love could be imagined than that the Lord from Heaven would give His life for those still His enemies.

2:17. What is “propitiation”?

The word is used by John, Paul, and this author. Once, the Greek behind it is translated “mercy seat.” It is the atoning sacrifice of one seeking the favor of God on someone else. It is the mercy-motivated offering of Jesus for our sins.

2:18. How are suffering and temptation linked?

When the Father, normally our Protector, steps aside and allows us to be tested by the enemy, we know we are being loved and formed into the image of Christ.

Peirazo, the Greek behind tempt, can mean anything from attempt to tempt to test. And all of these things are related. Jesus was tempted to sin by the devil, directly, in that famed wilderness experience. But when we are told that the devil left him for a little while, we often do not go back to the narrative of Jesus’ life with the idea in mind that it was a *very little* while before he showed up on the scene.

The devil was forever working on those closest to Jesus, making them doubt, making them attempt to keep Jesus from the cross. And that final week of Jesus’ life here was filled with the devil’s tests by way of human suffering. Jesus passed every test and comes to us when we are suffering to tell us we can pass the test also.

SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-2

Jesus is the message now. He is greater than the prophets, greater than the angels. He is the Son of God.

So we need to listen carefully to what Jesus is saying. After all, it is Jesus, not the angels, who will one day rule the world, and many humans will rule with Him.

However for the time being, we see a Jesus who was placed in the same category as the human race, even to the point of suffering and death. He was made like us and because of that He is able to come to our aid when we go through our own suffering.

He is in fact the new High Priest, Who offers Himself as the Sacrifice that pleases the Father.

Better than the prophets and the angels. Now we will see how Jesus compares to Moses and his entire priestly system.

CHAPTER 3

3:1. To whom is the letter of Hebrews now addressed?

We have known from the beginning of the letter that the author was addressing a Hebrew Christian audience. Whoever added the title later reenforced that assumption. But it is in this verse that he actually gives his readers a name. Two names, actually...

First, they are holy brothers. He has just been describing the work of Jesus on their behalf, that He came and suffered that they might become holy, and true brothers of whom He is not ashamed. He has quoted David and Isaiah confirming that Messiah and His people are one holy family. Believing that, the Hebrew Christians must now walk in the reality of it. They are not just the writer's holy brothers, but the holy brothers of Jesus, the Son of God.

Then they are "partakers of a heavenly calling." It is clear that the entire program the author is describing has been orchestrated by the Father of the Lord Jesus, Yahweh Himself. God has not called angels to be redeemed but did indeed give aid to the seed of Abraham.

Take a close look at this Jesus, he says to the Hebrew Christians who are thinking of going back to Moses. Look at Him in his two roles of Apostle and High Priest.

3:1. Why these two titles given to Jesus?

Jesus is only here called specifically an apostle, in all of Scripture. But the idea of one being sent refers to no one better than it does to our Lord, who was sent into the world to save us from our sins. "As the Father has sent me, so send I you," can only mean that

Jesus is the first and most important Apostle, and that the disciples called by that name are secondary. We must never forget this.

As to the “High Priest” designation, it will become clear through other portions of the letter why Jesus so perfectly fits this description, and we have already mentioned the sum of it: Jesus is the One Who offers the Sacrifice to God, the only sacrifice in which God is well pleased: Himself. As in the Mosaic version of that office, the High Priest stands between God and the people, mediating the salvation being offered from Heaven. But the writer will show that the Mosaic mediation had some fatal flaws.

3:2. How are Jesus and Moses said to be alike?

Both had a specific task given them of God. Both were faithful to that task. But that task of Jesus, and His faithfulness to it, immediately tips the scales away from Moses and creates a clear contrast.

3:3-6. How are Jesus and Moses declared to be contrasted?

Jesus is to be glorified above the prophet of the Law in two major ways:

1. He is the Creator; Moses was part of the created. Notice that verse 4 says that the builder of all things is God. Just before this statement, we are comparing Jesus and Moses. But in verse 4 it is Moses compared to God. The context is Jesus’ new priesthood and Law as it is better than Moses’ system. But the author expands the context here.

Moses – and everything in the universe – is the “House.” The creation. The Law. The priesthood. Jesus built that House. We give honor to the Architect, not the building. The

building is beautiful, but only because of the Master Mind behind it. Such is Jesus.

2. Though Moses was *in* God's House, serving well and faithfully, Jesus is *over* God's House. Thus, Moses was, in all his glory, only a servant. A slave. Jesus was and is the Son given authority through the Father to rule and reign over the Household.

Looked at carefully, these two articles are really one. Jesus with the Father has created all things, owns all things, and is the rightful Master over all things. All others, Moses and all the rest, were brought on the scene to serve the purposes of the Godhead.

3:6. How does the author bring his readers into the discussion?

Though he begins by speaking generically of the "house" of Moses and Jesus, even to the point where He indicates that God is the builder of "all things," he ends by proclaiming that we, that is, the people of the true Israel, are the House about which he is talking. From the beginning of time, God has been building a family. Through all the twists and turns of our history, the Family still exists. Jesus even told His disciples that He would specifically go back to Heaven to prepare a place for them. A prepared people with a prepared place is still our lot.

But then he adds the word that Christians have feared through the ages: "If..."

3:6. How secure is our membership in the family?

This is not the first, nor will it be the last time the writer will warn his readers. In chapter two was the threat of no escape for neglecting the work of Jesus for us.

Now, Jesus is lifted before them again, with the added blessing that they are God's very house, but only *if we hold on to the end*. He goes on to quote one of the most severe words from God to Israel, letting them know that God has not changed His mind about hardening the heart.

Since we know this was all addressed to believing Jews, and we believe in the same God, we must take all of this to heart also. But what is the message we are to take? Is our salvation dependent on us? In verse 14 the "if" returns. We have actually become partakers of Christ, he says in another figure, but only *if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end*.

The warning extends on into the next chapter, opening in verse 11 the possibility that some might fall. Essentially two full chapters of warning. Add to this the severe talk in chapters 6 and 10, and the message is clear: some are not going to make it.

Some will not hold their confidence to the end. Some will fall away. Some will be hardened. Some will walk in disobedience. Some will crucify Christ afresh. Some will keep on sinning after they receive the knowledge of the truth. Some will trample under foot the Son of God.

The question is, Who are these people? One thing for sure, says the writer in 6:9,

We are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

And in 10:39,

We are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

We will comment more on those passages when we come to them, but for now it is important to know the context in which these harsh words were written.

There are in many – I want to say all, but persecuted churches are often exempt from this harshness – churches a sprinkling of people who cannot be described in any way but unbelievers. They were raised in the church, or came in by some other doorway than Christ. They have been feeding with the flock but never growing in their love for Jesus.

They are not born again. They are not of us. Only, with us. We are told elsewhere to examine ourselves, to be sure that we are among the true of the congregation. There is a true and there is a false. The lines are exceedingly difficult to draw, but God knows how to draw those lines.

Letters like Hebrews are given by the Spirit to warn the people of God. It is through the repentance caused by these warnings that God's true people will indeed persevere until the end. It is not possible that the true will fall away, because they will be guided by God's Word to be humble and aware.

This theme will be picked up over and over, as I said, and we will speak of it more as needed.

For now, another Old Covenant quote.

3:7. Who is the author of Psalm 95:7-11, quoted here in Hebrews 3:7-11?

We surmise it was David. Just as I surmise Hebrews is from Paul, though neither work is attributed to a human author. But the unnamed human author of Hebrews attributes Psalm 95 to the Holy

Spirit, as we do this letter that quotes from it. That is all that is important. It came from God.

3:7-11. To what was the Holy Spirit referring in the Psalm, and to what is the Holy Spirit referring in Hebrews, though the words are nearly the same in both passages?

It will be helpful to place the Psalm and our text here in close proximity, so as to see differences. Remember that the Septuagint is often used by Apostolic writers, and that is the case here.

Here is Psalm 95:7b-11. (NASB)

*Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah,
As on the day of Massah in the wilderness,
When your fathers put Me to the test,
They tested Me, though they had seen My work.
For forty years I was disgusted with that generation,
And said they are a people who err in their heart,
And they do not know My ways.
Therefore I swore in My anger,
They certainly shall not enter My rest.*

And here is Hebrews 3:7b-11. (NASB, where it is indeed capitalized to show an Old Testament quote.)

*TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR
HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS ON THE DAY OF
TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, WHERE YOUR FATHERS PUT ME TO
THE TEST, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.
THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID,
'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT
KNOW MY WAYS'; AS I SWORE IN MY ANGER, 'THEY
CERTAINLY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'*

One notable difference that first catches the eye is the use of proper nouns in the Psalm, and translations of those nouns in Hebrews.

I speak of *Meribah* and *Massah*. The first word comes into play early in the story of the Israelite wanderings in the wilderness. The people seemingly had run out of water. They began to argue with Moses about it, provoking him and the Lord to anger. When the issue had been resolved, the Lord named that place *provocation*, or Meribah.

He also named it Massah. Massah means *trial* or *test*.

The Psalmist speaks of the geographical location where this provoking trial occurred. The Hebrews writer speaks of the meaning of those two words, and by making the words more generic, he includes his present readers on down to us in our day. Do we not still provoke and test the Lord?

As to where the “forty years” is connected, it is a moot point. Forty years they saw the works of the Lord and were still unbelievers. Forty years the Lord was angry with them because of their unbelief during the whole period.

A conclusion can be reached after forty years of testing, the kind of testing that God allows in a nation or an individual. Forty years was enough for God to conclude, “Enough! They will never believe me. Therefore they will never enter My rest!”

In answer to the question: The Psalm refers to the testing in the wilderness of the children of Israel, for a forty-year period. This incident ended with an entire generation of Jews being forbidden to enter the rest promised to Israel.

Hebrews refers to the generation of Israel hearing the words of this letter. They too are being tested. God is working marvels among them, in particular, those wonders surrounding the Person and Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. If hardness of heart continues, the readers of this letter also will be forbidden to enter the eternal rest offered by Jesus.

An earnest warning to the readers of that day, and this.

3:12. Is it possible for an unbelieving heart to be in a truly saved person?

When warnings against any sinful behavior or attitude are enjoined on God's people, we take them seriously. If it were not possible for us to be overcome with unbelief, the apostle would not have so spoken.

Is it possible that Jesus could have sinned? Men have wrangled about this one for centuries. But if Jesus could in no way have sinned, then were the temptations merely a drama enacted for us? Was Jesus truly tempted to avoid the cross? Was Gethsemane real?

Looked at in this way, we see Hebrews as real warnings to really saved people. But we also agree with the writer in coming chapters when he says that we are not of the sort who will fall away. And one of the reasons we will not fall away is these warnings. Circular reasoning, or so it seems. But the Scriptures are one of the very means by which the perfection demanded by the Scriptures will be carried out.

We must prayerfully bow the knee and the heart when this writer, through the Holy Ghost, tells us to take care, tells us of the possibility of not escaping, admonishes us about the hardened

heart. All God's true people are also people of flesh and blood and subject to failure. But the Word will prevail in us.

And one other factor will be in play...

3:13. Besides the Word, what other mechanism is in place in the Kingdom to keep us from falling?

The church. This victorious life will come to pass because you and I will be telling each other to be careful, to wake up, to heed the Word, etc. Victory is assured in this way.

3:13. How long is "Today"?

We first confronted this word in 1:5, speaking of that ongoing "today" of the incarnation of Christ. He was begotten in one sense before the foundation of the world, in another sense at His entering Mary through the Spirit's conception. In God's eyes, "Today" can mean an exceedingly long period of time.

But the writer cautions us that there will come a time when "today" will end. There is an extended day of grace for every man, but at death or the coming of Christ, that day is finished. Today does not mean forever. Eventually, today becomes the tomorrow of eternity. Too late.

3:14. Commented on above. See verse 6. Also, take a look at how I addressed this verse in my *Through the Bible Q & A*:

Hebrews 3:14. Is our salvation conditional?

Whether one leans toward "free will" (Arminian) or "election" (Calvinistic) he must honestly face the fact that there will be difficult passages, if not books, to deal with. This verse is certainly a dilemma for the Calvins among us.

Here we are told that we are partakers of Christ if (how a Calvinist hates that word) we hold fast our assurance unto the end.

Pretty tall order. The next verse reminds believers not to harden their hearts, or they will not enter in to His rest.

So my salvation depends on me after all, and not Jesus holding my hand? Not so fast.

Look at verse 14 again. See it as a description, not as a command. How do we know who are the ones who will be partakers of Christ? They are the ones who hold fast their assurance. And how do they do that? The same way as they were saved. By the daily grace of God.

But in a big church there are those who have an unbelieving heart, a murmuring spirit as those who died in the wilderness. These are not the elect, but those who are posing as such.

Study it some more. Bottom line: Be sure that hardened heart is not your own!

3:15-19 is the author's commentary on the Psalm.

3:16. What exceptions to the provocateurs could be mentioned here?

Bible students recall that Joshua and Caleb did not come under the curse of God in the passage mentioned. These two men were faithful and full of faith for the entire journey. And of course, all the children, twenty years old and under, were given a chance to prove themselves and enter the Promised Land, for God's own purposes.

3:18-19. What is the connection between disobedience and unbelief?

They are linked together inseparably. A constantly disobedient person has never known the Lord and committed his life to Him. He does not believe the promises and commands of God. His heart is hard. The people of Israel are in this regard a wonder to behold. Consider all the works God wrought for them in Egypt, then in the wilderness. Yet their hearts were not changed. Participation in the miraculous does not equal a heart-felt faith in the Lord. How the church needs to hear this principle today!

Believing there is a God who does wonders is not the same as trusting a God who makes promises. Blessed are those who have not seen, yet still believe. These are the ones who obey God whatever He says. His directives often make no sense, but the true believer obeys anyway, whereas the miracle-hunter will only believe when he sees proof.

Jesus rebuked the one who came and asked for a miracle. Unless you see, you won't believe, He said. Some have softened this anger into a statement of simple fact, namely that miracles are the common and necessary way to lead a man to belief.

No, it is still true that faith comes simply by hearing the Word of God. I read the Word. I hear it preached. I believe it. Case closed. Show me nothing, I'm in.

Of all the adults over 20 in the wilderness, only Joshua and Caleb *believed God* with Moses. The rest believed *in God*.

SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-3

Jesus, Son of God, is greater than prophets or angels.

So we need to listen carefully to what Jesus is saying. Jesus will rule the world one day. For now, though, He became lower than angels, suffered, and therefore is able to comfort us His people who suffer.

He is in fact the new and better High Priest, Who offers Himself as the Sacrifice. We can compare Him also to Moses favorably.

It is essential, in the light of who Jesus is, that we take heed to the warnings in the Old Testament about the hardening of the heart. Take a long look at Israel in the wilderness, and determine not to be among the unbelieving disobedient in our own day.

CHAPTER 4

4:1. Are we then to live in fear?

This is what they used to call a “loaded” question. There is no simple answer, as the following Scriptures (from ESV) will indicate:

Luke 12:7 - *Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.* Don't be afraid that the Father does not care about you.

Luke 12:32 - *Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* Don't be afraid that somehow you will be left out of the things that are coming.

Matthew 10:28 - *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* Don't be afraid of anyone on this earth. But live in serious respect for the One who lives in the heavens. Be sure you are in right relation to Him.

Luke 1:50 - *And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.* Be afraid of Him so that He will make you unafraid.

Acts 9:31 - *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.* Honor and respect and right relation to the Lord generates comfort or lack of fear from the Holy Ghost.

Romans 8:15 - *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”* Walk in the Spirit and you will

know the love of a Father, Who is to be honored but not feared any longer.

Philippians 2:12 - *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. "Be very sure,"* as the old song says, "your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock." Be very sure!

2 Timothy 1:7 - *for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.* Fear, once the Holy Spirit has comforted, is not from the Lord, but from the enemy.

Hebrews 13:6 - *So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"* As Jesus said. Honor the Lord in all things and you will fear no one.

1 John 4:18 - *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.* Eventually, fear of all kinds drops away as love conquers it.

But our text here in Hebrews commands us to fear. That is, again, be sure! Are you absolutely confident you have entered into Christ, and are not still trusting someone or something else? If God is not on your side, you should be afraid indeed!

4:1. What "rest" is the writer speaking of?

Yet another issue that has caused confusion in this letter. The writer actually speaks of three different "rests". In the chapter we last studied, verses 7-18, there is no doubt he is speaking of Canaan, the Promised Land just ahead of the travelling Israelites. This rest was forbidden to a substantial number of the migrants.

He then introduces in the chapter before us, an example regarding the seventh-day Sabbath rest, verses 3 and 4.

But in studying both chapters it becomes clear that a third rest is being described for the people of God. That today's believers are being encouraged to enter that rest rules out the Canaan option for sure, except that it stands as a severe warning of what can keep us out of that rest.

The seventh day is ruled out also, as the author reminds us that it was God who rested on that day long ago. It is not something we "enter into" today. His works were finished, He entered rest. Again, an example of how rest applies, but not the final fulfillment. Rather, the seventh day becomes a picture of the true.

But what is the true? I believe he does not answer that question fully until the last verse of the chapter where he invites us to draw near to the throne of grace and receive God's mercy for ourselves. A permanent rest, gained by faith in Jesus.

This is how I answered the question in *Through the Bible Q & A*:

4:3-11. Is this passage about the Jewish Sabbath? Canaan? Then what is the rest promised by God?

No, not about keeping the Sabbath every week. Nor is it about Canaan and the rest that would come to Israel when they settled in their own land.

"There [still] remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God."

And what is that rest? Verses 2-3: Hearing and believing the Gospel. The Israelites heard so many truths but perished due to unbelief. It is "we who have believed" who enter the promised rest.

And verses 10-11: The one who enters His rest is the one who has rested from his own works. That is ceasing to try to please God, and be saved by God by working to earn His favor. Even God Himself “rested” from His works on that seventh day. We must stop “working” too, stop depending on ourselves, and start trusting in what Jesus did. Those who do not come to God this way will fall eventually, and never enter the true rest.

4:1-2. What is the only way to “come short” of the promise given by God of eternal rest?

He points out that Israel heard the Word, but did not believe it. The application is clear. If we hear the Word, but do not believe it from the heart, we too will fall short of entry on that day. This is why Jesus will say no to many as they try to convince Him of their worthiness to enter the kingdom. They will say, “We saw”, “we did”, “we experienced,” and so on.

But the entrance requirement is “we believed.” And those who believed will not have to prove it to Jesus. True faith will produce a lifetime of good works. He will know.

Notice how the writer compares the good news we have received to that which was received by the Israelites. Their good news, their “Gospel”, was a land flowing with milk and honey, a Kingdom ruled by God Himself, a place prepared just for them. All they had to do was trust God to bring it to pass, and obey His directives that would lead the way to the fulfillment.

Our good news is a Savior who died for us, was raised for us, to bring us to a place of incredible bounty in the next life, a place prepared just for us. All we have to do is trust God to bring it to pass, and obey His directives that will lead the way to the fulfillment. Only believe. Only believe. Trust, and obey.

4:3-5. Why does the writer bring in the creation account here?

He is commenting on the Psalm he quoted in 3:11. The words “My rest” remind him and us of what happened at the end of the creation of the world. God rested from His labors of creation and set aside that day for His people to likewise end their labors for a day each week.

He says that this literal Sabbath rest was instituted millennia ago and could not refer to the rest that God has in mind in the Psalms. That original rest was only a day per week. Though God stopped creating the natural world He did not stop working forever.

No, the writer concludes, we’re not talking about a seventh-day rest here. Something more. Maybe Canaan-land?

4:6-8. So is God talking about Israel and the Canaan promise when He speaks of rest in the Psalm and originally to the Israelites?

So after the creation, the writer says, there is still a possibility of entering God’s rest. The Israelites in Egypt and the wilderness had a second shot at entering God’s rest in the form of the Old Testament version of the Good News, namely the promise of a land of their own.

Joshua is to be the one who will lead them to rest. But Joshua did not fill the bill. Years passed. And David, hundreds of years after the wilderness experience and the entry into Canaan, is still talking about a rest (verse 7).

It’s that word “Today” again. An ongoing “today” introduced by David and announced to God’s people: You didn’t get it through the creation rest. You didn’t get it through the Canaan rest. There’s another day coming. Another “today”. And when you hear the

Voice of God on that day, don't let your hard heart bypass the final opportunity to rest with God.

4:9-11. So what is that rest and how do we enter it?

First, what the rest is not.

Part of the confusion in this passage is the author's use of *sabbatismos*. This word is used only here throughout the New Testament. It is a derivative of *sabbaton*, the word translated "sabbath," and meaning "repose."

So is the expanded word to be translated simply "rest" as in the KJV or "sabbath rest" as in this and other versions? To leave it as "rest" when there are other words that can be used for that idea, leaves us unsure what is being said.

Katapausis is used throughout Hebrews 4 as the word for "rest". It does not seem appropriate to translate a different word, *sabbatismos*, in the same way. I believe that must be why translators settled on an expression used exclusively here, namely "sabbath rest."

Does that mean that the writer of Hebrews is telling us that we are to keep the seventh-day Sabbath as our own day of repose in the church age? Some would go that way for sure. But it would seem to me that the author has already ruled that possibility out in the previous verses, as well as the whole Promised Land of Canaan idea.

There is something unique about this rest. Let us follow the author.

1. There is a rest today. But it is not the Jewish Sabbath or the land of Canaan. A weekly observance does not fit the picture, and Joshua did not give the people of God a permanent rest. Obviously.

2. The rest is a rest from “his works” (v. 10). As God rested from His works on that day following creation, God’s people are to rest from their own works.
3. The rest is something we deliberately and diligently enter. Not to enter is considered disobedience (v. 11).
4. The rest is obtainable via the throne of grace (v. 16).
5. The rest is mercy and grace (v. 16).

The author goes on to explain how Jesus Christ has made this rest possible for us.

Does the idea of rest come up in any other New Testament book? I was able to find one significant one, from the lips of Jesus Himself, in Matthew 11:28, where the Savior invites the weary and heavy-laden to come to Himself so that He can give them rest.

More advantageous to our search, though, is to see what the Hebrew prophets, familiar to these Hebrew readers, said about rest:

Isaiah speaks of a time when the Lord will give Israel rest from its pain (14:3). Jews will be offered rest, but they will not listen (28:12). “In repentance and rest you will be saved...” but again, Israel not willing (30:15).

Jeremiah enjoins his people to walk in the ancient paths if they want rest for their souls (6:16).

The Jews were awaiting a time when Messiah would reign over all the earth and bring peace to Israel. For them to hear this letter declaring a future rest for the people of God mad sense. The writer

is pointing them to Jesus as the only way to peace and rest, whether in the heart or in the coming Kingdom.

4:12. How does this oft-quoted verse about God's Word fit into a discussion about "rest"?

It seems to me that the author is looking back to the Scripture He has been quoting in this chapter and the last. Three times the words, "Do not harden your hearts" is repeated, along with the surrounding contextual material. This is the Word of the Lord; it is to be heard and obeyed at the risk of losing eternal rest with God.

We learn here that whatever God says is alive forever and accomplishes specific purposes. We can be thankful, by the way, that modern translators have updated the KJV "quick", the Greek for which has nothing to do with speed and everything to do with vitality, life.

4:12. As a cutting sword, God's words divide soul from spirit. How can that be?

Man is a three-part being. Attempts to define precisely these three parts have been many. The body is clear enough. But what is the difference between soul and spirit? When the Bible says we were dead in trespasses and sins, does it imply that the spirit man was not functioning at that time? Would that make the "soul" correspond to simply human life?

If so, God is saying here that His Word, whether in Book or Person form, knows the intricate differences and dividing lines between human life and His life within us. We get them confused quite often. We may be over-awed by a religious song, only to find later that that which appealed to us most was the way it was sung, and the musical instruments that accompanied it. That is, the song was

soulish and not spiritual. Nevertheless, there was a spiritual component to it and we took it as a package.

God is able to divide those two immaterial parts of our being, even when we are not.

God is able to look at thoughts and intentions as well as actions. Our actions may seem to be of the spirit while our motivation springs from the soul.

All of this seems to tie in with the present discussion, going back to verse 1, of the people of God being very careful that they are approaching God's rest properly. Are we living by faith or have we adopted a different standard? God knows the heart and will judge based on that knowledge, as he did unbelieving Israel in the wilderness.

4:12. How does God divide "joints and marrow"?

Joints and marrow, elements of the physical body, are used here as an example of the sharpness of God's sword. As a literal sword could literally cut between literal parts of a literal physical body, so God's sword/word can cut between the most intimate parts of who we are and let us know which is which.

4:12-13. In this passage, is the word of God something we are to know or something that knows us?

The question answers itself. And the answer is obvious. God's word is here said to cut and to judge and to reveal. There are no secrets we can hold within us. God knows the hardness of our heart and can lay it bare before our eyes and the eyes of those around us. There is nothing hidden that will not one day be made known.

In light of all of this, or "therefore", the text goes on...

4:14. Because of God's Word being able to penetrate our very innermost person, because we have been called to enter Christ's rest by this great high priest, what follows?

We must hold on. We must draw near. The Hebrews of this audience were drawing away and letting go. Argument after argument is given to show the folly of such a move.

4:15. What is the significant difference between our High Priest, and the one under the Mosaic system?

Jesus had no sin. He was tempted in every way that we are tempted but had no sin. The temptations give Him the power of association with us. He understands in a personal way whatever we are tempted to do or not do. He sympathizes, not in a weepy sentimental way, but in full comprehension and therefore comfort and empowering.

4:16. What is the "throne of grace" and how do we access it?

