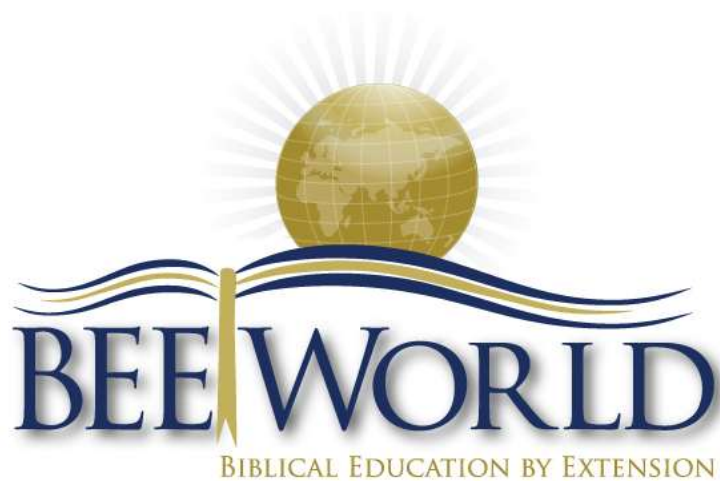


# The Epistle to the Hebrews



## **THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS**

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# The Epistle to the Hebrews

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## Course Introduction

On February 20, 1547, Edward VI, who was just nine years old at the time, was crowned king of England. The young king was compared to Josiah, the king of Judah who inherited his father's throne at just eight years of age (2 Kgs 22; 23). Why was Edward VI compared to the godly king Josiah? Josiah returned the people of Judah to the reading of God's Word, and he rid the country of idolatrous practices. Under the short, six-year reign of Edward VI, there were forty to fifty editions of the English Bible printed in England. Many of the unbiblical practices both within and outside of the church were stopped.



In this course on the epistle to the Hebrews, you will learn much about God's special King-Priest. But this King is not one who came to the throne with so little preparation. Jesus "learned obedience through the things he suffered" and was "perfected" for His roles as Priest and King (Heb 5:8-9) so that now He is "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb 2:9). King Edward VI recognized the true source of authority to rule. For his coronation service, he refused to be offered three swords, which would have represented the three countries he would rule. Instead, he insisted on being presented a copy of the Bible. He wanted to send a message to the people of England that true authority rests in him who wields the Sword of the Spirit. King Jesus will return one day. "From his mouth extends a sharp sword, so that with it he can strike the nations" (Rev 19:15). His reign will not be as that of King Edward VI who ruled only six years; King Jesus will reign forever and ever. In the epistle to the Hebrews, you will learn more about the present-day ministry of Jesus than in any other book of the Bible. You will learn of Him whose reign will have no end.



# Course Information

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## Description of the Course

In this course, you will study the majestic epistle to the Hebrews. You will study background information, such as dating, authorship, background and setting, and purpose. You will become better acquainted with the epistle's theme, its structure, and its use of the Old Testament. You will gain a new appreciation for what it means to your own life and Christian growth to have Jesus as the King-Priest in the present church age—what He has already accomplished for you and how He can come to your aid in times of need. You will also be greatly enriched in your expectations of what Christ will bring when He returns to gather His people and set up His kingdom.

One aspect of this epistle that gives it great importance is its application to the believer's prayer life today. Not only does the author lay out Jesus' intercessory work, but he develops in detail the greater access we have to God in the heavenly tabernacle through the blood of Jesus. Of all the sacred pages of Scripture, it is here in Hebrews that you will experience a new appreciation for what one student of this epistle has referred to as "the miraculous perfection of God's Word." Truly, in this literary masterpiece it is God who has spoken.

## Course Objectives

When you have completed this course, you will be able to:

- State the key issues concerning dating, authorship, background, setting, and purpose
- Construct an outline of Hebrews that reflects its development and major themes
- Describe the author's basic approach to understanding and applying the Old Testament
- Defend interpretive decisions of the key terms and crucial theological passages in the epistle
- State clearly and precisely how the message of Hebrews has impacted your life
- Base the joy in your Christian walk on the certain promises of a glorious future awaiting faithful believers when Christ returns

## Units of Study

The lessons are grouped into four units:

### Unit 1: Jesus, The Superior King-Son (Heb 1:1-4:13)

Lesson 1: Introductory Issues to the Epistle and the Prologue (Heb 1:1-4)

Lesson 2: The King-Son's Superiority to the Angels and First Warning (Heb 1:5-2:18)

Lesson 3: The King-Son's Superiority to Moses and Joshua and Second Warning (Heb 3:1-4:13)

### Unit 2: The Superior Person of Jesus, The High Priest (Heb 4:14-7:28)

Lesson 4: Help Available from the Merciful High Priest (Heb 4:14-5:10)

Lesson 5: Confrontation and Motivation to Move on to Maturity and the Third Warning (Heb 5:11-6:20)

Lesson 6: Superiority of Jesus as a High Priest (Heb 7:1-28)

### **Unit 3: The Superior Ministry and Sacrifice of Jesus (Heb 8:1-10:39)**

Lesson 7: Comparison of the Prophesied New Covenant to the Old Covenant (Heb 8:1-9:15)

Lesson 8: The Perfect Sacrifice (Heb 9:16-28)

Lesson 9: The Fourth Warning (Heb 10:1-39)

### **Unit 4: Means and Responsibilities of New Covenant Life (Heb 11:1-13:25)**

Lesson 10: The Life of Faith that Pleases God and Brings Reward (Heb 11:1-40)

Lesson 11: Final Exhortation and Fifth Warning (Heb 12:1-29)

Lesson 12: Spiritual Sacrifices Appropriate Under the New Covenant and Epilogue (Heb 13:1-25)

As you plan your study schedule, decide the dates for when you want to finish each unit. You can then divide this time into study periods for each lesson.

We suggest that you try to do three or four lessons per month. You can do this if you study about one hour each day.

### **Recommended for Further Reading**

The only required reading for this course is the epistle to the Hebrews in your Bible, “A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews” by J. Paul Tanner, and the course articles.

There are many commentaries on Hebrews available today that you may be interested in reading, but they are not required.

Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. 2d ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1990.

Carson, D. A. and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

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Guthrie, Donald. *New Testament Introduction*. 4th ed. Downers Grove, IL. Intervarsity Press, 1990.

Hagner, Donald A. *Encountering the Book of Hebrews*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2002.

Hodges, Zane C. "Hebrews." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament edition, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983.

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Koester, Craig R. *Hebrews*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 2001.

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Lang, G. H. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. London: The Paternoster Press, 1951; reprint, Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle Publishing Company. 2008.

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Montefiore, H. W. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Black's New Testament Commentaries. London. Adam & Charles Black, 1964.

Morris, Leon. "Hebrews." In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, 3-158. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981.

Westcott, Brooke F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1892; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974.



# Unit 1: Jesus—The Superior King-Son

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## Unit Introduction

Before you could be qualified to fly an airplane, you would need to go through many hours of sitting in a classroom, studying books and manuals, taking exams, going through the motions of flying a plane in a simulator, and sitting in a plane observing a pilot who is actually performing the task of flying a plane. The more difficult a task, the more preparation it requires. The interpretation of a text with the complexities of the epistle to the Hebrews is not an easy task. Hopefully, you have already been introduced to the work of interpreting Scripture through *Romans and Galatians* and through *Studying the Bible*. These are excellent training tools for approaching the text of Hebrews. Another step before actually “flying the plane” is to study external matters related to this rich epistle.



In Lesson 1, you will study background information and issues concerning the epistle to the Hebrews. You will read articles on the authorship, canonicity, and dating of the epistle. You will also study the prologue and see how it introduces the great theme of the epistle.

In Lesson 2, you will see how the author uses the Old Testament to prove the superiority of Jesus over the angels. You will also study the first warning.

In Lesson 3, you will see the author develop the theme of Jesus as the King-Son who is superior to Moses and Joshua, and you will study the second of five warnings included in the epistle.

As you study the epistle to the Hebrews, you will be studying a literary work of the highest quality—a work of beauty with intricate precision. The Divine Author has spoken through the human author to give His believer-priests a word of exhortation on how to serve our great High Priest, the Messiah of God, Jesus the Son and coming King! It is this “how to serve” that should be the focus of our study. These rich theological truths have critical, practical application to the one who wants to serve the superior King and High Priest, Jesus the Messiah. As much as any of the texts of Scripture, this epistle gives the follower of Christ the following:

- Vital information on how to walk by faith and hope in a fallen world
- How to function as a priest in ministry to others
- How to avail oneself of the tremendous new covenant truths on prayer
- How to serve the coming King victoriously in the church age (in brief)

## Unit Outline

Lesson 1: Introductory Issues to the Epistle and the Prologue (Heb 1:1-4)

Lesson 2: The King-Son’s Superiority to the Angels and First Warning (Heb 1:5-2:18)

Lesson 3: The King-Son’s Superiority to Moses and Joshua and Second Warning (Heb 3:1-4:13)

# Lesson 1: Introductory Issues to the Epistle and the Prologue (Heb 1:1-4)

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## Lesson Introduction

When a student of the Bible does inductive Bible study, he or she is attempting to discover, as closely as possible, what thoughts were in the original author's mind when writing the words of the text. The difficulties involved in attempting this goal stem from the two thousand years that have passed since the writing of the New Testament and about 3,500 years since Moses authored the Torah. There is a wide gulf in customs, language, geography, and countless other details that remove us from the world of the biblical authors.



In this lesson, you will study background information and issues concerning the epistle to the Hebrews. You will read articles on the dating, authorship, and canonicity of the epistle. Bible students sometimes skip over such topics as if they were unimportant. At times the research does not seem to provide enough fruit to warrant the work involved. But these areas of study provide the path for entering into the mindset of the author's world. While their value may not be immediately evident to the novice, the serious student cannot avoid looking at these questions that lead to a better feel for the author's world; his way of expressing thoughts; and, thus, the truth he intended to communicate.

In this lesson, you will study background information to the epistle to the Hebrews and the prologue that introduces this rich epistle.

## Lesson Outline

Topic 1: Dating of the Epistle to the Hebrews

Topic 2: The Authorship and Canonicity of the Epistle to the Hebrews

Authorship of Hebrews

Canonicity of Hebrews

Topic 3: Background and Setting of the Epistle to the Hebrews

Characteristics of the Readership

Purpose of the Epistle

Topic 4: The Prologue to the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb 1:1-4)

Basic Assertion

Supporting Assertion About the Son's Greatness

## Topic 1: Dating of the Epistle to the Hebrews

Your desire at this point may be to get right into the text of this great epistle. It is true that an issue like the dating of the epistle will not have a great spiritual impact on your life; whereas the truths about your privileges as a new covenant worshipper can drastically change your prayer life. So, why study an issue that probably has no certain answer and will not have direct spiritual application to your life? Biblical scholars through the centuries have dealt with such issues. In some cases there have been quite remarkable results affecting biblical exegesis. New archaeological evidence has increased our understanding of the biblical languages and the applications of knowledge from other fields of study, such as linguistics to biblical exegesis are just two of many areas that influence biblical scholarship. To drop such topics from our field of study would guarantee no further progress in finding answers to centuries-old questions. Trying to state with precision the date of the writing of Hebrews helps us put ourselves in the author's shoes and get a feel for the background and the worldview from which he wrote.



### Assignment

- At one sitting read through the entire epistle to the Hebrews. As you do so, try to picture yourself as the author writing the epistle.
- Please read “The Dating of the Epistle to the Hebrews” (placed earlier in the lesson).

### QUESTION 1

We can be certain that Hebrews was written before AD 95-96 because a letter written during that time period quoted the epistle to the Hebrews. That letter was written by the bishop of Rome, by the name of \_\_\_\_\_.

- A. Alexander
- B. Peter
- C. Clement
- D. Bishop Lightfoot

### QUESTION 2

Based on Hebrews 12:4, explain why the epistle would probably have been written before AD 64 if it were written to Christians in Rome.

### QUESTION 3

Which of the following support dating this epistle AD 68-69? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. Since there is no mention of Paul, it is quite possible that Paul had recently been martyred.
- B. The author speaks of the old covenant animal sacrifices and Levitical priesthood as if they are still in operation. This would be very unlikely after the destruction of the temple in AD 70.
- C. The mention of Claudius expelling the Jews from Rome proves the epistle was written after AD 49.
- D. The mention of Timothy (Heb 13:23) shows that the epistle was written during Timothy's lifetime. Timothy's imprisonment is not referred to in Paul's letters and may well have been after Paul's martyrdom, about AD 68-69.

## Topic 2: The Authorship and Canonicity of the Epistle to the Hebrews

The author of Hebrews makes no statement with more emphasis than that of the prologue: “God has spoken!” Unfortunately, there have been differences of opinion as to what writings belong in that corpus of literature which preserve for us the words which “God has spoken.” Paul wrote, “Every scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16). The Greek for “inspired by God” is *theopneustos* which literally has the idea of “God-breathed.” Peter added, “Above all, you do well if you recognize this: no prophecy of Scripture ever comes about by the prophet’s own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:20-21).

In the early church, some of the inspired writings were initially questioned for a variety of reasons. Some thought the theology of James contradicted Paul’s emphasis on justification by faith. Some doubted the apostolic authorship—and therefore the authority—of 2 Peter, Jude, James, and other letters. Some questioned the content of Revelation.

You will study the theological issue of canonicity in more detail in other BEE courses. This brief study is focused on the questions of authorship that were raised in reference to Hebrews before it found universal acceptance as part of that unique revelation resulting from the fact that “God has spoken!”

### Authorship of Hebrews

#### Assignment

- Before answering the next three questions, read “The Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.”

#### The Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews

An entire course could be devoted to the centuries-long debate over the authorship of the epistle to the Hebrews. A major weakness for some views is their lack of any early support; Luther seems to have been the first to put forward the idea of Apollos being the author. Tertullian (c. AD 160/170-c. 215/220), the African apologist and strong proponent of Trinitarian theology, attributed the epistle to Barnabas. The Latin-speaking areas of Africa and the early Roman church did not accept Pauline authorship. “This reflects the prevailing approach of the West towards this epistle until the time of Hilary, Jerome and Augustine” (Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 670). If indeed Paul was the author of Hebrews, it seems curious at best that a name carrying such enormous authority would become disassociated from the epistle.

The church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (c. AD 265-339) has left us some insight into the early questions surrounding Hebrews in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Eusebius tells us that Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 155-220) thought Paul wrote Hebrews, and Clement gave explanations as to why Paul did not attach his name to the work. First, the Hebrew audience would have a prejudice against Paul and reject it upfront if Paul was named as the author. The second reason Clement gave was not his own but was that of the “blessed elder” (Pataenus, first director of the theological school in Alexandria, d. c. AD 190). In light of the fact that the Lord had been sent specifically to the Hebrews, Paul, out of humility and as an apostle to the Gentiles, did not want to present himself as an apostle to the Hebrews. He adds that Paul also saw this as a work over and above his primary calling as a preacher and apostle to the Gentiles. Clement attributed the difference in style of Greek between Hebrews and Paul’s other epistles to Luke’s work of translating and publishing it for a Greek audience (*Ecc Hist VI*, 14).

Regardless of Clement’s trust in Pauline authorship, some questions persisted among the eastern, i.e., Greek-speaking, theologians. The most famous of Clement’s students was Origen (c. AD 185-254), a prolific writer who directed theological schools in Alexandria and Caesarea. He acknowledged that the view of Pauline authorship had been handed down by men from the beginning (Gk *archaioi*, Loeb: VI, XXV). At least some

agreement with that popular opinion seems to be clearly reflected in his reference to the “fourteen letters” of Paul (III, 3). Yet, he also reported receiving accounts of Clement (bishop of Rome) or of Luke being the author. Origen shared “his own opinion that the thoughts seem to be those of the apostle (Paul),” but that the phraseology and composition seem to be those of one who called to mind what the apostle had taught and took notes on what had been spoken (VI, 14). In other words, Origen thought that if Paul were the author, the epistle was probably written in Hebrew and translated into Greek or that it was written in Greek by an author recalling what he had heard Paul teach.

“To speak summarily, when the book first appears in general circulation three distinct opinions about it had already obtained local currency. At Alexandria the Greek Epistle was held to be not directly but indirectly St Paul’s, as either a free translation of his words or a reproduction of his thoughts. In North Africa it was known to some extent as the work of Barnabas and acknowledged as a secondary authority. At Rome and in Western Europe it was not included in the collection of the Epistles of St Paul and had no apostolic weight” (Westcott, pp. lxx-lxxvi).

Origen’s often-repeated conclusion stands today as the only sure conclusion one can reach: “The one who wrote the epistle, truly, God knows” (VI, 25). Thus, of the many suggested authors (Paul, Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Luke, Sylvanus, Philip, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquilla, etc.) none has been able to gain universal persuasion. For an excellent discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the differing views, see Guthrie (*NTI*, pp. 668-682).

What can we learn about the author from the epistle itself? The writer of this epistle was clearly an educated, intelligent person. The style of Greek is among the most literary of the New Testament writings. Its style and vocabulary differ markedly from that of Paul and are among the main reasons for rejecting the view of Pauline authorship. The many passages used from the Old Testament reveal an author very well acquainted with the existing Scriptures. The author’s use of the Old Testament shows a heavy reliance on the Septuagint text. Some believe, due to the strong emphasis on the sacrificial system and the tabernacle, that the author was likely a Levite.

Whoever the author was, he was certainly acquainted with the audience of the epistle. Notice that the author knew something of how they received the gospel message (Heb 2:3), was aware of their present spiritual condition (Heb 5:11-6:12; Heb 12:5-12), knew of their past faithfulness (Heb 6:10; Heb 10:32-34) and past struggles (Heb 12:4), showed a confidence in the leaders of the group (Heb 13:7, Heb 13:17), expected to see those brothers and sisters in the near future (Heb 13:19), and had a common acquaintance in Paul’s co-worker Timothy (Heb 13:23). Barnabas is clearly one who would meet this last criterion.

It is also interesting that Barnabas was a Levite (Acts 4:36). The fact that the author was male is indicated by the use of the masculine participle *diēgoumenon* (‘relating, describing’ is a participle modifying ‘me’) in Hebrews 11:32. It seems highly unlikely that a female author would use the masculine participle in referring to herself. This first-century author had received confirmation of what Christ taught through those who had personally heard the Lord teaching (Heb 2:3). What we have here is a list of general indicators that falls far short of pinpointing the author with any great degree of certainty.

In addition to several points already given supporting Barnabas as the author of Hebrews, there are other lines of evidence that, while not proving that position, would prove interesting if such were the case. Barnabas is one candidate who would have apostolic authority (Acts 14:14, 1 Cor 9:1-6). The meaning of Barnabas’ name was interpreted as “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36), and the epistle is referred to as a “message of exhortation” (Heb 13:22). In the Greek text the word for “encouragement” and “exhortation” is the same word, *paraklēseōs*. Westcott adds one further line of support (pp. xxvii-xxix). The sixth century New Testament manuscript Codex Claromontanus seems quite clearly to be referring to the epistle to the Hebrews in its listing of books, but it does so under the title *Epistle of Barnabas*. While this does not have the strength to be an early support near the time of writing, it does indicate the view that Barnabas was the author was a tenacious view. For example, this was the view of fourth-century bishops Gregory of Elvira and Filaster of Brescia. One must admit that these interesting lines of evidence do not qualify as proof. We simply do not have that kind of evidence available to us today.

The question of who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews was certainly important during the time of recognizing the canon of the New Testament (see later discussion) in light of the importance placed upon apostolic authority. However, all of the potential authors that have been seriously considered qualify as apostles, were those who served as coworkers with the apostles, or were influenced strongly by the apostles. Fortunately, knowing who wrote the epistle has very little effect on understanding the truth revealed therein or on the application of that truth to our lives. We keep this in proper perspective when we remind ourselves that this message ultimately came from the Divine Author—it is God who has spoken—and it is to Him that we must give an account of our response to what He has said.

#### QUESTION 4

Select the view of the authorship of Hebrews that matches the early location of that view.

<i>Authorship</i>	<i>Location</i>
The thoughts or words are those of Paul	A later view, first proposed by Luther
Barnabas	North Africa
Did not list Hebrews with Paul's epistles	Greek-speaking Alexandria
Apollos	Rome and Western Europe

#### QUESTION 5

Which of the following statements are accurate statements regarding the authorship of Hebrews? (Select all that apply.)

- A. The view that Apollos authored Hebrews was not held by early church fathers.
- B. The information available to us today does not allow us to be more dogmatic or specific about the author of Hebrews than the early scholar Origen who said, "God knows."
- C. The author of Hebrews was probably not a woman (as a few recent commentators have suggested), because the author uses a masculine participle in referring to himself (e.g., Heb 11:32).
- D. Almost all biblical scholars today agree that we can say with a strong degree of certainty that Paul was the human author of the epistle.

#### QUESTION 6

Which of the following are explanations scholars have given as to why Paul might leave his name out if he were writing the epistle to the Hebrews? (Select all that apply.)

- A. As an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul avoided all possible contact with the Jews.
- B. A Jewish audience might have a prejudice against Paul and reject it upfront if Paul was named as the author.
- C. Because of Paul's humility, he never mentioned his own name in his writings.
- D. As an apostle to the Gentiles, he might not want to present himself as an apostle to the Jews.

#### QUESTION 7

The two names associated with authorship of Hebrews by the time of its general circulation were Paul and Barnabas. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 8

There is considerable support for taking Barnabas as the author of Hebrews. See the discussion in “The Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews” (placed earlier in the lesson). In your Life Notebook record your answer to the following: What are the main points in support of this view, and do you consider them persuasive? Why or why not?

See “Suggested Answers to Question 8.”

## QUESTION 9

Record in your Life Notebook any practical application you can see from this issue of authorship of the epistle to the Hebrews.

After completing this question, see “Suggested Answers to Question 9.”

## QUESTION 10

Application: Think of some specific ways that you can edify other brothers and/or sisters in your church or your community without anyone other than yourself knowing the source of the blessing. Follow your thoughts up with actions that will make the blessing a reality. Dedicate these activities to the glory of God. Record your thoughts about doing this in your Life Notebook. Do you find a sense of fulfillment in doing good to others without any human recognition? How does your prayer for what you are doing in secret differ from prayer over an activity for which you know you are going to receive human recognition?

## Canonicity of Hebrews

### Assignment

- Please read “Canonicity of the Epistle to the Hebrews.”

### Canonicity of the Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews was among the New Testament writings that some of the early fathers questioned during the process of recognizing the inspired revelation. James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation were also among the writings more slowly acknowledged by a consensus of church leaders. Even as late as the middle 1500s, during the Protestant Reformation, questions were still being raised about these writings. In the early church, Revelation was highly questioned in the eastern, Greek-speaking church due to its content. Hebrews was one of the most doubted epistles in the western, Latin-speaking church due to the questions over authorship. If Paul did not write the epistle, many thought it lacked apostolic authority. Once Pauline authorship became widely accepted, the issue of apostolic authority was no longer a problem. For those advocating Barnabas as the author, apostolic authority was recognized because of his close relationship with Paul and the fact that he is referred to as an apostle (Acts 14:14).

One of the most important questions asked by early church leaders in considering which writings were inspired was that of apostolic authority. The writings did not have to be authored by apostles; Luke and Acts were written by Paul’s medical doctor and co-worker, Luke. However they did need to come from a source so closely related to an apostle so as to have the apostolic stamp of approval.

Even with the question of authorship being so unsettled, we find Hebrews quoted along with most of the other New Testament books by Irenaeus in the late second century. It was included in early Syriac translations of the New Testament. In the mid-fourth century, Augustine recognized it as part of the canon. Thus, it is not surprising to find the councils of Hippo (AD 393) and Carthage (AD 397), which dealt with the issue of canonicity, listing Hebrews among the inspired writings forming the New Testament as we know it today.

In the end, the God-breathed character of the writings God had given to humankind (2 Pet 1:20-21) led to their acceptance by His church. The writings that compose our Bible were recognized rather than selected. The unique nature of the writings of Scripture were recognized for the fact that they were *theopneustos*, “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16). For almost two millennia, the church has been nurtured and has grown on the Word of God. As the author of Hebrews was writing of the many times and ways God had spoken, he himself was under the direction of the Holy Spirit in giving further verbal revelation from God to man. No word of revelation gives us a more lofty and detailed picture of the high-priestly work of this King-Priest and victorious servant-leader, Jesus, God the Son.

### **QUESTION 11**

The books that we have in our New Testament were selected by early church leaders as they met in councils at Hippo (AD 393) and Carthage (AD 397). *True or False?*

### **QUESTION 12**

Early church fathers would only accept writings as canonical if they were written by an apostle. *True or False?*

## **Topic 3: Background and Setting of the Epistle to the Hebrews**

The solutions for many background issues concerning the Bible have proven elusive to biblical scholars. One such difficult problem is “To whom was the epistle to the Hebrews written?” Even if we may not be able to determine with much certainty the place where the epistle was written or the locality of the recipients, we can gain some knowledge of the recipients through scattered statements in the epistle. It is easy to show that this was not just a general letter to Christians in the world at large. This letter was written to a specific group of believers known to the author.

Not only did the author know this group, but he had a good understanding of their spiritual condition. He knew that they were believers and addressed them as “holy brothers and sisters” (Heb 3:1). He knew that they had been Christians for more than just a short time (Heb 5:12). He was aware of their past spiritual success (Heb 6:10; Heb 10:34). But neither did their spiritual failure escape his notice (Heb 5:11-14). Any Christian group may suffer spiritual decline after having mountaintop experiences of success. At that point, any believer needs a word of exhortation to maintain their confession of trust in Christ and endure in their walk of faith. Thus this author exhorts his audience with the goal of their spiritual victory and growth.

## **Characteristics of Readership**

### **Assignment**

- Read Hebrews 1:1-4.
- Read in the commentary introduction section “Background and Setting.”



### QUESTION 13

Write a brief paragraph describing how frequent reference to the Old Testament in Hebrews is a clear indication that the author of Hebrews was writing primarily to a Jewish audience.

### QUESTION 14

Which of the following is the author of Hebrews asking his readers to do when he calls them to go “outside the camp” (Heb 13:13)? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. Make a decisive break with the legalistic system of Judaism
- B. Make certain that they are suffering physical persecution
- C. Identify with Jesus as Messiah and the new covenant He instituted
- D. Place their faith in Jesus for eternal life

### QUESTION 15

Match the following references with what each tells us of the recipients of this epistle.

<i>Recipients</i>	<i>References</i>
Believers in Christ	Hebrews 1:1
Had a commendable history	Hebrews 4:14
Primarily Jews	Hebrews 10:32-34
Presently facing spiritual disaster	Hebrews 5:11-6:12

### QUESTION 16

Match the following references with how each tells us the recipients of this epistle were members of a specific, identifiable community.

<i>Recipients of Identifiable Community</i>	<i>References</i>
The author had intentions of visiting them.	Hebrews 13:19; 13:23
They had a history of doing good deeds together.	Hebrews 6:10
They had suffered from trials and persecution together.	Hebrews 10:32-34
Some had stopped meeting regularly with the assembly.	Hebrews 10:25

### QUESTION 17

Which of the following does not support the view that the recipients of the epistle were believers in Jesus as their Messiah?

- A. The warning passages are too severe to be addressed to believers.
- B. The focus is on endurance in their faith, not bringing them to a point of faith.
- C. Those seriously warned in Hebrews 6:4-6 struggled with immaturity rather than a lack of a saving relationship with God.
- D. They are addressed as “holy brothers and sisters” (Heb 3:1; see Heb 10:19).

## Purpose of the Epistle

### QUESTION 18

As you begin to consider the purpose of this epistle you will also need to begin asking questions about the theme of the work as a whole. Hebrews has been outlined a number of different ways. The author had a skill for weaving themes together to form a beautiful tapestry of images. Now that you've read through the epistle as least once, match the unit themes to the references.

Hebrews Unit Themes				
	Instructions			
Superior priestly ministry under the New Covenant				
Prologue				
Superior High Priest and Covenant				
Epilogue				
The Superior Person of Jesus Christ guaranteeing the superiority of the New Covenant	1:1-4	1:5 - 7:28	8:1 - 10:39	11:1 - 13:17 13:18-25

### QUESTION 19

From your study of the commentary introduction earlier in this lesson, which of the following is a fitting purpose statement for the epistle to the Hebrews?

- A. A letter of exhortation to unbelievers to place their faith in Jesus as Messiah
- B. A warning letter to keep believers in Jesus from losing their eternal life
- C. A letter to encourage a group of Jewish Christians who were suffering for their faith and tempted to give up on their Christian walk
- D. A severe warning to Christians who had apostatized and needed to come back to Christ for eternal salvation

## Topic 4: The Prologue to the Epistle to the Hebrews

As you develop your own understanding for how the author develops his theme in Hebrews, you will use five steps: (1) research the background; (2) read the book as a whole; (3) make an observational chart; (4) create a simplified chart; (5) write out the theme and purpose statements. In Lesson 1, you became acquainted with background issues affecting the epistle as a whole. Specific items will require background study as you proceed with the study.

In your continuing study, you will need to alternate between focusing on the details of the text and backing away to look at the overall picture. In this way, you will constantly be testing the tentative theme of the epistle with the details to see if the details do indeed support that theme. If, at any time during your study, you sense that there seems to be a lack of agreement between what the details are saying and your understanding of the overall theme, this should serve as a warning that you might be off track in your understanding of the details or of the theme of the work as a whole. Always remember the importance of the prologue in introducing the theme.

## **Basic Assertion of the Prologue**

### **Assignment**

- Read the entire epistle at one sitting without pausing to consider details (Heb 1–13).
- Please read the commentary section on the “Prologue.”

### **QUESTION 20**

Write a short paragraph in your Life Notebook on what significance there might be to your Christian walk in light of the fact that the new covenant replaced the old covenant.

If you are having difficulty seeing this as the proper relationship of the new covenant to the old covenant, see the first paragraph under “Prologue” in the commentary.

### **QUESTION 21**

What is the basic assertion made in the prologue to the epistle to the Hebrews?

## **Supporting Assertion about the Son’s Greatness**

### **Assignment**

- Please read Hebrews 1:1-4, the prologue to the epistle to the Hebrews, with a conscious focus on the structure.

Answer the following questions based on your review of Hebrews 1:1-4.

### **QUESTION 22**

Construct a mechanical layout of the prologue, showing how the parts relate to one another.

### **QUESTION 23**

Reflect for a few moments on the statements that build the supporting assertion in the prologue:

1. The inherited name “Son” reflects the position Jesus will occupy as ruling king over the future world-wide dominion.
2. The Son is greater than the angels.
3. The Son as the very representation of God is indeed God.
4. The Son is the creator and sustainer of the universe.
5. As the great High Priest, the Son provided the purification for sins.

Now spend a few moments praising God for each of these assertions about your personal Savior.

**QUESTION 24**

Develop a sermon outline based on the prologue of Hebrews. Be sure that the main idea of your sermon matches the basic assertion in the prologue and that your sub points match the supporting assertion about the Son. Record the outline in your Life Notebook.

**QUESTION 25**

Based on your reading of Hebrews and your study of the course materials thus far, state in your own words a provisional theme for the epistle to the Hebrews. Record this in your Life Notebook and leave room in your notebook for coming back to this theme later to make revisions if needed.

## Lesson 1 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

The fact that we cannot say for certain who the human author of Hebrews was should not overly concern us, because the supreme importance of the message comes from the fact that God has spoken and given His climatic revelation to us in His Son. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

Which of the following men was **not** held to be a possible author of Hebrews in the early church?

- A. Luke
- B. Apollos
- C. Paul
- D. Barnabas

### QUESTION 3

The early church theologian, Origen (c. 185-c. 254), has given the best answer to the authorship of Hebrews: “The one who wrote the epistle, truly, God knows.” *True or False?*

### QUESTION 4

When early church councils met to discuss which writings were the inspired writings belonging in the New Testament, the main requirement was that the human author was an apostle. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

According to our study of 2 Timothy 3:16, the unique nature of the writings considered to be Scripture was the fact that they were *theopneustos*, which means they were

- 
- A. Written by an apostle
  - B. In agreement with the Old Testament
  - C. Free from error
  - D. God-breathed

### QUESTION 6

All of the following are descriptions of the greatness of Jesus the Son in the prologue of Hebrews **except** which one?

- A. The Son has “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” in a place of authority.
- B. As the representation and essence of God, the Son is clearly presented as deity.
- C. Jesus is a priest of the order of Melchizedek.
- D. He is the heir of the kingdom in the world to come.
- E. The Son is the creator and sustainer of the universe.

### QUESTION 7

Part of the reason the author of Hebrews shows the superiority of Jesus over angels is that, by tradition, angels were believed to be mediators of the old covenant. *True or False?*

**QUESTION 8**

The author of Hebrews probably did not know the Christians to whom he was writing the epistle.  
*True or False?*

**QUESTION 9**

The probability that the recipients of Hebrews were mostly Jews is shown by the old covenant topics throughout the epistle and by the reference in Hebrews 1:1 to “our ancestors.” *True or False?*

**QUESTION 10**

Because the author speaks of the old covenant animal sacrifices and Levitical priesthood as if they are still in operation, the writing of Hebrews probably took place before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in \_\_\_\_\_.

- A. AD 70
- B. AD 135
- C. AD 30
- D. 586 BC

## Lesson 1 Answers to Questions

### QUESTION 1

C. Clement

### QUESTION 2: *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

It appears from Hebrews 12:4 that the recipients had not yet experienced martyrdom among their group. That would be unlikely for Christians in Rome after the beginning of Nero's persecutions in AD 64.

### QUESTION 3

- A. Since there is no mention of Paul, it is quite possible that Paul had recently been martyred.
- B. The author speaks of the old covenant animal sacrifices and Levitical priesthood as if they are still in operation. This would be very unlikely after the destruction of the temple in AD 70.
- D. The mention of Timothy (Heb 13:23) shows that the epistle was written during Timothy's lifetime. Timothy's imprisonment is not referred to in Paul's letters and may well have been after Paul's martyrdom, about AD 68-69.

### QUESTION 4

<i>Authorship</i>	<i>Location</i>
The thoughts or words are those of Paul	Greek-speaking Alexandria
Barnabas	North Africa
Did not list Hebrews with Paul's epistles	Rome and Western Europe
Apollos	A later view, first proposed by Luther

[See paragraph four in "The Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews."]

### QUESTION 5

- A. The view that Apollos authored Hebrews was not held by early church fathers.
- B. The information available to us today does not allow us to be more dogmatic or specific about the author of Hebrews than the early scholar Origen who said, "God knows."
- C. The author of Hebrews was probably not a woman (as a few recent commentators have suggested), because the author uses a masculine participle in referring to himself (e.g., Heb 11:32).

### QUESTION 6

- B. A Jewish audience might have a prejudice against Paul and reject it upfront if Paul was named as the author.
- D. As an apostle to the Gentiles, he might not want to present himself as an apostle to the Jews.

### QUESTION 7: True

### QUESTION 8: *Your answer*

#### Suggested Answer to Question 8

Your answer should include most of these points:

- The early church apologist and theologian Tertullian (c. 160/170—c. 215/220) quoted from Hebrews 6 and attributed it to Barnabas.
- As a Levite (Acts 4:36) Barnabas would be familiar with the topics of the priesthood, the tabernacle and the sacrificial system.
- The epistle was probably written before the death of Barnabas.
- One sixth century manuscript seems to be referring to Hebrews under the title *Epistle of Barnabas*.

### QUESTION 9: *Your answer*

#### Suggested Answers to Question 9

Example of how you might have answered this question: You will be asked throughout this course for ways you have already applied or will apply this material in your life. You may wonder how the question about

authorship can have any application today, especially when there is no definite answer. Here is an example of personal application: The epistle to the Hebrews has been used for centuries for edification of Christ's church. The ultimate author is of course the Holy Spirit. The human author did not get remembered in generations to come for writing one of the most published letters in history. Ministry is often like that. Our lives should be used to edify others in the body of Christ. We do what we do to bring glory to God. Ministry should never be done for our own glory, fame or profit. When we use our God-given talents the way God wants us to use them, He will get the glory. His people will be blessed. Our blessing comes from knowing that we have helped further God's purposes and have been used to edify others. Yet God will reward faithful service through a rich inheritance in the coming kingdom of Messiah.

**QUESTION 10:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 11:** False [The writings of Scripture were recognized due to their God-breathed nature rather than being selected based on the opinions of men.]

**QUESTION 12:** False [The writings of Scripture were required to have apostolic authority, but that did not necessarily mean direct authorship by an apostle, e.g., Luke was not an apostle but had worked closely with an apostle. See paragraph two in "Canonicity of the Epistle to the Hebrews."]

**QUESTION 13:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

The author quotes the Old Testament about forty times and emphasizes many aspects of the law, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system under the Old Covenant. See commentary again on the background and setting of Hebrews.

**QUESTION 14**

- A. Make a decisive break with the legalistic system of Judaism
  - C. Identify with Jesus as Messiah and the new covenant He instituted
- [See paragraph one in "Background and Setting" of the commentary.]

**QUESTION 15**

<i>Recipients</i>	<i>References</i>
Believers in Christ	Hebrews 4:14
Had a commendable history	Hebrews 10:32-34
Primarily Jews	Hebrews 1:1
Presently facing spiritual disaster	Hebrews 5:11-6:12

**QUESTION 16**

<i>Recipients of Identifiable Community</i>	<i>References</i>
The author had intentions of visiting them.	Hebrews 13:19; 13:23
They had a history of doing good deeds together.	Hebrews 6:10
They had suffered from trials and persecution together.	Hebrews 10:32-34
Some had stopped meeting regularly with the assembly.	Hebrews 10:25

[See paragraph three in "Background and Setting" of the commentary.]

**QUESTION 17**

- A. The warning passages are too severe to be addressed to believers. [See paragraph two in "Background and Setting" of the commentary.]



## QUESTION 18

Hebrews Unit Themes				
				Instructions
The Superior Person of Jesus Christ guaranteeing the superiority of the New Covenant	Superior priestly ministry under the New Covenant	Epilogue	Superior High Priest and Covenant	Prologue
1:1-4	1:5 - 7:28	8:1 - 10:39	11:1 - 13:17	13:18-25

## QUESTION 19

- C. A letter to encourage a group of Jewish Christians who were suffering for their faith and tempted to give up on their Christian walk

**QUESTION 20:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 21:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

“God has made His climactic revelation to mankind through the Son of God.”

**QUESTION 22:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 23:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 24:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 25:** *Your answer*

## **Lesson 1 Self Check Answers**

**QUESTION 1:** True

**QUESTION 2**

B. Apollos

**QUESTION 3:** True

**QUESTION 4:** False

**QUESTION 5**

D. God-breathed

**QUESTION 6**

C. Jesus is a priest of the order of Melchizedek.

**QUESTION 7:** True

**QUESTION 8:** False

**QUESTION 9:** True

**QUESTION 10**

A. AD 70

# **Lesson 2: The King-Son's Superiority to the Angels and First Warning (Heb 1:5-2:18)**

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## **Lesson Introduction**

The prologue to the epistle has already set the stage for all that follows. Jesus is better! He is the coming King who will restore the original design for mankind to rule over God's world (Gen 1:26-30). He is the High Priest who has taken care of the great sin problem of mankind. He has inherited a name that is above every name—the name of "Son"—a name that reflects His position as ruler of the world to come. How marvelous is this King-Son, who is none other than God Himself. He is indeed the creator and sustainer of the universe. For these very reasons, the readers of the epistle must listen carefully to all that the Father has revealed through the Son and must bravely embrace the new covenant He has inaugurated.

The author is now going to spell out step by step the superiority of this majestic Heir. In this lesson, we will see how he makes extensive use of the Old Testament to prove the superiority of the Son to the angels. In Hebrews 1:14, the author makes a parenthetical aside. Here he gives the first of five warnings in the letter: the "salvation to come" is so great that it would be absolute folly to neglect it. We are then brought back to focus on Jesus, who, although He is better than the angels, for a while had to be made lower than the angels.

In this lesson you will study one of the most exalted pictures of Jesus in Scripture. He has been crowned with glory and honor as He awaits His appointed time to assume active rule over His kingdom.

## **Lesson Outline**

Topic 1: The Son's Superiority to the Angels Proven (Heb 1:5-14)

Old Testament Proof for Jesus' Superiority

The Future: The Inherited Salvation

Topic 2: The First Warning (Heb 2:1-4)

Exhortation to Pay Close Attention when God Speaks

Old Testament Analogy of Disobedience and Punishment

Added Confirmation to God's Message

Topic 3: Reasons the Son Was Briefly Lower than the Angels (Heb 2:5-18)

Fulfillment of God's Design for Man to Rule

Preparation of the Son for His Role as High Priest

# Topic 1: The Son's Superiority to the Angels Proven (Heb 1:5-14)

Nowhere in this epistle will you find greater dependence on the Old Testament than in this section. To prove that Jesus is superior to the angels, the author relies on the Old Testament, quoting it seven times in just this short section of Hebrews 1:5-14. You might wonder how these various passages were chosen and why they were taken as so definitely messianic. In typical Jewish style, passages that contained the same or similar elements could be linked together. In both 2 Samuel 7:11-16 and Psalm 2 you find references to "son" and to a king enthroned by God to rule over a kingdom. Those shared terms were all that was needed to bring the passages together in common support for the author's argument here for the superiority of the Son over the angels.

Another perspective we see here in the application of the Old Testament is the thoroughly messianic interpretation. Throughout this epistle, the author seems to look at the entire Old Testament as messianic. This is no different from the way Jesus used the Hebrew Scriptures with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Luke 24:27 tells us that Jesus could use the entire Old Testament as a resource for teaching concerning Himself. In the same way, the epistle to the Hebrews is filled with messianic application from a diverse sampling of Old Testament passages. These passages all point ultimately to the One who would restore human rule over God's creation in the world to come, the very topic of Hebrews (Heb 2:5).

## Old Testament Proof for Jesus' Superiority

### Assignment

- Read carefully Hebrews 1:5-14, taking special care to observe how the author uses the Old Testament in developing his argument.
- Read the "Commentary on Hebrews 1:5-14." Be sure to look up each reference cited and study the immediate Old Testament context. Watch for common words in these passages that show up in Hebrews. These recurring words were clearly concepts related to the theme the author of Hebrews had in mind throughout his epistle.

### QUESTION 1

Match the following verse references with the themes in Hebrews.

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 1:5-14	Proof that Jesus is superior to the angels
Hebrews 2:1-4	Exhortation to listen carefully to God's message
Hebrews 2:5-18	Reasons the Son was made lower than the angels

### QUESTION 2

In Ancient Near Eastern thought, when a person was elevated to the position of king he assumed the status of being the deity's \_\_\_\_\_.

### QUESTION 3

Match the following topics with the Old Testament passage.

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Scripture</i>
The Messiah becomes “Son” to the Father	Psalm 110
The King-Priest sits at the right hand of God	Psalm 2:6
God’s Son installed as King on Mt. Zion	Psalm 2:8
God’s Son as heir of the nations	Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7

### QUESTION 4

How does the author use Psalm 45 and Psalm 104 to show that Jesus is superior to the angels?

### QUESTION 5

Which of the following are comparisons in this section showing the superiority of the Son over the angels? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. The Son is destined to rule, but the angels have servant roles.
- B. The Son is eternal, but the angels are temporal.
- C. The Son is a physical being with a body, but the angels are spirit beings.
- D. The Son has the special “father-son” relationship to God, but the angels do not.

## The Future: “Inherited Salvation”

### Assignment

- Read “Understanding ‘Salvation’ in Scripture.”

### Understanding “Salvation” in Scripture

“Salvation” is certainly a central focus throughout the Bible. The Scriptures, from beginning to end, trace the story of redemptive history—the story of a loving God seeking and delivering a fallen and rebellious mankind. Yet, as central as this concept is, it is probably one of the most confused areas of theology. What does it mean to be “saved” in the biblical sense? What does the Bible mean when it speaks of “salvation”?

