

## **Hebrews Bible Study #1: First Matters and Structure**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### **Introduction**

The Book of Hebrews is one of the most enigmatic parts of Holy Scripture. It has an unknown author, a difficult structure, and presentation of doctrine which is unlike any other in the New Testament. But we are nonetheless bound to study it as the Word of God, knowing that there are countless treasures stored up in it, just waiting to be discovered by the faithful for their edification and comfort.

The author of Hebrews addresses a small and persecuted group which is tempted to leave the Christian faith for their prior religion, if only to make the hardships which they experience cease. Since the Church always appears small and persecuted in the world, the message of Hebrews is *perennial*, and of utmost importance for the faithful today.

But before we can dive into the solid meat of the Word, we must address the issues which leave people lost or confused in their study. The first issue is the matter of authorship and canonicity, which trips up many people and leaves them wondering whether Hebrews was an attempt at subverting the early Church. The second is the issue of structure, since how we *understand* Hebrews to be laid out will determine how we *interpret* much of the book itself.

### **The Elephants in the Room**

On the issue of authorship, it has been a matter of debate for centuries. Chrysostom believed that St. Paul wrote it, while Origen, Jerome, Augustine, and even Luther disagreed. Most of their arguments hinge on the nature of the Greek used, the unique flow of the Epistle compared to other Pauline texts, and an assumption that the writer was a “second-generation believer” from Heb.2:3-4.

But Clement of Alexandria, one of the Early Church Fathers who died ca. 215 A.D., claimed that St. Paul wrote it, and his close proximity to the Early Church gives this statement much more weight:

*“He says that the Epistle to the Hebrews is the work of Paul, and that it was written to the Hebrews in the Hebrew language; but that Luke translated it carefully and published it for the Greeks, and hence the same style of expression is found in this epistle and in the Acts. But he says that the words, Paul the Apostle, were probably not prefixed, because, in sending it to the Hebrews, who were prejudiced and suspicious of him, he wisely did not wish to repel them at the very beginning by giving his name. Farther on he says: “But now, as the blessed presbyter said, since the Lord being the apostle of the Almighty, was sent to the Hebrews, Paul, as sent to the Gentiles, on account of his modesty did not subscribe himself an apostle of the Hebrews, through respect for the Lord, and because being a herald and apostle of the Gentiles he wrote to the Hebrews out of his superabundance.”*

*-From Eusebius' History of the Church, VI:XIV*

While this does not for certain establish St. Paul as the author, we *do* know that the author is of Jewish extraction, and that such was his original audience, from the very first verse:

*“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets”*

This establishes that, whether St. Paul or someone else wrote it, it was written for a very specific purpose, as an address to Jews living in the first century. The authorship is not so important as the content of the text and whether it was Apostolic in nature. Most of those who hold to Pauline authorship point out that there are many times in which the author writes with similar phrases and diction to St. Paul, to the point of paraphrase; this means that even if it is not St. Paul himself writing it, it was written by a man who was *very* familiar with the Apostle to the Gentiles, as well as the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>1</sup> Before the writer of Hebrews elevated Christ above Moses and all Old Testament saints, Jesus Christ elevated Himself above Solomon (Matthew 12:42). Much like St. John goes further than the Synoptics by declaring Christ the *Logos*, the author of Hebrews proclaims Jesus to be outright Divine several times. It also presents an orthodox Gospel, thus passing St. Paul's “sniff test” from Galatians 1:8-9.

It is this extreme familiarity with Apostolic teaching and refusal to contradict it that helps us understand its *canonicity*. We might ask how we know that this book is truly Scripture if we do not know the author, but Church history demonstrates that it has always been recognized as such.

The most important thing to recognize is that Hebrews was written *very* early. The author makes argument relating to the Jerusalem Temple assuming that it is still standing, meaning the whole text was written before 70 A.D., when the Romans destroyed the city and the Temple. Because the author also writes about priests operating in the present and conducting sacrifices (Hebrews 10:11), this also means that the Temple was in full operation – something that would not have been the case during the Jewish War which started in A.D. 66. This means that Hebrews was written and circulated before most of the Apostles were martyred, including St. John; the Early Church Fathers, who were still familiar with those trained by the Apostles, were more than willing to argue against false information and pseudepigrapha, as St. Irenaeus does regarding the number “616” being attributed to Revelation.<sup>2</sup> Not one Apostle nor Apostolic Father nor Early Father goes against Hebrews.

That there is no argument *against* including Hebrews in the Canon is important, especially since it was in wide circulation before the Apostles had all died. Clement of Rome (a bishop consecrated by St. Peter) openly quotes Hebrews four times in “1 Clement,” or his epistle to the Corinthians. Thus Hebrews was recognized *very* early on in the first century A.D. as Scripture by at least one bishop who was trained by the Apostles. To compound this, a complete copy of Hebrews is found in the Codex Sinaiticus, meaning it had been copied *as canon* by scribes for a long time.

The final issue, as the book is entitled “Hebrews,” asks how we know whether or not it is a subversive book, intended on sending a bad message to the Church. This is the easiest to answer. Note that much of this is a letter or sermon *to* Jews who had converted to Christianity. It is an exhortation for them to not go *back* to Judaism. Kind of like a counter-subversion. In fact, the Book of Hebrews defeats dispensationalism quite handily by virtue of its plain words. The author spends more than half of the book explaining how Jesus Christ is superior to literally everyone and everything else, while countering the arguments made by the Judaizing faction in the early Church. If this is an attempt at subversion...the author was a low I.Q. Failure.

Besides, there is hardly anything in the Book of Hebrews that is not found elsewhere in both the Old and New Testaments. Part of the reason for its inclusion in the Canon is the sheer, thorough *orthodoxy* of the book, recognized by the Church from the very beginning. Its foundation is firm on the Old Testament, yes, but it expounds the doctrines laid out by the Apostles in greater detail the same

1 <https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/1-2-timothy-titus-philemon-hebrews-james-1-2-peter/authorship-of-hebrews/>

2 <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103530.htm>

way St. Paul did not innovate any new doctrine himself! Again, if such is “subversion,” then the author of Hebrews accidentally reinforced orthodoxy.

**Interpretive keys:**

These two passages will be of utmost importance to how we understand the book.

Hebrews 1:1-4

*1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

This first passage establishes the author's first and foremost intention: to teach us that Christ Jesus is superior to all, Divine, and thus worth worshipping.

Hebrews 13:22

*I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.*

This second passage (although just a verse) reveals the *occasion* for the author to write Hebrews. It is not just a theological description of Jesus, but an exhortation to *stay* with Him in light of Who He is.

**Interpretive Structure**

Since Heb.1:1-4 tells us what the main message of the book is, and Heb.13:22 gives us the occasion for writing it, we can utilize these to break Hebrews down into sections that help keep the sense of the text. Starting next week, we will be reading and studying according to these sections.

<b>The Superiority of Christ Jesus</b>	<b>Our Loyal Response</b>
Ch.1:1-4 –Thesis Statement Ch.1:4-14 – Jesus over Angels	
Ch.2:5-18 – Jesus Incarnated Ch.3:1-6 – Jesus over Moses	Ch.2:1-4 – First Admonition
Ch.4:14-5:8 – Jesus the High Priest	Ch.3:7-4:13 – Second Admonition
Ch.7:1-28 – Jesus and Melchizedek Ch.8:1-9:28 – Jesus over the Old Covenant Ch.10:1-18 – The Nature of Christ's Ministry	Ch.5:11-6:19 – Third Admonition
	Ch.10:19-39 – Fourth Admonition Ch.11:1-40 – Excursus on Faith Ch.12:1-28 – Fifth Admonition Ch.13:1-24 – Final Remarks and Conclusion

## Hebrews Bible Study #2: The Thesis Statement of Hebrews

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 1:1-4

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

### Hebrews 1:1-4 with grammatical structure and highlighting

(Indentation demonstrates the development of the initial statement. Matching highlighted colors demonstrate comparison and contrast for key figures or words. For lay leaders, it might be beneficial to write this passage in this way using a whiteboard, or to simply print the large-font version of the structured passage for handouts included at the end here).

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God **spoke** to **our fathers** by the **prophets**,  
**but**  
in these last days He has **spoken** to us by his **Son**,  
whom He **appointed** the heir of all things,  
through whom also He created the world.  
He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His  
nature,  
and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.  
After making purification for sins,  
he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,  
**having become** as much **superior** to angels  
as the **name he has inherited** is more excellent than theirs.

### **First Concept: Revelation**

The author of Hebrews first says “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,” with the operative word being *spoke*. God is the actor here, and He spoke to someone: first to “our fathers” - meaning the pre-Christ Hebrews, and then later to the Church.

The text states that it was “by the prophets” that our Lord spoke to the children of Israel, but *first* it says that God spoke in “many ways” by these prophets. What does he mean here? How can sending a message from a prophet (one way) equal sending messages in many ways?

Deuteronomy 18:15-22 establishes the *office* of Prophet, the attorney and spokesman for the Lord. This was done in multiple ways. The Old Testament was written by prophets, so obviously many of them wrote (“the Law and the Prophets” being used in the Gospels as a catch-all term for the OT). Others were itinerant preachers, as Elijah and Samuel were. There are even times in which they had to make public illustrations with their deeds, as Ezekiel does in Ezek.4. Many ways, as Hebrews says, but only through one medium – the prophets.

**But** – the author now contrasts the Prophets with Jesus Christ, the only Son of God. Our Lord Jesus is often called the Final Revelation, on account of the praise which the author heaps upon Him. The prophets were normal men given a message from the Lord: Jesus Christ *is* that final message. After this the author makes his case by discussing Who Jesus is to establish His qualifications. It is as though he were saying “Yes, the Prophets said all this and it is true. But now let me introduce you to the *new* message which is brought to us by Christ Jesus.”

## Second Concept: The Supremacy of Christ

By “our fathers,” the writer is recognizing that his audience has Jewish heritage. This means that they will most certainly understand the solid foundation of the Law and the Prophets, but as new Christians, will they be able to say the same about the revelations concerning Jesus? In order to make it clear to them, he establishes Christ's qualifications by discussing:

1. What the Father has established about Jesus.
2. Who Jesus is.
3. What Jesus has done.

### What has the Father established?

#### 1. Jesus is King of all Creation

God the Father has appointed Jesus to be the “heir of all things.” Meaning, as Jesus says in Matthew 28:18, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*” The author of Hebrews is establishing here that Jesus Christ is Lord of literally all the universe, having received this authority from the Father. This is repeated in verse 3, which states “he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” The expression “at the right hand” means to be placed in a position of both honor and authority.

#### 2. Jesus is how creation was accomplished and how it is preserved

It was also through Jesus that the Father created the world. The word translated “world” in the ESV is actually αἰῶνας,<sup>1</sup> transliterated “aionas,” which can be translated “ages.” While the word *can* mean world, the author chooses this word over the Greek word “kosmos” (meaning cosmos, universe, etc.) as a *more* expansive term. Every age, even the very beginning, was made through Christ. In verse three, he adds “he upholds the universe by the word of his power,” adding *more* to Christ's function in the creation of the universe by saying that He *preserves* everything in their operations. The author of Hebrews was apparently familiar with St. John – who wrote the same message in John 1:1-3.

*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 were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

He also mirrors what St. Paul has to say in Colossians 1:16-17.

*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

We do not understand how exactly our Lord Jesus holds the universe together; to say it is “by the word of His power” does not give us much detail, other than this being a description of omnipotence: if Jesus says the universe is to be upheld, then it is so. Some Roman Catholic commentators have speculated that Christ being the Logos means that He is the rational principle

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<sup>1</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/165.htm>

behind the universe itself, so by *being* the Word, He upholds the universe as both Word and power. We might be permitted this kind of speculation, as explicit statements in Scripture point to something similar. 1 Corinthians 1:24 states that Jesus Christ is the “power of God and the wisdom of God.” If Jesus was the One through whom the universe was created, and if it is by Jesus that everything is held together, this does suggest that He functions as the outworking of God's omnipotence and omniscience – in other words, knowing what to say and how to say it – and even shorter, *Logos*.

### 3. Jesus is superior to all angels.

In the fourth verse, on account of Christ residing at the Father's right hand, the text states “having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” We must be on guard against the “adoptionist” heresy, which states that Christ was at some point not Divine, but later on adopted into divinity by the Father through His righteous qualifications and Atoning death. The matter of superiority over angels is already established by Christ's role in creation and preservation of all things: here though the author is establishing His supremacy over angels *to us*, and by extension His supremacy over Moses and the Old Testament saints. It is about reputation and name, not metaphysical status. The author here is saying that Jesus has obtained a reputation, or Name, which is superior to angels and all others, which matches the glory which He has always had.

#### Who is Jesus?

-Jesus is Divine

We see then that not only is Jesus the “heir of all things,” but this is at least in part because He is the catalyst and power behind the creation of all things and all ages. This would start some down a path of questions that the author answers with: “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” In other words, it is stated here that Jesus is God.

If Jesus is the “radiance of the glory of God,” then He is eternal. God has stated He does not change (Malachi 3:6, among other places); if He has glory which radiates, then He has *always* had glory which radiates, making Jesus Christ eternal. But we must recall that *glory* is high praise, honor, and splendor, as well as God's manifest presence (Isaiah 60:1, 2 Corinthians 3:18); if Jesus Christ *is* God's Glory shining forth, then He is identified with God Himself. Jesus is said here to be the very presence of God. Further examination of the Scriptures makes this even more evident, as the Father has said “My glory I give to no other” (Isaiah 42:8), but Jesus explicitly states that the Father will glorify Him (John 16:14-15); this only makes sense if Jesus Christ shares the Divine essence (or “hypostases”) with the Father, making Him God. In fact, that word “hypostases” is used, translated “nature,” when the author says Christ is the “exact imprint of His nature.” By “imprint,” the word used (*χαρακτήρ*),<sup>2</sup> denotes *likeness* instead of manufacturing or simple marking; in other words, whatever may be said about God's nature and character is also true about Jesus. If anyone should tell you that the Bible does not teach the divinity of Christ, let it be known that this is stated clearly and plainly in the first three verses of Hebrews – the author leaves us with no other conclusion.

At the same time, since radiance is a shining forth *from* something, the author here is affirming what later theologians would call eternal generation. Jesus is God, but He is also eternally begotten by the Father, being eternally generated of Him. This makes sense of the second verse, showing us how God speaks to us through Jesus: Christ is, as being begotten of the Father eternally, the self-revelation of the Divine. This ties into the “exhortation” aspect of the book (Heb.13:22). Here the stakes are made clear in the book of Hebrews regarding those who were tempted to return to judaism: if Jesus Christ is

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<sup>2</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/5481.htm>

God's perfect self-revelation, then to reject Him is to reject what God has spoken.

### What did Jesus do?

The third verse speaks of the Gospel: “ After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” By using the word “purification,” the author is foreshadowing his later discussion of Christ's role as High Priest, the One who has the authority to make expiation for all our sins with His priestly order (called the “order of Melchizedek”), and also *being* the very sacrifice which makes the Atonement! By being both priest and sacrifice, our Lord Jesus establishes Himself as the Savior and Lord over all, thus being placed at the Father's Right Hand. This establishes Him as the enduring High Priest, Prophet and King over us all.

It might appear at first that the author is merely paying lip service to the Gospel, mentioning it only briefly. Let us not be deceived though, as he will go in depth on the Gospel to show how much more Christ did for us than we think! Later on, we will discover how much more there is to the Gospel than meets the eye.

### **Hebrews Bible Study #3: Christ over angels**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

#### **Hebrews 1:5-14 with cross references and highlighting**

**5** For to which of the angels did God ever say,

“You are my Son,  
today I have begotten you”?

Psalm 2:7

Or again,

“I will be to him a father,  
and he shall be to me a son”?

2Samuel 7:14, Psalm 89:26-27

**6** And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

“Let all God's angels worship him.”

Deuteronomy 32:43 (Septuagint)

**7** Of the angels he says,

“He makes his angels winds,  
and his ministers a flame of fire.”

Psalm 104:4

**8** But of the Son he says,

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,  
the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

**9** You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;  
therefore God, your God, has anointed you  
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

Psalm 45:6-7

**10** And,

“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands;

**11** they will perish, but you remain;  
they will all wear out like a garment,

**12** like a robe you will roll them up,  
like a garment they will be changed.

But you are the same,  
and your years will have no end.”

Psalm 102:25-27

**13** And to which of the angels has he ever said,

“Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

Psalm 110:1 (Matthew 22:43-44)

**14** Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

## Context, Messaging and Citations

First and foremost, in this passage the author is demonstrating that Jesus is superior to angels. But why would he take the time to prove this? During the first century A.D., Jewish groups had a serious problem in overemphasizing angels. Since the Book of Enoch was written in the second century B.C.,<sup>1</sup> there was an “Enochian fever” which paid great attention to the four supposed Cardinal Angels (Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel). Pseudepigrapha was rampant, from 1 Enoch to the Book of Jubilees and countless others, almost all of which went into great detail on angels, watchers, guardian spirits, etc. There was a belief among some groups, like the Qumran community, that these books took precedence over everything Moses wrote and could even be used to *abrogate* what the Law commanded. Ascetic practices went hand-in-hand with attempts to foster contact with these angels. St. Paul condemns it in Colossians 2:18-19, saying:

“Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.”

Like St. Paul does in Colossians, Hebrews argues that Christ is the Head, superior to all, making angels *relatively* superfluous (their actual importance notwithstanding, in comparison with Jesus they are minor figures indeed). Certainly the author does not necessarily *have* to see the contemporary Jewish preoccupation with angels as the reason he writes this, but it is from there that he will launch arguments for the supremacy of Jesus over everyone else as well. Angels, being spiritual beings in communion with God directly, are naturally the first group which he needs to put in their proper place.

## How is Jesus superior to the angels?

The author establishes Christ's higher status over the angels in the following ways:

1. The Father has proclaimed Jesus to be His Son and the Messiah.
2. The angels are to worship the Son.
3. Angels are servants in the Royal Court of Heaven: Jesus Christ, being God, is King.

For each of these, Scripture is presented as evidence. In fact, Scripture is the *only* evidence for the author's arguments. On this digression, this is part of the importance to the book of Hebrews. The Book of Romans is a soteriological text; 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians are practical texts; Hebrews, on the other hand, is a lecture on Christology that utilizes the systematic theological method entirely. Unlike the book of James or Jude, which are more or less didactic in nature, Hebrews lays out a Christological position and then defends it almost entirely by Scripture alone. Practices like this are part of the foundation of Lutheran theological methodology. But, again, I digress.

## How has the Father proclaimed Jesus to be Son and Messiah?

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<sup>1</sup> That is, 1 Enoch was *expanded* by an unknown author. St. Peter and St. Jude quote the only legitimate portions which Enoch actually spoke.

First he quotes Psalm 2:7, which states “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.” The second Psalm is already about the Messiah as ruling over the nations: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.'” God rebuffs the plans of rebellious rulers by declaring the Anointed One to be His Son.

Let us not be swayed by the word “today” in verse five, as though Jesus has not always been the Son of God. We already rebuffed “adoptionism” last week, but this verse does not go against eternal generation. God exists in an eternal present, and it is always “today” for Him. For the Father to address the Son, who is also Divine, is to address Him *in* that eternal present. The writer of Hebrews will discuss some of the time aspect later on in the book, so we will wait for that discussion until he brings it up.

But he also brings 2Samuel 7:14 into his argument – at least at first blush. The exact words stated are “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.” This is not a statement on the sonship of Christ, whether of eternal generation or functional (per the “social Trinity” view). If he were, then he would be better off quoting more from Psalm 2 or bringing up the “Son” verses from Daniel. Instead, by quoting this passage the author is identifying Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of a promise God made to King David:

“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, 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 to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

-2Samuel 7:12-16

Having declared Jesus to be the Son in Psalm 2, God the Father adds to that by telling King David that the dynasty will be everlasting. The prophecy partially applies to David's son Solomon, who indeed built a house for God, did sin and was reprovved. But the rest of the promise, which laid unfulfilled by Solomon, regards one who is God's Son, who establishes an everlasting kingdom, and sits on David's throne forever – these are fulfilled only by Jesus. The author, then, is saying that Jesus is over all angels because God has declared Him to be King and Messiah (as the Son of David) rather than any of the angels.

### In what way are angels told to worship Jesus?

The author quotes the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 32:43, saying “Let all God's angels worship Him.” Let us look at the passage in question, Deuteronomy 32:39-43.

**39** “See now that I, even I, am he,  
and there is no god beside me;  
I kill and I make alive;  
I wound and I heal;  
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.  
**40** For I lift up my hand to heaven  
and swear, As I live forever,  
**41** if I sharpen my flashing sword  
and my hand takes hold on judgment,

I will take vengeance on my adversaries  
and will repay those who hate me.  
42 I will make my arrows drunk with blood,  
and my sword shall devour flesh—  
with the blood of the slain and the captives,  
from the long-haired heads of the enemy.  
43 Rejoice with him, O heavens;  
bow down to him, all gods,  
for he avenges the blood of his children  
and takes vengeance on his adversaries.  
He repays those who hate him  
and cleanses his people's land.”

So God is speaking, yet telling the angels (translated “gods” in the ESV, more on that below), to worship God. To the author of Hebrews, who has already established Christ's Divinity, this is a clear statement of hierarchy, as the Father is making this command. Angels are commanded to worship Jesus, making Him clearly above them.

There is a tricky matter of translation though which must be addressed. The argument is still valid from other translations, but the Septuagint is more direct. This is due to those translations which emphasize the Masoretic text, which lacks the phrase.

-So the King James unfortunately reads thus, and the NKJV, NASB, etc. are in agreement:

“Rejoice, O ye nations, *with* his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, *and* to his people.”

-While the ESV, together with the NRSV and Septuagint, will read similarly:

“Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land.”

The ESV says “gods” and not “angels” likely due to the use of the word *elohim*, which is often translated “mighty ones” when not referring to God Himself. This is unfortunate, as not only has God denied the existence of other gods in verse 39, making it impossible for such non-existence deities to worship Him, but the author of Hebrews, Holy Scripture, *tells us* that the beings referred to are angels, not gods! As for us, we ought to go off the declarations of New Testament authors regarding translations rather than some other “academic” method. But again (and again and again), I digress.

### How are angels servants? What else is the author stating?

The author actually defines angels in verses seven and fourteen, and this is likely the only definition of “angel” given in Scripture. They are said to be ministers, or more properly “ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.” He does not define them in any metaphysical fashion, leaving their exact nature something of a mystery. More important to him is the *function* of angels as spiritual beings sent to help *humanity*. This is reflected in Psalm 34:7, which states “The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them,” as well as St. Paul's declaration in 1 Corinthians 6:3 that the saints will judge the angels. A legitimate question to ask is, if angels serve humanity, and humanity is below Christ, what does that mean regarding their place in the hierarchy?

Then in comparison, he cites Psalm 45:6-7, and Psalm 102:25-27 as applying to Jesus. It would be redundant for us to go in detail over every reference, so let us merely show the argument. Verse eight begins with “But of the Son he says,” and verse five establishes that God is the One speaking. How does God address Jesus? As God. The Father calls Jesus Christ “God” and “Lord,” appropriating

to Him the same things appropriated to the Father. One would imagine the author writing this as the final say, a critical blow against those who held too high an esteem of angels.

There are other things which the writer will speak of regarding Jesus as we continue through Hebrews. Let us not believe that he speaks incessantly about Jesus's Divinity as his only argument for the congregation to stay faithful. There is plenty more. However, if the author *did* do this, it would still be entirely legitimate. Jesus Christ is God, King, and Messiah, establishing both the reason to stay with Him, as also to accept no substitute.

## Hebrews Bible Study #4: The First Exhortation

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 2:1-4

**1** Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. **2** For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, **3** how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, **4** while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

### Hebrews 2:1-4 (restructured and highlighted for interpretation)

#### **1** Therefore

**we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard,**

lest

we drift away from it.

#### **2** For

since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable,

and

every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,

**3** how shall we escape

if

**we neglect such a great salvation?**

↓

↓

It was declared at first by the Lord,

and

it was attested to us by those who heard,

**4** while

God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles

and

by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

### **Two Key Statements**

The first and third verses constitute the message of the first exhortation. If we put them together, then it forms a cohesive thought that helps us understand what the author is explaining.

**“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”**

As far as exhortations go, this is as clear as the author could get. If the congregation (and all believers for that matter) drifts from the faith to the point of *neglecting salvation*, then there is no escape from the wrath to come. Therefore, both they (and we) must adhere to the faith closely – that is,

to be devout. While the ESV translates περισσοτέρως<sup>1</sup> προσέχειν<sup>2</sup> as “pay much closer attention,” the two words are more expansive than merely aiming mental focus on something, making them a little more difficult to translate. As a rule, however, περισσοτέρως brings connotations of abundance, while προσέχειν, the thing the author wants us to have in abundance, is to taking heed to what we have heard, to have rapt attention – or more properly, be *devoted in faith*. The author here is giving us a plain command toward piety, especially of the inner sort. This must not be misconstrued as advocating for mysticism, however, as the author is concerned here with “what we have heard,” or the faith itself.

## The Author Explains the Two Statements

### First Statement

*“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”*

We are told here to give abundant heed to, or pay close attention to, “what we have heard.” What is it that the author is referring to? First we note the “therefore,” which tells us that everything the author has thus far said about Jesus Christ is the main motivator. From our last two weeks of study, Jesus Christ is the Divine King above all creatures; He is eternal, omnipotent, and seated at the Right Hand of our Heavenly Father. The author's “therefore” tells us that all of this must be taken into account, and the only reasonable response in light of Christ's infinite significance is to pay sharp heed to “what we have heard.” But we must be careful not to assume that Christ's importance and highest status is the *substance* of “what we have heard,” when the language used implies more that it is a *motivation* to keep our attention there.

A brief digression: why is this question so important? It is important because the author is giving the reader a *command*. But that command is impossible to obey if the reader cannot ascertain what he must do. If we must pay attention, devotion even, to what we have heard, but we do not know what that is, then we are lost as far as the author of Hebrews is concerned. Furthermore, there is theological import here; if we do not find the answer to the question, then someone may erroneously answer it to the detriment of the Church as a whole. Imagine someone believing that the emphasis on Christ over the angels was the substance of “what was heard,” and he then goes about binding Christians everywhere to hear sermons establishing imaginary hierarchies of angels. Or worse yet, another individual believes that this passage binds Christians to works in order to be saved, because he sees endless devotions and Hail Marias as a requirement before God finds us worthy of going to Heaven. So, to avoid cases of eisegesis or just bad interpretation, we find it necessary to answer the question with Scripture, cross references, and linguistic understanding. But I digress.

The question remains, what was heard? The author speaks to Christians, but he is speaking to Hebrew Christians primarily. Chances are then that his explanation in the second verse is meant as a referent to the Old Testament, namely the giving of the Law and the wilderness wanderings.

-“since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable”

The New Testament has various places which mention – in passing – that Moses received the Law from angels working on behalf of God. St. Stephen says in Acts 7:38, “This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.” In Galatians 3:19, St. Paul mentions the same thing: “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom

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1 Transliterated “perisoteros,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/4057.htm>

2 Transliterated “prosechein,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/4337.htm>

the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.” Per Hebrews 1:2, Jesus Christ is a living revelation of God to us, meaning that if the messages given through angels to Moses were acceptable and reliable, then so much more should we consider Christ's message to be reliable.

-“every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution”

If the reference to angels acting as messengers of the Law is what the author means in the first clause, then this clause is clearly a reference to what happened *after* Sinai, when the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness. St. Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians 10:6-13, stating:

“**6** Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. **7** Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” **8** We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. **9** We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, **10** nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. **11** Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. **12** Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. **13** No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

Indeed, from Exodus to Numbers, every transgression which the Israelites committed while in the Wilderness was met with swift retribution from God. They suffered from an addiction to apostasy based on grumbling, testing, idolatry, and lustful thinking: St. Paul warns us against these specifically after lumping their sinful motivations under the umbrella of “desiring evil.” But one cannot help but notice that the Israelites also struggled with *faith*, often accusing God who says “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2) of bringing them to the desert to kill them (Exodus 14:2, 14:11, Numbers 16:13, 21:5). They did not believe *what they had heard* about the God who delivered them from slavery.

It is reasonable to believe that the author is drawing a parallel between what the ancient Israelites should have placed their attention on (the deliverance God won for them in the wilderness), and what Christians should place our attention on (our salvation in Christ). In short, the answer to “what did they hear” is the Gospel. The best explanation for “what was heard” then can be summarized in this way: “What our forefathers experienced in the Wilderness was a result from drifting from faith in the God who delivered them: in fact, they stopped believing they had been delivered! Let us hold fast to our deliverance and to Christ who won it.”

## Second Statement

*“How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation”*

So now you might ask why we put so much effort in identifying the Gospel in the first statement, when the author goes out of his way to say we ought not neglect our great salvation. The reason for this is in the nature of the text: the author *assumes* that his audience knows a great deal about the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, as well as the core proclamations of the gospel. He is drawing a clear parallel between the ancient Israelites in the wilderness and the Church of his day, with a warning that the congregation of believers may undergo a worse punishment than Israel if they decide to neglect the Gospel.