I will allow Mr. Barnes to answer this one:

"The throne of grace!" What a beautiful expression. A throne is the seat of a sovereign; a throne of grace is designed to represent a sovereign seated to dispense mercy and pardon. The illustration or comparison here may have been derived from the temple service. In that service God is represented as seated in the most holy place on the mercy seat. The high priest approaches that seat or throne of the divine majesty with the blood of the atonement to make intercession for the people, and to plead for pardon; That scene was emblematic of heaven. God is seated on a throne of mercy. The great High Priest of the Christian calling, having shed his own blood to make expiation, is represented as approaching God and pleading for the pardon of people. To a God willing to show mercy he comes

with the merits of a sacrifice sufficient for all, and pleads for their salvation. We may, therefore, come with boldness and look for pardon. We come not depending on our own merits, but we come where a sufficient sacrifice has been offered for human guilt; and where we are assured that God is merciful. We may, therefore, come without hesitancy, or trembling, and ask for all the mercy that we need.

SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-4.

Jesus, Son of God, is greater. So we need to listen carefully to what He says. Jesus will rule the world one day. For now, though, He became lower than angels, suffered, and is able to comfort those who suffer.

He is our High Priest, Who offers Himself as the Sacrifice. In the light of who Jesus is, we must take heed to the warnings about the hardening of the heart. We must determine not to be among the unbelieving disobedient in our own day.

Israel was promised rest, but did not receive it. There is a rest promised to us also. But the hardening of the heart can keep us from it. This Jesus must be approached with confidence so that the needed grace will be received.

CHAPTER 5

5:1. What theme is continued from 2:17 to this present verse?

The High Priesthood of Jesus.

“... a merciful and faithful high priest...” (2:17)

“...the Apostle and High Priest of our confession...” (3:1)

“... a great high priest who has passed through the heavens...”
(4:14)

And here in chapter 5 he speaks of earthly high priests by comparison.

5:1. How does the author summarize the function of a high priest?

High priests are to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. The gifts would be the grains and wine and other inanimate items prescribed by Mosaic law. Sacrifices would be the bloody offerings of bulls and goats. The high priest stood between man and God and offered what God demanded so that God would not look at sins committed.

5:1, 4. Is the high priesthood a volunteer position?

No. High priests are “taken from among men” by God, “appointed on behalf of men” by God, “called by God.” There is a sense in which no office in Israel or the church is volunteer. Each one has a specific calling from the Holy Spirit and is to remain in that calling and no other. It may seem that we are offering ourselves when we feel drawn to a particular service, but it is the Holy Spirit who draws men to Himself and to the ministry of Christ.

There was no doubt in Aaron's mind, or in his brother's, that Aaron was to be the first high priest and was to pass that honor down to his sons after him.

Even Jesus Himself, in complete obedience to and cooperation with the Father, did not make Himself the High Priest, as verses 5 and 6 document for us.

5:2-3. Why must the high priest be a human being, as opposed to some angelic entity?

From Aaron on down, and even in the new priesthood of Jesus, a man must be chosen for this work so that he can sympathize with those for whom he offers sacrifice.

The high priest *can* deal gently with fellow humans. He is aware of his own sins that need atoning and knows he must serve in this office faithfully. The *can* implies that not always is this the case in the purely human priesthood. There were high priests in Israel who cared only for the political power the office brought.

Thus the need for a priest who was human and understood, but who was sinless and would carry out the office in the purity that the work demanded. A Godman would have to fulfill this ministry.

5:5-6. What Biblical proof does the author give us of the call of Jesus to the High Priesthood?

See the perfect submission of the perfect Christ Jesus to His Heavenly Father. The heavens were made by Him, yet He lived and lives subject to the Father's good pleasure, to the Father's decrees. Two such decrees are recorded for us.

The first one has already been used in connection with chapter 1's comparison of Jesus to the angels (1:5). It is Psalm 2:7, and the one

who said this, says the Hebrews writer, also said the words of Psalm 110:4, quoted next,

“YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”

This is the first mention of Melchizedek, whose identity we will go after when the letter of Hebrews approaches it. For now the point is made that the one Who has authority to call Jesus the Son also has the power to give Him an eternal priesthood.

It is this Psalm 110 with which Jesus confounds the Pharisees, letting them know – though they never discerned His meaning – that it is He to whom David referred when he wrote this song.

It begins with The Lord speaking to David’s Lord, that is, the Messiah King to come. In the first verses the Lord (Jesus) is promised a scepter. Then comes the priesthood. In the latter part of the Psalm, Jesus is also the judge and the mighty conqueror.

5:7. How did Jesus’ priesthood begin even before He offered His body to the cross?

Once more we are introduced to the subordinate position the Son of God took while in the “days of His flesh”, that is, during the Incarnation, His thirty-three years as Emmanuel, God with us.

Imagine. Almighty God the Son, on His knees and face before the Father, fairly shouting and crying out for help. This praying is called an “offering up”, signifying a sacrifice given to God.

But this verse 7 shares with us another riddle to be expounded. Jesus, it says was crying out to be saved from death *and was heard*. How are we to understand this? Jesus prayed in the garden that the cup of death and suffering could pass. But it did not pass. He had

already told His disciples He was going to die at the hands of sinful men. Why even pray such a prayer? He suffered and died an ignominious death.

So God heard, but said no? How is it possible for the Son to pray outside the will of the Father? There is a mystery here indeed.

Jesus the Son of man does not want to die or be tortured. Men who desire such things are called masochists. It is unnatural to desire evil things to come upon us.

But Jesus the Son of God was perfectly lined up with the will of God. The resolution of the problem is in the word “nevertheless” that came from the heart of an obedient Son. Nevertheless, though I tremble in my humanity about what is to come, Your will Father, Your will be done.

God heard the prayer and answered according to the will of the Godhead, with Which Jesus was in full communion. The answer is well known to us all, and is the reason for our salvation.

The Lord had respect to this offering because of the reverential fear of the Son (translated – in my opinion – unfortunately as “piety” in the NASB.) The word in the Greek means “caution” in the presence of one who is seriously respected. Noah was moved with “fear” (same Greek word), and the KJV says here that Jesus feared in the same way. That is, His perfect knowledge of the Father’s plan and power let Him know that He must line up with what God wanted, not with what He Himself wanted.

This is simply the fear of God that all of us are to walk in, the very beginning of knowledge. Jesus walked in that fear, reverence, even approaching dread, of the Father, as to never allow human understanding or feelings to interfere.

5:8. Jesus “learned” to obey?

From the *Through the Bible* book:

Jesus submitted Himself to the learning process. And a major part of that process has to do with suffering. Even up to the Garden of Gethsemane, He was learning that though we wish something, and though we know God is able to give it, sometimes our prayers are answered with a “no.” He learned that the glory of the Father is more important than temporary satisfaction and avoidance of grief. And He passes those lessons on to us, who have a challenging time learning them...

Again, Jesus was a man. Men learn. He was perfect in every stage of that learning, but had He stopped learning He would have been imperfect. His knowledge was commensurate with His age at every moment.

The question might arise, If Jesus was perfectly obedient all the time, how could it be said that He learned obedience after He suffered? Was it not obedience that brought Him to and through the suffering?

The Benson Commentary attempts an answer:

It is said he learned obedience, not he learned to obey, which will give us light in the meaning of the passage. He did not learn that to be his duty which he knew not before, or did not consider; nor was he impelled to, or instructed, or directed in the various acts of the obedience required, as we are often taught by chastisements. But, He learned obedience by experiencing it, as a man learns the taste of meat by eating it. Thus he was said to taste of death, or to experience what was in it by undergoing it. The obedience he learned was a submission to undergo great, hard, and terrible

things, accompanied with patience under them, and faith for deliverance from them. This he could have no experience of but by suffering the things he was to undergo, and by the exercise of appropriate graces while suffering.

Paul tells us (Philippians 2:8) that Jesus

Humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

He *obeyed* because it was His Nature to obey. He *experienced* the fruit of obedience when the actual event occurred.

5:9. Wasn't Jesus perfect all along?

See above and notes on 2:10.

5:9. Isn't salvation by grace alone through faith alone? How can the writer add obedience to the plan of salvation?

We who are saved are those who obey Him. The fruit of our faith and His grace is obedience. A man who says he has faith, says James, but does not do the works of a Christian, has not received the grace of God, but something inferior. Works without this grace of God cannot save, but works necessarily follow when one has been touched by Heaven.

5:10-11. Why is the writer hesitant to share details about Melchizedek?

His readers had been drifting away from Christ and back to Moses. When one takes his eyes off of the source of His salvation, His vision becomes blurry. Teach as eloquently as he may, the teacher cannot get through to a mind that is cluttered with unbelief and philosophies of the devil. A holy mind and a pure heart grasps

intuitively the things of God, difficult as they may seem to the world or the “carnal Christian.”

5:12-6:2. What does the writer of Hebrews consider to be elementary, or basic, teaching, i.e. the “milk” of the word?

- Repentance from dead works.
- Faith toward God.
- Instruction about washings (baptisms).
- Instruction about laying on of hands.
- Resurrection from the dead.
- Eternal judgment.

This list should strike a little of the fear of God in church members who have sat in their congregations for thirty years and could tell you about none of the above if their life depended on it.

And their spiritual life does depend on it. They will never be able to go into the deep things of the Lord until the basics have been learned. We see in this passage how God honors doctrine and our understanding of it. It is not to be cast aside as an extra or even as in some places, a non-existent part of the church’s impartation.

We are not called together each week to hear the preacher’s opinions, the world’s philosophies, the flesh’s attractions. We are called to continue in the apostle’s doctrine. Period.

5:12. How do the mature hold on to what they have, and advance others in the faith?

Those who have mastered the “milk” are called upon to share their knowledge with new converts. Teaching others is one of the best ways to internalize the lessons learned.

5:13-14. What labels does the writer assign to persons in all the churches of the saints?

- Infant: Continues to feed on the above-listed items, and desire them in every meeting. Clueless when the teacher goes off into something deep so the rest of the church can profit.
- Mature: Is totally prepared to use his new spiritual teeth to feast on matters beyond the above-listed items. Loves it when the pastor by-passes the babies for awhile so as to disseminate some solid food. The mature need to keep growing too, and are often left out in the weekly meeting.

5:14. Is not discernment a gift of the Spirit? How is it a matter of “practice makes perfect”?

Discernment of spirits is a gift of the Spirit. But this passage speaks of *learned discernment*. It reminds us that we must constantly be filling our mind with Truth, so that error will be immediately distinguishable. Those depending on a miracle to fend off every difficulty may be disappointed to know that serious study, fervent prayer, constant fellowship, are all essential ingredients in knowing the difference between right and wrong. The Christian life is one of diligent discipline and regular practice.

SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-5.

Jesus, Son of God, is greater. He will rule the world one day. He became lower than angels, suffered, and is able to comfort those who suffer, thus a highly effective High Priest.

In the light of who Jesus is, we must take heed to the warnings about the hardening of the heart.

The hardening of the heart can keep us from God's rest. This Jesus must be approached with confidence so that the needed grace will be received.

It is available to you because Jesus was appointed by God to be our High Priest, in the order of Melchizedek, a mystery figure that I would love to talk about, but you seem to be too young in your understanding. Solid food is for mature believers.

CHAPTER 6

6:2. Why is *baptismos* (washings/baptisms) in the plural?

Early in the Christian's experience he needs to be taught about the water and the Spirit. He needs to know that water baptism is not an option but a clear command of the Savior. He also needs to know that although water baptism was a practice of the early church and is relevant today, there is a greater baptism of which water is only the picture. From the beginning, Christians need to hear of the Holy Spirit, and seek a proper relationship to Him.

6:2. Is the laying on of hands still with us?

There are times when the hands of elders need to be laid on members of Christ's church. Examples are throughout the book of Acts:

6:1-6. Deacons had the hands of apostles laid on them as a symbolic act of transferring of authority to these new officers of the church.

8:14-17. Apostles were called to Samaria to lay their hands on a group of believers who had not yet received the Holy Spirit.

9:17. Ananias of Damascus is the first non-apostle who is recorded to have laid hands on someone. That someone is the future apostle Paul. The outcome of that encounter was healing and receiving the Holy Spirit.

13:1-3. Here is recorded the action of a group of believers in Antioch, the laying on of hands upon Paul and Barnabas to set them apart for the coming ministry.

19:6. Paul, as Peter and John earlier, lays his hands on Ephesian believers who had not heard the fullness of the Christian message.

28:8. Paul lays his hands on the father of Publius, and he is healed instantly.

This same Paul, in 2 Timothy 1:6, laid hands on Timothy and imparted to him the gift of the Holy Spirit. But to that same convert, the apostle sounds a warning about the laying on of hands (1 Timothy 5:22) : Don't be too hasty about conferring a blessing on one who may have unconfessed sin in his life.

So, whether for receiving the Holy Spirit, receiving healing, being sent into ministry, the church's example is clear. When the candidate who stands before you is a repentant believer, and in need of some grace from God, lay your hands on him, letting him feel the contact of the representative of God Himself, and pray.

Both the giver and receiver of these needed blessings must be in full communion with God for the transaction to be meaningful. Many have been the empty ceremonies of unregenerate men through the ages, which imparted nothing. This fact should not keep us from employing a practice that the writer of Hebrews says is among the elemental features of the Christian practice.

6:3. Why does the writer add, "if God permits". Is this plan not of God?

The writer is not expressing doubt about the directive. It must be done. The question is, Who will do it? James instructs us in the next Bible book always to say "If the Lord wills" we will do such and such. There is no promise of a future here, for any of us.

And so humbly, the writer says that he as a teacher, and the Hebrews as disciples, will indeed move on to mature thinking and acting as the Lord enables.

6:4-6. Can a Christian fall away?

Let's take a look at the person being described here. Is he a real Christian? Can a pseudo-Christian experience these same things? Here is a chance to exercise true discernment.

- “Once enlightened.” He understood. The light came on. Like the seed planted by the wayside. But the birds came and gobbled it up.
- “Tasted of the Heavenly gift.” By being in the same room with those who were imbibing freely? By observation? Or by possession?
- “Made partakers of the Holy Spirit.” In the sense of being able to work miracles, which we assume even Judas could do? True believers can do these things too, but there is a class of “Christians” that will be told, “I never knew you”, even though they seemed to have been doing spiritual works.
- “Tasted the good word of God.” Sat in Bible studies, seminars, conferences. Enjoyed it. But refused to live it, could not live it, because the Spirit had actually not entered?
- “Tasted the powers of the age to come.” Were in miracle meetings to see the miracles, not to glorify God?
- “Fell away.” That is the question. The person described above hung around with believers, but in the end manifested the truth: They were not really interested in this Jesus and the demands He put on their lives.

I offer this as a possibility. This is a view from the Calvinistic side, for sure. The “free will” folks will tell you that the things mentioned in the text prove that this man was a stellar believer who at the very end lost everything.

The church is split over this one. I encourage you to keep reading, keep listening.

The warning of these verses is consistent with those of chapters 2,3 and 4:

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?... God testifying... by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit... (2:3-4)

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." (3:7-8)

Therefore let us fear... any one of you may seem to have come short... (4:1)

The writer is adamant in his position: It is possible to have drawn very near to salvation (some say "to have been saved") yet in the end to lose out with God. All readers of this treatise are called upon to examine themselves "to see whether they are in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

6:6. What effect does one's falling away have on Christ?

Jesus died for sinners. To be received into His love, then turn and deny that love, is like asking Jesus to mount the cross again and die for sin again. Christ is shamed before the world, as they look at such a one and claim that Jesus doesn't really save, doesn't really forgive, doesn't really change a man's life.

6:7-8. What is the fate of the fallen, who bear no fruit?

Here we are reminded again of the parable of the four soils. The first three types that Jesus mentions are alike fruitless in their production of life. Hard ground that never received the seed to

begin with. Rocky soil. Rocky ground depicting those who received the seed but fell away (His very words) in time of persecution. Thorny ground, that pictures one who never allows the seed to prosper in him because of the things of this world.

Could any of these three pictures be illustrating the Christian life? The Word was present. The miracles were there. The Spirit was all around them. They could even say with that crowd of Matthew 7, did we not cast out devils and work miracles in the name of Jesus? Yes indeed they did. But they are barred from heaven anyway. No fruit. No obedience.

John 15 seems to be the other connection to the writer of Hebrews. Here is described a vine with branches. Fruitless branches are those not abiding in the Vine, Jesus. They are visibly in Him, but actually have no relationship.

Branches of this sort are first thrown away. Then gathered up. Then thrown into a fire. How clear is that?

The parables and Hebrews together form a teaching that cannot be denied, Calvinist or Arminian or anything in between: There is a group of people among us – call them saved if you must, but I think not – who are Christian in name only. Like Judas and many of his disciples afterwards, they hang out with Jesus, experience His power and goodness, preach, teach, sing, even do the miraculous.

But when serious temptation comes along. Or persecution. Or a call to serious discipleship... don't look for these people. They will find something else to do. They will leave. Because they never were with us to begin with.

Their end is to be burned. Forever.

Quickly, the writer almost apologizes to his readers, of whom, he says, he is not speaking. These are the saved. They will not fall away. They are the fourth soil. They bring forth fruit in different amounts, but the fruit is visible for all to see.

Both Jesus and this writer mention that fruit-bearing class (John 15:5 and verse 7 here). Jesus attributes “much fruit” to those who abide in the vine. Here, the soil and the water on it waters the seed and brings forth the vegetable life that is a blessing to those around it.

6:9-10. What is the evidence of, the things that accompany, our salvation?

The writer does not give a full list here, but foremost among the evidences of our salvation are work, the love of His Name, and ministry to the saints.

Saved people are not lazy in their Kingdom efforts. Saved people want to magnify the Name of Jesus. Saved people love and bless other saved people. The apostle either knows, or knows about, his audience, has seen or heard of the fruit it is producing, and knows that all the things he has been saying thus far do not apply to them.

Which brings us again to the conclusion that those who fall away were not truly of the Body of Christ to begin with. Saved people do not fall away.

6:11-12. By what means do the saints persevere?

Through exhortations such as the one in these verses, God’s people are equipped and challenged to continue on in the faith. There is nothing automatic about our salvation and eventual victory. There is no sitting back and waiting for the rapture mentality among the

true saints. There is work, and when one seems to be growing tired of the work, there is challenge, even rebuke.

But everything points to the final victory of the true child of God. The writer says, You are doing great, now keep it up. Follow those who have gone before you and prevailed.

6:13-15. Why is the promise to Abraham introduced here?

Verse 12 actually introduces the idea of promises to be inherited through faith and patience. What Old Testament saint had more faith and needed more patience to inherit a promise than “Father Abraham”? Decades were to pass before the first promise would be fulfilled, the birth of Isaac. Other promises have yet to be fulfilled even in our own day, namely that in the Seed of Abraham all the families of earth would be blessed. We have seen the Seed, for it is Christ Jesus. But the earth has yet to see the fullness of blessing that His death and resurrection and victory over Satan’s domain has brought to us.

Genesis 22:15 is quoted in verse 14. What is not quoted is Genesis 22:16, that has God saying what the writer implies here in verse 13,

By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord...

6:18. What double assurance did God give to Abraham?

From *Through the Bible Q & A*:

God makes a series of promises to Abraham. Genesis 12:1-3. Abraham is to be a great nation. His name will be great. He shall be a blessing. Those who bless him will be blessed. Those who curse him, cursed. And in Abraham every family on earth will be blessed!

The promise is echoed by Melchizedek, about whom the writer of Hebrews gives us some valuable information. Genesis 14:19, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High..." Indeed.

Then in Genesis 22 Abraham offers his own son to this God who has blessed him so. At that point, God adds an oath to the promise: (16-17) "By Myself I have sworn ... indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed... in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed..."

The two "immutable" (unchangeable) things appear to be a promise followed by an oath to back up the promise. God can swear by no greater than Himself, so the promise is made doubly secure by this oath.

6:18. How does a promise given to a patriarch thousands of years ago have anything to do with us?

Again from Through the Bible Q & A:

Now, the writer of Hebrews says (6:17) that the reason God added an oath to the promise was...us. Yes, God desired "to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose..." Heirs? Abraham is not the only heir? Oh my, no. The heirs are the nations of the earth that will be blessed by faithful Abraham.

For Abraham will have a son, Isaac. See how that simple truth is being demonically fought by the 25% of earth's people who are Muslims.

Isaac produced Jacob and so on, down to Christ Jesus Himself. This is the Seed, the Seed of Abraham, in which the nations will receive blessings. Yes, there will come a time when the entire earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, when all will know Him and love Him.

We know that that time is not now, but rather when Abraham's Seed returns to earth to establish His Kingdom.

6:18-20. How is it that the Christian's hope "enters within the veil"? What is the veil?

God cannot lie. His purposes never change. He spoke the promises, backed them up with an oath. Our hope of a future with Him is steadfast, like an anchor holding a ship in place. These ideas are fairly easy to grasp, and wonderful to believe.

But then the writer tells his people that this hope, this sure and steadfast hope "enters within the veil." And once more we are made to pause and investigate a little.

The *veil* (with an "e") is to be distinguished from the *vail* (with an "a"). The latter is the covering referenced in 2 Corinthians 3, a cloth of some sort placed over Moses' face so as to dim the glory that was shining from it after having fellowshiped personally with the God of Light.

Actually, modern dictionaries do not give a noun meaning for the word "vail" as used in the KJV. Both spellings mean the same thing, so we imagine that the KJV translators were simply trying to tell us that two different Greek words were used. But the fact is, both words amount to the same idea: a covering of something that needs to be hidden for one reason or another.

The reason for Moses' veil/vail I have given. But what is that other veil/vail of Scripture? There is only one: The curtain that divided the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies in the Jewish Tabernacle and Temple. God's glory, God's Presence, God's availability, was to be hidden from humanity.

But then comes Jesus. At His death, we all recollect, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom, by God, not man, making the Holy of Holies available to all because of the blood of Jesus that paid for man's unholiness.

And our hope enters within – I prefer “behind” as in several modern translations – the curtain, which exists no longer.

Verse 20 says that the reason our hope enters there is because Jesus has entered there ahead of us. Jesus was able to access the inner sanctum of God's heart first. Our hope now tells us that we are next in line, we, the Body of Christ.

And all of this leads the author back to his current theme, the high priesthood of Jesus. It is only the High Priest who can enter into the space behind the veil. The curtain. Jesus did better than that. After He entered in, He removed the curtain! It blocks us no longer. We can enter in and claim any promise of God.

And He did this as a representative of an ancient order of priests, which the writer now has determined to discuss, even knowing that many of his hearers won't understand. Will we understand?

SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-6

Jesus, Son of God, will rule the world one day though for now He became lower than angels, suffered, and has become a highly effective High Priest in the process.

In the light of who Jesus is, we must take heed to the warnings about the hardening of the heart which can keep us from God's rest. This Jesus must be approached to receive His grace.

It is available to you because Jesus was appointed by God to be our High Priest. His work along these lines has made our faith available to us, and I want to share with you some of the deeper things about it.

I warn you again about falling away. But I am convinced you will not fall. God has made a promise to you with an oath. He will keep it. And Jesus has come along and made the promise even more secure by His death on the cross, opening up the very Inner Sanctuary of God's glory. This is our hope.

CHAPTER 7

7:1-3. What do we know of the man Melchizedek?

- He was the King of Salem, perhaps the town that was later called Jerusalem. Salem means “peace.”
- The name Melchizedek means “King of Righteousness.”
- He was priest of God and remains such to this day.
- He met Abraham after a battle, and blessed him.
- He brought out bread and wine to Abraham.
- Abraham gave him a tithe of the spoils of the battle.
- We do not know his genealogy.

These are the facts, gleaned from verses 1-3 and Genesis 14:18-20. The facts alone are suggestive of a Heaven-sent manifestation. Let us see what the writer of Hebrews does with these facts. Let us investigate thoroughly before drawing a conclusion to this mystery. For it is a mystery indeed, and our writer has let us know that casual Christians won't understand it. Are we able? Can we approach the text with no prior decision made and simply read what it says?

7:1-2. Should we view these proper names as simply descriptive or actual names? Should verse 1 just begin, “For this king of righteousness, king of peace, priest...”?

That is certainly a temptation and would solve the problem immediately. It would do away with a village in Canaan and be

telling us only that there was this Heavenly Personage who suddenly appeared to Abraham.

Trouble is, no translation, whether of Hebrew in Genesis, or Greek here, takes that route. In both cases it is assumed there was indeed such a town, and that there was such a man with this given name.

The translations of Melchizedek and Salem are dealt with by the author, and they are truly significant, but, no, we cannot take away the fact of the names given to town or man. There was a Canaanite town named Salem. There was a king in that town, as there were kings all over Canaanite territory. And there was a priest.

As with kingships, priests of pagan religions abounded in this land cursed of God and slated for destruction. But in the city chosen of God before the foundation of the world, there was a priest of God, and he was the same person as the king.

Melchizedek's blessing of Abraham, who he presumably had not met before, would seem additionally to classify him as prophetic.

A prophet, priest, and king reigning in (Jeru)salem. A good start to understanding the mystery.

7:3. Did Melchizedek have no parents? No beginning or end?

Immediately here we want to say, this is Jesus. But just as immediately we are confronted with the words, *like the Son of God*. Not the Son of God, but like Him.

If the man Melchizedek had no parents, where did he come from? Can there be another prophet-priest-king living from eternity past and into eternity future, and not Jesus? He cannot be angelic, for angels are not called to the prophetic or priestly offices of men.

Here in verse 3 we begin to see the direction our Hebrews writer is going. And that direction is typology. I believe that saying that Melchizedek and Jesus are the same cannot be affirmed, though those who think this way are demonstrating the point that the author is making, namely that there is a marked similarity between Jesus and the King of Salem.