In classical Greek, the verb *sōzō* and the noun *sōtēria* were used in a variety of contexts with the idea of “delivering” or “rescuing” someone from a dangerous situation such as war or sea-voyages, i.e., “to protect” (“Theological Dictionary of the New Testament” VII pp. 965 ff). In Homer’s epic poem *The Iliad*, we find “Feet, knees and horses save heroes from the battle.” As a “deliverance” from judicial condemnation or illness the verb could be used for “to pardon.” Furthermore, with the idea of “benefiting,” the verb could be used of “being cured” or “staying” in good health.

The term “to be saved” has so often been understood in a very narrow, technical way as if it always and only referred to salvation from eternity in hell. (Of course it can have that meaning in Scripture, but the point of this article is to clarify that it also has other meanings.) In the New Testament, the verb *sōzō* and the noun *sōtēria* are used in a variety of situations where rescue from dangerous or harmful situations is needed. The verb is used in contexts of deliverance from death (Mt 8:25; Mk 3:4), from a dangerous situation (Jn 12:27), from disease or illness (Mk 5:34; James 5:15), from lack of fulfillment in one’s position in life (1 Tim 2:15); from a

life of failure due to the consequences of sin (Mk 8:35; James 1:21; 5:20), or from this world to a heavenly kingdom (2 Tim 4:18). The noun is used for preservation of physical life (Acts 27:34; Heb 11:7); deliverance from bondage (Acts 7:25); deliverance from enemies (Lk 1:71); final deliverance from this world system (Rom 13:11; Heb 9:28); deliverance from prison (Phil 1:19).

There is only one book in the Bible that claims it is written specifically to show a person how to get eternal life; namely, the Gospel of John. John was very direct about his purpose for writing: “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:30-31). John expresses the same basic truth in John 3:14-15, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” John states eight times in his gospel account that the requirement for having life is to believe on Jesus. There is no other requirement or prerequisite given...not one! John had a specific purpose in writing his gospel; he wanted to show a person how to get eternal life. His answer was quite simple. A condemned and lost sinner can get eternal life one way and only one way: by placing his faith in Jesus Christ. This brings “salvation” or “deliverance” from eternity in hell, separated from the loving, creator God.

In spite of the clarity of John’s message, numerous attempts have been made to add works to faith as a requirement for eternal life. Among the most misunderstood verses in the New Testament is Philippians 2:12. This has often been taken as teaching that we must contribute some good works if we are to be delivered from eternity in hell. The context clearly shows that Paul is thinking of deliverance from a failed spiritual walk. This includes deliverance from pride, self-interest above the needs of others, complaining and arguing, and a crooked and perverse society. Such deliverance leads to a blameless and pure life that shines as light in the world and holds on to the word of life (see particularly Phil 2:12-18). In Acts 4:12 we do find a deliverance from the ultimate penalty of sin, i.e., a deliverance from hell. This deliverance only comes through Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for the sins of the world.

Another well-known passage often taken out of context is Romans 10:9, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Most of us have heard in an evangelistic context, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 10:13). Three exegetical questions should be asked at this point: (1) What does it mean to “call on the name of the Lord”? (2) How does Paul’s theological focus compare with John’s “be saved”? (3) How does Paul use the phrase “be saved” and the related term “salvation” in Romans?

First, let’s consider the phrase “call on the name of the Lord.” Starting with Romans 10:15, what is the first thing that happens chronologically in this verse? Messengers are sent. After this, they preach. Going back to verse 14, what happens after the preaching? The recipients of the message hear. Once they have heard, some believe. Only after they have believed can they “call on the name of the Lord” in whom they have believed. You see, when a person believes in Christ, that person is justified (Rom 10:10; 3:22; 3:28; 4:3; 4:5; 4:9; 4:13; 4:24), i.e., the person is positionally declared righteous before God and becomes the “righteousness of God” in Christ (2 Cor 5:21). Such a person has eternal life as a gift (Rom 6:23). John’s emphasis is on the reception of eternal life when one believes; Paul’s emphasis is on one’s legal justification before God. By justification a person is reckoned as righteous because of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Both of these occur simultaneously when one places faith in Christ.

Only one who has this justified standing before God, as one of His children, has the privilege to “call on his name.” Consider the following:

- Samuel to the Israelites: “I will **call upon the LORD** to send thunder and rain” (1 Sam 12:17, emphasis added).
- “Then Samuel **called upon the LORD**, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain” (1 Sam 12:18, emphasis added).
- Elijah before the prophets of Baal: “Then you call on the name of your god, and I will **call on the name of the LORD**. The god who answers by fire—he is God.” (1 Kings 18:24, emphasis added).

- “Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and **call upon me** in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me” (Ps 50:14-15, emphasis added).
- In the Day of the LORD, those upon whom he has poured out his Spirit **call on his name** for deliverance from the physical disasters in Joel 2:32. This is the passage quoted in Romans 10:13 (emphasis added).
- Pentecost presented the first installment of the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32. For those who wondered, “Who can save us from the Day of the LORD?” Peter would answer, “Jesus of Nazareth, the ‘man handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge’” (Acts 2:23, emphasis added).
- Ananias explained to the Lord that Saul had been traveling with authority to arrest “all who **call on your name**” (Acts 9:14, emphasis added)
- In Damascus folks in the synagogues asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who **call on this name?**” (Acts 9:21, emphasis added).
- Paul gives his testimony of how Ananias said to him, “Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, **calling on his name** [as a believer!] ” (Acts 22:16, emphasis added).
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who **call on the name** of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:2, emphasis added).
- Paul wrote to Timothy, “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who **call on the Lord** out of a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22, emphasis added).
- Peter exhorted his readers, “As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance...so be holy in all you do...since you **call on a Father** who judges impartially...” (1 Pet 1:17, emphasis added).

Think of a mother and father who have a birthday party for their son, Nicholas. Johnny, a friend of Nicholas from the same neighborhood, comes to the party. Two weeks later Johnny shows up at Nicholas’s parents’ doorstep and asks his friend’s father for a birthday present. The father, somewhat bewildered, questions why he should have a birthday gift for Johnny. Johnny explains, “Well, you bought a gift for Nicholas on his birthday, and today is **my** birthday.” Do we expect the father to reason, “I had not quite looked at it that way. I certainly do not want to show favoritism.” Would we really expect the father to sense an obligation now to buy birthday gifts for every child who came to the party when their birthdays come? Or, might we expect the father to reason, “Now wait a minute. Nicholas has a right to expect a birthday gift from me only because he is my child. Johnny does not have that relationship with me. If I buy him a birthday gift I might be expected to buy one for the other eleven kids who came to the party. I don’t think I should be expected to give Johnny a gift.” You see, it is the **special relationship** that warrants the expectations for special privileges. What then does it mean to “call on the name of the Lord”? It means that believers face all kinds of difficulties, dangers, and needs in life. Because they are in a Father-child relationship with their heavenly Father, they can come to him in times of need and expect help. This is the privilege exercised in Hebrews 4:16.

Moving on to the second question: if “believing” in John’s gospel brings eternal life, what is the equivalent focus in Paul’s letter to the Romans? As shown above, believing (placing faith) in Christ results in a person being justified before God (Rom 10:10a; 3:22; 3:28; 4:3; 4:5; 4:9; 4:13; 4:24). The primary emphasis in both John and Romans is a change in the fundamental status of an individual. Before belief in Christ a person stands condemned, unjustified and facing eternal separation from God (Jn 3:18). After belief in Christ a person is no longer condemned (Rom 8:1) but has passed from death to life (Jn 5:24). For John, the focus in his gospel is that when a person places faith in Christ, that person is delivered from eternal condemnation and is given the gift of eternal life. Paul, in Romans, focuses on the fact that when a person places faith in Christ, that person is justified before God by being credited with the righteousness that can only come from God. In other words, to “be saved” in John is simultaneous to the “being justified” in Romans. The author of Hebrews expresses it as being “made holy” or “sanctified” (Heb 10:10; 10:14; 10:29). All are permanent transactions based on our position in Christ.

A final concern is to consider how Paul uses the terms *sōzō* “to save” and *sōtēria* “salvation” in Romans. These are actually very general terms in Greek that can have a wide variety of application. The basic idea is just one of deliverance. What the deliverance is from is totally a matter of context.

Foerster has correctly noted that in Paul “forgiveness of sins, reconciliation and justification are differentiated, though not sundered, from [‘to be saved’]” (*TDNT* VII p 992). A clear distinction is indeed evident in Romans 5:9 where justification is presented as a state already obtained by the blood of Christ. On the other hand, salvation is pictured as a future deliverance from wrath (temporal judgment in Romans) that is accomplished not by His death and sacrifice but by His life (Rom 5:10). We get deliverance in our Christian walk by the intercessory work of Christ (Heb 9:24; 1 Jn 2:1) before the Father and His indwelling and empowering presence in our lives. For Paul, we have been reconciled to God but will be delivered both in our Christian walk in this world and eschatologically (in the end times) when Christ returns (Heb 9:28). It is in this latter sense that Paul can say we are nearer to salvation than when we believed (Rom 13:11). The great theme of Romans is laid out in Romans 1:16-17. There is righteousness from God available by faith that puts one right with God. There is also deliverance from all the aspects and effects of sin (the penalty—at conversion, the power—through the obedient walk, and the presence—when Christ returns).

Paul combines two acts necessary for deliverance or victory in the Christian life: the life must first begin by faith that brings justification (Rom 10:9b; 10:10a); victory in that life can then be obtained through confession of Jesus as Lord (Rom 10:9a; 10:10b). John 12:42 states ever so clearly that there were some who believed in Christ but would not confess him for fear of being cast out of the synagogue. As seen earlier in John’s gospel, belief in Christ is the only way one can receive eternal life. What those “secret believers” missed out on was victory in their Christian walk. Such victory brings blessing (1 Pet 4:14). A faithful walk now will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor 3). There was a day when Peter failed to confess Christ with his mouth. In fear he cried, “I don’t know the man” (Mt 26:72). The result was not an experience of the abundant life (Jn 10:10), but rather an experience of sorrow and shame. “He went outside and wept bitterly” (Mt 26:75).

It is unfortunate that the Christian community has taken a very general term “salvation” and turned it almost exclusively into a technical term referring to deliverance from eternity in hell which one receives at conversion. Great confusion has resulted. The walk of faith brings boldness, confidence, and blessing both immediately and when the Lord returns. This spiritually victorious life is referred to in the New Testament as “salvation.” A life lived in fear brings shame and discipline and loss of reward (Rom 10:11-12; 1 Cor 3; 1 Jn 2:28). It is by the good news of what Christ has accomplished, is accomplishing, and will accomplish that we achieve victory over sin. These all are aspects of biblical “salvation.”

For the purposes of this course, it is extremely important that the word “salvation” be clearly understood. In the commentary you will notice this important statement: “Thus, the neglect of our ‘so great a salvation’ does not mean a rejection of the gospel, but rather a failure to properly care about the future aspect of our salvation connected with our Lord’s Second Coming and His Kingdom.” In other words, “salvation” as used here is not a reference to deliverance from hell but one’s participation and enjoyment of the full rewards and benefits of our Lord’s future kingdom. This deliverance is available for every person who has trusted in Christ and continues to walk in obedience to His will.

The verb *sōzō* occurs two times in Hebrews. The first occurrence (Heb 5:7) is a reference to God the Father’s ability to deliver Jesus from death. Indeed, He did so through the resurrection. It should be equally clear that the usage in Hebrews 7:25 does not refer to deliverance from hell. The author speaks here of Jesus’ intercessory work on behalf of the believer. For those who approach God in a time of need, Jesus can deliver them completely from whatever situation they find themselves in. This is a reference to the victorious life that is available through dependence on Christ and His power to save.

The meaning of the noun *sōtēria* is context-sensitive. The last use in Hebrews is obviously not soteriological. In Hebrews 11:7, the reference is to physical preservation of life for Noah, his wife, and their family. The first three occurrences of the noun in Hebrews are in the section where Jesus is shown to be better than the angels (Heb 1:14; 2:3; 2:10). Notice that the first of these is not a present possession but a future inheritance. The usage in Hebrews 2:3 should be governed by this same context. The ultimate deliverance from all that sin has brought into the world and upon mankind is in view. The sanctification process is partly in view at Hebrews



2:10-11, but even that present process is just a step toward that eschatological deliverance when many sons will be brought to glory. The “eternal salvation” of Hebrews 5:9 is dependent on obedience. This is clearly not a gift that is in view but part of the reward for faithfulness. Nothing in the context would require any different understanding in Hebrews 6:9. Jesus “learned obedience through the things he suffered” (Heb 5:8), and so we should suffer with Him (Heb 13:12-13) with our hearts set on His return. In this way we experience a fuller deliverance when He returns with “salvation” to reward those who have faithfully served Him (Heb 11:6).

How terribly confusing the message of Hebrews becomes when salvation is equated with deliverance from hell and receiving eternal life. In Hebrews we have a word of encouragement to believers who have already experienced this aspect of salvation. Their concern, and that of the author, is the sanctification process of their Christian walk with the possibility of a victorious culmination at the return of King Jesus. That is indeed the salvation that motivates the pilgrim in this life to be prepared for the world to come.

One of the most important terms crucial to an understanding of the epistle to the Hebrews is that of “salvation” (Heb 1:14). The Hebrew and Greek words for “salvation” are used frequently in Scripture referring to deliverance other than deliverance from eternity in hell and the legal penalty that sin deserves.

### QUESTION 6

The most important question to be asked in each situation is this: What is the deliverance or rescue from? The following passages use the common Hebrew and Greek words frequently translated “salvation.” Match the following passages with the danger or threat posed in each situation.

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Danger</i>
Psalm 38:22 (see vs. 12 and 19)	Egyptian army
Exodus 14:13	Starvation
Acts 27:34	Prison
Philippians 1:19	Personal enemies

### QUESTION 7

Which of the following reasons given in the commentary on Hebrews 1:14 about salvation refers to the legal/eternal penalty of sin (paid for by Christ on the cross)?

- A. The salvation here is that which can be inherited; that inheritance can be jeopardized.
- B. The author of Hebrews makes no mention here of the payment for sins.
- C. Elsewhere in the epistle the salvation mentioned is a future salvation to be brought when Christ returns (Heb 9:28).
- D. In Hebrews 2:5 the author designates his topic as the future “world to come.”

## Topic 2: The First Warning (Heb 2:1-4)

The entire “message of exhortation” (Heb 13:22) of Hebrews is based on the authority and reality that God has spoken (Heb 1:1-2). Because of the source of the message, the message itself has enormous urgency. Under the old covenant, obedience was commanded and expected. But now a greater revelation has come with the new covenant based on Christ's shed blood. Thus, the necessity for obedience is even greater; the penalties for disobedience are even more certain.

It is the seriousness of obedience required in response to this message that brings the author to break off his discussion about Jesus' superiority to the angels and issue the first of five warnings. The catchword "salvation" (Heb 1:14) signals the need for the author to issue this warning with respect to neglecting such a great salvation (Heb 2:3). This warning and the others in Hebrews have resulted in intense scholarly debate. Are these warnings to believers or unbelievers? Are these real, viable warnings or are they just hypothetical statements designed to motivate through fear? What is the penalty for failure to heed the warnings? You will begin to deal with these questions here.



## Exhortation to Pay Close Attention When God Speaks

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 1:1-2:18 and make observational notes of the persons and their relation to each other.
- Read the "Commentary on Hebrews 2:1-4."

### QUESTION 8

In your Life Notebook, write out three short statements in reference to "salvation."

1. Express thanks to God for your **past** salvation, i.e. from the penalty of hell, by what Christ did on the cross.
2. Write out a brief prayer stating your dependence on the power of Christ for the **present** salvation from the attacks of Satan and from your own lusts that war against your soul.
3. Describe in just a few words how the thought that King Jesus will return to bring a total salvation brings encouragement to your life today. That salvation will be from the presence of sin forever. For those who have been His faithful partners, He will reward them with places of authority in His kingdom.

### QUESTION 9

To "drift away" in Hebrews 2:1 refers to a believer in Christ leaving the gospel and losing eternal life. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 10

The commentary offers three reasons why this warning is addressed to unbelievers. *True or False?*

## **Old Testament Analogy of Disobedience and Punishment**

### **QUESTION 11**

Why is the obedience under the new covenant more urgent than under the old covenant? *(Select all that apply.)*

- A. The penalties are greater under the old covenant.
- B. The old covenant was mediated by angels but the new covenant was brought in directly by God's Son.
- C. The revelation under the new covenant is superior to that under the old covenant.
- D. The new covenant includes grace, which makes penalties less severe.

### **QUESTION 12**

In your own words, express the specific danger that is in this warning.

### **QUESTION 13**

The result of neglecting the great salvation God offers is loss of eternal life. *True or False?*

## **Added Confirmation to God's Message**

### **QUESTION 14**

The salvation spoken of in Hebrews 2:3-4 culminates with a person's salvation from eternity in hell. *True or False?*

### **QUESTION 15**

The message of salvation delivered by Jesus was reinforced by what methods? *(Select all that apply.)*

- A. The personal testimony of those who heard Him teach
- B. The use of Old Testament quotations
- C. God swearing with an oath
- D. Supernatural miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit which were often associated with the apostles

## Topic 3: Reasons the Son was Briefly Lower Than the Angels (Heb 2:5-18)

In Titus 2:9-10, Paul exhorts slaves to live their lives in such a way as to “adorn” or “bring beauty to” the teaching of God our Savior. Think of how God created a world with such majestic beauty as the mountains, trees, oceans, flowers, the multi-colored fish, etc. God obviously has a sense of aesthetic beauty. The author of Hebrews has created an artistic literary composition with great care; he adorned the Word of God.



In the prologue we have seen these two aspects of the superiority of the Son: (1) the Son was a much better communication from God than were the messages given through the prophets; (2) the Son has a name superior to the angels. Both of these comparisons played crucial roles in the first expository section of the epistle. In that section of the epistle, the author took seven quotations from the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is indeed superior to the angels.

This Son and Savior, so beautifully portrayed through the Scriptures, is now pictured as the High Priest who can so faithfully meet the needs of those whom He represents before God. Although this theme will be further developed later in the epistle, enough is given in this section to make one aware of the awesome greatness of Jesus.

### Fulfillment of God’s Design for Man to Rule

#### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 2:5-18.
- Read the section of the “Commentary on Hebrews 2:5-18.” Don’t rush by the biblical references given. You will miss much of the benefit of the commentary if you don’t study the biblical references and see for yourself how these relate to Hebrews. Pay special attention to the Old Testament passages.

#### QUESTION 16

When the Son is described as being made “lower than the angels for a little while” the reference is to which of the following?

- A. His suffering on the cross
- B. Being subject to the Father
- C. The three days in the tomb
- D. The incarnation

#### QUESTION 17

Set aside a half hour to meditate on Titus 2:10. How does God’s Word appear to others as it is lived out in your life? Jesus lived out His life in a way that brought pleasure to His Father. He did this by total obedience. It was for that reason the author of Hebrews could paint such a beautiful portrait of this One who was made perfect through suffering to serve as our High Priest.

How often do you study God’s Word and marvel at its literary beauty? How are you affected by the beautiful portrait of the Son painted in the prologue of Hebrews? Write down your thoughts in your

Life Notebook. Thank God for the way He created us with the ability to appreciate beauty. Is this a time to make a renewed commitment to let your life adorn the teaching of God's Word; if so, go to God in prayer with that commitment.

### **QUESTION 18**

In the commentary discussion of Hebrews 2:5, the focal point is the world to come. *True or False?*

## **Preparation of the Son for His Role as High Priest**

### **QUESTION 19**

Jesus took on flesh and became lower than the angels for a little while in order to do which of the following? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. Destroy the one who holds the power of death
- B. Be qualified as the Captain and merciful High Priest through suffering
- C. Experience death for all mankind to make atonement for sins
- D. Fulfill the dominion promise of Genesis 2:5-9
- E. Set free those who had been held in slavery due to a fear of death

### **QUESTION 20**

Construct a sermon outline based on the incarnation of Jesus as shown in Hebrews 2:5-18. Write out the outline in your Life Notebook.

## Lesson 2 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

When the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 2:7, “You are my son! Today I have fathered you,” he does so in reference to Jesus’ installment as King at the resurrection/ascension. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

Which one of the following is not one of the comparisons in this section showing the superiority of the Son over the angels?

- A. The Son is destined to rule, but the angels have servant roles.
- B. The Son is eternal, but the angels are temporal.
- C. The Son is a physical being with a body, but the angels are spirit beings.
- D. The Son has the special “father-son” relationship to God, but the angels do not.

### QUESTION 3

To “drift away” in Hebrews 2:1 refers to a believer in Christ leaving the gospel and losing eternal life. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 4

The seriousness of obedience in Hebrews 12:25 focuses once again on what crucial topic that has already been planted in the reader’s mind in the prologue to the epistle?

- A. Jesus is the Great Shepherd.
- B. We are in grave danger if we resist the words of Scripture because it is God who has spoken.
- C. Justification is by faith alone.
- D. The Son is the creator of all the orders of the universe.

### QUESTION 5

Through His incarnation, Jesus was able to experience specifically the temptation to give up and turn away from the living God. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

Failure to give attention to the great salvation believers possess will result in disaster in one’s Christian walk, and such disobedience brings temporal punishment. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 7

When the Son is described as being made “lower than the angels for a little while” the reference is to His being made lower temporarily. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 8

The author appeals to Psalm 8:4-6, because that psalm is David’s reflection on the dominion promise of Genesis 1. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 9

The warning section in Hebrews 2:1-4 is addressed to believers. *True or False?*

**QUESTION 10**

When the author of Hebrews speaks of the reign of Christ, he is not talking about the present rule of Christ in the lives of His people but rather the future reign on the Davidic throne in the world to come. *True or False?*

## Lesson 2 Answers to Questions

### QUESTION 1

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 1:5-14	Proof that Jesus is superior to the angels
Hebrews 2:1-4	Exhortation to listen carefully to God's message
Hebrews 2:5-18	Reasons the Son was made lower than the angels

### QUESTION 2: *Your answer should be one of the following:*

Firstborn, First born, First-born [see commentary section II.A.1.a, paragraph two]

### QUESTION 3

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Scripture</i>
The Messiah becomes "Son" to the Father	Psalms 2:7; 2 Samuel 7
The King-Priest sits at the right hand of God	Psalms 110
God's Son installed as King on Mt. Zion	Psalms 2:6
God's Son as heir of the nations	Psalms 2:8

### QUESTION 4: *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Psalms 104 pictures the angels as transitory like wind and fire. Psalm 45 presents God's throne as one which is eternal and belongs to the Son. Psalm 104 was used to show the temporal role of angels; Psalm 45 was used to show the Son's eternal role. [See commentary on Heb 1:7-12.]

### QUESTION 5

- A. The Son is destined to rule, but the angels have servant roles.
- B. The Son is eternal, but the angels are temporal.
- D. The Son has the special "father-son" relationship to God, but the angels do not.

### QUESTION 6

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Danger</i>
Psalms 38:22 (see vs. 12 and 19)	Personal enemies
Exodus 14:13	Egyptian army
Acts 27:34	Starvation
Philippians 1:19	Prison

### QUESTION 7

- B. The author of Hebrews makes no mention here of the payment for sins.

### QUESTION 8: *Your answer*

**QUESTION 9:** False [The author is not talking about losing eternal life, but he is addressing his message to believers. He includes himself in the warning by the use of "we" in 2:1 and 2:3. The fact that believers are in view is also shown by the context where the group being addressed are those who are served by angels and will inherit the eschatological salvation (Heb 1:14). To "drift away" results in losing out on the level of inheritance one could have received in the world to come (Heb 2:5). The loss of reward (level of inheritance in the kingdom) results from disobedience to the revelation of God's Word through the Son. The fact that the believer is secure in his relation with God will be clearly shown later (10:10, 14). If you answered "true," please study the commentary section again.]

**QUESTION 10:** False [Quite to the contrary, Dr. Tanner states, "Nothing in the context suggests that unbelievers are in view." See commentary on Heb 2:1.]

### QUESTION 11

- B. The old covenant was mediated by angels but the new covenant was brought in directly by God's Son.
- C. The revelation under the new covenant is superior to that under the old covenant.

### QUESTION 12: *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

"The danger is one of believers falling away from faithful obedience to what God has revealed in the new covenant."



**QUESTION 13:** False [The Old Testament situations referred to disobedience that brought temporal punishment instead of the blessing God wanted to bring His people. It is the obedient life now that will bring reward when Christ returns. Failure to follow God faithfully brings disaster into our lives. We cannot escape disciplinary punishment when we disobey.]

**QUESTION 14:** False [The salvation culminates in the future kingdom when Christ rules.]

**QUESTION 15**

- A. The personal testimony of those who heard Him teach
- D. Supernatural miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit which were often associated with the apostles

**QUESTION 16**

- D. The incarnation [The Son was made lower than angels by taking on human form through the incarnation. Angelic beings are spirit beings without many of the limitations put on us by having physical bodies. Through the virgin birth, Jesus humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant with the limitations of human flesh. But this was temporary, lasting just for His physical life on earth.]

**QUESTION 17:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 18:** True

**QUESTION 19**

- A. Destroy the one who holds the power of death
- B. Be qualified as the Captain and merciful High Priest through suffering
- C. Experience death for all mankind to make atonement for sins
- D. Fulfill the dominion promise of Genesis 2:5-9
- E. Set free those who had been held in slavery due to a fear of death

[All five answers are true and stated in Hebrews 2:5-18.]

**QUESTION 20:** *Your answer*

## Lesson 2 Self Check Answers

**QUESTION 1:** True

**QUESTION 2**

C. The Son is a physical being with a body, but the angels are spirit beings.

**QUESTION 3:** False

**QUESTION 4**

B. We are in grave danger if we resist the words of Scripture because it is God who has spoken.

**QUESTION 5:** True

**QUESTION 6:** True

**QUESTION 7:** True

**QUESTION 8:** True

**QUESTION 9:** True

**QUESTION 10:** True

# Lesson 3: The King-Son's Superiority to Moses and Joshua and Second Warning (Heb 3:1-4:13)

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## Lesson Introduction

If you were asked to capture the theme of Hebrews but were allowed just one word, the word might well be "Jesus." If you were allowed three words: "Jesus is better." The prologue brought into clear focus Jesus, the one who inherited the kingly title of Son. The first major unit, Hebrews 1:5-2:18 resounded with the cry, "Jesus is better than the angels." What an incredible Captain of our salvation, one who has shown the courage to suffer under the rages of a sinful world. What a victorious Conqueror crowned with glory and honor as He waits for the perfect time to set up His kingdom.



This first major section of the epistle closed with two catchwords leading into the next unit. One of the reasons for the incarnation was that Jesus "could become a **merciful** and **faithful** high priest" to those under His care (Heb 2:17, emphasis added). In the first section of the following lesson (Heb 3:1-4:13), Jesus is presented as the faithful High Priest who is superior to Moses (Heb 3:1-6). This theme of faithfulness leads the author to exhort the readers to a life of faithfulness (Heb 3:7-19). He then shows that Jesus is one who had a task superior to that which Joshua had (Heb 4:1-13). In the following section the author will hearken back to the first of the two catchwords in Hebrews 2:17 as he presents Jesus, the merciful High Priest (Heb 4:14-5:10). With these two attributes of Jesus as our High Priest, the author takes the reader into an even richer portrait of the Son.

## Lesson Outline

Topic 1: Jesus Superior to Moses as the Faithful Son over God's House (Heb 3:1-6)

The Tapestry and Interpretation of the Passage

What It Means to be "God's House"

Topic 2: The Second Warning—Cost in Failing to be Faithful to God's Calling in Our Lives (Heb 3:7-19)

To Whom Is this Warning Addressed?

What Is the Exact Nature of the Warning?

What Are the Possible Outcomes in Relation to this Warning?

Topic 3: Our Goal of Entering God's Greater Rest

The Meaning of "God's Rest"

The Greater Rest than that in Joshua's Day

## Topic 1: Jesus Superior to Moses as the Faithful Son over God’s House (Heb 3:1-6)

Only the names of Jesus and David occur more often in Scripture than that of Moses. Think of it—Moses is referred to more times than Father Abraham! The importance of Moses as leader to the Jewish people is reflected in the fact that his name is mentioned 767 times in the Old Testament and eighty times in the New Testament. When the author of Hebrews wanted to demonstrate the greatness of Jesus as High Priest, he could not have grabbed the Jewish reader’s attention in a more startling way than to compare Jesus with Moses.



Have you ever thought of Jesus’ life and ministry as limited? He led no army. He conquered no nation. He assumed no titles that would warrant attention from the secular world. Where then is His qualification as a leader? What mark of greatness in His life would cause you to seek out His guidance through troubled times? The proof of His ability to fill the highest office of leadership is found right here in Hebrews. Jesus as a leader surpassed Moses. Jesus took on tasks that were far more challenging than those of Joshua. And through it all, He showed Himself to be one who could be trusted as the source of mercy in time of need.

### The Tapestry and Interpretation of the Passage

#### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 3:1-5:10.
- Read Hebrews 10:19-39.
- Read the section of the “Commentary on Hebrews 3:1-6.”

#### QUESTION 1

Remember that Hebrews has been outlined a number of different ways. Some people place Hebrews 4:14-16 with what precedes and others place it with chapter 5. Match the themes with the appropriate verse references.

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 3:1-6	Jesus is the merciful High Priest who can help those in need.
Hebrews 3:7-19	Jesus is superior to Moses as a High Priest.
Hebrews 4:1-13	Second warning of the epistle.
Hebrews 4:14-5:10	Jesus fulfilled a superior task to that of Joshua.

#### QUESTION 2

Now compare Hebrews 3:1-6 with Hebrews 10:19-25 and make observational notes in your Life Notebook of the common words or themes you find in both passages. Also note any key interpretive words. You should be able to find at a minimum six key words or phrases that are crucial terms. Some students may find a dozen or more. This exercise is designed to accomplish two things: (1) get you thinking about the key concepts that were in the author’s mind; and (2) keep you looking at the big picture after you have considered the details.

See “Suggested Answers to Question 2.”

## **What It Means to Be “God’s House”**

### **Assignment**

- Read Hebrews 3:1-6.
- Read Numbers 12. Again, pay special attention to words in the Old Testament passage which are significant to the expositions in Hebrews.
- Read the section of the “Commentary on Hebrews 3:1-6.”

### **QUESTION 3**

One key to good interpretation of a text of Scripture is allowing other scriptural passages to aid in the interpretation. We should note other passages that have striking similarities with the passage we are studying. Equally crucial is keeping in mind the importance of context. Remember, Scripture never contradicts itself. The commentary exemplifies these steps by its use of 1 Peter 2:5 in showing that being a “house” in Hebrews has to do with the believer functioning in a \_\_\_\_\_ role.

### **QUESTION 4**

What word is used to describe Moses twice in Numbers 12 and once in Hebrews 3?

- A. Prophet
- B. Priest
- C. Builder
- D. Servant

Just being a believer does not guarantee a person will faithfully fulfill his priestly calling. It is only when a believer functions in a priestly capacity, e.g., offering prayer for others, representing God’s people to God, carrying out tasks assigned by the High Priest, that the believer could be described as “God’s house.” Just as the tabernacle in the wilderness was the place of priestly activity and God’s meeting with His people (Num 12), so the believer fulfilling his obligations under the new covenant becomes the house of priestly activity. The believer was bought (Ex 15:13 “redeemed”) from bondage and brought (Ex 19:4) to the Lord by grace. The blood over the doorposts pictured the sacrifice that the Lamb of God would make for the purchase of mankind from the slave market of sin (Mk 10:45). From that point of redemption comes an opportunity for service for which there is no guaranteed success. The faithful life of a believer is conditional—dependent on the choice for obedience. That choice leads to God’s people functioning as a kingdom of priests (Ex 19:5-6; Rev 1:6).

### **QUESTION 5**

According to Dr. Tanner, “house” in Hebrews 3:1-6 refers to a person being a believer. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 6

In picturing Jesus as greater than Moses, which of the following is **not** used in this passage (Heb 3:1-6)?

- A. Jesus is a priest of Melchizedek's order; whereas Moses was of the Levitical priesthood.
- B. Moses' ministry is related to the symbol; whereas Christ's ministry is related to the reality.
- C. Moses was a servant while Christ's position is as Son.
- D. Moses performed priestly functions in God's house; whereas Jesus serves over God's house.

## QUESTION 7

In your Life Notebook, make a list of ways that your faithfulness to God's calling results in priestly kinds of activities. Are there ways the Old Testament priests ministered to people that you have overlooked but which could be effective in edifying the body of Christ? If so, write out some definite plans to incorporate these into your service to God's people.

## Topic 2: The Second Warning—The Cost of Failing to be Faithful to God's Calling in Our Lives (Heb 3:7-19)

Moses was a meek man. For the most part, his passions and thoughts and talents were under submission to the Lord of his life. Earlier in Moses' life, we see an individual who could be driven by anger to murder and who thought of excuses when instructed by the Lord to a course of action. We also see isolated instances later in his life when he allowed his emotions to control his actions (Num 20). Each one of us as believers in Christ has had those moments or even periods of time when we simply were not faithful to what we felt God was calling us to do. But, thanks be to God, who in His gracious character does not focus on the negative in a way that loses sight of the positive. "The LORD's many kindnesses never cease, for his great compassion never comes to an end. They are renewed every morning; your faithfulness is abundant!" (Lam 3:22-23).

Centuries later, when the author of Hebrews looked back on the life of this great leader, he described him as one who was faithful (Heb 3:2). The thought that both Moses and Jesus proved faithful to the Father's calling on their lives led the author to exhort his readers. As Paul instructed Timothy to pass on to faithful men what he had been taught, this writer not only urges his readers to faithfulness, but also warns them of the failure to be faithful.

### To Whom Is This Warning Addressed?

#### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 3:7-19.
- Read the "Commentary on Hebrews 3:7-19."

## QUESTION 8

Which of the following support the suggestion that the warning in Hebrews 3:7-19 is meant for believers? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. The readers have a confession and confidence resulting from their faith.
- B. It is clear from the context that loss of courage and hope means loss of eternal salvation.
- C. The exhortation given implies that they already have responsibilities as believers in Christ.
- D. The readers are addressed as holy brothers and sisters.

## What Is the Exact Nature of the Warning?

### Assignment

- Read Psalm 95.

## QUESTION 9

A clear indication that the warning in Hebrews 3:7-19 is meant for believers is that Psalm 95:7, which immediately precedes the verses quoted in Hebrews 3, is a warning to the Lord's sheep, the flock under His care. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 10

According to Psalm 95, the children of Israel turned to idolatry because they had never truly believed in the one true God. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 11

When the author of Hebrews speaks of one who “forsakes the living God” (Heb 3:12), he seems to be warning the people to hold closely to the Lord and not rebel against Him as the Israelites did in their desert experience. *True or False?*

## What Are the Possible Outcomes in Relation to the Warning?

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 3:12-19.
- Read the “Commentary on Hebrews 3:12-19.”

## QUESTION 12

The words translated “evil” and “unbelieving” in Hebrews 3:12 are never used of unbelievers. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 13

Based on Psalm 95, we can safely say that the author has chosen a passage that pictures temporal judgment. Which of the following describe the results of the unbelief on the part of the children of Israel? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. They were condemned because they had never known God personally.
- B. They experienced physical death in the wilderness.
- C. They lost their opportunity to experience rest in the land of Canaan.
- D. They lost their status as a redeemed people.

### QUESTION 14

What does it mean to become “partners with Christ” (Heb 3:14)? Write out your answer in your Life Notebook and describe how this can serve as a motivation in your own life to cling closely to the Lord.

Your answer should make clear that being a partner is not just being a believer. The word “partner” implies sharing with Jesus in His rule and inheritance. The degree to which each person shares in the partnership in the future kingdom is based on his faithfulness in his earthly life. This hope should serve as a great motivation for obedience and faithful service in this life.

## Topic 3: Our Goal of Entering God’s Greater Rest (Heb 4:1-13)

We see a recurring pattern in Hebrews: exposition of an Old Testament passage; exhortation based on that exposition; exposition of another Old Testament passage; exhortation. Against the background of Numbers 12:7, Jesus is shown to have a superior ministry to that of Moses. This is followed with a warning about faithfulness.



Now the author uses Psalm 95 and Genesis 2 as his texts. He takes another of the greatest leaders in the Old Testament, Joshua, and shows that Joshua's task was not equal to that of Jesus. Joshua took over the leadership of the Israelites and led them in the daunting challenge of conquering their new homeland. Only with a deep dependency on and faith in God could they do this seemingly impossible task and enjoy the "rest" God desired to bless them with.

As we have seen earlier, the salvation pictured in Hebrews is primarily the eschatological deliverance culminating in the messianic rule of King Jesus. The names Jesus and Joshua are the same in Hebrew and Greek. The meaning of the name is “Yahweh delivers.” As Joshua delivered God’s people and led them to a place of safety and blessing, so Jesus provides mercy and grace—deliverance for those who come to Him in their time of need.

### The Meaning of “God’s Rest”

#### Assignment

- Study carefully Hebrews 4:1-5.
- For an understanding of "rest" read Deuteronomy 3:18-20; 12:9-11; Psalm 132.
- Please read the “Commentary on Hebrews 4:1-5” again before answering the questions.



### QUESTION 15

Since the rebellious Israelites did not enter the Promised Land, we should conclude that they were not true believers and did not have eternal life. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 16

Match each interpretation of “rest” in Hebrews 3 and 4 with a weakness of that interpretation.

<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Weakness</i>
Heaven	Limits the “rest” to 1,000 year period and takes away the reward aspect of faithfulness.
A Christian’s life of peace	It makes the believer’s works negative or carnal
Millennial kingdom	The warning of 4:1 would have to be to unbelievers

### QUESTION 17

Which of the following views of rest in Hebrews 4 does Dr. Tanner consider the best?

- A. Ruling with Christ in His messianic kingdom, which includes the new creation
- B. Depending on God for victory in the Christian walk rather than one’s own efforts
- C. Spending eternity in heaven
- D. Being with Christ during the millennial kingdom

### QUESTION 18

How would you describe the rest for the people of Israel in Joshua’s day?

## The Greater Rest Than That in Joshua’s Day

### Assignment

- Study carefully Hebrews 4:6-13.
- Please study the “Commentary on Hebrews 4:6-13” before attempting to answer the questions.

### QUESTION 19

According to the commentary, the rest available to believers under the new covenant is a future eschatological rest in Christ’s kingdom. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 20

From what will new covenant believers who fail to walk by faith and who live in disobedience disqualify themselves? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. A place in heaven
- B. Being in the millennial kingdom
- C. Future rewards at the judgment seat of Christ
- D. Sharing in the dominion with Christ over God's creation in the messianic age to come

## QUESTION 21

**Application:** The first line of Psalm 90:12 is often translated “Teach us to number our days” without capturing the true significance. What is really meant is that we are called to consider our mortal state. If this understanding of entering rest is new to you, it may give you an increased sense of importance to this brief life. God is preparing you for glory (Heb 2:10)! Your servant-trust in God through this earthly sojourn prepares you for leadership in the future dominion of Christ (Matt 20:25-28). Ask God to use His incisive Word and all-seeing vision to show you problem areas you have failed to recognize or deal with in your own life. How much better to make corrections now rather than see the destruction of one's life work at the judgment seat of Christ! As you reflect on the promise of rest that is yours today, record in your Life Notebook changes you want to make in your life in light of your potential partnership with Christ in His rule as Messiah-King.

## QUESTION 22

Construct a sermon outline for Hebrews 3:1-4:13 which shows how the failure of a previous generation of believers can serve as a valuable lesson for us today. Record the outline in your Life Notebook.

## Lesson 3 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

By its use of 1 Peter 2:5, the commentary shows that being a house in Hebrews means which of the following?

- A. Possessing land that God has promised
- B. Being a believer
- C. Being a priest
- D. Faithfully fulfilling the obligations one has as a priest

### QUESTION 2

According to Dr. Tanner, context is not crucial in understanding house in Hebrews 3:1-6. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 3

Which of the following passages constitutes the second warning in this epistle?

- A. Hebrews 4:1-13
- B. Hebrews 4:14-5:10
- C. Hebrews 3:1-6
- D. Hebrews 3:7-19

### QUESTION 4

A clear indication that the second warning is meant for believers is that in Psalm 95:7, immediately before the portion that is quoted applies the warning there to the Lord's sheep, the flock under His care. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

Since the rebellious Israelites did not enter the Promised Land, we should conclude that they were not true believers and did not receive eternal life. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

Which of the following is the greater rest in store for faithful believers?

- A. Heaven
- B. The millennial kingdom
- C. Rule in the messianic kingdom
- D. The faith-rest experience of believers who stop depending on their efforts for victory

### QUESTION 7

When the author of Hebrews speaks of one who "forsakes the living God" (Heb 3:12), he is warning the people to hold closely to the Lord and not rebel against Him as the Israelites did in their desert experience. *True or False?*

**QUESTION 8**

Which of the following describes the unbelief of the children of Israel as pictured in Psalm 95?

- A. They failed to recognize salvation was by faith.
- B. They failed to believe God's promises that He would give them the land of Canaan.
- C. They turned to idolatry because they had never truly believed in the one true God.
- D. God's discipline of them showed that they were not true children of God.

**QUESTION 9**

The believer's future reward for faithfulness in this life includes participation in the dominion over God's creation. *True or False?*

**QUESTION 10**

Receiving an inheritance that includes a sharing with Christ in the rule of His millennial kingdom is conditional on our obedience in this life. *True or False?*

## Lesson 3 Answers to Questions

### QUESTION 1

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 3:1-6	Jesus is superior to Moses as a High Priest.
Hebrews 3:7-19	Second warning of the epistle.
Hebrews 4:1-13	Jesus fulfilled a superior task to that of Joshua.
Hebrews 4:14-5:10	Jesus is the merciful High Priest who can help those in need.

### QUESTION 2: *Your answer*

#### Suggested Answers for Question 2

Just some of the possible answers you may have listed: brothers and sisters, confidence, hope, confession, house, priest, Jesus. They are all key terms that the author uses repeatedly or draws from Old Testament contexts to develop his thoughts. If you have learned well the art of observation, you may have doubled this number of key terms. Notice the following: the connecting word “therefore;” the phrases built on the same Greek verb “if indeed we hold” (Heb 3:6) and “let us hold” (Heb 10:23); the words “faithful” (Heb 3:2, 5, 6) and “trustworthy” (Heb 10:23) again based on a common Greek noun; “take note” (Heb 3:1) and “let us take thought” (Heb 10:24) also based on the same Greek verb.

### QUESTION 3: *Your answer should be one of the following:*

priestly, priest, priesthood, priest’s

### QUESTION 4

D. Servant

[See Heb 3:5 and compare with Num 12:4-8.]

### QUESTION 5: False

### QUESTION 6

A. Jesus is a priest of Melchizedek’s order; whereas Moses was of the Levitical priesthood.

### QUESTION 7: *Your answer*

### QUESTION 8

- A. The readers have a confession and confidence resulting from their faith.
- C. The exhortation given implies that they already have responsibilities as believers in Christ.
- D. The readers are addressed as holy brothers and sisters.

### QUESTION 9: True [Read Psalm 95 again and notice that the first seven verses call God's people to worship and the verses which follow serve as a warning.]

### QUESTION 10: False

### QUESTION 11: True

### QUESTION 12: False

### QUESTION 13

- B. They experienced physical death in the wilderness.
  - C. They lost their opportunity to experience rest in the land of Canaan.
- [See section B.1.b on Ps 95 and Heb 3:7-19 in the commentary. Neither the judgments in Exodus, nor death in the wilderness, nor the loss of privilege of possessing the Promised Land, involved their eternal destiny.]

### QUESTION 14: *Your answer*

### QUESTION 15: False [There is nothing said about eternal life in the Old Testament narrative, in Psalm 95, or in Hebrews 3-4. All of the judgment that fell on that generation was temporal judgment. They were not able to experience the inheritance of the Promised Land because fear, rather than faith, ruled in their hearts. This fear also prevented them from enjoying a place of victory over their enemies. Rather than finding rest in a land of milk and honey, their lives were cut short by physical death in a desolate wilderness.]