Remember that the author is establishing a *comparison* here in parallel with his comparison between Jesus and the angels. If Christ is superior to angels, then Christ's message is superior to the message passed along by angels. If the message by angels was considered reliable, then the message regarding Jesus Christ is *far* more reliable, and we have even less of an excuse than the ancient Israelites.

To underline this, the author establishes a recollection of all the sources which verify the Gospel. He says first, "it was declared at first by the Lord." This is not only a reference to Christ Himself proclaiming the Gospel, but it is also confirmed by the Father's voice in Luke 9:35, when He says "'This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!'" This means direct Divine attestation to the legitimacy of the message.

Then he writes "it was attested to us by those who heard," meaning the Apostles who functioned as eyewitnesses to Christ's ministry and Resurrection. Some have used this part of the third verse to claim the author cannot be St. Paul, since he is considered an eyewitness directly disciplined by Christ, but we cannot forget that St. Paul was not an eyewitness to how the Gospel "was declared at first by the Lord." He met with the Apostles later on. We have this same attestation in the writings of the Apostles today in the form of the New Testament, while the congregation written to in Hebrews likely heard it first-hand.

Then he writes "while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." Given the run-on nature of this part of verse four, it is reasonable to assume that he is lumping all these things together as supernatural evidence for what the Church had received. While the Church does not often see these gifts and miracles today, we must be aware that we *do* see a miracle whenever we see someone Baptized, whenever we partake in Communion, whenever we see genuine repentance in a sinner, and so forth. While it might not seem as "showy" as they may have experienced, these are *far* more important and supernatural than a cut or illness being miraculously healed, or someone speaking in a strange language. I wager that the congregation Hebrews was written to was more impressed by the changes they saw in peoples' lives and the relief from sin they experienced than any miraculous gift being manifest.

While the author bases his exhortation on Christ's perfection and His perfect message – *being* the very Revelation of God – this ought not be taken to mean that he is denigrating the Old Testament or trying to say that it is not the Word of God. In fact, the Old Testament forms the foundation of his further arguments, as we will see later.

## **Hebrews Bible Study #5: The Incarnation and Mission of Jesus**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 2:5-18

**5** For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. **6** It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,  
or the son of man, that you care for him?”

**7** You made him for a little while lower than the angels;  
you have crowned him with glory and honor,  
**8** putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Psalm 8:4-6

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. **9** But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

**10** For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. **11** For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, **12** saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers;  
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

Psalm 22:22

**13** And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

Psalm 18:2, Isaiah 8:17

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Isaiah 8:18

**14** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. **16** For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. **17** Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **18** For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

## **Teleological Christology**

In Hebrews 2:1-4, the author gives the first exhortation which compares the early Church with the Israelites during their wilderness sojourn. His main point was: given how the angelic proclamation of the Law was considered trustworthy, thus making the Israelites as having no excuse, the congregation to which Hebrews was written has even *less* of an excuse, since Christ Jesus is God Himself, and is the final revelation. But this might lead the reader to ask *why* the difference matters. If

both the angelic message and the message of Christ are trustworthy for believers, what difference does it make? The four answers he gives regard the direct application of Christ's Incarnation and Atonement to the believer's life.

First Answer: Hebrews 2:5-8a

**5** For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. **6** It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,  
or the son of man, that you care for him?  
**7** You made him for a little while lower than the angels;  
you have crowned him with glory and honor,  
**8** putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Psalm 8:4-6

Before entering into the teleology of Christ's Incarnation and Passion, the author gently reminds the reader that Jesus not only is superior to the angels in nature (being Divine), but also He has a superior *status* designated by our heavenly Father. This means that Christ is of far greater importance and merits real loyalty on our parts. Of course, it might not *look* like it to the average 1<sup>st</sup> Century person who has been raised up with all sorts of stories regarding the powerful acts of angels, in comparison with Jesus who was at various times called just a healer and a prophet. But this has been predicted in Psalm 8. It is no coincidence that the author cites this Psalm, as Jesus refers to Himself as the “Son of Man” several times, and is called by this title 88 times in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> The witness of the Psalmist, King David, establishes here that the Son of Man is designated as lower than the angels temporarily, but He is now ruler over all.

Second Answer: Hebrews 2:8b-9

**8b** Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. **9** But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

The author readily admits that it does not *look* like everything is in subjection to Christ. Not that it appears as though there is nothing under His feet, but certainly the congregation does not see a total victory. But then he reminds the reader that Christ was made lower than the angels *so that* He could die on our behalf. This introduces the clear theological distinction between Christianity and all other religions: the Christian faith teaches that God is *for you*. Jesus Christ, King of the entire universe underwent death *for you*. Other religions, such as buddhism or hinduism or islam, give a “how to” guide for saving oneself and then frame this as “grace,” when it is no grace at all. Siddartha buddha teaches men how to reach enlightenment, the hindoo writings teach people how to escape the reincarnation cycle, and Moses, if someone ignores the Gospel texts within the Old Testament, gives a way for people to obey God in response to His deliverance at the Exodus. It is possible to read the Old Testament religion as a works based one, unfortunately, as this is exactly what the Pharisees did. But all of these religions lack a top-down vision of Grace, wherein God graciously delivers us without our having merited it. Christianity maintains this distinction, that God is *for you* and Christ *died for you*, and the author of Hebrews wisely makes this his first point after establishing Christ's Divine Rule.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-Son-of-Man.html>

### Third Answer: Hebrews 2:10-13

**10** For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. **11** For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, **12** saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers;  
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

Psalm 22:22

**13** And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

Psalm 18:2, Isaiah 8:17

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Isaiah 8:18

Further developing the notion that Christ's work was *for you*, the author explains that our Heavenly Father is the One who decided on the plan of salvation, knowing that it is “fitting,” or necessary, that Christ's purpose – “bringing many sons to glory” – is completed through the pain inflicted on Him. One might be tempted to see the tenth verse as advocating for adoptionism through the English translation using “perfect,” as though Jesus was somehow *imperfect* before the Atonement. This is an impossible interpretation, as the author of Hebrews has already established that Jesus Christ is God numerous times by this point, making Him already perfect in nature. The word translated as “perfect” though is *τελειῶσαι*,<sup>2</sup> a verb form of *telos*, or “purpose.” In other words, though Jesus is already perfect in the sense of being eternal and Divine, He would *not* be a perfect founder of our salvation if He did not suffer; if He has not incarnated as a human being and died for us, then no one would be saved.

When the author says “he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source,” and then goes about calling us “brothers” of Jesus, he is demonstrating the relationship between Christ and Christians. The depth of this *telos* in this passage is best explained in this way:

1. Jesus comes from God the Father through eternal generation.
2. Mankind comes from Adam through natural parentage.
3. In the Incarnation, Christ is made man, taking on a human nature in addition to the Divine.
4. This means that through His humanity Christ comes from Adam.
5. By taking on a human nature, those who are saved by Christ are adopted by God the Father, being “many sons” brought to glory.

∴ Thus those who are saved may say that they come from God by adoption, while Christ comes from Adam through Incarnation; both parties (Christ and those who are saved), may be said to have the same source.

Hence the quotes from Isaiah 8:17-18, which reflect this brotherhood between Christ and ourselves, established in the Incarnation: we are God's children now by adoption, given to Christ who in His humanity is our brother.

### Fourth Answer: Hebrews 2:14-18

**14** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and

<sup>2</sup> Transliterated “teleosai,” from Strong's #5048 <https://biblehub.com/greek/5048.htm>

deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. **16** For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. **17** Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **18** For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

In this final section in the passage, the author describes the importance of the Incarnation even further. By becoming our “brother” in having a human nature, Jesus is the perfect representative of humanity who can contend with the devil and defeat him, thus liberating all who are offspring of Abraham. In using the term “high priest,” the author is pointing to the notion of “high priest” as a chief religious representative and mediator between the people he represents and God. If Christ had not been Incarnated with a human nature, sharing all of our struggles except guilt for sin (Christ of course never sinned), then He could not have served in this role.

We must be careful to note that, though the author is writing to Jewish Christians, he is not *limiting* the Atonement to physical descendants of Abraham, as Scripture has already stated that Abraham's true children are those who share his faith, not his bloodline (stated directly in Romans 4:16, Romans 9, and Galatians 3). Nor is this passage advocating for “ransom” theology, or the idea that Christ had to pay a ransom to the devil in the form of his own life to save humanity – this is impossible given the plain words here that Christ will destroy the devil!

Regarding the devil as one “who has the power of death,” this is a secondhand power. The devil is called a “tempter” in Matthew 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 3:5, and 1 Corinthians 7:5 – all identifying him as one who tries to get us to sin. If someone sins, they are under a death sentence by the righteous requirement of God's Law. The devil proliferates death by first tempting us to sin, then accusing those sinners who would seek absolution (Job 1-2, Zechariah 3, and Revelation 12:10). Interestingly enough, the author states that it is through the *fear* of death that we were in lifelong slavery, not death itself. The devil is a master at presenting the Second Use of the Law – that of a mirror – to engage in his accusations. Satan does not necessarily terrify us by himself, but rather he lets the Law put fear in our hearts. Praise the Lord that Christ defeats him!

## **Conclusion**

The four answers here are all connected, building upon one another to present a full case:

1. Jesus is King, having been only temporarily under angels in status
  2. He was under the angels temporarily through the Incarnation so He could die for you.
  3. By being made man, He made assurance that we might belong to God through adoption.
  4. By becoming one of us, He now serves as our high priest for our benefit.
- ∴ The first exhortation is relevant *because Jesus Christ is for you.*

## Hebrews Bible Study #6: Christ over Moses

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 3:1-6

**1** Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, **2** who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. **3** For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. **4** (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) **5** Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, **6** but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

### **Three Statements**

In this passage, the author makes a cardinal exhortation to all believers, to “consider Jesus.” Over the course of all six verses, he makes three explanatory statements which tell us exactly what he has in mind when considering our Lord. What do we consider about Him? What is the importance here?

### First Statement

**1** Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, **2** who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.

Beginning with “therefore,” we must examine the basis for this passage. By saying “therefore,” he recalls to us the teleological Christology that we went over last week. Christ incarnated as the son of the Virgin Mary *in order* to save us, be our high priest, and to suffer on our behalf; now, He helps us as we go through our temptations, and intercedes for us. It is also for this “therefore” that the author restricts these next verses to those “who share in a heavenly calling.” Christ Jesus is *not* the high priest over nonbelievers, and nor should a persistent nonbeliever consider Christ as being their God or King. Christianity is not a universalist religion, saving everyone: nonbelievers, so long as they continue in unbelief, are *missing out* on a relationship with Jesus. Since Jesus does all these wonderful things *for us* in particular as our High Priest, we ought to consider Him.

We must also note that the author calls the congregation “holy brothers” in understanding which readers this verse is *not* restricting. He declares here that Christians are already considered holy and glorified by our Father in Heaven as people who “share in a heavenly calling,” agreeing with Romans 8:30. This denies the Catholic notion that one is not rightly called a saint, or “holy one,” unless declared so by the Holy See. In calling those who *share* the faith as brothers, he also rebuffs the notion that dispensationalists and “Hebrew Roots” thinkers might have that this Epistle chiefly pertains to the Jews. But just as Romans 8:30, this verse may easily be misconstrued as a proof-text for Calvinism. The “calling” is an invitation. But is that invitation something we share in the same sense as sharing the benefits of a decree of election? This cannot be the case, as the word μέτοχοι<sup>1</sup> for “share” here is more properly understood to be *active participation*. The believer hears the call of our Lord (as everyone does, John 12:32), and when enlightened by the Word decides to actively participate in the Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Transliterated “metochoi,” from Strong's #3353.

faith instead of resisting the Grace offered to them. Thus the author addresses us believers as his “holy brothers.”

We are told to consider Jesus Christ, who is the “apostle and high priest of our confession.” This is no demotion of our Lord to the rank of “apostle” as though He were equal to the Twelve Apostles. All that is meant by the word Ἀπόστολον,<sup>2</sup> or messenger, “sent one,” someone sent to accomplish a task. This is to say that yes, in agreement with John 20:21 in which our Lord Jesus says it plainly, the Father sent Him as our Redeemer and the Final Revelation. As stated before, Christ is also our High Priest in terms of His intercession and Atonement won for us.

The author points special attention to the faithfulness of Jesus, who accomplished everything for which He was sent – *just as Moses*. The allusion to Moses is no accident, given the apparent parallels between Christ and the prophet. Someone might hear the author of Hebrews expounding Christ's merits and superiority over all angels, but then opine that Moses the Lawgiver is just as special. Moses occupies a special status in the Old Testament as the author of the Pentateuch and the prophet tasked with writing the Law, from which the bulk of Israelites were judged by other prophets. And to make it deeper to some, Moses had special circumstances surrounding his infancy and persecution (Exodus 2), God using him to deliver His people (Exodus 3-4), and the clear prophetic status of Moses along with his leadership. Thus is borne an idea that persists in how people read the Gospel of Matthew to this very day: Jesus is presented as a “second Moses,” one superior mostly by being the giver of a “new” Law after the old is fulfilled.<sup>3</sup> Here the author begins to address this notion.

### Second Statement

**3** For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. **4** (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)

It is easy to imagine the surprise that must have come across the faces of the Jewish Christians who first heard these two verses read aloud to them. Christ the Logos, Christ the Divine, Second Person of the Trinity is easy to establish as being over the angels. But when comparing someone *human* to Jesus, it is frightfully simple to start comparing them to Jesus the *man*, speaking of His human nature. The author here refuses to fall into Nestorianism by acting as though Jesus were two persons: instead, he plainly attributes Christ's Divinity as being the main cause of His superiority over Moses.

Jesus has more glory than Moses. The House – that is, the household of faith which previously was dominated with Law and Promises – the house which the Israelites dwelt in, which Moses led through the wilderness, was built by God. And Jesus, the author says, is that very Deity which built it. Moses resided in and served among the congregations of the people of Israel; in a certain sense, he *was* the representative of Israel and intercessor for them. But even if he counts as “the house” in this representative sense, Christ is superior to him *because He built it*.

We cannot understate the shock value of this statement which explains what “considering” Jesus means for the first century congregation. The author is here stating that Jesus Christ is the *real* Lawgiver, and Moses was simply a faithful servant in the house Christ built. The One then that Moses ate with in the Covenant confirmation feast (Exodus 24) was Christ. The Angel of the Lord who spoke with Moses was Christ. To the assertion that Jesus is a “second Moses,” the author of Hebrews replies “there is no comparison – Christ's glory is as a mountain, Moses's glory is as a speck of dust.”

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2 Transliterated “Apostolon,” from Strong's #652

3 <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/is-jesus-a-second-moses>

### Third Statement

5 Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, 6 but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

Getting into the mechanics of this dynamic, the author is clear that Moses *served* the God who built the house of Israel. While it is true that he served as a judge settling cases and disputes, his leadership was derived entirely from his place as a messenger relaying what God told him. Meanwhile, Christ being the Son of God means His authority is not derivative at all. It is a *real* and eternal authority which He has in Himself. Of course, this is already established with the revelation that Jesus “built the house,” so to speak, but the author invites us to understand this implication. Moses received his authority only insofar as he spoke as was instructed of him; Christ has eternally possessed this authority by nature of who He is.

The author does not stop there either. The reader is invited to remain a member of God's house by continued participation in the confidence (or assurance) and “boasting” (a term for exultation, rejoicing, jubilation, etc.) in the hope God has afforded us. But we ought to notice what this means for the original readership. The author does *not* say that one is part of God's house, the House of Israel, by descent from the line of Jacob; instead he points to faith. The hope which he speaks of is an expectation, as the term ἐλπίδος,<sup>4</sup> translated “hope” also carries with it a firm link to faith. One expects, hopes, looks forward to, all that God has promised in light of what He has done for the faithful.

The sixth verse, along with the very first, formally separates blood from faith. One is not a brother in God's House unless they celebrate the same holy calling. Neither are they in the same house unless they share the same *faith*. Despite the name of the Epistle being Hebrews, it is clear that the author espouses the same supersessionist view of Israel that St. Paul embraces in Romans 9-11. This is in part due to the sheer and massive superiority of Christ over Moses, who by the first century A.D. had become something of a national figure for Judea.

And so the author of Hebrews invites his Hebrew Christian readers and initial audience to remain in God's house by *faith*, forsaking the notion that they would be fine and considered elect by their blood. Honestly though such was never a Biblical idea in the first place. Speaking of Moses, there was a “mixed multitude” that went with him on the Exodus (Ex.12:38). There is a clear sense in the Old Testament that there were Gentiles who were saved by putting their faith in the God that delivered them (e.g., the Widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17): it was *never* about blood, it was always about faith. It is simply here that the author of Hebrews simply makes this plain for us to all hear and rejoice in.

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4 Transliterated “elpidos,” Strong's #1680

## Hebrews Bible Study #7: The Second Exhortation

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Hebrews 3:7-4:13

**7** Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

“Today, if you hear his voice,

**8** do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,  
on the day of testing in the wilderness,

**9** where your fathers put me to the test  
and saw my works for forty years.

**10** Therefore I was provoked with that generation,  
and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;  
they have not known my ways.’

**11** As I swore in my wrath,  
‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

Psalm 95:7-11

**12** Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. **13** But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. **14** For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. **15** As it is said,

“Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

**16** For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?

**17** And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? **18** And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? **19** So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

**4:1** Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. **2** For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. **3** For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. **4** For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” **5** And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.”

**6** Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, **7** again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

**8** For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. **9** So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, **10** for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

**11** Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. **12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13**

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

## Introduction

This is easily one of the most confusing passages in all of Holy Scripture. It requires breaking the text down into subsections, following the logic from one section to the next, and returning back to previous sections to explain them using information gathered in the latter parts. I cannot stress this enough...it's difficult. So let's explain each section as it speaks plainly, then go back and re-explain certain parts after they have been illumined by the latter sections.

### First section: Hebrews 3:7-11

7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

“Today, if you hear his voice,

8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,  
on the day of testing in the wilderness,

9 where your fathers put me to the test  
and saw my works for forty years.

10 Therefore I was provoked with that generation,  
and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;  
they have not known my ways.’

11 As I swore in my wrath,  
‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

Of first importance is establishing the context of the passage. Starting with “therefore,” the author is using the previous passage to springboard onto his exhortation. The “therefore” in question is referring to Christ's superiority over and eclipsing of Moses. Hebrews 3:1-6 reveals (as we studied last week) that a chief implication of Christ's Divinity is that He is the *true* Lawgiver, the *true* Leader through the Exodus, and the *true* Originator of the Holy Israel that is established by faith, not by blood. Thus the author goes forward with the understanding that the Christian Church on earth is in a sort of “wilderness” period just like the Israelites were after their departure from slavery in Egypt. It must be said again that the author of Hebrews is not saying Jesus is merely a “second Moses,” but rather that Jesus is *far more* than Moses could ever hope to be – but this includes His being everything and more to the believer than Moses ever could have been.

It is with this understanding that he applies Psalm 95, particularly the last five verses, to the Church. The Holy Spirit, speaking through King David, is giving a warning to us. Israel's failures in the wilderness are the heritage of the Church, and so we are warned to not emulate the mistakes of our spiritual forebears. By their constant rebellion and faithlessness towards God, they were barred from ever entering the Holy Land (with the meager exceptions being Joshua and Caleb, per Numbers 14): only *some* of their children could enter. Thus the Psalmist admonishes us to not harden our hearts.

### Second Section: Hebrews 3:12-19

12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. 15 As it is said,

“Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

16 For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom

did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? **19** So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

In this next section, having quoted the Psalm from which the exhortation flows, the author is determined to explain to the congregation what hardening one's heart truly *looks* like. He instructs the audience to “take care,” or be on guard against, having an evil and unbelieving heart. While he ties together evil and unbelief (as one is not considered righteous outside of faith in Christ), the notion of active guarding against this raises the question of *how*. What does being on guard against this look like? Primarily in exhortation between fellow believers, as he is addressing the church as a collective. This is to guard against sin's deceitfulness, which is the primary cause of hearts being hardened. Why deceitfulness? Because it is through the temptation and sin that one is led away from the Word and the good doctrine which comes from it. Some examples we might see in our own lives would be an acceptance of fornication on account of a love interest who does not want to marry, or having no qualms with fraud or bribery on account of workplace pressure. Neither of these sins ever stopped being wrong; but the temptation to engage in them for our own pleasures can lead us to rationalizing our sin or doing away with our faithfulness altogether.

But why wouldn't this be a matter of individual devotion, as the parades of monastics and religious recluses presume to believe? The fourteenth verse states “we have come to share in Christ.” Believers are united to Christ in their Baptisms (Romans 6:4-6 and Galatians 3:27), making them not only united to our Lord, but also to *each other*. This means that no sin exists in a vacuum; again, there is *no such thing* as a victimless sin. We exhort one another to stay faithful to Jesus and in obedience to Him precisely because we are accountable to one another, and when we sin, we sin against God, all of our fellow believers, and ourselves. This means that faith is *not* a private affair.

To harden one's heart is to lead oneself away from acceptance of the Gospel. Verses sixteen through eighteen exemplify the people who fell in the wilderness by disobedience and rebellion, but it is *unbelief* which is finally named as a motivator *for* this behavior. Ultimately it was not the sins which barred the people from entering the Promised Land, for God is a forgiving God; it was their lack of faith in the God who brought them out of Egypt that led to their demise. Therefore, as the eleventh chapter will discuss in greater detail, the matter of salvation – described here as entering God's rest – rests upon faith.

### **Third Section: Hebrews 4:1-5**

**4:1** Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. **2** For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. **3** For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. **4** For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” **5** And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.”

This pericope establishes the connection between the Israelites and the Church: by saying a promise of entering God's rest still stands, this means that the promise which was made to Israel in the Old Testament directly applies to the Church. Thus we are instructed to fear lest we fail in the same fashion as the Israelites in the Old Testament – that is, by a lack of faith. The second verse is a clarification; saying “failed to reach it” in the first verse might imply *earning* one's rest, but this cannot be the case if it is *promised*. Something promised unilaterally (e.g., the unilateral promises God made to Abraham, which served as the basis for entering the Promised Land in the first place) makes the apprehension of the promise a matter of *receiving*. Just as faith receives the Sacraments, faith receives the promises of God. Thus in the second verse, the author yet again points to a lack of *faith*, not a lack

of *works* as the cause of failure to enter God's rest; conversely, as the third verse shows, faith enters God's rest.

The rest which the author speaks of is connecting two concepts, namely the Sabbath and the Seventh Day, which he will describe more in detail in later verses. But it is important to note that here he connects faith and rest, particularly in the context of God resting on the Seventh Day (Genesis 2:3). If someone wants to wonder why Lutherans are not of the "Sabbatarian" persuasion like many among the Reformed, it is because we believe the words of Scripture here which says Christ *is* our Sabbath.

#### **Fourth Section: Hebrews 4:6-10**

**6** Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, **7** again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

**8** For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. **9** So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, **10** for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

In light of his exhortation to faith as a means of entering God's rest, it is now necessary that the author should specify some things. No longer can rest be on a single appointed day of the week, now that faith in Christ Jesus and His Gospel is made plain. Instead of waiting for the seventh day, now it is "Today," or *every day*, that we must have un-hardened hearts and enter God's rest. Since there is a connection to the wilderness wanderings of Israel here, there is then a distinction between the children of Israel entering the Promised Land and the *Rest* which God refers to in Psalm 95. Joshua, Moses's successor who led the conquest of Canaan, could not have actually brought the people into the rest to which Hebrews refers; there remained a hard distinction between the Sabbath requirement in the Law, and the rest that the Sabbath observance foreshadows.

To enter God's rest is to have faith: this relieves the believer of the harsh requirements of the Law. Where previously the Sabbath was a day of refreshing from the toils encountered during the week, *now* it is a state of being in which the demands of the Law no not apply to us. On the 7<sup>th</sup> Day, God enjoyed seeing His completed work of Creation; when we place our trust in Christ, we enjoy God's completed work of salvation won for us. Sabbath observance was engaging in the typology of salvation, where one day a week the Old Testament believer was able to experience something like unto the beatific rest which God promises. Here we understand that the author of Hebrews is not doing away with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment, but introducing a more proper observance for the New Testament believer.

#### **Fifth Section: Hebrews 4:11-13**

**11** Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. **12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Obedying the Third Commandment is now a matter of entering into God's rest by faith. Since the "disobedience" in verse eleven is borne out of a lack of belief (Heb.3:19), "You shall remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy" might be understood in the New Testament era to mean "You shall keep the faith by hearing the Word," as we would characterize Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism.<sup>1</sup>

Before Luther connected the Sabbath and the Word, the author of Hebrews did so plainly. We are judged by God through His Word, which will reveal the true orientation of our souls. No matter how labyrinthine the human heart may be, the Word cuts through all complexity of motivation or haziness of belief like Alexander's sword slicing open the Gordian Knot. It is true that the twelfth verse

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<sup>1</sup> From the Small Catechism, "We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it."

demonstrates the difference between the soul and spirit, lending credibility to the trichotomist view of man's composition (that we are made of body, spirit and soul), but attention is better paid to the reason the author brings this up. Either one is a believer who holds to what Scripture has proclaimed, or he has an “evil, unbelieving heart;” this is discerned by the Word, which cuts through all of our nuance and excuses to reveal our true self; the Word will either kill you or make you alive. Commentators have noted the sword comparison as a weapon of *wounding*, stating that the Word harms or kills us in order to make us alive, as the author highlights the *active* and *discerning* nature of Scripture. Rather than just laying flat upon a shelf, the Bible shows you what you truly are, and points you to our Savior when you are found wanting.

Lest one object that the Scriptures are mere ink on paper, the author reminds the reader that no one is hidden from God's sight. No one can run from God, hide from Him, lie to Him nor fight Him. The Judge who laid waste to an entire generation of Israelites in the wilderness, laid them low by the standard of what was revealed to them. So too are we judged according to what God has given to us; if we should make the same mistake that the Israelites made, then we will be accused according to the same standard – the revealed Word. This is why the exhortation is to enter the Rest which God has promised; all other paths lead straight to wrath.

### **Tying the Passage Together**

The author of Hebrews is not writing in an obtuse way as though he were intentionally confusing us with several strands of thought. But he writes briefly on a complex series of subjects which tie together in a way that bring the exhortation great power. Let's simplify and organize the message into a logical argument for our understanding:

#### Premise One

- God rested on the Seventh Day from the work of Creation (Genesis 2:1-3).
- The Third Commandment was intended as a weekly observance of this Seventh Day as a typological experience (Exodus 20:8-11).
- The entrance into the Promised Land was intended to be the same typification of the Seventh Day as the Sabbath, though it was not accomplished (Psalm 95:11, Heb.4:4, 4:8).
- ∴ The Seventh Day persists as more than just an era in which God's work of creation is finished: it is also a state of being, heretofore referred to in Hebrews as God's *rest*.

#### Premise Two

- The generation of Israel who departed from Egypt were wiped out due to unbelief which resulted in disobedience (Heb.3:16-19).
- Unbelief means being barred from entering God's rest.
- ∴ If unbelief bars one from entry, then belief means entering God's rest (Heb.4:3).

#### Premise Three

- The Third Commandment is not abrogated (Heb.4:9).
- Believers are now called to actively enter the Seventh Day rest, rather than wait for the material seventh day of the week (Heb.4:5-6).
- Obedience to the Third Commandment has changed: previously it was waiting for a certain day, but it is now to be observed *every day* (Heb.4:7).
- Obedience to the Third Commandment does not take the form of abstinence from earthly labor anymore: it is now the apprehension of God's rest by faith.

∴ The Third Commandment is now best understood to mean “We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”

### **The Christian Moral Conclusion**

-Disobedience comes from a hardened, unbelieving heart (Heb.3:12-13).

-If we fall from the faith by the deceitfulness of sin and having a hardened heart, then we will fall just as the Israelites in the wilderness did (Heb.4:11).

-If we strive to enter God's rest by faith, then such does not happen to us (Heb.4:3).

-God's Word is the means by which our hearts are discerned by the Almighty (Heb.4:12). We do not want to be judged as faithless and thus fall.

∴ We must exhort one another towards faith in Christ and obedience to God's Word (Heb.3:13-14).

Thus the author of Hebrews invites us to exhort one another to hear God's Word and rejoice in it, that we may walk in faith and obedience, entering God's rest apart from our works. Amen and amen!

## **Hebrews Bible Study #8: Jesus the High Priest**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 4:14-5:10

**4:14** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**5:1** For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. **2** He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. **3** Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. **4** And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

**5** So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

“You are my Son,  
today I have begotten you”;  
**6** as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,  
after the order of Melchizedek.”

**7** In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. **8** Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. **9** And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, **10** being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

### **Introduction: Two Motifs**

In the previous passage, the author of Hebrews delivers the Second Exhortation, urging his readers to enter God's Rest. He explains that we no longer enter the Sabbath day by waiting for a particular day of the week to arrive; instead, the Sabbath is understood to be a state of being, entered in by faith. Thus the bulk of obedience to the Third Commandment is observed in holding fast to faith in Christ Jesus and in the Word of God. But then in Hebrews 4:14, the author almost treats this passage as a parenthetical interruption, pivoting to Christ Himself as the “great high priest.” This is not to say that the previous subject matter was unimportant, but rather that the author wants to return to his second motif.