And by no means is the significance of the Canaanite King to be diminished because he is not Jesus. Verse 4 is insistent to the contrary.

7:3. What affirmation do we have here of the Deity of Jesus?

Here the author affirms that the Son of God, Jesus, as the Eternal Word, has no human parents, has no beginning, has no end. A ringing endorsement of the Godhood of the Son.

7:3. “Made like the Son of God.” What does this mean?

From *Through the Bible Q & A*:

Surely Jesus was not made, though technically we are not describing Jesus here, but Melchizedek. But the words “made like” seem to imply “made to resemble”. Not made in the sense of created, but in the sense of designed. “Introduced to look like,” or “developed into a similarity with,” might be two other ways to say it.

7:4. Was Melchizedek simply a man?

To demonstrate the difficulty of this passage, allow me to quote from my own writing, published just a few years before the above conclusion. Not meaning to confuse you here, but at that time I was fully convinced that Melchizedek and Jesus *are one and the same*, a position held by reputable men.

From my *Through the Bible Q & A* of 2017:

Many have wrestled with the identity of this person [Melchizedek]. Was he the Word of God before that Word entered the planet as the Son?

Or was he merely a unique man that serves as a model for who Jesus will one day be, a priest forever? King of righteousness, King of Peace, Priest of God, Bread and Wine, Receives tithes?

Jesus is to be a priest forever after the order of this man. Could this man be Jesus, if Jesus is to be a priest after His order? On the other hand, could there be some higher order than Jesus, to which Jesus is attached hundreds of years later?

I believe I must team up with those who have seen Jesus in this man. The clues seem overwhelming. Consider:

- *His name means "King of Righteousness." I do not believe he was given this name by some loving mother who hoped the best for her Son. The name was given in Heaven, and has eternal meaning.*
- *The city over which He presides is "peace." He is the King of Peace. In Isaiah, His name shall be called "Prince of Peace." Whether seen as God or the Son of God, peace is the domain of King Jesus.*
- *He serves bread and wine. Symbols of the very Body and Blood of Jesus.*
- *He is called The Priest of God Most High. The priest. The only priest. The High Priest. A designation reserved for Jesus, to be sure.*
- *He blesses Abraham.*
- *He receives tithes of Abraham.*

- *Jesus is to be a priest after this order, swears God Himself.*
- *No [earthly] father, mother, genealogy.*
- *No beginning, no ending.*
- *Forever a priest. (Can there be two High Priests forever?)*

Just as the Lord of Glory appears to Abraham as a man and visits his tent, so here the Word takes on human flesh to appear as High Priest.

The Son always was. The Word always was. He steps down here to establish a priesthood that pre-dates Aaron's, then steps down 2,000 years later to assume the office of High Priest personally. Amazing.

There you have it. Two conclusions to one mystery:

On the one hand we have Jesus becoming a priest like Melchizedek, a man who lived in Abraham's day and established a precedent for a pre-Aaronic priesthood. That is, Aaron was not the first man given the office of High Priest by God. Here was a man hundreds of years earlier who functioned in that role. And Jesus is to be a priest in that same way, because Jesus Himself was before Aaron, and was given the priesthood in Heaven before the worlds began.

On the other hand Jesus Himself stepped down to earth in Canaanite history, and was established as the Priest of God in that place, setting the precedent for the Divine priesthood that He would enter into more fully when He came to earth through the Virgin.

Not very satisfying, right? Let's move on in the chapter with these two options before us, and see which one fits the rest of the narrative. Perhaps things will clear up as we go along...

7:5-6. When and through whom did the tithe originate?

No question that tithing is a part of the Mosaic law. The descendants of Levi, the fourth son of Jacob, are not only given a priesthood, but a way of sustaining such an order: ten percent of the goods of all the other tribes of Israel is to be collected for the Levites.

But according to the author, there was already another priesthood in the world. Melchizedek's origins are unknown, but since he lived long before there was a Jacob or a Levi or a Levitical priesthood, his receiving of tithes is in no way connected to the Mosaic/Aaronic tithing.

Yet he received them. Abraham willingly turned over the ten percent to a priest ages before the priesthood with which we are most familiar existed! Here is the beginning of tithing, not in the later laws of Moses.

Surely Melchizedek was a great man.

7:5-7. What irony does the writer point out in regard to the various descendants of Abraham?

At the end of this verse, the writer says that even though the Levites were equally descended from Abraham, they somehow were allowed to receive tithes from their brothers. Matthew Poole comments:

...yet these Israelites who were to pay those tithes to these [Levites] as superior to them in office, were their own brethren by nature, of

the same rank, coming out of the same loins of Abraham, but subjected to these priests, who, by God's ordinance, were set above them in their office; and their receiving tithes was an inseparable property of that superiority.

Melchizedek claims no physical relationship to Abraham but receives tithes from him. The original pattern. The lesser normally gives to the greater. But the Israelites, the members of the twelve tribes, were equal to each other... yet one tribe is elevated above the others to receive tithes.

7:8. What other contrast does the writer make between the Levitical receiver of tithes and the man Melchizedek? How should this help determine who Melchizedek is/was?

Mortal vs immortal is the implication here. Aaron's priesthood was most certainly made up of ordinary men. Brothers elevated above brothers, but all human. Mortals.

But Melchizedek. What is being said here? That Melchizedek was immortal? He "lives on", says the author? Well, not exactly. He refers to the Genesis story and his own comments about it. Here was a man who, as far as the text is concerned, had no beginning or end. He was essentially eternal in nature. "It is witnessed" that he lives on. That is, the story itself suggests it. Not that it was literally true.

For Melchizedek to have lived eternally, no matter what else we believe about him, he would have to be God, equal to the very Son of God. That, we know, is impossible.

Unless... we go back to the idea of some, that Melchizedek is Jesus.

This verse, lifted out of the context of the whole chapter, would seem to point to the Deity of Melchizedek. But let's keep reading.

7:9-10. How is it that Levi, the receiver of tithes, actually gave tithes to one who lived centuries before, Melchizedek?

The author is trying to press home the superiority of Jesus in all things. He is letting God's people know that going from Moses to Jesus looks forward and backward. That is, the Jesus Priesthood came before Aaron's, and now is made official after it.

Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek. But inside of Abraham was the seed that would lead to Isaac, then Jacob, then Levi, and eventually all the Levitical priesthood. So Abraham's gift was being given by his progeny.

At least, "one might say this", adds the author. He realizes that the concept is a difficult one, and may stretch their imagination a bit. Unborn ancestors doing what I am doing now because they are inside of me? Oh my, what a thought.

7:11. Why was it absolutely necessary for a new priesthood to arise, after Melchizedek's order?

The word is "perfection". The concept is dealt with again in verses 18 and 19. The Law which involved the entire Levitical system did not yield perfection. Of what perfection are we speaking here?

The Mosaic model of priesthood could not take away sins permanently and completely. Its high priests were mortal. They died and new ones had to be trained to start the process over again. And some of these mortal men walked in carnality and every worldly pursuit. Consider only the High Priest of Jesus' day whose one great passion was to kill the Son of God. Human priesthood was not good enough.

Its system of sacrifice was not appropriate. Bulls and goats cannot take away sin, Paul tells us elsewhere. That which would be pleasing

to God must be perfect. Not only the One Who offers, but that which is offered, must be perfect.

So the Levitical Priesthood limped along through the centuries, awaiting One Who would arise with an endless life, as it seemed was the case of Melchizedek, as far as the text is concerned. We read not of his beginning or end, so textually he is “eternal.” In actuality the One Who came 2,000 years later was the truly endless person, Who qualifies to be a priest forever.

And when the eternal priest gives His own life as the sacrifice, everything is in order. All is complete. Perfect.

7:12-14. Why do Law and Priesthood rise or fall together?

An even quick reading of the Torah, the books of Moses, makes it clear that most of the words that came from Heaven to the man of God concern the priesthood. The priesthood of his brother Aaron. If that priesthood is given to someone else, the words of the Law crumble one at a time. If Jesus is to be the Priest of God, there is no need for the prescribed offerings, the incense, the furniture, the vestments. Human priests needed all of these things. Jesus *is* all of these things.

After all, reasons the writer, the very tribe to whom all of this is assigned, Levi's, is no longer God's special people as far as priesthood is concerned: Jesus is from the tribe of Judah! Judah is not mentioned at all as being significant to the Aaronic priesthood. Everything must change. New priesthood, new Law.

From my original answer in *Through the Bible Q & A...*

To switch from the Aaronic priesthood to that of Jesus involves so many changes that the entire legal system collapses. Jews were to sacrifice for this and for that. It had to be done just right. The moral

code itself was impossible to keep due to the weakness of human flesh. With Jesus in charge, all the sacrifices are completed, in Him. He is the One Who offers the Sacrifice, He is the Sacrifice. His Spirit fills His believers in such a way that they walk by a new Law, also, the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It's all different now. All things have become new.

7:15-17. Not only tribal connection, what other quality does Jesus have that calls for the end of the Levitical priesthood?

Jesus is in the “likeness” of Melchizedek. In what way? An “indestructible” life. Again we are reminded that Melchizedek was a type of Christ, an image of Jesus seen thousands of years before He came. That image involves a life that – seemingly – had no beginning or end. Melchizedek, in the text, just “was.” So, in reality, is the Son of God. He always was. And that is just the thing that is needed to have a perfect priesthood, one who always is, whose life consistently applies with righteousness and holiness the forgiveness of God for His people. No human or even set of humans could do this.

A word here about mystery men in the Old Testament. Lest you are concerned that we take “typology” too far in our quest to describe this mystery man of Abraham’s day, consider other men who were Christ figures.

Consider Prophet Elijah, who like Melchizedek suddenly appears in the Bible, walking in the power of God. Consider his exit from the world, ascending in glory before his disciples. Is this not a type of Christ? Why his very name means “The Lord God.” Yet he is not Christ, and appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Even greater in similarity is King David. See him climbing the very same hill that Jesus would climb a millennium later. See him

weeping as he goes, forsaken by His people, on his way, for all he knows, to his death. Then hear him crying out in the Psalms, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" And people marvel, and they say, is David speaking? Or is it Jesus? And we smile and say, "Yes." But we know that both men lived and live. Both will return in glory. But they are not the same man ultimately.

Why, Abraham himself, with whom this Melchizedek was associated. Another hill, another day, with his own son Isaac carrying wood on which he is to be sacrificed. Is not Jesus all over that picture? Yet Isaac is Isaac and Jesus is Jesus.

The mysteries of Scripture are great. The one before us is no exception. Melchizedek is in many respects just like Jesus, our author tells us. But it would seem to me, they are not the same. There can be only one High Priest of His people. Only one with an endless life. Only one called *the* Son of God.

7:18-19. Not only is the weak and useless Law set aside, but what else does the priesthood of Jesus bring to His people?

Hope. The Levitical priesthood could promise nothing beyond the moment. One did his rituals, received the blessing from the priest, and went on his way feeling a bit relieved. We think immediately of religious practices of our own time which have the same effect.

Enter Jesus. The One Who is forgiving you now will forgive you tomorrow. He'll be alive and present in your life whenever needed. He will place eternal life within you so that you may live with Him forever, in perfect love and acceptance. What is not to like? How can Moses offer anything to match this? I am saved today and will be saved tomorrow because of this One with the endless life.

God was distant before, now He is present and His very presence gives me a certain knowledge about my future.

7:20-22. What security does the Lord offer His people that Aaron's priests could not offer?

Carrying on the idea of "hope" to his readers, the author inserts the fact God has sworn that He will not be changing His mind about the priesthood of Jesus. This taking of an oath was not a part of the Levitical procedure. Nowhere is eternal priesthood promised to a High Priest of Israel. Nowhere are the sacrifices offered considered eternally binding. Multiplied millions of animals continued to be offered, but none could pay the price of man's sin permanently.

Jesus is the guarantee. The Father has sworn that Jesus will forever be the One Who forgives and intercedes and Whose offering is accepted.

7:23-25. What is the huge disadvantage of the Levitical priesthood?

This is review, but an important one. Death of the High Priest continued to disrupt the flow of forgiveness and authority. Though the Law regarding the priesthood never changed, different men might interpret it differently. Or, some priests, as we have pointed out, could become corrupt, or lazy, or disconnected from God altogether. What then? Was an unspiritual priest still God's man of the hour? Could a mortal be trusted in this office?

Too many problems when such serious matters are placed in the hands of just any man. But Jesus is perfect and eternal and anyone at any time may approach Him and expect service.

7:25. In what way does the Son of God intercede for us?

We are not made privy to the workings of the Spirit world. But we are told in Romans 8 about Another Who intercedes for us, namely the Spirit of God. It is said there that this intercession is comprised of “groanings too deep for words.”

Is the intercession of the Son equal to that of the Spirit, since in the Godhead there is perfect unity? Or does the Son’s intercession have to do with the ongoing sin problem, which can only be resolved with the application of the Son’s blood? Does the Son constantly show to the Father His wounds and sacrifice so that our sins can be forgiven, and then does the Spirit help us in the everyday issues and struggles of life?

The author wants us to know here, without defining intercession, that it is ongoing. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” agrees John in his first epistle. Only the High Priest Jesus can match the need for an ongoing sacrifice, an ongoing forgiveness.

I speak not here of the Romanist idea of an unbloody sacrifice in the Mass. I speak of the bloody one, the act which is so powerful as to be instantly accessed by the One Who performed it. We speak, legally, of “pleading the blood.” Our only plea when we sin is that Jesus’ blood covers our sin. Somehow, I believe, this is how Jesus’ intercession works for us.

7:26. What does “fitting” mean here?

It was proper. It was appropriate to meet our needs. I ask the question because the statement of the author seems to indicate some pride in us that demanded we be treated in a certain manner. The fact is, humankind is seriously lost, forever. There was only one

thing God could do to snatch us from Hell. There was only one appropriate way for sin to be blotted out from us. That way was for an intermediary, a priest, to stand between God and our failure, to be the One Who offered and the One offered. Only in Jesus was the Father satisfied. His work exactly fit our need.

7:26. What other requirements does the author now list for a priest that would be proper for our salvation?

1. He would have to be holy. Perfect in goodness and righteousness.
2. He would have to be innocent. As a young lamb, perfect before God.
3. He would have to be undefiled. All the rituals and ceremonies of the Law of Moses would apply to this one. No rules would have been broken by Him.
4. He would have to be separated from sinners. Jesus mingled with sinners but never participated in their sin.
5. He would have to be exalted above the Heavens.

He would, in short, have to be God.

7:27. What would the perfect High Priest *not* have to do or be?

He is not encumbered with the task of offering sacrifices for Himself. He does not have to offer sacrifices for the people every day. This was accomplished once by the one sacrifice of Calvary.

For this reason we repudiate the idea of the unbloody sacrifice of Rome, which binds the masses to the "Mass." Jesus is not being sacrificed any longer. It is finished. It was finished the day of His crucifixion and it is still finished.

Once for all. Period.

7:28. What changing of the time order is noticeable in this verse?

First was the Law, says our writer. Yes. 1,400 B.C. Aaron, the Levites, the rules and regulations, the offerings, the tabernacle, its furniture. All very weak. All very human. All very subject to the ills of human nature. This one has to be replaced.

Next came an oath, he tells us. But wait. If we are talking about a priesthood that began with Melchizedek, that ancient figure showed up 600 years *earlier*, not later. What oath?

First notice that in the Genesis account of the mystery man, nothing is said about an oath. No comment is made about the man. He just shows up, offers bread and wine, takes the tithe, then disappears.

Here in verse 28 perhaps is the final piece of the puzzle, for those who have not figured it out yet. Namely, the oath. That oath can only be referring to Psalm 110:4, spoken through the “prophet” David. (Yes, anyone thorough whom God speaks prophetically is at that moment a prophet.)

The oath simply says that the Lord sitting next to the Lord is to be given a priesthood like the one of Melchizedek. Namely, it will have no beginning or end. This priesthood will feature the giving of bread and wine to God’s people. It will receive the tithes and offerings of the ones served. It will be administered by one who is the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace.

No longer will the Aaronic priesthood hold sway. A new priesthood, prefigured in 2,000 B.C., promised by oath in 1,000 B.C., and verified in Person at the advent of the Christ, will be the new norm, the one God had in mind from the beginning of creation.

Hence our author says that the oath regarding Melchizedek, not Melchizedek himself, came *after* the Law. It replaces the Law. But it was here in “type” before the Law, via the man we have been studying.

No weakness here, says the author. Not a mortal. The very Son of God, perfect from the beginning, still perfect. Always perfect. His stability is one of the avenues toward our own stability. Confidence. Security.

SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-7

Jesus, Son of God, will rule the world one day though for now He became lower than angels, suffered, and has become a highly effective High Priest in the process.

In the light of who Jesus is, we must take heed to the warnings about the hardening of the heart.

His grace is available to you because Jesus was appointed by God to be our High Priest.

I warn you again about falling away. But I am convinced you will not fall. God has made a promise to you with an oath. And Jesus has come along and made the promise even more secure by His death on the cross.

The life and work of Jesus is exemplified beautifully by the man Melchizedek described in Genesis. Through examining this story we find that the Levitical priesthood is not the final method for your sins being taken away. An eternal unchanging Priest was needed, and Jesus is that Priest.

CHAPTER 8

8:1. How does the writer summarize the last few chapters?

Jesus is the high priest we need and have.

8:1. What is the significance of the “right hand” of a Throne?

Barnes' Commentary puts it this way:

He is exalted to honor and glory before God. The right hand was regarded as the place of principal honor, and when it is said that Christ is at the right hand of God, the meaning is, that he is exalted to the highest honor in the universe; Of course the language is figurative - as God has no hands literally - but the language conveys an important meaning, that he is near to God; is high in his affection and love, and is raised to the most elevated situation in heaven; see Philippians 2:9; notes Ephesians 1:21-22.

Consider the praises to Yahweh by Moses and the Psalmist:

Your right hand, LORD, is majestic in power; Your right hand, LORD, destroys the enemy (Exodus 15:6).

The right hand of the LORD is exalted; The right hand of the LORD performs valiantly (Psalm 118:16).

John talks of the throne of God and of the Lamb. Two thrones? Or one throne belonging to both?

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bondservants will serve Him; (Revelation 22:3).

How to parse out the difference between Father and Son, where the work of one ends and the other begins, is far beyond our capability.

This we know. The Word of God became flesh and lived among us. Then that same Word, Jesus, ascended into heaven and has sat down at the right hand of God. This is the One exalted above all for the continuation – forever – of our salvation.

8:2. Of what “sanctuary” and “tabernacle” is the author speaking here?

The Tabernacle (Tent) of Moses included a holy place and a most holy place, or “holy of holies.” It is this latter room that is being referenced here by the term “sanctuary”.

I might stop to comment here that it seems a bit odd that we call the largest room in a church building, the “sanctuary.” Yes, that is where God’s holy people meet. Yes, worship takes place there. Yes, the Word of God goes forth there. But there is a danger of idolizing that room, or the whole building for that matter. And any room where prayer and the word take place can be considered a holy place. The Romanist/Jewish idea of a particular place where we go to be holy and to meet the Holy One, is not supported in the New Testament.

That said, there is a Holy Place for New Testament people. There is even a Tabernacle to house that Place. There is a High Priest who ministers in the Sanctuary. All of these realities are Heavenly, not earthly.

Jesus, our Minister/Priest intercedes for us before the Father. Offerings of prayer are made before Him, and by the Spirit of God that entire process is part of the church’s life. There is a Holy

Church that the Holy Spirit indwells. Its boundaries are invisible but very real. This is the Place where true ministry happens in a true Tabernacle, a true House of God. Step back and look at it all. It is in Heaven, and through the Spirit in the church, it is also on earth.

One day these realities will be manifested to all. For now we take it by faith that everything the Law pointed to is being fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

8:3. How does Jesus' offering match the "gifts and sacrifices" of the Aaronic priests?

Though a multitude of offerings were enjoined upon the priests, Jesus offered only the one Sacrifice, the one which satisfied the wrath of God regarding sin, namely, Himself. (See 7:27) This was all He had to offer, all He needed to offer.

Some might want to look on His intercession, His empowerments for ministry, His coming Kingdom, as part of the outpouring of "gifts", but it is probable that Calvary is all that is intended here.

8:4. Why wouldn't Jesus be a priest if he were here?

Moses' priests did what the Law says. They offered sacrifice after sacrifice, in hopes that God would be appeased and that the people would be able to change their ways. Jesus could not officiate over a system like that, though He once enjoined it upon His people so they could be tutored in their understanding of their need.

While the Jewish system continued, begun as it was by God's own decree through Moses, Jesus could not be officiating within that process. The author has already proved in chapter 7, that He is the head of another system. He is not of the tribe of Levi, but Judah. He offers the one sacrifice, not millions. His life is eternal, not limited.

The priesthood of Jesus and the priesthood of Aaron cannot function in the same place at the same time. That old way was simply a shadow of what was to come. Now that the reality is here, we don't mix the two.

8:5. Why was God so insistent that everything in the Levitical Tabernacle be made exactly as He commanded?

Though the fathers could not see it, the Lord had an ultimate program in mind. He knew that this Tent with its furniture was not the final creation. He knew that His Son would one day dwarf all these pictures by becoming the Sacrifice, the Tabernacle, the Priest, everything!

So the pictures had to be perfect. This was to be no ordinary Tent.

The author quotes Exodus 25:40. The sentiment is repeated in 26:30 and Numbers 8:4. God is very specific.

This "pattern" idea is carried over to the New Testament in that God wants His people to follow the pattern of teaching (Romans 6:17) and living (2 Thessalonians 3:9, Titus 2:7) handed down from Jesus and the apostles. He has not changed when it comes to specific teachings being laid upon His people. There is a pattern. It is to be obeyed.

8:6. Besides Jesus Himself, and His High Priesthood, what else does the author now introduce as "better"?

Jesus' ministry as High Priest is immeasurably better than the priesthood of Aaron. The word "better" does not describe for us what is being said. The comparison is not even close. Eternal vs mortal. Successful vs failed. Heavenly vs earthly. Better by an incomprehensible measure.

But that is not all. This Priesthood involves a New Covenant, the New Testament. We read of this new agreement and its terms in the book by that name, but the Covenant itself is a sovereign pledge between the Almighty and the believers of all time. It is something that registers within us.

The New Covenant, like the High Priesthood of Jesus, is infinitely better than the Old. He will expound on this in the coming verses.

The Covenant that is ours is based on promises which themselves are better than the promises given to Israel. I like the way Barnes articulates this statement:

The promises in the first covenant pertained mainly to the present life. They were promises of length of days; of increase of numbers; of seed time and harvest; of national privileges, and of extraordinary peace, abundance, and prosperity. That there was also the promise of eternal life, it would be wrong to doubt; but this was not the main thing. In the new covenant, however, the promise of spiritual blessings becomes the principal thing. The mind is directed to heaven; the heart is cheered with the hopes of immortal life, the favor of God and the anticipation of heaven are secured in the most ample and solemn manner.

Better indeed!

8:7-8. Did God find “fault” with the Old Covenant or with the people (“them”)?

In verse 7 the author tells us that the Old Covenant had faults, or defects. But in the quote from Jeremiah, the prophet is pointing out the fault of the people.

Most commentators want to go one way or the other. I think that both may be in the mind of the author. There was a defect in the

Covenant, the Law of Moses, because the people were defective. The Law did not provide the means of keeping it. The people were unable to do what the Law required. Something would have to be made that would resolve both issues at once. This resolution is the very thing proposed through Jeremiah (31:31-34).

8:8-12. What is the main and significant difference between the Old Covenant (Testament) and the New?

Sinai was a written covenant that demanded perfection in every word, to be gained via man's perfect obedience. No one was able to keep that perfect law. It was doomed to failure, and was created to bring man to the point where he absolutely needed a better way.

The better way came through first the death of Jesus, then the filling of the Spirit to create in man a new and clean heart, one that would obey by its new nature, not dependent on the old nature.

Persons living under the Old Covenant did not necessarily even know the Lord. Those living infused by the Holy Spirit, true Covenant people, all know Him, every one.

The New Covenant is a different mindset. A new and better way. Oh, much better.

8:11. Do all know Jesus today?

The answer is obvious, but I ask it to make all understand that we are not living yet, visibly, in the day foretold here. Though the Gospel has come to us, it has not been received by all. When unbelievers are moved out of the way, at the coming of Jesus, then shall the saying here come to pass. Everyone left will know Him. You won't have to go around asking people to "know the Lord." That knowing of the Lord will be a prerequisite of living in the Kingdom.

Of course, there is a measure of such today. In Israel, it was quite possible for a person not to have a relationship with God. In the true church, this is not possible. Trouble is, who is a part of the true church? Are you sure?

8:12. Does the New Testament begin in Matthew 1?

It is a bit confusing, when teaching new ones about the Covenants, explaining to them that the New Testament (Covenant) does not begin officially until Jesus' act of sacrifice for our sins. When sin is taken away, the Old Testament ends. The record of this is at the end of the four Gospels. So, no, the Covenant does not begin in Matthew 1. It is not even ratified within the assembly called the church until Acts 2, when the Spirit fell.

Though we have a record of all these proceedings, and the teachings and prophecy that belong to the church, in a book called the New Testament, we must continually remind ourselves that the actual fulfillment of the Covenant promise does not happen in a book. The New Covenant is the new life in Christ through the Spirit. It is Christ in us. The Book merely informs us of these realities.

If all we have is a book, wonderful as it is, we have nothing more than the Old Testament saints had, and that system failed.

8:13. Has the Old Testament vanished, disappeared?

God made the Old Covenant obsolete, that is "no longer in use or no longer useful." Old is old. Old things eventually die.