**QUESTION 16**

<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Weakness</i>
Heaven	The warning of 4:1 would have to be to unbelievers
A Christian's life of peace	It makes the believer's works negative or carnal
Millennial kingdom	Limits the "rest" to 1,000 year period and takes away the reward aspect of faithfulness.

**QUESTION 17**

A. Ruling with Christ in His messianic kingdom, which includes the new creation

**QUESTION 18:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Possessing and inheriting the land God had promised them, the people would be able to rest from their enemies. If you are not clear on this, please study the first paragraph in the commentary under the section on Hebrews 4:1-13.

**QUESTION 19:** True

**QUESTION 20**

C. Future rewards at the judgment seat of Christ

D. Sharing in the dominion with Christ over God's creation in the messianic age to come

**QUESTION 21:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 22:** *Your answer*

## Lesson 3 Self Check Answers

### QUESTION 1

D. Faithfully fulfilling the obligations one has as a priest

**QUESTION 2:** False

### QUESTION 3

D. Hebrews 3:7-19

**QUESTION 4:** True

**QUESTION 5:** False

### QUESTION 6

C. Rule in the messianic kingdom

**QUESTION 7:** True

### QUESTION 8

B. They failed to believe God's promises that He would give them the land of Canaan.

**QUESTION 9:** True

**QUESTION 10:** True





# Unit 2: The Superior Person of Jesus, the High Priest

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## Unit Introduction

Jesus is indeed greater. He is greater than the angels. He is greater than Moses. He fulfilled a greater task than did Joshua. He has a greater priesthood than the Levitical priesthood. He instituted a new covenant that is greater than the old covenant. Yes, in every way you look at it, Jesus is better!

God has been at the work of redeeming men and women since He clothed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But His greatest work of redemption was through the finished work of the Son. Every believer has already been delivered from the ultimate penalty of sin (Jn 5:24). But the work of redemption continues today.

When you are in need, when you are tempted, when you suffer, there is no more faithful and merciful High Priest to go to for help and grace than Jesus. When you languish in spiritual lethargy there is one solution to get back on track and press on to spiritual maturity. That solution is to refocus your life on being obedient to Jesus. You can serve Him with a secure hope founded on the very promise and oath of God. There is no greater source for security in this life.

In Lesson 4, you will learn how Jesus became qualified as the merciful High Priest (Heb 4:14-5:10).

In Lesson 5, you will find a warning against spiritual immaturity and solutions for avoiding it (Heb 5:11-6:20).

In Lesson 6, you will see how Jesus was perfected as our High Priest (Heb 7:1-28).



## Unit Outline

Lesson 4: Help Available from the Merciful High Priest (Heb 4:14-5:10)

Lesson 5: Confrontation and Motivation to Move on to Maturity and the Third Warning (Heb 5:11-6:20)

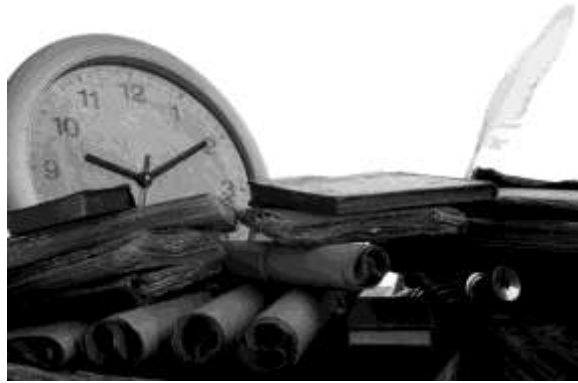
Lesson 6: The Superiority of Jesus as a High Priest (Heb 7:1-28)

# Lesson 4: Help Available from the Merciful High Priest (Heb 4:14–5:10)

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## Lesson Introduction

As often is the case, the translations we have today of Hebrews can obscure literary markers that were more obvious in the original Greek text. One of the primary reasons for taking Hebrews 3:1-4:16 as one literary unit is the presence of an *inclusio*. By *inclusio*, we mean the use of a key word or phrase near the beginning and ending of one unit of thought. [This unit of thought may be one paragraph or extend over several paragraphs]. We note the mention of Jesus as “high priest” in Hebrews 3:1 and in Hebrews 4:14. What is not so clearly seen is the additional inclusion of “our confession” which, in the Greek text, is exactly the same in both verses.



Although Hebrews 4:14-5:10 is linked more closely with the preceding material in the commentary, it will be grouped with the following passage for the purposes of this lesson. Biblical scholars have spent countless hours trying to come up with the definitive outline of Hebrews. The goal has proved elusive. The author of this epistle was a master at weaving topics together, drawing the reader on with the use of key words near the end of a unit that hints of coming thoughts. He was truly an artist with words and at intricately overlapping his themes. Part of the joy you can derive from this study is finding ways the material fits together and seeing it in your own unique way, which may be different from how other students of this great epistle see it.

## Lesson Outline

Topic 1: An Exhortation to Hold Fast to the Grace of Our High Priest (Heb 4:14-16)

The Nature of the Exhortation

The Helper and the Help Available

Topic 2: Jesus' Qualification to Serve as High Priest (Heb 5:1-6)

The Nature of the Levitical Priesthood

Unique Nature of Christ's Melchizedekan Priesthood

Topic 3: The Perfecting of Jesus as High Priest (Heb 5:7-10)

Deliverance of Christ Through Devotion

Deliverance of Christ's Followers Through Obedience

## Topic 1: An Exhortation to Hold Fast to the Grace of our High Priest (Heb 4:14-16)

Where do you turn in time of great need? Do you find yourself bound in a prison of fear? Do you depend on friends who may let you down just when you need them most? Do you try to force your way through a situation by your own efforts? We all face difficult challenges, failures, discouragements, and disappointments in life. But we have help available to us when those times of need come. We have a Captain of our salvation ready to help. He is **not** one who will chastise us or berate us when we come humbly seeking His assistance. Psalm 46:1 is not just a truth for a people in an age long ago. It is just as true today as when the words were penned, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” Jesus stands ready to help.



Have you ever thought of Jesus’ life and ministry as limited? He led no army. He conquered no nation. He assumed no titles that would warrant attention from the secular world. Where then is His qualification as “leader”? What mark of greatness in His life would cause you to seek out His guidance through troubled times? The proof of His ability to fill the highest office of leadership is found right here in Hebrews. Jesus as a leader surpassed Moses. Jesus took on tasks that were far more challenging than those of Joshua. And through it all He showed Himself to be one who could be trusted as the source to find mercy in time of need.

### The Nature of the Exhortation

#### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 3:1-7:28.
- Read the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 4:15-5:10.”

#### QUESTION 1

What title [position] is repeatedly applied to Jesus in Hebrews 2:17; 3:1; 4:17?

- A. Counselor
- B. High Priest
- C. Savior
- D. Son of God

#### QUESTION 2

Notice the way the exhortation is structured in Hebrews 4:14 with the words “therefore since we have ... let us ...” The author bases the exhortation on his previous discussion. Do you find the same structure in Hebrews 10:19-23 in your own translation of Hebrews?

### The Helper and the Help Available

#### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 4:14-16.
- Study carefully the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 4:14-16.”

### **QUESTION 3**

Judging from the context of the previous material (3:12-3:19), the temptation the author probably has in mind is that of giving in to unbelief and by doing so \_\_\_\_\_ against God.

### **QUESTION 4**

What basis does the author of Hebrews give the believer for being able to approach God's throne for mercy and grace with confidence (Heb 4:16)?

### **QUESTION 5**

Do your own word study on the terms "mercy" and "grace." Where else in the New Testament do you find these words paired together? What third term do you find with these two? Study the meaning of these words in your native language. How do these terms reveal Paul's desires for other believers? Does the force of combining these words in a salutation of a letter add richness to the significance of Hebrews 4:16? Record your findings in your Life Notebook.

### **QUESTION 6**

Hebrews is packed with principles that can transform your prayer life. Take a few moments of careful observation and meditation on Hebrews 4:14-16 with the specific focus on principles for prayer in your life. Record these in your Life Notebook.

See "Suggested Answers to Question 6."

## **Topic 2: Jesus' Qualification to Serve as High Priest (Heb 5:1-6)**

If you are suffering and want help, what kind of person would you go to for relief? You would want someone who knows what you are going through. Jesus has proven to be a High Priest who does fully understand our struggles with sin because He faced temptation beyond what we will ever face. You would also want someone who had legitimate claims to be able to help. Jesus was declared High Priest by the Father; He was called by God to fill this office. No greater claim for legitimacy could exist. When compared with priests under the old covenant, Jesus is superior!

### **The Nature of the Levitical Priesthood**

#### **Assignment**

- Read Hebrews 5:1-6.
- Read the commentary on "Hebrews 5:1-4."

### **QUESTION 7**

A large portion of the remainder of this epistle will point out how the differences between worshippers and the priests changed between the old covenant and the new covenant. All of the following descriptions of priests under the old covenant are given in Hebrews 5:1-4 with one exception. Which one do you **not** find there?

- A. The honor of this position was never by self-appointment.
- B. The priest's task was to represent God to mankind.
- C. Every priest had to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as others.
- D. Priests shared in human nature with their fellow men.

### **QUESTION 8**

What compelled Levitical priests to deal compassionately with the worshippers whom they served?

## **Unique nature of Christ's Melchizedekan Priesthood**

### **Assignment**

- Read the commentary on "Hebrews 5:5-6."
- Read Psalm 2 and Psalm 110.

### **QUESTION 9**

By using quotes from Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 in quick succession, the author brings together the uniqueness of Jesus, showing that He fills both the offices of the Davidic king and the Melchizedekan priest. *True or False?*

### **QUESTION 10**

What was the importance of the author's quoting from Psalm 110 in his discussion of the priesthood of Jesus?

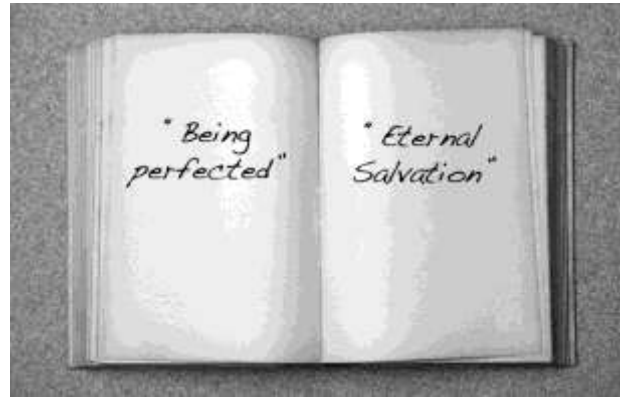
## **Topic 3: The Perfecting of Jesus as High Priest (Heb 5:7-10)**

At this point in your study of Hebrews, it is extremely important that you take the time to study carefully some of the key terms the author is using. Of particular importance in this passage are the terms "being perfected" and "eternal salvation." If you do not understand clearly how these terms are being used, you will miss out on some of the great theological truths expounded in the remainder of

the epistle. You may also arrive at interpretations that contradict what other Scriptures plainly teach, leading to faulty application in your own life and ministry.

The manner and the purpose of Jesus' being "made perfect" are of tremendous importance to the believer's growth to maturity. Jesus was perfected for the role He fills as our High Priest. We have already seen that it is to Him as High Priest that we go for mercy and grace in our time of need.

The "eternal salvation" offered is much more than the deliverance from hell (which the believer already possesses). Yet, many believers are unaware of the rich inheritance which should be a strong motivating factor in their lives. These few verses in Hebrews should serve as one of the most motivating passages in a believer's life.



## **Deliverance of Christ Through Devotion**

### **Assignment**

- Study carefully Hebrews 5:7-10.
- Please read the commentary on "Hebrews 5:7-10" again before attempting to answer the questions.

### **QUESTION 11**

Jesus was "perfected" through the experiences of obedience, submission, and suffering. In that He was always morally and spiritually perfect, in what way did He need to be "perfected"?

### **QUESTION 12**

It is of tremendous importance that every believer realizes where to turn in times of trial, weakness, suffering, and fear. In such times, Jesus is the source to whom one should go for mercy and grace. Develop a sermon outline on the theme "Jesus: the Merciful High Priest" as it is laid out in Hebrews 4:14-5:10. Write down the outline in your Life Notebook.

### **QUESTION 13**

Luke 2:52 states, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and with people." The author of Hebrews gives a more specific picture of how Jesus increased in wisdom when he points out that Jesus learned how to be obedient through suffering. *True or False?*

### **QUESTION 14**

All true believers will assuredly live obedient lives. *True or False?*

## Deliverance of Christ's Followers Through Obedience

### Assignment

- If you are still uncomfortable with the idea that “salvation” in Scripture refers to concepts other than deliverance from hell, carefully study “Understanding ‘Salvation’ in Scripture.”

### Understanding “Salvation” in Scripture

“Salvation” is certainly a central focus throughout the Bible. The Scriptures, from beginning to end, trace the story of redemptive history—the story of a loving God seeking and delivering a fallen and rebellious mankind. Yet, as central as this concept is, it is probably one of the most confused areas of theology. What does it mean to be “saved” in the biblical sense? What does the Bible mean when it speaks of “salvation”?

In classical Greek, the verb *sōzō* and the noun *sōtēria* were used in a variety of contexts with the idea of “delivering” or “rescuing” someone from a dangerous situation such as war or sea-voyages, i.e., “to protect” (“Theological Dictionary of the New Testament” VII pp. 965 ff). In Homer’s epic poem *The Iliad*, we find “Feet, knees and horses save heroes from the battle.” As a “deliverance” from judicial condemnation or illness the verb could be used for “to pardon.” Furthermore, with the idea of “benefiting,” the verb could be used of “being cured” or “staying” in good health.

The term “to be saved” has so often been understood in a very narrow, technical way as if it always and only referred to salvation from eternity in hell. (Of course it can have that meaning in Scripture, but the point of this article is to clarify that it also has other meanings.) In the New Testament, the verb *sōzō* and the noun *sōtēria* are used in a variety of situations where rescue from dangerous or harmful situations is needed. The verb is used in contexts of deliverance from death (Mt 8:25; Mk 3:4), from a dangerous situation (Jn 12:27), from disease or illness (Mk 5:34; James 5:15), from lack of fulfillment in one’s position in life (1 Tim 2:15); from a life of failure due to the consequences of sin (Mk 8:35; James 1:21; 5:20), or from this world to a heavenly kingdom (2 Tim 4:18). The noun is used for preservation of physical life (Acts 27:34; Heb 11:7); deliverance from bondage (Acts 7:25); deliverance from enemies (Lk 1:71); final deliverance from this world system (Rom 13:11; Heb 9:28); deliverance from prison (Phil 1:19).

There is only one book in the Bible that claims it is written specifically to show a person how to get eternal life; namely, the Gospel of John. John was very direct about his purpose for writing: “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:30-31). John expresses the same basic truth in John 3:14-15, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” John states eight times in his gospel account that the requirement for having life is to believe on Jesus. There is no other requirement or prerequisite given...not one! John had a specific purpose in writing his gospel; he wanted to show a person how to get eternal life. His answer was quite simple. A condemned and lost sinner can get eternal life one way and only one way: by placing his faith in Jesus Christ. This brings “salvation” or “deliverance” from eternity in hell, separated from the loving, creator God.

In spite of the clarity of John’s message, numerous attempts have been made to add works to faith as a requirement for eternal life. Among the most misunderstood verses in the New Testament is Philippians 2:12. This has often been taken as teaching that we must contribute some good works if we are to be delivered from eternity in hell. The context clearly shows that Paul is thinking of deliverance from a failed spiritual walk. This includes deliverance from pride, self-interest above the needs of others, complaining and arguing, and a crooked and perverse society. Such deliverance leads to a blameless and pure life that shines as light in the world and holds on to the word of life (see particularly Phil 2:12-18). In Acts 4:12 we do find a deliverance from the ultimate penalty of sin, i.e., a deliverance from hell. This deliverance only comes through Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for the sins of the world.

Another well-known passage often taken out of context is Romans 10:9, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Most of us have heard in an evangelistic context, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 10:13). Three exegetical questions should be asked at this point: (1) What does it mean to “call on the name of

the Lord”? (2) How does Paul’s theological focus compare with John’s “be saved”? (3) How does Paul use the phrase “be saved” and the related term “salvation” in Romans?

First, let’s consider the phrase “call on the name of the Lord.” Starting with Romans 10:15, what is the first thing that happens chronologically in this verse? Messengers are sent. After this, they preach. Going back to verse 14, what happens after the preaching? The recipients of the message hear. Once they have heard, some believe. Only after they have believed can they “call on the name of the Lord” in whom they have believed. You see, when a person believes in Christ, that person is justified (Rom 10:10; 3:22; 3:28; 4:3; 4:5; 4:9; 4:13; 4:24), i.e., the person is positionally declared righteous before God and becomes the “righteousness of God” in Christ (2 Cor 5:21). Such a person has eternal life as a gift (Rom 6:23). John’s emphasis is on the reception of eternal life when one believes; Paul’s emphasis is on one’s legal justification before God. By justification a person is reckoned as righteous because of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Both of these occur simultaneously when one places faith in Christ.

Only one who has this justified standing before God, as one of His children, has the privilege to “call on his name.” Consider the following:

- Samuel to the Israelites: “I will **call upon the LORD** to send thunder and rain” (1 Sam 12:17, emphasis added).
- “Then Samuel **called upon the LORD**, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain” (1 Sam 12:18, emphasis added).
- Elijah before the prophets of Baal: “Then you call on the name of your god, and I will **call on the name of the LORD**. The god who answers by fire—he is God.” (1 Kings 18:24, emphasis added).
- “Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and **call upon me** in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me” (Ps 50:14-15, emphasis added).
- In the Day of the LORD, those upon whom he has poured out his Spirit **call on his name** for deliverance from the physical disasters in Joel 2:32. This is the passage quoted in Romans 10:13 (emphasis added).
- Pentecost presented the first installment of the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32. For those who wondered, “Who can save us from the Day of the LORD?” Peter would answer, “Jesus of Nazareth, the ‘man handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge’” (Acts 2:23, emphasis added).
- Ananias explained to the Lord that Saul had been traveling with authority to arrest “all who **call on your name**” (Acts 9:14, emphasis added).
- In Damascus folks in the synagogues asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who **call on this name**?” (Acts 9:21, emphasis added).
- Paul gives his testimony of how Ananias said to him, “Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, **calling on his name** [as a believer!]” (Acts 22:16, emphasis added).
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who **call on the name** of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:2, emphasis added).
- Paul wrote to Timothy, “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who **call on the Lord** out of a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22, emphasis added).
- Peter exhorted his readers, “As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance...so be holy in all you do...since you **call on a Father** who judges impartially...” (1 Pet 1:17, emphasis added).

Think of a mother and father who have a birthday party for their son, Nicholas. Johnny, a friend of Nicholas from the same neighborhood, comes to the party. Two weeks later Johnny shows up at Nicholas’s parents’ doorstep and asks his friend’s father for a birthday present. The father, somewhat bewildered, questions why he



should have a birthday gift for Johnny. Johnny explains, “Well, you bought a gift for Nicholas on his birthday, and today is **my** birthday.” Do we expect the father to reason, “I had not quite looked at it that way. I certainly do not want to show favoritism.” Would we really expect the father to sense an obligation now to buy birthday gifts for every child who came to the party when their birthdays come? Or, might we expect the father to reason, “Now wait a minute. Nicholas has a right to expect a birthday gift from me only because he is my child. Johnny does not have that relationship with me. If I buy him a birthday gift I might be expected to buy one for the other eleven kids who came to the party. I don’t think I should be expected to give Johnny a gift.” You see, it is the **special relationship** that warrants the expectations for special privileges. What then does it mean to “call on the name of the Lord”? It means that believers face all kinds of difficulties, dangers, and needs in life. Because they are in a Father-child relationship with their heavenly Father, they can come to him in times of need and expect help. This is the privilege exercised in Hebrews 4:16.

Moving on to the second question: if “believing” in John’s gospel brings eternal life, what is the equivalent focus in Paul’s letter to the Romans? As shown above, believing (placing faith) in Christ results in a person being justified before God (Rom 10:10a; 3:22; 3:28; 4:3; 4:5; 4:9; 4:13; 4:24). The primary emphasis in both John and Romans is a change in the fundamental status of an individual. Before belief in Christ a person stands condemned, unjustified and facing eternal separation from God (Jn 3:18). After belief in Christ a person is no longer condemned (Rom 8:1) but has passed from death to life (Jn 5:24). For John, the focus in his gospel is that when a person places faith in Christ, that person is delivered from eternal condemnation and is given the gift of eternal life. Paul, in Romans, focuses on the fact that when a person places faith in Christ, that person is justified before God by being credited with the righteousness that can only come from God. In other words, to “be saved” in John is simultaneous to the “being justified” in Romans. The author of Hebrews expresses it as being “made holy” or “sanctified” (Heb 10:10; 10:14; 10:29). All are permanent transactions based on our position in Christ.

A final concern is to consider how Paul uses the terms *sōzō* “to save” and *sōtēria* “salvation” in Romans. These are actually very general terms in Greek that can have a wide variety of application. The basic idea is just one of deliverance. What the deliverance is from is totally a matter of context.

Foerster has correctly noted that in Paul “forgiveness of sins, reconciliation and justification are differentiated, though not sundered, from [‘to be saved’]” (*TDNT* VII p 992). A clear distinction is indeed evident in Romans 5:9 where justification is presented as a state already obtained by the blood of Christ. On the other hand, salvation is pictured as a future deliverance from wrath (temporal judgment in Romans) that is accomplished not by His death and sacrifice but by His life (Rom 5:10). We get deliverance in our Christian walk by the intercessory work of Christ (Heb 9:24; 1 Jn 2:1) before the Father and His indwelling and empowering presence in our lives. For Paul, we have been reconciled to God but will be delivered both in our Christian walk in this world and eschatologically (in the end times) when Christ returns (Heb 9:28). It is in this latter sense that Paul can say we are nearer to salvation than when we believed (Rom 13:11). The great theme of Romans is laid out in Romans 1:16-17. There is righteousness from God available by faith that puts one right with God. There is also deliverance from all the aspects and effects of sin (the penalty—at conversion, the power—through the obedient walk, and the presence—when Christ returns).

Paul combines two acts necessary for deliverance or victory in the Christian life: the life must first begin by faith that brings justification (Rom 10:9b; 10:10a); victory in that life can then be obtained through confession of Jesus as Lord (Rom 10:9a; 10:10b). John 12:42 states ever so clearly that there were some who believed in Christ but would not confess him for fear of being cast out of the synagogue. As seen earlier in John’s gospel, belief in Christ is the only way one can receive eternal life. What those “secret believers” missed out on was victory in their Christian walk. Such victory brings blessing (1 Pet 4:14). A faithful walk now will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor 3). There was a day when Peter failed to confess Christ with his mouth. In fear he cried, “I don’t know the man” (Mt 26:72). The result was not an experience of the abundant life (Jn 10:10), but rather an experience of sorrow and shame. “He went outside and wept bitterly” (Mt 26:75).

It is unfortunate that the Christian community has taken a very general term “salvation” and turned it almost exclusively into a technical term referring to deliverance from eternity in hell which one receives at conversion. Great confusion has resulted. The walk of faith brings boldness, confidence, and blessing both immediately and when the Lord returns. This spiritually victorious life is referred to in the New Testament as “salvation.” A life lived in fear brings shame and discipline and loss of reward (Rom 10:11-12; 1 Cor 3; 1 Jn

2:28). It is by the good news of what Christ has accomplished, is accomplishing, and will accomplish that we achieve victory over sin. These all are aspects of biblical “salvation.”

For the purposes of this course, it is extremely important that the word “salvation” be clearly understood. In the commentary you will notice this important statement: “Thus, the neglect of our ‘so great a salvation’ does not mean a rejection of the gospel, but rather a failure to properly care about the future aspect of our salvation connected with our Lord's Second Coming and His Kingdom.” In other words, “salvation” as used here is not a reference to deliverance from hell but one’s participation and enjoyment of the full rewards and benefits of our Lord’s future kingdom. This deliverance is available for every person who has trusted in Christ and continues to walk in obedience to His will.

The verb *sōzō* occurs two times in Hebrews. The first occurrence (Heb 5:7) is a reference to God the Father’s ability to deliver Jesus from death. Indeed, He did so through the resurrection. It should be equally clear that the usage in Hebrews 7:25 does not refer to deliverance from hell. The author speaks here of Jesus’ intercessory work on behalf of the believer. For those who approach God in a time of need, Jesus can deliver them completely from whatever situation they find themselves in. This is a reference to the victorious life that is available through dependence on Christ and His power to save.

The meaning of the noun *sōtēria* is context-sensitive. The last use in Hebrews is obviously not soteriological. In Hebrews 11:7, the reference is to physical preservation of life for Noah, his wife, and their family. The first three occurrences of the noun in Hebrews are in the section where Jesus is shown to be better than the angels (Heb 1:14; 2:3; 2:10). Notice that the first of these is not a present possession but a future inheritance. The usage in Hebrews 2:3 should be governed by this same context. The ultimate deliverance from all that sin has brought into the world and upon mankind is in view. The sanctification process is partly in view at Hebrews 2:10-11, but even that present process is just a step toward that eschatological deliverance when many sons will be brought to glory. The “eternal salvation” of Hebrews 5:9 is dependent on obedience. This is clearly not a gift that is in view but part of the reward for faithfulness. Nothing in the context would require any different understanding in Hebrews 6:9. Jesus “learned obedience through the things he suffered” (Heb 5:8), and so we should suffer with Him (Heb 13:12-13) with our hearts set on His return. In this way we experience a fuller deliverance when He returns with “salvation” to reward those who have faithfully served Him (Heb 11:6).

How terribly confusing the message of Hebrews becomes when salvation is equated with deliverance from hell and receiving eternal life. In Hebrews we have a word of encouragement to believers who have already experienced this aspect of salvation. Their concern, and that of the author, is the sanctification process of their Christian walk with the possibility of a victorious culmination at the return of King Jesus. That is indeed the salvation that motivates the pilgrim in this life to be prepared for the world to come.

## QUESTION 15

When Hebrews says that Jesus was “perfected,” the force of the Greek word translated “perfected” means to bring something to its intended \_\_\_\_\_.

## QUESTION 16

Which of the following are reasons why “salvation” in this passage does not refer to soteriological deliverance from hell? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. The “salvation” mentioned here is obtained through obedience, not as a gift through faith.
- B. The verb “to save” in Hebrews 5:7 simply means deliverance from suffering and death.
- C. The Greek word used in Hebrews is different from the Greek word used to mean soteriological “salvation.”
- D. Other references to “salvation” in Hebrews either clearly or probably do not refer to this aspect of salvation (Heb 1:14; Heb 2:3; Heb 2:10; Heb 5:9; Heb 6:9; Heb 9:28; Heb 11:7).

### **QUESTION 17**

What theological problem arises if one takes the “eternal salvation” in Hebrews 5:9 to be a reference to deliverance from the legal penalty of sin, i.e., eternity in hell?

### **QUESTION 18**

Which of the following definitions of “eternal salvation” fits Hebrews 5:9?

- A. Deliverance from physical death
- B. Soteriological salvation from eternity in hell
- C. Salvation from trials, temptations, and suffering
- D. Sharing in Christ’s inheritance and kingdom rule

### **QUESTION 19**

The fact that the Greek behind “obedience” in Hebrews 5:8 and “obey” in Hebrews 5:9 are closely related in meaning indicates that the obedience in the author’s mind is connected with the thought of holding obediently to one’s confession (Heb 4:14) even in times of suffering. *True or False?*

### **QUESTION 20**

Construct your own outline of the units of thought in Hebrews 1-4. Try to think of ways the individual units are related to one another. In other words, is the author just throwing in disconnected themes or topics, or is there a progression of thought through the letter? Remember, there is not just a right or wrong answer to this exercise. The goal is for you to begin analyzing the material and developing what you think the author is saying and how he is saying it.

## Lesson 4 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

According to the commentary, failing to successfully enter God's rest is the same as not obtaining the proper inheritance a believer should be able to obtain. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

Levitical priests offered sacrifices for all who were not priests. Daily sacrifices did not need to be offered for priests because the high priest offered one sacrifice to cover them on the Day of Atonement. Refer to Hebrews 5:1-4. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 3

The quotation from Psalm 110 is important because it shows that Christ belongs to which priestly order?

- A. Levitical
- B. Aaronic
- C. Melchizedekan
- D. Mosaic

### QUESTION 4

The "eternal salvation" referred to in Hebrews 5:9 is the eschatological salvation brought by King Jesus when He claims His full inheritance and exercises dominion over His kingdom. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

Which one of the following descriptions of Levitical priests is not found in Hebrews 5:1-4?

- A. The honor of this position was never by self appointment.
- B. Every priest had to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as others.
- C. The priest's task was to represent God to mankind.
- D. Priests shared in human nature with their fellow men.

### QUESTION 6

By using in quick succession quotes from Psalm 2 and Psalm 110, the author brings together the uniqueness of Jesus in that He fills both offices of Davidic king and Melchizedekan priest. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 7

Because Jesus was already morally perfect, He could not have been made more perfect in His nature but did need to be perfected in the sense of being **prepared** for His role as our High Priest. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 8

The "eternal salvation" in Hebrews 5:9 could not be a reference to deliverance from the legal penalty of sin and eternity in hell, because that deliverance is said to be obtained by faith. *True or False?*

**QUESTION 9**

Which of the following definitions of “salvation” fits Hebrews 5:9?

- A. Deliverance from physical death
- B. Soteriological salvation from eternity in hell
- C. Salvation from trials, temptations, and suffering
- D. Sharing in Christ’s inheritance and kingdom rule

**QUESTION 10**

The writer of Hebrews can say Jesus’ prayers to the Father to deliver Him from death were heard, because Jesus was delivered from the bonds of death through the resurrection. *True or False?*

## Lesson 4 Answers to Questions

### QUESTION 1

B. High Priest

**QUESTION 2:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 3:** Rebellious

**QUESTION 4:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Our High Priest who leads us there is one who is sympathetic with our weakness because of His own experience with temptation.

**QUESTION 5:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 6:** *Your answer*

### Suggested Answers to Question 6

Answer: Just some of the principles you might have noted:

1. Jesus has prepared a way into heaven itself—the true Holy of Holies of which the earthly one was merely a symbol. We enter into God’s very presence through prayer in Jesus’ name. Hebrews 9:11-14 describes Christ’s cleansing of the heavenly tabernacle; the believer in Christ can enter boldly because the ritual purity has been achieved by the blood of Christ.
2. The man or woman of prayer will always be a man or woman of faith. Faith involves dependency on the truthfulness of God. To hold firmly to God in faith is the foundation of meaningful prayer.
3. Jesus truly has “walked in our shoes.” He knows how difficult the path can get; He can sympathize with our human frailty in the face of satanic temptation. We must never avoid prayer, thinking that He does not understand your struggle.
4. Could you depend on a coach to help you improve your athletic skills if that coach had never succeeded in the sport you were attempting to master? How about a piano teacher who could not play the instrument you wanted to learn? When you come for spiritual help, what better source than one who has never once given in to sin! He can sympathize with us because He has experienced temptation to its fullest; He is a competent one to guide us, because He has never failed in the walk of faithfully entrusting Himself to the Father’s will each and every step of the way.
5. When we approach the throne of God, we cannot help but remember our position as creatures of dust. God is almighty; He sits as ruler on a throne! What a privilege to be able to approach Him.
6. This throne is a throne of grace. Do we deserve to be there? No. Should we go expecting harsh treatment? No. We can go there to find mercy when we don’t deserve it; we find acceptance when we are not in ourselves worthy of it. It is a throne of grace.
7. How can a mere sinful mortal come into the throne room of God? It is only because of Christ preparing the way. But not only has He prepared the way, He has so totally prepared the way and the worshipper that we can come with **confidence**. Much more will be said about this later in Hebrews, but it truly is one of the greatest principles of prayer for the believer under the new covenant. We can approach the throne of God boldly because we come under the blood of Christ. This access is because of Him and the sufficiency of His sacrifice—not because of who we are. Praise God!

### QUESTION 7

B. The priest’s task was to represent God to mankind. [The calling to be a priest was the calling to represent man to God through gifts, prayers, offerings, and other means. Some have seen a dual task in Jesus’ calling reflected in Hebrews 3:1. Jesus is called “apostle” (as a messenger from the Father, He represented God to man) and “high priest” (by which office He presents the needs of man to the Father).]

**QUESTION 8:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

The Levitical priests were also subject to weaknesses and were obligated to make sin offerings for their own sins.

**QUESTION 9:** True [As discussed previously, the wording “you are my Son” from Psalm 2 pictures the inauguration or installment of a king on his throne. Psalm 110 beautifully combines both royal and priestly offices in a strongly Messianic psalm, the psalm that is referred to in the New Testament more than any other psalm.]

**QUESTION 10:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

The importance of the author’s use of Psalm 110 is that it shows that Christ was of a different priestly order than the Levitical priests. If this were not so then Christ could offer no better priestly ministry than that under the old covenant.

**QUESTION 11:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

In order to be a sympathetic and merciful High Priest, He had to be prepared and perfected for that position through experiencing the trials and temptations and pains of humanity. He experienced the force of temptation greater than any other human being, because He never gave in to temptation. Only by experiencing the temptations personally could He really empathize with mankind.

**QUESTION 12:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 13:** False [Through suffering Jesus learned what the experience of obedience was like. He did not need to learn how to be obedient because He was never disobedient.]

**QUESTION 14:** False [Although the commentary assumes this answer, one does not have to look at examples in Scripture long to find reasons why this is so. In 1 Corinthians 3 the Judgment Seat of Christ is a time when the believer’s works will be judged. There are some who will suffer loss of reward yet are saved (1 Cor 3:15). Obviously, they failed to live obedient lives. 1 John 2:28 implies that there are those believers who will be ashamed before Christ when He appears because they have not continued their walk “in Him.” Paul does not deny the faith of Hymenaeus and Alexander, but he does describe it as “shipwrecked” and therefore cause for discipline (1 Tim 1:20).]

**QUESTION 15:** Goal

**QUESTION 16**

- A. The “salvation” mentioned here is obtained through obedience, not as a gift through faith.
- B. The verb “to save” in Hebrews 5:7 simply means deliverance from suffering and death.
- D. Other references to “salvation” in Hebrews either clearly or probably do not refer to this aspect of salvation (Heb 1:14; Heb 2:3; Heb 2:10; Heb 5:9; Heb 6:9; Heb 9:28; Heb 11:7).

[If obedience, other than the obedience to believe, is a condition for salvation, then the salvation clearly cannot be based on faith alone or be a gift. [See Eph 2:8-9 on salvation as a gift]. The use of the verb “to save” in Hebrews 5:7 should alert the reader to the possibility that the deliverance in this context is a deliverance other than from hell and sin. Notice in the commentary the references that are clearly not referring to a deliverance from eternity in hell (Heb 1:14; 9:28; 11:7). If you study these in context you should see that these are not references to salvation from hell. Such a salvation is already a possession for the believer and not something that will be received in the future.]

**QUESTION 17:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Your answer should include something about the fact that salvation here is conditioned on obedience. If obedience is the means, then the salvation is by works. Yet the New Testament clearly describes it as a gift by grace (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 6:23; Tit 3:5).

**QUESTION 18**

- D. Sharing in Christ’s inheritance and kingdom rule [The author of Hebrews looks at a salvation to be brought when Christ returns (Heb 9:28). The eschatological theme of Hebrews 1 concerning the rule Christ will have when His enemies have been made his footstool provides the background for the salvation mentioned in Hebrews 2:3. The deliverance will be fully realized in the world to come (Heb 2:5) when the original design for mankind to rule over God’s creation will again be the nature of things (Heb 2:6-10).]

**QUESTION 19:** True

**QUESTION 20:** *Your answer*



## Lesson 4 Self Check Answers

**QUESTION 1:** True

**QUESTION 2:** False

**QUESTION 3**

C. Melchizedek

**QUESTION 4:** True

**QUESTION 5**

C. The priest's task was to represent God to mankind.

**QUESTION 6:** True

**QUESTION 7:** True

**QUESTION 8:** True

**QUESTION 9**

D. Sharing in Christ's inheritance and kingdom rule

**QUESTION 10:** True



# Lesson 5: Confrontation and Motivation to Move on to Maturity and the Third Warning (Heb 5:11–6:20)

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## Lesson Introduction

Hebrews 6 has proven to be one of the most controversial passages in all of Scripture. Is the warning too severe to be addressed to believers? Does the failure to heed the warning result in loss of eternal life? Is the warning a sincere warning or is it only a hypothetical warning designed to instill fear as a motivation to godliness? It is most unfortunate that a passage with so much practical value has become the basis for conflict and division between brothers and sisters in Christ. If there is ever a need for careful, reasoned, in-depth exegesis, it is with this particular passage.

One crucial point made in the commentary on this section is that the literary device of *inclusio* ties the section together as one unit. The Greek word *nōthroi* “sluggish, dull” is used in Hebrews 5:11 and Hebrews 6:12 to mark off the section that deals specifically with confrontation and warning. Dr. Tanner correctly notes that the audience is therefore the same for the entire section. The problem clearly introduced is not a need for regeneration but a need for spiritual growth. Only for those who had already experienced the new birth would the topic of spiritual growth be applicable. The author is addressing fellow believers in Christ Jesus.



## Lesson Outline

Topic 1: Confrontation Regarding the Need for Maturity (Heb 5:11-6:3)

The Nature of Spiritual Infancy

Topic 2: The Third Warning (Heb 6:4-12)

Topic 3: Motivation for Maturity (Heb 6:13-20)

## Topic 1: Confrontation Regarding the Need for Maturity (Heb 5:11-6:3)

Believers under the new covenant have incredible blessings, opportunities, and responsibilities. They serve under a perfectly qualified and prepared King and High Priest, one whose greatness is surpassed by none. Each believer has the privilege to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God and, through that service, function as the priestly household of God (1 Pet 2:5). To function properly in this service requires the same life of faith in God and dependency on God that Joshua (and Caleb) exhibited when they looked at the Promised Land and declared it conquerable. The Promised Land was not declared conquerable in light of their own strength but in light of the power of the God who had promised.

The same almighty God has not left the believer-priest under the new covenant without a promise. But to claim the promise still requires holding firmly to the faith that depends on God (Heb 4:14). To achieve the greatest potential available in this priestly role requires training, continued spiritual growth, and a constant recognition of the total sufficiency of the Captain of our salvation, Jesus, the Son of God. The author does not want his readers to miss out on the greatest potential they have to live victoriously and claim the maximum inheritance available to them.



## The Nature of Spiritual Infancy

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 5:11–6:3.
- Read the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 5:11–6:3.”

### QUESTION 1

Match the themes with the appropriate references.

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 1:1–4:13	Superiority of Jesus’ priestly ministry
Hebrews 4:14–5:10	Superiority of Jesus, the Son, as King and High Priest
Hebrews 5:11–6:20	Introduction of a new priesthood for the new covenant
Hebrews 7:1-28	Motivation to a new level of maturity

### QUESTION 2

What characteristic of the audience was the author noting when he referred to them as “sluggish in hearing”?

### QUESTION 3

Which of the following are characteristics of a spiritual infant? (*Select all that apply.*)

- One who understands only the fundamental basics of the faith
- One trained to discern good and evil
- One who has been a believer only a short time
- One who has been a believer for a long time but cannot carry out the responsibilities that would be expected of someone of that spiritual age.

### QUESTION 4

The exhortation in Hebrews 6:1 is for the reader to make progress toward \_\_\_\_\_.

## QUESTION 5

Which of the following is not listed as elementary instructions in Hebrews 6:1-2?

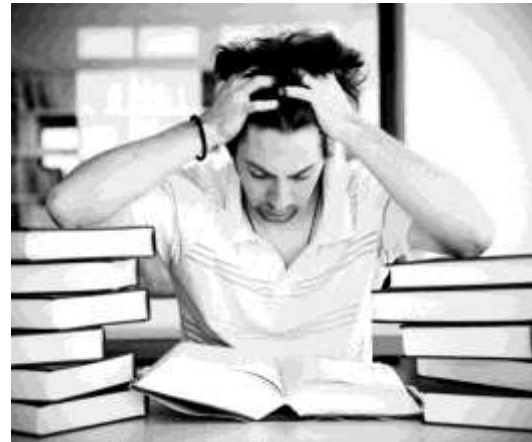
- A. Repentance from dead works
- B. Instruction about ceremonial washings
- C. Sharing in the Holy Spirit
- D. Faith in God
- E. Resurrection from the dead
- F. Eternal judgment

## QUESTION 6

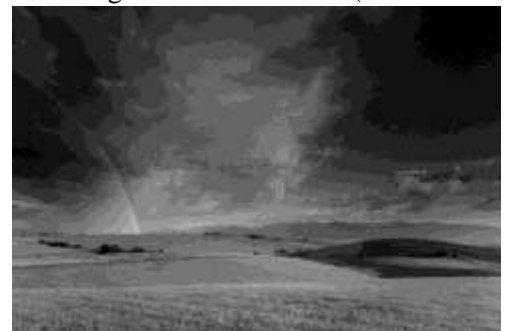
The group addressed in Hebrews 5:11-6:20 had apparently been led to saving faith but never taught the foundational truths of Scripture, thus leaving them in an immature state. *True or False?*

## Topic 2: The Third Warning (Heb 6:4-12)

At this point in your study of the epistle to the Hebrews, you have come to the specific passage that has probably been the most contested of any in the epistle. The debate goes back for centuries. Little wonder that many students would throw up their hands in despair with the thought, “If the scholars have not been able to come to a consistent understanding of this passage, why should I waste my time trying to understand it?” Unfortunately, even Bible translators are not immune from contamination by tradition and theology. When this happens, even further confusion can result from faulty translations of the original Greek.



In spite of how confusing the past treatment of this passage might be, there is a valuable message here for those who are ready to listen. The author desires his listeners to press on toward maturity. To do so will result in a productive life analogous to a productive plot of land that receives the rich blessing of rain from God. These believers have experienced the rich blessing of faithfully doing God’s will (see Heb 10:32-39). There the author reminds them that the obedient life will bring great reward in the future. The apostle Paul showed in his own life a concern to be productive, not for selfish gain, but for sharing with those in need (Acts 20:32-35) In this section of Hebrews the author does not limit his focus on right theology and advancing in knowledge. He motivates the readers to maturity by reminding them that “God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love you have demonstrated for his name” (Heb 6:10). Paul emphasized the same principle of reward for living to serve the needs of others when he quoted the Lord saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Proverbs 11:25 states it this way, “the one who provides water for others will himself be satisfied.” These readers have experienced this kind of life that



brings the Lord's blessing and reward. But the race is not over and the great reward awaits those who press on with diligence "toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14).

## Assignment

- Read Hebrews 6:4-12 and the commentary on "Hebrews 6:4-12."
- Read "The Significance of the Participles in Hebrews 6:4-6."

### The Significance of the Participles in Hebrews 6:4-6

Hebrews 6:4-6 is one of those rare places in Scripture where knowledge of the biblical languages is essential for a clear understanding of the passage. Without understanding the grammatical significance of participles and the syntactical structures in which they are used in this passage, the interpreter is at the mercy of translations. The men who wrote the Bible translations we have today were certainly godly men who sought to be faithful in their work, but in some cases a particular translation they chose may not accurately reflect the original Greek text. Hebrews 6:4-6 is a good case in point. Our hope is that this Appendix will shed more light on the problem.

The basic sentence structure in Hebrews 6:4-6 is as follows: *anakainizein* "to renew" (subject) is *adunaton* "impossible" (predicate adjective). In the Greek text the adjective "impossible" comes first in the sentence which means the author wanted to bring some degree of emphasis to the word. The renewal is further defined by a prepositional phrase, "unto repentance." This leads to some questions. What is impossible? Why or when is it impossible? These questions are exactly what the Greek participles answer.