At the beginning of Hebrews the author establishes the first motif, that Jesus Christ is fully Divine. He is God, being above all angels, making belief in Him mandatory for anyone who desires to be faithful to the Lord. But with that the matter of His human nature must be addressed; it is actually sensible for someone to ask, “yes Jesus is God, making Him my Lord, but what is He to me when it comes to His humanity?”

This question must be answered, lest we fail to grasp the importance of the Incarnation. Worse yet, one might begin to perceive Jesus as an absentee Savior, a Divine figure who died on a cross long

ago but cares not for those He saved, doing nothing for them. It would be easy to rebuff this kind of fear with rote demands for worship, to say “Christ does not exist for you, you exist for Him” – after all, Heb.2:10 says Christ is the One for whom all things exist. He owes us nothing and we owe Him everything, so we must not complain when feeling that He is distant and uncaring. But such a harsh answer would be cold comfort to a people beset by persecutions and misery. It gives the impression that a cold-hearted Jesus died for us solely so that whoever believes in Him is left alone and made to suffer, with His sovereignty being a club with which to browbeat people into silence. Without the Incarnation and the continuing ministry of Christ in His humanity, one is left with a Trinitarian version of the islamic god at best, and a remote deistic version of God at worst.

Thankfully, the second motif in Hebrews, the *priesthood* of Jesus, dispels any worries like that. Heb.2:17-18 establish that His Incarnation, establishing His priesthood, was chiefly to enact the Atonement in the purest way, and in adding a human nature He underwent temptation, thus making Him better able to help us when we are tempted. He also establishes Christ's role as high priest in connection with His superiority over Moses, as one managing the house of Israel (Heb.3:1-6). There is a sense now in which Jesus Christ, in His humanity, serves the believers in this role *currently* rather than only at the Cross.

Various Bible study resources point to the priesthood motif as evidence for the “Prophet, Priest and King” roles that are said to be chief among Christ's post-Resurrection activities. One might be surprised to find the author of Hebrews, who writes to a congregation of Hebrew Christians who heretofore were awaiting the Davidic Messiah, does not dwell on the kingship of Christ the way St. Matthew does. It is mentioned, and the Psalms brought up thus far touch on it, but aside from that “kingdom language” is mostly reserved for the latter half of the twelfth chapter. For the author of Hebrews, it is more important to discuss Jesus as High Priest. Why is this?

If we might be permitted to speculate, the context of the congregation he wrote to matters. The Hebrew Christian in the first century A.D. is *detoxing* from jewish life at this time. Having been raised with regular trips to the temple in Jerusalem and with strict observance of the Mosaic Law, the temptation to go back to that life and religion would be a strong one. In first century jewish religion, one *sees* what the priests do for the people more clearly than the Christian might have, as they played a public role in sacrifice, health inspection, teaching the Word, and settling disputes. It was altogether very necessary that an Apostolic writer should teach them what exactly Christ does in their day to day life, especially in connection to the Sabbath. If the priests worked during the Sabbath for the daily sacrifices, then we who are called to rest in Christ may rest assured that He is doing much more for us than any normal priest ever could. In so doing, while he spends most of this passage detailing what Jesus does as high priest, the author clearly establishes Christ's superiority over the entirety of the jewish religious structure.

### **Hebrews 4:14-16**

**4:14** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

If anyone should wonder where this High Priest is, He has “passed through the heavens,” and is seated at the Right Hand of the Father. Yet in spite of this He is not distant, but actually *sympathizes* with our weaknesses. He knows us well, even individually, making it the case that a normal priest (especially those who were in Jerusalem) is *more* distant than Christ. Verse sixteen puts this in a positive light, in that Jesus having had the same struggles as we do means we may *boldly* draw near His throne for mercy and grace. *Contra* those denominations who demand satisfaction before absolution is

granted during confession, the sense of the text is that one may simply go to Christ and proclaim, “Dear Savior, I have sinned, and I am sorry, I beg your forgiveness,” and he shall receive the forgiveness for which he asks. Does this negate private and corporate confession? Absolutely not, as James 5:16 and elsewhere in Scripture shows we are given the task of confessing to one another; but part of the Office of the Keys is relating the mercy which Christ has promised us here in the fourth chapter of Hebrews.

Verse fifteen establishes that Jesus Christ was entirely sinless. He was “without sin,” negating sins of deed, nature, and thought. We may hear various commentators argue whether Christ was *incapable* of sinning and whether this impacts the reading of the text; Scripture is silent on it, but assures us that Jesus truly was tempted in the same ways we are, but was triumphant against such temptations. He never failed, while other priests certainly have in the past. Thus He, being unfailing and sympathetic at the same time, can and must be trusted.

### Hebrews 5:1-6

**5:1** For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. **2** He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. **3** Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. **4** And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

**5** So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

“You are my Son,  
today I have begotten you”;  
**6** as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,  
after the order of Melchizedek.”

A key definition is presented in Heb.5:1 here. A high priest is defined as someone “appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.” If this is the case, then calling Jesus our high priest means this is what Jesus does *for us* – with a key difference, in that He has offered Himself as the final sacrifice, and thus merely has to be in the presence of the Father to be a sacrifice presented. So if any should ask “what has Jesus done for me lately,” the answer is definitively given in this chapter: “at the *very least*, He has acted on your behalf in relation to the Father. If any of your prayers have been answered, it is because of Jesus your high priest!”

A bit of comparison is offered here as well. A normal priest has to have a humble outlook toward the afflicted sinners he deals with, because he himself is “beset with weakness,” and must also make sacrifices for his own sin. Our Savior is not so burdened. But while Jesus is not required to make any sacrifices on His own behalf, there *is* a requirement which He shares with the lowly priests in the Old Covenant: that of being selected.

If someone is going to be a go-between for God and man, or a mediator, then they must be selected by God *first*. This is known as the immediate call. The congregation confirms it through appointment, making human selection a “mediate” call. In the Old Testament, the priesthood operated differently, namely by being a descendant of Aaron instead of a called pastor, but the author bolsters his case by mentioning that Aaron and his family were chosen by God; their appointment by the Lord gives them an immediate call. Jesus too fulfills this requirement by being appointed a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” though He was already beyond qualified as the Son of God. If one should ask about the mediate call of Christ, truth be told it is not necessary for Him. But even so, for the Aaronic priesthood, the observance of the sacrificial system by the children of Israel functions as their mediate call – though it was commanded, it still fulfilled this function. The case could be made that the faith and worship of all believers offered to Jesus acts in a similar fashion: commanded, but nonetheless offered freely as an *acceptance* of Christ as our High Priest.

One might ask why Melchizedek's is the priestly order to which Jesus was appointed. The author will explain this in greater detail later, so we will also reserve most of the explanation for the day when we arrive at that passage. However, suffice it to say that one important reason is that the Messiah was prophesied to be descended from David, establishing His right to the throne of Israel; but at the same time, the Messiah is shown to function in a priestly role. The order of Melchizedek squares this circle, for the King and High Priest of the Church, who is descended from Judah and not Aaron. More details will follow in coming weeks.

### **Hebrews 5:7-10**

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

As with Heb.2:10, which teaches that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for our sins on account of His obedience, the author is now discussing that same obedience as a product of suffering. While certainly there was physical suffering, toil and misery involved, it is in the immediate context of fulfilling His office of high priest. He suffered by offering up “prayers and supplications,” to the point of tears. If He had not done these things on our behalf, He could not have been an appropriate sacrifice for us, the author relates: it is precisely by the toil and pain of reverent intercession that He learned the obedience which made Him a perfect sacrifice. In other words, Christ's priestly function is a key part in the Atonement.

Someone might balk at the notion that Jesus, being God, ever had to learn anything. The sense of the text however is that this is an *experiential* learning. The word utilized demonstrates reflection upon lived experiences, rather than an accumulation of skill or head knowledge.<sup>1</sup> It is through His intercessory suffering on our behalf that He *knew what it is like to be tempted* and to struggle with the same things men struggle with as well. The author is recalling Heb.4:15, which says our Lord can sympathize with us in all our weaknesses *yet* He is without sin. Going through this in His earthly walk, He became eminently qualified, so that none could question what He has done, and is still doing, for us.

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1 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3129.htm>

## **Hebrews Bible Study #9: The Third Exhortation, Part 1**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 5:11-6:20

**5:11** About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. **12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, **13** for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. **14** But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

**6:1** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. **3** And this we will do if God permits. **4** For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, **5** and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, **6** and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. **7** For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. **8** But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

**9** *Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.* **10** For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. **11** And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, **12** so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

**13** For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, **14** saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” **15** And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. **16** For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. **17** So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, **18** so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. **19** We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, **20** where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

### **Introduction**

While various translators have split this passage into two distinct pericopes, this misses the Law and Gospel dynamic employed by the author to spiritually edify the Hebrew congregation. To separate both halves of the passage and look at each in isolation is to miss the dynamic message intended by the writer, especially in terms of the chiastic structure

Nonetheless, one of the reasons for the artificial split in the passage by translators and publishers is that the message of Law which the author proclaims is an extremely hard one which has befuddled exegetes for *centuries*. Luther famously called Hebrews 6:4 a “hard knot” because of the

difficult implications presented by the text. Here we will carefully examine the meaning of the sections of this passage week by week, starting with Heb.5:11-14 and tying them all together.

First Law Section: Hebrews 5:11-14

**5:11** About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. **12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, **13** for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. **14** But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

**5:11 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.**

Starting the passage with “about this,” the author refers to the previous verse in which he began to speak about the Melchizedek priesthood, the order to which our Lord Christ was appointed in His high priestly station. He admits that this is a difficult task because the Hebrew congregation was “dull of hearing.” As *hearers* of the Word, they slid away from sound doctrine and could not truly listen to the message he wanted to give. Note however that he *does* still give the message concerning Melchizedek in chapter seven. It is evident then that the author believes his message in Heb.5:11-6:20 will *enable* the congregation to hear it. He is not calling them idiots, but saying that their ears must be opened to hear this message and encouraged before hearing what he will say. The Third Exhortation then is serving as a preparatory message before going deeper into spiritual truth.

There is also an issue here which the phrase “hard to explain” raises regarding the perspicuity of Scripture. The Bible teaches right doctrine plainly, for all to see and benefit from. However, this does not mean that every single phrase, verse, or word of Scripture is necessarily *easy* to understand, let alone teach! The concept of the Trinity, for instance, is relatively easy to demonstrate from Scripture – one may find the relevant verses which prove that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each fully Divine and also distinct, put them forward and leave the rest to mystery. The doctrine of the Hypostatic Union, however, or even the theology of the Cross, these are understood after much study and discernment, making teaching them in a succinct way almost impossible. Understanding the icono-theological implications of Moses and Joshua requires careful study and understanding the limits which an exegete must place upon himself; teaching this typological event is even more difficult when one knows that his hearers may not feel so limited. But we must note that the author says that the doctrine of Melchizedek's priesthood is difficult to explain *because* of the congregation's dull hearing, not because the Scripture lacks clarity.

The author also states that they “have become dull of hearing.” At one point they were not. In the context of the temptation the Hebrew Christians were facing to return to their old religion and way of life, one gets the sense that, for some of them at least, this temptation and the false teachers who were introducing it led to a kind of sluggishness in responding to true doctrine. We see this in modern times as well. How many people were raised and confirmed in Confessional Lutheran churches, only to find themselves going to college and later attending some evangelical church? They found themselves in a place where perhaps campus ministry sects began to get in their ear, and they believed this was the only way to stay faithful in the face of secular pressures from universities. The author of Hebrews writes to a congregation that had given their ear to the temptation to go back to Judaism; clearly their stagnating spirituality is a fruit of this.

**12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.**

Then the author chides the congregation, saying they ought to be teachers by now. Teachers of whom exactly? If we held to Roman Catholic magisterial doctrine, we should be quite shocked to hear that an entire congregation would be expected to teach! But while there *is* a teaching office established in Ephesians 4:11, every Christian is expected here to be able to teach those whom God puts under their charge. Pastors teach their congregations, husbands and fathers are expected to wash their wives and children with the Word (Eph.5:26, 6:4), and mothers instruct their children (under patriarchal supervision). Evangelists teach while evangelizing! Apparently, though the Hebrew congregation has been around for some time, they are failing at this basic responsibility.

Instead, they need to be taught basic doctrine *again*. By “oracles of God,” the author uses λογίων, “logion” (Strong's #3051), which simply means “utterances” - in other words, the Word of God, the Scriptures. They had already been catechized into the Christian faith, but doctrine is often a matter of “use it or lose it.” Someone who is *not* steadfast in learning the Scriptures often will forget much, if not all, of what he learned. The congregation has undergone a spiritual regression, they have gone *backwards* in their sanctification such that they must be *re*-catechized with spiritual “milk” rather than solid food. But this does not mean that the author of Hebrews then schedules some seminar in which he goes over the fundamentals of the faith! Instead, since he does in fact start teaching the “solid food” regarding Melchizedek in the seventh chapter, he believes that this exhortation suffices for teaching “again the basic principles of the oracles of God.”

So what are these basic principles? While he specifies more in Heb.6:1, encapsulating the principles as “the elementary doctrine of Christ” and offering a few examples, the idea is the core of Christian teaching. We might compare what he is saying to, say, the Small Catechism, which establishes basic Christianity for anyone who reads it. Someone who focuses solely on the Small Catechism might learn good doctrine, but if they only superficially read the Scripture that gives this doctrine to us, then they will miss out on the growth given by other portions of the Bible.

**You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.**

Milk is for children and solid food is “for the mature.” Let us not take this message as meaning that there is a spiritual hierarchy of laity and priests and bishops and theologians and popes. All are called to maturity, all are called to discernment, all are called to distinguish between good and evil. This is written to an entire congregation of Christians, not just to a bishop or priest.

Both milk and solid food are nourishing, but milk is what makes someone mature. Solid food is for those who *are* mature; it does not *make* someone mature. Once one *is* matured by basic doctrines (as milk helps a child to grow), they learn discernment through this and *then* may engage in the distinguishing of foods, the understanding of more advanced doctrines and the ability to tell whether a certain “food” or doctrine is poisonous or rotten. The intention is that an individual will have his foundation in solid, basic dogma, and then move on to learning harder doctrines later on – without forsaking the foundation. This way he will be able to appreciate the treasures of Scripture with maturity, while also being able to reject false teaching. Understanding the fullness of the importance of the Incarnation is an example of the former, as the author of Hebrews has brought up, appreciating an advanced understanding of doctrine. Reading through and understanding Irenaus's *Adversus Haeresius* or Walter Martin's *the Maze of Mormonism* are good examples of the latter!

On the topic of discernment, we must be...well, discerning. Though there is a kind of discernment that is solely a special, spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:10), the basic understanding of “discernment” here is “to distinguish good and evil” – something every Christian must be able to do. Once someone has a firm foundation in “milk” and “constant practice” in discernment, they must

continue on to “solid food” so they may be skilled in the Word of Righteousness – the Word of God. This truly establishes more of the same; someone who is mature in faith and discernment is able to continue learning more about the faith and engaging in deeper discernment, appreciating treasures from Scripture even more while also being able to stand against the deeper heresies which assail Christendom every day.

Now, this is not to say there are “hidden” doctrines in Christianity; our faith is entirely exoteric. However, we do not teach calculus to three year olds: some doctrines are confusing to believers who are early on in their sanctification, and it might harm their faith. We also do not teach five year olds how to use guns, lest they find new and terrible ways to misuse them: so too do we wait a little in teaching new believers doctrines and understandings of Scripture which might lead to them being entangled in false teachings, as we have seen with language concerning icons in Scripture or the few times the New Testament permits an allegorical reading of the Old. But nonetheless, these doctrines *are* out in the open for all to see, while we hope that believers are prepared to learn them in due time. Next week we will explore more of how the author of Hebrews prepares this congregation.

Amen and Amen.

## **Hebrews Bible Study #10: The Third Exhortation, Part 2**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 5:11-6:20

**5:11** About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. **12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, **13** for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. **14** But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

**6:1** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. **3** And this we will do if God permits. **4** For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, **5** and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, **6** and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. **7** For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. **8** But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

**9** *Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.* **10** For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. **11** And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, **12** so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

**13** For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, **14** saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” **15** And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. **16** For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. **17** So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, **18** so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. **19** We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, **20** where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

### **Introduction**

While various translators have split this passage into two distinct pericopes, this misses the Law and Gospel dynamic employed by the author to spiritually edify the Hebrew congregation. To separate both halves of the passage and look at each in isolation is to miss the dynamic message intended by the writer, especially in terms of the chiastic structure

Nonetheless, one of the reasons for the artificial split in the passage by translators and publishers is that the message of Law which the author proclaims is an extremely hard one which has befuddled exegetes for *centuries*. Luther famously called Hebrews 6:4 a “hard knot” because of the

difficult implications presented by the text. Here we will carefully examine the meaning of the sections of this passage week by week, continuing with Heb.6:1-8 and tying them all together.

### Second Law Section: Hebrews 6:1-8 (Structured for interpretation)

**1 Therefore**

let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity,

not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. **3 And this we will do if God permits.**

**4 For**

it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened,

who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, **5** and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,

**6** and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance,

**since**

they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

**7** For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. **8** But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

**6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity,** not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. **3 And this we will do if God permits.**

By “therefore,” the author relates the previous part in which he discusses the Hebrew congregation's spiritual immaturity. Though he has said “you need milk, not solid food,” it is time to “leave the nest” so to speak and discuss advanced doctrines – hence verse three's hopeful statement, “and this we will do if God permits.” Though they need milk, it is evident that the criticism was aimed at motivating the congregation to *seek* that greater maturity in the faith.

It might appear at first glance as though the author is expressing contempt for basic Christian doctrine, as though it were merely the beginning of one's walk and ought to be departed as soon as one is ready to discuss some “disciplina arcani.” But we cannot forget that he is urging them to not lay *again* the foundation of these basic doctrines. If a child can pronounce “Jesus loves me, this I know,” such should not be forgotten nor scorned, but rather *enhanced* with a deeper knowledge of this fact. To “leave” the foundation is truly to build upon it, as the author will demonstrate in his discussion on Melchizedek. A foundation is that upon which the entire edifice is built; it does not go away, nor does it lose its importance once one learns more. Milk and solid food may be differing in substance, but both are nourishment for the body.

We understand the “elementary doctrine of Christ” to be the basic tenets of the Gospel – Christ crucified and risen to save sinners. But what are the foundational doctrines which come after? The author lists a few, namely: repentance, faith, “washings” (that is, Baptisms, as βαπτισμῶν is the plural of Baptism in Koine), laying on hands, the Resurrection, and the Judgment. This is not to be taken as a complete list, lest we erroneously believe that the first century Church had only primitive, basic dogma to work with. There have been scholars who held to such, that the Church developed doctrine over time such that the Apostolic era would have been marked by simpletons and buffoons. Such a notion would contradict the very things the author is saying in urging the congregation to engage with deeper truths!

**4 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened**, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, **5** and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, **6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since** they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. **7** For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. **8** But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

This is the first of the notorious “warning passages” in Hebrews, a notoriety only established by human anxiety and a lack of understanding in the grammar employed. Let us first note the “For” in verse four, the Greek term “gar” utilized in the text. If we fail to connect the immediate context with these verses, then we will be lost as to the very reason the author wrote them in the first place. He is exhorting the congregation to not lay the same foundation more than once in verse 1, using the word θεμέλιον, or “themelion” for “foundation” (Strong's #2310), which means a literal foundation, as for a building. If a foundation is left alone, and there is no structure or shelter built on it for the one who resides there, then all who are on it are vulnerable to the elements; it is reasonable to believe that the author of Hebrews was thinking of St. Paul's words in Ephesians 4:11-14, in which he urges the Church to use her gifts for the edification of the Body – using similar parabolic language regarding children, building, etc.

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.* [emphasis added]

The notion is clear: those who remain children in the faith are vulnerable to the winds of doctrinal disputes, predatory activities by false teachers, and more. But what is the *result* of refusing to grow? What St. Paul does not explore, the author of Hebrews says quite succinctly: apostasy is a real possibility.

The text is clear and painful: for someone who has been enlightened, or brought to true faith in Christ Jesus, and thus has shared in the Holy Spirit, if he or she “falls away,” then there is no hope for them. They cannot be restored to repentance. For them to try would be to say that they as a new creation in Christ must be made *another* new creation in Christ, requiring Jesus to die for them all over again – a grave insult to our Lord. This is a stark and clear preaching of Law which rightfully terrifies the hearers; the author is saying “if you do not pay attention and choose instead to continue in your stagnation, this can happen to you.”

But what is falling away? From the Greek root παραπίπτω, “parapipto,” meaning “to fall, fail, fall back, fall away” (Strong's #3895), it is apostasy in the sense of a believer deciding to be a nonbeliever – or, in the case of a convert like those in the Hebrew congregation, to return to one's prior nonbelief. It even has the connotation of retreat in battle, abandoning the way, and so forth. This is *not* referring to someone in a backslidden state, wherein they rebel against the Christian walk but do not fully disbelieve the Christian faith; there is hope for backsliders, even those who might verbally deny Christ as St. Peter did; though they might stray, perhaps even straying far, they still believe in some

sense,<sup>1</sup> and may return to good standing with God. This passage is referring to apostasy proper, in which one completely rejects the faith that they had.

There is a belief called “perseverance of the saints,” which proclaims that apostasy proper is an impossibility. According to this doctrine, any apparent apostasy without a return to the faith is proof that the individual who apostatized was never a believer to begin with. However, Scripture does not bear this out. To share in the Holy Spirit is to share in salvation, as the Holy Spirit is referred to as the seal of our salvation in Ephesians 1:13. The individuals to whom the author ascribes no hope are those who did indeed lived in a state of grace. Famous accounts of people who left the Church and denied the faith temporarily do not disprove what the Scriptures are saying, but nor does it mean that those individuals who return to the Body of Christ are returning in vain. It simply means that they were in a state of backsliding, not full apostasy.

Again, this does not negate the clear pattern of Scripture regarding those who can return to the faith after straying. The Old Testament is replete with examples of God telling those who departed from the faith to return to Him<sup>2</sup> – a command He would not give unless such was a true possibility! But the prophets preached to those who presumably would hear the message, who knew deep down that God was truly speaking to them.

Thus we ought not fear *so* so much, as those who fear God's wrath for their backslidden state are hearing God's call to return to Him (John 12:32). An apostate proper will not fear, but rather hold the entirety of the faith in contempt or hatred. While this is a possibility according to the author of Hebrews, should one continue in their stagnation and sin, he advises the faithful to build upon the foundation which Christ lays – the foundation of the Gospel and basic Christian doctrine. To build upon it is to create a shelter which protects us from the “winds of doctrine” as St. Paul puts it, that we may be safe. This ties into the doctrine of “Preservation of the Saints,” which the author will build upon, and we will build upon, next week.

Amen and Amen.

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1 The backslider ought not be considered to have *saving* faith, but perhaps a regression to mere *notitia* faith, mental assent to the historical facts of the Gospel. Repentance would be a return to *fiducia* trust in the Lord for forgiveness and salvation.

2 2 Chronicles 29:9, Isaiah 44:22, Jeremiah 3:12, and Zechariah 1:3, just to name a few.

### **Hebrews Bible Study #11: The Third Exhortation, Part 3**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

#### Hebrews 5:11-6:20

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#### **Introduction**

While various translators have split this passage into two distinct pericopes, this misses the Law and Gospel dynamic employed by the author to spiritually edify the Hebrew congregation. To separate both halves of the passage and look at each in isolation is to miss the dynamic message intended by the writer, especially in terms of the chiastic structure

Nonetheless, one of the reasons for the artificial split in the passage by translators and publishers is that the message of Law which the author proclaims is an extremely hard one which has befuddled exegetes for *centuries*. Luther famously called Hebrews 6:4 a “hard knot” because of the

difficult implications presented by the text. Here we will carefully examine the meaning of the sections of this passage week by week, continuing with Heb.6:9-12 and tying them all together.

It is noted that last week we did not go through and explain Heb.6:7-8. That is because of their great importance to the subsequent verses this week in terms of soteriology, and they will be explored in connection to today's passage.

### Previous Section's Pertinent Verses

7 For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. 8 But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

### First Gospel Section: Hebrews 6:9-12 (Structured and highlighted)

Highlighting key:

- contrast between statements
- expansion of statements, explanation

9 Though we speak in this way,  
yet in your case, beloved,  
we feel sure of better things—  
*things that belong to salvation.*

10 For  
God is not unjust  
so as  
to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

11 And  
we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness *to have the full assurance of hope* until the end,

12 so that  
you may not be sluggish,  
but  
imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

**9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.**

It is evident by the use of contrasting words in verse nine that the entirety of Hebrews 5:11-6:20 is best understood as a Law and Gospel *sermon*. The author had just finished explaining to the congregation that their spiritual stagnation was comparable to residing in a building with nothing but a foundation, leaving them exposed to the elements and other sources of harm. If they continued, then the possibility is opened up to apostatize, and thus be lost forever, like a crop of thorns and thistles destined to be burned. But then he shifts tone, going from a proclamation of Law to a section of Gospel: “Though we speak in this way” – that is, harshly and in terms of Law – “yet” he is persuaded that the congregation nonetheless has advantages which contribute to an assurance of salvation. The First Commandment forbids any apostasy of any kind, and the author spoke first “in this way” is to warn and convict; but now he intends to build them up, presenting evidence of their salvation.

**10 For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.**

To explain what persuaded the author that the Hebrew church possessed good things which point to their salvation, he appeals to God's justice. God would be unjust to “overlook” the things which would be in favor of the congregation. These are namely their continued devotion to God through their service rendered to the saints.

Does this mean that works are taken into consideration in matters of salvation? Sort of. Certainly not in the sense that one ought to trust their works to earn them merit before God – the author had already explained in verse seven, “land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.” The good works to which he points are a fruit of the faith that they have, suggesting that they are not the thorn-bearing, blighted land which would be destroyed. So works being done through the believer *can* be a reassurance of their salvation.

Now some may take the land-and-crop analogy too far, suggesting that no one does any sort of good work on their own accord. Ever. We must necessarily reject this passive, feminine theological disposition reflexively, as the author says “*your* work and the love that *you* have shown,” not “the work done through you and the love that is shown through you.” If the believer is held responsible for their sins, but is not held responsible for the good they do, then the Christian faith becomes a matter of hoping that one's will – and thus much of their personhood – is taken away for the sake of not being damned. The field analogy is accurate: indeed, God deserves all credit for the good works which we do as a fruit of faith. Yet the author also does not lie when he says that your work and love are just that – yours. Perhaps it is good to say that one may be encouraged in the works which the Holy Spirit *inspires* and *enables* the believer to do with their newly freed, however weak, will.

**11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,**

Now is the presence of good works in a believer the *only* thing which ought to encourage them? Heaven forbid! The failures which we all have as believers would mean that any assurance we gain from our good works will be tainted, incomplete. For every good work you do which might contribute to your reassurance, you have at *least* one sin which detracts from it. Besides, civic good works may also be observed in nonbelievers as well – so the author here does not permit this to be the only vector for discerning whether one is saved. Instead, he expresses a desire for the congregation to have an earnest – or diligent – orientation to possess a *full* assurance. This is not a goal to work toward by one's own efforts, by the way; to say that one seeks to earn full assurance is to admit that one will never have it.

But what is full assurance? The word employed is *πληροφορίαν*, transliterated *plerophorion*, Strong's #4136. It means a full carrying out or convincing or coming to bear of a matter, that one's mind may be made up. It is to have unwavering faith in one's salvation, having no uncertainty. This cannot be done by observation of fruits; otherwise, the author would write only of a partial assurance – as he just finished criticizing the congregation's stagnation, their imperfect fruits! Instead, if there remains a “*plerophorion*” which one may have, then it is wrapped up in Christ who died for sinners, much in the same way the author has expressed that Christ is the Sabbath rest which remains for the people of God. This is why we rejoice in Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and in the Gospel, because nothing is a “*maybe*” with these means of Grace by which God saves. With Him, there is full assurance of hope which we may possess until the end. The author does not confuse Law and Gospel here, as he is not actually telling us to do something, but instead encouraging us with the fruits of our faith and – even better – the invitation to be completely convinced of our eternal life in Christ.

**12 so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

Finally, the author makes two things very clear. The plerophorion which solidifies one's understanding that they are not blighted land is the very thing which stops spiritual stagnation. Everything the author warned the congregation about in the sections of Law is stopped, not by the warnings and condemnations of rote commandment, but in the motivation given by being certain of the faith. One will not be sluggish if he truly knows God put him on track to go to heaven! This is a key point to understand, that the New Obedience is the *principle way* by which one is motivated and energized to go deeper into the faith, to grow in observance of God's Commandments, and to stay faithful in times of trial. We do not do good works or grow in order to be Christians, but rather we do these things because we *are* Christians.

The author also hopes for the congregation to be imitators of the saints, those who have inherited the promises – something which he will discuss further in chapter eleven. But the subject matter of chapter eleven, that of faith, is foreshadowed here by the reference to faith and patience as our way of life, but especially in the causative use of faith as a means of inheriting God's promises. The saints which we are to imitate did not earn the promises being fulfilled; if that were the case, they would not be promises, but *wages*. Promises were given unilaterally, and to inherit them is to receive them by *faith*. But this is a discussion to have down the line when approaching the eleventh chapter.