Actually, at this writing, the Old Covenant was legally dead as far as any binding on God's people. Jesus was risen, the Spirit had fallen, the church was formed, the new life was introduced.

Why then suggest that it was only “ready” to disappear? It is thought by many that this is a reference to the coming destruction of Jerusalem, of which the writer of Hebrews knew nothing.

God’s curse was on the failed system because of the evil men who claimed to be in charge of it. He had sent a new and better way but they had rejected it and killed the appointed High Priest.

Within forty years of that horrid event, another horrid event occurred. With the coming of the Romans under General Titus, A.D. 70, the Temple itself was destroyed, thus causing to vanish from human history the sacrificial system and the Law that demanded it. Two systems of God-ordained sacrifice and forgiveness would not be allowed to stand together in the earth. “He takes away the first that He may establish the second (10:9).”

SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-8

Jesus, Son of God, better than all heavenly beings, will rule the world one day though for now He became lower than angels, suffered, and has become a highly effective High Priest in the process.

In the light of who Jesus is, we must take heed to the warnings about the hardening of the heart.

God's grace is available because Jesus was appointed by the Father to be our High Priest.

I warn you again about falling away. But I am convinced you will not fall. God has made a promise to you with an oath. And Jesus has come along and made the promise even more secure by His death on the cross.

All of this is pictured by the man Melchizedek. Through examining this story we conclude that the Levitical priesthood is not the final antidote for sin. An eternal unchanging Priest was needed, and Jesus is that Priest.

Not only is He the giver of the Sacrifice and the Sacrifice itself, He is the Mediator of a New Covenant between God and man, one foretold by Jeremiah. The Old Covenant is finished.

CHAPTER 9

9:1-5. What elements of the old system, which the author claims is about to pass away, does he use to compare to the new?

He mentions the following:

- The Tabernacle, or Tent.
- The outer room, or Holy Place, wherein were housed the lampstand, the table, and the sacred bread.
- Two veils.
- The inner room, the Holy of Holies, where resided the altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant, which itself contained manna, Aaron's rod, and the tablets of the Law.
- The cherubim above the ark focused on the mercy seat.

But he makes it clear (v. 5) that he is not going to give all the typology of each item. Rather, the rest of the chapter deals with the Holy of Holies, and what that means today in reference to the actual Heavenly location of it. For all of these items of Moses were merely pictures of a reality in Heaven. The author is content that his readers understand the main event of the Old and New Covenant: The entry of Jesus Himself into the Holy of Holies.

9:2-3. How many tabernacles were there?

The Hebrews knew, and so did this writer, that the Tabernacle of Moses is one. Exodus 26 clarifies this for us. Yet the author treats the two parts of the structure as though they were two separate tents. Indeed, the symbolism they were meant to portray is of a reality that justifies such talk. What could be more separate in our

thinking than the difference between a place where man is permitted and a place where only the perfect holiness of God is exhibited?

There is one [part of the] tabernacle that is in view in the rest of the chapter, namely that “Inner” sanctum, the Holy of Holies, which Moses designates simply as the Most Holy [Place].

9:3. How many veils were in the Tabernacle?

When we think of the veil of the Temple – and thus the Tabernacle – we remember the day when it was split in two from top to bottom, signifying that God Himself was opening the door to Heaven to all. But there was indeed another veil, or curtain, hanging at the entrance of the first room of the Tent, dividing the court from the Holy Place. That is, it was placed at the entrance of the entire Tent. See Exodus 26:36-37 for this description.

It is behind the second veil the author now takes us and explains what is there in the Heavenly realm.

9:2-5. To what Mosaic pattern was the writer referring when he listed all the elements of the Tabernacle?

The informed Hebrews of his day knew exactly where all the items of verses 2-5 could be found in the ancient Tabernacle, though the present Temple, about to be sacked, was devoid of these things. Today we would refer people back to the original in Exodus 25, 26, and 30. But this quick summary of the things mentioned:

The lampstand. A seven-fold light, today known as the menorah. It symbolizes Jesus, the light of the world.

The table and the sacred bread. This special holy bread was to be kept visible at all times. From this table David borrowed during his escape from Saul. Jesus, the bread of life, is depicted.

The altar of incense from which a specifically designated mixture of spices was to be offered in a prescribed way near the ark. Incense can mean for us, the prayers of God's people.

The ark of the covenant. A box containing cherished items of Israel's encounters with God, especially the tablets containing God's Law. The covenant-keeping God has now established a new covenant with God's people, written on their hearts.

Also in or on the box:

- The manna. A container of manna was set aside to remind God's people of how they were preserved in the forty years of wilderness wandering.
- Aaron's rod that budded. As a demonstration of God's choosing of Aaron's priesthood over the challengers to his office, God miraculously brought forth blossoms on a barren rod.
- The cherubim and the mercy seat. The top of the ark was overlaid with gold and designated as the seat of mercy, the place where God actually met with the leadership of Israel, directed them, forgave them. Overspreading this cover were the wings of two carved cherubim, somehow shown to their creators.

I will follow the lead of our author and not elaborate any further on each of these items. Those who wish further explanation of them should go to the indicated Scriptures.

We shall continue on with his lead-up to the true meaning of Tabernacle/Temple worship.

9:6-7. How does the author specify the difference in activity between the outer and inner rooms of the Tabernacle?

The outer room saw a plurality of ministers coming and going, performing their various duties. Benson's commentary gives us insights regarding these services:

Performing what was there to be done, namely, burning the incense at the morning and evening sacrifice, dressing the lamps and supplying them with oil, changing the showbread every sabbath morning. Added to this, as the principal part of the service of this tabernacle, the priests brought into it the blood of the sin-offerings, and sprinkled it before the veil, Leviticus 4:6. At all other times they entered into it without blood, for the blood of the burnt-offerings was sprinkled about the altar, Leviticus 1:11.

No one is suggesting that these actions were without merit or importance. But they are not to be compared with what went on in the Holy of Holies.

Here only one priest could enter, the High Priest. And he could enter only once a year. This was the day of atonement, the Yom Kippur, celebrated to this day, but today without the required blood.

Thus the Jews of our day, and every day since Christ's offering, have rejected the blood given by God and have had taken from them the blood expected by Moses. Theirs, like the Catholics,' is an "unbloody" sacrifice, totally worthless in Heaven. To reject the sacrifice given once for all on the cross of Calvary is to invite the eternal wrath of God.

Leviticus 16 outlines the role of the High Priest – in this case, Aaron – on that special day. It is told there how he must dress, what specific offerings he must make, the frequency of this observance, etc.

The Hebrews writer now proceeds to tell us what we are to understand about that procedure, and the New and Better Offering and Priest, Jesus Christ.

9:8. Who gave us the rules and regulations of the Aaronic priesthood?

Perhaps it is unnecessary to note, but here is one of those hidden confirmations that the writers of the New Testament believed the Scriptures to be God-breathed. It was the Holy Spirit of God that ordained all the procedures carried out by Aaron and his descendants.

9:8-9. What can never happen as long as there is an “outer tabernacle”?

Though Aaron could enter the Most Holy Place (on earth) once a year, the picture of the Law is of a Room that entertains no visitors, on pain of death. Forgiveness of sin is impossible. Fellowship with God is impossible. Access to things heavenly, impossible. And as long as the Jewish system remains in place, this impossibility remains.

The word “symbol” in the NASB is from a word that means parable. All that happened in Mosaic days is to be a picture of the realities of heaven for us. And the picture is: Heaven is essentially closed to mankind under the Old Law.

9:9-10. What did the old way lack that is essential for forgiveness?

There were gifts offered. Sacrifices offered. Food, drink, washings. All of this was external. Things to do, things to wear, how to wear them. Do this, do that.

But the conscience could not be cleansed by any of this. Oh that religious practitioners among us could hear this message! Nothing that is done in a “church service” today has the power to cleanse the conscience of sin.

But a change is coming to Israel and all God’s people for all time.

9:11. What is meant by the “good things to come” in reference to Christ’s high priesthood?

He speaks here of the anticipation the Jews had of Messiah’s Kingdom, and the improvements of their lives when that event occurred. Some translations read, “the good things that have come.”

Even promises of Messiah could not have given the Jews an inkling about how improved their condition would be. And even before the official Kingdom is set up, Jesus’ work on Calvary initiates the priestly function of His career. Genuinely good things have come and still will come to God’s people.

9:11. What is the “greater and more perfect tabernacle” here?

The commentators seem split on this one. Some see this tabernacle simply as the antitype of the earthly tabernacle, a non-material reality of the place in Heaven where and how God forgives the sins of man. Jesus in ascending to the right hand of the Father presented His blood as the perfect atonement for man’s errors and God the Father accepted the work of the Son. All of this was done in such a

way as to remain an unfathomable secret for us, but reality nonetheless.

Revelation 15 mentions, by the way, a Tabernacle and Temple in Heaven, with angels coming in and out of it. This Temple, as Isaiah's, is filled with the smoke of the glory of God. There certainly is something in the Spirit world that matches what God said to make on earth.

However there are other views. The *Pulpit Commentary* explains a popular one:

The most notable, as being that of Chrysostom and the Fathers generally, is that it means Christ's human nature, which he assumed before passing to the throne of the Majesty on high. This view is suggested by his having himself spoken of the temple of his body (John 2:21), and calling it, if the "false witnesses" at his trial reported him truly, ἀχειροποίητον (Mark 14:58); by the expression (John 1:14), "The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us;" by St. Paul's speaking of the human body as a tabernacle (2 Corinthians 5:1, 4); and by Hebrews 10:19, 20, where the "veil" through which we have "a new and living way into the holy place through the blood of Jesus" is said to be his flesh. There is thus abundant ground for thinking of Christ's body as signified by a tabernacle; and the expression in Hebrews 10:19, 20 goes some way to countenance such an interpretation here.

Is there a way in which these views mesh? Is Christ's body, now glorified, the very Tabernacle of God, unseen by us, but the reality by means of which our sins have been and are being remitted?

9:11-12. How is it that Jesus entered the Most Holy Place in Heaven with blood? Is this literal talk?

There is much talk of the blood of Jesus in the church. And well there should be. It is the blood that cleansed us from our sins and made it possible for us to live forever with Jesus.

But questions have arisen, and along with the questions, a certain amount of superstition. Romanists have over the years given us images of saints who have seen real blood in the cup. Statues of Jesus reportedly have shed real blood.

Is the literal, physical blood of Jesus still available to God's people? Or when the Bible speaks of the blood does it merely mean that Jesus shed His blood on Calvary and God accepted that sacrifice as final for all time?

The High Priest of Aaron's time had to offer sacrifices of bulls and goats. There was sprinkling of that blood. We will discuss that practice later in the chapter. That sprinkling was literal, physical.

Jesus offered Himself. His blood was shed. But were you, was I, sprinkled with blood literally? Is that physical blood still a part of the cleansing, or rather the historical fact, the "once for all" that is important?

Let us see how the discussion develops about the blood in this chapter before we make conclusions:

9:13. To what Mosaic practices is the author referring here?

The first reference is to the elaborate system of animal sacrifices laid out in the book of Leviticus. The blood of these animals was accepted as an external and temporary satisfaction for crimes committed.

The second reference is to Numbers 19:1-10. A young red cow was to be found and slaughtered. Its blood and ashes were then to be sprinkled on Israelites who had defiled themselves in some way.

As we are introduced to the concept of sprinkling here, allow Charles Spurgeon to lead our thinking in his sermon, "The Blood of Sprinkling.":

But the text [Hebrews 12:24-25] does not merely speak of the blood shed, which I have explained to you, but of "the blood of sprinkling." This is the atonement applied for divine purposes, and specially applied to our own hearts and consciences by faith. For the explanation of this sprinkling we must look to the types of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the blood of sprinkling meant a great many things; in fact, I cannot just now tell you all that it signified. We meet with it in the Book of Exodus, at the time when the Lord smote all the first-born of Egypt. Then the blood of sprinkling meant preservation. The basin filled with blood was taken, and a bunch of hyssop was dipped into it, and the lintel and the two side-posts of every house tenanted by Israelites were smeared with the blood; and when God saw the blood upon the house of the Israelite, he bade the destroyer pass that family by, and leave their first-born unharmed. The sprinkled blood meant preservation: it was Israel's passover and safeguard.

The sprinkled blood very frequently signified the confirmation of a covenant. So it is used in Exodus 24... The blood was sprinkled upon the book of the covenant, and also upon the people, to show that the covenant was, as far as it could be, confirmed by the people who promised, "All that the Lord hath said will we do." The blood of bulls and of goats in that case was but a type of the sacrificial blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The lesson which we learn from Exodus 24 is that the blood of sprinkling means the blood of ratification or

confirmation of the covenant, which God has been pleased to make with men in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since Jesus died, the promises are Yea and Amen to all believers, and must assuredly be fulfilled. The covenant of grace had but one condition, and that condition Jesus has fulfilled by his death, so that it has now become a covenant of pure and unconditional promise to all the seed.

In many cases the sprinkling of the blood meant purification. If a person had been defiled, he could not come into the sanctuary of God without being sprinkled with blood. There were the ashes of a red heifer laid up, and these were mixed with blood and water; and by their being sprinkled on the unclean, his ceremonial defilement was removed. There were matters incident to domestic life, and accidents of outdoor life, which engendered impurity, and this impurity was put away by the sprinkling of blood. This sprinkling was used in the case of recovery from infectious disease, such as leprosy; before such persons could mingle in the solemn assemblies, they were sprinkled with the blood, and thus were made ceremonially pure. In a higher sense this is the work of the blood of Christ. It preserves us, it ratifies the covenant, and wherever it is applied it makes us pure; for "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." We have our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience; for we have come unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

The sprinkling of the blood meant, also, sanctification. Before a man entered upon the priesthood the blood was put upon his right ear, and on the great toe of his right foot, and on the thumb of his right hand, signifying that all his powers were thus consecrated to God. The ordination ceremony included the sprinkling of blood upon the altar round about. Even thus hath the Lord Jesus redeemed us unto God by his death, and the sprinkling of his blood hath made us kings

and priests unto God for ever. He is made of God unto us sanctification, and all else that is needed for the divine service.

One other signification of the blood of the sacrifice was acceptance and access. When the high priest went into the most holy place once a year, it was not without blood, which he sprinkled upon the ark of the covenant, and upon the mercy-seat, which was on the top thereof. All approaches to God were made by blood. There was no hope of a man drawing near to God, even in symbol, apart from the sprinkling of the blood. And now to-day our only way to God is by the precious sacrifice of Christ; the only hope for the success of our prayers, the acceptance of our praises, or the reception of our holy works, is through the ever-abiding merit of the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost bids us enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; there is no other way.

There were other uses besides these, but it may suffice to put down the sprinkling of the blood as having these effects, namely, that of preservation, satisfaction, purification, sanctification, and access to God. This was all typified in the blood of bulls and of goats, but actually fulfilled in the great sacrifice of Christ.

9:13-14. How were you and I blood-sprinkled, and thus cleansed?

It should become increasingly obvious to us that a literal sprinkling of a literal blood on our literal bodies is not what is intended by the author. Though Jesus' literal blood was shed on the cross, He did not somehow preserve the flow of that blood and sprinkle it on us at our conversion. His death, His sacrifice, procured our salvation. God saw the blood and was satisfied.

Notice it is the conscience, and not the body, which is now made holy before God. All of Moses' rituals were outward only. There was nothing that a Jew did in these ceremonies that could take away the

guilt of sin or the power of sin. Only the shed blood of Jesus could do that.

9:14. How was the Holy Spirit involved in the sacrifice of Christ?

The three Persons of the Godhead are involved in every action of Heaven. The Son offered His Body a ransom for our sins to the Father. That we can see. But here we are told that it was through the other Person of the Godhead that all this was accomplished.

We do not read much of the work of the Spirit in Jesus' life after His baptism. It seems this is the normal silence the Spirit assumes in all His own. The Spirit lifts up Jesus, not Himself. But the truth is, Jesus walked in the power of the Spirit all His ministry. The miracles, the victories, the Life itself, was all from the indwelling Holy Spirit that guided every move of the Son.

Thus it was in the power of the Spirit that Jesus was able to endure the arrest, the torture, the shame of the latter days of His life. We think of the Spirit's power as that which resurrects. But the Spirit must be on and in a man who offers himself to a cross even more so. God's Way was written on the heart of His Son through the Spirit that lived in Him.

9:15. What is a mediator and who was the mediator of the Old Covenant?

One that mediates between parties at variance, is the simple definition. Two entities, individuals, or groups, have a grievance. Someone is called to stand between these two and attempt a reconciliation.

God has had a grievance with His people from the beginning. The grievance is about sin. How to bring these parties together, God and His people?

Answer 1: The Law. Here are my rules. Obey every one and we will be at peace, says the Lord. Just do what I tell you.

Sounds easy enough, but we all know the Law, given by God through the mediator Moses, saved no one because of the weakness of our flesh.

A new mediator to enact a new proposal is needed. A new covenant.

9:15. What “reason” is the author referring to as the reason that Jesus could become the mediator of a new covenant?

As he will explain in the next verses, blood must be involved in the making of a covenant or “testament.” Jesus’ blood qualifies Him to be the new mediator.

One legal definition of “testament” is: *an act by which a person determines the disposition of his or her property after death.* We speak today of our “last will and testament.” This is what I want to happen after I die. When I die, this testament is in effect.

But who died under the Old Covenant? This question he answers in verses 18-19. For now it is important to see that Jesus died to inaugurate the new will, which will is still in effect for God’s people.

9:15. Does this verse answer the ongoing question about the status of the Old Testament saints? Were they saved as are we?

The author says that a death took place (Jesus’) to redeem sins committed under Moses. Benson comments:

That is, for the redemption of transgressors from the guilt and punishment of those sins which were committed under the first covenant. In other words, He suffered for this end, that he might

procure deliverance, not only from the condemnation due to the sins which have been committed since his death, but from that due to those which were committed during the former dispensation and state of the church, which could not be fully expiated by any of those sacrifices which belonged to the first covenant.

Yes, the blood of Jesus availed to bring in those who sinned under the Old Covenant, but whose heart looked to God for salvation.

9:15. What inheritance were the Israelites promised? And what is ours?

Israel was promised a land. A Kingdom. A nation. A Messiah. All of this was and will be fulfilled for them. But to us is promised eternal blessing. Ours is a heavenly calling with a heavenly reward (3:1). We will see God and reign with Him. We will live forever in His Presence. Jewish inheritance has been revealed, but it has not yet been revealed to us what wonders we shall become and behold. The promises given to Israel, like everything given to them, are only pictures of the true, to be fleshed out in the glory of the sons of God who shall be revealed.

9:16-17. To what rule is the author appealing here? What is meant by the word “covenant” or “testament”?

This is a thornier issue than what first meets the eye. Commentators go on for some length about the differences between “covenant” and “testament.” *Diatheke* is the Greek word that underlies both ideas.

Some translators and theologians want to make verses 16 and 17 an exception to the general usage of *diatheke* as covenant, since here it seems to be talking of a different transaction.

Strong defines *diatheke* in this way:

diathékē (from 1223 /diá, "thoroughly," intensifying 5087 /tithēmi, "place, set") – properly, a set-agreement having complete terms determined by the initiating party, which also are fully affirmed by the one entering the agreement.

So is *diatheke* simply an agreement between two parties or more like a will made before one dies. I give you Barnes here:

The simple idea is, that God has made an "arrangement" by which his worship may be celebrated and souls saved. Under the Jewish economy this arrangement assumed one form; under the Christian another. In neither was it a compact or covenant between two parties in such a sense that one party would be at liberty to reject the terms proposed; in neither was it a testament or will, as if God had left a legacy to man, but in both there were some things in regard to the arrangement such as are found in a covenant or compact. One of those things - equally appropriate to a compact between man and man and to this arrangement, the apostle refers to here - that it implied in all cases the death of the victim.

The Hebrews to whom our author is writing understood *diatheke* in a way portrayed by the text. We also can understand what is being said because of our experience with "last will and testament" following a funeral.

I believe we should be consistent with Greek words whenever possible. This one in particular has a consistent use in the Greek Septuagint and the Greek of the New Testament. It is that which is conveyed above by Strong.

So we accept the "rule" the author is stating as a fact of God's dealings with man from the beginning, namely that blood is always a part of covenants between God and man. Look at the covenant of blood between God and Abraham, Genesis 15. Behold the

incredible amount of blood needed to secure the Mosaic covenant. And now the author will introduce the even greater blood sacrifice.

Understand that these two verses are an example of the necessity of death, not a literal word-for-word pattern of what happens in the realm of the Spirit. To be sure, in the Old Testament, *animals* died, not men. Nevertheless, the point is made that death occurred before the Covenant could be secured.

9:18-21. To what incident is the author referring now?

The story is recorded in Exodus 24:3-8. In that account,

- Moses spoke all the words of the Law to the people.
- The people agreed to the covenant.
- Moses then put the covenant in writing.
- Moses, early the next morning, built an altar.
- At Moses' directive, several young men offered sacrifices.
- Moses took the blood of those sacrifices and divided it into two portions:
 - Half of the blood was sprinkled on the altar.
 - Moses read the covenant again.
 - The people agreed again.
 - Moses then sprinkled the other half of the blood on the people, announcing that this was the blood of the covenant.

The author of Hebrews adds that the book of the law, the tabernacle, and "all the vessels of the ministry" were likewise

sprinkled. Where did he obtain this information? It is believed that oral traditions passed down through the centuries were well-known among the Hebrews and that the author was drawing on them here. Also, hear Ellicott:

The incident here mentioned [sprinkling of tabernacle and vessels] belongs, of course, to a later date. It is not expressly recorded in Scripture, but is related by Josephus (Ant. iii. 8, § 6); and, apart from internal probability, might almost be concluded from the narrative of the Pentateuch itself. In Exodus 40:9-15 we read of the divine injunction that Moses should put the anointing oil not only upon Aaron and his sons, their garments, and the altar, but also upon the Tabernacle and its vessels. In Leviticus 8:10-12 is recorded the fulfilment of this command; but in the later verses of the same chapter we read that the altar was sprinkled with the blood of the sin-offering (Hebrews 9:15), and that Moses sprinkled Aaron and his sons and their garments with "the anointing oil and the blood which was upon the altar." Manifestly we may infer that the Tabernacle and its vessels were included in the latter ceremony. Whatever was connected with the covenant which God made with His people must be sprinkled with the blood, which at once typified purification (Hebrews 9:14; Hebrews 9:24), and ratified the covenant (Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 9:17).

"This is the blood of the covenant," the first covenant, of course. Moses makes it official here.

1,400 years later, the second Moses, our own great Lawgiver, Jesus Himself, would raise a cup before only a handful of disciples and declare:

"This cup which is poured out for you is the *new covenant in My blood.*" (Luke 22:20)

The blood must always be present when a covenant, a testament, a will, is being ratified.

9:22. The Law provided for cleansing of almost all things. Why “almost”?

In Leviticus 5:11-13, people who could not bring an animal of any kind are allowed to bring a grain offering for their sin. There were also purifications by water and fire that involved no blood. But these items were certainly the exception to the general rule the author lays down here.

9:22. What is the author’s conclusion, and how does he reach it?

Whether on the earth or in heaven, the blood must be applied to forgive sinners. He uses the Law of Moses, which was indeed the Law of God, to prove his point. Even though the Law and these sacrifices only pointed to forgiveness and did not forgive, the fact that God laid them down as His Law proves that blood must be shed.

9:23-24. What are the “copies of the things in the heavens” that were cleansed by the Jewish sacrificial system?

For one, the “holy place” of the tabernacle, mentioned in the very next verse as a “copy” or “pattern” of the true tabernacle of Heaven. And in verse 21 he mentions the various vessels of the service that took place in the tabernacle. Every one of these items had a spiritual significance but was not the real essence of what God was doing. They were only copies, models, of the true. Moses was told to sprinkle animal blood on these copies, but a better sprinkling was needed and provided in Christ. In Christ, the very blood of a sacrificed God was applied to the Tabernacular Headquarters of Heaven.

9:24. Does this “now” refer to the present era that commenced at His ascension, and satisfied God forever, or day by day ever since He sat down at the right hand of the Father?

Hear commentator Gill:

... now to appear in the presence of God for us; Christ, as God, was always in his presence, from everlasting; as Mediator, he was with him in the council of peace; while he was here on earth his Father was with him, he was not alone; but now in his human nature he is at his right hand, where he appears before him, as a favourite before his Prince, on the behalf of another, or as an advocate on the behalf of his client: Christ appears in the court of heaven for his elect, by representing their persons; by presenting himself, his blood, sacrifice, and righteousness, before God on their account; by introducing them into the presence of God, and offering up their prayers with the incense of his mediation; by presenting them to himself, and to his Father, and obtaining every blessing for them. And this he does "now", since his entrance; not that he did not appear before God for the saints of the Old Testament, ... though he did not appear then in the manner he does now, as the Lamb in the midst of the throne, as if it had been slain; but it denotes the continuance and perpetuity of his appearance for his people; he is ever interceding for them.

Such is the consensus of the commentators I have read: Jesus is ever present to and for His people, hearing their confessions, pardoning their iniquities, and so authorized by the fact of what He did on the cross.

Ever interceding... Actually we covered this concept in 7:25, but it was well worth revisiting.

9:25-28. How valid is the daily offering of a “bloodless” sacrifice on the “altars” of the Roman Catholic Church?

According to these verses, there is no validity at all in repeated “sacrifices” as though His one sacrifice was not enough. Human tradition with – I believes – Satanic backing, has created a system by which the forgiveness of Christ is ever contingent on the mumblings of a Roman priest.

No. He says it multiple times:

v. 25, He did NOT offer Himself often.

v. 26, ONCE He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

v. 28, He was offered ONCE to bear the sins of many.