After the adjective "impossible," the writer gives a series of substantival participles. A participle is simply a verbal adjective. That means that structurally, it can fill any slot in a sentence that could be filled by a verb or any slot that could be filled by an adjective. Participles functionally are used in two primary ways: (1) Adverbial participles modify verbs by limiting them in some way or giving additional information about the verbal action; (2) adjectival participles either modify nouns or, if there is no noun to modify, fill in as a noun. We see these same two functions for adjectives in English. "I love my red car." "Red" is an adjective modifying "car." Contrast this with the following sentence: "Red is my favorite color." In this case, the word "red" is filling a noun slot as the subject of the sentence.

When a Greek participle has the definite article (English "the") with the participle, its use will be adjectival. In Hebrews 6:4-6 we have five participles very tightly connected in a string with one definite article heading the entire list, thereby making the entire string of participles adjectival. The author is using the participles to describe a group of people:

- (1) *photisthentas* 'having been enlightened'
- (2) *geusamenous* 'having tasted'
- (3) *genēthentas* 'having become'
- (4) *geusamenous* 'having tasted'
- (5) *parapesontas* 'having fallen.'

These participles are all in the accusative case. In English such accusatives in this structure with an infinitive "to renew" get translated as the subject of the infinitive. In Greek they are actually accusatives of reference; i.e., they limit or give the reference to which the verbal action of the infinitive is applicable. In other words, the action of renewal is restricted in this statement to the group of people described by these accusative participles.

This is the resulting structure. "It is impossible for those who..."

<i>tous</i> 'the ones'		
(1)	who have been enlightened	once
(2) <i>te</i> 'and'	have tasted	the heavenly gift
(3) <i>kai</i> 'and'	have become	partakers of the Holy Spirit
(4) <i>kai</i> 'and'	have tasted	the good word of God
	<i>kai</i> 'and'	the powers of the coming age
(5) <i>kai</i> 'and'	have fallen.	

The most serious translation problem occurs when translators translate the last participle as if it were adverbial. You can see this in an English translation when they add a word just before “have fallen.” When they translate it “**if** they have fallen away,” the translators are attempting to make the participle conditional. This would require an adverbial participle and cannot be supported by the Greek structure. No matter how badly one’s theology causes him or her to want this to read “if they fall away,” the Greek simply does not allow it.

In other words, the text of Hebrews 6:4-6 is picturing someone who has fallen, that is, the very same person who has also been enlightened, and has tasted, etc. Other theological issues have to be answered as to whether this refers to believers or unbelievers and what the results of such action might be. But the one thing the Greek will not allow is to think the author does not have in mind someone who has fallen.

The preceding information helps us to see that the correct translation of these verses should be: “It is impossible for those people who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the coming age, and have fallen to be renewed to repentance.”

This sounds like an absolute statement that would never allow for anyone guilty of this “falling” to be renewed to a place of repentance. Such would be the case if it were not for two additional participles that do not fall within the tightly bound string of adjectival participles. These last two participles are without the definite article. That is because they are used adverbially. The last two participles are:

- (1) *anastaurountas* “crucifying again”;
- (2) *paradeigmatizontas* “holding up to contempt” or “submitting to public disgrace.”

Since these two participles are adverbial they could be taken as:

- (1) conditional—‘since’;
- (2) temporal—‘while’;
- (3) causal—‘because.’

This removes the absolute nature of the impossibility. The people described by the adjectival participles, including the participle that refers to the act of falling, cannot come to a place of renewal “since,” “while,” or “because” they are crucifying again for themselves the Son of God and submitting Him to public disgrace. When or if they stop doing these things, they can indeed be renewed to a state of repentance. It seems likely that, in the context of Hebrews, the writer pictures those who are falling back into the old covenant practices of offering animal sacrifices. To do so is to submit the Son of God, who has totally and sufficiently and for all time paid the price of sin, to public disgrace. Such action insults the efficacy of Christ’s blood poured out for the sin of the world.

The first issue that needs to be addressed in this passage is that of determining as far as possible to whom the author is writing. We have already seen in the first warning that the author included himself as one needing warning (Heb 2:1-4). The reference to the Lord’s sheep in Psalm 95 (quoted in Heb 3) was a clear indicator that the author was taking an Old Testament passage to believers and

making application to those whom he addressed as “holy brothers and sisters” (Heb 3:1). It might seem surprising to some that there would be a question about the audience here.

### **QUESTION 7**

Which of the following reasons from Hebrews 6 indicate that the warning is addressed to believers? (Select all that apply.)

- A. Previous statements of concern were addressed to believers (Heb 3:12).
- B. The exhortation is to go on to maturity, not to place saving faith in Christ.
- C. The reference to “burning” (as in Heb 6:8) always is a reference to hell in Scripture.
- D. The future reward for good works done by this group is implied in Hebrews 6:10.

### **QUESTION 8**

Those versions that translate “if they fall away” in Hebrews 6:6 do not accurately portray the adjectival force of the Greek participle. *True or False?*

### **QUESTION 9**

The impossibility of renewal to repentance in Hebrews 6:4-6 is not necessarily an absolute impossibility, but one conditioned on an obedient response on the part of the one who had “fallen.” *True or False?*

### **QUESTION 10**

This warning brings out the nature of sin in the believer’s life. It is not just something that affects oneself or one’s fellow man. Sin is a direct affront to the person and the work of Jesus, the Son of God. David realized how sin is evidence of a rebellious attitude, specifically against God, when he cried out, “For I am aware of my rebellious acts; I am forever conscious of my sin. Against you, especially you, I have sinned; I have done what is sinful in your sight” (Ps 51:3-4).

Set aside a period of time to meditate on this nature of sin. Are there areas of your life that are not bringing honor to your Lord and Savior? Record in your Life Notebook changes you want to make in the way you live out your calling as the Lord’s ambassador to be more pleasing in His sight.

Many translations have separated these two verses into two sentences with phrases similar to: “Land that drinks...But land that...” The commentary corrects this faulty understanding of the biblical illustration. A better way for this to be translated is to show the contrast between the two types of ground such as “For the ground that has soaked up the rain...But if it produces...” In other words, one plot of land is being contrasted—when it is producing poorly and when it is producing good crops. Those translations that use “land” or “ground” twice give the impression that two separate plots of soil are pictured. This gives the reader the false impression that a believer (Heb 6:7) and an unbeliever (Heb 6:8) are being contrasted. Then, taking this idea, the thought can be introduced back into verses 4-6 that believers are never guilty of the sinful actions mentioned; only unbelievers are. This is not what the author of Hebrews is teaching.

In a similar fashion to the structure of verses 4-6, the grammar of the Greek original shows clearly that one plot of land is being described as (1) having soaked up rain, (2) yielded good crops, but then (3) having produced thorns and thistles. The general principle that is being portrayed here is that the same plot of land can produce either beneficial or worthless plants.



### **QUESTION 11**

Take a few moments to reflect on your life as a ministry to others. Does the way you present God's Word to others have beneficial or detrimental effects? Is your life like the obedient servant who shows "all good faith, in order to bring credit to the teaching of God our Savior in everything" (Tit 2:10)? Write down some of your reflections in your Life Notebook as a reminder to frequently inspect the produce of your life. Such an inspection is not for the purpose of determining whether you are a believer or not, but if you are yielding fruit, which will bring a rich inheritance when Christ returns!

### **QUESTION 12**

How would you support the view that this passage is not concerned with whether or not one is a believer, but whether or not the product of one's life is good or bad?

### **QUESTION 13**

Which of the following is not used in the commentary to support the idea of temporal judgment in this passage?

- A. The allusion to Genesis 3:17-18 and the curse on Adam's disobedience.
- B. The contrast of mature and immature believers has been in view since Hebrews 5:11.
- C. The use of "curse" in Deuteronomy 28-29 refers to temporal judgment.
- D. Paul's fear of not having eternal life expressed in 1 Corinthians 9:27.

### **QUESTION 14**

Why is the author so confident in his readers even after expressing such a harsh warning?

### **QUESTION 15**

Which of the following is not one of the factors that indicates Hebrews 6:10-12 is a reference to eschatological rewards rather than the gift of eternal salvation from hell?

- A. The focus is on a time when God remembers their work.
- B. The preceding verses which mention being cursed and burned are clearly referencing to hell.
- C. The author's desire here is for his readers to demonstrate "eagerness" (or "diligence" in some translations); he makes no mention of their need to believe in Jesus for the gift of life.
- D. The inheritance has already been presented as the ultimate deliverance from the fallen order to God's original plan for man to share in the rule over His creation.

### Topic 3: Motivation for Maturity (Heb 6:13-20)

Here again we see the literary skills of this author. The *inclusio* has already been noted, showing that Hebrews 5:11-6:12 is marked off by the use of “sluggish” at the beginning and end of the unit. The term “inherit the promises” in Hebrews 6:12 is a key linking term which leads into the next section. In Hebrews 6:13-20, the author develops the reliability of God’s promises and the inheritance available to the one who faithfully trusts in those promises. Life in a creation that groans as it awaits redemption (Rom 8:18-23) needs a basis for hope (Rom 8:24-25).



Abraham stands out as one who was willing to act on the basis of God’s commands and promises rather than his personal instinct, desire, and sight. Abraham could not see what the future would hold when he set out from Ur, the land of his ancestors. But he “left, just as the Lord told him to do” (Gen 12:4). God told Abram, “Get up and walk throughout the land . . . so Abram moved his tents” (Gen 13:17-18). God told Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away as Sarah had told him to do, and Abraham did so (Gen 21:10-14). When Abraham obeyed God’s command to sacrifice Isaac, he became known as “God’s friend” (Gen 22; James 2). What further encouragement does a believer need than these: Abraham’s example; God’s promise backed up by God’s oath; and Jesus’ preparatory work in the heavenly sanctuary as our great High Priest?

#### Assignment

- Study carefully Hebrews 6:13-20.
- Please read the commentary on “Hebrews 6:13-20.”
- For an understanding of the promise here, read Genesis 22.

#### QUESTION 16

The inherited promise for Abraham was not justification by faith but blessings as a reward for persevering in his faithfulness as a believer. *True or False?*

#### QUESTION 17

The inheritance that God has promised to the faithful believer is shown by the author to be certain for two reasons. First, God has promised it. Second, God added to His promise the confirmation of an \_\_\_\_\_.

#### QUESTION 18

In your own words, describe what the author means by the “anchor for the soul.”

### **QUESTION 19**

This unit, Hebrews 5:11-6:20 has a theme of maturity. Using this theme, develop a sermon outline on this unit and include it in your Life Notebook.

## Lesson 5 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

The exhortation in Hebrews 6:1 is for the readers to progress toward maturity. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

All of the following are listed as elementary instructions in Hebrews 6:1-2 except which one?

- A. Miracles of the coming age
- B. Repentance from dead works
- C. Instruction about ceremonial washings
- D. Resurrection from the dead

### QUESTION 3

The group addressed in Hebrews 5:11-6:20 had apparently been led to saving faith but never taught the foundational truths of Scripture, thus leaving them in an immature state. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 4

The English versions that translate “if they fall away” in Hebrews 6:6 do not accurately portray the adjectival force of the Greek participle. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

The impossibility of renewal to repentance in Hebrews 6:4-6 is not necessarily an absolute impossibility but one conditioned on an obedient response on the part of the one who had “fallen.” *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

Hebrews 6:7-8 pictures two plots of soil, one representing the believer and the other representing the unbeliever. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 7

In Hebrews 5:11-6:20 the contrast developed is between which of the following?

- A. Believers and nonbelievers
- B. Immature believers and nonbelievers
- C. Immature and mature believers in danger of rebelling altogether
- D. True believers and those mistakenly thinking they are believers

### QUESTION 8

The author of Hebrews has confidence that his readers will press on to maturity and receive a rich inheritance for which of the following reasons?

- A. Because all believers will receive the same inheritance he has in mind.
- B. Because perseverance in good works is an assured necessary result of their conversion to Christ.
- C. Because God has promised that all believers will rule with Christ in His kingdom.
- D. Because of their past faithfulness and love, and because of their present service to the saints.

**QUESTION 9**

The curse in Hebrews 6 looks back to Genesis 3 where the result was spiritual and eternal judgment. *True or False?*

**QUESTION 10**

The promise Abraham inherited was not justification by faith but blessings as a reward for persevering as a faithful believer. *True or False?*

## Lesson 5 Answers to Questions

### QUESTION 1

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 1:1-4:13	Superiority of Jesus, the Son, as King and High Priest
Hebrews 4:14-5:10	Introduction of a new priesthood for the new covenant
Hebrews 5:11-6:20	Motivation to a new level of maturity
Hebrews 7:1-28	Superiority of Jesus' priestly ministry

**QUESTION 2:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

The recipients of the letter did not understand and obey when it came to comprehension of spiritual truth.

### QUESTION 3

- A. One who understands only the fundamental basics of the faith
- D. One who has been a believer for a long time but cannot carry out the responsibilities that would be expected of someone of that spiritual age.

**QUESTION 4:** Maturity

### QUESTION 5

- C. Sharing in the Holy Spirit

**QUESTION 6:** False [The author recognized their need to have someone teach them the elementary instructions again. Although some translations leave out this one important word, the commentary correctly makes note of the word “again.” This makes it quite clear that they had indeed been taught these foundational truths before. Their problem was not one of insufficient education but one of insufficient obedience. This was not an academic issue but a spiritual issue.]

### QUESTION 7

- B. The exhortation is to go on to maturity, not to place saving faith in Christ.
- D. The future reward for good works done by this group is implied in Hebrews 6:10.  
[The future rewards implied in Hebrews 6:10 are based on past good works and on works they are presently doing. Unbelievers could not press on to maturity without first being born again.]

**QUESTION 8:** True [See “The Significance of the Participles in Hebrews 6:4-6.”]

**QUESTION 9:** True [See “The Significance of the Participles in Hebrews 6:4-6” on the two adverbial participles that modify the verbal idea of “to renew.”]

**QUESTION 10:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 11:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 12:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

There are several lines of evidence that you could give here. On a grammatical level, you could point to the structure of the Greek text which depicts one plot of land with three descriptions. You could refer to the judgment pictured in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, which uses fire not as a symbol of eternal hell but as a revealer of the quality of a believer's works. The following context in Hebrews 6 mentions their work and their potential inheritance. Here and in 1 Corinthians 9:27 the same Greek term *adokimos* (“disapproved” or “disqualified”) was used by the apostle Paul to refer to his own works that could be judged unfit for reward.

### QUESTION 13

- D. Paul's fear of not having eternal life expressed in 1 Corinthians 9:27.

**QUESTION 14:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

He remembers not only their past faithfulness and love but also notes that they are “continuing to serve the saints” (Heb 6:10).

### QUESTION 15

- B. The preceding verses which mention being cursed and burned are clearly referencing to hell.  
[The “curse” resulting from disobedience alludes to Genesis 3:17-18 and the temporal judgment. Temporal judgment is the “curse” opposed to “blessing” in Deuteronomy 28-29.]

**QUESTION 16:** True

**QUESTION 17:** Oath

**QUESTION 18:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Holding fast to the hope that belongs to the believer because of Christ's atoning sacrifice.

**QUESTION 19:** *Your answer*

## Lesson 5 Self Check Answers

**QUESTION 1:** True

**QUESTION 2**

A. Miracles of the coming age

**QUESTION 3:** False

**QUESTION 4:** True

**QUESTION 5:** True

**QUESTION 6:** False

**QUESTION 7**

C. Immature and mature believers in danger of rebelling altogether

**QUESTION 8**

D. Because of their past faithfulness and love, and because of their present service to the saints.

**QUESTION 9:** False

**QUESTION 10:** True



# Lesson 6: The Superiority of Jesus as a High Priest (Heb 7:1-28)

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## Lesson Introduction

Jesus has been shown to be superior to the angels, superior to Moses, and to have a superior task to fulfill compared to that of Joshua. It has already been hinted that He is superior to the old covenant priests and priesthood. When believers want the greatest blessings they can get from God, Jesus is the Captain and King upon whom they can depend for the victorious life if only they will walk by faith. When times of trial or times of desperate need come in life, Jesus is the merciful High Priest ready to provide grace and assistance. To attain maturity in the Christian walk, Jesus is the name to be confessed and trusted in for that spiritual growth.

All of the above comparisons help us appreciate who Jesus really is and what He has accomplished for us. Jesus is better! Yet, the author is far from finished portraying this incomparable King and High Priest. It is Jesus alone who is the basis for our hope. He is the anchor for the soul in the earthly sojourn of His faithful followers. His priestly office is not temporary but permanent. His calling goes far beyond that of the old covenant priests. His calling required so much more than theirs did so that it necessitated changes in three key areas: in the Law, in the priestly order, and in the sacrifice required to meet the requirements of God. Only one who had been perfected in His ability to fill this role could accomplish the perfect result. It would indeed require one from the order of Melchizedek, whose priesthood is an eternal priesthood! This lesson will now guide us in a careful study of Christ's Melchizedekan priesthood as presented in Hebrews 7.

## Lesson Outline

Topic 1: The Greatness of Melchizedek (Heb 7:1-10)

Topic 2: The Need for a Better Priesthood (Heb 7:11-22)

Topic 3: Comparison of Two Priesthoods (Heb 7:23-28)

## Topic 1: The Greatness of Melchizedek (Heb 7:1-10)

Believers under the new covenant have incredible blessings, opportunities, and responsibilities. They serve under a King who has learned obedience; they perform priestly duties under a High Priest who understands what it is to be subject to weakness, yet one whose greatness is surpassed by none. Jesus is perfectly suited to His roles by the experiences He has had. Each believer has the privilege of offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God and, through that service, functions as the priestly household of God (1 Pet 2:5). To function properly in this service requires the same life of faith in God and dependency on God that Joshua and Caleb exhibited when they looked at a promised land and declared it conquerable. The Promised Land was not declared conquerable in light of their own strength but in light of the power of the God who had promised that the land would belong to Abraham and his descendants.

That same almighty God has not left the new covenant believer-priest without promises to be inherited in Christ's kingdom. But to lay hold of these promises still requires holding firmly to the confession of our faith in Christ (Heb 4:14). To find the greatest potential one has in this priestly role

requires training, continued spiritual growth, and a constant recognition of the total sufficiency of the Captain of our salvation, Jesus, the Son of God. The author does not want his readers to miss out on the greatest potential they have to live victoriously and claim the maximum inheritance available to them.

**Assignment**

- As you near the end of a major section of the epistle, this is a good time to read through the entire epistle again at one sitting. Give your own titles to the major sections of the epistle as you see it at this point. Write the titles down in your Life Notebook. [We suggest that you identify at least four but no more than eight major sections for the epistle as a whole].
- Read Hebrews 7:1-10.
- Read the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 7:1-10.”

**QUESTION 1**

Match the verse references with the appropriate themes.

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 1:1-4	Superiority of Jesus’ priestly ministry
Hebrews 1:5-7:28	Epilogue
Hebrews 8:1–10:39	Responsibilities of life under the new covenant
Hebrews 11:1–13:17	Superiority of Jesus as King and High Priest
Hebrews 13:18-25	Prologue

**QUESTION 2**

The Old Testament revelation of Melchizedek is found in \_\_\_\_\_ (passage reference).

**QUESTION 3**

All of the following are descriptions of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 **except** which one?

- A. He blessed Abraham.
- B. He was a king of Salem.
- C. His priesthood was eternal.
- D. He received tithes from Abraham.
- E. He was a priest of God.

**QUESTION 4**

The name Melchizedek comes from Hebrew words meaning “king of peace.” *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

Which of the following show Melchizedek's superiority over Abraham? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. No genealogy is given for Melchizedek.
- B. Melchizedek blessed Abraham.
- C. There is no record of Melchizedek's death.
- D. Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God.
- E. Melchizedek received a title from Abraham.

### QUESTION 6

Scholars have produced a variety of ideas concerning the identity of Melchizedek. According to the commentary, what may we conclude about his identity?

- A. He is Noah's son, Shem
- B. He is a Canaanite priest
- C. He is the pre-incarnate Christ
- D. He is a real person and a type of Christ

### QUESTION 7

Those who hold that Melchizedek was a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ base this view partly on the wording of Hebrews that Melchizedek had no father, mother, genealogy, beginning of days, or end of life. If Melchizedek was just a human priest, how would you explain these descriptions in Hebrews?

### QUESTION 8

If a Bible student focuses only on the details of the text here, just the facts given, he or she might be left wondering, "So what?" To prevent this from becoming simply an academic exercise, consider two aspects of this passage. First, what has been said so far is just foundational to the increasingly glorious picture of Jesus which is developing. We see Him as the merciful and faithful High Priest to whom the believer can come in times of need. The greatness of Melchizedek only points to the supreme greatness of Christ. Furthermore, the priesthood of Melchizedek instructs us that the Old Testament itself looked forward to a greater priesthood than that of the Mosaic law. It is vitally important that when believers need help they can go to someone totally competent and capable of meeting their needs. Because Jesus' priesthood is of this great order, He can meet each and every need! Second, remember that the task of a priest was to represent the people to God (Heb 5:1). Jesus is your "advocate with the Father" (1 Jn 2:1). Take some time to meditate on the daily blessing in your life of having such a magnificent one as your High Priest and advocate—One who is not only magnificent, but also sympathetic with your weaknesses. How should the model of Jesus' priestly role affect your life as you reflect on your role as a royal priest? Write down in your Life Notebook some of these reflections with specific applications to your life.

## Topic 2: The Need for a Better Priesthood (Heb 7:11-22)

The author has just shown the greatness of Melchizedek. He has done so in order to show the greatness of Jesus as our High Priest. It is the blood of Jesus that provides the perfect sacrifice for the purification of sin. This sacrifice provides a hope which anchors the soul through the storms of life (Heb 6:18-20). Because of the blood of Christ, the believer today can enter into the very presence of God to find mercy and grace in time of need.



Since the Levitical priesthood could not provide perfection for the believer, there was a need for something better. It is to this better priesthood that the author now turns. A change in priesthood required a change in law. Just as the former priesthood could not provide perfection, neither could the law make anything perfect. But Jesus institutes a new covenant through which the believer can be perfected; His blood provides a better hope for drawing near to God.

### Assignment

- Read Psalm 110.
- Read Hebrews 7:11-28 and the commentary on “Hebrews 7:11-28.”
- Read Isaiah 6:5-7.

### QUESTION 9

Think of those times when God felt distant to you. The psalms express such feelings of separation when the worshipper cries out to God but gets no reply. Take some time for meditation on Hebrews 7:11-19. Focus on the concepts of “perfection” and “drawing near to God.” Think of your own imperfections that are known only to you and to God. Does that leave you feeling unclean and unworthy—unfit to enter into God’s presence?



Write down your feelings of identification with Isaiah in your Life Notebook. The “better hope” (Heb 7:19) introduced through the new covenant is the solution for all of those aches of the human soul. This next section in Hebrews will provide commentary on Isaiah 6:7—the more you meditate on what Jesus has done, is doing, and can do for you, the more you will praise God.

### QUESTION 10

By “perfection” in Hebrews 7:11 the author reveals the possibility for every Christian to reach a point of perfection in their Christian walk. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 11

How does Jesus’ descent from the tribe of Judah relate to His qualification to serve as priest?

### QUESTION 12

In verses 15-17, the author of Hebrews focuses on the term \_\_\_\_\_ from Psalm 110:4 to show the superiority of Christ’s priesthood over the Levitical system under which high priests were removed from office by death.

### QUESTION 13

According to the author of Hebrews, the reason Jesus needed to come was because the former law was weak and totally useless, unable to bring perfection. *True or False?*

## Topic 3: Comparison of Two Priesthoods (Heb 7:23-28)

The author has already touched on a topic that will be discussed in much greater detail later. This is the fact that God's purpose was for the old covenant to be replaced by a new covenant. The old covenant was never meant to be permanent. God “overlooked such times of ignorance” (Acts 17:30) and “in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed” (Rom 3:25). The law was a “guardian until Christ” (Gal 3:23-25). It is little wonder that under such a passing administration the priests themselves would serve temporarily and, having fulfilled their mission, pass on the task to others. In Hebrews 7:20-28 the author continues a comparison of the Levitical priesthood and that of Jesus which is based on the order of Melchizedek.

### Assignment

- Study carefully Hebrews 7:20-28.
- Please read the commentary on “Hebrews 7:20-28” again before attempting to answer the questions.

### QUESTION 14

The point the author makes about God adding a “sworn affirmation” (oath) in establishing the order of Melchizedek is that the oath added a certainty to God’s Word. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 15

In the latter part of Hebrews 7, the author of Hebrews gives a beautiful picture of how Jesus’ intercessory work helps deliver sinners from an eternity in hell. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 16

All of the following facts give us a picture of the Levitical priesthood **except** which one?

- A. The first Levitical high priest was Aaron.
- B. The office of high priest was held for one year.
- C. There were eighty-three high priests from Aaron to the fall of the temple in AD 70.
- D. High priests held their office from appointment until death.

### QUESTION 17

What does the author mean when he says that Jesus’ intercessory work can “save completely” those who come to God through Him?

**QUESTION 18**

In his use of "saving completely" (Heb 7:25), which does the author have in mind "saving fully" or "saving permanently"?

**QUESTION 19**

The use of "perfection" in Hebrews 7:11 and the cognate term "made perfect" in Hebrews 7:28 is an example of the literary technique of \_\_\_\_\_ which marks off the unit dealing with the appointment of "a son" to the order of Melchizedek.

**QUESTION 20**

Hebrews 7:1-28 develops the superiority of Jesus as a High Priest of the order of Melchizedek. Compose a sermon outline on this unit and include it in your Life Notebook.

## Lesson 6 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

The Old Testament teaching about Melchizedek is found only in Genesis 14:18-20. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

All of the following are descriptions of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 except which one?

- A. He blessed Abraham.
- B. He was a king of Salem.
- C. His priesthood was eternal.
- D. He received tithes from Abraham.
- E. He was a priest of God.

### QUESTION 3

The name Melchizedek comes from Hebrew words meaning “king of peace.” *True or False?*

### QUESTION 4

Scholars have produced a variety of ideas concerning the identity of Melchizedek. According to the commentary, what may we conclude about his identity?

- A. He is Noah’s son, Shem
- B. He is a Canaanite priest
- C. He is the preincarnate Christ
- D. He is a real person and a type of Christ

### QUESTION 5

By “perfection” in Hebrews 7:11 the author reveals the possibility for every Christian to reach a point of perfection in their Christian walk. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

The point the author makes about God adding a “sworn affirmation” (oath) in establishing the order of Melchizedek is that the oath added a certainty to God’s Word. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 7

The author of Hebrews gives a beautiful picture of how Jesus’ intercessory work helps deliver sinners from an eternity in hell. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 8

All of the following facts give us a picture of the Levitical priesthood except which one?

- A. The first Levitical high priest was Aaron.
- B. The office of high priest was held for one year.
- C. There were eighty-three high priests from Aaron to the fall of the temple in AD 70.
- D. High priests held their office from appointment until death.

**QUESTION 9**

The use of “perfection” in Hebrews 7:11 and the cognate term “made perfect” in Hebrews 7:28 is an example of the literary device of *inclusio* which marks off the unit dealing with the appointment of “a son” to the order of Melchizedek. *True or False?*

**QUESTION 10**

The author of Hebrews focuses on the term “forever” from Psalm 110:4 to show the superiority of Christ’s priesthood over the Levitical system under which high priests were removed from office by death. *True or False?*



## Lesson 6 Answers to Questions

### QUESTION 1

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 1:1-4	Prologue
Hebrews 1:5-7:28	Superiority of Jesus as King and High Priest
Hebrews 8:1-10:39	Superiority of Jesus' priestly ministry
Hebrews 11:1-13:17	Responsibilities of life under the new covenant
Hebrews 13:18-25	Epilogue

**QUESTION 2:** *Your answer should be one of the following:*

Genesis 14:18-20, Gen 14:18-20, Genesis 14

### QUESTION 3

C. His priesthood was eternal. [The fact that the Davidic king to come (i.e., the Messiah) would have an eternal priesthood is revealed in Psalm 110, not in Genesis.]

**QUESTION 4:** False [The two words mean “king” and “righteousness.”]

### QUESTION 5

B. Melchizedek blessed Abraham.

E. Melchizedek received a tithe from Abraham.

### QUESTION 6

D. He is a real person and a type of Christ

**QUESTION 7:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

The author of Hebrews is speaking from the perspective of the Genesis narrative. In the narrative none of these are mentioned. So, from the picture given in Genesis, one could view Melchizedek in this way.

**QUESTION 8:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 9:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 10:** False

**QUESTION 11:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Your answer should include something about the fact that Jesus' priesthood did not depend on ancestral descent. Being of the tribe of Judah proves He would not even qualify for a position as high priest under the Levitical priesthood.

**QUESTION 12:** *Your answer should be one of the following:*

forever, eternal [This actually translates the Greek phrase *eis ton aiōna*, “unto the ages.”]

**QUESTION 13:** False [The Law (former command) was described as useless only in respect to its ability to perfect the worshipper for drawing near to God. As Dr. Tanner notes in the commentary, the Levitical sacrificial system “served a purpose, namely, to teach the concept of substitutionary sacrifice pointing forward to the work of Christ in His atonement for sins.”]

**QUESTION 14:** False [God's Word is absolutely certain because of His truthfulness and omnipotence. What the oath did was give additional force to the establishment of the Melchizedekan priesthood.]

**QUESTION 15:** False [The author will develop emphatically in chapters 9 and 10 that Jesus' death was the only payment for sin and is sufficient in itself.]

### QUESTION 16

B. The office of high priest was held for one year. [The Levitical high priests held the office for life.]

**QUESTION 17:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Your answer should mention saving those in need of help by the mercy and grace available at the heavenly throne (Heb 4:16). When facing trials and difficulties on the journey through life, the pilgrim needs deliverance. That deliverance will be completed when Christ brings salvation from this world that is under a curse. Presently the whole creation groans as it awaits redemption (Rom 8:19-

25). The final deliverance will include removal of all pain and death (Rev 21:4) and even removal of the curse (Rev 22:3).

**QUESTION 18:** Saving fully

**QUESTION 19:** *inclusio*

**QUESTION 20:** *Your answer*

## Lesson 6 Self Check Answers

**QUESTION 1:** False

**QUESTION 2**

C. His priesthood was eternal.

**QUESTION 3:** False

**QUESTION 4**

D. He is a real person and a type of Christ

**QUESTION 5:** False

**QUESTION 6:** False

**QUESTION 7:** False

**QUESTION 8**

B. The office of high priest was held for one year.

**QUESTION 9:** True

**QUESTION 10:** True



# Unit 3: The Superior Ministry and Sacrifice of Jesus (Heb 8:1–10:39)

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## Unit Introduction

The previous section of Hebrews focused on the person and high priesthood of Jesus, the Son. He alone was uniquely prepared to fulfill the promised new covenant. In these next three chapters, the focus will be on the ultimate sacrifice He made for sin and the relationship of that sacrifice to the new covenant.



In Lesson 7, you will learn about the limited nature of the Old Covenant. It was by design temporary and destined to be replaced. The promised new covenant was not new from God's perspective, seeing that it was foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34. It was to be a better covenant with a better mediator and a better ministry (Heb 8:1-9:15).

In Lesson 8, you will study the better sacrifice Christ offered and the better effect it had on the worshippers. That sacrifice was even offered in a better, heavenly sanctuary (Heb 9:16-28).

In Lesson 9, you will study the most severe of all the warnings in the epistle. The new covenant brought tremendous blessings and greater access to God. But, to whom much is given, much is required. Failure to acknowledge the appropriate responsibility under the new covenant leads to divine punishment and loss of reward (Heb 10:1-39).

## Unit Outline

Lesson 7: Comparison of the Prophesied New Covenant to the Old Covenant (Heb 8:1–9:15)

Lesson 8: The Perfect Sacrifice (Heb 9:16-28)

Lesson 9: The Fourth Warning (Heb 10:1-39)

# Lesson 7: Comparison of the Prophesied New Covenant to the Old Covenant (Heb 8:1–9:15)

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## Lesson Introduction

Paul plainly understood the temporary nature of the old covenant as evidenced by his question and answer: “Why then was the law given? It was added because of transgressions, until the arrival of the descendant to whom the promise had been made... Thus the law had become our guardian until Christ, so that we could be declared righteous by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (Gal 3:19; 3:24-25).

In Hebrews 8:1-9:15 we see the new order of things that no longer calls for a guardian. In the Greco-Roman world a guardian supervised the development of a child. When adulthood was achieved, the guardian was no longer needed. The old covenant was a guardian watching over God’s people until the promised Messiah should come (see Gal 3:16 and Gen 17:7). When Christ offered the sacrifice that became the basis of our justification by faith, the obsolete nature of the old covenant became clear. The covenant was not imperfect in and of itself. The fault was more with the people who failed to remain faithful to God and His covenant that had been given them at Mt. Sinai. This is shown in Hebrews 8:9. It is also stated in Hebrews 8:8 (the NET Bible translates “But showing its fault” for what would be better translated “But finding fault with them”).



## Lesson Outline

Topic 1: The Better Covenant (Heb 8:1-13)

The Better Tabernacle (Heb 8:1-5)

Topic 2: The Better Ministry Under the New Covenant (Heb 9:1-15)

Regulations for Worship Under the Old Covenant

Regulations for Worship Under the New Covenant

## Topic 1: The Better Covenant (Heb 8:1-13)

Here again we see why the epistle to the Hebrews is the epistle of better things. The Melchizedekian priesthood is better than the Levitical priesthood. Jesus is a better High Priest than were any of the high priests under the old covenant. Now the writer goes into greater detail explaining how this better covenant (Heb 7:22) was foretold and is indeed better.

The following section focuses on the better ministry under the new covenant. The ministry takes place in a better tabernacle. This tabernacle is the true tabernacle (Heb 8:2), set up by the Lord, not

man. It is heavenly (Heb 8:5) rather than earthly (Heb 9:1) and it is indeed a “greater and more perfect tent not made with hands” (Heb 9:11). Little wonder that such a better covenant would render the first one obsolete. Christ has fulfilled the law!



## The Better Tabernacle (Heb 8:1-5)

### Assignment

- Read Exodus 25. Notice the use of “pattern” (Ex 25:9; 25:40).
- Read Deuteronomy 4–5.
- Read Hebrews 8:1–10:39.
- Read the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 8:1–10:39.”

As you can see, the outline in the lesson varies slightly from that of the commentary. As mentioned previously, biblical scholars often differ on how they see the outline of the book. Our present lesson outline places Hebrews 9:1-15 with chapter 8. One reason for doing so is that Hebrews 8:6 and Hebrews 9:15 can be seen as an *inclusio*. Notice the themes of mediator, covenant, and promise in both verses. Remember that the original text had no chapter or verse divisions. Greek was written more in a style almost equivalent to paragraphs, in such a way that the English idea of a sentence does not find an exact correlation. Every translator who divides the text into sentences and paragraphs does so on the basis of interpretive decisions. This rarely affects the meaning in any appreciable way.

In Hebrews 8:6 we see that Jesus mediates a better covenant that is enacted on better promises. As if to complete the specific discussion of the mediator, the author brings back the idea that Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant and its accompanying promise of eternal inheritance in Hebrews 9:15.

### QUESTION 1

Section of passage	Section of passage	Section of passage
Theme of passage	Theme of passage	Theme of passage

Construct your own chart of Hebrews 8:1–10:39. Do not feel restricted by the outline of the commentary or of the lesson. As you construct your outline, think of how you will take the units of the text and form sermons based on the flow of the text.

### QUESTION 2

In Hebrews 8:1, the author summarizes all he has mentioned so far in one main point, which is?

- The messianic kingdom of Jesus
- Jesus’ role as King
- Christ’s role as High Priest
- The reign of Jesus from His place at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven

### QUESTION 3

In the gospel of John, John seemed to use the concept of “true” to contrast something new with that which was found in the Old Testament. “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ” (Jn 1:17). The Israelites ate the manna, bread from heaven, in the wilderness, but Jesus is the “true bread from heaven” (Jn 6:32). The author of Hebrews makes a similar comparison. Christ entered the “true tabernacle” (Heb 8:2) and the “true sanctuary” (Heb 9:24) in contrast to the copy and shadow under the old covenant. Which of the following descriptions are used in Hebrews to show the superiority of the tabernacle in which the new covenant sacrifice was offered? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. The tabernacle under the old covenant was temporary and built by man.
- B. The true tabernacle exists in heaven, while the former tabernacle was only earthly.
- C. The former tabernacle pictured legalism and man’s effort.
- D. The former tabernacle was built by man; the true tabernacle was set up by the Lord himself.
- E. The earthly tabernacle was only a copy of the heavenly tabernacle.

### QUESTION 4

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah prophesied the specific timing of a new covenant which would be put into effect at the death of Messiah. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

The old covenant was made specifically with the spiritual seed of Abraham. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

Although the new covenant was inaugurated at the cross, it is best to see it as being \_\_\_\_\_ fulfilled since there are certain aspects awaiting fulfillment.

### QUESTION 7

Which of the following are descriptions of the old covenant in Hebrews 8? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. Inadequate
- B. Obsolete
- C. Remains in effect but was supplemented by the new covenant
- D. Was designed to be replaced

### QUESTION 8

What specific passage from the Old Testament did the author of Hebrews quote concerning a new covenant?

### QUESTION 9

Why was the time of Jeremiah’s prophecy about a new covenant significant?



## Topic 2: The Better Ministry Under the New Covenant (Heb 9:1-15)



Living in a world torn by war, disease, poverty, and endless sources of suffering and pain, it is easy to forget the beauty of God’s design for mankind. God placed man and woman here on this beautiful earth to rule over His kingdom (Gen 1:26). Man’s sin ended his qualification to serve as God’s governor over the earth (Gen 3:14-19). What we currently see is a world groaning as it awaits redemption—deliverance from the curse (Rom 8:18-22).

The good news is that this corrupted state is temporary. A time of glory lies ahead (Rom 8:18) when King Jesus will rule over creation (Ps 2), and His faithful subjects will share in the original role God had from them as His vice-regents (Ps 8). This is the future world about which the author of Hebrews writes (Heb 2:5). The redemption from the curse has already been purchased (Heb 9:12). Although Christ’s sacrifice is the basis for that future day of glory, it is also the basis for the present “new order” (Heb 9:10) under which worshippers are being prepared for that day of glory (Heb 2:10). It is this new order of worship that the author now explains as part of the new covenant.

### Regulations for Worship Under the Old Covenant

#### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 9:1-10 and the commentary on “Hebrews 9:1-10.”
- Read Leviticus 16 and Exodus 25–30.



#### QUESTION 10

The two aspects of worship under the old covenant that the author focuses on are (1) regulations for worship and (2) the earthly sanctuary. *True or False?*

#### QUESTION 11

Match each article from the tabernacle with its appropriate typological significance.

<i>Article</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Lampstand	Prayers of the saints
Oil for the lamp	God’s provision for spiritual life
Loaves of bread	Purpose of God’s people in the world
Alter of incense	Holy Spirit

## QUESTION 12

According to Hebrews 9:4, the ark of the covenant contained all except which of the following?

- A. Golden urn containing manna
- B. Aaron's rod that budded
- C. Moses' staff
- D. The stone tablets of the covenant

## QUESTION 13

Scholars have long puzzled over Hebrews 9:3-4. In Exodus 30:6 and Leviticus 16:12-13 the small altar for burning sweet incense is clearly placed in the first or outer tent. It stood just in front of the curtain; the ark of the covenant stood nearby on the opposite side of the curtain, in the second or inner tent. Many translations imply that the altar of incense was in the Holy of Holies (Heb 9:4). Which solution to this problem is given in the commentary?

- A. The reference is not to the altar of incense but the golden censer for transporting coals.
- B. The author is thinking in terms of function rather than place.
- C. The author just says the Holy of Holies "had" the altar, not that the altar was located there.
- D. The author of Hebrews was probably quoting from a faulty source.

Another solution to the problem focuses on the word "contained" in Hebrews 9:4. The author states that the second tent "had" (Gk *echousa*) the altar. He does not say precisely that the altar was located within the inner tent. The situation pictured, according to this view, is the Day of Atonement when the curtain was drawn to allow the incense smoke to fill the Holy of Holies. The smoke, symbolizing the prayers of the saints, was closely associated with the throne room of God. Here, the author may simply have been thinking of the close functional relationship between the altar of God's presence and the prayers of the saints. In that sense, the altar of incense belonged to the Holy of Holies. The inner tent "had" the altar and its fragrant smoke.

## QUESTION 14

Do you agree with the commentary on the solution to this problem? Check any other references you have available. Study the supporting evidence carefully. Record in your Life Notebook your solution and how you came to that conclusion.

## QUESTION 15

In addition to the evidence given in the commentary, there are other factors that would support taking the reference in Hebrews 9:4 as the golden censer rather than the altar. The Greek text describes the object (*thumiatērion*) as "made of gold" (*chrousoun*) but the ark of the covenant as "covered over all around with gold" (*perikekalummenēn pantothen chrusiōi*). According to Exodus 30:3, the altar of incense was not made of gold, but was covered with gold. The author's focus on the Day of Atonement refers to the one day of the year when the censer full of coals was taken into the Holy of Holies, thus making his description very specific and accurate. By using the Latin term for censer, *turibulum*, Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin in the fourth century, understood that the censer was being referenced. Does this additional information change or reinforce your previous decision? Record your thoughts in your Life Notebook.

## QUESTION 16

In your own words, what does it mean that the old covenant sacrifices “could not perfect the conscience of the worshiper” (Heb 9:9)?

## QUESTION 17

Meditate on the awesome privilege and responsibility of prayer. In prayer we enter into God’s very presence; and through prayer we uphold others in their time of need. Prayer is one way—and certainly one of the most important ways—we fulfill our priestly role. Write your thoughts down in your Life Notebook.

## Regulations for Worship Under the New Covenant

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 9:11-15.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 9:11-15.”

## QUESTION 18

Which of the following show that the priestly ministry of Christ is superior to that of the old covenant? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. Christ’s payment was permanent in that it was “once for all.”
- B. Christ entered into heaven itself rather than an earthly tabernacle.
- C. Christ offered His own blood based on a sinless life.
- D. Christ’s sacrifice can purify the conscience of the worshipper.

## QUESTION 19

The eternal inheritance mentioned in Hebrews 9:15 is unconditional. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 20

Which of the following is **not** one of the “eternal” things mentioned in Hebrews 9:11-15?

- A. Eternal inheritance
- B. Eternal covenant
- C. Eternal redemption
- D. Eternal Spirit

## QUESTION 21

Take a few minutes to read Hebrews 8:1–9:15 with a focus on the privileges of new covenant worshippers. Now take about ten minutes and meditate on how these truths can have practical application in your own prayer and worship. Record your thoughts in your Life Notebook.

## Lesson 7 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

The temporary purpose of the old covenant and its sacrificial system was a mystery in the Old Testament awaiting revelation in the New Testament. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

What is the Old Testament text the author of Hebrews used to show God's intention for a new covenant?

- A. Genesis 14:1-20
- B. Psalm 2
- C. Psalm 110
- D. Jeremiah 31:31-34
- E. Genesis 15:1-21

### QUESTION 3

The main topic of Hebrews 1-7 is that of Christ's high priesthood. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 4

Although the new covenant was inaugurated at the cross, it is best to see it as being progressively fulfilled, since there are certain aspects awaiting fulfillment. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

The two primary aspects of the old covenant system of worship were the regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

The commentary solution to the problem of Hebrews 9:4, the golden altar of incense in the Holy of Holies, is to take the reference to be of the censer used to transport the coals from the altar into the Holy of Holies. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 7

Which one of the following is not a description of the old covenant given in Hebrews 8?

- A. Inadequate
- B. Obsolete
- C. Remains in effect but was supplemented by the new covenant
- D. Was designed to be replaced

### QUESTION 8

Which of the following is not one of the ways the priestly ministry of Christ is shown to be superior to that of the old covenant?

- A. Christ's payment was permanent in that it was "once for all."
- B. Christ entered into heaven itself rather than an earthly tabernacle.
- C. Christ's sacrifice was voluntary, but old covenant worship was required.
- D. Christ offered His own blood based on a sinless life.
- E. Christ's sacrifice can purify the conscience of the worshipper.