Until then, let it suffice that believers do a disservice to our Lord in declining to learn from or respect the saints of old. Certainly given the first century dating the author of Hebrews was thinking of Old Testament saints, but this does not discount the various people we call “saint” in Church history. It can be quite beneficial to pay homage to and imitate the heroic faith and patience of the martyrs and Church fathers and other heroes we know of, and we disobey this verse's exhortation if we see our churches as existing in a vacuum. Even so, we also would be violating it if we did *more* than imitate and learn from their examples, going so far as to engage in un-Scriptural forms of veneration and adulation. Next week we will look at the first of two examples that the author offers up for our benefit in seeing a healthy way to learn this practice.

But until then our Lord bless you and keep you,  
Amen and Amen.

### **Hebrews Bible Study #11: The Third Exhortation, Part 3**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

#### Hebrews 5:11-6:20

**5:11** About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. **12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, **13** for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. **14** But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. **6:1** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. **3** And this we will do if God permits. **4** For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, **5** and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, **6** and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. **7** For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. **8** But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. **9** *Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.* **10** For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. **11** And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, **12** so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

**13** For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, **14** saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” **15** And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. **16** For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. **17** So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, **18** so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. **19** We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, **20** where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

#### **Introduction**

While various translators have split this passage into two distinct pericopes, this misses the Law and Gospel dynamic employed by the author to spiritually edify the Hebrew congregation. To separate both halves of the passage and look at each in isolation is to miss the dynamic message intended by the writer, especially in terms of the chiasmic structure

Nonetheless, one of the reasons for the artificial split in the passage by translators and publishers is that the message of Law which the author proclaims is an extremely hard one which has befuddled exegetes for *centuries*. Luther famously called Hebrews 6:4 a “hard knot” because of the difficult implications presented by the text. Here we finish the Gospel section of this careful study, the

completion of the edification process the author intended, with Hebrews 6:13-20, and tie the message together – so that we, like the Hebrew congregation, may be prepared to learn about the Melchizedek priesthood.

### Second Gospel Section: Hebrews 6:13-20 (Structured and highlighted)

- connective phrase
- central subject/predicate statement
- illuminating aside
- 2 line parallelism
- \_\_\_\_\_ -parallelism marker

#### **A1**

##### **13 For**

when God made a promise to Abraham,  
since he had no one greater by whom to swear,  
he swore by himself,  
14 saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.”

#### **B1**

##### **15 And thus**

Abraham,  
having patiently waited,  
obtained the promise.

#### **C1**

##### **16 For**

people swear by something greater than themselves,  
and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.

#### **A2**

##### **17 So**

when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise  
the unchangeable character of his purpose,  
he guaranteed it with an oath,

#### **B2**

##### **18 so that**

by two unchangeable things,  
in which it is impossible for God to lie,  
we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement  
to hold fast to the hope set before us.

#### **C2**

##### **19 We have this as**

a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul,  
a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,

#### **D1**

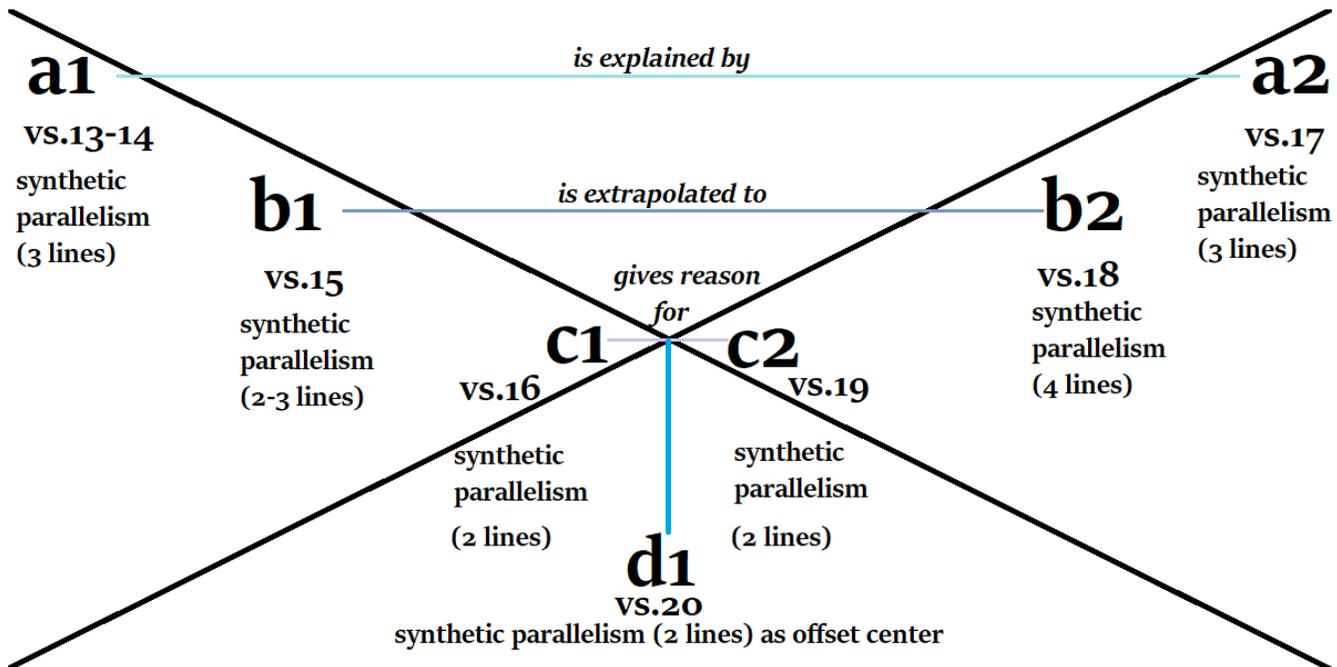
20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf,  
having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

At the beginning of his message in Heb.5:11, the author chides the Hebrew Christians as being dull of hearing, then later being unwilling to hear the deeper doctrines of the faith – namely Christ's high priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. It is with Heb.6:1 that the author expresses his intention

to get them up to speed, ready for the teaching by this brief message. After warning that this stagnation of theirs could shipwreck their belief (and thus their salvation), he then begins to encourage them by virtue of the fruits of sanctification which they have shown and the imperative to imitate those saints which have gone before them. Now at this time, starting in Heb.6:13, he begins to utilize Abraham as the prime example which they should look to.

**Structuring**

The passage has been structured for ease of interpretation, revealing that the author seems to have intended for this pericope to be made in the syntactical shape of Hebrew poetry. It is an off-centered chiasm, or “X-shaped” poetic passage in which each statement has a parallel to another, with what would be the “center” or climactic central message being at the end rather than the typical beginning. Each connective phrase (“for,” “and thus,” “so that,” etc.) begins a statement like a stanza; each stanza is parallel to another on the other half of the chiasm. To make it more easily understandable, we will have to show it by diagram.



By “synthetic parallelism,” what we mean is that segment of poetry where each line either repeats or builds on the previous lines. Typically every parallelism in Scripture is written in two, three, or four lines. A good example of a synthetic parallelism which mirrors what the author of Hebrews is doing here would be Psalm 2:8

*Ask of me,  
and I will make the nations your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth your possession.*

Strictly speaking it has three lines, with the beginning being an illuminating aside which gives context to the two parallel lines. The Father tells our Lord Jesus to ask, and thus receive the nations as heritage (line one), and the ends of the earth to be His (line two). By “illuminating aside,” we mean a part of the sentence which is not necessary for the statement to make sense, but adds details. Verse 13, without the illuminating aside, may say “For when God made a promise to Abraham, He swore by Himself” and still retain its meaning.

Synthetic parallelism is distinct from another kind of parallelism, antithetical parallelism, which contrasts two statements to get at the main message. A good example of this would be Proverbs 11:1  
*A false balance is an abomination to the LORD,  
but a just weight is his delight.*

There are no antithetical parallelisms in Hebrews 6:13-20. An antithetical parallelism is typically meant to *warn* the reader away from sin and to promise good for obedience. A synthetic parallelism is intended to *build up* what the reader already has, to teach and/or encourage them. Each statement the author of Hebrews utilizes in his chiasm here is intended to build the congregation he is speaking to, fulfilling the aim he has of the hearers being ready to hear about Melchizedek. Let us look at the connected statements and view them with this in mind.

A1	A2
<b>13 For</b> when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <b>14</b> saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.”	<b>17 So</b> when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath,

God promises to bless Abraham and multiply his descendants, swearing an oath by Himself in order to demonstrate His unchanging determination “more convincingly.” Verse 17 explains God's actions shown in verse 13; God actively showed His faithfulness to the patriarch to inspire more faith in him.

B1	B2
<b>15 And thus</b> Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.	<b>18 so that</b> by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

Noting that verses 13 and 17 show God inspiring greater faith in Abraham, the patriarch thus waits patiently and by this patience receives the promise God gave him. Since this passage is spurred on by verse 12, telling the congregation to imitate the saints, the author then extrapolates verse 15 into a cause for the reader to do the same: to take courage and have patience on account of God's unwavering faithfulness. The two “unchangeable things” mentioned are His promise and purpose, spoken of in verse 17. God keeps His promises, and His purpose (namely our salvation) never falters, so we hold on to hope that He will save us as He says.

C1	C2
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**16** For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.

**19** We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,

Since an oath is a final confirmation that someone will do or give as they say, God's solemn oath to Abraham is direct proof of His faithfulness; therefore, we Christians hold onto His promises with the steadfast anchor of His unchanging faithfulness. This holding on to Christ's Atoning Work and the doctrines which we know will keep us where we want to be (that is, faithful to Christ and undriftng, like an anchored vessel). Like the "inner place" - the holiest of holies, our hope brings us to God's presence, as one cannot be near unto God without faith. But this faith is anchored knowing that the promise of salvation is confirmed with the same kind of oath which was promised to Abraham.

**D1**

**20** where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Christ, as our high priest, has an eternal Beatific Vision, being in the *holiest* of the holiest of holies. As High Priest, this is His prerogative, and from here the author decides to begin his discussion on Melchizedek. But that is a discussion we will start next week. Until then, let us summarize this complicated pericope:

God's purpose and promise are unchanging. He proved this with Abraham, demonstrating it by a solemn oath to encourage him. Abraham patiently held onto that promise because of this demonstrated earnestness, and thus he received it. We too have received precious and gracious promises from our Lord in the Gospel, and we must emulate Abraham by doing the same thing – holding fast to the faith which brings us to the presence of God, who will not betray us nor go back on His Word.

Amen and Amen!

## **Hebrews Bible Study #13: Typology and Melchizedek, Pt.1**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 7

**1** For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, **2** and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. **3** He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

**4** See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! **5** And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. **6** But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. **7** It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. **8** In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. **9** One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, **10** for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

### **Introduction**

After having spent three sessions *preparing* to learn about the connection between our Lord Jesus and Melchizedek, it is now finally time to start unpacking what the author of Hebrews has to say about this mysterious figure.

### **Who is Melchizedek?**

From Genesis 14:17-24

**17** After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). **18** And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) **19** And he blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Possessor of heaven and earth;  
**20** and blessed be God Most High,  
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. **21** And the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.” **22** But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, **23** that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ **24** I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.”

Melchizedek's name, which translates to “My king is right” or “King of Righteousness,”<sup>1</sup> only occurs twice in the Old Testament. Once in Genesis 14:18, and once in Psalm 110:4. That's it. Yet the author of Hebrews emphasizes him to the point of declaring him superior to Abraham. Why would this be? First, let us discuss the obvious reason, which is that Melchizedek points to Christ in every detail given about him. He is the king of Salem, which is an early name for Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> Christ Jesus prepares the New Jerusalem at which He shall reside with believers (John 14:3, Revelation 21). Melchizedek brings out bread and wine, the two elements in the Eucharist which Christ established (Luke 22:14-23). Melchizedek somehow knew of Abram's exploits in delivering Lot, and expressed a benediction which shows religious authority over him; Christ too expresses personal knowledge of Abraham and speak of having greater authority than him (John 8:48-59). Melchizedek is king and priest over Salem; so too is Christ our King and also our High Priest. Of all types in the Bible, Melchizedek is the strongest.

### *Typology*

What is a type? In Scripture, *typology* is a Biblical foreshadowing of some aspect of the New Testament found in the Old – by *persons, laws and events* rather than by direct prophecy. If an Old Testament personage is a *type*, then they are intended to foreshadow Christ or the Gospel by various aspects of their life. St. Paul identifies Adam as a type of Christ in Romans 5. In Galatians 4, Hagar and Sarah are depicted as serving a typological function depicting the Church era distinction between those enslaved by the Law and those freed by the Gospel. The feast days of the Old Testament, in fact the entirety of the Ceremonial Law, are considered types of Christ in that they pointed to Him (Colossians 2:17).

These connections are made in Scripture, though we must be careful not to engage in “typomania,” seeing types where Scripture has not pointed us. This is important to our discussion today. It is one thing to say that there are similarities between a person in the Old Testament and Christ, and given enough similarities we might even say that their life is typological in nature. For instance, King David is clearly shown to be a type in Scripture, as is Melchizedek, and even Joseph of technicolor dreamcoat fame. However, a problem arrives when someone starts seeing types that are *not* centered around Christ and the Gospel, when we forget the Christological principle asserted in Revelation 19:10, which thus gives us boundaries for typology. The Roman Catholic Church arrives at the practice of praying to the saints through typology, proclaiming that the kingdom of Judah was typologically connected to the Kingdom of Heaven; just as the common citizen would have to go through intermediaries to get to the King, so too does the common Christian have to go through meritorious saints in order to obtain God's favor most of the time (especially Mary, whom they claim is “Queen of Heaven” because of Judah's queen-mother practice). The problem is that Scripture *does not say* that the current Kingdom of Heaven operates according to the traditions of man, and nor does the Word even hint at it. It is an abuse of the typological method of interpretation.

Just as the abuses of gematria, meanings of names, double fulfillment in prophecies, etc., one might use typology to justify saying *anything*, and then claim the Bible teaches it. Yet with that unfortunate practice, we end up with uncomfortable implications that are not addressed by the innovators. If the Kingdom of Heaven operates under the same habits as the Kingdom of Judah, does that mean Christ has more than one Bride? After all, nearly all of the kings of Judah practiced polygamy. Is the Trinity an understatement, given the kingly imperative in Judah to have multiple candidates for the throne? Such questions reveal a mercenary use of typology on Rome's part, since they are unwilling to have a 1:1 comparison between Judah and Heaven here: it is only used to justify a

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1 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4442.htm>

2 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8004.htm>

practice they wanted to have in the first place. Mary is called Queen of Heaven or Queen Mother from typology – yet she is also called the Ark of the New Covenant through typology. Which is it? Was the original Ark of the Covenant thus a type of the Queen Mother figures that show up in the histories of Judah? For that matter, since the Law of Moses foreshadowed Christ, why not command observance of the Law instead of living under the New Covenant? This is all to say that proper typology will *point* to our Savior in a prophetic manner: lest we confuse the faith, it cannot have actionable consequences in the life of the believer or the normal operations of the Church.

Melchizedek is indeed a type of Christ, but the implications of his office as a king and priest, his superiority to Abraham, etc., are all discussed satisfactorily by the author of Hebrews: we need not look into further ideas which are not supported by the text. We cannot, as the mormons do, establish a “Melchizedek priesthood” here on earth, as this is merely an extension of the typological thinking, not something explicitly endorsed in Scripture – for someone to establish a Melchizedek priesthood here on earth, as though the King of Salem himself ordained it through a laying on of hands, is as untenable as praying to saints just because King David was a type of Christ. We must look to the *text*, establish what the *text* is saying, and go no further. But as this passage does not merely discuss typology, but also history and theological details, now we may engage in commentary.

## Commentary

*1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.*

Melchizedek, by his very existence, demonstrates that there was a priesthood and a Godly nation-state before Israel's founding. By nature, this separates him from the Abrahamic heritage without separating him from God, despite what certain judaizing factions might say. Thus, Christianity is an Abrahamic religion in the sense that we share the faith of Abraham (Romans 4:16). But at the same time, it is *not* an Abrahamic religion in that physical descent from Abraham or having connections to the Levitical priesthood do not matter one whit to us; the priesthood of Christ according to the order of Melchizedek demonstrates this. Permit a little speculation here, but it appears that the author of Hebrews brings up Melchizedek to demonstrate to a congregation tempted by Jewish religion that the true faith is much *older* than Abraham. Abraham is of great importance, but contra what dispensationalists, Jews and Muslims might say there is no need to claim him; Abraham, like us, is a convert to a faith which Melchizedek already preached.

By a name which means King of Righteousness and being King over a place named “Peace,” he pictures Christ, who indeed by His Divine nature is King of Righteousness and King of Peace. These titles properly belong to God alone. That these titles were conferred to Melchizedek during his reign as a foreshadowing of Christ also demonstrates the distinction which Christianity enjoys. In the Mosaic Law, ruler and priest are strictly separate; not so with our Lord Jesus.

*3 He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.*

The root word translated as “resembling” is ἀφομοιῶ,<sup>3</sup> which usually has a definition closer to assimilation or “to make like.” However, it is in the passive participle, ἀφομοιωμένος, meaning that he is passively made to exemplify Christ. This is not to say that the man, like Enoch or Elijah, lived forever; nor does it mean that Melchizedek *was* Christ, as the two are made separate by this verb. Melchizedek is made to *picture* Jesus, rather than identified as one with Him.

The author is thus not establishing some divine quality in Melchizedek (contra what the Qumran community and other cultists believed, see [here](#) for more details), but explaining that the exclusion of any genealogy or detail regarding lifespan is an *intentional* omission by Moses (more properly, by the Holy Spirit who inspired Moses) to serve the greater typological purpose of pointing to Christ. Yet in this verse, which states “he continues a priest forever,” we *are* given an important detail that indeed Melchizedek is a saint, residing in Heaven. Such would not be the case if, as perhaps the enemies of Christendom in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. would argue, Melchizedek's priestly position were illegitimate or of pagan origin. By saying his priestly operations continue, the author grants legitimacy to Melchizedek which establishes him to be of the same (superior even) status as the Levitical priesthood. We might also note that since Israel was God's *ecclesia* on Earth until Christ's Passion, yet Melchizedek and his priesthood are separate from it, this also goes against the harder readings of “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus,” or “Outside the Church there is no salvation.” If an individual separate from Israel proper is declared a saint, then such might be said of those who are separate from the historic Apostolic churches; there is more room for Mueller's “felicitous inconsistency” on account of this verse.

*4 See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! 5 And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. 6 But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. 8 In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. 9 One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, 10 for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.*

The rest of this passage is easy to understand. An inferior grants tithes to his superior. A superior gives blessings to the inferior before then. Thus Melchizedek is superior to Abraham, and by extension he is clearly superior to Levi. If this is the case, then the Melchizedek priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood in every respect. Thus the ministry of Christ, as we will cover next week, is better than anything that could be offered in the Jerusalem temple.

Now we might get mixed up on account of verse 8. This might imply that Melchizedek was some eternal person thus equated with Christ. However, as we established, the Greek does not permit Melchizedek and Christ to be the same person. It is much more likely that Melchizedek's guaranteed status as a saint means that the tithes which he received, given his continuing ministry even after his death, establish further his superior status over the Levitical priesthood. But that is, again, a matter for next week as we hope to rejoice in this deep, advanced doctrine.

Amen and Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/871.htm>, transliterated “aphomoioh”

## **Hebrews Bible Study #14: Typology and Melchizedek, Pt.2**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 7

**11** Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? **12** For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. **13** For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. **14** For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

**15** This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, **16** who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. **17** For it is witnessed of him,

“You are a priest forever,  
after the order of Melchizedek.”

**18** For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness **19** (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

**20** And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, **21** but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:

“The Lord has sworn  
and will not change his mind,  
‘You are a priest forever.’”

**22** This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

**23** The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, **24** but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. **25** Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

**26** For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. **27** He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. **28** For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

### **Introduction**

After having spent three sessions *preparing* to learn about the connection between our Lord Jesus and Melchizedek, it is now finally time to start unpacking what the author of Hebrews has to say about this mysterious figure. Having spent the past ten verses explaining why Melchizedek himself is an important figure as a type of Christ and how his priesthood is superior to the Aaronic priesthood, now the author turns his attention to the *why* of the matter. Here he explains the purpose behind the ordination of Christ to the Melchizedek priesthood, which today we will discuss as related to justification by faith. Thankfully, the track of argumentation the author gives here is much simpler than previous sections, not requiring the same level of highlighting, underlining, etc.

Heb.7:11-14

*Heritage and Change*

**11** Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? **12** For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. **13** For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. **14** For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

With “Now,” the author changes the direction of the lesson. He just established the “who” and the “what” concerning Melchizedek and his typological relationship with Jesus; now it is time to explain the “Why.” Why is it necessary for God to do what He says in Psalm 110, reestablishing the order of Melchizedek under the leadership of Christ? We must not forget that during this time, the congregation to whom the author writes is being tempted to *leave* Christianity for what appeared to be a more well-established Hebrew religion. In Jerusalem, the Levitical priesthood was carrying on as they had since just after the Exodus, and there was an entire nation and race devoted to following the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law; Christianity, by contrast, appeared as a tiny sect and movement, consisting of persecuted Gentiles and Jews who had believed the claims of the Apostles. Why replace what is so fundamental to Hebrew life as it was in the first century?

So the author argues first and foremost that the Levitical priesthood is insufficient. Indeed, if it *had* been able to accomplish God's complete aims, then God would not have spoken of a Melchizedek priesthood. But for there to be a new priesthood means there must be a new law, and a new governing body. Thus he identifies our Lord Jesus as the One to whom the new priesthood belongs; it must be a special ordination, as otherwise He would have no right to have performed any sacrifice at all. Previous Davidic kings *attempted* on occasion to fulfill duties reserved for the Levitical priests, to disastrous effect; in 2 Chronicles 26:16-21, Uzziah attempted to burn incense at the altar in Jerusalem, and God struck him with leprosy! If Jesus had been merely some claimant to the Davidic throne, without having been set into a real priesthood, then the Atonement would have been an illegitimate act. But with the Melchizedek priesthood established separate from the Aaronic order, there is no need under the Law for Christ to have been descended from Levi; with this, He rightly inhabits both the offices of King and High Priest.

Heb.7:15-21

*The Need for Change*

**15** This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, **16** who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. **17** For it is

witnessed of him,

“You are a priest forever,  
after the order of Melchizedek.”

**18** For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness **19** (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

20 And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, 21 but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:  
“The Lord has sworn  
and will not change his mind,  
‘You are a priest forever.’”

The *legitimacy* of Christ's Atonement is established with the Melchizedek priesthood, and there is a sense in which the *insufficiency* of the Levitical priesthood is argued for, but here the author gets into more detail as to the *reasons* for both facts. The Levites had their heritage by blood: one's position was handed down to him by his father who had it previously, and in turn he would pass his position along to his sons. This is to say that the Aaronic order was an order which dealt with the reality of death; it was never sufficient because the priests died, just as their sacrifices did, making more priests and more sacrifices necessary over the course of time. Jesus, the New High Priest, has an “indestructible life,” having risen from the dead; He does not need to pass His work on to anyone else, and as the Sacrifice Himself, He has for all eternity established the efficacy of the forgiveness won on the Cross.

Verses 18-21 introduce a basic Law and Gospel distinction to help explain this further. The Aaronic priesthood is established as a matter of Law; it is commanded that these men be ordained by their bloodline, and they continue on with a weak, useless system. The Law is established by *requirement*, not efficacy. It makes demands, but demands do not in and of themselves give results, hence the Law's weakness. It tells us to *be* righteous, but cannot *make* us righteous; the Levitical system, established by the Law, is as powerless as the Law to save us or give us hope. Note here that the author is not telling us the Law is *worthless*, as indeed one does learn from it as a tutor which teaches us how righteous people act (Galatians 3:24). But if the goal is salvation, to make someone righteous or give them life in and of themselves, then the Law cannot help a sinful man fulfill a single commandment, let alone give him eternal life.

Meanwhile, the Melchizedek priesthood is established by an oath from God, or a *promise* that He makes. God says He will do this, and then He does it, regardless of human action or inaction. While the Law cannot save us, only demanding that we save ourselves, the promises of God (or the Gospel for short), have the guarantee that God will accomplish what He says, making a priesthood based on such a much more hopeful, powerful thing than the Law could ever establish. And if God is the One making promises, then the matter of salvation is accomplished by His power alone by His Grace Alone (that is, unmerited favor), making our benefit won merely by receiving those promises, which we do by faith.

Heb.7:22-28

#### *The Better Covenant*

22 This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

26 For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. 27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. 28 For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the

word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

The twenty second verse is incredibly easy to understand. A covenant which saves you is superior to a covenant which does not. As it is called “better,” it also establishes that, as a matter of fact, there is a *New Covenant*, contra the imaginations of some Reformed thinkers that the New is merely a continuation of the Old with some modifications. The Mosaic Covenant was not working; it had to be replaced. The requirements of the Law and law-keeping are unattainable: therefore these requirements had to be replaced by a single aspect of Christian life – that of faith.

The author also argues that he who is dead cannot make intercession, as death ceases their offices. Thus the old priesthood cannot redeem, as they cannot continuously make intercession when death takes away their status; Jesus Christ, on the other hand, lives eternally, meaning that His priesthood continues forever and thus His intercession for us is efficacious *eternally*. This is over and against the Roman Catholic arguments for praying to the saints, as these verses say quite plainly that death prevents someone from making intercession. While Rome might claim that these individuals are alive in Christ, it is a life that is qualitatively *different* from life on earth: the Old Testament saints who were of the Levite priesthood are *not* able to make intercession, even though their life is in Christ as well.

The last few verses hold to the same principle. An eternal priest means an eternal priesthood means eternally valid intercession. To add to this, the author re-asserts Christ's perfection, being completely sinless and unspotted, making Him both the perfect Sacrifice *and* the perfect High Priest. He does not need to make sacrifices for any sin of His own, since He has none, and He is never ceremonially unclean. This separates Him from the Aaronic priests, whose efficacy in sacrifice depended on their ritual cleanliness, their sacrifices for their own sins, and so forth; if a priest of that order made a mistake, then there is no absolution given regarding the offering, as it is invalid. Such is not the case with our perfect Savior. This means that there is *zero* justification for saying that the Eucharist is an “unbloody sacrifice” or that Christ is “re-offered” at the Altar during Communion. To the contrary, since He is perfect, with an office made perfect forever, the function of the Sacrament can *only* be Grace upon us, and *never* a second prosecution of the Atonement. To the contrary, absolution is *always* offered perfectly and received by faith for those who come to Christ at the Altar, since the Atonement was accomplished once for all. When we take Communion, His part has been finished for the past two thousand years.

That's it for our excursus on Hebrews 7. Next week we will tie everything we have read thus far into a cohesive message regarding the person and work of Melchizedek, in the hope of receiving great benefit from the treasury of God's Word.

Amen and Amen.

## **Hebrews Bible Study #15: Melchizedek Overview and Further Questions**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 7

**1** For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, **2** and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. **3** He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

**4** See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! **5** And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. **6** But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. **7** It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. **8** In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. **9** One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, **10** for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

**11** Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? **12** For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. **13** For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. **14** For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

**15** This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, **16** who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. **17** For it is witnessed of him,

“You are a priest forever,  
after the order of Melchizedek.”

**18** For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness **19** (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

**20** And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, **21** but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:

“The Lord has sworn  
and will not change his mind,  
‘You are a priest forever.’”