10:10, ...sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus ONCE for all.

10:12, He offered ONE sacrifice for sins for all time.

10:14, By ONE offering He has perfected the sanctified for all time.

How many times does God have to tell us? What part of “ONCE” does the Roman system not understand? Let a Romanist grab the meaning of Hebrews 9 and 10, and the whole Roman structure falls apart.

Rather than wait on such an eventuality, better to come out of Rome now. What wasted effort to belong to a group of men who actually believe they are calling down Christ from Heaven to be sacrificed repeatedly at the tinkling of a bell or the chanting of a formula!

The word is ONCE.

9:26. Where does the writer of Hebrews say we are, historically?

First century A.D., when Jesus came and when this writer composes his letter, is considered by him the “consummation of the ages” (NASB).

Other translations have it,

“The culmination of the ages” (NIV)

“The end of the ages” (ESV, NKJV)

“The end of the world” (KJV)

Though “ages” is consistent with the Greek in the text, the first word, translated so many ways, is, per Strong,

sunteleia: a joint payment (for public service), joint action, spec. completion

You will recall that Joel and Peter spoke of the Day of Pentecost as occurring in the last days. We live in those last days. We live in the day of the Lord, in one sense, a day when all things will be wrapped up, and all in Christ.

First, His coming. Then, His offering. Then His ascension to the right hand of the Father and His intercession. Then His offering through the Spirit and His Spirit-filled men, of this salvation to the entire world of Gentiles. Then His return in judgment.

Two thousand years seems like forever to us, but in God’s eyes these last millennia have been the end of the world as we know it. The grand climax of things may be near, but the finishing of God’s plan continues until the last Gentile seen from the foundation of the world comes into the fold.

9:27-28. How does the writer use our own death as an example of what Christ did for us?

The pattern of human life is clear: We die only once, and go to judgment. So, Jesus: He died only once, and that one death makes it possible for Him to return to save those who would otherwise be judged.

One death for humankind, period. Jesus was a man, and no exception is being made for Him. His death was atoning, but it only had to occur once.

Men are guilty before God. Their sins must be judged. After death comes that judgment. In Jesus' case, He became sin for us when He died. After His death comes, not judgment, but salvation for many of the judged.

Ellicott puts it this way:

The work of redemption is so ordered as to correspond to the course of man's history: as man must die once, and what remains is the judgment which he must abide, so the Christ has died once, and what remains is His return for judgment—a judgment which He Himself administers, giving salvation to His people.

9:28. How is it that Jesus returns “without sin,” since Jesus never sinned to begin with?

The first part of the verse clarifies the second part. His first coming was to “bear the sins of many.” The second coming will not be of Jesus the sin-bearer, but Jesus the Savior. The sin problem is settled. Our sins will have been cast far from us and He will not have to deal with them any longer.

9:28. For whom does Jesus return?

One way of describing the awaiting bride of Jesus Christ is “those who eagerly await Him.”

One must search awhile in the Western world to find one whose daily cry is “Come, Lord Jesus!” But in the persecuted world it is a well-known throbbing of the heart.

The concluding chapter of earth’s history is called by us the Great Tribulation, a time of unimaginable suffering and cataclysm worldwide. God’s people will most certainly be eagerly awaiting the coming of their Savior in Earth’s final hours.

SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-9

Jesus, Son of God, better than all heavenly beings, will rule the world, though for now He became lower than angels, suffered, and has become a highly effective High Priest in the process.

Because of Whom Jesus is, take heed to the warnings about the hardening of the heart.

God's grace is only available because Jesus was appointed by the Father to be our High Priest.

But I warn you again about falling away. I am convinced you will not fall because God has made a promise to you with an oath. Your sins are gone.

Consider the man Melchizedek. Through examining his story we conclude that the Levitical priesthood is not the final antidote for sin. An eternal unchanging Priest was needed. Such is Jesus.

This Jesus is the giver of the Sacrifice and the Sacrifice itself, the Mediator of a New Covenant between God and man. The Old Covenant is finished.

All the trappings of the Old Tabernacle point to Jesus. Especially the entering in of a High Priest with blood into the Holy of Holies. Jesus has entered the real Place in Heaven.

The original priests had to enter this place every year. But Jesus accomplished everything by His one Sacrifice.

When He comes again He will enjoy the fruit of His labors.

CHAPTER 10

10:1-4. What were the flaws in the original system?

The writer seems to be reviewing here, and we will review with him. The problems with the Mosaic legal priestly system were:

1. It was meant only to be a shadow, not the essence of God's saving plan.
2. Perfection – sinlessness – could never have been gained by yearly offerings.
3. The sacrifices reminded the people every year that they still had sins that needed dealt with.
4. It is impossible for the blood of animals to take away the sin of humans. A human must die for a human.

10:5-7. When and where did this conversation take place, and between what two Persons?

The “He” of verse 5 points back to the last person referred to in the text, Christ Himself. It is always important to remember that there are no chapter divisions in the originals. We wish at times that man had not inserted them, for, as is the case here, they often separate thoughts.

So, when Christ comes into the world, He is the living enactment of the words spoken one thousand years earlier through King David, found in Psalm 40:6-8 (here in Hebrews 10, verses 5-7).

Notice the tense of the verbs. He comes. He says. Not “He came, He said.” All of which the writer speaks is accomplished fact, yet the

continuing present is used to reflect the eternity of the decrees and actions of Heaven.

By coming into the world with a specific purpose in mind, Jesus is obeying the heart of the Father, a heart which He has revealed to King Saul before David. That desire of the Father is to take away sins, an action He cannot perform through the blood of bulls and goats, which the author has just declared in verse 4.

Immediately we are faced with an issue in the reference. Psalm 40 goes on to talk about the way Yahweh has opened the ears of the One speaking to Him in that text. But the Hebrews writer claims that the text promises an entire Body has been prepared.

Which is it? Hear Benson in his commentary for some clarification:

The words, a body hast thou prepared me, are the translation of the LXX [Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible].; but in the Hebrew it is, Mine ears hast thou opened, or bored; an expression which signifies, I have devoted myself to thy perpetual service, and thou hast accepted of me as thy servant, and signified so much by the boring of mine ears. So that, though the words of the translation of the LXX., here used by the apostle, are not the same with those signified by the original Hebrew, the sense is the same; for the ears suppose a body to which they belong, and the preparing of a body implies the preparing of the ears, and the obligation of the person for whom a body was prepared, to serve him who prepared it; which the boring of the ear signified.

The boring of the ears reminds us of the practice of love slaves who allowed this practice when they were promising to serve a given master forever. Their bodies and souls were thus given over in a permanent covenant with their owner.

So the texts, at first miles apart, do have an overlapping meaning. The Son says to the Father, I am Yours to do with as You will.

10:7. What volume of what book is referenced by the coming Messiah?

The issue is sacrifices. God lets His people know that ultimately the blood sacrifices demanded by Moses cannot take away sin. They only point to One Who can. That One is Jesus, and here He proclaims that He will come and do the will of God, give His own life for the redemption of the world.

But in the spelling out of this desire He mentions that this Sacrifice is recorded in a particular book, and in a scroll of that book.

Actually the death of Jesus is spoken of throughout the Scriptures. From Genesis 3:15 on there are either direct statements or unmistakable pictures of One Who will come and die for the people. This particular reference, say the commentators, is probably to the books of Moses. Since David initiated the words, they would probably pre-date David, and Moses is the most obvious place to find statements of Jesus' death.

10:8-9. What is the writer's conclusion after he reads and quotes Psalm 40?

1. God does not any longer require sacrifice of animals, or the first priestly covenant.
2. God has accepted the second sacrifice, that of His own Son. That "system" shall now be the established law for the Jews (and Gentiles too).
- 3.

10:10. What “will” is the writer referencing here?

Verses 7 and 9 quote the Psalmist – and Jesus – as saying that He comes to do the Father’s will. “Not My will, but Yours,” said Jesus. The wish, the desire, the plan of the Father to save sinners by the blood of His Son is a will that has been written into the fabric of history from the foundation of the world.

10:11-12. After another review, the author now adds what other factor in regard to the work of Christ?

We are thankful that at times Bible writers speak to us in words we can understand regarding heavenly things. Jesus “sat down at the right hand of God.” What could that possibly mean if we look at a literal sitting and a literal right hand?

God is a Spirit. His Presence is everywhere. He can have no right hand in a physical sense. Jesus is the God-Man. Where would He be “sitting” in such a scenario?

No, the picture is given to us to remind us of the relationship between Father and Son, to speak of the fact that the work is accomplished, to tell us that the Father is satisfied and accepts what His Son did without qualification.

It is wording that came through the apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:20. God the Father raised Jesus from the dead “and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.”

Mark 16:19 declares the historical fact: “... He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.”

In Acts 7 we see through Stephen’s eyes a standing Jesus, still at the right hand of the Father, but perhaps welcoming the first martyr of the church into Heaven.

In a more exalted vision, the apostle John, in Revelation 5, sees this same Jesus as a Lamb. He is receiving worship equally with One seated on a Heavenly Throne.

The Father and the Son, one in Deity, one in worthiness, one in program and plan, now reunited in victory and dominion that shall last forever.

Matthew Poole comments:

...he sat himself down (having abolished sin, and finished his work as a servant for ever) in the highest place of dominion and power at God's right hand, while the Aaronites stood trembling and waiting at God's foot-stool: and thence he powerfully and efficaciously commands the blotting out of sins, applieth his merits, and dispenseth to his servants the covenant mercies which he purchased by his own blood for them...

Amen.

10:13. How does the imagery of sitting continue throughout history?

Though the picture of a King on a Throne is an effective way to illustrate what He is trying to say now, we must not think of Jesus as sedentary for these many centuries. We can only imagine what are His movements and activities over the years, but certain facts are sure:

1. Jesus has overcome and is in the very Presence of the Father forever.
2. He is waiting for the exactly correct time to return and finish what He began at Calvary and the resurrection and Pentecost.

3. Jesus still has a host of enemies. What He did at His first coming has in no way shut them down, though it sealed their eventual doom.
4. When Jesus returns all His enemies will be thoroughly defeated. The book of Revelation is clear about this.

The timetable for these coming events is described by none other than the apostle Paul, who once more attracts us to himself as a possible writer of Hebrews. Hear his words to the church at Corinth in his first letter to that congregation (15:22-27):

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to our God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.

Both letters are of course referring to Psalm 110:1 where David is used by God to declare the truth referred to by Jesus and the apostles: Jesus will defeat His enemies.

Hebrews 10:13-14. What is the connection between the victory over Jesus' enemies and the offering Jesus made to perfect us?

The word "for" at the beginning of 14 causes us to ask the question. How is the author connecting these two ideas?

Actually the "for" refers back to the main discussion of this section, the sacrifice of the High Priest Jesus. The other high priests offered sacrifices which cannot take away sin. Jesus offered a sacrifice that in itself is sufficient for all time. A man or woman or child can accept this forgiveness and be made perfect.

The comment about the enemies being conquered is added to show that Jesus is no longer occupied with offering sacrifices, but rather is waiting for the time when He shall return to receive His sanctified people. It is nearly a parenthetical statement, spoken on the way to the main idea: we are forgiven by what Jesus did, not by what the Mosaic code spelled out.

10:15-17. Why does the author quote again the passages he used in chapter 8?

The passage is from Jeremiah 31. Let me quote it here:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD: “I will put My law within them and write it on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their wrongdoing, and their sin I will no longer remember.”

Its contents are broad enough to cover two subjects the Hebrews author is discussing. In chapter 8 he is speaking of covenants, old and new. And Jeremiah speaks directly of that new covenant, comparing it favorably to the old. From their own Scriptures, the Hebrews had to see that the old covenant was not meant to be permanent.

But here in chapter 10 he is speaking of sacrifices and sin being taken away. Jeremiah addresses this also, in that last line. God is actually going to forgive and forget. Sin will be dealt with by the one sacrifice of Jesus.

10:18. What is the author's conclusion, based on his arguments?

It is obvious that if sins are forgiven by the sacrifice of Jesus, there is no need for any further offerings.

10:19-21. What new section of the letter is introduced here?

The "therefore" tells us that an application is coming. Like Paul – and I still lean toward Pauline authorship – the author has given a detailed and specific theology. He has spoken clearly of Christ, His priesthood, His sacrifices, the Covenants, etc.

But also like Paul, he allows the later parts of his correspondence to deal with how this all must be applied in the believer's life.

We can now go beyond the veil through the flesh and blood of Jesus, offered for us. We have an eternal High Priest. We are secure.

10:20. How is it that our way of salvation is "through the veil" or curtain?

Though this was hinted at in chapters 6 and 9, the author clearly states here that it is in Jesus that we have access to the Father. Barnes says it so well:

The plain meaning of the expression is, that the way to heaven was opened by means, or through the medium of the flesh of Jesus; that is, of his body sacrificed for sin, as the most holy place in the temple was entered by means or through the medium of the veil. We are

not to suppose, however, that the apostle meant to say that there was in all respects a resemblance between the veil and the flesh of Jesus, nor that the veil was in any manner typical of his body, but there was a resemblance in the respect under consideration - to wit, in the fact that the holy place was rendered accessible by withdrawing the veil, and that heaven was rendered accessible through the slain body of Jesus.

Now begins the application portion of the book. The final three- and one-half chapters are one long exhortation to faithfulness, and a warning about apostasy. It is the section of Hebrews with which most people are more familiar, especially the famed chapter 11. But there is still much to learn.

10:22. To what do the “sprinkling” and “washing” refer now, since the Mosaic priestly rules do not apply?

Remember that the writer of Hebrews is addressing a very Jewish audience and tries to bring the Christian message in terms they as Jews can understand. The sprinkling of the heart here matches the sprinkling of blood we discussed earlier. The washing reminds them of the ritual washings required by all the priests.

Since the blood image translates into a non-material sprinkling of Spirit, so probably does the idea of body-washing. The use of the word “pure” should let us know that the water being referenced is not H₂O. Here once more is an image of what the Spirit does in a man’s life when he is being regenerated. The conscience is made clean, then the person is made free from sin.

The commentaries and Christians through the centuries are split over whether water baptism is intended by the writer of Hebrews. I would rather say that water baptism is indeed required of one who

has repented of his sins, but that that action may not be what this verse is pointing to.

My objection here has to do with the word “pure.” I believe that the writer may well have had in mind the words of Ezekiel (36:25) where God promised, through the prophet, to sprinkle “clean” water on His people in the future.

Romanism has taken Ezekiel to mean that there is such a thing as “holy water” and that one can sprinkle this holy water on a baby or adult and somehow, magically, make him a child of God, repentant or not.

The earliest Christian teaching, and the Scriptural teaching, regarding the Greek *baptizo* is that it means an overwhelming, a plunging, an immersion. It is a picture of the burial of Jesus Christ and our own death and burial, figuratively.

To make any of this literal is to go back to Moses, where priests were literally sprinkled and literally washed. Our writer is simply bringing into the spiritual what once was literal water.

That Ezekiel 36 passage bears out this interpretation by referring to the Spirit more than once. I would contend that never once has a man or woman or child been regenerated, washed by God, through water, any more than the blood of bulls and goats can take away sin.

But I immediately add that water baptism is a commandment to be obeyed, and is the first commandment after a man has been born of the Spirit. Let God give His Spirit, and let man echo the gift by going down into the water.

10:23. What does Jesus' faithfulness to us, demand from us?

Jesus keeps His promises. Heaven promised the prophets that one day He would start a new covenant; that He would write His law on our hearts; that He would forgive our sins, and even forget them. Jesus has kept the promises that Heaven made and the writer here admonishes the people of God to return this unwavering commitment to us with an unwavering commitment to Him. We love Him because He first loved us.

10:24. Are we told here to think of ideas or of one another?

Though the Greek is a little unusual here, I believe it is best served by using the KJV rendering:

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

Other translations interject a "how" into the mix and give the impression that we are to think up ways to stimulate our brothers to love one another. While there may be truth in such a notion, I do not believe that the text demands it.

The idea seems to be that we are to care about our brothers to the point that we encourage them to live godly lives.

By the way, "provoke" here may not be the best way to translate *paroxusmos*, because of the way we use it today. Nevertheless, it is a strong way of saying that some of our brothers do need a jab now and then, a little irritation, to get on the right pathway.

10:25. Is the “all the more” of this popular verse referring to more and more assembling, or more encouraging?

In the first place, the earliest church was meeting daily in the Temple. How frequent were the meetings after that we are not told. There seems to have been a special meeting on the first day of the week, but it is hard to imagine that that was the only time they came together. These people loved one another and were experiencing the goodness of God, which they shared when they met.

In short, grammatically and historically speaking, I don't believe that the author is here telling the people to meet more often. Rather he is telling his readers to *encourage* people *more and more* to assemble, as some have begun to stay away from church, thinking it was not all that important. Their tribe is with us today...

Notice that the “love and good deeds” of verse 24 is connected to assembling together in verse 25. It is in the assembly where the word is preached that God's people learn about how to live the Christian life. This is the reason for the assembly, not merely to receive an emotional high once or twice a week.

10:25. To what “day” is the author referring?

The Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary says,

This, [“the day”] the shortest designation of the day of the Lord's coming, occurs elsewhere only in 1Co 3:13; a confirmation of the Pauline authorship of this Epistle.

You see I have not given up on throwing out hints that Paul is probably the author of this epistle. At least, one who knew Paul quite well. But we digress...

It seems at first unusual that the writer would suddenly introduce the “day” into their thinking. But in fact, he has already introduced it. In the last chapter, at the end, which is really a part of this same chapter 10 discussion, he has told them that Jesus, the sin-bearer, will come to earth a second time without having to deal with sin, for those who are eagerly expecting His return.

In chapter 8 he mentions the coming of a new covenant, where all will know the Lord and sin will be history. Surely they knew this day had not come.

Chapter 6 mentions “the end” and the inheritance of promises.

Chapter 3 speaks of a time when it will no longer be “today” for which the Hebrews must prepare with an un-hardened heart.

Chapter 2 talks about escaping judgment to come.

And chapter 1 quotes the Psalm that says that one day all of Jesus’ enemies will be a footstool for His feet.

Later in this very chapter (10) and in other passages to come, the writer speaks of the day of the Lord that is coming. It is an underlying theme of the book.

His mention of “the day” actually introduces his final thoughts in the rest of this chapter, namely more warnings to those who are thinking of abandoning the Christ way.

10:26-27. What does it mean to “receive the knowledge of the truth”? And is there no forgiveness for the sinning Christian?

We come upon now the second of two passages in Hebrews that are the go-to verses for those who tell us we can lose the salvation that God has given us.

The question of course is, Has God given it to us? Is the writer here addressing the believer or the unsaved? Is he speaking directly to his readers or is he speaking to them about some group other than them?

I shall not resolve in a few words what Christians have wrangled about for centuries, but let me allow some observations.

Notice the wording carefully. The receiving of the knowledge of the truth is akin to the seed that Jesus spoke of in the parable of the sower. A man sowed. It was good seed, but it fell on hard and thorny and rocky soil. Thus, was it "received" by the soil? In a measure, yes, but toward fruition, no.

A man may "receive" the word in a church service and delight in it, and say somewhere inside that he'll have to go after what the preacher was talking about. But through immediate distraction, or worldly cares, or people's ridicule, he decides against such a path. He continues his sinning ways, though the Gospel had called him to repentance.

For such a man, the sacrifice of Calvary means nothing, and the writer here tells that man, There is no other sacrifice coming down the road. This is it. Speaking specifically to the Jewish people who will read this letter, he says, You had Moses, you rejected him. Now Jesus has showed you what Moses really meant. If you reject Him too, there simply is nothing else. Nothing but judgment.

This to me seems a more reasonable understanding of the writer's words than to say to a struggling Christian, If you don't repent of this thing that keeps tearing you down, you're going to hell. You can't keep on sinning!

Though it is true that Jesus calls His people to perfection and holiness, is there one who does not stumble now and then? The remedy for such people is in chapter 12, not here. This seems to be a warning to the Jews who are still hesitant about coming over to Christ from Judaism. The writer lets them know this is their last chance for salvation.

Please recall that there is no address for this letter, no designation as to who should be reading it, except “Hebrews,” a title added later. Though most of the book can indeed be said to be an exhortation to believers, there is no reason why the unbeliever cannot come into the writer’s view. This seems to be one of those places.

Isaiah 26:11 is the source of at least part of verse 27:

*LORD, Your hand is lifted up, yet they do not see it. They see Your zeal for the people and are put to shame; **Indeed, fire will devour Your enemies.***

Here was my explanation of Hebrews 10:26 and following from my *Through the Bible Q & A*:

Here is a man who has received the knowledge of truth, but ignores it and keeps on sinning. There is no hope for such a man. No other sacrifice has been provided. These people may hang around the church for one reason or another, but at the end of this passage, verse 39, the writer separates himself and all God’s people, from such unbelief by saying, “We are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”

So, in the two most frightening verses of Hebrews (chapters 6 and 10), the Hebrews writer distances himself and his hearers from the

persons he is describing and affirms the true believers by letting them know that they are not going to fall away!

10:28. Where is the Mosaic passage that spells out what the Hebrews writer is describing here?

Deuteronomy 17:2-7, a frightful text, speaks of the judgment on the disobedient. In particular, those who are found to be worshipping other gods are first to be investigated thoroughly, then brought before a solemn court. Out of the millions of Israel, only two or three are sufficient to corroborate the evidence found and condemn the sinners to death.

The writer here sets up a comparison. Under the old covenant, death could come immediately following the testimony of the witnesses, and no mercy was to be shown.

What of the new way? Mercy?

10:29. What punishment is more severe than death (by stoning)?

The offender under Moses had set up idols in place of God. He had broken the very first and most obvious of the rules of Heaven inscribed on earth as the ten commandments.

Our writer now describes a more serious offence: taking the true God from Heaven and trampling Him under one's foot.

The major translations are consistent in using the word "trample" here, a word we do not use often in our day. Strong tells us that the Greek is

From kata and pateo; to trample down; figuratively, to reject with disdain -- trample, tread (down, underfoot).

And so the English should be dwelt on a bit also. It is an awful word in reference to our treatment of Jesus. Webster:

1:Tramp: especially : to tread heavily so as to bruise, crush, or injure

2: to inflict injury or destruction, especially contemptuously or ruthlessly —

3: to crush, injure, or destroy by or as if by treading

It is thus that the Holy Spirit views rejection of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the great High Priest. Bruising. Crushing. Injuring. Ruthlessness. Destruction.

But the writer does not tell us here what the greater punishment for this much greater sin might be. We know it now to be eternal death, eternal separation from God, in fellowship with the devil and his angels.

Moses was punished with death. But we will see him in glory. Those who are punished with eternal death will never be seen again. The contrast is stark and meant to shake the Hebrew readers, as well as the rest of us, into repentance.

10:29. How is it that the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of grace,” is insulted?

Though Barnes does not hold to specifically Calvinistic views, his comments here are helpful:

The Holy Spirit, called “the Spirit of grace,” because he confers favor (grace) upon people. The meaning of the phrase “done despite unto” – ἐνυβρίσας enubrisas – is, “having reproached, or treated with malignity, or contempt.” The idea is, that if they were thus to apostatize, they would by such an act treat the Spirit of God with

disdain and contempt. It was by him that they had been renewed; by him that they had been brought to embrace the Saviour and to love God; by him that they had any holy feelings or pure desires; and if they now apostatized from religion, such an act would be in fact treating the Holy Spirit with the highest indignity. It would be saying that all his influences were valueless, and that they needed no help from him.

The disciple of Calvin would say that the apostasy of a true Christian from the faith of Jesus is impossible, and would assign this passage to those who came close to converting but never did. Others might say that a Christian can apostatize but not to the point of eternal condemnation. In either case, or in the Arminian sense, the Holy Spirit is dealt a slap on the face when He is treated so. Here is God Almighty offering a way out of the tragedy of an unredeemed life, an un-atoned sin, and here is little man saying, "I don't need that. I'll keep what I have."

The text does not get any lighter in verse 30:

10:30. Is the God of vengeance and judgment an "Old Testament" idea?

In the light of this verse, to ask the question is to answer it. Such fantasies abound in the church today of how the idea of God has evolved over the centuries until in the days of Jesus and the apostles we now have only a God of love and mercy and kindness and forgiveness.

Of course we have all of that. But the writer of Hebrews reminds us that we still have the God of the Old Covenant. One God, Who never changed and never will change. He cannot change. And He cannot lie. And He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. Those who refuse to accept Jesus' sacrifice for them will have to sacrifice

themselves for their sins, and since they are not eternal God themselves, their sacrifice can never ever be enough.

The verses quoted in 30 are both from Deuteronomy 32. The former is verse 35 and the latter, verse 36.

10:31. How is universalism refuted here?

Whether one can or cannot lose his salvation, it is clear from this verse that somehow, there is a group of people who will “fall into the hands of the living God.” And those hands will not be there to wipe tears from the eyes, or heal wounds of earth’s battles. They will slap down into hell fire those who dared to insult the Spirit and reject what God Himself did on a cross for them.

Not everyone is going to make it to heaven.

But some are. And it seems many of the audience of this apostle are among that number. For as in chapter 6, starting with verse 9, there is suddenly a shifting of gears:

10:32 (6:4). What does it mean to be “enlightened”?

In these two instances, chapters 6 and 9, it seems to me that the Calvinistic way of thinking is vindicated if the readers will just keep reading. Observant readers will immediately realize that my comments took a different turn in chapter 6. There I was trying to say that the persons he describes were probably not saved. Now I am suggesting another way to approach this text, more in line with other New Testament teachings.