**QUESTION 9**

Obtaining the eternal inheritance mentioned in Hebrews 9:15 is at the heart of what it means to “enter into his rest.” *True or False?*

**QUESTION 10**

The eternal inheritance mentioned in Hebrews 9:15 is clearly unconditional. *True or False?*

## Lesson 7 Answers to Questions

### QUESTION 2

C. Christ's role as High Priest [See commentary on Heb 8:1.]

### QUESTION 3

- A. The tabernacle under the old covenant was temporary and built by man.
- B. The true tabernacle exists in heaven, while the former tabernacle was only earthly.
- D. The former tabernacle was built by man; the true tabernacle was set up by the Lord himself.
- E. The earthly tabernacle was only a copy of the heavenly tabernacle.

[See commentary on Heb 8:2 and 8:5.]

**QUESTION 4:** False [The Old Testament never gave the time when a new covenant would replace the first covenant.]

**QUESTION 5:** False [The old covenant was made with the nation of Israel (Heb 8:9). See commentary on Heb 8:7-12.]

**QUESTION 6:** progressively [See commentary on Heb 8:7-12, paragraph three.]

### QUESTION 7

- A. Inadequate
- B. Obsolete
- D. Was designed to be replaced

**QUESTION 8:** *Your answer should be one of the following:*

Jeremiah 31:31-34, Jer 31:31-34

**QUESTION 9:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

The date of 586 BC was significant because the nation of Israel was about to be led into captivity in Babylon. The passage in Jeremiah shows that the fault was with the people—not the Covenant itself.

**QUESTION 10:** True [See Hebrews 9:1.]

### QUESTION 11

<i>Article</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Lampstand	Purpose of God's people in the world
Oil for the lamp	Holy Spirit
Loaves of bread	God's provision for spiritual life
Alter of incense	Prayers of the saints

[See commentary on Heb 9:2-3.]

### QUESTION 12

C. Moses' staff

### QUESTION 13

A. The reference is not to the altar of incense but the golden censer for transporting coals. [See commentary on Heb 9:4-5.]

**QUESTION 14:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 15:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 16:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Your answer should include something about the yearly repetition of sacrifices meant that no one could have confidence that his sin had been dealt with adequately. [See commentary on Heb 9:8-10.]

**QUESTION 17:** *Your answer*

### QUESTION 18

- A. Christ's payment was permanent in that it was "once for all."
- B. Christ entered into heaven itself rather than an earthly tabernacle.
- C. Christ offered His own blood based on a sinless life.
- D. Christ's sacrifice can purify the conscience of the worshipper.

**QUESTION 19:** False

**QUESTION 20**

B. Eternal covenant

**QUESTION 21:** *Your answer*

## Lesson 7 Self Check Answers

**QUESTION 1:** False

**QUESTION 2**

D. Jeremiah 31:31-34

**QUESTION 3:** True

**QUESTION 4:** True

**QUESTION 5:** True

**QUESTION 6:** True

**QUESTION 7**

C. Remains in effect but was supplemented by the new covenant

**QUESTION 8**

C. Christ's sacrifice was voluntary, but old covenant worship was required.

**QUESTION 9:** True

**QUESTION 10:** False



# Lesson 8: The Perfect Sacrifice (Heb 9:16-28)

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## Lesson Introduction



The author of Hebrews shows us more clearly than any other writer of Scripture that, in its ultimate intent, the entire Old Testament is messianic. The preceding section of the epistle revealed rich typology based on the tabernacle, furnishings, and regulations for worship under the old covenant. Now he takes the typology a step further. The shedding of blood reflected the drastic nature of sin. Death was required as payment for the terrible breach of relationship between man and God. From the skins God used to cover Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21) to the goat sacrificed as the sin offering on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:15), a life had to be sacrificed to cover the terrible consequences of sin.

John the Baptist summarized the essence of Hebrews 8:1-10:39 with one simple declaration: “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). We might look at this section of Hebrews as a commentary on that statement by John. The old covenant sacrifices served a purpose, but Jesus is a better sacrifice and His sacrifice was made to inaugurate a better covenant. Alluding to Isaiah 53:12, the author notes that “Christ was offered once to *bear the sins of many*” (Heb 9:28, emphasis added). When Christ offered that ultimate sacrifice, He also made possible the final salvation through which His faithful followers would share with Him in His future rule.

In this lesson you will study the role of blood in inaugurating both the old and new covenants.

## Lesson Outline

Topic 1: Inauguration of the Old Covenant (Heb 9:16-22)

Wills and Covenants

Importance of Blood Under the Old Covenant

Topic 2: Inauguration of the New Covenant (Heb 9:23-28)

Superiority of Christ’s Sacrifice

The Final Salvation Available to the Faithful

## Topic 1: Inauguration of the Old Covenant (Heb 9:16-22)

The superiority of the new covenant over the old has been touched on in several ways. The high priesthood of the old covenant was inferior to that of the new covenant. The old covenant was temporary and incomplete. The old covenant had a sanctuary that was only a copy of the true, heavenly sanctuary. The effects on the worshipper were inferior under the old covenant.

Now the author provides more detail on the better sacrifice mentioned in Hebrews 9:12. Under the old covenant, sacrifices provided ritual purity. The superiority of the sacrifice under the new covenant is implied when the author writes, “how much more” (Heb 9:14). The sacrifice of Christ’s “own blood” was indeed better.

The author does not give explicit information as to why a sanctuary in heaven would need to be cleansed. Some have thought it was necessitated by the fact that Satan had rebelled in heaven and had thus left an impurity that had to be cleansed. Another possibility is to take the verb translated “cleansed” (*katharizō*) to mean “to consecrate” with a reference to the inaugural sacrifice which consecrated the heavenly sanctuary. What the text of Hebrews does make clear is that such a cleansing was required, and this cleansing required “better sacrifices” (Heb 9:23). The plural “sacrifices” may seem a bit strange but is probably just used by analogy to the old covenant situation. The following context will leave no question at all about the fact that only one sacrifice was needed under the new covenant. The sacrifice of Christ’s blood was far superior to anything under the old covenant. It was entirely sufficient to inaugurate the new covenant and make every provision needed for the ultimate inheritance, salvation in the world to come.



## Wills and Covenants

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 9:16-17.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 9:16-17.”

### QUESTION 1

This Greek word *diathēkē* can mean a covenant, an agreement or contract, between two or more parties, or it can mean a will, the legal declaration of a person’s desire for the disposition of his property after death. The only difference between a covenant and a will is that only in the case of a will is death required. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

The superiority of the new covenant is shown in that, unlike the old covenant, blood was required for the forgiveness of sin. *True or False?*

Few passages of Scripture have resulted in such a huge quantity of debate and discussion as Hebrews 9:16-17. At issue is the meaning of the Greek word *diathēkē*. In some Bibles, the word is variably translated as “covenant” or “will,” while in others only “covenant” is used. Different scholars have

taken *diathēkē* to mean (1) covenant in every biblical instance, (2) will in every biblical instance, or (3) either covenant or will, depending on the context.

Admittedly, most scholars and English translations see a wordplay going on in which *diathēkē* is used in the same context to mean two different legal procedures. Yet a seminal article by John J. Hughes (“Hebrews ix 15ff. and Galatians iii 15ff.: A Study in Covenant Practice and Procedure,” *Novum Testamentum* 21[1979] 27-96) gives strongly convincing evidence that *diathēkē* should be translated consistently as covenant. A synopsis of the conclusions is given by William L. Lane in the *Word Biblical Commentary* “Hebrews 9-13,” vol. 47B, Word, Books 1991. Here is a succinct summation of his conclusion: “A recent review of this argument has demonstrated that it is impossible to translate the original word in vv. 16-17 as “will” or “testament” and to harmonize the writer’s statements with any known form of Hellenistic, Egyptian, or Roman legal practice. There is no evidence in classical or papyriological sources to substantiate that a will or testament was legally valid only when the testator died. A will became operative as soon as it was properly drafted, witnessed, and notarized. Moreover, inheritance did not occur only after the death of the testator, since it was common legal practice for an inheritance, as parental distribution *inter vivos* (“among the survivors”), to take place before death” (p. 231).

Of significance in this argument is the use in Hebrews 9:17 of the plural *nekrois*, Greek for “dead ones.” Although this is variously translated as “men,” “someone,” and “only at death,” the reference is almost certainly, in this context, to the dead animals slain at the ratification of a covenant (Gen 15:9-21). A covenant was confirmed upon the death of sacrificial victims that represented those making the covenant. When God made the covenant with Abraham, he was in effect saying, “If I do not keep the terms of this covenant, may what has happened to these animals happen to me.” Therefore Hebrews 9:16 refers to the sacrificial animals when it says, “there was a necessity of death being brought forward.” The death of the animals was symbolic of the oath under which the ratifier(s) of a covenant were placing himself/themselves.

### QUESTION 3

Which of the following have been ways of understanding the biblical term *diathēkē* in scholarly discussions? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. The word consistently means “will.”
- B. The word consistently means “covenant.”
- C. The word means “will” in some instances and “covenant” in others.
- D. None of the above

## Importance of Blood Under the Old Covenant

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 9:18-22.
- Read Exodus 24.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 9:18-22.”

The author seems to use both extra-biblical and biblical information to build his argument on the importance of blood to the old covenant. There are no specific references in the Old Testament to the use of goat’s blood, scarlet wool and hyssop, or the sprinkling of the book at the inauguration of the old covenant (although Ex 24:8 does clearly indicate that the blood was sprinkled on the people). It is probable that these facts were not recorded in Scripture but were kept accurately preserved through

either the oral or written traditions of the Hebrews. The fact that Scripture was written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21) protected the authors from using false information.

The accuracy of the information is further verified by the amazing attention to detail displayed by the author of Hebrews. In Hebrews 9:22 he notes “according to the law almost everything was purified with blood.” Thus he is aware of the exception in the case of the poor seen in Leviticus 5:11-13. For the very poor, the sin offering could be made with fine wheat flour. The statement that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” sums up the overall picture of the sacrificial system. The exceptional case was already acknowledged by his earlier “almost.”

#### **QUESTION 4**

The superiority of the new covenant is shown in the fact that it, unlike the old covenant, required a death for its inauguration. *True or False?*

#### **QUESTION 5**

The inauguration of the old covenant is found in which Old Testament passage?

- A. Psalm 2
- B. Exodus 24
- C. Genesis 15
- D. Psalm 8

## **Topic 2: Inauguration of the New Covenant (Heb 9:23-28)**

We see in this section of the epistle a continuation of the theme that Jesus is better. Specifically we see that the better tabernacle required a better sacrifice. The object of the cleansing, the sacrifice that provided the cleansing, and the effects of the cleansing were all superior to their types under the old covenant. The sacrifice itself was particularly superior in the duration of its effects—it was indeed “once for all.”

Again we see how carefully the author has given the reader a foretaste of things to come through this epistle. In Hebrews 1:3, it was the Son who “accomplished cleansing for sins.” This point has not been forgotten. The primary work of Jesus as High Priest is in focus in this next section, for it is Christ who came “to put away sin” (Heb 9:26) and “to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:28). With amazing precision, the prediction of the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 found its fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah. The Servant that Isaiah saw “lifted up the sins of many” (Isa 53:12). Through this one unique atoning sacrifice the problem of man’s judgment found its cure. Christ destroyed the “certificate of indebtedness” (Col 2:14) and provided for the day when salvation will be complete and the curse will be no more (Rev 22:3).

### **Superiority of Christ’s Sacrifice**

#### **Assignment**

- Read Isaiah 53.
- Read Hebrews 9:23-26 and the “Commentary on Hebrews 9:23-26.”

### QUESTION 6

Which of the following reasons are given in Hebrews 9:23-26 to show Christ's sacrifice was better than those under the old covenant? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. His once for all sacrifice was better than the yearly sacrifices offered under the old covenant.
- B. Christ entered heaven itself into the very presence of God.
- C. Christ offered His own blood rather than the blood of animals.
- D. Christ's sacrifice was based on the reliable word of prophecy.

### QUESTION 7

According to Hebrews 9:26, what is the purpose of Christ's first coming into the world?

## The Final Salvation Available to the Faithful

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 9:27-28.
- Read the commentary on "Hebrews 9:27-28."

### QUESTION 8

Part of the secret to faithfully enduring in the Christian life is to be eagerly awaiting the return of our Lord Jesus. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 9

The salvation mentioned in Hebrews 9:28 refers to what?

Notice that this salvation is not something already possessed by believers, but it refers to something brought by Christ in the future. It is not brought to everyone who has trusted Christ but to those who eagerly await Him, i.e., those who are faithfully serving Him.

### QUESTION 10

Conduct a word study of the Greek word *apekdechomai* "eagerly await." It is used in Hebrews 9:28 of those who are looking ahead to the second coming of the Lord. The other occurrences are: Romans 8:19; 8:23; 8:25; 1 Corinthians 1:7; Galatians 5:5; Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 3:20. All of these references, with one exception, are to believers. Take time to reflect on what this word is saying about the lives of believers. Write down in your Life Notebook applications to your own life.

**QUESTION 11**

Take a few moments to examine your own life. In what ways and how often would you characterize your thoughts as reflecting an attitude of “eagerly awaiting” the return of Christ? Record these in your Life Notebook. Try to add some ways you could give self-encouragement to increase this characteristic.

**QUESTION 12**

One way the structure of this epistle has been viewed is to see two major sections, each including exposition and exhortation: (1) God’s King-Son, Hebrews 1:5-4:16; (2) God’s Priest-Son, Hebrews 5:1-10:39. Based on your study thus far, construct a basic outline of the epistle through chapter 10, giving no more than five major divisions.

**QUESTION 13**

The commentary describes the salvation of Hebrews 9:28 as conditional. What does that mean to you?

## Lesson 8 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

According to the course commentary, the Greek word *diathēkē* consistently means “covenant” in the book of Hebrews.” *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

Which of the following was **not** specifically stated in Hebrews 9:23-26 as part of the rationale for Christ’s sacrifice being better than the old covenant sacrifices?

- A. It was based on a prophetic word from God.
- B. It was offered in heaven in the very presence of God.
- C. It involved the blood of the sinless Son of God rather than the blood of an animal.
- D. It was offered only once rather than repeated year after year, thus proving its effectiveness.

### QUESTION 3

The inauguration of the old covenant and the new covenant were different in that the old covenant required no death to enact it, whereas the new covenant required the death of Christ Himself. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 4

The author of Hebrews apparently used extra-biblical sources to give additional information about the process of the inauguration of the old covenant. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

The true sanctuary into which Christ entered with His blood was the actual sanctuary on which the old covenant sanctuary design was based. Refer to Hebrews 9:23-24. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

All of the following are descriptions of the salvation mentioned in Hebrews 9:28 except which one?

- A. It is eschatological.
- B. It is conditional.
- C. It is available to every believer.
- D. It is given equally to everyone who is a believer.
- E. It is given according to the degree that believers faithfully endure in their Christian walk.

### QUESTION 7

The author of Hebrews quoted from Genesis 15 because that passage recorded the inauguration of the old covenant. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 8

When the author of Hebrews stated “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins,” he was teaching the truth that every sacrifice in the Old Testament required the shedding of animal blood. *True or False?*

**QUESTION 9**

As seen in Hebrews 9, what was the primary act of Christ in His role as High Priest?

- A. His cleansing of the heavenly tabernacle
- B. His resurrection
- C. His sitting down at the right hand of the throne of glory
- D. His atoning work on the cross by which He took away the sin of the world

**QUESTION 10**

One possible reason the sanctuary in heaven had to be cleansed was because of the purity lost due to the rebellion of Satan. *True or False?*



## Lesson 8 Answers to Questions

**QUESTION 1:** False

**QUESTION 2:** False

**QUESTION 3**

- A. The word consistently means “will.”
- B. The word consistently means “covenant.”
- C. The word means “will” in some instances and “covenant” in others.

**QUESTION 4:** False [In the Ancient Near East covenants were ratified by the death of sacrificial animals. The dividing of animal carcasses led to the phrase “to cut a covenant.” See commentary on Heb 9:22.]

**QUESTION 5**

- B. Exodus 24

**QUESTION 6**

- A. His once for all sacrifice was better than the yearly sacrifices offered under the old covenant.
- B. Christ entered heaven itself into the very presence of God.
- C. Christ offered His own blood rather than the blood of animals.

**QUESTION 7:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Christ made the payment for sin. In the words of the NET Bible, He came “to put away sin.”

**QUESTION 8:** True [See commentary on Heb 9:27-28.]

**QUESTION 9:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Your answer should include something about sharing in the rule of Christ over His kingdom. Review the commentary on Hebrews 9:27-28 if your response did not include this information.

**QUESTION 10:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 11:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 12:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 13:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

The nature of this salvation is part of the believer’s reward when Christ returns. Since Christians have varying degrees of faithfulness in their obedience to Christ, there will be varying degrees of reward. Obedience depends on a choice each of us makes. Only those who choose to walk in faith and obedience will receive the rewards, just as the children of Israel could not take possession of the Promised Land without faith and obedience.

## Lesson 8 Self Check Answers

**QUESTION 1:** False

**QUESTION 2**

A. It was based on a prophetic word from God.

**QUESTION 3:** False

**QUESTION 4:** True

**QUESTION 5:** True

**QUESTION 6**

D. It is given equally to everyone who is a believer.

**QUESTION 7:** False

**QUESTION 8:** False

**QUESTION 9**

D. His atoning work on the cross by which He took away the sin of the world

**QUESTION 10:** True

# Lesson 9: The Fourth Warning (Heb 10:1-39)

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## Lesson Introduction

Once again we see this author's love for dropping hints of topics that he plans to subsequently address. Already in Hebrews 9:9, he has said that the old covenant sacrifices could not perfect the conscience of the worshipper. The better sacrifice offered by Christ is able to purify the conscience "from dead works to worship the living God" (Heb 9:14). In the following section we find a much more detailed expression of the purifying power of the new covenant sacrifice. The blood of Christ can indeed perfect the worshipper coming to God. And better yet is the fact that this perfected status is "for all time" (Heb 10:14).

New covenant worshippers have been entrusted with much more spiritual enlightenment and privilege than worshippers under the old covenant. The principle of Luke 12:48, "from everyone who has been given much, much will be required, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be asked" seems to be exemplified in the following warning section. Hence, in response to the greater effects on worshippers under the new covenant, the most severe warning of the epistle is delivered. The author first gives three exhortations in light of the greater access into the presence of God that has been achieved by our great Priest. Yet even after the most severe warning the author has reserved some words of encouragement as he expresses strong confidence in his readers.



In this lesson you will study the most severe of the five warnings in Hebrews.

## Lesson Outline

Topic 1: The Perfected Worshippers (Heb 10:1-18)

The Inability of the Old Covenant

The Prophetic Anticipation of a Replacement of the Sacrifices

The Completed Offering and Perfected Worshippers

Topic 2: The Fourth Warning (Heb 10:19-39)

Three Exhortations

Warning of Severe Judgment for Enmity Toward God

Expression of Strong Confidence in the Readers

## Topic 1: The Perfected Worshippers (Heb 10:1-18)

The repetition built into the old covenant sacrificial system had its purpose. The very nature of sacrificing animal blood had a didactic design. The gory sight of cutting the throats of innocent animals was vivid testimony to the deadly nature of sin. As the worshipper meditated on the loss of life he must have realized that sin had left its effects even on the innocent in this world. Just as a man's sin could affect his family or the nation, so the presence of rebellion against God had brought

the necessity of death to innocent animals. If one sacrifice did not have this effect on the worshipper, surely the repeated nature of sacrifices would. Day after day the priests were at work slaying animals, shedding blood. Year after year after year the Day of Atonement proclaimed the deadly nature of sin.

Yet it was this very repetition that showed the weakness in the old covenant system. The same sacrifices had to be offered over and over again. There was never a point of finality that said, “The sin problem has been solved, Hallelujah!” Instead there were the daily and yearly reminders that something was not complete. Sin might be covered over, but there was not yet sufficient atonement to say that the price had been totally paid. The author of Hebrews finds in the Psalms anticipation of the offering that would indeed purify the worshipper once for all.

## The Inability of the Old Covenant

### Assignment

- This would be a good time in your study to back up and look at the big picture. Set aside a block of time to read through this epistle at one sitting. Using all you have learned up to this point, try to put yourself in the shoes of one of the original readers.
- Read carefully Hebrews 10:1-4.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 10:1-4.”

### QUESTION 1

One way the structure of this epistle has been viewed is to see two major sections of exposition and exhortation: (1) God’s King-Son, Hebrews 1:5-4:16; (2) God’s Priest-Son, Hebrews 5:1-10:39. Match the passages below with an outline of Hebrews that would have only five major divisions.

<i>Passages</i>	<i>Outline</i>
Hebrews 1:1-4	God’s Priest-Son
Hebrews 1:5-4:16	Epilogue
Hebrews 5:1-10:39	Living out the new covenant life
Hebrews 11:1-13:17	Prologue
Hebrews 13:18-25	God’s King-Son

### QUESTION 2

Which annual ritual typified Christ’s sacrificial blood more than any other?

- The Feast of Purim
- The Feast of Weeks
- The Day of Atonement
- The presentation of the temple tax

### QUESTION 3

Which of the following show the inferiority of the old covenant to the new covenant? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. The Day of Atonement was repeated year after year.
- B. The Levitical sacrifices were not able to perfect the consciences of worshippers.
- C. The law was only a shadow of the reality to come.
- D. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins.

### QUESTION 4

When the author refers to the inability of the law to make perfect those who come to worship, he is thinking about the inability of the Levitical sacrifices to decisively help the conscience of the worshipper. *True or False?*

## The Prophetic Anticipation of the Replacement of the Sacrifices

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 10:5-14.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 10:5-14.”

### QUESTION 5

When the Greek LXX translated the Hebrew text of Psalm 40 “ears you have dug for me” with the phrase “a body you have prepared for me,” the meaning in both instances was that the speaker was ready to hear God’s Word and do His will. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

In Hebrews 10:5, the writer uses the word \_\_\_\_\_ to make application of this Old Testament passage to the incarnation of Christ and His total obedience to God’s will.

### QUESTION 7

In Hebrews 10:12, we see the use of Psalm 110 (the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament) once again. The point made is that after Christ had made the final sacrifice for sins, He “sat down.” Why did the author note this?

- A. It shows that Christ had entered the Sabbath rest.
- B. It pictured Christ as the ruler of the messianic kingdom.
- C. Whereas old covenant priests continually stood when performing their priestly duties, the picture of one sitting anticipated a sacrifice that was final and sufficient for perfecting worshippers.
- D. Because Melchizedek sat down after he accepted tithes from Abraham

## The Completed Offering and Perfected Worshippers

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 10:15-18.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 10:15-18.”

### QUESTION 8

The author returns to Jeremiah 31 to make a closing point about the forgiveness of sins implied in the statement, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no longer.” Since the sins are brought up “no longer” the conclusion is that there is “no longer” (Heb 10:18) any further offering to be made for sin. As the commentary notes, “This is the confirming argument that the sacrifice of Christ is the once and for all payment of our sins.” Set aside fifteen minutes to meditate on the ways this truth should affect your outlook on life and your relationship with God. Write down your thoughts in your Life Notebook. Can you list some practical changes this will make in your life?

### QUESTION 9

Hebrews 10:1-18 is actually using a series of proof-texts from the Old Testament that argue for the once for all nature and superiority of Christ’s sacrifice. (A proof-text is a verse from Scripture that is cited to support a particular teaching or doctrinal position.) *True or False?*

## Topic 2: The Fourth Warning (Heb 10:19-39)

As indicated earlier, the entire “message of exhortation” (Heb 13:22) of Hebrews is based on what God has said. Because God has indeed spoken, the message coming from Him has great authority. To fail to listen invites great peril (Heb 1:1-2). The fourth warning in Hebrews is preceded by a series of exhortations. But notice how even these exhortations follow closely the example of Christ who said, “Here I am: I have come to do your will” (Heb 10:9). It is once again the fact that God speaks and God reveals His will that makes our obedience so important. To disregard instructions from other humans can be serious at times. To disregard a message from God is the height of arrogance and leads to certain judgment.



The fact that God has spoken through His Son brings out the importance of our obedience to Him. It also reveals the importance of our dependence on Him in light of the benefits we receive as worshippers of the new covenant. Under the new covenant every believer has continual, personal, and free access into the very throne room of God. Because we have a great High Priest who is sympathetic to our requests, needs and failures, we can come boldly into His presence. To not take advantage of the tremendous privileges is sheer folly. To turn away from such a gracious God brings sure and certain judgment.

### Three Exhortations

#### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 10:19-25.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 10:19-25.”

### **QUESTION 10**

The commentary offers two purposes for the curtain between the outer and inner tents: (1) It hid the \_\_\_\_\_ glory of God; and (2) it gave the high priest access to the presence of God.

### **QUESTION 11**

Which of the following are the exhortations given in Hebrews 10:19-25? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. Spur one another on to love and good works.
- B. Focus on the inheritance of salvation to be brought when Jesus returns.
- C. Hold unwaveringly to the hope we confess.
- D. Draw near to God with a sincere heart and assurance of faith.

### **QUESTION 12**

Construct a sermon outline on Hebrews 10:19-22. After you have written down the outline, spend some time reflecting on how vital these exhortations are in your local Christian community. Record in your Life Notebook ways you can apply these truths in your own life and how you can encourage others to be more faithful in these areas.

## **Warning of Severe Judgment for Enmity Toward God**

### **Assignment**

- Read Hebrews 10:26-31.
- Read Deuteronomy 32.
- Read the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 10:26-31.”

### **QUESTION 13**

In your own words, express the specific danger expressed in this warning.

Other ways of describing the particular sin might be seen in this context. In verse 22, the author exhorts the audience to draw near (probably thinking of coming near to God for worship) with a full assurance of faith. The Christian who lives doubting at times and trusting God at other times shows a weak faith. Such faith fails to recognize the terrible price Jesus paid to open the life of worship available to us as believers. In verse 23, the author exhorts the believers to hold on to their confession of hope. Hope is another description of a life of faith. If we really do trust the promises of God, we can only live our lives filled with hope about the future. Doing less than this is certainly an affront to the faithfulness of God and is indeed a sin worthy of punishment.

### QUESTION 14

Which of the following reasons support the view that believers are addressed in the warning? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. The recipients are addressed as “brothers and sisters.”
- B. The “we” in Hebrews 10:26 must be the same as those addressed in the previous exhortations.
- C. They are described as having received “the knowledge of the truth.”
- D. The one guilty of the sin is one who has been “made holy” by the blood of the covenant.
- E. The judgment of God is described as that against “His people.”

### QUESTION 15

The phrase “received the knowledge of the truth” (Heb 10:26) appears to be a technical expression in the New Testament for those who are truly believers in Christ. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 16

Which of the following is **not** one of the three ways the author describes new covenant rebellion?

- A. Rejects God’s plan of salvation
- B. Treats as common the blood of Christ which sanctified him
- C. Insults the Spirit of grace
- D. Shows contempt for the Son of God

### QUESTION 17

Carefully reread the commentary section on Hebrews 10:30-31. State whether you believe that the judgment for failing to heed the warning is against believers or unbelievers. Be sure to give reasons from the text to support your view. Give your analysis of how well you think Dr. Tanner has supported his position in the commentary.

## Expression of Strong Confidence in the Readers

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 10:32-39.
- Read the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 10:32-39.”

### QUESTION 18

The author of Hebrews uses quotations from Deuteronomy 32 to show that God does not execute judgment against His people but only against unbelievers in rebellion. *True or False?*



**QUESTION 19**

Which of the following are given as examples of how the recipients of the epistle to the Hebrews had lived victoriously for Christ in the past? *(Select all that apply.)*

- A. They shared the sufferings of those in prison.
- B. They had been exposed publicly to abuse and afflictions because of their faith.
- C. They had endured harsh suffering after becoming Christians.
- D. They had joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property.

**QUESTION 20**

The use of “confidence” in Hebrews 10:35 does not necessarily imply that believers are in view since the same word is used in Hebrews 10:19 to refer to a false confidence of unbelievers. *True or False?*

**QUESTION 21**

Construct a sermon outline on Hebrews 10:26-39. Notice how the author of Hebrews follows a severe warning with encouragement to his readers. Does this serve to remind you of the vital need we all have to get encouragement? Don't leave out positive encouragement when ministering to your people; there is no stronger motivator to begin or to continue good works.

## Lesson 9 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

The one ritual, more than any other, that typified Christ's sacrificial blood was the yearly Day of Atonement. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

Which of the following is **not** one of the exhortations given in Hebrews 10:19-25?

- A. The Day of Atonement was repeated year after year.
- B. The Levitical sacrifices were not able to perfect the consciences of worshippers.
- C. The law was only a shadow of the reality to come.
- D. Only on the Day of Atonement could the high priest enter the Holy of Holies.

### QUESTION 3

When the author refers to the inability of the law to make perfect those who come to worship, he is thinking about the inability of the Levitical sacrifices to decisively help the conscience of the worshipper. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 4

When the Greek LXX translated the Hebrew text of Psalm 40 "ears you have dug for me" with the phrase "a body you have prepared for me," the meaning in both instances was that the speaker was ready to hear God's Word and do His will. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

In Hebrews 10:5, the writer focuses on the word "body" to make application of this Old Testament passage to the incarnation of Christ and His total obedience to God's will. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

In Hebrews 10:12 we see the use of Psalm 110 once again. The point made is that after Christ had made the final sacrifice for sins, He "sat down." Why did the author note this?

- A. It shows that Christ had entered the Sabbath rest.
- B. It pictured Christ as the ruler of the Messianic Kingdom.
- C. Whereas old covenant priests continually stood when performing their priestly duties, the picture of one sitting anticipated a sacrifice that was final and sufficient for perfecting worshippers.
- D. Because Melchizedek sat down after he accepted tithes from Abraham.

### QUESTION 7

All of the following are exhortations given in Hebrews 10:19-25 **except** which one?

- A. Jesus is not subject to angels.
- B. Spur one another on to love and good works.
- C. Be part of meetings with other believers.
- D. Focus on the inheritance of salvation to be brought when Jesus returns.
- E. Hold unwaveringly to the hope we confess.
- F. Draw near to God with a sincere heart and assurance of faith.

**QUESTION 8**

All of the following are ways the author describes new covenant rebellion with the exception of which one?

- A. Rejects God's plan of salvation
- B. Treats as common the blood of Christ which sanctified him
- C. Insults the Spirit of grace
- D. Shows contempt for the Son of God

**QUESTION 9**

The warning section in Hebrews 10:26-31 is clearly addressed to unbelievers. *True or False?*

**QUESTION 10**

The use of "confidence" in Hebrews 10:35 does not necessarily imply that believers are in view since the same word is used in Hebrews 10:19 to refer to a false confidence of unbelievers. *True or False?*

## Lesson 9 Answers to Questions

### QUESTION 1

<i>Passages</i>	<i>Outline</i>
Hebrews 1:1-4	Prologue
Hebrews 1:5-4:16	God's King-Son
Hebrews 5:1-10:39	God's Priest-Son
Hebrews 11:1-13:17	Living out the new covenant life
Hebrews 13:18-25	Epilogue

### QUESTION 2

C. The Day of Atonement [See commentary on Heb 10:1, section III.C.1.]

### QUESTION 3

- A. The Day of Atonement was repeated year after year.
- B. The Levitical sacrifices were not able to perfect the consciences of worshippers.
- C. The law was only a shadow of the reality to come.
- D. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins.

**QUESTION 4:** True [See commentary section III.C.1, paragraph two.]

**QUESTION 5:** True [See commentary section III.C.2.a, paragraph one.]

**QUESTION 6:** body

### QUESTION 7

C. Whereas old covenant priests continually stood when performing their priestly duties, the picture of one sitting anticipated a sacrifice that was final and sufficient for perfecting worshippers. [See commentary section III.C.3, paragraph two.]

**QUESTION 8:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 9:** True [See commentary section III.C.4, paragraph two.]

**QUESTION 10:** shekinah [See commentary section III.D.1.a, paragraph three.]

### QUESTION 11

- A. Spur one another on to love and good works.
- B. Focus on the inheritance of salvation to be brought when Jesus returns.
- C. Hold unwaveringly to the hope we confess.
- D. Draw near to God with a sincere heart and assurance of faith.

**QUESTION 12:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 13:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Arguments are given in the commentary to support the view that the author is thinking of a specific sin, namely, that of abandoning one's confession of faith. See the discussion in the commentary.

### QUESTION 14

- A. The recipients are addressed as "brothers and sisters."
- B. The "we" in Hebrews 10:26 must be the same as those addressed in the previous exhortations.
- C. They are described as having received "the knowledge of the truth."
- D. The one guilty of the sin is one who has been "made holy" by the blood of the covenant.
- E. The judgment of God is described as that against "His people."

[All five are strong indications that believers are addressed in the warning.]

**QUESTION 15:** True

### QUESTION 16

A. Rejects God's plan of salvation [See commentary on Heb 10:29.]

**QUESTION 17:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 18:** False [See commentary on Heb 10:28-29.]

**QUESTION 19**

- A. They shared the sufferings of those in prison.
- B. They had been exposed publicly to abuse and afflictions because of their faith.
- C. They had endured harsh suffering after becoming Christians.
- D. They had joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property.

**QUESTION 20:** False [See commentary section III.D.3.b.]

**QUESTION 21:** *Your answer*

## Lesson 9 Self Check Answers

**QUESTION 1:** True

**QUESTION 2**

C. The law was only a shadow of the reality to come.

**QUESTION 3:** True

**QUESTION 4:** True

**QUESTION 5:** True

**QUESTION 6**

C. Whereas old covenant priests continually stood when performing their priestly duties, the picture of one sitting anticipated a sacrifice that was final and sufficient for perfecting worshippers.

**QUESTION 7**

A. Jesus is not subject to angels.

**QUESTION 8**

A. Rejects God's plan of salvation

**QUESTION 9:** False

**QUESTION 10:** False

# **Unit 4: Means and Responsibilities of New Covenant Life (Heb 11:1–13:25)**

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## **Unit Introduction**

In the United States, we have “halls of fame” to acknowledge achievements, especially in sports. God is not without His hall of fame. Hebrews 11 is not simply a list of believers. It is a recounting of individuals who, either throughout life or at some significant instance of life, rose above the average person in depending on God for strength or provision to do something extraordinary. Some of the individuals, Samson, for example, would probably be ejected from many local congregations! Yet, he finds a place in God’s hall of fame. In chapter 12, the author refers to these men and women as “a great cloud of witnesses.”

In Lesson 10, you will see how Hebrews 11 contributes to the rest of the epistle (Heb 11:1-40).

In Lesson 11, you will study the author’s final exhortation and warning (Heb 12:1-29).

In Lesson 12, you will see how the author wraps up this literary masterpiece (Heb 13:1-25).

## **Unit Outline**

Lesson 10: The Life of Faith That Pleases God and Brings Reward (Heb 11:1-40)

Lesson 11: Final Exhortation and Fifth Warning (Heb 12:1-29)

Lesson 12: Spiritual Sacrifices Appropriate Under the New Covenant and Epilogue (Heb 13:1-25)

# Lesson 10: The Life of Faith That Pleases God and Brings Reward (Heb 11:1-40)

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## Lesson Introduction

If we were to update the hall of faith to include more contemporary heroes, George Müller would certainly be among them. Born in Germany in the early 1800s, Müller is known for various accomplishments and endeavors for the kingdom of God. The accomplishment he is most widely known for, however, is founding an orphanage to house over 3600 orphans from all over England in 1834. Müller's testimony is that he never requested funds to support himself or the orphanage, but instead exemplified dependence and trust in God to provide for all their needs. His faith was great; he was confident that his heavenly Father would give them all they needed, and He did!



Hebrews 11 is not only about the George Müllers who lived consistent lives of gigantic faith. The chapter is indeed a hall of fame...only a very few out of millions of believers found a place in this brief list that covers centuries of history. Many more from our day could be added in an updated hall of fame. Perhaps the inclusion of some of them would be just as surprising to us as the inclusion of Samson and Barak in Hebrews 11. They did not live consistent lives of faith or faithfulness! But at least on one occasion in their lives they cast themselves before God and trusted Him to come through in an hour of need. They gained a victory through faith. In the same way, there are believers who have failed spectacularly over long periods of time. There is still hope. When we exhaust all other resources, the final resource (which should have been our first) is the answer. When we give up all claims to self-sufficiency and cast ourselves before Almighty God, we enter into that great hall of faith. In coming to Him in simple, even desperate faith, we find He is indeed the God of the impossible. He can do all things. Without Him we can do nothing.

In this lesson you will study the definition of faith as well as living examples of faith.

## Lesson Outline

Topic 1: Literary Structure (Heb 11:1-2; 11:39-40)

Connection with Preceding Section

Use of *Inclusio* to Mark the Section

Connection with Following Section

Topic 2: The Examples of Those Who Showed Faith (Heb 11:4-40)

Chronological Development of Old Testament Characters

Structural Markers Showing Major Sections



## Topic 1: Literary Structure (Heb 11:1-3; 11:39-40)



Literary geniuses, such as Plato, C.S. Lewis, and Su Dongpo, are artists who paint pictures and ideas with words. It is fascinating to see how Plato intricately weaves a fabric of logic with words. C.S. Lewis captures his readers with the delicate balance of his poetry and prose. Su Dongpo writes poems that portray harmony between exuberant spontaneity and emotional rootedness in the world.

We have such an author who has written for all the ages this beautiful epistle to the Hebrews. We do not simply find a chronological list of men and women in chapter 11; what we find is a beautifully balanced exposition that sets us up for the exhortation in chapter 12.

### Connection with Preceding Section

#### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 10 and Hebrews 11 together in one sitting to see if you can see how subtly the author moves from one topic to the next. The simple use of “faith” can move the author from the exhortation of chapter 10 to the exposition of chapter 11. Think about how you would divide chapter 11 into topic-based sections.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 11:1-40” carefully.

#### QUESTION 1

One way the structure of this chapter may be viewed is to divide it into two major sections. See if you can detect any literary or grammatical clues that would point toward the following structure. Match the references below with the outline point showing the two major sections in Hebrews 11.

<i>References</i>	<i>Outline Point</i>
Hebrews 11:1-3	Man’s response in faith to the experiences of life
Hebrews 11:4-12	Summary of Part II
Hebrews 11:13-16	Prologue
Hebrews 11:17-38	God’s attitude toward faith
Hebrews 11:39-40	Summary of Part I

Some translations do not reveal clearly the verbal thread that connects chapters 10 and 11. In Hebrews 10:39 we have the Greek *pisteōs* “of faith” that brings preservation of life. This leads right into Hebrews 11:1 where *pistis* “faith” is defined. (Some translations, like the NET Bible, use the word “believe” in 10:39 and the word “faith” in 11:1, but in the Greek text these words are the same.) The walk of faith described in chapter 11 is indeed the path that leads to a preserved life and avoids destruction. Through this faith, the believers of ages past received a commendation for their faithful lives.

## QUESTION 2

This is really a powerful principle of life that is woven throughout the pages of Scripture. One who walks in dependence on God finds a greater quality and quantity of life (see Josh 1:8; Deut 4:40; 22:6-7; 28:1; 28:15; Prov 3:1-2; 4:10; 10:27-28; 11:4, 19; 12:28; Rom 8:13; Eph 6:1-3). (Of course we must acknowledge that although this principle may be generally true, there are exceptions. Sometimes a walk in dependence on God may result in martyrdom and a shorter life, or God may simply choose to take one of His children home early because it somehow leads to His greater glory.) Whether it is finding purpose in life, success in business, meaningful relationships, fulfillment from one's efforts...these are fruit of a life that is lived in obedient faith.

Take a few moments to meditate on how walking by faith has affected your own life. Read Psalm 1 reflectively as you weigh the different outcomes of living a life independent of God and one lived in dependence on Him. Record in your Life Notebook how your life has been enriched by casting all your care and trust in God, who keeps His promises.

## Use of *Inclusio* to Mark the Section

### Assignment

- Examine Hebrews 11 for structural markers. Look for repeated words or phrases, contrasts and comparisons drawn, and similar ways of expressing things.
- Read carefully the commentary on “Hebrews 11:1-2” and the “Hebrews 11:39-40.”

## QUESTION 3

Carefully compare Hebrews 11:1-2 with Hebrews 11:39-40. Which of the following words or phrases tie into one unit the thoughts of chapter 11? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. Fear before a holy God
- B. Commendation
- C. Reward
- D. Faith

## Connection with Following Section

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 11 and Hebrews 12 together as one unit, and look for the connection between them.

## QUESTION 4

The author of Hebrews repeatedly used Old Testament texts and/or his own exposition before issuing an exhortation (recall Heb 1:1-2:4; 3:1-4:13; 5:11-6:20 and Heb 10:1-39). *True or False?*

## Topic 2: The Examples of Those Who Showed Faith (Heb 11:4-40)

What pleases God? It is a helpful exercise to study the Scriptures that refer to pleasing God. Some of the passages warn of things we do that do not please God (Rom 8:8). Others caution about those distractions that keep one from pleasing the Lord (1 Cor 7:32). Prayer certainly brings pleasure to the Lord (Prov 15:8; 1 Tim 2:3).



Have you ever wondered why Cain’s sacrifice displeased the Lord while Abel’s sacrifice pleased Him? Many who have considered this question come to the same conclusion as Dr. Tanner that Abel was obedient to offer the “greater sacrifice” God desired. The author of Hebrews puts Abel in the spotlight as a true worshipper, one who brought gifts in addition to his sacrifice. Then, summing up the first examples, Abel and Enoch, the author gives an editorial comment that those who want to please God must recognize that He is indeed one who rewards those who seek Him.

### Chronological Development of Old Testament Characters

#### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 11:4-40.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 11:4-40.”



#### QUESTION 5

The commentary correctly brings out what is unmistakably a chronological organization to the examples of those who acted in faith. *True or False?*

#### QUESTION 6

When Noah became an “heir of the righteousness that comes by faith,” he was already a believer. The commentary affirms that statement by revealing Noah built the ark in faith that the flood would come. In that way, Noah already had a righteous standing before God by faith. It was his walk of faith that made him an heir. *True or False?*

#### QUESTION 7

When God commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac on the altar, He had not yet told Abraham that Isaac was the one through whom the promised seed would come. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 8

Match the following Old Testament characters with the way their future orientation is pictured in Hebrews.

<i>Old Testament Character</i>	<i>Future Orientation</i>
Abraham	Blessed his twin sons concerning the future
Isaac	Believed God could raise the dead if necessary
Jacob	Made a death-bed wish concerning his bones
Joseph	Worshipped God in the final moments of his life

## QUESTION 9

Which of the following are ways Moses' faith was exhibited in his life? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. He fixed his eyes on the reward God had for him.
- B. He chose to be ill-treated with God's people.
- C. He rejected the life of luxury as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.
- D. He gave up the treasures of Egypt.
- E. He did not fear Pharaoh's anger.

## QUESTION 10

Only Jews are named in the great "hall of faith." *True or False?*

## QUESTION 11

What reason does the commentary suggest for why the author mentions women receiving back their dead raised to life?

## Structural Markers Showing Major Sections

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 11:13-16 and Hebrews 11:39-40.
- Read these sections of the commentary: "Hebrews 11:13-16" and "Hebrews 11:39-40."

## QUESTION 12

Comparing Hebrews 11:13-16 and Hebrews 11:39-40, what parallels might indicate that these two passages are the author's way of giving a summation of two major units? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. They did not receive what was promised.
- B. God made preparations for something future.
- C. Something "better" was laid in store.
- D. Both passages began with "these all."

### **QUESTION 13**

Using these similar passages, we might say the first unit shows God's attitude toward faith in that He is not ashamed to be called the God of those who follow Him in faith. The second unit shows man's response in faith to various experiences of life; it is a response that awaits fulfillment or perfection in the messianic kingdom. Those who respond to God in faith do not receive all that God has promised in this life. Write down any responses or applications you can make to your own life and ministry from these thoughts.