**22** This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

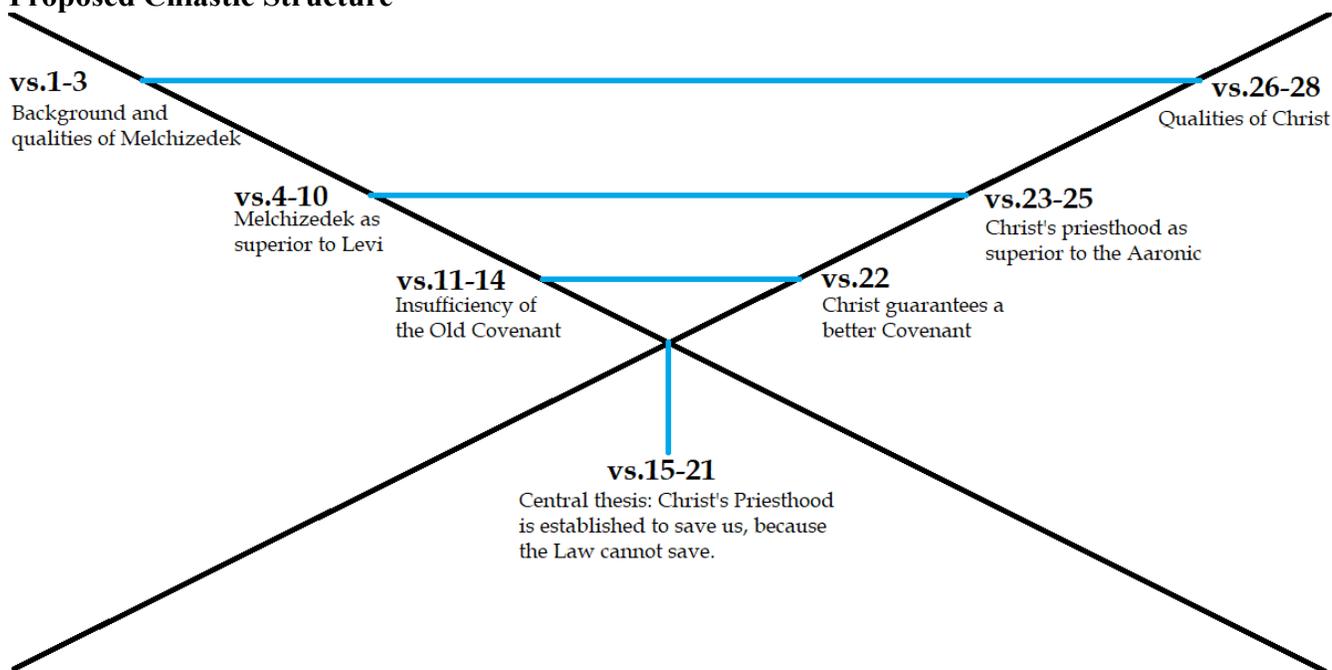
**23** The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, **24** but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. **25** Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

**26** For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. **27** He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. **28** For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

## Introduction

We spent a long time going over how the author of Hebrews makes the case that one ought to go deeper in their faith, while never abandoning nor re-laying the foundation of basic, pure doctrine. The intention he has is that one has a *stronger* faith when they learn to have a *deeper* faith. Thus far, we have attempted dutifully to learn these deeper matters. We have gone into the mechanics of typology, the comparison between the priests of Levi and the Melchizedek priesthood, and the Law/Gospel dynamic presented by the ordination of Christ to the latter. As the Levitical priesthood and old covenant were functions of Law, and the priests only able to intercede while still alive, an eternal priest who was born separate from Levi was necessary to both establish a new Covenant and continue for eternity for intercession. However, if we see these two points (covenant and priesthood) as the only doctrine to be gleaned from the passage, we risk missing out on some of the deeper things to which the author of Hebrews may be pointing. Thus it is worth another look and examination: following this introduction are some observations which may prove fruitful in other Biblical study series. Also, it goes without saying that the speculative nature of some of this lends itself to a less formal means of discussion. The pdf here on [verylutheran.biz](http://verylutheran.biz) will only be of so much help, and the audio will be more beneficial.

## Proposed Chiastic Structure



As we saw with chapter 6, the author of Hebrews is not to be seen without an eye toward chiasm, and this passage certainly is no different. Verses fifteen through twenty one demonstrate the teleological *why* of the Melchizedek subject. The Old Covenant was not working: Christ was ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood in order to justify the establishment of a better Covenant and priesthood.

But this raises the question: why have the Old Covenant or the Mosaic Law in the first place when Melchizedek demonstrates the existence of a different community which worshiped God before Abraham was given the Covenant? Rephrase: if Melchizedek's priesthood was satisfactory, why have Abrahamic or Mosaic Covenants at all? One might opine that there is an ethnic component over this; since Melchizedek did not have a genealogy (vs.3), then his priesthood and religious structure would not have sufficed to fulfill the prophecies given by Noah regarding Shem (Gen.9:26-27), which might suggest that salvation *had* to come out of the loins of that son. If Melchizedek was a Japhethite or

descendant of Ham, then while his congregation in Salem may have been sanctified, it could not bring salvation to all the peoples of the world as was promised to come through Abraham's line (Gen.12:3). However, while this point has explanatory power, it leaves open the question of whether or not Noah's pronouncement was truly prophecy or merely the angry reassignment of inheritance by a man with a hangover.

[REST OF DISCUSSION IS ON RECORDING]

## **Hebrews Bible Study #16: Teleology of the New Priesthood**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 8:

**1** Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, **2** a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. **3** For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. **4** Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. **5** They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” **6** But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. **7** For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

**8** For he finds fault with them when he says:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord,  
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel  
and with the house of Judah,

**9** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers  
on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

For they did not continue in my covenant,  
and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

**10** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel  
after those days, declares the Lord:

I will put my laws into their minds,  
and write them on their hearts,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.

**11** And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor  
and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’  
for they shall all know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest.

**12** For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,  
and I will remember their sins no more.”

**13** In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

This is the Word of our Lord

**Thanks be to God!**

### **Introduction**

The eighth chapter of Hebrews is one which can be understood only by careful commentary: not verse-by-verse, but statement by statement. Because of this, we will have little time for “fluff” in this study today, spending the bulk of our time parsing through each thing the author is saying before attempting to tie everything together at the end.

### **Vs.1-2**

**1** Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, **2** a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.

*Now the point in what we are saying is this.* Here the author intends to reiterate and enhance the message he gave in chapter 7. Having gone through the importance of Melchizedek and demonstrating the reasons for Christ's ordination to that priesthood, now it is time to discuss the meaning and implications *for* this new high priesthood. And his point is precisely this, that Christ the High Priest has direct access to the Father and stationed at His Right Hand. As he will discuss further, this makes Him superior to earthly priests and His Covenant superior to the Old Covenant.

### **Vs.3-4**

**3** For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. **4** Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law.

As the new High Priest according to the Order of Melchizedek, Jesus Christ is appointed to offer “gifts and sacrifices.” By this, presumably the author refers strictly to the Atonement, at least as far as sacrifices go. However, one may make a case that our good works, done on account of belonging to Christ, are presented before our Heavenly Father as a freewill offering. This would hearken to the “Peace Offering” of Leviticus 7, which is offered unto the Lord as a matter of thanksgiving; in the New Covenant, our lives and deeds are freewill offerings of gratitude made to God (Romans 12:1).

This means that our good works are pleasing to God, but not meritorious unto salvation. If they are freewill offerings, then to say that they contribute to our salvation would be a category error akin to mixing up the Old Testament sacrifices; if we are not permitted to mistake a peace offering for a sin offering in Leviticus, then we are not to mistake our good works for the Atonement already won for us on the Cross.

It is of utmost importance that Christ be at the Right Hand of the Father for this ministry. If His ministry was earthly, then two things would be certain. First, He would not be a priest at all, for if He had not died and risen again, ascending to Heaven to enact His ministry, the Levitical priesthood would still be valid and in force. Second, even if He were a priest (perhaps if He were incarnated into the Aaronic line), then His priestly duties would be in service to the Law, rather than the New Covenant of the Gospel. Praise the Lord that this is not the case!

### **Vs.5**

**5** They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”

This is a startling revelation, but one which greatly assists the exegete. Here the author of Hebrews says that the priests in Jerusalem are only serving “copy and shadow” of heavenly things. This means that there is an altar in the Heavenly Jerusalem, there is a heavenly lampstand (seen directly in Zechariah and Revelation), and so forth. Citing Exodus 25:40, the author contends that Moses was not shown blueprints or drawings of the tabernacle furnishings, but *actual objects* in Heaven to which the earthly copies coincide. This also helps us to see that David's Psalms which refer to a temple of the Lord are in reference to a *Heavenly* Temple which precedes the structure Solomon built.

This is the first time that the author brings up what we *might* call a platonic vision for Heaven. Not that Plato's theory of ideals is necessarily proven correct in Scripture, but the resemblance is striking. Heavenly objects have corresponding earthly objects, such as the lamps for churches in the letters of Revelation and the temple, and in later chapters the author will discuss the correspondence between heavenly and earthly *places* (Jerusalem in particular). As he gives more details on it later, this mention is a foreshadowing of the greater details placed latter chapters. For now, suffice it to say that the existence of heavenly objects pertaining to Christ's high priesthood are mentioned to further demonstrate the legitimacy of His current ministry. No one could denigrate Christ's proclaimed priesthood by claiming He had no ephod, altar, etc., because these things truly exist in proximity to the Heavenly Throne.

### **Vs.6-7**

**6** But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. **7** For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

Not only is His position greater than that of a Levitical priest, being in much closer proximity to the Father and also being of a Heavenly priesthood, Christ also predicates His ministry on the New Covenant. For the author of Hebrews, a Covenant establishes a priesthood, not the other way around; the Old Covenant at Sinai established the Levites, the New Covenant established at Calvary established Christ as the new high priest. This is done, of course, because the Old Covenant is incapable of achieving the aims that God wants to accomplish. Of course, before a priesthood is established by a Covenant, a Covenant has to be established by Promises – ie., the Word of God given to men. The Old Covenant was given to Moses as a means of fulfilling promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The New Covenant is given to all of humanity since the Fall in Eden (Genesis 3:15).

Church history is replete with people getting this exactly backwards by the way. Several times we Christians have established priesthoods according to *\*our\** stipulations in order to write up covenants with God and thus merit His promises. It seems to me this is a deeply seated backwardness centered on man rather than God.

### **Vs.8-12**

**8** For he finds fault with them when he says:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord,  
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel  
and with the house of Judah,

**9** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers  
on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

For they did not continue in my covenant,  
and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.

**10** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel  
after those days, declares the Lord:

I will put my laws into their minds,  
and write them on their hearts,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.

**11** And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor  
and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’  
for they shall all know me,

from the least of them to the greatest.

**12** For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,  
and I will remember their sins no more.”

Citing Jeremiah 31:31-34 as an example of the “better promises” on which the New Covenant is predicated, in which the Lord says that He will provide: righteousness that comes from within, a renewed belonging to His people (for the remnant anyway, as St. Paul discusses the inclusion of the Gentiles and branches broken off in Romans 9-11), mercy regarding their sins and the total forgiveness thereof. These things are the true aims of the God who wants His people to be *truly His*. The Law could not accomplish this.

To be fair, it is not the fault of the Law that it cannot produce the righteousness which God wants to see in His people. Jeremiah clearly states that the blame lays with the sinfulness of the children of Israel: “they did not continue in My Covenant.” With the Ten Commandments, God reveals His ethics for all of man's life; with the Mosaic Covenant, which includes the Decalogue, applications are given in case law and Levitical/ceremonial regulation. This means that while there was already a perfect standard of conduct given by the Lord in Exodus 20, the Mosaic Law expanded on the civic regulations and code of conduct which would make the Israelites truly holy before the Lord. Yet because it is an expansion of commandments, it is also a greater opportunity to sin.

### **Vs.13**

**13** In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Indeed, this is a complete and total abrogation of the Mosaic Law. Humanity is no longer judged by their obedience to various commandments; they are judged now on the basis of whether they believed in Jesus and were Baptized (Mk.16:16). Those who reject faith in Christ are truly judged by the stipulations of the Old Covenant – and will perish by and with it. Those who do hold to Christ rejoice in His mercy and grace given unto them, the *free* offer of salvation given to sinners.

To provide a brief summary, the author of Hebrews is not merely shoring up the legitimacy of Christ's high priesthood. He is saying that it had to be this way if anyone to be saved, escaping the judgment of the Law. And if anyone was to have a truly righteous heart, then a new Covenant was necessary which is superior to the old, in order that there may be a people who are the true children of God.

Next week we will expand on this as we dive into the further details granted in Hebrews 9. But until then, our Lord bless you and keep you.

Amen and Amen.

## **Hebrews Bible Study #17: The Slow Death of the Old Covenant**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 8:13-9:10

**13** In speaking of a new covenant, He makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

**1** Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. **2** For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. **3** Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, **4** having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. **5** Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

**6** These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, **7** but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. **8** By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing **9** (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, **10** but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

### **Introduction**

The author of Hebrews intimated in the eighth chapter that salvation could not be accomplished through the Old Covenant. It was not capable of achieving the ends which God desired to see accomplished for mankind, and this was by design; in all aspects, the Old Covenant was intended to foreshadow the New Covenant, as all of the objects utilized by the Levitical priesthood were earthly representations of heavenly realities. Nonetheless, it was also predicated on lesser promises made to Abraham and the other patriarchs of Israel, whereas the New Covenant was predicated on *greater* and *older* promises, necessitating a different, Heavenly priesthood – that of Christ Jesus.

In the ninth chapter, the author describes the precise reasoning for his declaration that the Mosaic Covenant cannot save, while the New Covenant can. Taken as a whole, the chapter lays out in detail a *firm* separation between the two, contra Reformed notions that they are taken as one, or that the New Covenant is merely a development or “dispensation” of the Old.<sup>1</sup> If Scripture tells us there is an Old and a New, then we are bound by the plain meaning of Scripture to confess that they are *not* the same. This also damages the concept of a “regulative principle of worship,”<sup>2</sup> as a New Covenant demands new modes of worship from believers. Furthermore, praxeologically it renders the Eastern Orthodox imitation of Old Testament sacrificial practices (namely an ersatz Holiest of Holies) superfluous. That said, let us explore the first ten verses, which describe the method and characterization of acts of worship in the Mosaic Law.

Verse one through ten present a delineation of two distinct Tabernacle places, both of which are exemplified by entirely obsolete objects. First is the Holy Place in the Tabernacle, which is where priests conducted their usual work of intercession for the people. The second was the Holiest of Holies

<sup>1</sup> <https://faculty.wts.edu/posts/calvin-and-the-unity-of-the-biblical-covenants/>

<sup>2</sup> Regulative Principle of Worship, or RPW, is the doctrine that worship must conform to explicit Biblical command in all things, or else be regarded as abomination; if a practice is not expressly commanded, it is forbidden.

(here called “the Most Holy Place”), which was considered even more sacred, as the title suggests; it is this place where real, true forgiveness from iniquities was passed on to the people through the Day of Atonement, one single day of the year, provided that the high priest charged with performing the rites associated with it was purified of his sins. The author then highlights the Ark of the Covenant... which was not in the Temple when he wrote Hebrews. We will examine both of these and then summarize how the author of Hebrews characterizes this aspect of the Old Covenant.

### **The Holy Place and Insufficient Furnishings (vs.1-2)**

Let us look at the first holy place and the *extremely* important prefatory statement of the first verse.

1 Now even the first covenant had **regulations for worship** and an earthly place of holiness.

2 For a tent was prepared, the first section,  
in which were  
the lampstand  
and the table  
and the bread of the Presence.  
It is called the Holy Place.

The author says “even the first covenant had regulations for worship.” In translating the word μέν<sup>3</sup> as “even” in the ESV,<sup>4</sup> it is implied that regulation for worship is extended from the New to the Old in comparison, and not the other way around as one might expect. “Even” is a favorable translation, since μέν is typically employed as the first half of a comparison - “even/indeed (concession A)... but (rebuttal B);<sup>5</sup> it appears that the author intends to further shock his hearers. After all, to the first hearers of this Epistle, the Mosaic commandments precede the New Covenant according to earthly time, having been subject to a Covenant Confirmation feast in Exodus 24. This would make it precede the Atonement, wherein Christ institutes the New Covenant, by 1477 years. But in the previous chapter, he established that Moses merely communicated patterns and designs which already existed in Heaven,<sup>6</sup> and there was already a Promise of the New Covenant in Genesis 3:15. In this sense, we anticipate Christ's priesthood and Covenant to be a *return* to what ought to be, rather than building on a foundation laid by Moses. Christ's superiority over Moses has already been established earlier in Hebrews 3:1-6, and so the comparison continues.

Important to this overall theme regarding the supremacy of Christ and His ministry, and the literary motif of comparison, is what the author addresses now: regulations. By “regulations,” the word employed is δικαίωματα,<sup>7</sup> or “things declared correct,” here understood as standards for worship – an important distinction from hard law (νόμος)<sup>8</sup> or Commandment (ἐντολή).<sup>9</sup> Deviations from these regulations (δικαίωματα) are strewn throughout the Old Testament, and the attempts of men to obey them with and through changes are typically honored or tolerated by God. Thus the mention of regulations for Old Covenant Worship in Hebrews 9:1 is intended to be a further description of the Old Covenant's insufficiency and slide into obsolescence.

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3 Transliterated “men,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/3303.htm>

4 Translations may differ by using “indeed” or “verily” (KJV/NKJV, Douay-Rheims). Some seem to neglect translating the word altogether (NIV, NLT, Berean Standard)

5 The “but” to the μέν in vs.1 is found in vs.11.

6 Hebrews 8:5, Exodus 25:40

7 Transliterated “dikaiomata,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/1345.htm>

8 Transliterated “Nomos,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/3551.htm>

9 Transliterated “Entolay,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/1785.htm>

A tent, the Tabernacle, was prepared according to Exodus 26, and sacrificial worship was to be conducted *there only*, wherever the Lord designates the Tabernacle to reside, and *only* in the ways prescribed by the Lord (Deuteronomy 12:1-7). Much may be made about Nadab and Abihu being killed for disobeying this and offering strange fire (Leviticus 10), but the worship of the Lord in the Tabernacle was itself a standard that saints regularly violated with God's apparent approval. First and foremost, Jews in the first century did not *have* a Tabernacle anymore, but this was a command deemed utterly abrogated; the Tabernacle regulations (and the Tabernacle itself) were completely ignored after God put His glorious approval on the Temple Solomon built (1Kgs.8:1-11). Yet there are Old Testament deviations as well. Samuel and the school of prophets were not punished for worshiping at high places (1Sam.9:12, 10:5); King David building an altar separate from the Tabernacle and sacrificing to the Lord (while not being a Levitical priest!) was not punished – to the contrary, his burnt offerings there stopped a plague from God (2Sam.24:18-25). This also goes for regulations concerning the bread of the Presence, only the Aaronic priests could eat it (Lev.24:8-9), yet King David and his men eat it and are justified by Christ (1Sam.21:1-6, Matthew 12:1-8). These are but a *few* examples.

Why such thorough treatment of these deviations? The apparent inconsistencies between God's strict regulations and His apparent acceptance of stark disobedience from the Israelites is no inconsistency at all if one recalls Hebrews 8:13 – “In speaking of a new covenant, He makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” The author brings up the regulations concerning the Tabernacle and the Holy Place as examples of things that, being pictures of Heavenly realities, *are seen to be insufficient and vanishing even before Christ incarnated*.

### **The Most Holy Place and the Most Holy Absence (vs.3-5)**

**3** Behind the second curtain was a **second section**  
called the **Most Holy Place**,

**4** having the golden altar of incense  
and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold,  
in which was a golden urn holding the manna,  
and Aaron's staff that budded,  
and the tablets of the covenant.

**5** Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.

**Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.**

There is a great deal of irony in mentioning the Holiest of Holies. Remember, “In speaking of a new covenant, He makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” For the author “becoming obsolete” has been occurring for a long time, since the Old Testament era itself; but someone may respond “Of course the Tabernacle is obsolete. We have the Temple now!” But during the time in which the author wrote, the Ark of the Covenant had been missing since Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:8-21, 2 Chronicles 36:17-21), over six hundred years before Hebrews was written. This means that the high priest in Jerusalem literally could not perform his duties on the Day of Atonement in accordance with the Law, which requires blood to be sprinkled on the mercy seat (Leviticus 16). In the author's lifetime, the high priest sprinkled a “foundation stone” where the Ark used to be.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, it appears that the statement “of these things we cannot now speak in detail” is not some reference to limited time or space on the

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<sup>10</sup> A House of Prayer for All Nations: The Holy Temple of Jerusalem by Chaim Richman, pp. 31-32.

parchment the author wrote on; it is far more likely that he is saying they cannot speak further of that which is *actually absent*.

### **The 1<sup>st</sup> Century Situation (vs.6-10)**

6 These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, 7 but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. **8 By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing** 9 (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, 10 but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

Special attention must be paid to the eighth and ninth verses, which give a central thesis for the whole pericope. The first section, wherein the show-bread et.al. are located, represents the former covenant. The Holy Spirit is demonstrating that one cannot access the real presence of God or the true way of salvation so long as the old system stands. One is left with the implication that the entirety of the Old Covenant's operations were made *entirely* obsolete this way – that is to say, the priests in Jerusalem were doing little more than busy work and barbecues after the Atonement. The Old Covenant is not just inferior to the New, it is just *gone*, having been entirely replaced with something better.

Not only is it gone, it never truly saved anyone. The standard priest goes into the “first section,” or the area outside of the Holiest of Holies. Their usual rites and priestly administration cannot actually bring a clear conscience to anyone. Even then, there was indeed a Day of Atonement, but this only occurs once a year, involving much blood, but the author makes it clear that this cannot actually do that now. Leviticus 16:16 does specify that the Day of Atonement absolved the children of Israel of *all* of their sins, not just their ignorant, presumptuous sins; thus the author is emphasizing the spiritual blindness and bankruptcy that the priesthood and people suffered from, until the true Atonement was performed by Christ; *now*, the Jewish rites in Jerusalem do absolutely nothing.

### **Summary**

The author prefaces this passage by saying that the Old Covenant is obsolete and vanishing. With his examples, the Tabernacle, its furnishings, and the Ark, he presents to his readers objects that are already absent in order to underline what has happened: the Old Covenant died a slow, painful death, and its final breath was exhaled as Christ proclaimed “It is finished” (John 19:30). Thus, while he has already stated that the Old Covenant was insufficient for salvation, he ties the past to the present in saying that this has always been the case and always will be; the priesthood and laity trying to hold onto the Temple system are completely ignorant, if not foolish. Next week, we will delve into what Christ did, and why His priesthood and operations are unchanging and perfect in contrast to the descending Old Covenant.

Amen and Amen.

### **Hebrews Bible Study #18:**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

#### **Hebrews 9:11-28**

**11** But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) **12** he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. **13** For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

**15** Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. **16** For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. **17** For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. **18** Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. **19** For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, **20** saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” **21** And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. **22** Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

**23** Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. **24** For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. **25** Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, **26** for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. **27** And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, **28** so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

#### **Introduction**

The first ten verses of Hebrews 9 illustrated the insufficiency and perishing nature of the Old Covenant (Heb.8:13), using two objects that were *very* noticeably absent from Judea in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century: the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. Thus the Old Covenant simply cannot save. It is predicated on lesser promises, relies on objects which are fleeting to the point of total disappearance, and establishes such a hard separation between the Holy and the mundane that redemption is, at best, a fleeting moment apprehended once a year. The author chides those attempting to live under the Old Covenant as ignorant, concerned only with minor things like ritual baths and diet.

But now it is time to demonstrate the superiority of the New Covenant under the high priesthood of Christ. If Christ is the superior High Priest and His priesthood (the Melchizedek priesthood) are superior to the Aaronic priesthood, then it is natural to conclude that the Covenant

which Christ establishes is superior in every way as well. The latter portion of Hebrews 9, following the tenth verse, gives the reasoning for this supremacy.

**vs.11-14**

**11** But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) **12** he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. **13** For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

The author began discussion of Covenants with *negative* reasoning, explaining why the Old Covenant was inferior, perishing, and ineffective. This is not to say that it was *evil*, but rather that it did not accomplish what man would hope it to accomplish. But now, having shown the unhappy result of the Old, it is time to make a *positive* case that the New Covenant is *good* by itself.

The first of these positive reasons, and foremost in the mind of the author, is that Christ is the superior Priest going into a superior Tabernacle.

-The Heavenly Tabernacle is superior to the earthly one because it is not made by imperfect human hands. We might add that the Tabernacle *is still there* in Heaven, while the Mosaic Tabernacle disappeared close to a thousand years before the author of Hebrews wrote his Epistle. That which is made directly by our Lord will be superior and permanent to whatever man can institute, at least in part because what God creates will not be destroyed.

-This heavenly Tabernacle is the one off of which the earthly Tabernacle was based. If the Heavenly Tabernacle remains in place, then the sacrifices which are presented there and the activities of a priesthood taking place there remain as well: thus our Lord Christ entered “once for all into the holy places,” meaning that His work of Redemption was entirely, permanently efficacious. All of the ritual purification in the Old Covenant, referred here by the blood of various animals, was something that had to happen *frequently*, never just *once*.

-Christ is also shown as being the more perfect sacrifice, as He is already the perfect High Priest. One must note that the thirteenth verse speaks of ritual purification for the flesh (something the Levitical priests had to do); in verse fourteen, the purification through Christ's blood is not done for His own sake, but for ours – He needs no purification, for He is already pure!

Now when we hear about a heavenly place, we must take that statement at its plain meaning. Scripture says there is a throne room, a Tabernacle, and other areas in Heaven. The same goes for the *objects* in Heaven, from the Tabernacle furnishings to the Olive branches to the very Throne of God. There is no excuse for believers to claim that Heaven is not a “place” simply because it is not physical. Those who would claim that separation from geospatial language is necessary are intending to turn everything symbolic in our hermeneutics, but this is not justified because the symbols themselves are actual things, the same way the symbolic objects of worship utilized in the Old Covenant were still things. While it may be admirable to try to chase away the threat of Platonism infecting our theology, the text stands as written; Platonism will be addressed as an addendum to this study. There are objects in the heavenly places which preside over the physical objects which take inspiration from them; the author of Hebrews *assumes* this fact rather than teaching more on it, as it is wrapped up in a larger point of the superiority of Christ's ministry and Covenant.

## vs.15-22

**15** Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. **16** For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. **17** For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. **18** Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. **19** For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, **20** saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” **21** And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. **22** Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

The “therefore” shows that on account of Christ's position as High Priest, and on account of His Passion, He is rightly said to “mediate” or establish the New Covenant between God and man. However, this New Covenant is not done without a *purpose*; it was enacted that whoever is called (which is everyone per Matthew 22:14 and John 12:32) has the opportunity to receive salvation. We might re-word the latter part of the fifteenth verse so as to say “Jesus died that whoever will hear may be saved, because He redeems all from their transgressions.”

When the text mentions “those who are called,” we have two potential, yet false, alternatives to seeing the referent as all of humanity; the first being the “elect” in a calvinist sense, the other being the jewish people. To the first alternative, it may be tempting to see “those who are called” as differentiated from the general call given in John 12:32, since the *crux theologorum*<sup>1</sup> dictates that not all who are called will be saved. Thus, Hebrews 9:15 saying “so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” could in theory lead to the notion that, since only the elect receive that inheritance, this is the referent. However, the word translated as “may receive” is λάβωσιν,<sup>23</sup> which is in the subjunctive, meaning that the outcome is not certain. And if it is not certain, then the phrase is more consistent with the general call than the elect only; thus the passage supports a universal Atonement rather than a limited one.

We also understand that this is not in reference to the jewish people only, despite the reference to the sentence of death under the Old Covenant. Otherwise, we would have to throw out the *entire book of Romans*, especially the second chapter, which teaches that a stipulation of the Mosaic Law was its binding nature upon all: while Israel was given the specifics of the commandments at Sinai, Gentiles too are judged (and killed) on account of their sins which are enumerated under the Decalogue whether they received the Law orally, in written fashion, or not at all.

Thus, it is most reasonable to assume that the author is stating something we all knew to begin with: Jesus Christ died for all sinners to redeem them, so that whosoever believes may receive the promise of eternal life. The passage agrees with John 3:16 in this manner. However, the author expands on this by demonstrating more of the *requirement* that Christ's blood be shed. For “will” the same Koine word used for Covenant is employed, διαθήκη;<sup>45</sup> it is translated as “will” for contextual reasons, as the author is referring now to something akin to a modern “last will and testament,” which is not enacted until the author of it dies. He brings this up in the passage to establish that *nothing* which has force of law or Covenant is established without death, particularly in the currency of blood; more importantly, this means “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” In order for

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1 The Cross of the Theologians, which is the question of why some are saved but others are not.

2 Transliterated “lambesin,” from Strong's #2983

3 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2983.htm>

4 Transliterated “Diatheke,” Strong's #1242

5 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1242.htm>

people to be saved, there had to be a New Covenant; in order for there to be a New Covenant, there had to be a death.

### **Vs.23-28**

**23** Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. **24** For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. **25** Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, **26** for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. **27** And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, **28** so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Verses twenty-three through twenty-six make the sacrificial nature of the Atonement clear. Christ died on our behalf so that we may not die on our own behalf (which we cannot do). While a few aspects of this are a mystery, such as the implication that the objects in the Heavenly Tabernacle had to be “purified” (perhaps it was more of a positive sanctification than a removal of something impure from them), we do receive some precious truths here that are quite plain.

-Verse twenty-four makes it clear that Jesus Christ did this *for us*; we are not shackled to those theories of atonement which separate Christ's suffering from His love. The “ransom” theory or “Christus Victor” do, by denying that Christ suffered to achieve the forgiveness of our sins, preferring to see the Atonement as a matter of cosmic battle over real estate.

-Verses twenty-five and twenty-six show that Christ's Passion, His Atoning death, is *one and done*. He will never have to die for human sins again. This is fantastic news, as it means that no amount of sinning on our part will necessitate damnation for us or more pain for Christ. On the other hand, this also means that Christ is never *re-offered*. This rebuffs Eucharistic theories from Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism as well; the Mass is not the *Sacrifice* of the Mass, wherein Christ is re-offered to our Heavenly Father but rather the *Gift* of the Mass, that Christ – having already offered Himself to the Father – invites us to partake of His merit and blessing.

And if the Atonement was “one and done,” then there is no post-death second chance for us. This is a good thing, as it means that those who are in Christ do not suffer from an evil judgment due to some forgotten sin. There is no reincarnation, either someone is covered by Christ's blood and slated for redemption per vs.28, or they are not, having refused Him.

### *Side note on Platonism and Hebrews*

A note must be made that the author is not supporting Platonism per se. Platonism posits that there are abstract ruling entities called “ideas” or “forms” from which all material objects take their properties and identity. The author of Hebrews, in discussing spiritual places and spiritual objects, is not necessarily saying that these are platonic forms, having only pointed to the physical Tabernacle objects being made after the *pattern* or *design* of heavenly objects. He is not making a statement on how metaphysics works in general.