In chapter 6 we are told that “enlightened” people, if they were to fall away, could never be renewed to repentance. The author goes on to say, “we are convinced of better things concerning you.” The enlightened ones he addresses there *are going to heed the warning,*

and will by his writing and their heeding be received into eternal security with Christ.

It seems to be the same here in chapter 10. My clue is his using once more the term “enlightened.” These were true believers. The light of God had shone in their hearts, and they were ready to lay their lives down for the Gospel and the Gospel-carriers they met.

Serious, serious threatenings in verses 26-31. Suddenly the voice is tender, compelling, reassuring. Just think back brothers, remember what you’ve come through. Stay the course.

This turn-around will be the key to their own salvation. They will heed this warning also, they will look back at what God has done in them, they will be saved.

10:32-34. What evidence does the writer give here of the Hebrews’ salvation?

32: Endured conflict of sufferings.

33. Were made a spectacle through people reproaching them and causing trouble for them.

33. Became close friends of the persecuted church.

34. Showed sympathy to prisoners.

34. Accepted the loss of property that was stolen or burned by persecutors.

10:34. What was the mentality of early Christians regarding their personal belongings?

Who needs them? Our Lord is preparing a place and possessions for us in the heavens that is unspeakably better and lasting forever.

10:35-36. What is the conclusion of the writer, in light of all the theology he has shared with them, and in light of their own past with Christ and the people of God?

Don't throw all this away! You hoped that Christ would save you. Hang on to that hope! Nothing has changed in Heaven. Don't let it change on earth and in you. Endure to the end so you can receive what you hoped for, what He promised to give you.

10:37. How can the Scriptures repeatedly tell us that Jesus is coming in a little while, or soon?

I have often answered this question by looking at the word "soon" and explaining that it can also easily be translated "quickly." Quickly, as the eagle swoops down on the prey, or as the lightning flashes. A long wait, then quickly, suddenly, He is here.

But in this passage the phrase "very little while" is used and the explanation is not so handy. The writer is possibly referring in this verse to Habakkuk 2:3, though his quoting is more of a paraphrase than a direct quote.

Of course, Habakkuk referred to the first coming of Christ. Yet that first coming did not occur until hundreds of years had passed after the prophet lived.

The phrase is used in Isaiah 26:20, speaking of a judgment that will soon pass, and by Jesus Himself in John 16:16: "A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me." Both phrases in Jesus' words had to do with a matter of hours and days, not hundreds of years.

Here the author seems to be using the words to encourage the Hebrews to be steadfast. If they will just hang on a little while longer, deliverance will come.

The early church lived in expectation of the soon return of Christ. Later revelations in Scripture help us to understand more fully the details of that return. Certainly He will not delay past the appointed time, for there is an appointed time. The date is circled on Heaven's calendar.

That date could indeed be near. But the next verse speaks to the possibility that a wait may be involved. Until He comes, we live, we endure, by faith. God's true people live this way. They hear God, they believe God, they obey God. For them, the coming of the Lord will seem "a little while" as they are busily engaged in Kingdom business.

10:38-39. The question again, and the answer: Can a man shrink back and lose his soul once he has been enlightened?

The *if* is the key here. If a man could fall away totally from God, God would have no pleasure in that man. Obviously. But we, that is the writer and his readers, are not in that category. Those who are reading these words and believing them are chosen of God and simply will not "shrink back."

Now, the debate continues. Is the writer simply giving them a pep talk? That is, "Hey, you can make it. We are God's people! Hang in there! We win!" Or is he stating a profound theological statement? We who are saved now simply do not fall away! If we have true faith now, we will have the kind of faith that endures to the end.

He then goes on for the entire 11th chapter to define faith, in case someone was wondering what it was. This faith is the means by which this theology will work out. Faith is the way that election is demonstrated in a man's life. Have faith? You are chosen of God!

SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-10

Jesus, Son of God, better than all heavenly beings, will rule the world, though for now He became lower than angels, suffered, and has become a highly effective High Priest in the process.

Because of Who Jesus is, take heed to the warnings about the hardening of the heart.

God's grace is only available because Jesus was appointed by the Father to be our High Priest.

Though I warn you again about falling away, I am convinced you will not fall because God has made a promise to you with an oath. Your sins are gone.

Consider the man Melchizedek. Through examining his story we conclude that the Levitical priesthood is not the final antidote for sin. An eternal unchanging Priest was needed. Such is Jesus.

This Jesus is the Perfect Sacrifice, and the Mediator of a New Covenant between God and man. The Old Covenant is finished.

The old ways of Moses all point to Jesus, especially the entering in of a High Priest with blood into the Holy of Holies. The original priests had to enter this place every year. But Jesus accomplished everything by His one Sacrifice.

When He comes again He will enjoy the fruit of His labors.

The Law was a shadow, but in Jesus is the substance. So come to Him. I warn you yet again that He is the last chance for you to be saved, but I again am confident, from your past record, that your future with Christ is assured. We are the people of faith, and we will be saved.

CHAPTER 11

11:1. How is the author's definition of faith different from what we hear in our day?

Many strange ideas have surfaced in the Christian church, like the one that makes "now" an adjective describing faith in Hebrews 11:1. I won't even go there.

The most common misunderstanding of Biblical Christian faith is that it means simply to believe. An intellectual assent to some fact. Believing is a good thing. But as James points out, every demon believes that Jesus is the Son of God, and every other doctrinal point we could spell out, except perhaps his – Satan's – final defeat in a lake of fire, along with said demons.

Some belief is pure gullibility. Eve believed and lost everything for the human race. The fact that I believe something, whether it be false or true, may change worlds, but not save me. Faith is more than belief.

True faith involves more than the brain, in other words. God faith is rock-ribbed assurance deep within that a thing we have hoped for will indeed happen or has already happened. So in this context, faith follows hope.

The obvious question then, whence the hope? The writer in chapter 6 speaks of this entity. He says that the fact that God has Himself sworn with an oath regarding His covenant with us, is our hope and is like an anchor that keeps us from swaying.

The promises of God, in the Word of God, give us hope that is steadfast and sure. Faith comes along and says the "amen." Faith is the assurance that what I have hoped will indeed be. This is not

wishy-washy hope, frivolous demanding of God riches and fame and comfort in this life. This is about eternal values.

God has ordained certain things for His people. He has called those people by His Spirit. He puts in them at that calling a hope of sins forgiven, a hope of eternal life. The desire is real and stabilizing. Faith is the everyday confidence that what we have hoped for is real. Faith gives the day's marching orders. Faith lays out a life program that is consistent with the hope that is in us.

We cannot see God. We cannot audibly hear Him making these promises to us. But hope and faith tell us that does not matter. We know that we know these promises are real and will be fulfilled.

In short, faith is supernatural. No man can believe such things unless the Spirit of God has quickened him. Did Abraham think all of these things up and just start walking to Canaan, or did he hear from God? Such questions can be asked and answered in the same way about every man and woman of faith that is about to be described in chapter 11. And the same is true with you, if you are born of the Spirit of God.

11:2. Who are the “men of old” or the “elders”?

Newer translations help us understand texts a little better. The KJV “elders” is closer to the literal meaning of the word, the same Greek that is used to specify the officers of the church. But we understand why it was explained a bit by the NASB and others. These are the men who lived a long time ago, whose lives, though not perfect, were examples of the faith that the writer is trying to define. Their lives were “commended” (Greek), by God, approved, and therefore set before us as models to emulate.

Their stories fill the rest of the chapter.

11:3. If faith is more than simply intellectual believing, how is believing in the creation an example of the faith he has defined?

The devils believe. They believe because they know. They are in the spirit world and they know some things. That is not Christian faith. We believe because God has impressed on our inner being that these things are true.

11:1 talks of the evidence of things *not seen*. 11:3 speaks of things seen being made by things *not seen*. The “not seen” is the delineation between God and man.

It is also the demonstration to us humans of His power. Physical material things seem so almighty to us. But they are mere products of an unspeakably powerful God.

We receive greater insights and greater appreciation and love than the enemy. He wallows in jealousy and revenge. We delight in a God who has *prepared* (Greek *katartizo*) a world for His people. The scholars tell us that *katartizo* is used in many ways. KJV says “framed.” Or it can be

Usage: (a) fit (join) together; met: compact together, (b) act. and mid: prepare, perfect, for his (its) full destination or use, bring into its proper condition (whether for the first time, or after a lapse).

Look over that list in connection with the creation of the world. This was not a whim. This was an intricate design by the Designer Infinite. Why He decided to do all of this for a planet of rebels who have caused him trouble from the beginning, we cannot know now. But somewhere in the middle of all our chaos is a call from Heaven to love and be loved.

Faith understands. Perceives. Thinks. Appreciates. Not just “believes.”

11:4. Where are we told in the Genesis story that Abel was a man of faith?

The only clue we get in the original story is that Abel offered an offering that pleased God. We are not told there why that offering was so pleasing, only that God delighted in it.

Faith is not mentioned by Moses. We are led by our present author and other texts to draw some conclusions:

1. When God accepts your offering, it means you are acceptable to Him.
2. Your offering demonstrates your faith.
3. Acceptable offerings are not made acceptable by their appearance or quantity.
4. God accepts sacrifice of another, not arduous work on our part.
5. The only sacrifice that God accepts for the forgiveness of our sin is the Lamb of God, Jesus.

In telling Abel's story, the author is able to point his readers back to the high priesthood of Jesus, and the sacrifice He offered. Faith, the God kind of faith, will always lead back to Jesus.

11:5. Is faith mentioned in the Enoch story (Genesis 5:21-24)?

Actually there is not much of a story at all. We simply know that he lived a long life, gave birth to Methuselah, and walked with God to the point that God took him up to heaven without death, one of only two such persons recorded in Scripture.

From this scant bio, the writer gleans:

- Enoch pleased God.
- Enoch's faith was obviously what made him pleasing to God.
- If we want to be pleasing to God like Enoch was, we must have the kind of faith that Enoch had.
- Enoch believed there was a God, and that this God must be sought out and, when found, walked with.

We do not hear much about seeking God in our days. Though verse 6 is not meant to be some plan of salvation for a lost sinner, it is true that earlier generations took the seeking of God seriously. A sinful person confronted with a holy God was suddenly facing a dilemma. Would this God truly forgive one such as I? How can I know my sins are forgiven?

Today sinners are told to "say this prayer after me" and are assured that all is well afterwards. This is no better than Romanism's rituals that are said to save one. Eliminate the seeking and the person will wonder all his life whether he has the real deal or not.

There is a seeking and a finding possible and necessary in our day as in Enoch's. First we must be assured that there is a God. Then we go after Him. We find out what He wants from us. We then obey when He tells us. It may not be a five-minute transaction after all. It may involve days and weeks and more of crying before the Lord in repentance and deep sorrow for sins committed.

I will not quote here all the Bible verses that talk about seeking the Lord, but be assured they are a large company. If my reader has not begun this search for a real and living God, perhaps now would be a good time.

11:7. How do people of faith condemn the world?

1. They believe the revelation God without question.
2. They do what they are told to do.
3. They accept the salvation that is offered to them, regardless of the strangeness of the offer.

We all know the story of Noah, but do not often make it our own story. God has handed down a truly clear revelation to us. If we believe and obey it, regardless of the strangeness of the offer, we too will be saved.

We have been offered an ark of safety from a judgment yet in our future. It has already been built. The invitation has been issued to enter the ark. Entering in is all we are asked to do. Strange but true. We enter, we are safe. We do not enter, we are condemned.

It is God who has judged the world once and will judge it again. It is He Who has “condemned the world” to judgment in that sense. We are a part of the condemning process by putting before the world the choice mentioned in John by Jesus: “He that believes is not condemned. He that believes not is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

My coming to Christ, as surely as Noah’s entry into the ark, is a sealing of the doom of all those who are not thus secured. God shuts the door, but not until the entry of all who have been called to God’s safe place.

11:7. What is another product of true faith?

Noah was safe in the ark and would not perish with the world. But the writer of Hebrews takes it a step further. To be saved, then and now, has more than immediate consequences. Noah entered the

household of faith, that family that is clothed with the very righteousness of Christ.

Where is that in the text? Noah was already considered a righteous man. He found grace in God's eyes. Like Enoch, he "walked with God." Then, in those conversations with God, one day he heard that an ark was coming and that he would build it, to save humanity from extinction. He believed God in all of this, and – according to the writer of Hebrews – God made him an heir of another righteousness, the eternal sort. This is why we will see him in heaven, not because he was a good man who built an ark, but because the grace of God was upon him to make him a righteous man.

Even with that questionable incident after the flood involving some seriously fermented grape juice, and even with our failings and fallings, grace conquers, righteousness is accounted as with Abraham later: "And he believed God, and God counted it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

Notice here that true faith involves action, or works, as James would insist. Intellectual belief would say, yes, judgment is coming. Yes, some people will be saved by an ark. But Bible faith says in response to a command to build the ark, I will do it. And he does it.

Bible faith is a meshing of hearing, believing, and doing the bidding of an unseen Deity, on the basis of a clear revelation from Heaven.

The next twelve verses tell us how all this works in the case of one Abraham, a man who just happens to be a major player in the letters of Paul (Romans and Galatians especially). Yet another clue to authorship?

11:8-10. Did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all live together, as the text seems to say?

Perhaps an insignificant point, but Benson clarifies:

In saying that Abraham dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the apostle does not mean that they all three dwelt together in one family, and one place, while they were in Canaan; for Abraham and Isaac had separate habitations when Jacob was born. But he means that, while in Canaan, they all dwelt in tents; and by applying this observation to the two latter, as well as to Abraham, the apostle praises their faith likewise.

11:10. Did Abraham know he was actually in search of a heavenly city? Was this revealed to him at his call?

This theme will be better addressed in verses 13-16, and 39. Here we must say that Genesis is not clear on the matter. That is, we are not told just what Abraham was imagining when he was told to go to a land where he had never been.

One clue we might admit is in Genesis 23:4, where the patriarch confesses to the Hittites when seeking a burial place for Sarah, “I am a stranger and a sojourner among you.”

Indeed, Abraham and all God’s people are strangers, not only in Kiriath-Arba (Hebron of the land of Canaan), but anywhere we are on this planet. Pilgrims, “just a travelin’ through.” But did Abraham have such a fully defined sense of things?

We’ll discuss it further in a little while.

11:10. What city is being referenced?

Not Jerusalem of old, for sure, but the new Jerusalem which is above now, and which will one day descend to earth. The foundations, mentioned in Revelation 21:14, are none other than the apostles of the Lord who passed on the Word of God to God's people.

Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a place for each of us in that City.

Again we have to hesitate when declaring that Abraham knew all about this when God spoke to him in Ur and Haran. But whether he knew it or not, that New Jerusalem was where he, and all of us with him, find fulfillment and the end of pilgrimage.

11:11. Where does Genesis say that it was Sarah's faith that made her able to conceive?

This is a question similar to the one above. What was the mentality of the patriarchs and their wives? From my *Through the Bible* study:

Sarah surely stumbled for a while. We hear her laughing (Genesis 18:12) as she listens to God making promises about her future child. But where does the text of Genesis turn things around for us, as the writer of Hebrews seems to have discovered?

It does not. We must read between the lines. The product that God wanted, the boy Isaac, came forth. Somewhere along the line, Sarah was convinced that God was speaking the truth.

Was it in subsequent conversations with her believing husband? Was she suddenly brought to see the seriousness of the visitation at her own tent? Did the rebuke of the Lord start the faith moving?

We don't know. But the writer of Hebrews has it right. Without her faith added to her husband's, the child would not have come, and

salvation's plan would be destroyed. Thank God for the grace He gave her to believe Him. May He give it to us!

11:12. What Genesis passage is being referenced here?

Genesis 22:17. indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand, which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

Note that Hebrews 11:12 begins with “therefore,” meaning the author is still speaking of Sarah. Because of her faith in God’s ability to make and keep a promise, no matter how unthinkable, Isaac was born.

11:12. “Him as good as dead.” Does this refer to the age of Abraham or the fact that Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac on Moriah? Who is the “him”?

Most agree that the grammar and the context all point to Abraham. But the unambiguous evidence, and yet another hint that perhaps Paul is involved in the authorship, is Romans 4:19. The very same Greek word is used in both passages, though translated simply “dead” in the KJV. In the NASB it is “as good as dead” both times, and the Romans reference is clearly to Abraham.

Though I did not find it anywhere, it seems to me worthy of note that Isaac was as good as dead at one point in his young life also. Nevertheless, this incident will be covered in verses 17-19.

11:12. Knowing the multiplied billions of stars and grains of sand, how is it that Abraham’s descendants are called both?

The promise is not about a specified number. It is about the impossibility of counting such vastness. Consider all the physical

descendants of the man Abraham through his wives. Many millions. Then consider the people of God who have become spiritual descendants through the Main Descendant, Jesus Christ. How many more is that? No one has a clue. They are uncountable but the number is huge. Just like stars. Just like sand.

11:13-16. Is it a city or a country being sought?

Verses 10 and 16 mention a city. 14-16 speak of a country. The prophecies all point to the land of Israel being an eternal inheritance, but of course the New Jerusalem at its center is the great star in God's prophetic universe. That city alone, if we read Revelation 21:16 properly, will be more spacious than any country we have ever heard of, to accommodate all of God's people of all time. Jesus left earth with the promise that He would prepare a place for us. That is what He is doing or has done. And on our pilgrimage we continue to seek for this city in the land of Immanuel.

11:13. How is it that the patriarchs saw the promises from a distance? What promises?

Again we must say, as in verse 10, that it is not clear how much the patriarchs understood of what their call meant in any eternal sense. They were looking for the home that God pointed out to them, and in a shadow they received that home. But they died still believing that God would provide what He promised.

If indeed heavenly and everlasting possessions were in the hearts of the men and women of old, it is through a revelation given to the writer of Hebrews that we learn this. The Genesis text does not seem to suggest it.

11:15-16. What is one proof of our salvation alluded to in this verse?

One evidence that a person is saved is that he does not look back to the sinful life and circumstances of his past and desire to go there again. The sad history of the Israelites is that many did indeed desire to go back to Egypt, but the ones being referenced here were steadfastly headed in the direction of God's plan. It would not have been all that difficult for them to turn around and head back to Mesopotamia, says the writer. But in fact they not only could see an earthly destination, but somehow, a heavenly one, for it was the God of Heaven who had called them.

11:16. Who is the "they" of verse 16?

The immediate reference is to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But verse 14 seems to open the door to anyone who says "such things", that is, the confessing of just being pilgrims, just passing through this earthly land. Those who continue to believe that this world is not their final home honestly believe that a heavenly one is waiting. Of such people God is not ashamed. These are the chosen of God, as opposed to those who are consumed every moment by that which is visible and attainable here.

11:17-19. Where in the Genesis story is evidence that Abraham believed God was going to raise Isaac from the dead?

Genesis 22:5 tells us that Abraham told his servants to wait with the donkey while he and Isaac went to worship. Then, he said, "we will return to you." He had every intention to obey God's orders, and every belief that somehow Isaac would survive the day.

11:19. What does the author mean by a "type" (NASB) or "figure" (KJV)?

The Greek here is *parabole* which means a parable or comparison or simile. The picture of Genesis 22 is astoundingly like what happened to Jesus. See a young man climbing a hill, carrying on his back some wood? See him being laid on that wood to be offered as a sacrifice at the command of God? See that he is the only beloved son of the father? See that the father received him back after he was [essentially] dead? See how he did indeed return to the waiting servants and continue his life?

11:20. How was faith involved in Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau?

We all recall the narrative of how Jacob and his mother tricked Esau out of the blessing. The suggestion must have occurred to us at one time or another, that Isaac could have just said, “Oh my! I made a mistake here. I take it all back, Jacob, that blessing belongs to Esau!”

I believe that here is where faith enters the account. Isaac believed he was speaking on behalf of the living God, Who does not make mistakes, Whose word cannot return void. Isaac could not treat the words that flowed out of his mouth as the words of a man. Faith said, God has spoken, so be it. Regardless of where this leads, I cannot change a word from heaven.

How unlike this prophetic word is the word that flows through the lips of supposed prophets of our own day. How many are saying “The Lord told me” when the Lord never told them anything.

In Isaac’s case, he knew exactly what he was to say to son number one, and what he was to say to son number two. What he did not know was that the numbers had been reversed in Heaven. But the word stood. And the rest is history.

11:21. Where does Genesis 48 speak of Israel (Jacob) “leaning on the top of his staff” and worshipping?

Jacob of course had an affinity to Joseph and Benjamin that he did not have with the other sons, being that they had come from his beloved Rachel. So when it was time to bless Joseph, he decided, all in the plan and purpose of God, to give a double portion to Joseph by including Joseph’s two sons in the family as though they were his own (Jacob’s) sons.

The author tells us that it took faith to do this. Faith put the desire in his heart. Faith put the words in his mouth. Faith knew that one son would be blessed above the other, and it knew which son it was. The patriarchs were thus guided by the Holy Spirit to put a plan in place that Yahweh had known from before the foundation of the world. Faith just knows.

Of a lesser significance then is the question I have asked. Yet it does seem curious to us who know the story of chapter 48 to hear that Jacob was worshipping, and that he leaned on his staff.

The answer is found on variant reading, not in chapter 48, but in the final verse of chapter 47, after which there should be no break. The flow of the story is as follows:

1. Israel is about to die. 47:29
2. Israel calls Joseph to his side. 47:29
3. Joseph is asked to promise Jacob that he (Jacob) will not be buried in Egypt, but with his ancestors. 47:29-30
4. Joseph agrees, and swears that he will do as requested. 47:30-31

5. Israel then bows his head, per the Septuagint and others, to worship God, presumably in thanksgiving for Joseph's oath. 47:31

6. Israel leans forward, in his worship, on his staff. 47:31

Ellicott explains: *The Greek translators have taken the last word of the Hebrew verse to denote "staff" (Genesis 32:10), not "bed," the words which bear these different meanings differing very slightly in form. The whole clause is given here as it stands in the LXX., the difference between the renderings being immaterial for the purpose which the writer had in view. The quotation of the familiar words serves to recall the scene, and brings before us Israel's thankful and devout satisfaction when assured that he should rest with his fathers in the land of Canaan; by this, at the point of death, he expressed his faith in the promise by which Abraham and his seed received Canaan as their inheritance.*

7. Shortly afterward, the report comes to Joseph that his father is sick. 48:1

8. Israel, after the worship incident, has gotten into bed but lets it be known that he is not feeling well. 48:1

9. Joseph and his boys come to a meeting with Israel. 48:2

10. Jacob commences to bless the sons. 48:3 ff

Though it is true that the worshiping and the blessing did not happen at the same moment, they are close enough in the historical event for the author of Hebrews to link them as one happening. Jacob is blessed, worships, and then blesses his grandsons.

11:22. How does faith enter Joseph’s final words?

Here in Genesis 50, Joseph enters the ranks of the prophets, telling the brothers that God is going to finish what he started with his father, grandfather, and great grandfather. He also partly prophesies, partly commands, that his bones too will not be left behind in Egypt. Faith tells him that Egypt is not the land of promise, though eventually Egypt had been incredibly good to him. He knew where the future of the people of God lay... by faith.

11:23. Was Moses spared simply because he was a “beautiful child”?

Exodus 2:2 is in agreement here. There was something singularly attractive about this child that caught their attention. From birth until his being set adrift in the Nile River he impressed them as having some peculiar touch upon his life. Perhaps the very glory of God rested on him.

We will never know what these same parents might have done if the child has been “ordinary.” Many Israelites were complying with the command of the king and depositing their children in the Nile without an ark.

From the beginning the hand of God was on Moses, and faith was communicated to his mother that even if she disobeyed the king, she would be safe. So it turned out to be.

11:24-27. What did Moses know of the “reproach of Christ” and the “pleasures of sin”?

Once more the author sees things that Moses himself could not have identified at the time. The narrative of Exodus only tells us that Moses tried to settle a fight between an Israelite and an

Egyptian, then ran for his life when he realized that his murder was discovered.

We cannot read the mind of Moses with such a scant account, but the writer of Hebrews, illuminated by God's Spirit, is able to identify Moses' actions as a clear decision – in his mind perhaps for a long time – to unite with his persecuted brethren and abandon all the comfortable life which he had known from three months old. This extravagant Egyptian lifestyle the author equates with the pleasures of sin, the very “world” which we today are told not to love.

In uniting with God's chosen people and bearing the life of a fugitive, Moses entered into the perfect will of God for all His own. On this earth, the chosen – including the very Son of God – have always been strangers and pilgrims and reproached of men.

As with Abraham and all the men of faith, we know not how much of God's final revelation was granted Moses, but by choosing to suffer for this righteous cause, Moses had by God's Providence discovered the great truth of the Universe, and would later be introduced to the Author of that truth.

And all of this, his forsaking of Egypt, his self-denial, his championing of the afflicted people of God, was due to faith, the invisible power granted by God to do the will of God at all costs. The narrative and Moses himself do not mention the word, nor are we always aware that the word “faith” is what drives us, but our author insists that faith is working in us every time we do the right thing.

11:28. How was faith involved in the keeping of the Passover and the sprinkling of blood?

We have to go back to the original definition of faith given by the author. The substance of things hoped for. The evidence of things

not seen. Moses and company were up against the greatest power in the world at that time. Though Egypt had been weakened and somewhat demoralized by the nine plagues, it was by no means dead. Its serious military power would be manifest one more time as the Israelites marched through the wilderness in flight.

But Moses had accepted the fact, the given, that Israel was on its way to another land where they would be free from this oppression. This was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the promise made clearly to them. What was an Egyptian dictator in the face of this God?

So Moses did exactly as he was told, though the instructions did not match the need, naturally speaking. By faith in God's Word, he set before the people of Israel God's battle plan, and trusted God to do what He always does.