## Lesson 10 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

Comparing Hebrews 11:1-2 with Hebrews 11:39-40 we find “commendation” and “faith” to be words that tie into one unit the thoughts of chapter 11. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

Which of the following is **not** included in the ways Moses’ faith was exhibited in his life?

- A. He fixed his eyes on the reward God had for him.
- B. He chose to be ill-treated with God’s people.
- C. He trusted God to raise the dead if necessary.
- D. He gave up the treasures of Egypt.
- E. He did not fear Pharaoh’s anger.

### QUESTION 3

Belief in a resurrection is stated clearly or implied as a central aspect of the walk of faith of several of the people mentioned in Hebrews 11. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 4

The commentary correctly brings out what is unmistakably a chronological organization to the examples of those who acted in faith. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

The often repeated pattern we have seen in Hebrews is for the author to give an exhortation and then support the exhortation with an exposition of Scripture. Refer to Hebrews 11 and Hebrews 12. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

When God commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac on the altar, He had not yet told Abraham that Isaac was the one through whom the promised seed would come. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 7

Which of the following is **not** a parallel between Hebrews 11:13-16 and Hebrews 11:39-40?

- A. They did not receive what was promised.
- B. God made preparations for something “better” in the future.
- C. Both passages speak of resurrection of the dead.
- D. Both passages began with “these all.”

### QUESTION 8

When Noah became an “heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” he was already a believer. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 9

The walk of faith described in Hebrews 11 leads to destruction. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 10

Only Jews are named in the great “hall of faith.” *True or False?*

## Lesson 10 Answers to Questions

### QUESTION 1

<i>References</i>	<i>Outline Point</i>
Hebrews 11:1-3	Prologue
Hebrews 11:4-12	God's attitude toward faith
Hebrews 11:13-16	Summary of Part I
Hebrews 11:17-38	Man's response in faith to the experiences of life
Hebrews 11:39-40	Summary of Part II

**QUESTION 2:** *Your answer*

### QUESTION 3

- B. Commendation
- D. Faith

**QUESTION 4:** True

**QUESTION 5:** True

**QUESTION 6:** True

**QUESTION 7:** False [See commentary on Heb 11:17-19.]

### QUESTION 8

<i>Old Testament Character</i>	<i>Future Orientation</i>
Abraham	Believed God could raise the dead if necessary
Isaac	Blessed his twin sons concerning the future
Jacob	Worshipped God in the final moments of his life
Joseph	Made a death-bed wish concerning his bones

### QUESTION 9

- A. He fixed his eyes on the reward God had for him.
- B. He chose to be ill-treated with God's people.
- C. He rejected the life of luxury as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.
- D. He gave up the treasures of Egypt.
- E. He did not fear Pharaoh's anger.

**QUESTION 10:** False [Rahab was a Gentile who was commended for her faith; the women who received back their dead raised to life would include the Gentile woman from Sidon (1 Kgs 17).]

**QUESTION 11:** *Your answer should be similar to the following:*

Resurrection is the grand hope and the supreme achievement of faith.

### QUESTION 12

- A. They did not receive what was promised.
- B. God made preparations for something future.
- C. Something "better" was laid in store.
- D. Both passages began with "these all."

**QUESTION 13:** *Your answer*

## **Lesson 10 Self Check Answers**

**QUESTION 1:** True

**QUESTION 2**

C. He trusted God to raise the dead if necessary.

**QUESTION 3:** True

**QUESTION 4:** True

**QUESTION 5:** False

**QUESTION 6:** False

**QUESTION 7**

C. Both passages speak of resurrection of the dead.

**QUESTION 8:** True

**QUESTION 9:** False

**QUESTION 10:** False



# Lesson 11: Final Exhortation and Fifth Warning (Heb 12:1-29)

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## Lesson Introduction

A common human tendency is to dislike warnings! For many years, the medical community has warned about the dangers of tobacco. In many countries, every package of cigarettes is required by law to have a printed label warning of the dangers of smoking. The statistics are horrifying. Over five million deaths worldwide every year are the result of tobacco use. By 2030, that number is expected to be eight million. Tobacco use is the number-one preventable cause of death. In spite of years of warnings, the number of tobacco users is still increasing as millions of people endanger their lives for the passing pleasures of smoking.



Repeated warnings seem equally as ineffective in other instances. Many teenagers simply do not seem interested in hearing warnings, even when they come from experienced professionals and are backed up consistently by statistical evidence. Many children refuse to listen to their parents' warnings, often putting themselves in peril. Numerous automobile drivers refuse to wear seatbelts, even though statistics undeniably show their effectiveness in preventing severe bodily injury and death. Many other drivers try to get away with drinking alcohol and driving, ignoring the warnings of the danger in which they place themselves and others.

Is it any wonder that in an epistle like Hebrews, we need repeated warnings? God has spoken; and that is serious because of the holy, sovereign source of the warning. The epistle to the Hebrews presents five very clear warnings to those who read these pages: Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:1-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:26-31; and Hebrews 12:14-29. As we come to chapter 12 of the epistle, we are now ready to consider the fifth and final warning of the author.

## Lesson Outline

Topic 1: The Benefit of Discipline in the Quest to Endure (Heb 12:1-13)

The Call to Endurance

Instruction about the Positive Value of Discipline

Appreciation of the Benefits of Discipline

Topic 2: Fifth Warning—Be Faithful to the New Covenant (Heb 12:14-29)

A Word of Caution to Those Who Do Not Obey

The Contrast of Two Covenants

The Final Warning and Demand of a Response

## Topic 1: The Benefit of Discipline in the Quest to Endure (Heb 12:1-13)

I never received a spanking from my father. My brother received one; it must have been fifty years ago, but I still remember it! I remember it because it hurt me so badly to see my brother being

spanked that I went outside the house and cried my heart out. My brother came out a few minutes later and started laughing at me. He thought it was funny that I was crying. I guess he wasn't in as much pain as I thought. Not all discipline, however, can be laughed off so easily! People respond to discipline differently—my brother did not seem to learn from his spanking. Others can and will learn by seeing the consequences of sin, and abstain from it – we should strive to be people who can learn from the lessons in Hebrews.

It seems the author of Hebrews understood that his readers could react to his warnings in one of two inappropriate ways. They could laugh off discipline (as my brother did), which would result in the exhortation “Do not scorn (think little of) the Lord’s discipline.” On the other hand, the readers could become so frustrated or discouraged by discipline that they might want to give up altogether, which would result in the exhortation “Do not...give up when he corrects you.” Seen in the proper light, discipline is beneficial, though typically not enjoyable!



## Call to Endurance

### Assignment

- Read all of Hebrews 12.
- Read the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 12:1-3.”

### QUESTION 1

From your reading of Hebrews 12, match the verse references with the appropriate themes.

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 12:1-3	Call to render mutual help and encouragement
Hebrews 12:4-11	Final warning to be faithful
Hebrews 12:12-13	Instruction about the positive value of discipline
Hebrews 12:14-29	Call to endurance

### QUESTION 2

When the author instructs the readers to get rid of “the sin that clings so closely,” do you think he is speaking of a specific sin that was common to all of his readers? Or do you think he was speaking of more general sin that was individual for each reader? Taking the second of these two options, examine your own life and note the sin or sins you would describe as those that “cling so closely” in your life. Make a list in your Life Notebook of steps you can take to avoid those sins in your Christian walk.

## Instruction About the Positive Value of Discipline

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 12:4-11.
- Read the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 12:4-11.”

### QUESTION 3

One possible sermon outline for Hebrews 12:1-13 is the following: To endure faithfully in our Christian walk, we need to keep our focus on (1) the faithful acts of Old Testament believers who are currently observing us; (2) Jesus, who showed by example how to endure to the end; and (3) the reality of discipline as part of the Lord's training program. Study the passage to see how you would modify this outline. In your Life Notebook, write out a more detailed sermon outline that you can use to preach on this passage in the future.

### QUESTION 4

The passionate care of a pastoral heart is revealed in the writer of Hebrews. He knows that the onslaught of opposition can take its toll on believers serving on the frontline of spiritual battle. With knowledge of that reality, he offers this little sermon of encouragement. If you study Isaiah 40:28-31 you may wonder if the writer was thinking of those verses and how God really is the source of strength for the believer when he or she grows tired and weary. The same solution Isaiah gives is pictured here in the phrase, "keeping our eyes fixed on \_\_\_\_\_"?

- A. Endurance
- B. Discipline
- C. The race
- D. Jesus

### QUESTION 5

The recipients of this epistle had already endured more opposition than the Lord Himself had endured during His earthly life because of the increased persecution by Roman emperors. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

Which of the following is **not** given by the author as one of the keys to endurance?

- A. Remove sins that are like excessive weight to a runner.
- B. Consider suffering through trials as you would the loving discipline of a good father.
- C. Focus on the example of Jesus and how He endured to the end.
- D. Avoid conflicts no matter the cost, even if you have to compromise on principles, because unity and love are the ultimate goal of discipline.

### QUESTION 7

In your Life Notebook, make a list of ways that God's discipline has had beneficial results in your life. You will probably remember painful moments when you were going through discipline, but be sure to record in detail "the fruit of peace and righteousness" that God produced through the experience.

### QUESTION 8

Discipline is consistently pictured as negative in Hebrews because it is a synonym for judgment. *True or False?*

## Appreciation of the Benefits of Discipline

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 12:12-13.
- Read the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 12:12-13.”

### QUESTION 9

The exhortation in Hebrews 12:12-13 is intended to encourage each believer to strengthen himself and make his own path straight so that he could set a good example for those around him. *True or False?*

## Topic 2: Fifth Warning—Be Faithful to the New Covenant (Heb 12:14-29)

In his best-selling book *Dare to Discipline*, Dr. James Dobson describes the “critical factor in child management” as developing respect for one’s parents. Dobson’s book is certainly one in which you can see the close relationship between warnings and discipline. The warnings are of little worth unless a failure to heed those warnings is followed by discipline. Discipline can have disastrous effects unless it is administered only after sufficient and loving warnings have been given concerning the expectations of the one in authority.

## A Word of Caution to Those Who Do Not Obey

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 12:14-17.
- Read Genesis 27 as background information to Hebrews 12:16-17.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 12:14-17.”

### QUESTION 10

Which of the following support the suggestion that the “holiness” mentioned in Hebrews 12:14 is referring to progressive sanctification? (*Select all that apply.*)

- A. The same Greek word, *hagiasmos*, is used frequently in Hebrews of progressive sanctification.
- B. “Sanctification” is never used elsewhere in Scripture to describe an experiential process.
- C. The word is used elsewhere normally of progressive sanctification (e.g., Rom 6:19).
- D. The preceding context is one of progressive sanctification (see Heb 12:10).

### QUESTION 11

The author of Hebrews makes it clear that people will be saved only if they attain a certain level of holiness. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 12

Coming short of the “grace of God” (Heb 12:15) refers to one who is unsaved because of a lack of holiness in his or her life. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 13

Readers have understood the phrase “he found no opportunity for repentance” in Hebrews 12:17 in different ways. Some have taken it to mean that Esau had gone so far down a path of sin that repentance was no longer possible for him. Others understand the repentance as a reference to Isaac’s inability to change his mind. Which of the two does the commentary support? Do you agree? Write out these two options in your Life Notebook with your conclusion as to which you think is correct.

Hopefully, you noticed that what Esau really wanted was the blessing. However, the only way he could get that blessing was for Isaac to repent (i.e., “change his mind”). But there was no willingness by Isaac to do so; he had already given the firstborn blessing to Jacob and there could only be ONE such blessing. Esau’s tears could not undo what had already been done. That special blessing was no longer available; Esau could not change that fact.

## The Contrast of Two Covenants

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 12:18-24.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 12:18-24.”

## QUESTION 14

Which of the following does not describe the physical displays that engendered fear in the Israelites?

- A. Darkness and gloom and whirlwind
- B. Burning fire
- C. Blast of a trumpet and voice uttering words
- D. Tents built by men

## QUESTION 15

Which of the following is **not** one of the Old Testament passages the author draws from for his discussion in Hebrews 12:18-21?

- A. Exodus 19:16-20
- B. Exodus 20:18-21
- C. Psalm 110
- D. Deuteronomy 4:10-13
- E. Deuteronomy 5:22-27

If you missed any of the answers, see the commentary on this section. Have you continued to study the Old Testament passages the author quotes or alludes to—even when there are no course questions on them? Remember, to understand this author, you must understand the Old Testament passages from which he draws his message.

## QUESTION 16

The NET Bible translation of *ekklēsia* as “congregation” in Hebrews 12:23 is a poor translation, because the word consistently is used as a technical term for “church” in the New Testament. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 17

At this point in the course, you have invested a lot of time in the study of this rich epistle. You have seen what an amazing manual it is for new covenant worship with so much emphasis on the priesthood of Christ, the heavenly tabernacle, and the new covenant. Take about ten minutes to meditate on this comparison of the two covenants. How is the approach of the worshipper described? How does this contrast with the approach of a new covenant worshipper? Record in your Life Notebook the practical application this has had in your own prayer life. Has this changed the way you approach God’s throne in time of need? If so, take a few moments to praise Him for what Christ has accomplished for us and the tremendous privileges we have as new covenant worshippers.

## The Final Warning and Demand of a Response

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 12:25-29.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 12:25-29.”

## QUESTION 18

Since this last warning is the most severe in the epistle, it is clearly addressed to unbelievers. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 19

When the author of Hebrews speaks of the coming kingdom, to what is he referring?

- A. The spiritual rule of the church already on earth
- B. The rule of God in heaven now
- C. The eternal state in heaven
- D. The thousand year reign of Christ on earth, known as the millennial kingdom

## QUESTION 20

It is most unfortunate that these five warnings through the epistle to the Hebrews have so often been misdirected to those outside the family of God. These are serious warnings with serious consequences for failure but rich reward for those who heed them. Take time to look back over the five warning passages. Try to capture the essence of all five in one short statement. Record in your Life Notebook what you think the author is telling his readers. One thing you might take into consideration is use of the word “escape” in the first warning (Heb 2:3) and in the last (Heb 12:25). What is the escape from? What is the situation if one does not escape; what is the situation if one does escape? Try to write a one sentence statement that gives a condensed form of the all the warnings wrapped into one as practical and applicable in your own life as possible.

There are two terms in this final warning that are crucial interpretive terms. The first is “kingdom.” Those who interpret this as the spiritual rule of the church here on earth fail to recognize that this

kingdom is future, coming after the shaking of the present creation. Only then will that which is unshakable remain.

One aspect of that future kingdom that is so often overlooked in preaching through the New Testament is that of rewards. The fact that there will be rewards given when Christ returns to establish His kingdom is clearly taught in Matthew 16:27 and Revelation 22:12. That reward will include sharing in the authority of Christ's rule. On one occasion James and John came to Jesus, accompanied by their mother, to ask for high positions of authority in His kingdom (Mk 10:35-45; Mt 20:20-28). Jesus acknowledged that there would be such places, and they had been prepared by the Father (Mt 20:23). Revelation 20:4-6 so clearly pictures Christ having subordinates who share in His rule for those thousand years.

The second term subject to wide interpretation is the phrase "consuming fire." Many have just assumed that this refers to the fire of hell. However, fire is frequently used as a symbol for purification or cleansing in scripture. In the first use of the word in Hebrews it refers to God's angels and ministers as flames of fire (Heb 1:7). The context from which the author quotes (Ps 104) speaks of winds and fire among those aspects of nature that show the majesty of God. In Hebrews 10, it is a picture of God's judgment. The context is one of temporal judgment on both God's enemies (10:27) and His people (10:30). In Hebrews 11:34, fire pictures part of the persecution used against God's people that can only be conquered by faith. In Hebrews 12:18, the fire referred to was a physical display of God's power on Mt. Sinai. It seems much more reasonable to understand the phrase "our God is a consuming fire" as a description of His purifying and judging work that applies in this life.

### **QUESTION 21**

Which of the following is not used as a synonym for the coming kingdom in Hebrews 12?

- A. Mount Zion
- B. Mount Sinai
- C. The heavenly Jerusalem
- D. The city of the living God

## Lesson 11 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

The recipients of this epistle had already endured more opposition than the Lord Himself had endured during His earthly life because of the increased persecution by Roman emperors. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

Which of the following is **not** given by the author as one of the keys to endurance?

- A. Remove sins that are like excessive weight to a runner.
- B. Consider suffering as you would the loving discipline of a good father.
- C. Focus on the example of Jesus and how He endured to the end.
- D. Avoid conflicts no matter the cost, even if you have to compromise on principles, because unity and love are the ultimate goal of discipline.

### QUESTION 3

Discipline is consistently pictured as negative in Hebrews because it is a synonym for judgment. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 4

The exhortation in Hebrews 12:12-13 is for the group to show mutual care and concern for one another. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

The author of Hebrews makes it clear that people will be saved only if they attain a certain level of holiness. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

Coming short of the “grace of God” (Heb 12:15) refers to one who is unsaved because of a lack of holiness in his or her life. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 7

Which of the following does not describe the physical displays that engendered fear in the Israelites?

- A. Darkness and gloom and whirlwind
- B. Burning fire
- C. Blast of a trumpet and voice uttering words
- D. Tents built by men

### QUESTION 8

Which of the following is **not** one of the Old Testament passages the author draws from for his discussion in Hebrews 12:18-21?

- A. Exodus 19:16-20
- B. Exodus 20:18-21
- C. Psalm 110
- D. Deuteronomy 4:10-13
- E. Deuteronomy 5:22-27



**QUESTION 9**

The future reward for faithfulness of believers in this life will include sharing in the rule over God's creation. *True or False?*

**QUESTION 10**

The NET Bible translation of *ekklesia* by "congregation" in Heb 12:23 is a poor translation, because the word consistently is used as a technical term for "church" in the New Testament. *True or False?*

## Lesson 11 Answers to Questions

### QUESTION 1

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 12:1-3	Call to endurance
Hebrews 12:4-11	Instruction about the positive value of discipline
Hebrews 12:12-13	Call to render mutual help and encouragement
Hebrews 12:14-29	Final warning to be faithful

**QUESTION 2:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 3:** *Your answer*

### QUESTION 4

D. Jesus

**QUESTION 5:** False [See commentary on Heb 12:3.]

### QUESTION 6

D. Avoid conflicts no matter the cost, even if you have to compromise on principles, because unity and love are the ultimate goal of discipline. [The author will instruct the believers to pursue peace in the following section, but not without giving thought to the price. He has already emphasized the necessity of running “the race set out for us” in 12:1; God’s rules do make a difference.]

**QUESTION 7:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 8:** False [See commentary on Heb 12:7-8.]

**QUESTION 9:** False [See commentary on Heb 12:12-13.]

### QUESTION 10

C. The word is used elsewhere normally of progressive sanctification (e.g., Rom 6:19).

D. The preceding context is one of progressive sanctification (see Hebrews 12:10).

**QUESTION 11:** False

**QUESTION 12:** False [See commentary on Heb 12:15.]

**QUESTION 13:** *Your answer*

### QUESTION 14

D. Tents built by men

### QUESTION 15

C. Psalm 110

**QUESTION 16:** False

**QUESTION 17:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 18:** False [The warning in chapter 10 is clearly the highpoint of the warnings in the epistle. This entire chapter is addressed to believers. Beginning with the “we are surrounded” of verse 1, to the encouragement to pursue peace and holiness in verse 14, to “we are receiving an unshakable kingdom” in verse 28, the author consistently addresses Christians.]

### QUESTION 19

D. The thousand year reign of Christ on earth, known as the millennial kingdom

**QUESTION 20:** *Your answer*

### QUESTION 21

B. Mount Sinai

## **Lesson 11 Self Check Answers**

**QUESTION 1:** False

**QUESTION 2**

D. Avoid conflicts no matter the cost, even if you have to compromise on principles, because unity and love are the ultimate goal of discipline.

**QUESTION 3:** False

**QUESTION 4:** True

**QUESTION 5:** False

**QUESTION 6:** False

**QUESTION 7**

D. Tents built by men

**QUESTION 8**

C. Psalm 110

**QUESTION 9:** True

**QUESTION 10:** False



# **Lesson 12: Spiritual Sacrifices Appropriate Under the New Covenant and Epilogue (Heb 13:1-25)**

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## **Lesson Introduction**

Acts 20 is one of the most emotionally moving chapters in the Bible. Paul had given three years of his life and ministry in service to the flock in Ephesus. He had worked night and day to teach them the “whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27). But Paul now recognizes that his life is nearing an end. As he presses toward the goal of finishing the race well (Acts 20:24) and completing the ministry given to him by the Lord, he counts his physical life in this world as nothing.

In this stirring account, Paul is focused on getting to Jerusalem by Pentecost. But he cannot push on without a farewell to the Ephesian elders. What is foremost in the apostle’s mind as he has this one last charge to give to the dear brothers in whom he has invested so much of his own life? In some of his closing words, Paul lays out his heart: “And now I entrust you to God and to the message of His grace. This message is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). Whether Paul was the author of Hebrews or not, he could not have summed up the positive side of the epistle’s message any better. The author of Hebrews will close his letter of exhortation with the beautiful words, “Grace be with you all” (Heb 13:25).

## **Lesson Outline**

Topic 1: Personal Morality and Social Responsibilities (Heb 13:1-6)

Theme of Worship Throughout the Epistle

Specific Examples of New Covenant Living

Topic 2: Religious Life in Community (Heb 13:7-17)

Imitating the Faithful Leaders

The Contrast of Priestly Systems

Submission to Spiritual Leaders

Topic 3: The Epilogue to the Epistle (Heb 13:18-25)

The Author’s Request for Prayer

A Benediction for Their Spiritual Progress

An Epistolary Closing with Extended Greeting

## **Topic 1: Personal Morality and Social Responsibilities (Heb 13:1-6)**

Pure grace is an anomaly in this world. It is like a fish out of water; it is not in its natural habitat. This “whole creation groans and suffers together” (Rom 8:22) is how Paul describes the physical world

under the curse. In such an environment, the common understanding of creatures is that nothing is free! Strings are attached to any “gift.” When someone “gives” something, they often expect something in return. Is a “gift” given with this expectation truly a gift? In many cases, they are simply exchanges of merchandise; one thing given when another thing is expected in return. It is this expected reciprocity that destroys the purity of “gift.” God’s grace is not like that. He can truly give something that is free. That gift of salvation is indeed free to us, but it is a gift that was obtained at great cost—the blood of Christ.

It is perhaps the most difficult thing for the human mind to perceive such grace and not confuse it with some reciprocal relationship. Does God expect something from His children who are bought at a great price? Indeed, He does. Is the continued possession of the gift dependent on some response from the recipients? It is not! Therein lies true grace: true unconditional love—even love of the unlovely. Paul could not have stated this truth more clearly than he does in Romans 4:5: “But to the one who does not work, but believes in the one who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Declaring the ungodly righteous is the absolute essence of grace.

But, what then could we say of God’s expectations for His children? Does such grace promote ungodly living? Paul firmly denies such a charge. “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Absolutely not!” (Rom 6:15). Such a question never caused Paul to change his message of justification by faith alone. Grace could never be mixed in any way with works and still be called grace (Rom 11:6). When Paul persisted in preaching pure grace, he was misunderstood: “And why not say, ‘Let us do evil so that good may come of it?’—as some who slander us allege that we say” (Rom 3:8).

The author of Hebrews understood grace clearly. Even a person who shows contempt for the Son of God and profanes the blood of the covenant and insults the Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29) may be one who has been made holy by that very blood through the work of that very Spirit. That position of holiness is “once for all” (Heb 10:10) and such a person has, by the one offering of the body of Christ, been “perfected for all time” (Heb 10:14). That is pure grace. But that grace does not erase the desire of a Father to see His children live well. The closing thought of this rich epistle turns to ways of showing gratitude for such grace through grace-filled living.

## Theme of Worship Throughout the Epistle

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 13.
- Read the introductory section of the commentary on “Hebrews 13:1-6.”

### QUESTION 1

From your reading of Hebrews 13, match the verse references with the appropriate themes.

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 13:1-6	Personal morality and social responsibility
Hebrews 13:7-17	Religious life in community
Hebrews 13:18-19	Personal request for prayer
Hebrews 13:20-25	Benediction and closing

## QUESTION 2

Match the following terms and phrases that picture new covenant worship throughout the epistle:

<i>Terms and Phrases</i>	<i>New Covenant Worship</i>
“We are of his house”	All believers under the new covenant
House	Great High Priest under the new covenant
Jesus	Faithful believers who keep their confidence
Believer-priests	Worshipping community and their participation in it

## QUESTION 3

Because the new covenant is based on pure grace, there are no longer responsibilities for believers under this covenant. *True or False?*

## Specific Examples of New Covenant Living

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 13:1-6.

## QUESTION 4

The author exhorts the readers to let brotherly love continue (Heb 13:1). The commentary puts this in the light of believers facing persecution and hardships. In such opposition, mutual love and encouragement were vital for continued faithfulness. Is your situation similar or quite different from that facing these readers? Take a few moments to reflect on how much persecution exists in your context. Record in your Life Notebook your answer and then note ways communal love within the body has helped brothers and sisters endure. If you are in a situation where persecution is fairly nonexistent, take a few moments to pray for those who do serve in places of difficulty and persecution. Pray for God’s grace to be abundant in their lives.

## QUESTION 5

The phrase “some have entertained angels without knowing it” is just a figurative way of saying that God sees what we do even in secret places. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 6

It is interesting to see what a broad area of life is covered with so few words (Heb 13:1-6). All of the areas of life are touched on except which one of the following?

- A. Money and security
- B. Marriage and sexuality
- C. Acceptable and unacceptable foods
- D. Hospitality and compassionate ministry to those in difficult circumstances

## Topic 2: Religious Life in Community (Heb 13:7-17)

This passage in Hebrews has much to say about leaders and those who serve under them. If you remember, the author said in Hebrews 2:5 that his topic was the world to come, and the goal of God’s work in this present age is to prepare “partners” (Gk *metochoi*) who will lead and rule with King Jesus in the future kingdom (Heb 2:10). For this reason, the last few verses of this epistle are not just insignificant closing words. Would you like to share in the reign of the coming kingdom? If so, study carefully these words on the responsibilities and rewards of leaders.



### Imitating the Faithful Leaders

#### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 13:7-8.
- Read the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 13:7-8.”

#### QUESTION 7

You probably have some position of leadership in your church. You may not have noticed before how much is said in this short passage about leaders and the relationship of those who serve under them. In your Life Notebook, make a list of the responsibilities of both leaders and those they lead. Meditate for a few moments on how well you fulfill the obligations of leadership and any changes you will make in light of your study.

#### QUESTION 8

The commentary understands that the leaders referred to in Hebrews 13:7-8 have already died. *True or False?*

#### QUESTION 9

The section of Hebrews 13:7-17 is marked off by the reference to \_\_\_\_\_ in verses 7 and 17.

### The Contrast of Priestly Systems

#### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 13:9-16.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 13:9-16.”

#### QUESTION 10

In your own words, write a short paragraph about what it means to go “outside the camp” to Jesus. Notice that this phrase occurs three times in quick succession here. It is an important concept to the author. Before you write, study the commentary carefully—you’ll find rich comments there on how this applies to the believer under the new covenant. Do you agree fully with the interpretation? If not, record any possible alternative ideas you might have.



## QUESTION 11

The psalms are probably the most frequently visited portion of Scripture by those in difficulty, danger, or despair. Perhaps you have found in your study of Hebrews that this is equally valuable as a place to go for sustenance, strength and encouragement in times of trouble. As you see all the tremendous benefits of worship under the new covenant, you cannot help but be strengthened by the grace available through our Lord Jesus Christ. He has indeed gone outside the camp and experienced suffering far beyond what we will ever experience. Study carefully Hebrews 13:9-16 with a view to finding truths that will strengthen you in challenging times. Record those truths in your Life Notebook. For example, in verse 14 we are reminded how temporary this life is (a “puff of smoke that appears for a short time and then vanishes”— Jas 4:14). This is a great truth to reflect on when trials seem endless, when pain seems to go beyond our ability to endure.

## QUESTION 12

From the perspective of the author of Hebrews, the old covenant had sacrifices as part of the Law, but the new covenant, in contrast to the old, is free from sacrifices. *True or False?*

## QUESTION 13

A priest serving under the old covenant had certain new covenant privileges. *True or False?*

## Submission to Spiritual Leaders

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 13:17.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 13:17.”

## QUESTION 14

Which of the following statements is **not** true of leaders' relationships with those who they lead?

- Are advantageous to those under them when they lead with joy
- Should be followed in every situation because they are appointed by God
- Are tasked with keeping watch over the souls of God’s people
- Will give an account for their faithfulness as leaders

## Topic 3: The Epilogue to the Epistle (Heb 13:18-25)

This epistle began with a grand statement about the Son. It does not end on a diminished scale. The Lord Jesus Christ is pictured as the Great Shepherd of the sheep who deserves glory forever. What really is this letter about? Is it about the world to come? Yes. Is it about Jesus the King-Son? Yes. Is it about Jesus the Priest-Son? Yes. Is it about Jesus being better? Yes. Is it about encouragement to the followers of Jesus? Yes. Is it about endurance in the Christian walk? Yes. Is it about the rule of King Jesus both now and in the future? Yes. Is it about Jesus in His High Priestly role? Yes. Is it about worship under the new covenant? Yes.

You will never read more lofty literature. It models excellence in every way, including literary and spiritual excellence. Hopefully, your life will never be the same as a result of this study. If it is, you have focused far too much on looking for academic answers to academic questions. All this is wasted and for naught unless you have a new appreciation for who Jesus is, what He has accomplished on your behalf, what the future holds because of Him, and the privileges and responsibilities that are yours as a worshipper under the new covenant.



## Author’s Request for Prayer

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 13:18-19.
- Read the section of the “Commentary on Hebrews 13:18-19.”

### QUESTION 15

The writers of the New Testament **never** asked for prayer for themselves because that would have been self-serving. *True or False?*

## A Benediction for Their Spiritual Progress

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 13:20-21.
- Read the section of the commentary on “Hebrews 13:20-21.”

### QUESTION 16

Throughout this epistle we sense the strong influence of the Old Testament on the author’s thoughts. Match the following Old Testament passages with the content the author drew from the passage.

<i>Passage</i>	<i>Content</i>
Zechariah 11:4-14; 13:7	Announcement of a new covenant
Ezekiel 37:26	Great Shepherd of the sheep rejected by the nation
Isaiah 55:3	Eternal covenant used to refer to the new covenant
Jeremiah 31:33	New covenant culminates in the messianic kingdom

### QUESTION 17

All of the following are said of Jesus in the benediction except which one?

- He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep.
- He provided the blood of the eternal covenant.
- He is worthy of glory forever.
- He is the creator of the universe.

## An Epistolary Closing and Extended Greeting

### Assignment

- Read Hebrews 13:22-25.
- Read the commentary on “Hebrews 13:22-25.”
- Read one more time “The Recipients of the Epistle to the Hebrews.”

### The Recipients of the Epistle to the Hebrews

Although the identity of the intended recipients of this epistle is shrouded in mystery, we can piece together a general picture in light of clues found within the epistle. One of the more definite aspects is that the epistle was sent to a specific community of believers with whom the author had rather close contact. He knew something of how they received the gospel message (Heb 2:3). The author was aware of their present spiritual condition, including possible danger (Heb 5:11-6:12; 12:5-12), their past faithfulness (Heb 6:10; 10:32-34), and past struggles (Heb 12:4). He showed a confidence in the leaders of the group (Heb 13:7; 13:17). It is quite clear that the writer expected to see these brothers and sisters in the near future (Heb 13:19). Both author and recipients had a common acquaintance in Paul’s co-worker Timothy (Heb 13:22).

It is amazing that in light of the relationship between the author and the recipients, some have still questioned whether this epistle was written to believers. The author speaks of the faith “we possess” (Heb 4:14). He expresses the thought that they should be teachers in light of “this time”. What could this mean other than the time since they had become believers (Heb 5:12)? The author’s challenge to them is not that they place their faith in Jesus as their savior but that they press on to maturity (Heb 6:1). Their exercise of faith has a commendable history (Heb 10:32-34). Again, the exhortation is not to initiate faith, but to persevere in the faith they already possess (Heb 10:36; Heb 12:3). If anything is evident about the recipients of the epistle, it is that they were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. They shared an eternal salvation and a future destiny (Heb 12:28) with their coming High Priest-King.

The severity of the warnings (Heb 2:1-4; Heb 3:1-4:16; Heb 5:11-6:20; Heb 10:19-39; Heb 12:14-29) has been the primary reason some commentators think that unbelievers must be the object of such warnings. However, such a conclusion must be strongly contested in light of the way the author addresses them as “holy brothers and sisters, partners in a heavenly calling” and refers to Jesus as “the apostle and high priest whom we confess” (Heb 3:1). How could the warnings not be severe in the case of those who “are crucifying the Son of God for themselves all over again and holding him up to contempt” (Heb 6:6)? But to think this warning is addressed to unbelievers, one must also conclude the author is describing unbelievers as “those who have once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, become partakers of the Holy Spirit, tasted the good word of God and the miracles of the coming age, and then have committed apostasy” (Heb 6:4-6).

At least as equally severe is the warning in Hebrews 10:19-39. Indeed some would see this as the most severe warning in the epistle. Yet, even here the author speaks to “brothers and sisters” (Heb 10:19) and commends them for previous spiritual victory (Heb 10:32). No one questions the terrible nature of the sin pictured here; it describes one who “has contempt for the Son of God, and profanes the blood of the covenant that made him holy, and insults the Spirit of grace” (Heb 10:29). But the guilty one is described as one who has been “made holy” (from the Greek word *hagiazō*) in Heb 10:10, 14. The author has also emphasized the permanency of this state, saying in Heb 10:10 that it is “once for all” and in 10:14 that they are “perfected for all time.” Though the warning passages are severe, they must be interpreted in the light of the indications that the recipients of this epistle share a common faith with the author. This common faith places them in a permanent holy state before God.

Several lines of reasoning lead to the conclusion that the author and the majority of the recipients were Jews. Many of the topics in the epistle are geared to a Jewish audience: the Melchizedekian priesthood; the frequent reference to Old Testament figures; the contrast of the new covenant to the old covenant; the reference to “our ancestors” (Heb 1:1); the large sections dealing with the Levitical priesthood and the Jewish sacrificial system; and many more. As we shall see in the warning passages in the epistle, the author is concerned that these believers may slip back into the old system under Old Testament ritual. Such a concern would not be warranted

if the readers were primary Gentile. It is little wonder that the vast majority of commentators have understood this epistle to be addressed primarily to a Jewish audience.

What is not so clear in relation to the intended recipients is the meaning of the closing reference to “those from Italy” (Heb 13:24). Does the author refer here to fellow believers who are from Italy and with himself at some location other than Italy as he writes to those still residing in Italy? Or, is the author writing from Italy and joining the Italian believers with himself in sending greetings to others outside of Italy?

### **QUESTION 18**

The mention of Timothy here proves Paul was the author of this epistle. *True or False?*

### **QUESTION 19**

As you think about the phrase, “Those from Italy send you greetings,” what is your conclusion about what the author meant? Write your answer in your Life Notebook along with the reasons for your conclusion.

### **QUESTION 20**

Now that you are coming to the close of this study of such a great epistle, think for a moment how you would state the theme in one sentence. Write this sentence in your Life Notebook.

## Lesson 12 Self Check

### QUESTION 1

Because the new covenant is based on pure grace, believers have no responsibilities under this covenant. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 2

The phrase “some have entertained angels without knowing it” is a figurative way of saying that God sees what we do even in secret places. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 3

It is interesting to see what a broad area of life is covered with so few words in Hebrews 13:1-6. All of the areas of life are touched on **except** which one of the following?

- A. Money and security
- B. Marriage and sexuality
- C. Acceptable and unacceptable foods
- D. Hospitality and compassionate ministry to those in difficult circumstances

### QUESTION 4

The commentary understands that the leaders referred to in Hebrews 13:7-8 have already died. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 5

The section of Hebrews 13:7-17 is considered by Dr. Tanner as one unit because of the occurrence of “leaders” in both verses 7 and 17. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 6

From the perspective of the author of Hebrews, the old covenant had sacrifices as part of the Law, but the new covenant, in contrast to the old, is free from sacrifices. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 7

A priest serving under the old covenant had certain new covenant privileges. *True or False?*

### QUESTION 8

Which of the following statements is **not** true of leaders' relationships with those who they lead?

- A. Are advantageous to those under them when they lead with joy
- B. Should be followed in every situation because they are appointed by God
- C. Are tasked with keeping watch over the souls of God’s people
- D. Will give an account for their faithfulness as leaders

### QUESTION 9

The writers of the New Testament never asked for prayer for themselves because that would have been self-serving. *True or False?*

### **QUESTION 10**

All of the following are said of Jesus in the benediction **except** which one?

- A. He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep.
- B. He provided the blood of the eternal covenant.
- C. He is worthy of glory forever.
- D. He is the Creator of the universe.

## Lesson 12 Answers to Questions

### QUESTION 1

<i>References</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Hebrews 13:1-6	Personal morality and social responsibility
Hebrews 13:7-17	Religious life in community
Hebrews 13:18-19	Personal request for prayer
Hebrews 13:20-25	Benediction and closing

### QUESTION 2

<i>Terms and Phrases</i>	<i>New Covenant Worship</i>
“We are of his house”	Faithful believers who keep their confidence
House	Worshipping community and their participation in it
Jesus	Great High Priest under the new covenant
Believer-priests	All believers under the new covenant

**QUESTION 3:** False

**QUESTION 4:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 5:** False [As noted in the commentary, Abraham and Sarah literally entertained angels (Gen 18:2, 16). Angels are often associated in Scripture with activities involving worship: putting the Law into effect (Gal 3:19); worship at the birth of the Christ child (Lk 2:13-15); observation of church life (1 Cor 11:10).]

### QUESTION 6

C. Acceptable and unacceptable foods

**QUESTION 7:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 8:** True [See commentary on Heb 13:7.]

**QUESTION 9:** leaders

**QUESTION 10:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 11:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 12:** False

**QUESTION 13:** False

### QUESTION 14

B. Should be followed in every situation because they are appointed by God

**QUESTION 15:** False

### QUESTION 16

<i>Passage</i>	<i>Content</i>
Zechariah 11:4-14; 13:7	Great Shepherd of the sheep rejected by the nation
Ezekiel 37:26	Eternal covenant used to refer to the new covenant
Isaiah 55:3	New covenant culminates in the messianic kingdom
Jeremiah 31:33	Announcement of a new covenant

### QUESTION 17

D. He is the creator of the universe.

**QUESTION 18:** False [Several possible authors would have also known Timothy (e.g., Luke or Barnabas).]

**QUESTION 19:** *Your answer*

**QUESTION 20:** *Your answer*

## Lesson 12 Self Check Answers

**QUESTION 1:** False

**QUESTION 2:** False

**QUESTION 3**

C. Acceptable and unacceptable foods

**QUESTION 4:** True

**QUESTION 5:** True

**QUESTION 6:** False

**QUESTION 7:** False

**QUESTION 8**

B. Should be followed in every situation because they are appointed by God

**QUESTION 9:** False

**QUESTION 10**

D. He is the Creator of the universe.



# A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews

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**By Dr. J. Paul Tanner**

BEE WORLD

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## **Preface**

Writing a commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews has proven to be a daunting task, even though this work is only of modest length and technicality. At the same time, I cannot convey strongly enough what joys I have received in the study, reflection, and writing of this commentary. I trust that the reader will find much benefit in the following pages, and that whatever insight might be gained will lead him or her to a closer walk with the Lord Jesus, for whose glory this has been prepared.

The English version of this commentary was originally written for the ministry of BEE World using the NET Bible as the primary biblical text. To make the commentary more beneficial for a broader audience, all Greek and Hebrew words have been transliterated.

J. Paul Tanner

## Abbreviations

### Abbreviations

AD	anno Domini (“in the year of our Lord”); reference to years since the birth of Christ
BC	"before Christ"; reference to the years preceding the birth of Christ
BDAG	The 3rd edition of <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (by Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker; revised and edited by Frederick William Danker; The Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000)
e.g.	for example
esp.	especially
Eng	English
Gk	Greek
Heb	Hebrew
i.e.	that is
lit.	literally
LSJM	The 1996 updated 9th edition of <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott; Oxford: Clarendon Press)
LXX	The Septuagint (the Greek translation tradition of the Old Testament)
Macc	Maccabees (books found among the Apocrypha)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NT	New Testament

OT	Old Testament
Sir	Wisdom of Ben Sira (a book of the Apocrypha)
p	page
pp	pages
v	verse
vv	verses
viz.	namely

## **An Introduction to the Epistle to the Hebrews**

The epistle to the Hebrews is one of the most theologically profound books of the Bible. It exalts the person of Christ, His work on the cross, His ministry as a High Priest, and it anticipates His return to reign over His kingdom. Yet, in the early church, this epistle was slow to be accepted as part of the NT canon, and at times was even listed among the disputed books. This was largely due to the debate concerning the authorship of the epistle. Today, however, Hebrews is clearly recognized as a legitimate part of the NT. This book is also significant for the contribution it makes to discussions about salvation, perseverance, eternal security, the matter of rewards and what it means to reign with Christ.

### **Date of Composition**

Since Clement of Rome (c. AD 95-96) makes a clear reference to the epistle, it is certainly to be dated prior to this time (1 Clement 36:1-5). Internal references in the epistle, moreover, suggest that it was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple in AD 70. Since the author strives to prove the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice to the Levitical sacrifices of the old covenant, he would certainly have pointed out the temple's destruction to support his case. The fact that he does not suggests he wrote before this happened. Furthermore, other verses in the book (e.g., Heb 8:4; 13:10) imply that the temple was still standing and the sacrificial system was operational.

Another possible clue to the book's date is the reference to Timothy's imprisonment in Hebrews 13:23. Most likely this is the same Timothy who ministered with the apostle Paul. Yet the NT does not refer elsewhere to an imprisonment of Timothy, although Philippians 2:19-20 might allow for it. In any case, it is doubtful that Timothy was imprisoned prior to Paul's imprisonment. Paul's first Roman imprisonment is probably to be dated AD 60-62, implying that Hebrews would not be earlier than this. The likelihood, then, is that Hebrews was written between AD 60 and 70. If Timothy's imprisonment is after Paul's last epistle (since there is no clear reference to it in Paul's writings), then Hebrews may have been written after Paul's martyrdom, perhaps about AD 68-69.

### **Authorship**

The authorship of Hebrews has always been a controversial issue. Of course, the apostle Paul has always been one of the prime candidates. Since there is no salutation for the epistle naming the author (as is customary for Paul's writings), we cannot be certain of the author.

There are many arguments for and against Pauline authorship, far more than can be listed here. The author's profound insights into the Old Testament and his acquaintance with Timothy (Heb 13:23) would argue in favor of Paul. In the Eastern Church, Pauline authorship was typically assumed as early as Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 155–AD 220). Origen (c. AD 185–AD 254) frankly admitted

that only God knows the true author. The Western Church tended to reject Pauline authorship at least until the time of Jerome and Augustine in the fourth century AD. Today's scholars also tend to reject the notion of Paul as the author. The Greek of the epistle is more literary and polished than is typical of Paul, and there are significant vocabulary differences between Paul's other writings and Hebrews.

Numerous other suggestions have been put forward, including Barnabas, Apollos, and Luke. Despite the immense amount of scholarly effort that has been expended on solving this issue, it still remains a mystery. Though the author cannot be identified with any certainty this does not detract from the book's inspiration, as there can be no doubt that this is revelation from God and a vital part of the NT Scriptures.

## **Background and Setting**

The epistle contains some thirty-four to forty quotations from the OT, in addition to many OT allusions. We also observe that the author is exceedingly burdened to show the superiority of the new covenant in contrast to the old covenant established at Sinai. Along with this, he strives to prove the superiority of Christ's sacrifice to animal sacrifice, and the superiority of the Melchizedekian priesthood to the Levitical. Finally, in Hebrews 13:13 he calls for the readers to go "outside the camp," bearing the reproach of Jesus (see commentary on this verse). This seems to be a call for the readers to make a decisive break with Judaism and all its legalistic system in order to identify with Jesus and the new program of God through the new covenant. Taken together, these point to a predominantly Jewish audience.