But the motif of permanence in this passage may suggest platonic influence,<sup>6</sup> as the Greek philosophers were always battling with the topic of change. Change means impermanence, weakness, and uncertainty leading to a deconstruction of an object or person's identity, and the same was often said of motion. This led to various philosophical exercises which perplexed Greek philosophers for hundreds of years. One example would be the Ship of Theseus: if every part of Theseus's boat, even the

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<sup>6</sup> <https://platovschristianity.wordpress.com/2016/02/11/plato-vs-the-author-of-the-epistle-to-the-hebrews/>

hull, is changed out for a different part, does it remain the same boat or is it a different boat entirely? Reeling from these mental exercises, some thinkers like Parmenides became pantheists, while others floundered in materialism, as Thales did. Plato's solution was theorizing that changing physical objects take their shape and properties from unchanging abstracts. If there is an unchanging *thing* behind a changing object, then there is a firm identity behind the material world.

This leads to an overarching principle that the changeless is better than the changing, the self-existent is better than the contingent, and the eternal is better than the temporary. Since the author of Hebrews is making the case that the New Covenant is a permanent, unchanging one predicated on acting in a Heavenly Tabernacle, there is the temptation to see this as an endorsement of Platonic principles of thought. Is this the case though? Did the author take inspiration from pagan philosophers?

It is unlikely that this is at root in Hebrews for a number of reasons. First of all, the case regarding a permanent New Covenant is not in line with the platonic forms, which in Plato's understanding are completely uncreated and eternal. The author of Hebrews rests his case on an unchanging God rather than an unchanging pile of abstract objects, and the objects of the Heavenly Tabernacle are not said to be eternal in and of themselves. In addition to this, the contrast is primarily between a *dying* Covenant and a *living* one. The author of Hebrews notes that Christ died for our sins, something a Platonist would never accept based on his philosophy alone, especially since the Atonement was enacted to *change* the spiritual state of affairs.

That said, the congregation to whom Hebrews was written may have had hellenic influences, as philosophers like Philo of Alexandria *had* some enduring influence among the jewish diaspora. The author may be assuaging the concern that the state of affairs had changed based on the institution of a *permanent* Covenant. This should not be seen as endorsing Platonic thought, but addressing a concern that may be raised by a Platonic thinker.

## **Hebrews Bible Study #19: The Author's Teleological Conclusion**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 10:1-18

**1** For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. **2** Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? **3** But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. **4** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. **5** Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; **6** in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. **7** Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” **8** When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), **9** then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. **10** And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. **11** And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **12** But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, **13** waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. **14** For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. **15** And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, **16** “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” **17** then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” **18** Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

### **Introduction**

Having discussed the typological and Heavenly arguments for the superiority of Christ and Christ's ministry over the Levitical priesthood, the author of Hebrews now turns to the *telos*, or purpose of the Passion. In our confirmation classes, we learn that on the Cross, Jesus died for our sins, paying a penalty that we cannot so that we may be saved from sin, death and the devil; the author of Hebrews does not *deny* this fact at all, but sees to it that we understand the mechanics of the sacrifice in light of the Mosaic system. After all, a congregation of recently-converted Jewish Christians would naturally be confused as to why the change had to take place. Since the case has been fully made that the Old Covenant is dead and dying, that the New Covenant accomplishes what the Old could not, etc., now the author can state his conclusion.

#### **Vs.1-4**

**1** For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. **2** Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? **3** But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. **4** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

The first verse reaffirms something that the author's initial audience would have suspected: the Mosaic Law is a shadow of the Gospel. Rather than emphasizing St. Paul's proclamation that the Law *points* us to the need for a Savior (the Second Use), the Old Covenant is understood here as having prophetic power. Much in the same way the First Commandment teaches us that there is only one God, the sin offerings taught the ancient Israelites that blood atoned for sin, but true absolution would come by the Messiah who would be pierced for them (Isaiah 53).

But as it has a prophetic nature, it is thus a shadow of what would come. A shadow by itself cannot accomplish anything compared to the one who casts the shadow. Thus the author states flatly that the Old Covenant can *never* make anyone perfect. No one's sin is truly taken away so long as they find themselves having to go back to the sacrificial altar year after year to hear absolution. To be certain, he is not contradicting the pronouncement of Leviticus 4 that these offerings truly had absolution to them, but one must note that the absolution was mostly for unintentional sins; it was on the Day of Atonement (Lev.16) that transgressions were also forgiven, but even then it was not complete, as the Day of Atonement happened every year! Thus, as the One who casts the shadow of the Mosaic Law, Christ's Atonement is the genuine article, having the ability to wipe away every sin in addition to the tenacious original sin which results in our desire to commit iniquity.

#### **Vs.5-10**

**5** Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,

but a body have you prepared for me;

**6** in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.

**7** Then I said, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,  
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book."

**8** When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), **9** then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. **10** And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Citing Psalm 40:6-8, the author makes it clear that there was a point to the Old Testament sacrifices but not what the congregation thought it was. It is not that they were commanded in order to please God; they were not there to wipe away sins, but rather to speak of Christ who would eventually accomplish God's ultimate will, the salvation of all who trust in Him. Thus from the Psalm it says sacrifices and offerings were not desired by God, but instead they were made in order to benefit those who were making the sacrifices. To clear their consciences of sins they remembered, and to point them to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. Thus Christ accomplishes the will of the Father, where the Law could not, point instead *to* Christ. We also note the use of "once for all" as a motif in the author's language. Remember, he has established in the ninth chapter that the Atonement was *permanent*, meaning there would be no need for further sacrifices from here on out.

#### **Vs.11-14**

**11** And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **12** But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, **13** waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. **14** For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Yes, the priests in Jerusalem, no matter how many times they offer the same sacrifices over and over again, will never truly take away sin and guilt from people. No one is ever *saved* by the sacrifice of an animal: perhaps their conscience is cleaned temporarily, their guilt is not completely taken away. On the other hand, Christ *did* in fact offer Himself as the single sacrifice for sins, and on account of that merit, He has taken His seat at the right hand of God. From there the author makes a statement which points to eschatology; that our Savior is waiting until all enemies are made to be under His feet, calling back to earlier chapters. The implication is that once this happens, Christ will return, and the world will be made new, finally, for all time.

The fourteenth verse should not be used to support a “holiness” movement. It does not support the notion that God has made the individual believer immaculate and sinless. To the contrary, it is instead saying that *teleologically* God has accomplished His will in the individual, starting with the process of sanctification. Though this requires patience on our part, God's will accomplished in us means putting us on that path until we are finally delivered from sin and death at the Resurrection.

#### **Vs.15-18**

**15** And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

**16** “This is the covenant that I will make with them

after those days, declares the Lord:

I will put my laws on their hearts,

and write them on their minds,”

**17** then he adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

**18** Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Recalling Jeremiah's words, the author is making plain that if *God* says He will no longer remember our sins, then there is no need for an offering for sins. The Atonement was a consummation of everything the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to. The absolution present in the Mosaic sacrifices was a *forward* looking one, which soothed consciences by containing the promise from the Father, “one day I will forget it all, none of it will be held against you.” Thus according to Jeremiah and the author, this cleansing puts God's Law on our hearts in a special way distinct from its presence mentioned in Romans 2. Now there is not just information and condemnation, but also a *desire* from the heart to obey our Lord and live a sanctified life.

Finally, we cannot forget verse fifteen, wherein the author says that the Holy Spirit bears witness to all of this. He is the One speaking through the prophet Jeremiah. This means that like every other author of Scripture, the author of Hebrews is a *Trinitarian*. The Holy Spirit is not seen as a cosmic force or semi-pantheistic presence. He is a Person, and He is God. After all, everyone understood in the congregation that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and if the Holy Spirit is the One speaking God's Word through the prophet Jeremiah, then the Holy Spirit is *God speaking*. This is a precious verse, as there are many verses and passages which demonstrate Christ's equality with the Father, but the Holy Spirit is the “shy” member of the Trinity, preferring to witness to glory of the Father and the Son. Here, the curtain is momentarily opened to show His presence, glory and honor for all Christians.

## **Hebrews Bible Study #20: Brief Discursus on Assurance**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 10:19-25

**19** Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, **20** by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, **21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **23** Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **25** not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

### **Proposed Restructuring for Exegesis**

#### *Subject*

**19** **Therefore**, brothers, **since**  
we have **confidence to enter** the holy places **by the blood of Jesus**,  
**20** **by the new and living way that he opened for us**  
through the curtain, that is, **through his flesh**,  
**21** **and since**  
**we have a great priest** over the house of God,

#### *Predicate*

**22** **let us draw near** with a true heart **in full assurance of faith**,

#### *Explanation (or, "how to")*

**with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**

**23** **Let us hold fast the confession of our hope** without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **25** not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

### **Introduction**

Having made his conclusion regarding the supremacy of Christ's Being, Position, Sacrifice, and Priesthood, the author of Hebrews now directs his readers to hear the application of the matter. This enters into his fourth exhortation, the "so what" of all doctrinal content in the epistle which goes from the nineteenth verse of the tenth chapter all the way up to the end of the twelfth chapter. Here is now the *point* that he wants to make on account of everything he has taught. And it starts with assurance.

### **Subject: Priestly Confidence (vs.19-20)**

Beginning with a "Therefore," we are certain that the author is speaking of the preceding point he made in Heb.10:18, wherein he says "Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin." That is, Christ's atoning death on the Cross was so ultimately sufficient that the sacrifices laid out in the Book of Leviticus are no longer necessary nor desired by God. Since this is the case, "we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus," meaning we have an entry

into the Heavenly Jerusalem where God dwells on account of that final sacrifice. One might notice the use of “curtain” in verse 20, which recalls the curtain used to veil the Holiest of Holies in the Tabernacle; this location, wherein the Ark of the Covenant was supposed to be stored, was the place wherein the high priest obtained mercy for the people on the Day of Atonement, because in it was the special presence of God upon the mercy seat. From St. Matthew's Gospel, the “curtain of the Temple” into this location was ripped apart at the moment Christ died.<sup>1</sup> This means that our Lord Jesus has taken the place of the curtain.

The author of Hebrews has just made a statement bordering the scandalous for his initial readers. Christ is now the “Curtain,” and no one may enter the presence of God the Father except through Him, and no mercy may be obtained except by going through Him.<sup>2</sup> Well enough! The Old Covenant's sacrificial system has been replaced by one in which our High Priest serves as the Living Curtain, the only One who grants access to the Father. But the scandal is not in this revelation, for the 1<sup>st</sup> Century reader would know that the Temple replaced the Tabernacle which replaced the old system of stone altars.

What is shocking for them instead is that *we*, the believers, are granted access to the Holiest of Holies, God's direct presence, in this way. For over 1400 years, no one went into the Holiest of Holies except the high priests in the Levitical order; the laity and most everyone else were barred entry entirely.<sup>3</sup> Now, however, the author of Hebrews invites all believers to come to the Presence as though each one were elevated to the same rank as a High Priest. Thus he agrees with St. Peter that the Church, God's Israel, are the true priestly nation, and is elaborating on the consequences of this point.<sup>4</sup>

Elevating their status and value in this way would be fantastic news as it is, but the author continues the elevation by saying one may enter God's Presence with *boldness*. A confidence unlike the trembling, fearful fashion in which the High Priest entered into the Holiest of Holies, drenched in the blood of animals, wearing a rope with bells in case some minor sin was forgotten and he immediately died. In a way, the Christian has greater freedom, and even higher priestly status, than the man charged with running the highest sacrifices in the Old Covenant. The author of Hebrews states that the Christian already has this boldness, not that he must attain to it; whenever we pray “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,” we enter into this Holy Place spiritually and obtain what took *gallons* of blood to receive under the Mosaic Law. In case any one should claim that we have no such right to enter these places, the author reminds the readers, “we have a great priest over the house of God,” meaning that as a priestly nation we do not *answer* to those outside the Church who would bar us from God's graces. Thus additionally the author of Hebrews condemns all sacerdotalism.

### **Predicate: Assurance**

One must understand what assurance means to the author. He chooses the word *πληροφορία*,<sup>56</sup> which means to have a full bearing, or complete certainty. We must note that this author does *not* choose to say “faith,” or *πίστις*,<sup>78</sup> leading us to conclude that the author is thus establishing a distinction between the two. For that matter, when we reach Hebrews 11:1, it may be tempting to think of assurance as preceding faith, but the author uses a different word with a different meaning then, so we

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1 Matthew 27:51

2 John 14:6

3 One might include the apocryphal story of Babylonian soldiers entering in when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem in 586 B.C., but at that point, the priesthood was so corrupt that one would be surprised to see God's Presence there.

4 1 Peter 2:9

5 Transliterated “plerophoria,” Strong's #4136.

6 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4136.htm>

7 Transliterated “pistis,” Strong's #4102.

8 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4102.htm>

will cross that bridge when we get there. For now, the sequence the author uses here is faith, then confidence (vs.19), then assurance. One believes in Christ, leading to a priestly confidence to go to Christ for mercy, then an assurance that one has obtained mercy.

When the author makes a confusing statement like “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,” suffice it to say that we are called to have certainty in the efficacy of our faith and the One in Whom our faith resides. It is a positive formulation of St. James's warning against being double minded (Jas.1:5-8). In other words, we are to have confidence that we truly are justified by faith in Christ, and Christ truly did *save* us. To have assurance is to take one's faith from assensus, or mental assent to the facts of the Gospel (which even demons have per James 2:19), and deepen it to *fiducia*, or saving faith and *trust* that the Lord graciously saves us through the Gospel.

But if it is the full assurance *of* faith, then faith precedes assurance. This is only reasonable. How can one have assurance that they are saved by the blood of Christ if he has no faith in Christ to begin with? Thus, the author calls us to have the full assurance that faith produces, but also *in* the faith which God grants.

### **Where Assurance Resides (And how to find it)**

One reading this letter might ask how exactly one is supposed to have the full assurance of faith, when faith itself is not the same as assurance. One cannot say “I have faith, therefore I am confident in my faith,” let the reader understand that the author of Hebrews does not ask us to engage in this sort of circular logic. To which objects of faith does the Christian look, then, for this certainty?

1.*Baptism*. Verse 22 says we find this “with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” Knowing that St. Peter associates Baptism with clean consciences and the forgiveness of sins,<sup>9</sup> there is nothing else of which the author of Hebrews could be speaking. The washing of water on us applies the cleansing of the heart from evil. Not only then is the author supporting Baptismal regeneration, he is also saying that one finds assurance of the faith here. If we recall and treasure and believe in the promises made to us in our Baptism, then we are more certain of our salvation provided by Christ.

2.*Confession*. Not in the sense of confession and absolution, but the actual details of the Christian faith itself – that is, being faithful in the dogma revealed in the Word. In verse 23, the believer is called to remember the promises which our Lord has made on the basis of what He has done to secure “our hope.” It is for this reason that a Christian does well to study God's Word, and to memorize at least the Apostles' Creed, that they may always have a depth of understanding.

3.*Good Works*. Though good works are not meritorious unto salvation, they *are* beneficial for sanctification, especially as it touches our confidence in the faith. By exhorting one another to do good works and love per verse 24, we encourage a more solid walk with the Lord.

4.*Gathering*. Gathering together as Christians, required by the twenty-fifth verse, has an encouraging effect on believers. We understand that we are not alone, we are not forsaken by God, and that we are in the presence of people who care about us in the midst of our struggles. This strengthens faith indeed!

We ought to rejoice at how simple the author's means are for obtaining assurance. We look to these and say “yes, I am saved.” Let no one take away your certainty. So long as you can look to your Baptism, to your confession of the faith, to the good works our Lord inspires in you, and to your gathering with other Christians, all of these provide together a full assurance of the faith.

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<sup>9</sup> Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21

## **Hebrews Bible Study #21: Brief Discursus on Mortal Sin**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 10:26-31

**26** For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, **27** but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. **28** Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. **29** How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? **30** For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” **31** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

### **Introduction**

This is one of the most misunderstood passages in Scripture. Its wording seems so unpleasant that most readers encountering it for the first time dump all exegetical principles out of their brains and simply try to move on as quickly as possible. We forget that this passage does not exist in a vacuum. We forget to interpret Scripture with Scripture. We forget the overarching messages and themes of the Book of Hebrews and either swallow hard doctrine that *is not there*, or we end up pretending the passage does not exist to shield our soteriology from a perceived threat. But in this fourth exhortation, if we but take a moment to *actually interpret* the passage, we find the message the author gives to be rather encouraging.

### **Vs.26-27**

**26** For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, **27** but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Introducing this pericope with “For,” we understand that this particular message expands on the message of verses nineteen through twenty-five. The author began this exhortation with the desire that we should all “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb.10:22). Yet in expanding this, he includes a warning. Those who “go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth,” or sinning with a high hand knowing full well that their actions are wrong, cannot make sacrifice for their sins; thus they only have fear – *while* in a state of impenitent sin. In context of the author speaking to a congregation full of Hebrew Christians, this is to say that they cannot go back to the Levitical priests in Jerusalem to assuage their guilt or cover over their sin. Having spent chapter after chapter detailing how the Mosaic system has been abrogated completely, this is sensible; one cannot go back to a replaced Covenant for forgiveness. This also applies to Gentile ex-pagans as well – indeed, *any* non-Christian religion, as they all involve some form of sacrifice. Pagans made sacrifices to their gods, just as modern skeptics and atheists have shame-parades and apology tours for their own, there is the hasidic “sin chicken” sacrifice, and so forth. All religions involve sacrifice in one way, shape or form – but the true faith, Christianity, teaches that there has been *one* efficacious sacrifice for all time, Christ's Atoning death on the Cross. No one leaving the faith or sinning with a high hand can go *anywhere else* or *to anyone else* for forgiveness; until he returns to Christ, he is slated for God's wrath.

We must also note that the twenty-seventh verse presents a contrast to the “full assurance of faith” in verse twenty-two. Those who are in a state of mortal sin are fearful. Though a sinner might do his best to pretend there are no consequences, he has put himself in a place of fear because he has received “the knowledge of the truth,” which includes God's wrath against sin. Taken with the command to walk in full assurance, this means that avoidance of sin plays into one's security of faith.

These two verse are *not* saying that the backslidden man – or anyone who sins at all – has no hope. Indeed, in this life there is no way that a Christian could be completely free from sin.<sup>1</sup> Since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”<sup>2</sup> if Hebrews 10:26-27 was saying that egregious sin damns people permanently, then *no one* is saved at all. This is an absurd idea, as – and we repeat ourselves – the author had just exhorted his audience to full assurance in the faith! Those who advocate for a “sinless” state of perfection in this life as the meaning behind this verse, demanding that we all reach it, are absurdly claiming that the author of Hebrews wished to tarnish assurance in the faith right after asking that we seek it.<sup>3</sup>

Yet while the “holiness movement” is incorrect in their interpretations of these verses, the doctrine of the preservation of the saints is also an error to avoid. The author of Hebrews would not be encouraging his audience to stay in the Christian faith if it were not possible for them to leave. He would not be telling them to avoid egregious, mortal sin if this were not something believers could do. As with our discussions on Hebrews 6, the author supports the doctrine of the *preservation* of the saints, not the “perseverance” thereof. The latter doctrine, believing that no believer can ever engage in apostasy proper, comes from the logical inference that predestination is so absolute that no individual who is elect may ever actually depart from the faith (at least not permanently), as otherwise they would not be elect. But even if that were true, one is still called to make his calling and election sure,<sup>4</sup> meaning there is a way to make it *unsure*.

### **Vs.28-30**

**28** Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. **29** How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? **30** For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” **31** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

We have established that there is still forgiveness offered to the backslider. There will not be a sacrifice found outside of the Christian faith, as Christ's Atonement nullifies *everything* else. However, while one may still receive forgiveness, vengeance still belongs to God, and He has promised here to judge *His* people. Note that it says *His* people, not “those outside.” Yes, God damns those who do not belong to the faith, but He does not damn those who truly belong to Him – again, *His* people. Yet those who belong to Him are still chastised, facing consequences for their sins in this life. The author will delve into this topic in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews. We will do more of a deep dive into that topic when we arrive at the chapter, but for now, suffice it to say that our earthly life *is* Purgatory. For the sake of our souls and our sanctification, we undergo discipline and chastisement while here on earth, like heating raw metal to clear away dross. Those who backslide, though there is mercy for them, can expect to undergo this discipline even further than those who never leave. Yet because they are back in the fold of God's people, they must be reassured that it happens precisely because God loves them and desires that they should be remade in Christ's image.

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1 Romans 7:21-25, 1 John 1:8

2 Romans 3:23

3 For more on the “holiness movement,” see here: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Holiness-movement.html>

4 2 Peter 1:10-11

## **Hebrews Bible Study #22: The Author's Instructive Rhetoric**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### **Hebrews 10:32-39**

**32** But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, **33** sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. **34** For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. **35** Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. **36** For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. **37** For,

“Yet a little while,

and the coming one will come and will not delay;

**38** but my righteous one shall live by faith,

and if he shrinks back,

my soul has no pleasure in him.”

**39** But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

### **Introduction: Directive, Warning, Encouragement**

As many of our Sunday School sessions include passages that start with “but,” today is no different. Hebrews 10:32-39 starts with “But” so as to reply to the warning passage immediately preceding for the sake of encouraging his readers. Lest we miss the forest for the trees, the author is ultimately doing what he has done over the course of the entire book: exhort, then encourage in anticipation of the readers' response. Similar to how Law, Gospel, and Response are preached together (chapter 6 being a great example of such), the exhortations in Hebrews take a general pattern of directive, then warning, then encouragement.

Here is a brief example from the first four verses of chapter 2:

**1** Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. **2** For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, **3** how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, **4** while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Hebrews 2:1 starts with a directive: “we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard.” Then the author follows it with a warning in the third verse: “how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” Finally, having warned them, he builds the congregation up with the rest of the third verse and all of the fourth, reassuring the believers that the message delivered to them is *reliable*, and therefore worthy of the careful attention they have been directed to. In a word: directive, warning, encouragement. We must do this, if we do not there will be consequences, but God assures us that all will turn out well. Our passage for today, Hebrews 10:32-39, focuses on the “encouragement” phase.

### **Vs.32-34**

**32** But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,

33 sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction,  
and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

34 For you had compassion on those in prison,  
and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property,  
since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

We do well to pay attention to the conjunctions employed to understand the author's meaning. Starting with a contrasting conjunction (“but,” “however,” and so forth from the Greek δὲ), the tone is shifted away from the warning of Heb.10:31, which states “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” The congregation has received the directive and the warning: now is time to introduce encouragement.

The encouragement provided by the author is not one which we would expect given the other exhortations which point to God's work. Heb.2:1-4 pointed to the reliability of the Gospel message; Heb.3:7-4:14 pointed to the rest that is offered in Christ Jesus; and the tail end of the miniature sermon<sup>1</sup> preached in Heb.6:13-20, encouraged the hearers with the promises of God. But *now*, in the Fourth Exhortation, the author points to the congregation's experiences rather than something God has promised, said or done. Having already firmly rooted the Epistle in the faithfulness and power of our Lord, the author sees fit to encourage the congregation with the strength they had in previous times.

The Hebrew congregation has already experienced hardship in the past. When they first became believers, they “endured a hard struggle with sufferings.” This included public insult, injury, being witness to other members being insulted or injured, and being financially deprived by having to pay for imprisoned members' needs. On that last point, it is likely for the authorities to determine that either someone would provide for the prisoner, or the prisoner would starve. In other words, during their initial persecution, the Hebrew congregation “stepped up,” even rejoicing at the persecution on account of a “better possession and an abiding one.” The congregation to whom the author writes has been through this kind of temptation before, and it *did not harm their faith*; thus the author can confidently remind them that, having gone through persecution and temptation in the past, they have every capability of going through their current troubles with the same strength.

### Vs.35-38

35 Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

36 For you have need of endurance,  
so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

37 For,

“Yet a little while,

and the coming one will come and will not delay;

38 but my righteous one shall live by faith,

and if he shrinks back,

my soul has no pleasure in him.”

Since the congregation has been through similar circumstances, they are exhorted to stay the course as they had in the past. Like all believers, they have a need for endurance in order to finish the journey and receive the promised reward – but that leads to a serious question. If the reward is promised, how can receiving it depend on us? Can human works nullify or confirm that which God has determined? Of course, the answer lay in the nature of faith, as the author will expound upon in the eleventh chapter. But for now, let Christ's words in John 6:29 provide the explanation: “Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'” Faith is rightly understood as a gift, but it is an *active* gift given to us, one which we are to exercise, preserve and protect; we

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<sup>1</sup> Heb.5:11-6:19

receive God's promises by faith, and retaining that faith is a matter of endurance. Faith is given and Salvation is free, but the exercise of faith is a blessed endeavour which has rewards.

Verses thirty-seven and thirty-eight are enigmatic in that there is no single, particular verse that is quoted. It appears that the author is using the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament to paraphrase and combine Isaiah 26:20 and Habakkuk 2:3-4.

Here is how each of these verses reads according to the Brenton translation of the LXX:

-Isaiah 26:20, “Go, my people, enter into thy closets, shut thy door, hide thyself for a little season, until the anger of the Lord have passed away.”

-Habakkuk 2:3-4, “For the vision is yet for a time, and it shall shoot forth at the end, and not in vain: though he should tarry, wait for him; for he will surely come and will not tarry. If he should draw back, my soul has no pleasure in him: but the just shall live by my faith.”

For comparison, here is Hebrews 10:37-38 once more:

-For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; **38** but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”

Though it may be tempting to think so, this is *not* a misquote on the part of the author, and nor is it him attempting to modify the witness of Scripture. He does not say “it is written” as if to quote a prophet, and there is no language which would lean in that direction. He simply says “for,” and then brings together a paraphrase of what these verses say. In other words, his exhortation to hold on and remain faithful to God in spite of circumstances is well-founded in the commands given to believers in the past. The paraphrase serves as a reminder of this and a transitional verse going into the eleventh chapter – which is all about *faith*.

### **Vs.39**

**39** But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed,  
but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Verse 39 resolves much of the mental tension we Protestants may have regarding this passage as a whole. Thus far the author has spent the third part of the exhortation encouraging the congregation by pointing at their own previous accomplishments, referring to rewards promised for their endurance, and making references to Scripture which show a theology of *effort* on the part of believers since Old Testament times. For one raised in a monergistic denomination and holding to *Sola Fide*, this passage might worry us through a seeming advocacy of works. There is no need to worry, as the passage *does* advocate for works, just not in the salvific sense.

We are saved by Grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and St. Paul attests that none of these are by our own works, but as a gift (Eph.2:8-9). The author of Hebrews is in agreement here: in verse thirty-nine, he says we “have faith,” or more properly are of faith, not that we attain to faith.<sup>23</sup> Faith is not our responsibility to hear or not hear, as the entirety of salvation is attributed to God alone. However, while salvation is monergistic, sanctification is synergistic. We cooperate with the Holy Spirit to bring forward the good works for which we were created in Christ (Eph.2:10), thus, while we have faith because it is granted to us by the Holy Spirit working through means, we *do*, with faith, preserve our souls.

Is that to say that the preservation of the saints is entirely dependent on the activities of believers? Of course not, as otherwise we would be in dire straits. Thankfully, the bulk of sanctification

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2 A transliterated version of the clause from Koine might be worded “we however are not of those drawing back to destruction, but of faith to the preserving of the soul.”

3 <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/hebrews/10-39.htm>

is done by God to make the individual believer holy. However, we *do* play a part however small; only we must recognize that, to us, it will not feel small. The author uses language which points to our endurance and efforts in preserving our souls as a matter of degree. Though in the grand scheme of it the Lord does 99.999% of the work in sanctifying us and preserving our faith, to us that last .001% of our part in sanctification will and ought to feel like a lifetime of dedication. Thus our salvation is free, but our sanctification requires us to be *active*.

Those who would say this is not the case, looking for some way for total freedom from the believer's cooperation in these matters, wish for the Christian to lose all personhood. We reject those who would claim we are but spiritual automata – or even worse, that we should hope to be so. Christ died to save people, not objects imbued with awareness. But with that comes a call to devotion and Christian practice – and though some might be uncomfortable with the Pietism that this entails, we must answer this call to the best of our ability.

## **Hebrews Bible Study #23: The Discussion of Faith Begins**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 11:1-7

**1** Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **2** For by it the people of old received their commendation. **3** By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

### **Introduction**

Hebrews 11 is often referred to as the “Hall of Faith,” since the chapter catalogs heroes of the Old Testament as having accomplished great things and received great rewards through faith. But we must take great pains to define what faith *is* to the author, lest we misinterpret the entire chapter. This necessitates some precision with the Greek words employed, due to some confusion in English translation.

#### **1a Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,**

Assurance – ὑπόστασις,<sup>12</sup> meaning a confidence or substance given. That is, to trust or treat something as real. This is *not* the same word translated “assurance” as found in Hebrews 10:22, which employs πληροφορία.<sup>34</sup> The latter word used in Heb.10:22 means a complete certainty; here in 11:1, the word translated “assurance” connotes a steady confidence in something – treating it as real.

Things hoped for – ἐλπίζομένων,<sup>56</sup> A hope based in expectation. That is, the confidence and substance that characterize faith is found in the content of the faith, or what is promised/offered.