11:29. Whose faith is recorded in this verse?

The discussion passes here from Moses to the entire nation-to-be. Have we ever imagined what it was like to stand before a huge body of water, watch it divide into two parts, see a pathway of land in the middle, and be told to start walking? But God placed His promises deep in the hearts of the entire assembly that night, and by faith they took one step at a time until the mission was accomplished.

Interestingly enough, the Egyptians had a type of "faith" in the same task but their steps were not rewarded as were the Israelites. The world indeed is able to do some of the things we do, but if they are not guided by the same promises, their efforts will eventually fail.

The Egyptian faith was not about something they hoped for and guided by something they did not see. Theirs was a purely human, logical belief: The Israelites did this, we can do this, let's go. If there is any story that shows the difference between belief and true Biblical faith, it is this one.

11:30. How was it that faith took down the walls of Jericho?

The pattern is established now. The unseen God speaks things that seem undoable, someone believes what God speaks, and things begin to happen. Again the people of God are referenced here. They listened carefully to the instructions of their new leader after forty years with Moses. There is no human logic involved here. No scientific facts Joshua had at hand to prove that such a thing was possible. God's plan was simply God's plan. They obeyed by faith. See here how the two are always intertwined. Any obedience of which we read in Old or New Testament is always due to that unseen force called faith. We may try to analyze it later, Why or How could I have done that? The answer will always be , Faith.

11:31. Can an unbeliever have the God kind of faith?

A question like this assumes that Rahab was an unbeliever. Consistency with Biblical teachings about election and grace drives us to assume otherwise. That is, Rahab received the grace of God to believe that God was with Israel, and not with her homeland. Abraham, surely not versed in the things of God early on, similarly believed God when he heard Him say to disregard the place of his birth and move to a land God would show him. Scriptural scholarship is obviously not necessary for salvation, rather faith in the one true God, a faith that Rahab possessed by virtue of an inner revelation from that God. It is how we all are saved. Revelation of the word of God, faith in the word of God.

To answer the question from a unique perspective, it is only unbelievers that can receive and therefore have, the God kind of faith. You, He brought to life who were dead in your trespasses and sins, declares Paul.

11:32. Is there an example of faith for each of the persons the author mentions in verse 32?

Briefly:

Gideon believed God could conquer thousands with only 300. We look not at his trembling but at the faith that finally won the day.

Barak believed God could put to rout a people that had enslaved Israel for twenty years. He cared not that the glory of the victory would go to a woman; he only knew God was speaking.

Samson believed God was with him, even in all his failure and outright disobedience, and that faith literally “brought down the house.”

Jephthah believed that God had heard his prayer for victory, and carried out a vow to that God that broke his heart.

David believed that God forgave sin and bore the punishment for it with true humility.

Samuel and the rest of the prophets believed every word that God said, and passed it on to the people with the faith that God wanted them to hear what they, the prophets, had heard.

11:33-38. Is there a person or group of persons that fit each description the author mentions?

- Conquered kingdoms: David’s career is legendary for this.

- Performed acts of righteousness: Noah, Job, Samuel, Daniel, were all men of impeccable character before God.
- Obtained promises: Sarah and other mothers who pled with God for a son.
- Shut the mouths of lions: Daniel's story is certainly what is referenced here.
- Quenched the power of fire: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego thrown into a fiery furnace.
- Escaped the edge of the sword: Any number of Old Testament heroes qualify for this line. Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Elijah, etc.
- From weakness were made strong: Samson, at the end of his life.
- Became mighty in war: Barak and Gideon are two examples, already mentioned in verse 32.
- Put foreign armies to flight: Armies such as the Canaanites, the Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, etc. were put to flight by men like Joshua, all the Judges, and more.
- Women received back their dead by resurrection: As the woman of Zarephath, ministered to by Elijah.
- Tortured, not accepting release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection. While some were raising the dead by faith, others were dying by that same faith! The author here seems to be reaching beyond the canonized Scriptures into the eventful history of the Maccabean family spoken of in the first and second books of Maccabees. Martyrdom

abounded during this evil time under the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes.

- Mockings: Samson was mocked by the Philistines when at last they had discovered his secret. The returning Jews who desired to build the wall of Jerusalem suffered this punishment at the hands of Tobiah and Sanballat.
- Scourgings: Jeremiah.
- Chains and imprisonment: Hanani the prophet is imprisoned by King Asa. Micaiah the prophet is jailed by Ahab .
- Stoned: The prophet Zechariah mentioned in Chronicles.
- Sawn in two: Isaiah. Ellicott explains, *An ancient tradition, mentioned both by Jewish and by early Christian writers, relates that Isaiah was thus put to death by order of Manasseh.*
- Tempted: As was Job, by his own wife to “curse God and die.” Or martyrs in the Maccabean period who were offered their life if they would give up their faith.
- Put to death with the sword: Notice that to escape the sword and to be put to death with the sword can both be matters of faith (see above). Both can also be manifestations of unbelief. A coward who will not fight to the death for God or a zealot who dies for the wrong reason will win no favors in Heaven. But one who trusts God to win the battle and one who freely gives His life for another or for the cause of Jesus is heroic on all levels. This verse also might have to do with the martyrs dealt with in Maccabees. But the prophet

Urijah, slain by the wicked King Jehoiakim, is an example taken from Scripture.

- Went about in sheepskin and goatskins: The clothing of the vagabond, the outcast. Men who told the truth all the time about Israel and Israel's God, could not keep up a comfortable life. Elijah is one example.
- Destitute, Afflicted, Ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy): Once more it seems that the Maccabean sufferers are in view, and the prophets in general.
- Wanderers (deserts, mountains, caves, holes). From 2 Maccabees 5:27: *One of those cases may be referred to as strikingly illustrating what is here said. "But Judas Maccabeus with nine others or thereabout, withdrew himself into the wilderness, and lived in the mountains after the manner of beasts, with his company, who fed on herbs continually lest they should be partakers of the pollution;"*

Another commentary, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown adds: *Palestine, from its hilly character, abounds in fissures and caves, affording shelter to the persecuted, as the fifty hid by Obadiah (1Ki 18:4, 13) and Elijah (1Ki 19:8, 13); and Mattathias and his sons (1 Maccabees 2:28, 29); and Judas Maccabeus (2 Maccabees 5:27).*

So the author was not exaggerating. God's people, the true ones, have always walked in God-given faith. Let us not deceive ourselves any longer, if faith has not wrought in us some work of God here on earth.

11:38a What does the author mean by inserting "of whom the world was not worthy"?

One cannot improve on the answer given by commentator Barnes here:

Of whom the world was not worthy - The world was so wicked that it had no claim that such holy men should live in it. These poor, despised, and persecuted people, living as outcasts and wanderers, were of a character far elevated above the world. This is a most beautiful expression. It is at once a statement of their eminent holiness, and of the wickedness of the rest of mankind.

11:39-40. Did not the Israelites receive “the promise”? What is “the promise”?

There is a little bit of a let-down at the end of the chapter. These faithful men and women of God, after all their faithfulness, their practicing of the very thing the writer is asking us to practice, “did not receive what was promised.”

So what was promised? To Abraham and the other patriarchs was promised a land and an innumerable company of people to be added to their family. No, they did not receive that promise. Later generations did. But that doesn't seem to be what is on the author's mind in these enigmatic verses.

What promise was David given? A house that would last forever. Obviously, David could not receive a forever promise in his seventy years. So far the words are still true.

We must look at verse 40 to get the full meaning of the message here. There seems to have been hanging over all the faithful of all those pre-Christian people a promise of perfection, of something better than they had ever dreamed of, but which was involved in their own faithful obedience.

Jeremiah lays it down most clearly (chapter 31). A New Covenant is coming. Not like the Mosaic one. Not a series of laws to be obeyed or else. But the Presence of God Himself is to enter the people of God and cause them to desire to do His will. Other passages tell of the terms of that covenant, the sacrifice needed, the inability of man to keep the old Law, the need for a Redeemer and a host of other such items.

They saw through the Mosaic code, dimly, what was coming, what was needed. The Law was their schoolmaster that brought them to the realization of a desperate need for the very thing that God provided: a substitutionary atonement. They unknowingly bought into that New Thing by buying into the bits and pieces of instructions and events that took place in their history. As we see through a glass darkly about our own future, and trust God for what we do not see at all, so the Israelites simply obeyed and overcame and brought Israel eventually to its new day, which day they can access even now.

The good news of course is that everything they were promised, and everything those promises stood for, they will receive together with us when all God's elect are caught up together with the Lord in the air, perfected, and brought to the headquarters of Earth with King Jesus.

Thus ends the classic chapter of Hebrews. But the thought does not end. There's a "therefore" in the very next verse.

SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-11

Jesus, Son of God, better than all heavenly beings, will rule the world, though for now He became lower than angels, suffered, and has become a highly effective High Priest in the process.

Because of Who Jesus is, take heed to the warnings about the hardening of the heart. Though I warn you again about falling away, I am convinced you will not fall because God has made a promise to you with an oath.

Now, through examining the man Melchizedek, we conclude that the Levitical priesthood is not the final antidote for sin. An eternal unchanging Priest was needed. Such is Jesus, the Perfect Sacrifice, and the Mediator of a New Covenant between God and man.

The entering in of a High Priest with blood into the Holy of Holies points to Jesus. The original priests had to enter this place every year. But Jesus accomplished everything by His one Sacrifice.

The Law was a shadow, but in Jesus is the substance.

I warn you yet again that He is the last chance for you to be saved, but I again am confident, from your past record, that your future with Christ is assured. We are the people of faith, and we will be saved.

Let me tell you now what faith is, and show you by a number of examples from your people, exactly how it works. And these people who believed God in their day, will join with us who believe in Him in our own time, to receive the promise of eternal life that this Jesus procured by His sacrifice.

CHAPTER 12

12:1. Were the Old Testament saints surrounded with a cloud of witnesses? Why the word “also”?

Modern translations have eliminated the English “also” but the Greek *kai* which can mean simply *and*, or as the older translations have it, “also,” is not to be erased so easily.

Here is a verse that needs to be looked at as a whole, before its parts are defined. What is the thought, you English scholars, the subject and the verb?

Right, simply Let us *run* with patience. It is a command. “You” is understood: “(You) Let” would be the barebones meaning. The first part of the verse tells us why we *also* are to run as the Old Testament saints ran: because we have all the saints surrounding us, as it were, showing the way the race can be won.

We, says the author, as well as them, like them, *also*, must run with patience. They have led the way and are before us now guiding.

12:1. Do the Old Testament characters actually see us, witness us? Are they “cheering us on”?

The question is asked often, and if there is an answer to it, it is probably not in Hebrews 12:1. It is the writer of Hebrews that through the Holy Spirit has created the “cloud”. One *witness* at a time has been placed before the courtroom of the mind of the readers of his text. They have all, through his words, been allowed to testify as to how to run the race of faith and enter into the glory of God. Having read all these incredible stories, we are truly surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. It is a virtual surrounding of which the author speaks.

In case there is still a doubt, let the Greek language resolve this issue, as so many others, conclusively. When we think of “witnesses” we think of “spectators,” as at a ball game. There is an overlapping of the idea when it comes to “witnessing” an accident, for there the person, before he testifies, must have seen something. Jesus used the word – *martyres* – when telling the disciples they would be “witnesses” after the Spirit came upon them. And of course they must have seen the risen Christ to be so sent.

But there is another element to the word which rules out mere observation, and that is, testifying. The cloud of *martyres* that surrounds us saw the glory of God. They are not looking at us! They experienced the living God by faith, and the writer here testifies for them, completing the full meaning of the word: an eyewitness who tells his story by words or even giving his life. Hence “martyrs” in English.

We are surrounded by a cloud of *martyrs*! Men who essentially saw God and passed on their faith to us by giving their lives to the Unseen. Let your mind, says the author, be so filled with their stories that you will also run this life of faith to its fullest and to its completeness in the Heavenly City.

12:1. From what imagery is the author borrowing his ideas in verse 1?

Of course the allusion is to a race. Any heavy clothing or weight of any kind, even that taken internally, is meant here. We Christians can think of many things in our own walk/race that, taken on, can slow down or even stop our forward progress: the media, bad friendships, excessive debt, to name a few.

12:2. In what senses is Jesus an “author”?

The word in Greek means “founder,” first in a series, etc. Most of the modern translations have stopped using “author” because of its English connotation in our day. The connection, though, if one chooses to make it, is that authors originate or create books. Jesus originated and created our salvation in fellowship with the Father and the Spirit.

12:2. Did Jesus enjoy suffering?

The joy of the outcome was set before Him. He was not masochistic, desiring suffering for suffering’s sake. See Him in the garden as His humanity cried out for another way, but love demanded the way He chose.

Jesus could see the prize as we are to look at the prize. The contemplation of the prize gives us joy as we endure the suffering. We must never enter into the thought process that suffering itself is our final goal, but the eternal union with Christ and the pleasure of knowing that many others whom we have influenced will have that pleasure also.

12:3-11. Should we connect persecution with discipline?

I mean, the writer of Hebrews seems to do so. In verse 3 he is talking about the hostility of hearers of the message of Jesus. They are told to be encouraged when this occurs. They are further reminded that they have not had to shed any blood for their faith in Jesus.

That all sounds like a description of the persecuted church, yes? But suddenly he takes a turn and seemingly goes down a different path. Now all of a sudden, he is talking about discipline, our need for it,

and how to handle it. More encouragement. More directions about what to do next.

Two separate subjects? Textually, it does not seem to be so. Could it be that God uses the wickedness of men and their resistance to our message to cut us down a notch and give us the refining and purging we so need?

Success in ministry, to any degree, will produce two results, then. It will bring on some angry people. And it will cause some pride to be formed in our hearts. "Look what I did! People are coming to Christ! My church is growing! Lives are being transformed!"

For the latter, the pride, God produces the former, the persecution?

Paul, for example, was rewarded the rest of his days after a spectacular trip to Heaven, with a persistent demonic manifestation. Paul. Now, if he needed cutting back, then so do we.

12:5-6. From what passage does the author draw his exhortation?

Proverbs 3:11-12. Note in reading those words from Solomon, that in the original they are spoken from a human father to a human son. But the author of Hebrews sees in them a word from God Himself to His sons of all time.

The word itself is very painful, and what Christian parent has not said to his child when beginning a discipline "session," Son/Daughter, I'm only doing this because I love you.

True. And even more true with our Heavenly Father.

12:7. Do we endure to be disciplined? Or is this first group of words dependent on the second group?

There is a tricky Greek construction here, and a possible mistranslation, that has caused confusion about the meaning of these words. Those texts following the *Textus Receptus* as the KJV etc. have the preposition *ei* or “if” at the beginning, and the meaning seems clear: If you endure (not endure patiently, but merely experience) discipline, it is a proof that God is dealing with you as He would any son. In other words, a proof of your salvation and sonship!

It is easy to see how the other texts following older manuscripts came up with the Greek *eis* which has a variety of meanings, but not “if.” A totally different thought emerges, but based on reliable texts: *As discipline endure* is how the English would read word for word. It is a complete thought, not dependent on the next words. The idea is that, as Ellicott says,

the troubles that come upon you are for discipline—are not sent in anger, but in fatherly love.

Both ideas are valid Biblical concepts. Both match the context of Hebrews 12. God is a good Father Who disciplines His children as needed.

12:8. Does every true Christian have to undergo correction?

To ask this question is to answer it. If you know one who is called a believer but not experiencing absolutely anything negative in their lives, you can mark it down that they are not true sons or daughters of God. Jesus promised we would be perfect before it is all over, and He keeps His promises. Correction is the way you guided your own child into adulthood. It is how we grow up, too.

12:9. Why is God called the “Father of spirits” ?

The Almighty created our bodies but did not give birth to them. He breathed His Spirit into us at creation, but in these last days has filled us with His Spirit of Truth and Holiness and Power, It is the spiritual person that God has Fathered. The earthly part of our being is decaying and will return to dust. God has not fathered a decaying body.

12:10-11. How is God’s discipline the same as, yet different from, our parents’ corrective measures?

Different:

- The time and extent of parental discipline is based on human knowledge, or following learned principles. Sometimes it is even grounded in a parent’s feelings. But God knows exactly what is curative. The discipline may take years, or be done in a day, depending on the perfect knowledge of a perfect Father.
- The motivation. Parents want obedience. They want to see changes in behavior. The Heavenly Father is after communion with Him in His holiness.

The same:

- True discipline is painful.
- True discipline eventually bears fruit, right conduct.

12:12-13. What Old Testament passages are brought in now?

Certainly the writer to an audience of Hebrew people wants to teach them out of their own books. Here he uses Isaiah 35:3 (verse 12) and Proverbs 4:26 (first part of verse 13).

Note that the Isaiah passage, and therefore this one, is directed to the assembly, and meant to be taken as a directive to individuals to help other individuals. We must watch out for the weak among us, and strengthen them whenever possible. Often we are unable to minister to our own weakness, but surely the Lord will find a way to strengthen us as we have strengthened others.

12:13b. What warning is added to the Proverb by the Hebrews writer?

I believe commentator Ellicott has a good understanding here:

Let the paths (or tracks) which you follow be straight, for crooked and uneven paths will make the limbs which are lame more helpless still; should nothing aggravate the hurt that has been received, it may soon be healed. In the application, the words are a warning against the shifting courses of men who are ready to turn aside from strict duty when persecution threatens, and seek to avert the danger by compliance with what they do not in heart approve.

In my own commentary on this passage, I wrote,

Here is a man who has been wounded in his leg. He wants to be well and starts walking on roadways that are jagged and crooked and not conducive to healing. He is advised here to make straight paths for his feet, so that he can soon be walking well.

As for the application, the church is told here to be careful about the pathway one takes after having suffered God's discipline. One will be a bit weak, and needs to do things that weak people do, not try to get back to the same level of ministry. Bitterness must be abandoned, forgiveness embraced. A deeper walk with God personally will help prepare for what is coming. Fear must be battled. Failing these things, the wound could get worse...

12:14a. What sort of peace should we pursue with all men?

Other Scriptures admonish us to separate ourselves from any serious fellowship with the world. And Jesus tells us that He came not to send peace to the earth, but a sword. So it has been. From the family level to the national and international, the Name of Christ Jesus has divided humankind for all these centuries.

It is in this context that we must attempt to obey the author's injunction. Though we stay far from the sin of this world, we love sinners and try to lead a peaceable life next to them, even sharing the Good News of the peace of Christ by actions and words.

And though they hate our Gospel, as many will, and cause us to be imprisoned and tortured, the command rings clear to pursue peace. They will want war, but our attitude must never change. It is the highest and most difficult challenge of all, to love those who hate us, to love those who hate our ways and our God. But the command is clear. Love them. Pursue peace with them. Not so that we can be like them, but so that they can be like our Lord.

Unfortunately, the church of the Western world has fallen into a compromise with the world that is a false peace. Serious and defining doctrines are downplayed and glossed over. Morals slip and slide. The church that looks like the world probably is the world and has not pursued peace. Rather, it produces chaos and confusion.

The peace of which God speaks is uncompromising and strong. Peace through the strength of the Lord, not peace that surrenders, is what is called for.

12:14b. Is the author talking here about a disqualifier for Heaven or for fellowship here?

It is a clear teaching of Scripture, in my opinion, that a person who once “sees the Lord” will only see Him in greater and greater fashion as the years of earth and eternity roll by. And so this passage is telling us that one in whom sanctification has not begun is one who will never, in this life, or the next “see the Lord.”

There are many claims of persons today, whose lives seem to be quite earth-bound and unholy, that they have seen Jesus. We can repudiate these claims immediately with the words of the author here.

The Greek *hagiasmos* is described as a consecration, a setting apart to God, and the process that continues from there. One who is set apart is not perfect, but is in a position where perfection is the goal. Little by little the believer is made to look and act and speak like His Lord. If that process has not begun, there is no way a person can believe He will see the Lord, either in his new body one day looking upon the Lord and King of the earth, or with spiritual eyes now seeing Him by faith.

This virtual “seeing” of Jesus now is referred to earlier in Hebrews (2:9) where the author says that we see this one who was made a little lower than the angels. This is the seeing of faith. This is the faith that comes from hearing the Word. When the story of Jesus is told to us, we see Him and the sight of Him is enough to change all our plans and ideas about life. Faith sight will become actual sight one day.

God is a Spirit, though. We shall indeed behold Jesus the Son then, with our new physical eyes. How the new bodies will “see” in the Spirit has not yet been revealed to us. Until then we proclaim with

Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see and not another..."

Job knew that God was working somehow in his life. And the life in which God works His holiness is the life that shall see God, now and forever.

12:15a. How can a person come short of grace?

This portion of the verse is probably best joined to the rest of the verse, and the two following. Esau is given as an example of one who comes short of grace. Before that, the general caution against a "root of bitterness."

First, about that root. How does a root "spring up"? Deuteronomy 29:18 is in view here:

so that there will not be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go to serve the gods of those nations; that there will not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood.

Barnes' note on this verse is helpful:

The word here and in Deuteronomy 32:32 rendered "gall," is in Hosea 10:4 translated "hemlock." It is the name of a plant of intense bitterness, and of quick growth; and is therefore repeatedly used in conjunction with "wormwood" (compare Jeremiah 9:15; Lamentations 3:19; Amos 6:12), to express figuratively the nature and effects of sin (compare the marginal references.). The herb is probably the poppy. Hence, the "water" (i. e. juice) "of gall" Jeremiah 8:14; Jeremiah 23:15 would be opium. This would explain its employment in the stupefying drink given to criminals at

the time of execution (compare Psalm 69:21; Matthew 27:34), and the use of the word as synonymous with poison (compare Deuteronomy 32:33; Job 20:16). Wormwood - is the plant "absinthium." It is used to denote metaphorically the distress and trouble which result from sin. "The root that beareth gall and wormwood," means in this place any person lurking among them who is tainted with apostasy.

The commentators then point to Acts 8, where is given a brief encounter with one Simon Magus, a surface convert of Philip. When he tries to offer the apostles money so as to buy the power of God, he is rebuked by Peter with the words, "I see that you are in the *gall of bitterness.*"

Poison in the camp via one evil man. That's all it takes. One man who is not operating in the grace of God but in his own bitterness and misguided activities. Watch out for such a man.

And watch out for any "Esau" among you.

12:16-17. How did Esau come short of God's grace?

Perhaps here we can see the true meaning of "come short" or lack, or come behind. Just as Simon Magus, so Esau was lacking the grace of God. The blessing was ordained to go to Jacob. Esau had no desire for blessing or birthright. They were just words his parents tossed around. His manliness, his hunting skills, the "real" life now, that's what mattered to Esau. Not until it was too late did he realize that the things he had valued were worthless, and Jacob had cashed in on eternity.

12:17. Whose “repentance” is meant in this verse, Isaac’s or his own?

The flow of the text suggests that it was Isaac whose repentance Esau sought. Repentance simply means a change of mind or heart. Evil is not implied by the word. Indeed, Isaac had committed no evil here. Esau believed it was evil, however, and begged his father in tears to please change his mind, all to no avail.

Because of the pre-ordained plan of God to bless Jacob, combined with the carelessness of Jacob’s brother, Esau fell short of the grace of God and is an example for us. Church leaders are to be on the lookout for those who try to join their assembly who have not received God’s grace, and can therefore be a trial to the congregation.

12:18-21. What event is described in verses 18-21?

This is Mount Sinai, to which the Hebrews of old arrived soon after their escape from Egyptian bondage. The author insists that it is not the place of law that should be in their view now, but the place of grace. The specific references from that Exodus 19-20 description:

- A *mountain* that can be touched. 19:12. Though the mountain was physically capable of being touched, it was not to be touched by anyone but Moses and his associates.
- A blazing fire. 19:18. “the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace.” Awesome, fearful sight.
- Darkness. 19:16. It is hard to imagine blazing fire and darkness at the same moment, until one sees the mention of a huge cloud of smoke that the fire created. The smoke

surrounded the entire mountain area with a cover that was impenetrable and occlusive.

- Gloom. Deuteronomy 4:11. The darkness, as well as gloom, are mentioned in Moses' retelling of the story in Deuteronomy. Gloom tells more of the emotional atmosphere created by the darkness than the physical darkness itself. We would simply say, "It was scary!"
- Whirlwind. 20:18. I was unable to find this exact term in the Mosaic accounting of the time. But if, as Asaph describes in Psalm 77:18, the sound of thunder can be heard in a whirlwind, and if indeed there was thunder on that day, it is likely that a mighty wind passed through the area.
- The blast of a trumpet. 19:16, 19. Louder and louder the sound of the ram's horn grew, combined with all the noises of nature. No human being was blowing this trumpet. An angelic or Divine mouth was at the source of that awesome trumpeting. Would we all not have been terrified?
- The sound of words. 19:19, 20:1-22. Here were the ten "words," the ten commandments, the essence of the law of God, spoken for the first time to an audience who could not see the speaker. The most chilling portion of the entire day. An invisible Person speaking loudly and clearly through the mist and the whirlwind, His will for the people of Israel. A sight never to be forgotten. There was no way the people could ever say they did not know God's law.

So wondrous was the communication that the people begged to hear no more.