Furthermore, and most importantly for the interpretation of the book, the readers are identified as genuine believers who possess eternal life in Jesus Christ. This is an important point, since some commentators (especially those in the Reformed tradition) assert that the strong warnings in the epistle are not really addressed to Christians, but rather to those who have only professed a faith in Christ without truly being saved. Yet in Hebrews 3:1, they are called "holy brothers." An analogy is drawn between the present readers and the wilderness generation (Heb 3:16-19), most of whom were undoubtedly regenerate (see Exod 14:31). The readers who are seriously warned in Hebrews 6:4-6 are the same as those who ought by now to be teachers (Heb 5:12). This suggests that their problem is their lack of maturity, not of personal salvation from the penalty of sin (i.e., imputed righteousness). Earlier, the readers had demonstrated faithfulness, even at the expense of suffering for their faith (see Heb 6:10; 10:32-24). Finally, the stress of the book is on endurance, holding fast one's confession, and maintaining faith (Heb 10:36), all of which would be possible only for believers.

The author seems to be writing to a particular community, not just to Jewish Christians in general. The readers have a definite history (Heb 6:10; 10:32-34) and the author intended to visit them (Heb 13:23). It seems that some of their spiritual leaders had already died (Heb 13:7), with the result that the readers were drifting away from their teachings (Heb 13:9). Some had even begun to forsake meeting with fellow believers for worship (Heb 10:25).

There is also evidence that the readers had been undergoing significant trials and persecutions (Heb 10:32-34). Though apparently not yet to the point of martyrdom (Heb 12:4), yet they were growing weary in their Christian pilgrimage and were tempted to give up. The author was concerned that their spiritual wavering and immaturity might result in hardened hearts and outright rebellion against God (Heb 5:11; 3:12). He was also concerned that if this were not reversed, their rebellion might incite God's judgment against them (Heb 4:11; 10:26-31). Their endurance in faith, on the other hand, would result in obtaining God's promises, rewards, and blessings in the coming kingdom of Christ upon His return (Heb 6:11-12; 10:35-36).

## Purpose of the Epistle

The epistle of Hebrews is written to a particular community of Jewish Christians who were suffering for their faith, growing weary and being tempted to give up their confession. The author warns them of the dangers of their present immaturity and the consequences of rebelling against Jesus, and therefore seeks to motivate them to an enduring faith that would be greatly rewarded at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. To accomplish this, the author uses numerous arguments for the superiority of the new covenant, combined with warnings against covenant disobedience and rebellion that might bring God's judgment.

## Commentary

### I. The Prologue (Heb 1:1-4)

With the death of Christ, the new covenant has now replaced the old (Mosaic) covenant. The prologue introduces several important themes related to the coming of the new covenant. Some of these themes (e.g., the Son being better than the angels) will be further developed in the remainder of chapter 1. Others are further developed elsewhere—such as God's speaking through the Son (see Heb 2:1; 2:3; 12:25), His position at the Father's right hand in fulfillment of Psalm 110 (see Heb 8:1; 10:12; 12:2), and the Son's priestly work of purification of sins (see Heb 2:17; 5:6; and chaps. 7–10). The prologue conveys that God has given His ultimate revelation through the exalted Son of God, who as High Priest has atoned for our sins and as King awaits His final inheritance. This prepares the readers for the challenge to be faithful to the Son and the new covenant He has ushered in.

#### A. The Basic Assertion: God Has Made His Climactic Revelation (Heb 1:1-2a)

To say that “God has spoken to us in a Son” means that He has made His climactic revelation to man through Jesus, the Son of God. Furthermore, He has done so “in these last days,” not the “end times,” but, given the context of Hebrews, at this new stage in God's program that has been inaugurated by the new covenant (see the expression “days are coming” in Jer 31:31).

#### B. The Supporting Assertion About the Son's Greatness (Heb 1:2b-3)

These verses depict the greatness of the Son's person and accomplishments, which serve to underscore the importance of that which God has now revealed through Him. First, the author mentions the Son's appointment as “heir of all things.” This speaks of the Son's destiny, when in His future reign as King, He will receive His inheritance of a world-wide dominion (see Gen 1:26; Ps 72:8-11). The author is alluding to Psalm 2 (note Heb 1:5), which unites the thought of God's Son being King (Ps 2:6) with His inheritance of the nations (Ps 2:8). The OT anticipated that the kingdom would be given to the Son-Messiah (2 Sam 7:11-16; Isa 2:1-4; Dan 7:13-14). This destiny will be fully realized at His second coming (see Heb 1:6; 2:5; 9:28; 12:28). The Son's destiny also has profound implications for the readers, namely that those who faithfully endure with Christ will share in His inheritance and be rewarded.

Second, he mentions the Son's role in creation, “through whom He created the world” (see Jn 1:3; 1:10; Col 1:16). In contrast to His kingly role in the future, this looks to the distant past and His greatness “in the beginning.” Since He is our Creator, He is entitled to be King and to demand our allegiance.

Third, He points out the Son's nature as God, being “the radiance of His glory and the representation of His essence.” The word “representation” translates the Greek word *charaktēr*, meaning a faithful representation (of God). The words “of His essence” translate the Greek word *hupostaseōs*, which

stresses one's real being (what he fundamentally is). Together, these boldly state the Son's deity—He bears the glory of God and faithfully depicts His essence.

Fourth, not only is the Son the original Creator, but He currently sustains this creation by His all powerful word. Believers should obey His word (which is so powerful), and they can be assured of His ability to sustain them as they go through trials (see Heb 2:18).

Fifth, he points out the Son's atoning work for mankind, cleansing for sins. This looks to the Son's priestly work, in which He Himself became the very sacrifice that made purification from sins possible. This opening paragraph shows the Son to be both King and Priest, a combination that will be emphasized again in the epistle (see Heb 5:5-6). Since the purification of sins is complete, the Son has “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” an obvious allusion to Psalm 110 (see Heb 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). In contrast to old covenant priests, He can sit down now that His priestly work is finished. Consequently He was given a place of supreme authority and highest honor at the time of His resurrection and ascension (see 1 Kgs 2:19).

### **C. The Conclusion to the Prologue (Heb 1:4)**

The mention of angels links verse 4 with Hebrews 1:5-14. By tradition, angels were mediators in the giving of the old covenant (Heb 2:2; see Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19). The superiority of the Son over angels confirms that the revelation of the new covenant is superior to and replaces that of the old covenant. Though the Son has always been superior to the angels, the author indicates that He “became so far better than the angels.” With the completion of His redemptive work and His resurrection and exaltation to the Father's right hand, He has entered into the far superior role that the superior name of Son signifies.

## **II. The Superior Person of Jesus Guaranteeing the Superiority of the new covenant (Heb 1:5–7:28)**

In the first half of the epistle (Heb 1:5–7:28), the author looks back to the period of the OT, and makes comparisons between Jesus, who brought in the new covenant, and several leading figures involved in the establishment and operation of the old covenant. He will compare Jesus (1) to the angels, who mediated the old covenant revelation; (2) to two key human leaders, first Moses (to whom the Law was given) and then Joshua (who led God's people to their "rest" in the land); and (3) to the Levitical priests (responsible for the priestly ministry under the old order). In each case, Jesus is seen to be superior, and thus the new covenant established by Him must be superior to the old covenant.

### **A. The Son's Superiority to the Angels who Mediated the old covenant Revelation (Heb 1:5–2:18)**

The comparison with angels is the central concern of this whole section, though the author will pause in Hebrews 2:1-4 to exhort the readers.

#### **1. The Son's superiority to the angels proven (Heb 1:5-14)**

In the remainder of chapter 1, the author gives a rapid-fire quotation of seven passages from the OT to substantiate the Son's superiority over the angels.

##### *a. Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 (Heb 1:5)*

Hebrews 1:5. The author begins by linking Psalm 2:7 with 2 Samuel 7:14. The latter was one of the most crucial messianic verses in the OT, promising David that one of his descendants would eventually have an eternal throne-kingdom. This is called the Davidic covenant. Psalm 2 is a highly messianic psalm written by David (note Acts 4:25-26), in which he envisions the

fulfillment of the promises that had been made to him. Although earthly rulers have purposed to rebel against God's "Anointed One" (i.e., the Messiah), nevertheless God will install Him as King on the heavenly Mt. Zion, far above all (see Ps 2:6 with Heb 12:22). Thus, the promise in 2 Samuel 7:14 that the Davidic king would be "my son" finds its ultimate fulfillment in Messiah Jesus, the Son *par excellence*. The author's main point is that this title "my son" was never given to any angel.

But when was the Messiah "fathered"? In Ancient Near Eastern thought, when a god elevated a person to kingship, the king assumed the status of being the deity's firstborn. This analogy is applied to the Messiah in Psalm 89:3-4; 89:26-27. Therefore, this has nothing to do with physical birth or origin, but the time of coronation. The time of this begetting is "today," that unique occasion when the Messiah is elevated to the status of Davidic King. Note that Acts 13:33 connects Psalm 2:7 with the resurrection of Jesus. By His resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand, Jesus has been declared "the Son of God" (see Rom 1:3-4), though He must await the second coming for the formal inauguration of His kingdom. Lastly, we should also note that Psalm 2 goes on to speak of Messiah's inheritance, "You have only to ask me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance" (Ps 2:8). This is the basis by which the author can say that the Son has been "appointed heir of all things" (Heb 1:2). Clearly, no angel ever attained the honor that this Davidic Son has.

*b. Ps 97:7 (Heb 1:6)*

Hebrews 1:6. The source for this quotation is debated, but most likely it is drawn from the Septuagint text of Psalm 97:7. Psalm 97 is one of several "enthronement psalms" that look forward to the Lord's universal rule over the nations (note esp. Ps 96:13). The words "when He again brings" suggest that the author is thinking of the second coming event. The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 97, because it contrasts the Son's reception at the second coming with the role the angels will have. The Son will be welcomed as the universal King, whereas angels will assist Him and worship before Him (see Mt 24:30-31; Rev 19:6; 19:14). It is important to note that from the outset of the book, the author is thinking of our Lord's return, an event having important implications for believers (viz., rewards are in store for the faithful).

*c. Psalm 104:4 and Psalm 45:6-7 (Heb 1:7-9)*

Hebrews 1:7. In light of the Hebrew parallelism of Psalm 104:4, the first quotation is better translated "Who makes His angels **winds**" (as in NIV and NASB, emphasis added) rather than "Who makes His angels **spirits**" (as in NET and NKJV, emphasis added). Like the wind and like a flame of fire, the angels are transitory. The Greek text suggests that verses 7 and 8 of Hebrews 1 are meant to be contrasted. Thus, in contrast to the Son's eternal throne (Heb 1:8), the angels have merely temporal roles to play as God's messengers (the Heb word translated "angel" basically means "messenger").

Hebrews 1:8-9. Psalm 45:6 indicates that this eternal throne is for God (Heb *Elōhîm*), yet the author ascribes it to the Son. This verse not only points out the eternal nature of the dominion exercised by the Son, but sharpens the contrast to angels by pointing out that the Son rules as God. Apparently the author of Hebrews extends the quotation to include Psalm 45:7, because of its mention of the king's "companions" (Gk *metochous*), a term he later applies to believers who participate in the heavenly calling to the New Jerusalem of the new covenant (see Heb 3:1).

*d. Psalm 102:25-27 (Heb 1:10-12)*

Hebrews 1:10-12. Not even the creation itself is eternal, but the Son is. As Creator, He existed before the creation (v 10), and He will outlast it. In contrast to the eternal Son (whose "years will never run out"), the present creation is likened to an old outer garment to be changed. Yet when

the present creation is destroyed, His kingdom will not be shaken (see Heb 12:27). He is the Creator of all, whereas the angels were created.

*e. Psalm 110:1 (Heb 1:13)*

Hebrews 1:13. The seventh and final quotation is drawn from Psalm 110:1, a prominent verse in the epistle (see Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). No angel was ever invited to sit at the Father's right hand, but the Son now sits in this exalted position.

*f. Conclusion to Heb 1:5-14*

Hebrews 1:14. The author concludes by pointing out that the angels are ministering spirits (v 7 in view). Unlike the Son whose destiny is King over an eternal throne-kingdom, the role of the angels is to minister, not reign. In fact, they minister to “those who will inherit salvation.” By “salvation,” our author is thinking not of our Lord's saving work on the cross, but of a future salvation associated with His second coming (note the emphasis on the second coming in chapter 1). This is quite clear in light of his use of “salvation” in Hebrews 9:28, as well as his explicit mention in Hebrews 2:5 that he is speaking to the readers in regard to “the world to come.” Although there is a salvation for believers to inherit, this can be jeopardized by their neglect (Heb 2:3). Thus, the author will pause in Hebrews 2:1-4 to warn his readers before continuing the discussion of the Son's superiority to angels.

**2. The first warning—not to neglect our future salvation (Heb 2:1-4)**

The word “therefore” in Hebrews 2:1 connects this paragraph with chapter 1. Before continuing the discussion about angels, the author pauses to warn his readers of the failure to heed the superior revelation through the Son.

*a. The danger of failing to heed (Heb 2:1)*

Hebrews 2:1. In earlier times, God spoke at Mt. Sinai when the old covenant was given. Now God has spoken through the Son who has established the new covenant. Thus believers must pay closer attention to these things (i.e., the revelation associated with the new covenant), knowing they have the potential to “drift away” (Gk verb root *pararreō*). This verb (used only here in the NT) has the idea of something drifting by, as though it were being carried away by flowing water. The Greek translation (LXX) of Proverbs 3:21 used this verb in reference to someone gradually departing from or losing sight of God's wisdom. This suggests that the fundamental nuance is of a gradual departure rather than an abrupt one. Nothing in the context suggests that unbelievers are in view, or that the danger is one of rejecting the offer of the gospel. Rather, true believers (note that the author includes himself) are capable of departing from what God has revealed through the new covenant. Knowing that some of his audience had already become “sluggish in hearing” (Heb 5:11), he warns these believers that a subtle drift in their relationship with the Lord can lead to disaster in the Christian life (though the danger does not appear to be loss of personal salvation).

*b. The analogy to recompense under the old covenant (Heb 2:2-3)*

Hebrews 2:2. The “message spoken through angels” refers to the Mosaic law that was given at Sinai, which angels were involved in mediating (see Acts 7:38; Gal 3:19). Under this old covenant administration, “curses” (divine discipline) were given for disobedience (see Deut 28:15-68; Lev 26:1-46). These were primarily temporal in nature, and could be experienced by true believers. The word translated “penalty” is the Greek noun *misthapodosia*, meaning “recompense” when used in an unfavorable context, as it is here. The point is that under the Law, every violation had its own recompense (a negative consequence or penalty).

Hebrews 2:3a. The author deduces that if even the old covenant mediated by angels had its consequences (or discipline) for disobedience, certainly the superior new covenant brought in by



God's Son would have even more severe consequences for those who disobey it. The believer who drifts away from Jesus and the new covenant should stop to consider that he cannot escape the consequences of such a choice. The author does not state what these consequences might be, though he will have more to say later about God's discipline for the believer (in chapter 12). To neglect (Gk verb *ameleō*) means to be careless or cease to be concerned about something (see Jer 38:32 in LXX = Jer 31:32 in Eng). [The reader should be aware that the verse numbering in both the Greek LXX and the Hebrew text often differs from that in our Bible translations today]. Yet the object of neglect is "such a great salvation." The word "salvation" (Gk *sōtēria*) is not limited in meaning to what occurs at the moment of initial faith in Christ, but sometimes focuses on the climactic aspect that takes place at the Lord's second coming. It is used this way, for instance, in Hebrews 9:28 (see Rom 13:11; 1 Pet 1:5). The reference in Hebrews 1:14 to "inheriting salvation" and in Hebrews 2:5 to "the world to come" confirm that the author is thinking of this eschatological sense of the word.

Our Lord began His ministry by proclaiming "the kingdom of God" that was near (Mt 4:17), though He later revealed that it would not be fully inaugurated until His return (see Mt 25:31; 25:34; Lk 21:31). Thus, to neglect "such a great salvation" does not mean a rejection of the gospel, but rather a failure to properly care about the future aspect of our salvation connected with our Lord's second coming and kingdom. Later in the epistle he will clarify how this neglect takes place. Believers can do this by failing to endure in their Christian walk, by abandoning their confession of the Lord Jesus, and by failing to live by faith. For these Jewish believers, this might be accompanied by a retreat into some form of Judaism and its system of animal sacrifices.

*c. A reinforcement to the author's argument (Heb 2:3b-4)*

Hebrews 2:3b-4. The author reminds the readers that God's program of salvation culminating in the kingdom has been confirmed to them by those who heard him personally, and was further authenticated by the display of supernatural miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit. [Note the emphasis elsewhere placed upon apostles in these miraculous manifestations—Acts 4:33; 5:12; 14:3; 2 Cor 12:12]. The readers had ample evidence to put them on a solid course: believing in Jesus as the Christ, His kingdom teachings, and this new calling unto the new covenant that replaces the old.

**3. Reasons the Son was briefly lower than the angels (Heb 2:5-18)**

Following the warning of Hebrews 2:1-4, the author now continues his comparison of the Son with angels. Though the Son is clearly superior to angels (1:5-14), it was necessary for Him to be temporarily made lower than the angels (i.e., to become incarnate), in order to accomplish important things for man.

*a. To fulfill the dominion promise of Genesis 1 (Heb 2:5-9)*

Hebrews 2:5. In verses 5-9 the author reflects on God's original plan for man, namely, for him to have dominion over His entire created order (see Gen 1:26-28). Though the fall of man in Genesis 3 undermined that plan, God will yet fulfill this in the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus, which the author designates "the world to come." [The Greek term for "world," *oikoumenē*, is used in Psalm 93:1 and Psalm 96:10 in the context of the Lord's eschatological reign]. This kingdom was not given to angels but to the Son to reign over (a further proof of His superiority to angels). This kingdom is the same as that already introduced in chapter 1 (e.g., Heb 1:8) in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant promise of an eternal throne and kingdom (Heb 1:5).

Hebrews 2:6-8a. The author appeals to Psalm 8:4-6, in which David reflects on the dominion promise of Genesis 1. The psalmist marveled that God would honor lowly man (made lower than the angels) so highly by entrusting the rule of His created order to him. In doing so, God had

crowned Him with glory and honor. The psalm itself states that God's intention was to put all things under His control (Heb 2:8), and the author of Hebrews underscores this point by stating, "He left nothing out of His control." Though this psalm originally referred to the first Adam, the author of Hebrews finds its fulfillment in the last Adam, Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 2:8b-9. The problem is that this divine intention was not fully fulfilled in mankind, due to Adam's sin. In fact, man himself became a slave to sin and subject to the assaults of Satan and his demonic forces. Also, death still holds sway over man and keeps him in bondage (locked in fear). For this reason the author adds, "At present we do not yet see **all things** under his control" (emphasis added). Mankind does not have complete dominion over creation.

This paves the way for the promise to be fulfilled in Jesus, who has been appointed heir of all things (Heb 1:2). By His incarnation, He has joined the ranks of mankind as lower than the angels for a little while, and is thus a qualified candidate to exercise dominion over God's created order. Though He waits for His enemies to be completely subdued before His formal inauguration as king (Heb 1:13), He is already crowned with glory and honor. Mankind is crowned with glory and honor by virtue of his God-given privilege (that of ruling), but this promise from Psalm 8:5 comes to have a more significant fulfillment in Jesus. He has been resurrected and exalted to the right hand of the Father (see Heb 1:3), and from that position He exercises authority over everything (see Mt 28:18).

Jesus' incarnation also gives Him the opportunity to suffer on the cross and so "experience death on behalf of everyone" (a topic the author will take up in verses 10-18). Thus because we see Jesus in His suffering and work of redemption, we can have hope as we await His coming kingdom. This hope is founded on His resurrection, which ensures that His atoning work was successfully completed.

*b. To suffer for the many sons He is bringing to glory (Heb 2:10-18)*

Hebrews 2:10. Verse 10 highlights three ways in which the Son's sufferings uniquely benefit believers. First, the words "all things" recall verse 8 and that which man was originally to have dominion over. The Father has granted the "dominion rights" to Jesus Christ and (in turn) to those who follow Him and "inherit salvation" (recall Heb 1:14).

Second, just as the Son passed through His sufferings to arrive at glory, so the Father is at work in "bringing many sons to glory." The word "glory" recalls Psalm 8 again (see Heb 2:7) and how Christ experienced glory in resurrection and exaltation. To bring many sons to glory looks at the affirmation of God's plan for believers to also share in glory as Christ Himself did after successfully completing His earthly pilgrimage. Because of their faith in Him, they will eventually receive the glory of resurrection and (if they do not neglect the "so great a salvation") a sharing in the glorious reign and dominion of the Son. Obviously the latter privilege is conditional in light of Hebrews 2:1-4 (see Heb 4:1-11).

Third, the Father made "the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings." The word "pioneer" (Greek *archēgos*) basically means leader, and therefore His mission is to lead us (or, safely guide us, pioneering the way) to this future eschatological salvation that awaits us. In this context, "salvation" should be understood the same way as in Heb 1:14 and Heb 2:3. Just as He Himself had to pass through sufferings, so we too must do so on our earthly pilgrimage that leads to His kingdom. The verb "make perfect" is from the Greek verb *teleioō*, meaning to bring something to its goal. Jesus was not made more holy (He was eternally sinless). Rather, His endurance of sufferings served to complete the goal for Him to experientially learn obedience to the Father (see Heb 5:8).

Hebrews 2:11. The words "makes holy" (Greek *hagiazō*, to set apart) in this context and in light of Heb 10:10 refer not to progressive sanctification, but to the believer being set apart once for

all by the atoning work of Christ (i.e., positional sanctification). [This is referred to as justification in Paul's epistles]. As Christ is the leader of our salvation, we share a deep intimacy with Him. He has sanctified us (offering His body as our sacrifice), and we are sanctified. Therefore, He unashamedly views us as “brothers and sisters” [lit., “brethren”].

Hebrews 2:12-13. The author quotes two passages from the Greek Septuagint version of the OT to support this concept of being Christ’s brethren. The first is from Psalm 22:22, in which David's experience typifies the experience of Messiah (both are “king” over their congregation). The second is from Isaiah 8:17-18. In a time when the nation was turning from the Lord and resorting to Assyria for help, Isaiah put his trust in the Lord (v 17) along with his disciples (“the children” of v 18). In doing so, they typify the Lord Jesus (who trusted the Father) and the disciples (Jesus’ “children”) who have followed Him in faith.

Hebrews 2:14-16. These verses state very positively what Christ has done for His brethren. He has annulled the power of the devil, the one who had “the power of death,” and in so doing has delivered us from the fear of death. Man was created by God to rule (have dominion)—as Psalm 8 highlighted—but ironically became paralyzed through the fear of death. Satan's plot to get man to sin and thus suffer death was used to bludgeon humanity with fear. The death of Christ removes this fear, because His resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of the Father assures us of our own ultimate resurrection. Yet this concern (Christ's death that aids sinners) is of no benefit to angels, but only humans (those who share in flesh and blood). Christ’s atonement does not apply to angels but rather to Abraham's descendants, i.e., those who are the spiritual seed of Abraham by faith in Christ (see Gal 3:7).

Hebrews 2:17-18. The final two verses of the chapter depict the Son as “a merciful and faithful High Priest,” ready to help believers who are tempted. His incarnation in order to make atonement for sins also exposed Him to the realm of human temptation, as He learned experientially what we go through. In particular, He experienced firsthand the temptation of giving up and turning away from the living God. Because He remained faithful, however, He knows what it takes to endure and can thus help us do the same. The mention of “High Priest” in verse 17 (the first of many occurrences in Hebrews) serves to prepare us for what lies ahead, namely, the role of Christ as a High Priest. If we are to be successful in our earthly pilgrimage and receive a full inheritance in our eschatological salvation, we will need the help of this High Priest. In this role, He is both merciful and faithful, and focuses all of His attention on aiding us in trials and temptations in order to bring us to glory.

## **B. The Son's Superiority (as High Priest) to Moses and Joshua, Leaders of the old covenant (Heb 3:1-5:10)**

In this new section, the author continues his argument of demonstrating the superiority of the new covenant to that of the old. Yet his concern shifts from contrasting the Son with angels to contrasting Him with two key human leaders involved in the initial stages of the old covenant, namely, Moses and Joshua. The Son is faithful in a more significant way than Moses through whom the old covenant came. His task is also superior to that of Joshua, since He leads the people of God to a greater “rest.” In this new contrast, however, the author emphasizes the role of the Son as a merciful and faithful High Priest, a thought with which he concluded the previous section (recall Heb 2:17). His faithfulness is a key theme for Hebrews 3:1–4:13, while His mercy is a key theme for Hebrews 4:14–5:10. Furthermore, the author shows how these themes of His faithfulness and mercy have significant implications for new covenant believers.

## 1. The importance of being faithful to the High Priest of the new covenant (Heb 3:1–4:13)

This unit looks back to the role Moses and Joshua played under the old covenant. Moses was faithful in building the old covenant tabernacle, while Joshua faithfully led the people of God to their “rest” in the land of promise. What Jesus does is similar, yet it has far greater significance.

### *a. The model of Jesus' faithfulness (Heb 3:1-6)*

It is not without significance that our author would choose to draw a comparison between the work of Moses and that of Jesus. In the eyes of most Jews (including the recipients of Hebrews), Moses was regarded as the greatest person who ever lived. He led Israel out of bondage in Egypt, constituted Israel as a nation at Sinai, and inaugurated the old covenant that gave the people the Law. Yet Moses was also associated with the priestly side of the old covenant. Of Levitical descent himself (Exod 2:1-2), he was the one to whom the plans for the tabernacle were revealed and who was responsible for its construction. This paragraph highlights his role in building the old covenant tabernacle.

Hebrews 3:1-2. Significantly, the author begins by addressing his readers as “holy brothers and sisters” [lit., holy brethren]. This is a direct allusion to Hebrews 2:11, in which the “many sons” were made holy (positionally made righteous) and called His brethren. [The words “holy” and “made holy” are related to the same verb root *hagiazō*]. By saying this, the author not only links this section with the previous one, but clearly identifies his readers as genuine believers!

He also states that they are “partners in a heavenly calling.” The word “partners” (Gk *metochoi*) has the sense of being participants in something, or partnering in a common endeavor (recall Heb 1:9). Yet the “heavenly calling” is not the call to the gospel. In light of the context of the epistle as a whole, this is a calling to the greater heavenly realities associated with the new covenant, culminating with participation in the New Jerusalem of the messianic kingdom (see Heb 11:16). This is the pilgrimage on which they have embarked, one which will hopefully result in sharing in the dominion and inheritance of God's King-Son.

The readers are admonished to “take note of” Jesus, i.e., to contemplate and focus upon the One who is “the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess.” This confession refers to their public affirmation that Jesus is the Messiah and to their belief in the gospel (see Jn 9:22; 12:42; 2 Cor 9:13), which apparently they were being strongly tempted to abandon (Heb 4:14; 10:23). That they must not do. Instead they must focus upon His faithfulness as a model for their own.

Hebrews 3:3-5. The remainder of the paragraph focuses on the word “house.” By “house” is meant the tabernacle where priestly activities were conducted. Drawing on Numbers 12:6-8, the author presents Moses as being faithful in all God's house as a servant. Moses had been commissioned to build the tabernacle carefully according to God's precise instructions (Exod 25:9), and he was faithful to do so. This was important, because it served to “testify to the things that would be spoken afterward.” That is, the old covenant tabernacle was intended as a type of the greater realities that would come later when the heavenly tabernacle was disclosed (see Heb 8:4-5).

Hebrews 3:6. By way of comparison, Christ's involvement with God's house is far greater than Moses. Moses did so as a servant, but Christ as a Son. Moses was faithful **in** all His house, but Christ is faithful **over** His house. Moses' ministry related to the symbol, but Christ's to the reality itself. Thus, there is more at stake, and care must be taken to respond appropriately. The author alludes to this in verse 6 when he says, “We are of his house, if we hold firmly.” There is truly a condition that the readers must be prepared to meet, that of “holding firm.” There are two crucial questions related to verse 6. Who is it that must “hold firm”? What danger is there for failing to do so?

A reliable interpretation depends on two things. First, we should keep the context in mind with its emphasis upon the house (tabernacle) as a place where priestly activities take place. In light of 1 Peter 2:5, we are “built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices.” Believers have these priestly responsibilities in this new covenant “house,” which the author will remind them of later in the epistle (see Heb 12:28; 13:15-16). Only as one faithfully fulfills these obligations is he “being the house.” [Clearly, this has nothing to do with proof of being one of “the elect”]. Any withdrawal in faith (especially abandoning their confession) would mean they were falling short of their goal.

Second, we should note the striking similarity that this paragraph has with Hebrews 10:19-25. Both passages emphasize the readers as “brethren” and Christ as High Priest over the house. Also both refer to the “confession,” and “hope” of the readers. The latter passage, however, indicates that the need of the readers is not to believe the gospel (since they had already done that), but to “hold unwaveringly to” and “draw near.” In Hebrews 10:23 “let us hold unwaveringly to” is not merely a conditional matter but an exhortation, i.e., it is an obligation for believers. In neither passage is loss of personal salvation (eternal life) presented as a danger for failure to do so. The danger is a failure to grow up into the building (house) of God in Christ. Such failure may lead to temporal judgment from God (Heb 3:7-19).

Thus, Hebrews 3:6 confronts the readers with a grave concern. Will they remain faithful believer-priests of Christ's house over which He is High Priest? The fact that they are already genuine believers does not guarantee they will do so. In their earthly pilgrimage to the Son's kingdom, they must be sure to “hold fast.” This must be accompanied by endurance and doing the will of God (see Heb 10:36). Though failure to do so may bring about temporal judgment (Heb 3:7-19), faithfulness will ensure them of successfully entering the “rest” to come where blessings and rewards await them (Heb 4:1-13).

*b. A warning from Psalm 95: The unbelief of Kadesh-barnea (Heb 3:7-19)*

Hebrews 3:6 suggests that genuine Christians have a responsibility as believer-priests in the greater spiritual house over which Christ presides as High Priest. The author now strengthens this warning by drawing an analogy to the wilderness generation that experienced God's temporal judgment as a result of hardening their hearts against God. (For the background story, see Num 13:1–14:45). In their rebellion they made a fateful decision of unbelief at Kadesh-barnea. This decision not only brought temporal judgment (death in the wilderness) but also cost them their future, for they forfeited their opportunity to experience God's “rest” in the land of Canaan. The author of Hebrews saw an analogous situation for these new covenant believers to whom he wrote.

Hebrews 3:7-11. The author quotes extensively from Psalm 95, because it provided a commentary on the wilderness generation that rebelled against God and lost their future inheritance in the land. The psalm begins by calling the people of God to worship Him and be humble. The latter half, however, transitions to a warning about guarding oneself from a “hardened heart.” The quotation begins with the words “Oh, that today you would listen as he speaks.” It is crucial to observe that the word “you” in this verse is identified in the previous line of the psalm as those who are “the people of His pasture, the sheep He owns.” In other words, this warning is directed to God's people (genuine believers) indicating that believers are capable of hardening their hearts against God and experiencing His judgment. To suggest that all those who died in the wilderness were unbelievers (and eventually went to hell) is simply not sustainable (see Exod 15:13).

We notice in the words quoted from Psalm 95 that the word “hearts” occurs twice. This emphasis upon the condition of believers' hearts is significant, for it is in the heart that one either exercises faith or unbelief. Yet the unbelief in this situation was not a failure to trust God as

Savior or to believe in the Messiah, but a failure to believe Him in leading them to Canaan. This was a faith issue of their mission, not of their personal salvation (i.e., their justification). The unbelief seen as early as Meribah and Massah (Exod 17:1-7) eventually manifested itself in full-blown rebellion against God at Kadesh-barnea (see Num 14:4; 14:9; Deut 1:26). This reflects the danger of hardening one's heart against God, for it can easily lead to a catastrophic outcome. In the instance of the unbelieving Israelites, God swore, "They will never enter My rest." "Rest" is a symbol not of heaven but of the promised inheritance in the land of Canaan.

Hebrews 3:12. Following the quotation, the author provides his explication of the psalm, beginning with a word of caution. The words "See to it, brothers and sisters," indicate once again that our author regarded the readers as genuine Christians. His concern is that some of them might have an evil, unbelieving heart. As in Psalm 95, the real issue is one of the heart. The unbelief in view is not related to their personal salvation from sin. This is clear from the context, and especially verse 19, in which the very same word for "unbelief" (Gk *apistia*) is used. The wilderness generation did not enter the land "because of unbelief." They failed to believe God's promises that He would give them the land, and thus they forsook their mission. To speak of a believer having an "evil heart" is not inappropriate. The word for evil (Gk *ponēros*) is used for the disciples in Luke 11:13, for believers with "evil motives" in Jas 2:4, and in 1 Corinthians 5:13 for an immoral person in the church that had to be disciplined (note that the principle in this latter case applies to true believers as well as those who might not be—anyone who bears the name "brother").

The author's concern is that such a heart of unbelief might result in their forsaking the living God. The word translated "forsake" (Gk *aphistēmi*) is rendered in some translations as "falling away" (NASB). Ordinarily in the NT, this word means to depart from someone or a place literally (for theological usage, see 1 Tim 4:1 and Lk 8:13). The word occurs much more frequently in the LXX, and in several cases has the clear nuance of "forsaking" God by turning to idols (Deut 32:15; Josh 22:19) or of "rebellious" against the Lord (2 Chr 26:18; 30:7). This nuance of "rebellious" against the Lord precisely describes the actions of the wilderness generation. What they did at Kadesh-barnea was a rebellion against the Lord (Num 14:4; 14:9; Deut 1:26). Seen in the light of Hebrews 3:6, the author seems to be saying, "Hold fast, and don't rebel against God!"

Hebrews 3:13. The author now offers a remedy for unbelief and rebellion. They are to continually exhort (encourage) one another. Because any Christian can succumb to a hardened heart of unbelief, all need to avail themselves of a caring, encouraging community of believers (see Heb 10:24-25).

Hebrews 3:14. The author firmly warns his readers to stick with what they have undertaken. The words "partners with Christ" echo the thought in Hebrews 3:1 of being "partners in a heavenly calling." The word "partners" (Gk *metochoi*) is the same in each verse. When they trusted the Lord Jesus as their Messiah and Savior, they embarked upon a partnership with Him involving their pilgrimage to His kingdom and the heavenly Jerusalem. To share in His dominion and inheritance, they need to endure in a life of faith, doing the will of God (see Heb 6:11-12; 10:36).

Remaining Christ's partners is conditional. We do so, only "if in fact we hold our initial confidence firm until the end." The word translated "confidence" (Gk *hupostaseōs*) can have the idea of an undertaking or endeavor that one has obligated himself to (BDAG, 1040). By sticking with their original undertaking, they will enter the kingdom successfully, inheriting great rewards. Failure to do so will not mean loss of salvation (the author never suggests this!), but rather loss of reward (and possibly temporal judgment while on earth). Hence the author closes this paragraph with some final reminders about possible judgment from God.

Hebrews 3:15-19. Once again the author reminds them of the wilderness generation that hardened their hearts and rebelled against God. For those old covenant believers, this was sin that led to their death in the wilderness (temporal judgment from God). The implication is all too obvious: Something analogous awaits new covenant believers who harden their hearts and rebel! Furthermore the wilderness generation spoiled their future and forfeited their opportunity to enter rest (the land of Canaan). Similarly believers under the new covenant who fail to believe and obey will suffer something more dire. This will be the subject of the next section.

*c. Our goal of entering God's greater rest (Heb 4:1-13)*

God's judgment on the wilderness generation under Moses was exclusion from His "rest" of inheriting Canaan (Ps 95:11). The land was regarded on the one hand as a resting place because of the rest they could have from their enemies, and yet on the other hand as an inheritance (or gift) from the Lord (Deut 12:9-11). Yet this "land rest" did not exhaust the full intentions of the Lord. The psalmist was able to say to a new generation living in the land, "Oh, that you would listen." This implies that it was still possible to mistakenly harden one's heart, thereby forfeiting God's rest. This led the author of Hebrews to conclude that "rest" ultimately had a greater significance than the land-rest. It was typological of a greater rest to come. Furthermore he connected this theme with the creation rest, when God rested after the six days of creation.

Bible scholars hold different views regarding what is meant by this "greater rest." Each view must not only account for all the details of the passage, but must satisfactorily explain the danger mentioned in Hebrews 4:1—"we must be wary that ... none of you may seem to have come short of it." In the first view, the rest is regarded as equivalent to heaven (or the eternal bliss awaiting believers there) when the believer will have unbroken fellowship with God. The rest is a future experience, based on Heb 4:1—while the promise of entering his rest remains open (see Heb 4:11). In this view, the danger of coming short (vs 1) is then a failure to believe the gospel and be saved. However, this view is fatally flawed. The "rest" in chapter 4 depends on Psalm 95 for its analogy, a psalm that has old covenant believers in view (for whom saving faith was not the issue). Also Hebrews 4:11 clarifies that the rest may be jeopardized by following "the same pattern of disobedience" as the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea when they refused to believe that God would give them the land. Also the author admonishes the readers in Hebrews 4:14-16 to hold fast their confession and to confidently approach the throne of grace for help. These admonitions would be inappropriate for unbelievers who were falling short of believing the gospel.

A second view is that the greater rest is a present Christian experience of peace—what some refer to as a "faith-rest life" (see Mt 11:28-30) when a believer stops trying to live the Christian life in his own fleshly works and learns to trust God.

Proponents of this view argue that the present tense of the verb "enter" in Hebrews 4:3 (*eiserchometha*) supports the interpretation of a present (rather than a future) experience, yet this view is not convincing. While it is true that the verb "enter" in verse 3 is in the Greek present tense, there are other ways to understand this use of the present tense (see comments on v 3). The most problematic issue for this view is that it understands that the believer's works are regarded negatively or carnal, contradicting the analogy to God's works in verse 10. Furthermore, one should "make every effort" to enter this rest, that is, make great effort (Heb 4:11).

A third view is that the greater rest is equivalent to being in the millennial kingdom (the one thousand year rule of Christ on earth). While this view correctly understands the rest as a future experience in light of Hebrews 4:1, and connects the promise to the kingdom in light of the broader context of the epistle, there are concerns. First, why limit this to only the one thousand year rule of Christ on earth since Christ will rule forever and ever (Rev 11:15)? Advocates of this view also tend to see the promised rest as the destiny of all regenerate believers, thus

nullifying any danger for true believers. This is contrary to the analogy of the wilderness believers in Hebrews 3.

A fourth view is preferable, namely, the experience of receiving one's inheritance and ruling with Christ in the messianic kingdom. While this is similar to view three, there are important differences. This view includes the millennial kingdom but also extends throughout the New Creation (Rev 21–22), i.e., the messianic kingdom refers to the entire rule of Christ following His second coming. More importantly, entering the rest is not merely being in the kingdom (which all true believers are entitled to), but also focuses on the inheritance and reward awaiting faithful believers (and which unfaithful believers may very well jeopardize). Primarily, this “rest” will involve a share (as one's inheritance for faithfulness) in the dominion over God's creation (recall Hebrews 2).

This last view has the best support for the following reasons. First, this view understands the rest to be a future experience in keeping with Hebrews 4:1 (“the promise of entering his rest remains open”). Second, the epistle began by stressing that Christ is the heir of all things, a promise which finds its fulfilment at the second coming, when all His enemies have been subjected to Him (see Heb 10:13). Third, the author has been concerned about those who would inherit salvation (Heb 1:14) in the “world to come” (Heb 2:5; also see Heb 9:28). Fourth, this period of salvation will make it possible for man to have dominion over God's created realm, satisfying His original intentions for man (Heb 2:5-9). Fifth, this view is consistent with the analogy suggested in chapter 3 (recall Ps 95), in which God's children (not unbelievers) failed to gain their potential inheritance on account of unbelief and disobedience. Sixth, the matter of rewards for faithfulness is an ongoing motif of the epistle (see Heb 6:11-12; 10:35-36; 11:6; 11:26; 11:39). Seventh, this epistle stresses Messiah's kingdom (see Heb 1:8; 12:28), and the concept of “rest” is even linked in such passages as Isaiah 11:10 with Messiah's kingdom of peace when all the nations will resort to Him.

Hebrews 4:1-2. The author's question “how will we escape” in Hebrews 2:3 has now been strengthened to “we must be wary” (also translated as, “let us fear”). The author's point in verse 1 is that there is a rest yet remaining (see Heb 4:6; 4:9; 4:11) above and beyond the “rest” of Joshua's day. This greater rest is for the faithful believer upon receiving his inheritance in Messiah's kingdom. The words “we had good news proclaimed to us” translate one Greek verb *euēngelismenoi*, used here in a nontechnical sense of “preaching good news” in general rather than the gospel message specifically (see Lk 1:19; 1 Thess 3:6). The wilderness generation heard the good news of the offer to inherit Canaan (see esp. Num 13:30; 14:7-9), but new covenant Christians have been offered a far superior good news—the privilege to exercise dominion with Jesus in God's future rest. In both cases, however, a response of faith and obedience is required (see Heb 3:18-19).

Hebrews 4:3a-b. In verses 3-9 the author presents his proof that God's promise of rest remains good. He begins in verse 3 by giving the basic principle for entering the greater rest, namely, faith. This rest is for those of us “who have believed” (the aorist participle *pisteusantes* is best viewed as a “durative aorist,” stressing the progress of the action in past time). This faith is not that of a single occasion (such as one's original faith in believing the gospel), but a faith that has persevered over time. It is we who have persevered in faith that enter this rest, as the preceding context indicates (see Heb 3:6; 3:14). The present tense of the verb *eiserchometha* (“enter”) is probably a gnomic present, stressing the principle involved and not the time of fulfilment (see Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp 523-24). The author's appeal in verse 3 to the words from Psalm 95 supports this conclusion. Likewise, the principle has a corollary—failing to respond in faith may disqualify one from entering God's rest.



Hebrews 4:3c-5. In verses 3-5 the author seeks to draw lessons from God's creation rest. God Himself entered into rest upon completion of His work at creation. Two conclusions are drawn from this: (1) any subsequent offer of rest on God's part reveals that even the creation rest is not an end in itself but must foreshadow something greater; and (2) "rest" was intended by God to be enjoyed by those who complete their works (as He Himself modelled). The latter suggests that "works" should not be viewed negatively. Works—at least those done in faith through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit—are what believers should be faithful to do in this present life (see Jn 14:12; Eph 2:10; 2 Tim 2:21). In fact, there is a connection between faithfulness in doing good works that God has ordained for us and ruling with Christ after His return (see Rev 2:25-27). Just as God rested after His creation work, so this greater rest is offered to believers who faithfully endure and complete their works (note Heb 4:10).

Hebrews 4:6-9. In these verses, the author clarifies that this greater rest to come is still available (implying we should definitely pursue it). The author is thinking primarily of Psalm 95 and particularly the word "Today." If God's "rest" had been fulfilled in Joshua's day, the psalmist (writing many years later) would not have made the same offer and warning to his generation. So, both the rest associated with creation as well as the rest in Joshua's day point toward a greater rest in God's program which He has promised "It remains for some to enter it," i.e., the opportunity to successfully receive an inheritance in this future rest (God's ultimate Sabbath rest!) remains available to new covenant believers, unless they disqualify themselves "because of disobedience."