“Assurance of things hoped for” thus means that faith is a confidence in hopes and expectations which has a substantive impact on the believer. One's faith is not merely mental assent.

#### **1b the conviction of things not seen.**

Someone might critique the author of Hebrews by claiming that he is advocating for magical thinking *a la* fideism, but this is not the case. The word translated “conviction” is ἔλεγχος,<sup>78</sup> which means proof or persuasion. The individual must be persuaded toward faith (at least in the Christian context) by an external, which then helps him to believe beyond tactile apprehension.

Furthermore, this is not to be construed as being Arminian in outlook. The author's language is careful then to agree with St. Paul's words in Romans 10:17 and Ephesians 2:8 which characterize faith as a gift from God granted through means, namely the proclamation of the Word. Yet while faith is a gift, such Grace is resistible as the author of Hebrews is speaking of a *living* faith. One may be persuaded

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1 Transliterated *hypostasis*, Strong's 5287

2 <https://biblehub.com/greek/5287.htm>

3 Transliterated *plerophoria*, Strong's 4136

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4136.htm>

5 Transliterated *elpizomenon*, from Strong's 1679

6 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1679.htm>

7 Transliterated *elenchos*, Strong's #1650

8 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1650.htm>

that the contents of the Christian faith are true, but then refuse to treat it as real – that is, withholding *hypostasis*.

The First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me” has its mirror command: “You shall worship the true God.” In order to worship the true God, one must believe that He is; but if one has this faith in Him, this requires the active exercise of faith which engages in worship. The author speaks of this active part of faith in Hebrews 11:6, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

## **2 For by it the people of old received their commendation.**

The commendation, or witness,<sup>9</sup> of the “people of old” (Old Testament saints) is received passively by faith. Their achievements are not meritorious before God without their faith in Him. This is an important distinction, as St. Paul says plainly in Romans 14:23 that “whatever does not proceed from faith is sin,” and Heb.11:6 says that one must believe in order to please God. Faith precedes works, faith produces works, and faith is salvific while works are not. A saint is made by faith, not action; nonetheless, the faith which the saint has motivates and produces the actions which distinguish his witness.

## **3 By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.**

While it may be surprising that the “Hall of Faith” opens its catalog by mentioning Creation, the author is using the verse as a kind of chiasmic statement with verse 1, being its mirror. Both verses speak of sight and what is seen or not seen.

- 1.The first verse states that faith is not based on what we have seen.
- 2.The third verse says that this faith comprehends that what we *do* see was made by that which we *cannot* see – our Lord. This agrees with John 4:24, which states that God is Spirit, not flesh.
- 3.Thus faith does not rely on sight to trust God, the same way that God did not rely on matter to create.

God creates, ordains, decrees and acts without being material, and He does not require anything visible nor material to do so. The believer apprehends this by faith, the conviction of things not seen – namely God and His promises.

As an aside, this would mean that material Creation is something of a barrier between God and the believer, which is crossed or passed by faith. However, we must not take that as a cue to embrace Gnosticism (which derides material reality in favor of spiritual reality only). To the contrary, we must recognize that the current state of affairs would not be the case if mankind had not fallen into sin.

## **Question Arising**

This discussion on the definition and efficacy of faith leads to a question from critics and skeptics: isn't faith *blind* then? The author after all speaks of not relying on what we see as we believe. Is it the case then that Christians believe blindly, with zero evidence or legitimate motivation, only holding to their faith out of cultural morés or illogic or abusive authority?

The answer, of course, is “no.” According to the definition which the author of Hebrews gives, blind faith is an oxymoron, an impossibility. To have assurance in something hoped for means that faith has *motivation*, a goal, or a promise which the believer cherishes. Second, with faith being a conviction or persuasion, the believer has legitimate *reasons* for believing, up to and including evidence. We never

<sup>9</sup> The word for “commendation” is ἐμαρτυρήθησαν, Strong's #3140, related to the term *martyr* in use today. Similarly, the word “martyr” means witness.

see Christ telling people to believe in Him for absolutely no reason; to the contrary, He shows the men on the road to Emmaus that the Old Testament prophets made the case for His Resurrection! St. Paul does the same when proving the Gospel with the Scriptures whenever he visits the synagogues in Acts, as St. Philip does in speaking to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Though faith goes beyond tactile apprehension, this does not mean that it is without thought, motivation, or any sort of logic behind it.

## **Hebrews Bible Study #24: The Discussion of Faith Continues**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 11:4-7

**4** By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. **5** By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. **6** And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. **7** By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

### **Introduction**

Having made the case regarding the supremacy of Christ's Person, Sacrifice and Ministry, the author of Hebrews springboards into a section which extols and exalts faith, This comes on the heels of the fourth great Exhortation he makes to the congregation of Hebrew Christians (Heb.10:19-39). He spoke of assurance, mortal sin, apostasy and backsliding, all of which are related in some way to the topic of faith so as to prevent them from returning to religious judaism. This means it was necessary to finally come to a point of discussing what faith *is* (Heb.11:1-3), and what it looks like to have an active, living faith. Thus, beginning in the fourth verse, the author demonstrates saving faith with a list of Old Testament saints that had it and lived by it.

We begin with three persons from the first arc of the Book of Genesis: Abel, Enoch and Noah. This tells us that the author intends to go in chronological order so he can show the Scriptural basis for his teaching, but also he does this to demonstrate a special point. Per the sixth verse, not only must one have faith in order to please God, but also *no one* is saved without faith – something the tenth chapter establishes quite well (Heb.10:38). But this may worry the Hebrews to whom the author writes: one can almost hear them ask “what about our ancestors?” If the righteous live by faith, and that faith being in Christ, how shall any of their ancestors be saved?

By starting with Abel, Enoch and Noah, the author establishes the simple fact that faith has *always* been the source of justification for the saints, even before the Atonement. All the way back to the beginning, people were justified by their faith, not by their works. With these three he also shows that this salvation schema is *not* reliant upon the Covenant made to Abraham either. In other words, it is the author's argument that the Christian faith precedes the jewish religion by at *least* a few thousand years.<sup>1</sup> While his main point is to elevate and teach faith to the congregation, this context cannot be ignored.

Let us examine each of the three individuals with whom the author starts his message:

### Abel

**4** By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.

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<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, judaism was fully established with the codification of the talmud. However, the congregation to whom the author writes was surrounded by the argumentation of Pharisees (the precursors to the full jewish religion) who argued from the Mosaic Law and Abrahamic ancestry to make their case.

As the first human being brought up in the “Hall of Faith,” Abel's presence raises questions. The author points to the beginning in Heb.11:3, but seems to *skip over* Adam and Eve. Why is this? Did not Adam have faith? Perhaps he did, but his son Abel is the first human being in all of Scripture to demonstrate faith. Let us look at the pertinent Scripture regarding Abel.

#### Genesis 4:2b-7

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. **3** In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, **4** and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, **5** but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. **6** The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? **7** If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”

We must address the *time* in which Abel lived. He was born after Adam was expelled from Eden, so unlike his father he had to believe in God without ever having seen God walking among Creation. He believed in the goodness of God, having only heard of the paradise of Eden that was made for man. He made his offering to the Lord while only knowing what his parents told him of their experience and the Proto-evangelium of Genesis 3:15, the Gospel given to the first humans.

It may very well be that Adam and Eve had saving faith, but the author is not interested in this because the Scripture does not witness to their lives. For the author of Hebrews, saving faith is an active thing that produces God-pleasing works, and Abel is the first to be seen with this dynamic while living in the standard human condition (that is, without prior experience in Eden). It also must be inferred from what our Lord says to Cain that Abel *did* rule over crouching sin, leading to acceptable sacrifices through faith.

#### Enoch

**5** By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. **6** And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Enoch is not a prominent figure in Scripture at all, being barely mentioned in Genesis, and brought up briefly in Jude. However, the account of his life is important to the case the author of Hebrews is making. Here is the passage which tells us everything we know about him:

#### Genesis 5:18-24

**18** When Jared had lived 162 years, he fathered Enoch. **19** Jared lived after he fathered Enoch 800 years and had other sons and daughters. **20** Thus all the days of Jared were 962 years, and he died.

**21** When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. **22** Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. **23** Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. **24** Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

All we know about Enoch is that he walked with God and never died. But for the Book of Hebrews, this is more than enough to proclaim that even in Enoch's days faith is tied to two important things. First, by faith we please God. A man's works can be obedient, righteous to other men, and mighty, but they are worthless to our Lord if that man does not have faith in Him. Second, the example of Enoch shows that faith and eternal life are linked; one receives eternal life through faith, simple as.

#### Noah

**7** By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

If Abel is the first example of a believer having saving faith, and Enoch demonstrates the link between faith and eternal life, then Noah shows the faith which believes and acts based on the Word of God. Our Lord speaks to Noah, and Noah responds first by trusting in what He said, and then acting in obedience to it. From the Genesis account:

#### Genesis 6:11-22

**11** Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. **12** And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. **13** And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. **14** Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. **15** This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits. **16** Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks. **17** For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. **18** But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. **19** And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. **20** Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive. **21** Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them." **22** Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

Verse 22 (with emphasis added by this writer) shows Noah obeying God based not on his own experience or a pre-existent relationship with God, but on God's Word inspiring faith and obedience *in* him. Thus Noah's life establishes the relationship between the believer and the Word. Along with Abel and Enoch, he forms the picture of loyal and active faith as it existed before God called Abraham – whom we will begin to examine next week.

## **Hebrews Bible Study #25: Abraham and the Beginning of Clarification**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 11:8-19

**8** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. **9** By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

**10** For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. **11** By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

**13** These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. **14** For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. **15** If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

**17** By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, **18** of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” **19** He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

### **Introduction**

In Hebrews 11:4-7, the author spoke of the works, done by faith, of Antediluvian saints. Abel, Enoch, and Noah are highlighted as model believers. Abel was the first to put his faith in a God that he had never seen, who should be obeyed from the heart. Enoch lived by faith – eternally. Noah listened to and followed after the Word of God. One could make the case that we are standing on the shoulders of giants, so to speak, on account of the faith and faithfulness of these three. They lived in an era without the common blessings that we in the Church have today: the complete Canon of Scripture, regular Divine services, congregations, mass acceptance of Christianity, and so forth, yet they stayed faithful. For today's passage, he moves onto a close focus on Abraham, the father of all believers.

### **Why Abraham?**

It might be surprising then that the author spends only four verses discussing Antediluvian saints while taking twelve verses to discuss Abraham and his wife. But in light of the context of the Book of Hebrews itself, a focus on Abraham is appropriate. The author is writing to a congregation of Hebrew Christians who are being tempted to return to Judaism; naturally he wants to counter the claims that Jews have been bringing to the congregation. The prevailing opinion of Jews at this time was one which elevated Abraham to a position of extreme prominence, to justify ethnocentrism and to ground religious claims; they held to an argument which might be summarized as “ours is the correct religion and we are the master race because we hail from Abraham's loins.” The same group that told Christ “We are offspring of Abraham,”<sup>1</sup> and “Abraham is our father”<sup>2</sup> had a habit of appealing to this heritage

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1 John 8:33

2 John 8:39

*frequently*, leading to other New Testament personages to address them directly. John the Baptist addresses their argument with Divine power: “do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.”<sup>3</sup> St. Paul counters their argument by bringing up justification by faith, claiming that one is a child of Abraham through faith in Christ, inheriting God's promises by *fiducia*, not the flesh.<sup>4</sup> It is natural for the author of Hebrews, then, to focus on the patriarch in his meditation on faith itself; note that this does *not* mean Abraham is of less consequence regarding the topic of faith, but it does contextualize his focus.

It appears that the author of Hebrews is familiar with St. Paul's argument regarding faith, and has decided to expand upon it in his meditation on Abraham. Like St. Paul and St. James, he connects Abraham's life and his faith. Curiously, unlike St. Paul and St. James he does *not* cite Genesis 15:6, which says “he believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.”<sup>5</sup> Why this distinction? While all three bring up Abraham in relation to the Christian faith, they do so for different reasons.

-St. Paul discusses Abraham's faith in terms of salvation and inheritance; the patriarch was justified by faith alone.

-St. James discusses Abraham's works as a believer; the patriarch was vindicated by his faith and his works.

-The author of Hebrews hones in on Abraham's specific *acts*, done all *by* faith, to harmonize these by describing the works which come from faith. Recall that faith for the author of Hebrews has an active component which comes out of the passive part. The faith which God blesses us with will be exercised during our walk with God.

## **Why Sarah?**

The inclusion of Sarah in the monologue about Abraham is natural. Abraham and Sarah are one in terms of the life that they knitted together in matrimony. Both shared the same faith, both went on the same journeys, and Sarah was involved with almost all of Abraham's accomplishments as well. In a word, mention of Abraham merits mention of Sarah in most cases.

However, as we will demonstrate, the author of Hebrews takes the “Hall of Faith” section as an opportunity to correct the record about many of the saints. Those whom we would disparage based on their failings, the author holds up as good examples. Sarah serves as the first of these counterintuitive examples; the author gives her high praise that we would not expect given her immediate actions. In the process, the author provides much-needed clarifications about the Old Testament saints and their motivations.

These are the particular works which exemplify the active life of faith in the patriarch Abraham and his wife, Sarah. Provided with each is some commentary which may help the reader.

## **The Departure**

### Hebrews 11:8-10

**8** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. **9** By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. **10** For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Reference:

Genesis 12:1-4

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3 Matthew 3:9

4 Romans 4:16, 9:6-8

5 St. Paul cites this verse in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6. St. James also cites it in James 2:23

**1** Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. **2** And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”  
**4** So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

As Abram, the patriarch received the call from God to go into the Promised Land. As Heb.11:13 will show, he did not receive the land as his own possession in his lifetime. But when called by God, he responded with faith (vs.8) and obedience flowing from it. Interestingly, the author gives us Abraham's true motivation in the pericope, that of an *ultimate* home. While God promised him land and he dutifully obeyed the command to depart, Abraham saw the Lord with something of a similar attitude to St. Peter's words to Christ: “you have the words of eternal life.”<sup>6</sup> So while on the face of Genesis 12:1-4 it may appear that Abram was merely following the promise of earthly benefit, the author of Hebrews (writing under inspiration from the Holy Spirit) speaks of a holy drive to receive the promise of Heaven.

## **The Conception**

### Hebrews 11:11-12

**11** By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

Reference:

### Genesis 17:15-21

**15** And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. **16** I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” **17** Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” **18** And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you!” **19** God said, “No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. **20** As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. **21** But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.”

### Genesis 18:9-15

**9** They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” **10** The LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. **11** Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. **12** So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” **13** The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ **14** Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” **15** But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

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6 John 6:68

The text of Genesis 18 suggests that Sarah lacked faith when she laughed at God's promise. This is apparently not the case, or perhaps maybe was brought to faith very quickly after her humorous reaction. This is the first major instance of the clarification which the author provides. We read the text and are tempted to say “my, how shameful for her to laugh at these words!” The author of Hebrews reads the passage and sees Sarah's faith. Perhaps she chuckles at the absurdity of what she believes will happen or her doubt is washed away by God confronting her, regardless she is counted *faithful* here, and as faith receives all special Graces from our Lord, so too did her faith receive power to conceive from the Almighty.

## The Central Message

### Hebrews 11:13-16

**13** These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. **14** For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. **15** If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Being no stranger to chiasmic structures, it appears that verses thirteen to sixteen are the chiasmic center of the brief meditation on Abraham. It may be seen as a parenthetical or an aside if chiasm was not the intention, but it rightly underlines a deeper sense of faith. Starting from the eighth verse up to this point, the author has mentioned Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah; not one of these took full possession of Canaan. When the thirteenth verse says they died without receiving “the things promised,” the author likely means the Messiah and the land, as the patriarchs indeed *did* receive some blessings which were foretold. Isaac was the promised child whom Abraham *did* receive – twice, as the author will state. Abraham and Jacob got a taste of the many offspring promised.<sup>7</sup>

But the promise of a specific Seed of Abraham, the Christ, was not seen face to face by the patriarchs, nor anyone else in their family and line for approximately 2100 years. While the text of Hebrews 11 does not mention Christ as one promised, the reference to the binding of Isaac connects this passage to that promise (which is contained in Gen.22:17-18).

So the Patriarchs did not lay eyes on the Seed who had previously been promised to Adam and Eve in the Proto-evangelium of Gen.3:15, and it is clear from the text that neither Isaac nor Jacob fulfilled that Promise. This also applies to the land, as the children of Israel would not enter into the Promised Land for another five hundred years or so after Abraham's death.<sup>8</sup> Even so, the glory of the Patriarchs according to the author of Hebrews is that this *did not bother them in the slightest*. Their eyes were on a different prize, as they held themselves to be sojourners – not in the sense of their Bedouin profession, but in the sense that they were sojourners or exiles on Earth, awaiting a perfect home which our Lord prepared for them. This sentiment, which is echoed from John 14:2-3, speaks to the ultimate desire of every believer which our Lord fulfills: eternal life and eternal blessedness in the presence of God, which necessitates an eternal *place* in which we enjoy this promised state. With these few verses, the author confirms that the Patriarchs held to the Gospel based on the Promises of God, by which they were justified by our Lord and granted eternal life. We are called to do likewise with the Gospel today, whether we see earthly blessings or not.

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<sup>7</sup> That is, with Abraham's multiple offspring with Keturah and Jacob's twelve sons.

<sup>8</sup> Abraham lived approximately between 2167 and 1992 B.C. The Exodus occurred in 1446 B.C. And the entrance to Canaan was between 1406 and 1404 B.C.

## The Sacrifice

### Hebrews 11:17-19

**17** By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, **18** of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” **19** He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Genesis 22:1-8,

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” **2** He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” **3** So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. **4** On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. **5** Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” **6** And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. **7** And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” **8** Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

Genesis 22:15-19

**15** And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven **16** and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, **17** I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, **18** and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” **19** So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

The binding of Isaac demonstrates Abraham's faith in God, his obedience to God's commands, and also his unshaken belief that God has the power to raise people from the dead. This last point is added by the author of Hebrews and is not found elsewhere in Scripture; we must not forget that the author speaks as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Yet it is not unreasonable to assume, even without Heb.11:19, that Abraham knew about God's power over life and death. Abraham is a descendant of Enoch and Noah, both of whom witnessed God's power to either preserve someone from dying in the first place or to kill all life on the planet save a single family and a ship full of animals. He personally saw God's miraculous works in Egypt (Gen.12:17-20), and the smoke of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction (Gen.19:27-28). For someone who had obeyed God's command to leave his homeland for a Promised Land, it would have been the height of foolishness for Abraham to *not* trust that God could bring Isaac back from the dead. In other words, the Patriarch participates in and believes the Gospel.

With Hebrews 11:19, the author puts his stamp of approval on a typological reading of the Binding of Isaac. Isaac was received back from the dead (though he did not die physically) in a way which presages the promise of the Gospel. A sacrifice is provided in place of the one who was to die according to the command of God. This is a one-for-one parallel with the Gospel, as Christ willingly died on our behalf so that all believers may rise again – and truly, not figuratively. Another angle which is also applicable is that the author speaks of Abraham's μονογενῆ,<sup>9,10</sup> or unique son (often translated as “only begotten”) – a conscious reference to Christ the Only Begotten of the Father.

<sup>9</sup> Transliterated “monoganay,” Strong's #3439.

<sup>10</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/3439.htm>

## **Hebrews Bible Study #26: Clarifications on the Exodus**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 11:23-29

**23** By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. **24** By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, **25** choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. **26** He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. **27** By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. **28** By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

**29** By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

### **Introduction**

Previously, in discussing Hebrews 11:8-19, we focused on the faith and faith-inspired achievements of the great Patriarch Abraham. The author lauded him, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob as sojourners who looked ultimately to the Heavenly Jerusalem for the fulfillment of God's promises to them. In expounding upon Abraham's faith, the case is established that the foundations of Hebrew identity started with a man whose beliefs were, in essence, Christian. In agreement with St. Paul and St. James, Hebrews presents someone whose actions are motivated by his faith in God, leading to his justification and vindication.

Moses is next on the list, more properly Moses and the surrounding persons that he either interacted with or led. Since through Moses our Lord brought the revealed Law to all Israelites – and indeed the entire world – he naturally had a prominent position in the psyche of first century Judea. Moses, as Lawgiver, often stands in as a representative of the Law itself (something that Luther was fond of, often using “Moses” as a personified term for the Law). Our Lord Christ, knowing that Moses passed on the Law, still presents him as the prophet who also gave commands or permissions.<sup>1</sup> The Pharisees and other Jewish sects took this prominence to an absurd level, making the Law and Moses an argument for their religion; “Moses gave us this Law, so our religion and our interpretation is correct.” To the Pharisee, holding to Christ instead of the Old Covenant, including the Levitical sacrifices, would be paramount to abandoning Moses. Thus it is necessary to clarify the matter: Moses was no mere Lawgiver – he was first and foremost a man of *faith*, just as Abraham was.

While Hebrews was written to exhort the congregation to persevere in the Christian faith, the author does not take pains to say “these false teachers are wrong.” Instead, he counteracts the standard Jewish arguments in a *positive* fashion. St. Paul has already employed more forceful messaging to counter the arguments of Judaizers in Galatians; the author presents here a more propositional case.

If Abraham's line is actually a line of faith, wherein the promises of God are realized, then such is also the case for Moses. Even as Lawgiver, Moses is shown to be a believer – and so are the Israelites who left Egypt with him.

[VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY PROVIDED HERE DUE TO TIME RESTRAINTS:

<https://soundcloud.com/verylutheran/hebrews-study-pt26-moses>]

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 8:4, 19:3-9

## **Hebrews Bible Study #27: When Time Fails**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### **Hebrews 11:30-40**

**30** By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. **31** By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

**32** And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— **33** who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, **34** quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. **35** Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. **36** Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. **37** They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— **38** of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

**39** And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, **40** since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

### **Introduction**

Finishing the “Hall of Faith” chapter of Hebrews, the author has laid the groundwork to reveal that the basis for harmony with the Old Testament saints is found in sharing their *faith*. It is contrasted with the first-century Jewish understanding that a Jew was connected to the Tanakh via bloodline, the prominence of Abraham, and the Mosaic Law. To counter this, the author begins with faith in God's act of Creation (Heb. 11:3), demonstrating that one cannot even begin to appreciate the saints of old without starting with faith in the true God. Then he shows the importance of faith in those antediluvian saints who *had* no Abrahamic line nor Mosaic law to fall back on, that it was faith which led to their achievements; moving on to Abraham, Moses, and all those saints around them, the matter is no different – they operated on faith.

### **“Filler saints”**

Lest one hold that the rest of the chapter is just “filler,” since the author is bringing up various saints in a broad spectrum, they *are* important for understanding God's estimation of these people. One might claim that Rahab was nothing more than a terrified pagan hooker who let people in because she didn't want her throat split by spies; to the contrary, the author of Hebrews praises her faith and conversion, and how she did not die because *by faith* she gave a welcome to the spies. Gideon might be portrayed as a wishy washy fence sitter who accidentally saved Israel; Barak could be looked at as a coward who let a woman fight for him; Samson's impulsive sins could paint him as a contemptuous young man who did not care for God's Laws; Jephthah the rash man who sacrificed his daughter! All of these saints had their sins which we could use to describe them as bad or ugly, but the author of Hebrews (writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit), tells us that these are mighty heroes who conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, and so forth. Our Lord holds them in high esteem on account of their faith!

## **The Contrasted Life and Yearning**

All of these also point to the contrasted life of the saint, between great power that faith holds, and the persecutions and suffering which one experiences on account of it. Verses 33-35 describe fantastic feats which are only accomplished through faith. The last half of verse 35 and into verse 38, great pain and tribulation are described: “Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.” An example of this would be Jeremiah, who was beaten and thrown into a cistern, staying there until he was forced out. “Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.” This may refer to Michaiiah, whom King Ahab threw into a tower prison, presumably until he starved to death. They were stoned, as happened to Zechariah; they were sawn in two, as tradition hold happened to Isaiah at the hands of King Manasseh. The author may state “they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated” – to connect the Old Testament believers to recent events, as being beheaded, destitute, and living in the wilderness with animal hide clothing is directly attributable to St. John the Baptist. This may be a reminder to the congregation that this dynamic persisted even within living memory. Given the pain of persecution which they experienced, “the world was not worthy,” foreshadowing ultimate separation. When the author speaks of “wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth,” this is likely a reference to the prophets who hid during King Ahab's reign when Bathsheba gave orders to exterminate all of them.<sup>1</sup>

To encourage and comfort the Hebrew congregation, the author gives examples of men and women who did wonderful, mighty things by faith. To further comfort them, he assures them that they are not alone in their struggles (or going through the Theology of the Cross), as these Old Testament believers underwent the same thing. This also highlights the “already but not yet” nature of the Kingdom of God, where the believer is empowered and blessed, mighty in the faith, but at the same time does not have the realized, perfect Promise that we are given in Christ. This is why verse 39 states “all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised.” They did receive some promises as verse 33 states, but they did not receive the ultimate expression of what they were seeking. Like us, they were told to wait until all had been fulfilled, “that apart from us they should not be made perfect,” so they did not receive the fullness of the Gospel, the Resurrection, etc. God did not wish that we would be excluded from these things, so they were put “on hold” so to speak until all is realized.

The human soul yearns for heaven. No matter how many earthly blessings we receive from our Lord, there is a part of us that will not be satisfied until we are received into the Kingdom of God in its full actualization – the Resurrection and our residence in the New Jerusalem. As Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 3:11, “He has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.” Old Testament believers persisted in the faith despite not seeing the completion of the Promise of Heaven, eternal life in Christ, for God did not want us deprived.

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<sup>1</sup> One might note that this “hiding” strategy was replicated in the Early Church era, thus founding the monastic orders under the Desert Fathers. Unlike the Desert Fathers though, the Old Testament prophets left their caves when the persecution ended!

## **Hebrews Bible Study #28: The Fifth Exhortation Begins**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 12:1-3

**1** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2** looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

**3** Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

### **Introduction**

Hebrews 11 covered the vast importance of faith which counters, eclipses and replaced the first-century Jewish understanding of religion. The author establishes his agreement with St. Paul and St. James that one is part of God's people by faith, lives by faith, and does all works as flowing *from* faith. Yet with all the examples of Old Testament saints that he gives, one may be left asking “so what?” Why bring up all of these personages when he could have simply made his case about faith?

We must concede to the basic hermeneutic principle that *description* is not the same as *prescription*. To confuse these two is to teach falsely.<sup>1</sup> The author of Hebrews maintains this important distinction when using Old Testament saints as *illustrations* of his theological point, which is that faith is necessary for any relationship with God.<sup>2</sup> But at the same time, it would be irresponsible exegesis for us to ignore the veritable *flood* of examples he provides and not see that he is aiming to make a secondary point. This point is explored in the Fifth Exhortation, for which the saints serve as an encouraging crowd.

### **Commentary: The Primary Message**

**1** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses* – though the author prescriptively spoke of faith as the sole means to God and the central characteristic of sanctified life, the saints that he brings up serve as an encouraging edifice. They are witnesses, not mere corpses, precisely because through their faith they receive eternal life.

*let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely* – a result of seeing the cloud of Old Testament witnesses should be encouragement and motivation to seek holiness and sanctification as they did. Note that the author does *not* use this group of saints in Heaven as a motivation for praying to them or seeking their intercession. Instead, he speaks of them as examples: *if they* worked wonders and achieved great things by their faith, then so can we by the Grace of God.

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1 For example, many a liberal theologian has attempted to justify female ordination on the grounds that Deborah prophesied, that women were the first to see the risen Christ, etc., but none of these *descriptive* events entail a command or permission to ordain women; to the contrary, the *prescriptive* verses which touch on the matter expressly forbid it (1 Corinthians 14:33b-35, 1 Timothy 2:12-15)

2 Hebrews 11:6

*and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us* – The author characterizes the Christian life as an *endurance* race in which the believer is actually doing something. While we do rely on God for our salvation, our daily bread, and all good things, we are still expected to *do* things as Christians and to live an active life.

2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

*Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith* – Jesus Christ is spoken of here as the founder, not of some new religion or sect, but of the only surefire way to salvation. The author has already plainly established that He is God, the Second Person of the Trinity, so He has *always* been the Way, Truth and Life (Jn.14:6), but His earthly, immanent ministry and Atonement won for us established the great opening of salvation to all. Further, by calling Him the perfecter of our faith, it is clear that there is no Christianity without Christ – and no hope for us to have the same saving faith as the cloud of witnesses without Him either.

*who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame* – We all know that crucifixion is one of the most tormenting ways to die, and not just because of the extensive pain it involves; crucifixion also displays the victim in front of crowds so the one dying has to face mocking and scorn from those on the ground. Our Lord endured this for the sake of joy. What joy? Presumably joy of seeing humanity be redeemed, and also the honor, glory and authority over all Creation that He now has on account of His death for us.

*and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God* – Because of His sacrifice, our Lord Jesus is now in the place of highest conceivable honor, and He has all authority over the entire universe (Mt.28:18)

3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

*Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself* – By “consider,” the author is telling us that the first and foremost example and role model for us is Jesus Christ. The cloud of witnesses is wonderful and helpful for our motivation, but none of them compare to the One who actually died for us and endured far worse contempt and hostility than we ever could.