- The threat from God. 19:13. Man or beast, whoever touches this mountain will either be shot through with an arrow or stoned to death immediately. This seems to have been one warning from Heaven that the people obeyed, though we are very aware of other warnings they ignored. We know of no one who attempted to challenge the Almighty during this severe encounter.
- Even Moses was afraid. Commentators as a whole are at a loss to explain this comment by the writer of Hebrews. Reading through Exodus or Deuteronomy, where the event is recorded, one will not find such words coming from the lips of Moses. Then from where did this revelation arise? Barnes has meaningful ideas about it:

I know not how to explain this, except by the supposition that the apostle here refers to some tradition that the scene produced this effect on his mind. In itself it is not improbable that Moses thus trembled with alarm (compare Exodus 19:16), nor that the remembrance of it should have been handed down among the numerous traditions which the Jews transmitted from age to age. There must have been many things that occurred in their journey through the wilderness which are not recorded in the Books of Moses. Many of them would be preserved naturally in the memory of the people, and transmitted to their posterity; and though those truths might become intermingled with much that was fabulous [the stuff of fables], yet it is not irrational to suppose that an inspired writer may have adduced pertinent and true examples from these traditions of what actually occurred. It was one method of preserving "the truth," thus to select such instances of what actually took place from the mass of traditions which were destined to perish, as would be useful in future times.

We must leave it at that, with no further speculation.

For four verses the author reminds the people that to which they have *not* now arrived in their pilgrimage of faith. All that he describes is in their past, not their present or future. Something new is on the horizon, which he commences to picture now. The following three verses tell of the Christian's true status both now and forever.

12:22. How does Mt. Zion in Jerusalem figure into the heavenly scene unfolded here?

Most scholars want to place Mt. Zion in Heaven, or simply say that Mt. Zion means the church, or some such thing. Having a desire to stay as literal as possible when the text allows it, I prefer to think of Zion, the southern-most hill in Jerusalem, as the location of the coming Kingdom.

Zion was seen by Psalmist and prophet alike as the location of coming glory and power for Israel. Obadiah sees it as a place of great deliverance, a holy place. John sees 144,000 collected there with the Lamb in the last days. The passage (Revelation 14) goes on to talk of the great judgment that will fall on the Gentile world shortly after His elect are drawn to Him.

There is interaction with Heaven, to be sure, on that mountain. For the Son from Heaven has returned. Those who talk of the "open heaven" in our day will see it in its fullness then.

But to transport this physical mountain into the heavenly realm seems to me unnecessary. Mt. Zion is Mt. Zion, and we who are on pilgrimage have come there already in the Spirit as we anticipate the rule of Christ in its fullness.

12:23-24. To what/Whom else are we headed?

“Are we there yet?” says every young child on every journey of over ten miles. It is the question we have before us here. Does the writer indicate that we have already arrived at these places? Obviously, many have, but many are still earth-bound. But whether now or later or in some sense both, here, besides that heavenly/earthly Zion, are the prizes and people surrounding us:

- The church. Note that the true church is enrolled in heaven. This speaks not of one’s favorite denomination or congregation. These are the ones who have been born again and immediately registered as a citizen of the Heavenly assembly. Is your name written there? Is mine?

Note also, regarding the church, that they have all the privileges of the *firstborn* son in a Jewish home. Hence that title is given to them here.

- God Himself! Strange to see our God so far down on the list, but notice that the author is working from lesser to greater, with God and Jesus as the ultimate destination of our journey and fellowship.

Of all the ways our God can be described the author chooses here to call Him the Judge of all. Why? I believe it is in keeping with the constant call of warning in this letter. Already several passages have shaken his readers into an alert carefulness, and another is soon to follow. The words we are reading now are in fact preparation for the final verses of chapter 12.

Hebrews is to be taken seriously.

- Perfected spirits. Jesus promised early on in His ministry that God's people will be perfect because He is perfect. Matthew 5:48, referenced as I just did, sounds more like a promise than a command. The Holy Spirit striving within the true people of God will finally bring them to a state of perfection.

The question is, shall they be perfected here or there? We know that our bodies will turn to dust and miraculously we will be given perfect bodies. Does that same process apply to our old Adamic nature? Will we be striving here to be one with the Father, then receive from Him that final unity directly from His hands when we rise to meet Him in the air?

The spirits of our present verse are with the Lord, it would seem, mentioned in connection with the Judge of all the earth. Our pilgrimage ends when we are bypassed in judgment but perfected in body, soul, and spirit.

- Jesus. The One Who made all this possible, our visible Lord and Savior, who is God, is saved till last on the list. Ultimately we are coming to Jesus, the one who stands between us and the Father as the originator of a New Covenant, a new way of relating to Heaven. And a better way.
- The blood. The blood of sprinkling is spoken of in the Old Covenant, and Jesus' blood is compared to it. But this comparison is to the blood of Abel. Why?

There are some similarities in the story of the shedding of Abel's blood and the one telling of the Savior's spilled blood. Both men were killed by sinful men out of jealousy. Both men were innocent of any wrong against the murderers. Both murders called for vengeance on the guilty ones.

Ah but the difference between the two deaths is significant. The blood of Abel saved no one. Its only fruit was judgment on one. The blood of Jesus has saved millions of men and women and children the world over and will continue to do so. In the blood of Jesus the justice of God is appeased, men who want to be, can be free forever to live in relationship to the Almighty.

12:25. Once more we must ask, Is it possible for us to turn away from God?

The letter to the Hebrews is a series of warnings interspersed with reasons for those warnings. Every command is laced with the fear of judgment on those who dare turn aside from the one and only way of salvation secured in the New Covenant.

I offer these reminders of where we have been thus far:

2:1-3,

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every violation and act of disobedience received a just punishment, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

3:12,

Take care, brothers and sisters, that there will not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

4:1, 11,

Therefore, we must fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it... let us make

every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following the same example of disobedience.

6:4-8,

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For the ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and produces vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

10:26-31,

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. Anyone who has ignored the Law of Moses is put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severe punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The warning is no less severe here in 12:25. But understand once more that we are not talking about truly saved people who did or can fall away. We are talking about believers in name only who

never did heed God's warnings, and who never will, because they are not among the chosen of God. If you can hear the voice of God, says the writer, listen carefully. And of course, the righteous chosen from the foundation of the world will listen to these words. But the others will not.

Who are "the others" in this passage, by the way? Who are "those who did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth"?

The context demands that we continue speaking of the scene at Mt. Sinai. Oh, they were terrified enough. They heard every word. They promised eternal loyalty. But their carcasses were food for the jackals and other beasts of the Sinai peninsula. Not one came into the Promised Land but Joshua and Caleb. Not one had a heart for God, as they proved over and over on the journey.

Such percentages. Two persons out of 2-3 million persons? Oh yes. And there is a precedent to such math. Consider only 8 persons out of the entire population of Noah's day who heeded the warning from Noah. Men like Moses and Noah and the prophets warn us still from earth with the authority of Heaven. As then, we are given signs in nature as it rumbles its cautions to sinful men.

What will happen when the King of all the warnings speaks His final shaking?

Note once again: the "turn away" movement is not the action of an apostate here, but of a worldling, an unbeliever from birth to earth. Constant sin, constant warning, constant rejection, constant turning away. These people sit in synagogues and church buildings every weekend honestly believing they are on their way to the Promised Land. But the shaking will change all that.

12:26. To which two shakings is the author referring?

1. Exodus 19:18 talks of how “the whole mountain quaked violently” when the Lord descended upon it.
2. Haggai 2:6, 7 seems to be in view here, the great shaking of the end times:

For this is what the LORD of armies says: ‘Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD of armies.

The Prince of the power of the air and all his minions will be shaken in that day. The earth’s power structure will be totally rearranged. Christ will rule from Jerusalem, and the nations of the world will bring Him tribute. The final Temple will have been built and will be the central place of religious practice for the world. Not Mecca. Not Rome. Jerusalem.

12:27. How is it that “Yet once more” means shakable items?

There will be various shakings throughout history. None of them are the shaking to which Haggai and this author are referring. There shall be one final shaking. Anything that is not solidly grounded in God and His Word will be blown away. Reorganized. Scattered. Shuffled. Just one more time will God actually visit the planet in this way.

God Himself stepped down at Sinai. The area of the mountain was shaken. God Himself, in the person of His Son Jesus, will step down only one more time, and that will be at the end of this age. Jesus shall return. His people will be caught up to Him. A bloodbath will ensue. Jesus will singlehandedly rearrange the politics of this planet

and set it right. It is, after all, His creation, and He will order it as He pleases in that day.

But some things cannot be shaken.

12:28-29. What should be our response to an unshakable kingdom?

Some things will not change. The Lordship of Christ over His people will remain. The Truth of His Word will remain. The place of the apostles and martyrs will remain a place of honor and eternal glory. Praise to our God will remain.

The author gives a three-fold response: *Gratitude*, from which comes *service*, tempered with abject *reverence* for a God who can consume all in a moment.

The author ends this discussion for the Hebrews by once more quoting from their Bible, Deuteronomy 4:24.

For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-12

Jesus, Son of God, will rule the world, though for now He became lower than angels, suffered, and has become a highly effective High Priest in the process.

Because of Who Jesus is, take heed to the warnings about the hardening of the heart, though I am convinced you will not fall because God has made a promise to you with an oath.

Now, studying Melchizedek, we conclude that the Levitical priesthood is not the final antidote for sin. An eternal unchanging Priest was needed. Such is Jesus, the Perfect Sacrifice.

The Old Covenant High Priest bringing blood into the Holy of Holies points to Jesus. But Jesus accomplished everything by His one Sacrifice, not a yearly one. The Law was a shadow, but in Jesus is the substance.

He is the last chance for you to be saved, but I again am confident, that your future with Christ is assured. We are the people of faith, and we will be saved.

As to faith is, let me define and show examples of it. And these people who believed God in their day, will eventually receive the promise of eternal life that this Jesus procured by His sacrifice.

Our job now is to follow those who set the faith example, keeping our eyes on Jesus. Remember that from time to time you will have to endure discipline. This is a proof of your sonship. Keep moving on to the prize of eternal life with Him. Things may shake and tremble around you, but the promises of God will stand sure.

CHAPTER 13

13:1-17. Has the subject suddenly changed in chapter 13?

Not at all. In 12:28 the author was talking about the gratitude that should be ours because of the unshakable kingdom that is coming to us. Gratitude, he says, leads to a serious reverential service. And here is that service, in part:

1. Love of the brothers.
2. Hospitality to those who may (or may not) be outside the flock.
3. Remembering to care about prisoners and other persecuted brothers.
4. Upholding the sanctity of marriage.
5. Avoiding covetousness, trusting God to provide your needs.
6. Imitating the faith of your leaders.
7. Watching out for heretical teaching, specifically the Judaizers.'
8. Bearing the reproach of Christ.
9. Being continually in thanks and praise.
10. Sharing with others in deed and offerings.
11. Obeying your leaders.

These are some of the ways a believer can respond to a God Who, though a consuming fire, has decided to offer you eternal security in Him.

By the way, let none say that New Covenant people are without Law and “rules.” Every epistle offers ways to please God as Spirit-filled people. The difference now is that forgiveness through the blood of Jesus is available. The rules cannot crush us and condemn us. As before, they only bring us to Christ to ask for mercy and power to obey.

13:2. Who “entertained angels without knowing it?”

Of course we think of Abraham immediately (Genesis 18) who showed his normal hospitality to some travelers who later turned out to be angels, one of them the Lord Himself.

But Abraham was not alone in such visitations. His nephew Lot received a visit a little later in the story (Genesis 19). He likewise tried his best to show them the kindness due a stranger in town.

Judges 13 tells of an angel’s visit to Samson’s parents. The mother wasn’t sure at first that this “man of God” was an angel. Their hospitality was also offered, but in this case refused.

Point made. Angels do appear on specific missions that have to do with the carrying out of the purposes of God. They are not here for our comfort but for His glory. There are times when they come in incognito, other times when their presence is so obvious that one thinks he is in the very Presence of God. Daniel and Revelation are typical of these encounters.

God wants His people to honor the stranger with this thought in mind: the person eating your meal may be from Heaven.

12:3. How can we remember prisoners as though we were right there in prison with them?

One can pray, imagining one's self to be there. Or one can skip a meal or two and cut down on other meals, trying to duplicate what it must be like to subsist on prison food. Perhaps a person could enclose himself in the clothes closet for an hour, praying in the dark. Or gather a few friends together with the expressed purpose of praying for a list of known prisoners.

Money can be sent to organizations that deal specifically with our persecute brothers. Letters can be sent to some prisoners. If they do not receive the letters, the prison officials will read and sometimes be touched by the Spirit of God.

And there are those who find ways to visit prison countries, get messages to the incarcerated, along with food and money.

Once one begins to examine all the possibilities, there are actually many ways, not all of which I have listed, to remember those of our number who are suffering for the sake of Christ.

In all of our remembrances we must also remember that we could well be the next person in such a situation. The Golden Rule applies here: what would you want persons on the outside to be doing for you on the inside? Do that.

I have a map of the world in my room punctured with pushpins representing certain prisoners of whom I am aware. That is one way I remember them and thus pray for them. I encourage all my readers to produce a system of your own to obey this verse.

13:4. Does this verse indicate that fornication was rampant among the believers of the first century?

Ellicott says it all concisely:

The precept is directed against impurity (Hebrews 12:16), and also against the false asceticism of men "forbidding to marry" (1Timothy 4:3). The laxity of morals among Gentiles (Note on Acts 15:20) and the prevalence of divorce amongst Jews (Matthew 5:32) explain the sudden introduction of such warnings: of these sinners the all-seeing God will be the judge. (Comp. 1Thessalonians 4:6.)

So the conditioning of the people before their conversion, and the prevalence of such sin around them made the writer take special note of this sin. Note that it is just as evil to keep healthy men from marrying, as in the Roman priesthood, as it is to give the green light to adulterous affairs among the married.

See also the stern prediction of judgment on these sexual sins that have become so common among us as to cause a yawn when brought up. But nothing has changed in Heaven. God hates our misuse of the creative power within us.

13:5-6. How is covetousness tied to unbelief here?

It is something we may not think of often, but to desire unnecessary material goods is actually a sign that an individual does not believe in the continued provision of God. Sure, I have enough for today, as He promised, but what about tomorrow? I better work a little harder, save a little more, gather a few more things today in case the provision stops tomorrow. We all know the mentality in the West. There is so much around us for the taking, that we believe we should go out there and take it... just in case.

There is a certain amount of wisdom in setting aside for emergencies, but there is a line over which we can cross that takes away the daily joy of seeing God take care of His child. After awhile we push God aside and let Him know that we will take over this provision business from now on. Not good.

Two passages from the Hebrew Bible of the day are brought in as support: Deuteronomy 31:6 and Psalm 118:6. Notice that neither of these verses focus on covetousness, but rather on faith. Thus the connection between the two is identified.

13:7. Of whom is the author speaking here?

We seem to be led here back to the beginning of the epistle, where the author speaks of those who confirmed the word of the Lord with God's accompanying signs and wonders, miracles and gifts, of the Spirit (2:3-4). If this is Paul speaking, he is directing their attention to the original apostles who walked those years with Jesus, then after Pentecost did the very works that Jesus had done. His own ministry came shortly afterwards and was directed to the Gentiles. The author of this epistle is dealing with ministry to the Hebrews.

Whoever is the writer, he asks his readers to remember these early witnesses, look at their lives, and follow them in their faith and faithfulness.

13:8. Why is this statement placed here?

Some have seen this affirmation as connected to the preceding verse, some to the following, some to both. It certainly is strange to see such a bold faith statement appear when talking about past apostles on the one hand and future false teachers on the other.

But then, maybe therein is the mystery unfolded:

“Jesus Christ was in your leaders, showing His power and glory to the young church. This same Jesus of yesterday is with us today. And when the false prophets move in, remember that He will be the same Jesus tomorrow as He is today.”

13:9. What are the “strange teachings” referenced here?

There are of course any number of strange teachings that have found their way into the church. But the rest of the verse indicates that it is a particular doctrine the writer has in mind, one dealing with foods (“meats” in KJV), with which he concerns himself in the next several verses.

Gill explains:

not with meats; referring to the distinction of meats among the Jews; or the sacrifices ate [sic] both by the priests and by the people; or the whole ceremonial law which stood in divers meats and drinks:

which have not profited them that have been occupied therein; they were only profitable to the body; and could be of no other use to the soul, when they were in force, than as they led to Christ, and were regarded by believers; for they were of no advantage to hypocrites and carnal men; they could not sanctify, nor justify, nor cheer the spirits, nor establish the heart; and are of no manner of service at all, since the death of Christ, whereby the whole ceremonial law is abolished.

13:10. What is the “altar” of the Christian?

Since the subject is clearly sacrifices and all the details therein comprised, the author compares the altar upon which Jewish sacrifices were offered to the altar upon which our own Sacrifice was given.

My first inclination, in seeing the simple picture of a mechanism on which a sacrifice was laid, was to call this altar the cross of Christ. I see that commentators say the same thing. Except this one, again, Brother Gill:

We have an altar,.... By which is meant, not the cross of Christ, on which he was crucified; nor the Lord's table, where his flesh and blood are presented to faith, as food, though not offered; but Christ himself, who is altar, sacrifice, and priest; he was typified by the altar of the burnt offering, and the sacrifice that was offered upon it; the altar was made of Shittim wood, and covered with brass, denoting the incorruptibleness, duration, and strength of Christ: the horns of it, at the four corners, were for refuge; whoever fled to it, and laid hold on them, were safe; so Christ is a refuge to his people, that come from the four corners of the earth; and who believe in him, and lay hold on him, are preserved and protected by his power and grace: the use of it was for sacrifice to be offered upon it; which being a male, without blemish, and wholly burnt with fire, was a sweet savour to God; and which was typical of Christ's human nature, offered on the altar of his divine nature; which was pure and holy, suffered the fire of divine wrath, and was for a sweet smelling savour to God: this altar was but one, and most holy, and sanctified what was put upon it; all which is true of Christ: now this altar the saints have, and have a right to eat of it; even all Christ's friends and beloved ones; all that are made priests unto God by him; all that know him, believe in him, have a spiritual discerning of him, and hunger and thirst after him:

He has answered the question that the rest of the verse poses in his comments. Why do Jews have no right to eat of the sacrifice thus pictured by Christ Himself? Surely he is not saying that all are not invited to partake of Christ. He simply means that the Law of Moses, the sacrifices of Moses, the priesthood of Moses, is not compatible in any way with that of Christ. Those who demand to remain under Moses cannot at the same time be under Christ.

He offers more reasoning for this line of thought in the next two verses.

13:11-12. How is the burning of dead bodies “outside the camp” a proof that practicing Jewish priests have no right to our sacrifice?

The connection may not be obvious to readers not skilled in the Old Testament sacrificial system. But there is a connection...

Says Commentator Benson:

...therefore no part of them [the sacrifices] could be eaten by the priest or people; so they who, under the gospel, adhere to that way of worship [Mosaic sacrifices], cannot partake of Christ, who is the truth signified by that type. In other words, according to their own law, the sin-offerings were wholly consumed [by fire], and no Jew ever ate thereof. But Christ was a sin-offering; therefore they cannot feed upon him as we do.

It would be against the law for a priest or person of any rank to eat the sacrifice. Jesus is the sacrifice. Eating it/Him is forbidden to a Jew who wants to stay under Moses.

Note that the “gate” of Jesus’ Jerusalem is being equated with the “camp” of the Jews in the wilderness. All things evil had to be placed symbolically outside the population of Israel. Criminals were executed outside the gate. Sin sacrifices, likewise. Here we see just how far the Son of God was put to shame for our sake.

13:13-14. How can we go “outside the camp” in our day?

The context demands that the writer is speaking first to Jews trapped in the Mosaic system. As Jesus fulfilled the Law by being cast outside the gate, ostracized from His people, put to shame, so the readers are exhorted to put Judaism behind them, leave the

“system” behind, come out from among them and be separate. Visit Jesus in His humiliation, partake of Him.

Of course the broader application is for any of us who are willing to leave behind the inclusion provided us by a failed religion or family or government or culture, and partake of Christ’s suffering and life.

The writer then returns (v. 14) to his comments in chapter 11, speaking of people who are “seeking a country of their own... a better country, that is, a heavenly one... for He has prepared a city for them” (11:13-16). Those who follow Christ must by consequence disdain this present evil world.

13:15-16. What are two sacrifices we are to offer?

Such a command as is found in these two verses can never be taken as an addition to what Christ has already done, but rather a participation in Who Christ really is. He is God and therefore worthy of our praise. He is Love and therefore will produce in us, through His Spirit, love of the brethren. Thus the sacrifice of Christ continues on through us, though its efficacy for forgiveness has already been accomplished in His death. Sacrifice is the hallmark of the Christ way.

13:17. Do we have “rulers” in the church?

Unfortunately, the unscrupulous and power-hungry have come into the church and claimed something God never offered, namely a dictatorship. The King James “rule over” is not out of line as far as the Greek is concerned, but does not follow the spirit of the New Testament in the usage.

Hebrews needs to be set beside 1 Peter, where the apostle encourages leaders to *shepherd* without “lording it over those

allotted to your charge.” Jesus is offered as the example. Our Ruler is a gentle Shepherd.

True it is that when leadership is defined in this way, there are men who will misunderstand and try to walk over such a man. Thus this injunction: Obey your leaders. Though they are gentle and compassionate, they have a duty before Heaven to give account for your actions. They may have to act accordingly, that is, gently take their shepherd’s crook and bring you back into line. So be it.

There is an indication here of what the judgment seat of Christ will look like. Though we must give account for ourselves on that day, it would seem that there will be pastoral witnesses who will be compelled to tell the truth about our lives before the Judge of all the earth. It would be “unprofitable” indeed if you force your witness to give a bad account of how you lived here.

Perhaps the “giving account” has to do with the prayers they bring to the Father on your behalf from day to day. Whether they witness your life now or give account later, church members need to be aware of the singular importance of the man of God in their life.

13:18-19. On what basis are we permitted to pray a blessing on a brother in Christ?

The author seems to be laying down a principle here. We pray for God to bless people who are walking with Him. Whoever wrote the book seems to be confined somewhere, and is asking God’s people to pray for his release.

This is yet another hint that perhaps Paul, who spent much of his ministry in confinement, may be the creator of this epistle.

13:20. Is the term “God of peace” used elsewhere in the New Testament?

Paul uses that very title for Romans, the Corinthians, and the Thessalonians.

13:21. How does the writer bring out the Deity of Jesus Christ in his benediction?

Only God is to receive eternal glory. He shares that glory with no one. Yet here we read that to “Jesus Christ [is] the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

13:22. How did this writer view his letter?

In the eyes of the author, Hebrews is a short word of exhortation. Yet the acknowledgement of its serious character is in the command here given to bear with it. Take it seriously. Though I could have written so much more, what I have written is of the utmost importance.

Both Peter and Paul use this adverb to describe their letters. (1 Peter, Ephesians)

13:23. What other associates of Timothy are mentioned in Scripture?

Silas and Erastus are sent with Timothy by Paul to perform certain ministries. But for the most part, Timothy is Paul’s associate. He is called Paul’s son. He writes letters with Paul. He travels with Paul on many of his journeys.

This mention of Timothy in this, as in so many, of his letters (to the Corinthians and Thessalonians, to the Philippians and Colossians, to

Philemon, and of course two to Timothy himself) points ever so seriously to Paul as being the author of this epistle. In my opinion.

Here we gain the knowledge of the fact that Timothy, to whom Paul had to write to be done with fear, has overcome it to the place of being arrested for his faith in Christ. The writer will meet up with the recently released son of Paul, and visit the Hebrews to whom he is writing.

13:24. Where was the writer of this letter at the time of the writing?

Clearly he was in Rome, and was in fellowship with the Roman Church. He too, as well as Timothy, had been in a Roman prison and was possibly still there. Verse 19 seems to indicate that he was still confined and was praying for his own release.

But Timothy is free. The writer is awaiting him in Rome. Perhaps he has booked passage on the ship that will take him back to where these Hebrews are awaiting him. If this is so, it explains why he hopes that Timothy will come soon. The ship will leave without him otherwise.

If this indeed is Paul, it is possible he never did get released, and had to write 2nd Timothy to his son in the faith to explain to him why they could not go back together.

Much is speculation. But the evidence for Pauline authorship only seems stronger and stronger.

For those not convinced, perhaps verse 25 will seal the deal:

13:25. Is this “signature” a unique one?

Yes indeed. It is true that the book of Hebrews does not begin like any other work of Paul. But it surely ends like his letters!

In all thirteen of the letters of Paul, “grace” is in the final words. Romans has him including it a few verses earlier than the end, but it is still there. Paul was after all the apostle of grace as John was the apostle of love. Grace vs law. By grace you are saved. And so on.

“Grace be with you” is the clear identifier of the author of Hebrews. No other epistle uses this formula.

Now let us try to sum up the entire letter:

SUMMARY, the BOOK of HEBREWS

The Son of God will rule the world, though for now He became lower than angels, suffered, and has become a highly effective High Priest in the process.

Because of Who Jesus is, take heed to the warnings about the hardening of the heart, though I am convinced you will not fall because God has made a promise to you with an oath.

Studying Melchizedek we conclude that the Levitical priesthood is not the final antidote for sin. An eternal unchanging Priest was needed. Such is Jesus, the Perfect Sacrifice.

Jesus accomplished everything by His one Sacrifice, not a yearly one. The Law was a shadow, but in Jesus is the substance.

He is the last chance for you to be saved, and that salvation is by faith. We are the people of faith.

There are many examples from the people of God, of that faith. And these people who believed God in their day, will eventually receive the promise of eternal life that this Jesus procured by His sacrifice. We must follow those who set the faith example, keeping our eyes on Jesus.

From time to time we will have to endure discipline, a proof of our sonship. Things may shake and tremble around you, but the promises of God will stand sure.

On your way to the city, be hospitable, remembering of prisoners, faithful to your spouse, free from covetousness. Stay away from the old priesthood we have been discussing. It profits nothing.

Let us keep praising our God and loving His people and obeying His leaders.

Please pray for me, and I hope to see you soon. God and His grace be with you.

Amen.

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