*so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted* – The congregation to whom the author writes is clearly undergoing persecution: this passage would not be present if they were not! But it applies to all believers so long as we are capable of becoming weary or fainthearted. We are all called to look to our Lord Jesus as the example, motivation, and help for us to make it through the endurance race. Especially since Christ went through so much worse for us. While all will undergo the theology of the Cross, Christ went through it first and more powerfully than anyone else could lay claim to.

## **Hebrews Bible Study #29: Chastening from God**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 12:4-17

**4** In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. **5** And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
nor be weary when reproved by him.

**6** For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

**7** It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? **8** If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. **9** Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? **10** For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. **11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

**12** Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, **13** and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. **14** Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. **15** See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; **16** that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. **17** For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

### **Introduction**

Truth be told, this is one of the most difficult passages in all of Scripture. Not one of the most difficult to *interpret*, so much as it is difficult to *accept*. It is shocking to the new convert, and potentially embittering to those who are unprepared. For anyone undertaking to understand what the author is saying, be forewarned that this thesis from our passage today is hard, but it is worth internalizing for the sake of spiritual maturity.

The message:

-God intends for you to suffer.

-He intends to *make* you suffer, so that you will become a better person.

-If He did not make you suffer, then it would be evidence that He does not love you.

-But because God loves you He makes you suffer; therefore be steadfast in the faith.

Of course, this summary might sound uncharitable, and many could argue that it would be better to word it this way:

-God intends for you to be disciplined.

-He intends to *discipline* you, so that you will become a better person.

-If He did not discipline you, then it would be evidence that He does not love you.

-But because God loves you He engages in this discipline; therefore be steadfast in the faith.

But wording it in this alternative way does not capture what the new Christian *hears*, and it sugarcoats what God's sanctifying chastening often involves. From Job to Joseph to David to Jeremiah,

it is evident that what we might euphemistically call “training” entails real pain and suffering. The man who is new to the faith is right to point this out – but he must learn to praise God on account of it.

### Commentary

4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Christians are expected to *struggle* against their sinful habits, thoughts, and dispositions. We are called to fight against our flesh, though without engaging in self-harm or mutilation. Thus this verse condemns any theological position which would tell Christians to ignore their sin or pretend that merely going to Church will cover for the entire process of sanctification. While certainly our Lord promises cleansing and sanctification through Word and Sacrament, the believer must still positively cooperate and put in effort insofar as they are able. Nonetheless, the believer's role here is mentioned in only one verse, where by contrast the rest of the passage has to do with God's work against our sinful nature.

5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
nor be weary when reproved by him.

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

Citing Proverbs 3:11-12, the author tells all readers that King Solomon addresses us as *sons*. But Proverbs is inspired Scripture, so it is not so much King Solomon addressing us in this way as *God* is addressing us this way. God calls the believer His very own child by adoption.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, our Lord says plainly that we must take His discipline seriously, see it as a sign of His love and acceptance, and thus strengthen ourselves to endure.

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

While not all suffering is on account of this dynamic, it is a simple truth that God *does* discipline us as a father does his children. The term used for “discipline” is at root παιδεία,<sup>23</sup> meaning “instruction” or “training” (we get the word “pedagogy” from παιδεία). Still, we cannot soften the tone of the passage by claiming that this is about some process of education, as it is also a term for *chastening* in the fatherly sense, which context demands us to see in the passage.

The author also presents this as a necessary part of our relationship with God. A father who does not raise his children with discipline does not raise his children at all. They are not children to him so much as they are strangers or acquaintances that he just so happened to sire. Such children will grow to be abominable wretches, incapable of acting with any self-control or compassion on others. The same dynamic is seen with our Heavenly Father who adopted us; for Him to not take an active role in disciplining us would be extremely neglectful on His part. If God were to save us and provide blessings for us but never correct us, we would be the most immoral people on the planet, a species of spiritual anarchist that sins freely with the confidence of a “get out of jail free” card. Thankfully, our God is a *loving* Father who will not abide seeing us corrupted.

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1 Ephesians 1:5 and elsewhere.

2 Transliterated “Paideia,” Strong's #3809

3 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3809.htm>

**10** For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. **11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

A child disciplined is a child raised, and it is a father's duty to do this for his children. Of course, by appealing to the congregation's own experience with their fathers, the author is presuming upon a culture in which most were raised with both parents in the home. But that is beside the point. Scripture declares that we are justified, or declared righteous, by faith alone; but once someone is a Baptized believer in Christ Jesus, our Lord embarks on a project for each Christian to *become* righteous after being *declared* righteous. It is for Christ's sake and on His account that our Heavenly Father counts us as being righteous, with our Savior's merits applied to us; yet it is for our sake that our Heavenly Father sanctifies us, that by *substance* in addition to declaration we may be made better over time. Thus Christian discipline is chiefly the Father's role in sanctification, while the Holy Spirit does much of the internal work on our hearts (a subject which properly belongs to a different study, but we digress).

**12** Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, **13** and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.<sup>4</sup>

In citing Isaiah, the author is urging the congregation to endure the chastening of the Lord with the same attitude that the prophet exhorted his hearers to have. They were called in his day to positively engage in their relationship with God – not only enduring, but *strengthening* themselves to keep going. The word for “strengthen” in Isaiah 35:3 is צַיִן<sup>56</sup> which entails one's own gathering of personal might; this is cooperation with God in sanctification in the most relatable of terms! The author of Hebrews adds that in so doing we find a great deal of *healing*.

Consider this analogy. A coach for an athlete might make the athlete put in extreme effort in training for a big event, and the event itself might be painful. We all know that sports like football, boxing, and rock climbing have their injuries that inevitably happen. But an athlete following his coach's tough tutelage benefits *also* from active recovery on his own time; if he does not do his squats, his stretches, take his hot shower or ice his injuries, or even lift weights, then the accumulation of injuries will put him out of competition very quickly. This is not to say that the believer is solely responsible for healing – to be frank, God does the bulk of that – but the author here *does* point out a role for the individual Christian in spiritual recovery. This is the proper Christian response to our Lord's discipline: to engage in greater devotion to Him and to continue in good works.

**14** Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. **15** See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; **16** that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. **17** For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

The remainder of this passage is self-evident in its interpretation. The author first gives his readers the Godly response to undergoing chastening, and now it is time to tell us what *not* to do. He warns the congregation that, though sinning in response to God's discipline may be tempting, it will only cause conflict and more pain. He warns against bitterness, which will only taint the believer like a contaminant or invasive weed in otherwise good soil. To blame other people is to cause needless fighting; to blame God (or any other bitter emotion) is to poison oneself; to sin in response to the pain God gives us, rather than accept that it makes us better and stronger as Christians, is to forfeit many rewards and blessings one could have had – just as Esau listened to his hunger rather than his

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4 cf. Isaiah 35:3-4

5 Transliterated “Chazaq,” Strong's #2388

6 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/2388.htm>

inheritance. Let us not forget that Esau was still a part of Isaac's family, he was not cast out from before his father, but his immaturity and following after his lusts meant forfeiting his birthright! The good news contained in this exhortation is then that the Christian who *does* endure, and who does his best to avoid sin and anger at God, shall receive great rewards from our Heavenly Father; let us then not be like the child who tries to run away from home after he is spanked – rather, let us continue on in growth, for our pain is often a sign of God's love.

## **Hebrews Bible Study #30: Two Mountains**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 12:18-29

**18** For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest **19** and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. **20** For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” **21** Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” **22** But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, **23** and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, **24** and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

**25** See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. **26** At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” **27** This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. **28** Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, **29** for our God is a consuming fire.

### **Introduction**

The author of Hebrews spent the bulk of the twelfth chapter speaking of a hard truth: God disciplines His children for the sake of their sanctification, so believers must take an attitude of endurance. Yet he does not simply speak this as a rote *command*, as though he were giving a new Law. Instead, with our passage for today he reminds the Hebrew congregation of the reason they must hold on. It might seem redundant, since the entire *book* has included encouragement for remaining in the Christian faith, but the author does not quite repeat himself here. The latter part of Hebrews 12 explains the difference between the Old Covenant and the New in terms of the *voice* which God sets for believers – specifically, that of Law and Gospel, illustrated by Mount Sinai and Mount Zion.

### **Two Mountains: Former Residence in the Law**

**18** For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest **19** and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. **20** For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” **21** Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”

Using Mt. Sinai as an analogical symbol for the Law, the author reminds the congregation that they are not encountering the Law, nor living under it. The Law spoken by the Divine voice terrifies all who hear it spoken from this mountain.<sup>1</sup> It promises punishment for violations, namely death, as so much as touching that which is holy merits execution on the part of a sinner.<sup>2</sup> The old phrase *Lex Semper Accusat*, “the Law Always Accuses” comes to mind. As the children of Israel heard God's Voice speak from Sinai, they were confronted with their own sin and imperfection in the most powerful

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:18-20

<sup>2</sup> The author refers to Exodus 19:12-13 regarding touching the mountain.

way possible. His holiness was contrasted with their sinfulness so much that they cowered in fear and begged Moses to speak instead of the Lord.

Note also that the author begins with “you have not come to what may be touched,” an indication that the Old Covenant was *earthly*. While it comes *from* our Heavenly Father to the children of Israel, making it heavenly in origin, the stipulations, rewards, and consequences of the Mosaic Law primarily have to do with the earth, not Heaven. Sacrifices were made regularly, blood for blood; everything centered around the tabernacle (and later the Temple) as residing in a specific earthly place; devotion to God was commanded, but most of the Pentateuch's laws concern earthly matters, at least insofar as the civic and ceremonial laws are concerned.

But in denying that this is another “Sinai moment,” the author gives a clear distinction between one under the Old covenant and one under the New Covenant. The Old Covenant promises dreadful punishments to those who rebel, to the point of total destruction and being wiped out as a nation.<sup>3</sup> Under the New Covenant, believers are disciplined as family members *because they are part of a family*. If the topic of discipline were a matter of punishment in the sense of the Law, then the Christian message would merit the same response as that of Israel at Sinai: utter despair and terror. God is *disciplining* them, not *punishing* them; it is not the threat of eternal damnation or the destruction of nations which informs the painful side of sanctification.

### **Two Mountains: New Residence in the Gospel**

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

If life under the Old Covenant is characterized as encountering an earth-oriented Law at an earthly Mount Sinai, life under the New Covenant is one of a Heavenly, upward reaching Gospel settled upon an otherworldly Jerusalem. As the author has already spoken of a heavenly tabernacle in the ninth chapter, it is expected that he should expand on the notion of Heavenly locations here. One must note that this is not exactly a *new* concept, as apocryphal writers mention it, Ezekiel's Temple appears to be an illustration of a proposed ideal,<sup>4</sup> and later St. John will speak more in detail on the descent of Heavenly Jerusalem onto earth.<sup>5</sup> The author of Hebrews contributes that the Christian lives *in there now*.

We should not expect this to be merely metaphorical. The believer is truly united to Christ in his Baptism;<sup>6</sup> where Christ is, there the believer is too in a sacramental sense. Our position as sojourners on this earth, which we share with the saints of Hebrews 11, is one characterized by being here in body but with the Lord in our spirit. Indeed the inverse is true as well: one who subscribes to an old and dying earthly Covenant will be old, dying, and earthly himself as a resident of the material world.

Even more important is the characterization of the residence of the believer, one of being in the *Gospel*. The Old Covenant is one primarily of Law (although it does point to our Savior); the new Covenant is entirely God's Grace to the sinner. Therefore, just as angels rejoice over our repentance,<sup>7</sup> we live in a place of joy, relief, and in the presence of perfection. We reside spiritually with Christ in His Kingdom and under His authority. In context of the chapter, it means that the painful side of

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3 Deuteronomy 28

4 Ezekiel 40-48

5 Revelation 21

6 Romans 6:4-6, Galatians 3:27

7 Luke 15:10

sanctification – as well as the guilt we feel when sinning, we might add – is a matter of *Gospel*. God is perfecting us that we may be like the saints who cheer us on.

Another matter to note and clarify is that Christ's Blood “speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” Abel's blood cries out to God,<sup>8</sup> mostly as a matter of *guilt*. Cain is guilty of murdering his brother, and his brother's blood stains the land, convicting one man. Christ's blood convicts the world to be certain, but it covers those who are in Him and *saved* by the very Blood through faith in the Atonement.

### **The Proper Outlook in the Second Mountain**

**25** See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. **26** At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” **27** This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. **28** Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, **29** for our God is a consuming fire.

Christ speaks from both mountains. Established in Hebrews 3, Christ is the builder of the house, so to speak: He is the Lawgiver, much more so than Moses; He is the ultimate Passover Lamb, bringing us the Gospel and free offer of salvation. Yet when Christ spoke to the Israelites at Sinai, they begged to hear from another, and then built the golden calf to worship. At the mountain on earth, Christ's words were not heeded, leading to that generation's death.

Thus the author exhorts the Hebrew congregation (and by extension the whole Church) to heed our Lord's warnings. Previous warnings had been from the Law, namely punishment for sin; the current warning given is that a believer abandoning the faith would be giving up the salvation which Christ has freely offered, being new subjects in God's Kingdom. Adding to this, the author directly applies Haggai 2:6-7 to the New Jerusalem as an unshaking, permanent kingdom as contrasted to the shaken, destroyed kingdoms of the earth:

*6 For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. 7 And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts.*

The post-exilic prophet Haggai was speaking of the coming glory of the Second Temple. But this foreshadowed the permanent Kingdom of God, which shall alone remain after God is through with the machinations of the world. At the Eschaton, all will be burned – *for our God is a consuming fire*.

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8 Genesis 4:10

## **Hebrews Bible Study #31: Starting to Finish Up**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 13:1-6

**1** Let brotherly love continue. **2** Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. **3** Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. **4** Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. **5** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” **6** So we can confidently say,

“The Lord is my helper;

I will not fear;

what can man do to me?”

### **Introduction**

[Director's Note: due to time constraints, the outline of this Bible study may not be the same as the audio version. Hopefully both together can bring out a well-rounded sense of the text.]

Hebrews 12 serves as something of a climax for the author, at least in the final pericope. He has made his case for the Hebrew congregation to remain Christian, having discussed the supremacy of Christ, the superiority of the New Covenant, and the nature of faith as well as sanctification. Now that he has made his argument, he finishes up with general directions for Christian living.

This is incredibly prudent on the author's part. He has spent twelve chapters at this point teaching about fantastic, deep truths about the Gospel and the nature of heavenly things. There is a real risk that one reading the epistle in the congregation may find himself so puffed up by heavenly truths that he forgets he is still living in the material world! Combating the stereotype of Christians being “so heavenly minded that they're of no earthly good,” the final chapter of Hebrews reminds us that we must still love our neighbors and do good works.

### **Conduct in Various Circles**

#### *Local Congregation*

Starting with “Let brotherly love continue,” the author begins a series of imperatives which encourage believers to live out their faith. However, it must start with *brotherly love*, or Philadelphia, not affection for the stranger. In Christian conduct, love *begins with* and *prioritizes* those who are closer to the believer. A man is called in Ephesians 5 to love his wife as Christ loves the Church; no other human being on earth may receive this same degree of dedication from him. Similarly, the Fourth Commandment tells believers to honor their fathers and mothers – not the fathers and mothers of someone else, to be certain. By using the term *brotherly* love here, rather than Agape, the author is exhorting the Hebrew congregation to whom he writes to treat their fellow Christians in the local church as true brethren. Brotherly love belongs between *brothers*, and fellow believers are just that; they are to receive greater affection than outsiders, without neglecting the stranger.

#### *Strangers*

Hence, the next verse, by which all are commanded to show hospitality to strangers. Not that one must show *fealty* to strangers nor seek them out nor bring them in via migration (indeed, this must

be said because this verse and many others have been abused in an attempt to turn all Christians into xenophilic maniacs), but when the opportunity arises to show kindness to a stranger one must oblige. Note also the freedom given to Christians as to *how* they hospitality, so long as they maintain a friendly disposition to those that they do not know so long as they can help it. Of course, this does not necessarily mean a *universal* hospitality and friendliness. For example, the author does not ask you nor I to invite a mass shooter into our homes right after he has turned his weapons onto a crowd of innocent people. Such would be a failure to love our neighbors, ourselves, etc.

There is a unique motivation which the author presents, that “thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” This could be a reference to the parents of Samson showing hospitality to the Angel of the Lord in Judges 13, or perhaps the prophets (*angelos* means “messenger”), as indeed the widow who baked for Elijah was rewarded quite handsomely in 1 Kings 17. Regardless, this encouragement that one may be entertaining supernatural actors is not the *only* reason we should be hospitable to strangers, but it does present extra motivation given the opportunity to give direct assistance to God's servants, whether angelic or prophetic.

### *Prisoners*

The third verse speaks of remembering those in prison or mistreated. This mental recall should not be a mere thought or else there would be no point in the command; instead, by saying once must act as though in prison with them the author encourages the congregants to offer aid, comfort, and assistance when able – just as they would be able to within the walls of a cell. That said, this is not for *all* prisoners or *all* people who are mistreated, as the author specifies with “because you also are in the body.” That is to say, we are given the command to give assistance to Christians undergoing *persecution* for being Christians, especially since we are still in the same Body of Christ with them. They may not be able to attend Church services, but they are still members of God's family by Baptism.

Just as the author does not leave out the stranger in the need to be friendly, opting instead for prioritizing believers in the same congregation, this does not mean that the Christian is to be pitiless toward those who are in prison that do not belong to our Lord. While not addressed here, it is evident that prisoners, even guilty ones, are part of the “all nations” to whom the Great Commission beckons us to witness. Add that to their qualifying as strangers, and there is still good cause for the establishment of prison chaplaincies, prison ministries, etc.

### *The Married Estate*

Shifting gears somewhat, in the fourth verse the author exhorts all believers to hold marriage in honor to to conduct married life in an honorable, that is undefiled, way. Not only for the threat of judgment which properly belongs to the fornicator and adulterer, but also on account of marriage itself. If marriage is to be held in honor, then it is because it is *honorable* in and of itself. The covenant of marriage is something of a life unto itself, spurring a man and his wife to care for it and preserve its nature. Thus the marriage bed must be undefiled. What defiles a marriage bed? Sexual sins, straying, mistreating one another, or failing to fulfill the marital duty.

It is interesting to note that the author does not present coitus (or any other sexual act) between spouses as something ugly, impure, or detestable. That he would use the word “undefiled” for it suggests that purity and innocence are not *lost* at the consummation of a wedding, but they are *matured*. This is to say, one is still chaste even if he beds his wife every night. So while the fourth verse does contain a warning against sexual sins, the opposite extreme must also be avoided. Marriage should not be denigrated, nor should it be seen as disqualifying for ministerial office, nor should married couples be encouraged to stay in a state of celibacy “except for procreation.” Herein is condemned any church body which demands fasts from sexual activity for spouses, or like some church fathers warns against

“turning the bedroom into a bordello.” As the estate of marriage was established before the Church, the Church does well to respect it as an older institution.

*The financial sphere*

Finally, the author exhorts the congregation to “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have,” on the basis that God has promised to be with us. Thus he relies on God providing for us, that we may have faith in Him for blessing us. Greed and discontent are both a failure to trust God for our daily bread and to be grateful for what He has done. If we do not trust nor thank God for what we have, how can we say, as the author does,

“The Lord is my helper;  
I will not fear;  
what can man do to me?”

## **Hebrews Bible Study #32: Continuing to Finish Up**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Hebrews 13:7-17

**7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. **8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. **9** Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. **10** We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. **11** For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. **12** So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. **13** Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. **14** For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. **15** Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. **16** Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

**17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

### **Introduction**

At the closing section of the Book of Hebrews, the author has given the congregation a reminder (by his commands) that they still live in the world, though they are not of it. While he has taught them about Christ's immense, glorious and infinite supremacy over all, with the aim of helping them stay steadfast in the Christian faith, knowing doctrine and not apostatizing are not the whole of Christian life. Thus he adds exhortations to be free from greed, to be faithful in matters of marriage, etc.

Now, it is time to ensure that his teachings are maintained. First, by good teachers – that is, those entrusted with leadership in the Church. If a pastor is faithful with the message of Scripture, then it is all the more likely that the congregation will be as well. In other words, the congregants are to remain hearing the Word. Then, because of His Real Presence, there is the matter of the Sacrament, which the author commends the congregation to partake in with joy, especially at their exclusive access. Through this, believers are strengthened to undergo what Christ has gone through.

### **Teachers (the Ministry of the Word, vs.7-9, 17)**

Typically (in the Lutheran context anyway), the minister is ordained to the office of Word and Sacrament. However, this is really *two* offices which the pastor occupies. There are some ordained to teach, but not to consecrate: many theologians come to mind, as they are charged almost solely with teaching doctrine. Some are given teaching as a spiritual gift, or preaching (especially for evangelism), but are not necessarily selected to perform the Sacraments (Eph.4:11-12). Alternatively, the office of Deacon is an example of the minister ordained to Sacrament, but not Word (Acts 6). That said, most ministers are ordained to *both* Word and Sacrament, hence the author exhorting the congregation to remember and obey leadership in verses 7 and 17.

Historically, this is one passage which has been abused to justify pastoral tyranny, especially from Rome and increasingly in Lutheran churches. While these leaders are to be obeyed, it is in the *context* of the ministry of the Word, both in the minister's doctrinal teachings and in his example of

Christian living. “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” They are charged with these matters because they are accountable to God for it: “they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.” So obedience to a pastor or other spiritual leader is not a matter of sacerdotalism (that is, over-emphasis on clerical authority), but obeying that which they teach, do, and command *as it is found in the Word*. Christians are to examine their leaders and test them (1 Timothy 3), being willing to hold these men accountable. Since that accountability is found here and in James 3:1, a congregation loves their leadership not by rebellion, but by holding them accountable to the Word.

After all, it is not solely the minister who is charged with keeping the congregation away from false doctrines: it is the *congregation* who shares that responsibility. “**8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. **9** Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.” The individual Christian in the church is to be a student of the Word, fed by God's grace, able to maintain that since Christ does not change, *doctrine* does not change. We are to discern, even if that means discerning what the pastor says and finding him to be incorrect.

That said, the ministry *is* real leadership with real authority. We cannot be spiritual anarchists who deny the seventh and seventeenth verses entirely. But the authority which is spoken of is, as the office, a spiritual one. The congregation is instructed to listen to and believe their leaders, while following their example for Christian living. Thus pastors are charged with being a good example, teaching the Word accurately, and serving the people: their disposition in doing so, however, seems to be up to the body of believers. In saying “Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you,” the author is saying that the congregants must treat their leaders *well*, lest they lose all advantage of having a pastor in the first place. This means honoring the man, listening to him, and following his exhortations. While the church must still examine the cleric in what he says and does, they are not permitted to *mistreat* him.

### **The Altar and Sacrifices (the Ministry of the Sacrament and Sanctification, vs.10-16)**

The Scriptures teach the Real Presence of our Lord Christ in, with, and under the elements in Communion. Only Christians may partake of the Sacrament, which is received by faith. Hence the author speaks of an altar which those in the Jewish religious system cannot receive nor benefit from. The Christian, as part of a universal priesthood, partakes in the Sacrifice of our Lord in similar fashion to how the Levitical priests partook of Mosaic sacrifices (Leviticus 5-7).

One might opine that this cannot be the case, since the author says in the ninth verse, “it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.” Such would say, after Zwingli and the Baptists, that the eating and drinking from an altar here is a reference to faith rather than actual eating and drinking. However, just as Baptism brings us a good conscience without devolving into a mere ritual washing (1 Peter 3:21), the Eucharist brings us the very Body and Blood of Christ for the sake of our forgiveness and strengthening, so it is not merely a ritual meal.

The author also explains Communion as a matter of sanctification. Just as Christ bore reproach “outside the camp,” we therefore “go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.” In Philippians 1:21, St. Paul states “to live is Christ and to die is gain,” meaning that one becomes closer to our Savior by the experiences which we face in this world before moving on into the New Jerusalem; to be reproached and persecuted is part of being conformed to His image.<sup>1</sup> But the author brings up

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:29

eating at the altar *first*, before undergoing more of the slings and arrows of our sojourn here. I believe there is no other conclusion than to see that Christ strengthens our faith for just such a life as we live.

We turn around after having received Communion, and then we love others! First, we love our Lord and offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise, or “the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” This is consistent with the “sacrifice” spoken of in Psalm 116,<sup>2</sup> where it becomes clear that God values our trusting and grateful hearts far more than the blood of various livestock. Then we turn around to “do good and to share,” helping our brothers and sisters in all their needs. In doing so, we make further sacrifices to God as the sixteenth verse states; if someone should ask how we love God beyond praise and faithfulness, the author here answers that we love God *by* loving our neighbor.

That the author highlights thanksgiving, praise, and service to others as *sacrifices* highlights the universal priesthood of believers. The Mosaic Law permitted only priests born in Aaron's line to make sacrifices, and that consisting of the blood of animals. But now that our Lord Jesus has made the Atoning sacrifice once and for all, no more bloodletting or burning is necessary. Instead, each believer is now able to make sacrifices, particularly those which please God the most: loving Him above all through our praise, and loving our neighbors as ourselves through service. And Christ Himself comes to us at the Altar to strengthen and refresh us for this very task.

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2 Psalm 116:17

### **Hebrews Bible Study #33: Closing**

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

#### Hebrews 13:18-25

**18** Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.

**19** I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

**20** Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, **21** equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

**22** I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. **23** You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

**24** Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. **25** Grace be with all of you.

#### **Finishing Up**

The author has said all he wished to regarding the power of Christ over all and the motivations the congregation should have for staying in the Christian faith. *Now* it is time to make a final request, to give a benediction, and to present the epistle teleologically.

#### *The Request (vs.18-19)*

The congregation is asked to pray for “us.” This and the reference to St. Timothy in the 23<sup>rd</sup> verse means that the author was a traveling companion of the Apostles, an associate of the Apostles, or one of the Apostles himself. We might speculate on the identity of this man (most critics have opined that it is St. Paul), but that is not as important as the request itself – which is very revealing.

The prayer request does not state directly what is being asked, but oddly appears to have a chiasmic structure to reveal the content. We may diagram it as such:

A1. Pray for us

B1. for we are sure that we have a clear conscience

C. desiring to act honorably in all things.

A2. I urge you the more earnestly to do this

B2. in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

With the “C” clause being the center of the statement, it appears that the author and his companions are requesting strength of character. Like all sinners, they have clay feet, the same struggle with sin as the rest of us. It is a request consistent with the message of Proverbs that, generally speaking, good conduct brings about good results; they ask for prayer to help conduct themselves with honor *so that* they may visit the Hebrew congregation sooner. This reflects a deep humility on their part, as well as an unshaking faith that God rewards those who do their best to obey (with His help).

#### *The Benediction (vs.20-22)*

We may find the prayer request to be odd, given that the author has supported and proclaimed *Sola Fide*. If we are justified by faith and have eternal life in Christ, why ask for prayer for honorable conduct? In a word, it is because the author understands that piety comes from our Lord. With his

benediction, he does not pronounce a blessing of vague grace deposited upon the believer. Instead, he blesses the congregation with a *sanctifying* blessing, followed up with a further exhortation.

It is structured in parallel stanzas:

A1. Now may the God of peace

A2. who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,

A3. the great shepherd of the sheep,

A4. by the blood of the eternal covenant,

B1. equip you with everything good that you may do his will,

B2. working in us that which is pleasing in his sight,

B3. through Jesus Christ,

B4. to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

One could simplify the benediction by taking statements A1 and B1 as one sentence: “Now may the God of peace equip you with everything good that you may do his will.” But in writing with parallel poetic stanzas, he expands on the reasons for this very blessing. God is the God of peace because He rose our Lord Jesus from the dead, He who is our great Shepherd by the blood He shed to institute the New (and yet eternal – that is, planned from eternity past) Covenant. *As* the God of peace, the One who broke down the enmity between mankind and the Divine through the Atonement, He is also the One who equips us to do His will through Jesus Christ. This means that our piety comes from God. The author can exhort the Hebrew congregation to stay in the faith and keep doing good works all he wants, but there will be no fruit unless our Heavenly Father, working on us through our Lord Jesus, grants it.

#### *Teleological Instruction*

Before closing with a few greetings, the author makes a curious request in the 22<sup>nd</sup> verse:

“I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.”

The entirety of Hebrews is characterized by the author as an exhortation – one big encouragement and dictum that the Hebrew church stay with Christ instead of going back to Judaism or going in some other direction. This *includes* his great teachings on the supremacy of Christ over the angels, Moses, the saints, etc. This *includes* his dialogues on the heavenly Jerusalem, the Temple, the Covenants, and the two mountains. One could write thousands upon thousands of pages instructing the faithful about these matters, as the past two millennia of theologians has demonstrated; but for the author of Hebrews, head knowledge is not the point. Instead, he insists that this is all part of an exhortation: the knowledge which he imparts about the faith is done in order to strengthen and edify the congregation in staying faithful.

This is a wonderful revelation of the attitude toward knowledge that the writer possesses. Christians are not catechized just to fill their heads up with facts. Head knowledge does not save, but faith *does*. Any education one has in Christianity ought to be for the sake of getting us closer to our Lord, more obedient to His will, and with stronger faith in the Gospel. Over the course of this series in Hebrews, I certainly hope that the author's intended result is found to be fruitful in us just as much as he hoped it would be for the Hebrews.