Hebrews 4:10-11. The author once again highlights the importance of works. When believers complete their earthly pilgrimage, the opportunity for works will be over. There is no opportunity to go back (to relive one's life) and try to do it better. Hence, he says to the readers in verse 11, "Thus we must make every effort to enter that rest." Obviously, one does not make every effort (Gk *spoudasōmen*) to merit forgiveness and eternal life. The gospel promises eternal life as a free gift on the basis of faith alone in Christ alone (Rom 6:23). But diligent effort is appropriate for successfully entering this future rest where our inheritance in Christ's kingdom is at stake. This is not a call to self-effort, however. By no means! Throughout the epistle to the Hebrews the author makes clear that this call to diligent effort is through a life of faith, endurance, and reliance upon the enabling grace of Christ, our High Priest. The believer who neglects this call to diligent effort is in danger of "falling," if he follows the same pattern of disobedience exhibited by the wilderness generation of Moses' day. [The author's use of the term "fall" (Gk *pipō*) is a deliberate allusion back to Hebrews 3:17 and the outcome of those who in unbelief disobeyed the Lord—"whose dead bodies fell in the wilderness"].

Hebrews 4:12-13. Having called the readers to make a diligent effort to enter this future climactic rest and having warned them of the possibility of disqualifying themselves, the author now sternly reminds them that there is no way to escape the penetrating scrutiny of God. God is able to see to the very inner core of our lives, and is "able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart," for it is precisely in the heart that hardening takes place and unbelief arises. Since entering God's rest—receiving an inheritance and reward in Messiah's kingdom—is conditional, such a judgment by God is necessary and inevitable. One day, at the judgment seat of Christ, each believer must face such a scrutinizing judgment by God (see Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:12-15; 4:4-5; 2 Cor 5:9-10). As sobering as God's judgment is, we are not left helpless. Fortunately, Jesus is available to us now as our High Priest with the grace and mercy we need for the trials we face, as the next section explains.

## **2. The help available from the merciful High Priest of the new covenant (Hebrews 4:14–5:10)**

The previous unit (Heb 3:1–13) focused on the importance of being faithful to the High Priest of the new covenant in order to enter God's greater rest. The wilderness generation living under the old

covenant failed to enter God's land-rest in Canaan, because they hardened their hearts against God until finally rebelling at Kadesh-barnea. By analogy, believers under the new covenant can fail to successfully enter God's greater rest of Messiah's coming kingdom, that is, to obtain their potential inheritance. Yet new covenant believers need not "come short of it," for there is ample provision of help from Jesus, the merciful High Priest. Following an exhortation to avail oneself of His mercy and grace, the author then substantiates Jesus' qualification and preparation as High Priest.

*a. An exhortation to hold fast by availing oneself of the grace of Christ (Heb 4:14-16)*

Hebrews 4:14. The author resumes his consideration of Jesus as High Priest that he began in 3:1. The qualifying words "who has passed through the heavens" remind us that this High Priest has not gone into the mere earthly Holy of Holies, but into the ultimate heavenly one. Consequently, we must not abandon our confession of faith in Him (recall Heb 3:1), but rather hold it fast.

Hebrews 4:15. Despite His exalted position, this great High Priest does not stand uncaringly aloof from us. Rather, He can truly sympathize with our weaknesses, meaning that He can understand just how difficult our earthly pilgrimage is and how weak we are in the face of so many temptations that war against our souls. In light of the preceding context, the author is probably thinking of the particular weakness (and temptation) of succumbing to unbelief and rebelling against God. He Himself has felt the full force of what it means to be tempted, not the least of which was Satan's temptations against Him in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11). The author hastens to add these words yet without sin, for sin would have disqualified Him as a perfect sacrifice. In every temptation He faced throughout His earthly ministry, He did not yield to sin (see 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 7:26).

Hebrews 4:16. In facing temptation, God's solution is the throne of grace, and we are invited to confidently approach it. Hodges writes, "Such a conception of the presence of God into which beleaguered Christians may come at any time, suggests both the sovereignty of the One they approach (since they come to a 'throne') and His benevolence" (Zane Hodges, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament edition, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983], 790). Those who frequent this throne of grace do not need to fear coming short of His rest.

*b. Jesus' qualification as High Priest of the new covenant (Heb 5:1-6)*

Until now, Jesus' qualification as High Priest has been presumed. Since this "throne of grace" is so important to our earthly pilgrimage and attaining to God's greater rest, the author now substantiates His qualification to be our great High Priest.

Hebrews 5:1-4. In these verses the author points out several characteristics of High Priests who served under the Levitical system: (1) they were taken from among the people; (2) none were self-appointed; and (3) since every priest was himself a sinner (as evidenced by the fact that he even had to offer a sacrifice for himself according to Lev 16:6; 16:11; 16:15-17), he could quite naturally be compassionate with those whom he served.

Hebrews 5:5-6. The author now shows both the continuity and discontinuity between Christ and the Levitical priests. The discontinuity is obviously the issue of the sin condition (Christ had no sin). Yet there is also continuity: Levitical priests were not self-appointed, and neither was Christ. The author quotes from Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4 (two well-known messianic texts) to show that Christ did not glorify Himself.

By linking these verses, he calls the readers' attention to the fact that the Messiah was not only appointed to a royal position as the Davidic Son-King but also to a unique priestly ministry. Furthermore, Psalm 110 reveals that Messiah would be of a different priestly order than that of the Levites. If He were of the Levitical priesthood, His priestly ministry would be no better than

that offered by the old covenant. Yet because the new covenant is superior to the old, it is important that the priesthood associated with the new be distinct and qualitatively better. Indeed it is, for Christ is a priest of the order of Melchizedek, not that of Levi. The author will return in chapter 7 to elaborate this different priesthood.

*c. The perfecting of Jesus as High Priest (Heb 5:7-10)*

In these verses, the author now shows the relationship between the sufferings and endurance of Jesus in His earthly experience, and the help that He is able to give to new covenant believers today.

Hebrews 5:7-8. These verses highlight the difficulties and trials that Christ encountered in His earthly pilgrimage, especially in His experience at the cross. Even the eternal Son learned to cry out to the Father for help. In doing so, He found that the Father was able to save Him from death. The word “save” (Gk *sōzō*) does not carry a soteriological sense here, but rather has the common OT meaning of “deliver.” Jesus was heard, meaning that the Father answered Him favorably. The point is that, though Jesus fully participated in death (Heb 2:9), He was delivered from its bonds through resurrection.

From His sufferings (climaxing at Calvary), the Son learned obedience He did not need to learn **how** to be obedient, for He was never disobedient. Rather, He learned firsthand all that obedience entails, especially that doing the will of God often brings suffering.

Hebrews 5:9-10. Through His sufferings (and especially what He experienced on the cross), Jesus was perfected (Gk *teleiōtheis*). This cannot mean that Jesus became any more perfect in His nature, for as the Son of God He is eternally perfect. The Greek verb means to bring something to its intended goal. These sufferings served to complete the goal of preparing Him for the role He would have as our High Priest (see Heb 2:10).

This accomplished, He became “the source” (Gk *aitios*, the responsible cause) “eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” If we say that “salvation” in this verse means personal salvation (or redemption) that comes from believing the gospel, then we have a theological problem, in that the verse seems to condition this salvation on obedience. Yet the New Testament is clear that one's personal salvation can only be received as a free gift on the sole basis of faith alone in Christ alone, and thus only by God's grace (see Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). It simply will not do to say here that those who truly believe the gospel and are saved will assuredly go on to live obedient lives.

There are several reasons why “eternal salvation” in this verse does not refer to redemption from sin based on Christ's atonement (even though the cross is certainly part of this context). First, of seven occurrences of “salvation” in this epistle (Heb 1:14; 2:3; 2:10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28; 11:7), not once does it clearly mean “salvation from sin.” In several cases (Heb 1:14; 9:28; 11:7), it means something else, which should caution us from presuming a soteriological meaning in Hebrews 5:9.

Second, Christ's experience in Hebrews 5:7-8 is meant to parallel that of believers. He suffered, He cried out to the Father for help, and He was “saved,” i.e., rescued through resurrection to share in glory. The “salvation” of Hebrews 5:9 cannot overlook the use of this word in regard to Christ's own experience just mentioned in Hebrews 5:7!

Third, the context has not been talking about a sinner's need for salvation from sin. This unit (Heb 4:14–5:10) began with the exhortation for believers (those who can already be said to “have a great High Priest”) to hold fast their confession and turn to the throne of grace for help in dealing with their weaknesses.

Fourth, the obedience mentioned in verse 9 must be seen in light of the preceding verse. The verb “obey” in Hebrews 5:9 (from *hupakouō*) is clearly associated with the word “obedience” in Hebrews 5:8 (from the related noun, *hupakoē*). Thus the believer's obedience in Hebrews 5:9 is meant to be seen in comparison with Christ's obedience in Hebrews 5:8, namely, obedience connected with sufferings in the course of being faithful to God! He is not talking about obedience in general. Furthermore this call for obedience to Christ stands in contrast to the disobedience that disqualified the wilderness generation from attaining their rest (see Heb 3:11; 4:11). This suggests that the author is thinking primarily of the specific obedience of holding fast one's confession and not rebelling against the Lord, especially in the face of sufferings and persecutions.

If these verses do not refer to justification and personal salvation from sin, then what do they refer to? The context has highlighted how Christ was perfected for His role by obedience through sufferings, following which he experienced “salvation.” Now He is in a position to help His “brethren” (those already justified) who are being brought to glory (Heb 2:10). Through Him, they can attain to “eternal salvation” (eternal, because it cannot be taken from them). In the context of Hebrews, this means an eschatological salvation in which one shares in Christ's inheritance and reigns with Him (exercising dominion). Yet this is not automatic for believers; it is for those who obey Him—not a self-reliant obedience, but through reliance upon Christ as High Priest. Primarily, this includes the obedience of holding fast one's confession and drawing near to God rather than rebelling (recall Heb 4:14 and compare the issue of rebellion in Heb 3:12).

### **C. The Superiority of the Son's Priestly Ministry Over the Levitical Priests (Heb 5:11–7:28)**

The theme of Christ's priestly ministry is obviously of great importance to the author. Part of the new covenant's superiority to the old Mosaic covenant is the fact it introduces a new and superior priesthood. The author introduces this theme in Hebrews 4:14–5:10, and then returns to it in chapter 7 to compare and contrast Christ's priestly ministry with that of the Levitical priesthood. The material in between (namely, Heb 5:11–6:20) constitutes another warning passage to the readers, confronting their immaturity and seeking to motivate them to a life of persevering faith. A proper interpretation of this difficult warning passage depends on keeping the wider context in view. Since the author has been showing that Christ has a greater ministry than the Levitical priests and all they performed under the Levitical system, the author now warns his readers against returning to that system.

#### **1. Confrontation and motivation to move on to maturity (Heb 5:11–6:20)**

To make his point about the superiority of Christ's priestly ministry, the author relates this to the promise in the OT of a differing priesthood founded upon Melchizedek. This kind of discussion, however, presumes a certain level of spiritual maturity on the part of the readers, and yet it is precisely the issue of their spiritual immaturity that makes it difficult for the author to reason with them. The material in Hebrews 5:11–6:20 is meant to address this concern, in preparation for the presentation in chapter 7 of the Melchizedekan priesthood.

##### *a. Confrontation regarding the need for maturity (Heb 5:11–6:12)*

This section is strongly confrontational. Not only will their immaturity hinder them from comprehending the truth he wants to present, but continued persistence in this condition could result in their “falling away” (Heb 6:6), which the NET Bible translates as committing “apostasy.” That situation would not only invite God's judgment upon them (Heb 6:7-8), but would also jeopardize their inheritance (Heb 6:11-12).

Hebrews 5:11. As one progresses toward spiritual adulthood, he should grow in his ability to comprehend spiritual truth. Yet time alone does not guarantee this. In the case of the readers of

Hebrews, they were in fact “sluggish (*nōthroi*) in hearing.” This Greek word basically means “slow” or “sluggish” and suggests they did not hear well when it came to comprehending spiritual truth. This term occurs again in Hebrews 6:12 (only other use in the NT), thus forming an *inclusio* that marks the beginning and ending of the subunit. This observation is significant, suggesting that the same group of people is addressed throughout. Thus all the severe things that he says to them in Hebrews 6:1-8 stem from their spiritual immaturity (not their lack of regeneration).

Hebrews 5:12. Since their conversion, enough time had passed for the readers to mature and progress in spiritual understanding. Some time earlier they had been taught “the beginning elements of God’s utterances.” [Most Bible translations—but not the NET Bible—include the word “again” in verse 12 (Gk *palin*)]. The word for “elements” is the Greek word *stoicheion*, which means the fundamental truths of the faith or what we might call the ABCs. This term was used elsewhere of the letters of the alphabet that a school child would learn. The author likens these basic principles of the faith to milk in contrast to solid food. Only those who have worked their way through the “milk stage” are ready for deeper spiritual truth. Yet the author is not going to teach them their ABCs again. Instead, he issues a serious warning to them, and then exhorts and motivates them to obey.

Hebrews 5:13-14. The author reminds them that a milk diet is suitable only for infants (hoping to prompt them to desire a heartier spiritual diet). Yet a milk-only diet leaves one unskilled in “the message of righteousness,” i.e., the Word of God that is intended to help one grow in true righteousness (see Heb 12:11). Solid food, on the other hand, is for the mature. One who desires the “solid food” of God’s Word must realize that he cannot gain it apart from the process of maturing. This is a difficult process in which one’s spiritual perceptions are “trained by practice.” The words translated “trained by practice” are from the Greek word *gumnazō* and suggest rigorous training. Yet this training process is worth the price one pays, for in this way he comes to discern both good and evil (an essential element of maturity).

Hebrews 6:1. Immature believers could waddle in the playground of spiritual ABCs indefinitely, and fail to ever make progress. That would not be desirable, and in fact could even be dangerous (jeopardizing their inheritance, Heb 6:12). So the author exhorts them to “move on to maturity.” The word “maturity” is translated in some Bibles as “perfection,” though the author certainly does not mean “sinless perfection”. Rather, the Greek term for “maturity” is *teleiōtēta* (derived from *teleioō*, “to reach a goal”), which looks at true Christian maturity (the opposite of “infant” in Heb 5:13). Such a summons implies that the opportunity to “move on” is still available to them.

Hebrews 6:1b-2. If the original readers of the epistle were Jewish, their faith in the Lord Jesus and participation in the new covenant called for a radical reassessment of certain foundational truths (though the author did not wish to go over these again. These foundational truths were of two general types: (1) repentance from dead works and faith in God; and (2) instruction in various matters. Dead works are referred to again in Hebrews 9:14, where it is said that Christ’s blood is able to cleanse the conscience from them, in contrast to the blood of animal sacrifices which cannot. The dead works, then, represent the efforts connected with the earthly sanctuary system to secure cleansing and acceptance before God. Now that the Messiah had come and made a perfect sacrifice, Jewish believers who turned to Him in faith had to reassess (repent of—change their mind about) the Levitical approach to God. This called for an adjustment to their theology, one of placing their faith completely in the Lord Jesus as the sure and final atonement for their sins.

The author also mentions at least four areas of instruction that needed to be corrected in light of Messiah’s ministry. One example would be “teaching about baptisms” (or washings). This

probably does not refer to Christian baptism but to Levitical ritual washings (note the use of *baptisma* in the plural in Heb 9:10). Purification by the blood of Christ has accomplished infinitely more than what Levitical washings did under the old covenant. The “laying on of hands” was formerly associated with the symbolic placing of one’s sin on a sacrifice before it was slaughtered or sent outside the camp (Exod 29:10-19; Lev 8:14-21; 16:21), or for the consecration of Levites for ministry (Num 8:10). This act now indicated placing one’s blessing on a fellow Christian to send them out into the world for ministry (Acts 13:3-4). Even their understanding of the resurrection of the dead (though taught in the Old Testament, e.g., Dan 12:2) would have to be corrected in light of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. All judgment was now given into His hands by the Father (Jn 5:22), and even new covenant believers must be prepared to give an account of themselves at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10).

Hebrews 6:3. The mention of judgment suddenly brings the list to a close, for the author thought of the potential judgment that some of his readers might incur. They were on a downward slippery slope. This is evidenced by labelling them “sluggish in hearing,” exhorting them to hold fast their confession, and warning them in Hebrews 4:11 that they might follow the same example of disobedience as the wilderness generation. They were dangerously close to spiritual disaster, and continuation in this negative direction could mean that God might not permit them to “move on” to maturity.

Hebrews 6:4. In Hebrews 6:4-8, the author presents just such a case in which God might not permit spiritual advancement for those who “fall away” or “commit apostasy.” Though an obviously serious situation, there is nothing in the passage that explicitly states they might lose their salvation for this, any more than the sin of the wilderness generation meant loss of salvation for them. The analogy in chapter 3 with the wilderness generation suggests they may face temporal judgment and loss of their inheritance.

Verses 4-6 are one complete unit of thought. In the Greek text, the emphatic word “impossible” is placed up front in verse 4, while the complement “to renew them again to repentance” follows in verse 6. In between is a series of five participles describing those who cannot be renewed to repentance. Since all five participles are governed by one definite article in the Greek, they describe not two different situations but the same situation. That is, the one who “commits apostasy” is also one who had been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, etc. Assuredly these verses describe a genuine Christian for at least three basic reasons: (1) the author had expressed statements of concern about his readers earlier in the epistle (e.g., Heb 3:12) while referring to them as “brethren;” (2) what he has to say about them in Hebrews 6:4-6 cannot be divorced from what he has said about them at the beginning of the literary unit in Hebrews 5:11-14, namely, that they are spiritual infants who have not matured; and (3) the terminology in Hebrews 6:4-5 is most naturally descriptive of Christian experience, not that of unbelievers.

The author’s first description of them is that they had “once been enlightened.” He uses this expression one other time in the epistle in Hebrews 10:32, pointing out how they had suffered for their faith after being “enlightened.” This surely points to their regenerate state, for it is hardly imaginable that they—especially being first century Jews—would suffer persecution for Christ had they not truly come to know Him as their Savior.

Second, they had “tasted the heavenly gift.” Some commentators have erroneously tried to argue that the word “taste” implies that the original audience had only sampled the heavenly gift, but had not fully partaken of it. That is, they stopped short of “salvation” and failed to truly become Christians. Yet the word “tasted” (*geusamenous*) does not imply just a mere sampling. The same word was used earlier in Hebrews 2:9 to refer to Christ having “tasted death for everyone” (i.e., He fully experienced it). Thus the readers had truly experienced “the heavenly gift,” that is, God’s gift of eternal life in Christ (see Jn 4:10; Rom 6:23). Third, they had become “partakers

of the Holy Spirit,” having received the Holy Spirit at the moment of saving faith (see Eph 1:13-14).

Hebrews 6:5. Fourth, they had “tasted the good word of God and the miracles of the coming age.” They tasted (fully embraced) the Christian message, which in turn was accompanied by miraculous confirmations (recall Heb 2:3-4).

Hebrews 6:6. The final participle, “committed apostasy” (or “fall away,” as some translations have) indicates that it is possible for a regenerate person who has experienced everything described in verses 4-5 to meet with spiritual disaster. The Greek term for “commit apostasy” (*parapiptō*) is not used elsewhere in the NT, but it does occur eight times in the Greek LXX translation of the OT, frequently meaning “to transgress” against the Lord (e.g., Ezek 15:8; 20:27). Perhaps of greater insight is the use of the related cognate form *piptō* earlier in Hebrews 4:11. The readers might “fall” through following the same example of disobedience, in contrast to those who were diligent to enter God’s rest. There is also a very close connection with the word “forsakes” in Hebrews 3:12 (which had the Kadesh-barnea incident in mind). Though a lexically different word, it is conceptually related to *parapiptō* in Hebrews 6:6. We can thus conclude that “falling away” or “committing apostasy” in Hebrews 6:6 is to transgress against the Lord in a way that parallels what happened at Kadesh-barnea when the Hebrews rebelled against the Lord with a heart of unbelief. Their hearts were hardened against the Lord. In light of the author’s exhortations in Hebrews 4:14 and Hebrews 10:23, he is probably thinking of a rebellion involving an abandonment of one’s confession of faith in Christ.

The author is telling his readers that there is a point beyond which it is impossible to restore such a rebel to a state of repentance. This would presume that his heart had become severely hardened. The guilty one does not return to a repentant state, for this would be tantamount to recrucifying the Savior and publicly humiliating Him. The severity of such an action will be pointedly made later in Hebrews 10:26-31. [Author’s note: Despite my preference for the above-stated interpretation, some scholars hold a similar view of the audience but with repentance being possible. They would take the final two adverbial clauses as temporal, and translate “while they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.” In this view, the impossibility of returning them to repentance is true only so long as they continue doing this, implying that restoration is possible].

Hebrews 6:7-8. The author follows this somber warning with an illustration designed to drive home his point. The fact that he only uses the word “ground” once signifies that the author is not describing two different grounds, but rather two possible outcomes for the same ground. In a similar way, every Christian has the potential to produce “useful vegetation” or “thorns and thistles.” Regardless of the outcome, the ground has received the rain and care needed for growth. This probably speaks of God’s divine care and provision for spiritual growth in the life of a believer. If a believer’s life is not fruitful, it is not because God has not cared for him and done His part. The contrast in verses 7-8 is most likely that between a faithful believer who is fruitful and an unfaithful believer who should have produced but did not. In the latter case, however, it does not mean the loss of eternal life. Recall that mature and immature believers have been in view since Hebrews 5:11.

Hebrews 6:8 is a deliberate allusion to Genesis 3:17-18 (note the use of “thorns and thistles” as well as being “cursed”). The first man, Adam, received a curse for his disobedience, and the allusion to this brings to mind the temporal judgment that fell on the first man’s disobedience. Elsewhere in the OT, the word “curse” signified God’s temporal discipline upon His people for their disobedience to the covenant (see Deut 28–29). To be useless (other translations may use “worthless”) need not imply loss of eternal life. The Greek term for “useless” (*adokimos*) was used by the apostle Paul of himself in 1 Corinthians 9:27 in the sense of being “disqualified” as a

result of not disciplining himself (meaning that he feared jeopardizing his eternal reward). Thus the unfruitful ground of Hebrews 6:8 is “useless,” implying that the offender is considered unfit and has not gained God’s approval. He may be in store for God’s discipline and eventual loss of reward.

When the author says “its fate is to be burned,” he is not thinking of burning in hell. Though the metaphor of fire could be used in that sense, it is also used in the Bible to speak of God’s scrutinizing judgment of regenerate Christians, as in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. In such a case, fire is used for revealing the quality of the believer’s works, as a prelude to dispensing rewards. Two things in the following context suggest the author does have the works of believers in mind: (1) he specifically mentions their work in Hebrews 6:10; and (2) rewards are in view in Hebrews 6:12 when he speaks of those who inherit the promises because of their faith and perseverance.

Hebrews 6:9. The last four verses of this unit move on to look at encouragement and hope for the readers. The author, though quite concerned for his readers, apparently does not feel that they have yet gone to the extreme situation of “committing apostasy” as depicted in Hebrews 6:4-6. Thus he ends on a more encouraging note. Most likely, “salvation” (*sōtēria*) is being used in the same eschatological sense as earlier in the book, and as it will be used in Hebrews 9:28 in reference to the second coming. The author thinks of the time when man shall be crowned with glory and honor in the resurrected state, ruling jointly with Christ. This is the glorious destiny of believers who are faithful to Christ in this life (see Rev 2:26-27).

Hebrews 6:10. Now he states his reason for the confidence he has in them. He apparently had firsthand knowledge of them, and recalls their past faithfulness. This faithfulness is evidenced by their work and their brotherly love. They had indeed begun their Christian pilgrimage well, and it is important that they finish well.

Hebrews 6:11-12. Demonstrating eagerness suggests “making great effort” (recall Heb 4:11 where the cognate verb form *spoudazō* was used for making every effort to enter God’s rest). They must be eager or diligent about their Christian life, while remaining assured of their hope. A similar concern was voiced in Hebrews 3:6. (Some translations use “the fulfilment of your hope,” but the word translated “fulfilment” [Gk *plērophorian*] means to “have complete certainty” about something [BDAG, 827]). Based on the preceding chapters, the author is thinking about their confident hope that Jesus is the Messiah and has provided the sufficient sacrifice for their sins by His blood (see comments below for Heb 6:18-19). Therefore it is necessary that they persevere in maintaining their confession of Him and resist the tendency to be sluggish. The word “sluggish” (Gk *nōthroi*) is the same word translated “sluggish in hearing” in Hebrews 5:11. They must move forward in faith, and leave their spiritual sluggishness behind. By doing so, they can join with other saints who inherit the promises of God. These are no doubt the promises held forth earlier in the book regarding the “eschatological salvation” and entering the greater rest to rule with Christ. Disobedience and unbelief may jeopardize these future promises (see Heb 3:12; 3:19; 4:1; 4:3; 4:11), but faith and perseverance help secure them.

*b. Motivation for maturity (Heb 6:13-20)*

In this paragraph, the author immediately turns to a perfect example of a man of God who through faith and perseverance inherited God’s promise, Abraham, the “father” of the Jews. Surely these Jewish Christians would want to follow his example.

Hebrews 6:13-15. We should take note that when the author uses Abraham as an example, he does so not in regard to his justification, but to his faithfulness as a believer. This has important implications for the preceding warning in Heb 6:4-8. The quotation in Hebrews 6:14 is drawn from Genesis 22, which records Abraham’s loyalty when he was tested by God’s instruction to sacrifice Isaac. Following the successful completion of the test, God declared several promises to



Abraham (see Gen 22:17-18). Significantly, God introduced these promises with a statement that implied an oath: “By Myself I have sworn” (Gen 22:16). The point the author of Hebrews is trying to make is that God did not simply reward Abraham with promises for his faith and obedience; He strengthened the promises by the addition of an oath.

Of all the promises uttered to Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18, the author of Hebrews highlights the one pertaining to blessing and multiplied descendants, for that promise was the one that was most threatened by the sacrifice of Isaac, upon whom the covenant program depended. God’s reassurance of the promises, however, came after Abraham “persevered” (from *makrothumeō*, a cognate term to “perseverance” in Heb 6:12). This is an important lesson for the readers: perseverance in faith and obedience secures God’s promises all the more!

Hebrews 6:16-17. It was enough that God would reiterate these promises to Abraham, but the fact that he added the element of an oath provided even more assurance to Abraham. Since God never lies, the oath was actually unnecessary. Furthermore, God could not swear by a higher power than himself. [Recall that in the OT, believers were allowed to make an oath in the name of Yahweh—Deut 6:13; 10:20]. So, He swore the oath in His own name. The addition of the oath to His word of promise underscored all the more (for Abraham’s benefit) the immutability of God’s intent to do what He said. The readers of Hebrews could (and should!) learn a great lesson from this.

Hebrews 6:18-20. Just as Abraham and Sarah were “heirs of the promise” so the author’s readers had promises from God to inherit, promises connected with the new covenant and reigning with Christ in the future. Yet, just as Abraham first had to patiently endure and by faith obediently proceed with the sacrifice of Isaac, so the readers of the epistle must first hold fast to the hope set before them. The words “hold fast” (Gk *kratēsai*) draw our minds back to the same verb used earlier in Hebrews 4:14, “let us **hold fast** our confession” (see the similar verb *katechō* in Heb 3:6; 3:14; 10:23). They had already taken hold of this hope, and the author is concerned that they hold it fast.

But what is this hope (Gk *elpis*)? In the context of Hebrews, this hope is the blood of Christ, the foundation of the new covenant. In contrast to the sacrifices associated with the Levitical priesthood, the author declares in Hebrews 7:19, “a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.” It is Christ’s blood, not animal blood, that entered inside behind the curtain. The veil of the earthly tabernacle separated the Holy of Holies from the tabernacle proper. Once a year, the sacrificial blood was brought into this most sacred room behind the veil. Yet the author is thinking here of the fulfilment of the typology. Christ’s blood entered into the heavenly tabernacle and the very presence of God (see Heb 9:11-12).

The ones who are entitled to strong encouragement are those who continue holding fast to this hope of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. Indeed, it is “an anchor for the soul. Those who turn away from this and retreat back to some form of Judaism will find no consolation there. With this beautiful statement about the atoning blood of Christ, the author has returned full circle to the topic he had introduced earlier in chapter 5, i.e., the Lord’s ministry as a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. He will now elucidate the full significance of this in chapter 7.

## **2. The superiority of Jesus as High Priest of the Order of Melchizedek (Heb 7:1-28)**

Since Jesus was descended from the tribe of Judah, He was not qualified to be a Levitical priest. The OT, however, actually validates another priesthood known as the “order of Melchizedek.” Jesus is a priest of this order, which is immensely superior to the Levitical priesthood. Now that Jesus has entered into His priestly ministry, there is no need for the Jewish believers to whom the author wrote to continue participating in the priestly ministry of the Temple led by the priests of the old covenant order. All of that has now been replaced by something better.

a. *The greatness of Melchizedek* (Heb 7:1-10)

The author begins by reflecting on the person of Melchizedek and how great he actually was, though the OT revelation about him was so brief (only Gen 14:18-20). Yet he was clearly superior to Abraham, and, by extension, to Levi as well.

Hebrews 7:1-2a. The Genesis passage highlights three things about Melchizedek: (1) he was a king of Salem and a priest of God, implying that he was a king-priest, a combination not possible under the old covenant; (2) he blessed Abraham; and (3) he received a tithe from Abraham. Each of these demonstrates something of his superiority.

Hebrews 7:2b. The author of Hebrews even found significance in the meaning of Melchizedek's name. The name Melchizedek is a compound name formed from the Hebrew noun *melek* ("king") and *tsedeq* ("righteousness"). Appropriately then, he is "king of righteousness." Yet since Salem, apparently an ancient name for Jerusalem, means "peace," he is also "king of peace." Both were indeed appropriate for this ancient king-priest who serves as a type of Christ.

Hebrews 7:3. The comments about Melchizedek in this verse do not mean he was not a real person. Indeed he was. But unlike Levitical priests, the biblical record offers no genealogy for him. No mention is made in Genesis of his parents or line of descent. In contrast to the Levitical priesthood, which was based on proven hereditary lineage, Melchizedek's right to priesthood is based solely on the call of God. Similarly, the Lord Jesus' call to priestly ministry was based on God's oath to Him in Psalm 110:4. Furthermore, there was no record of Melchizedek's death, which gives him an eternal appearance. Yet what was prefigured in Melchizedek is realized in Christ, who is truly eternal. Just as there is no record of the termination of Melchizedek's ministry, so he prefigured Christ who would be "a priest forever."

Hebrews 7:4-7. Melchizedek is not only unique as a type of Christ, but the Genesis record also implies his superiority to the Levitical priests. This is seen first of all in Abraham's payment of a tithe to Melchizedek. The text highlights Abraham as the patriarch, the father of the nation. Abraham is not merely acting as an individual in this account, but is representative of the entire nation that stems from him. Abraham's act of giving a tithe is significant, for under the old covenant the Levitical priests collected tithes from the people (Num 18:21-24). Furthermore, Melchizedek blesses Abraham upon the payment of the tithe, which is significant in light of the fact that the one who is greater blesses the one who is lesser.

Hebrews 7:8-10. In these verses, the author draws out the typological significance of the observations reported above. In contrast with the Levitical priesthood, no record is given of Melchizedek's death and no provision is made for his succession. This gives him the appearance of an "unending life and ministry," though in reality he did die. In this way he typifies the Lord Jesus Christ who literally has an unending life and priestly ministry.

If Abraham acts in a representative fashion as "patriarch" and head of the nation, then in essence Levi, who was in Abraham's loins, was paying a tithe to Melchizedek. That, of course, would imply that the Melchizedekan priesthood was superior to the Levitical priesthood. Thus, Messiah Jesus, who was declared by an oath from God to be a priest of the order of Melchizedek in Ps 110:4, is a priest of a more superior priesthood than the Levitical one. How fitting it is, then, that the new covenant has its own priesthood and High Priest, and these are superior to those of the old covenant. Consequentially, there should be no hesitation for Jewish believers in the first century to embrace Jesus as their new High Priest and to abandon the sacrifices of the Levitical system.

*b. The appointment of Messiah to the order of Melchizedek (Heb 7:11-28)*

Whereas Hebrews 7:1-10 focuses on the person of Melchizedek as he is introduced in Genesis 14, the remainder of the chapter focuses more on the appointment of the Messiah to the “order of Melchizedek” as recorded in Psalm 110:4. In both cases, the implications are drawn out to argue for the inferiority of the Levitical priesthood to the present priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Hebrews 7:11-14. The author could see that the announcement in Psalm 110:4 that Messiah would be “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” had important implications. Psalm 110 was a psalm of David, written about 1000 BC. Yet the old covenant law (on which the Levitical priesthood was based) dated back to 1446 BC, when the Hebrews received it at Mt. Sinai after leaving Egypt. Obviously, then, Psalm 110, coming later, was introducing a change to the earlier priestly arrangements. This must mean that the Levitical priesthood was only a temporary arrangement, and the plan revealed in Psalm 110 must be superior to and a replacement of it.

By “perfection,” the author probably means the ability of the Levitical priesthood and its sacrificial system to make the worshipper perfect in conscience because of the certainty of having one’s sins eternally forgiven before God (see Heb 9:9; 10:1; 10:14). If the Levitical priesthood had indeed been able to give the worshipper this, there would certainly have been no need to make any changes to the priestly system. Yet Psalm 110 clearly indicated a major change. Significantly, how could Messiah be a priest, since other OT passages clearly presented him from the tribe of Judah (see Gen 49:8-10; 2 Sam 7:12-16)? Moses said nothing about priests being of the tribe of Judah, but only of the line of Aaron from the tribe of Levi.

Thus the revelation of Psalm 110 (coming later than the Law) and the obvious introduction of major change in the tribal origin of the priest himself pointed to the fact that this was not merely a modification of the system but an actual replacement of it. Of course, the time of the actual implementation of the new system was still unclear. Though announced in David’s day, it would apparently come later in history, when it was conferred upon Messiah. Yet the significance could not be missed: there would be a change of priesthood at some future point! This, in turn, had implications for the covenant itself. The Levitical priesthood is an inherent part of the old covenant. There can be no change in the priesthood, unless there is a major change in the covenant arrangement that legitimizes it. Now that Messiah had come, the temporary provision of the old covenant and the Levitical priesthood accompanying it were no longer operative. Levitical rituals were now obsolete!

Hebrews 7:15-17. The author now turns the attention of the readers to one specific word within Psalm 110:4, namely, the word “forever.” Under the old covenant, the High Priest had to be of the line of Aaron, and each individual High Priest was limited in the duration of his ministry. The legal regulation about physical descent dictated that a new High Priest could not take office until the previous High Priest had died, and he would continue as High Priest only until his own death. Yet the priest of the new order of Melchizedek would not have this time constraint, for his time of office would be “forever.” In order for one to be a priest forever, however, he would have to be more than an ordinary human. Only a person with an indestructible life could fulfill such a requirement. This was a powerful case for the new priest’s superiority, and thus the superiority of the covenant on which his priesthood was based.

Hebrews 7:18-19. In these two verses, the author does not put forward a new argument for the superiority of the Melchizedekan priesthood. Instead, he highlights the conclusion to which all of this is leading. If there is a new priesthood because the former one was inferior, then this must imply that the new priesthood makes possible a better sacrifice that gives people a better hope before God.

By “a former command,” the author means the entire set of commandments that made up the old covenant Law. The Law has been set aside, that is, put out of commission or made inoperative, because it is weak and useless. Of course, the Levitical sacrificial system was not completely “useless.” After all, it was instituted by God and served a purpose, namely, to teach the concept of substitutionary sacrifice pointing forward to the work of Christ in His atonement for sins. Yet it was weak and useless in the sense that it had no inherent power to provide a basis for forgiving sins or cleansing the conscience of the worshipper. Animal blood simply could not accomplish that. On the other hand, the precious blood of Christ provided a far better hope for the person wanting to draw near to God (i.e., to be able to approach Him).

Hebrews 7:20-22. In these verses, the author puts forward a new argument for the superiority of the Melchizedekian priesthood that confirms Jesus as a High Priest. Its announcement in Psalm 110:4 was attended by a sworn affirmation, or “oath,” as reflected in the introductory words “The LORD has sworn” [This is a similar argument to that used by the author in Heb 6:13-20].

Of course the Lord could have appointed Messiah as a priest of the order of Melchizedek without making any oath. A command from God is valid because of who God is, not because it is accompanied by an oath. Yet the presence of the oath in this verse gives additional force to what is being said. The Levitical priesthood was not established by oath, whereas Jesus’ appointment to this new priesthood was. This makes His appointment all the more certain, and also points to the greater superiority of the priesthood that He represents and the new covenant of which it is a part.

The author concludes by saying that Jesus has become a guarantee of a better covenant. The word translated “guarantee” (Gk *enguos*) only occurs here in the NT. However, it does occur three times in the LXX (2 Macc 10:28; Sir 29:15,16 [These are books found in the Apocrypha, a collection of non-biblical religious works that were included in the Greek LXX.]). In those cases, the word is used of a pledge or guarantee for something, i.e., something given as an assurance that a promise will be kept (such as pledge money). This oath introducing Psalm 110:4 strengthens the argument that Jesus is our guarantee that the new covenant is indeed a better covenant.

Hebrews 7:23-25. In Hebrews 7:15-17, the author called attention to the word “forever” in the promise of Psalm 110:4 to argue for the superiority of the Melchizedekian priesthood. In contrast to the Levitical priests who had short-lived ministries because of death, Jesus has an eternal ministry because He lives and serves forever. Over the years, there were many High Priests under the old covenant, not to mention the many assisting priests. The first High Priest was Aaron, but when he died he was replaced by his son Eleazar (Num 20:25-29). Eleazar in turn died and was replaced by his son Phinehas (Josh 24:33). According to the Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 20.227), eighty-three High Priests officiated from Aaron to the fall of the second temple in AD 70. The newer Melchizedekian priesthood, by way of contrast, does not have this succession of priests, because Jesus lives and serves forever.

The author’s point, however, is not simply to repeat the same argument, but rather to draw out a significant implication arising from Jesus’ unending and unchangeable priesthood. He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them. What exactly does the author mean by “save completely”? Does he mean that Jesus is saving sinners from the penalty of sin (speaking soteriologically)? If so, then this verse is saying that He does that because of His intercessory ministry that He continues to carry out on their behalf.

Yet that is precisely what the author is not saying. It would be theologically inaccurate to say that a Christian’s personal salvation from the penalty of sin depends on Christ’s ongoing intercession for him. Salvation depends solely on Christ’s work on the cross! That is why Jesus

cried out from the cross, “It is finished.” That is also why Paul, in Colossians 2:13-14, could proclaim that God has forgiven us all our sins and wiped out the “certificate of indebtedness”—the list of requirements we failed to fulfill—having nailed it to the cross. That kind of salvation is not dependent on the cross **plus** ongoing intercession!

More likely, the author has something different in mind than personal salvation from the penalty of sin. Since the verb “to save” (Gk *sōzō*) and the noun “salvation” (Gk *sōtēria*) are used predominantly in Hebrews in regard to an eschatological salvation, it is likely that he is thinking of a future salvation connected with the second coming of Christ.

It is also important to observe the objects of this particular saving ministry. It is “those who come to God through Him.” The word used for “come to” is *proserchomenous*. This verb is used seven times in the epistle (Heb 4:16; 7:25; 10:1; 10:22; 11:6; 12:18; 12:22). In Hebrews 4:16, for instance, the author had admonished his Christian audience, “Let us confidently **approach** the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help.” “Approaching” the throne of grace (or as some translations put it, “draw near”) is not for personal salvation, but is a resource for finding help in light of “our weaknesses” (Heb 4:15). This speaks of post-conversion activity (see a similar situation in Heb 10:22 concerning the brethren who are admonished to “draw near”). Consequently, this saving ministry of Christ is for those Christians who avail themselves of Jesus’ priestly role, and who want to “draw near” to God (i.e., receive His grace and mercy for their Christian pilgrimage).

The adverb “completely” (Gk *eis to panteles*) does not have a temporal force (some translations wrongly have “forever”), but rather conveys the thoroughness of His saving work. For those Christians who rely on Christ’s priestly role and intercession for them, they find that He is able to carry them completely through all trials and difficulties to arrive at their eschatological salvation, qualified to enter the greater rest.

Hebrews 7:26-28. The final argument for the superiority of the new priesthood with Christ as High Priest is that this priest is perfectly holy and righteous. By contrast, the Levitical priests obviously were not holy and undefiled, for they had to offer sacrifices for their own sins before they could offer up sacrifices for others. Furthermore, the Levitical priests had to offer up sacrifices every day, in contrast to Christ, who provided a final sacrifice once for all.

The words “made perfect” (*teteleiōmenon*) in verse 28 remind us of all that was involved in God’s preparing Jesus to be the High Priest for His people. This includes both His lifetime of sufferings (recall Heb 2:10; Heb 5:8-9) and His final act of suffering upon the cross. The former prepared Him to help His brethren who struggle in their sufferings, while the latter enabled Him to present His blood on their behalf to provide forgiveness of sins. Indeed, in so many ways chapter 7 portrays Jesus as an infinitely superior priest to all those who served under the Law.

### **III. The Superior Ministry of Jesus and the Sacrifice of Himself Guaranteeing the Superiority of the New Covenant (Heb 8:1–10:39)**

Beginning with chapter 8, the author embarks upon a new major section of the epistle. In the previous unit, the author argued for the superiority of the new covenant on the basis of the superior priesthood in which Jesus serves as the High Priest, namely, the Melchizedekian priesthood. The focus of chapters 8–10 is on the nature and accomplishment of the sacrifice that this High Priest makes and which forms the foundation for the superior new covenant.

## **A. The Foretelling of the New Covenant that Would Bring Forgiveness of Sins (Heb 8:1-13)**

Before elaborating the details of what makes Christ's sacrifice better than those of the Levitical system, the author first looks at God's intentions for the old covenant and its sacrificial system. Two major observations show that it was only intended to serve a temporary purpose. First, the whole tabernacle design was a copy of a greater heavenly reality (i.e., the earthly tabernacle pointed forward to something greater to come). Second, the Lord Himself announced through the prophet Jeremiah that the old covenant would be replaced at some future point by a new covenant.

### **1. The introduction of Christ as the High Priest of the heavenly tabernacle (Heb 8:1-2)**

Hebrews 8:1. With the words "Now the main point of what we are saying," the author indicates a major turning point in the epistle. Of all the author has talked about in the preceding chapters, the main thing is the matter of Christ being a High Priest. This was mentioned in every chapter except chapter 1, and even there it was implied in Hebrews 1:3. Even the thought that He "sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" was first enunciated in Hebrews 1:3 (the word "majesty" is a figure for God the Father). From this lofty position, He represents us as High Priest!

Hebrews 8:2. Verse 2, on the other hand, looks forward to a new facet of His priestly ministry. Christ is not merely a legitimate High Priest (substantiated in chapter 7), but He has carried out His priestly sacrifice in a "tabernacle" of far more significance than the earthly tabernacle/temple. He has carried out His priestly ministry in the true tabernacle itself, i.e., the heavenly tabernacle. Once again the author makes use of contrast to prove the superiority of Christ's priestly ministry. The Levitical priests merely functioned at the level of the earthly tabernacle but Christ at the heavenly level.

### **2. Christ's more excellent ministry than the Levitical one (Heb 8:3-6)**

Hebrews 8:3. The author begins this paragraph by directing our attention to what Christ has to offer. If He is a High Priest (and He is!), surely He must have something to offer. This anticipates what the author will expound on in chapter 9 concerning the offering of Christ's own blood.

Hebrews 8:4-5. For now, however, the author wants to call attention to the priestly activities taking place on earth, i.e., as performed by the Levites. [Verse 4 seems to imply that Herod's temple was still standing at the time the author of Hebrews wrote the epistle]. The Levitical priests did this on a daily basis, and the High Priest (in the line of Aaron) brought a special sacrifice once a year into the earthly Holy of Holies. But this whole system was merely a sketch and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary. This should be clear from the very instructions that God gave to Moses in Exodus 25:40, "Now be sure to make them according to the pattern you were shown on the mountain." Everything about the tabernacle was to be according to the design shown to Moses. The word "design" (from *Gk tupos*, meaning a pattern or model) implies that the tabernacle system is not the ultimate structure of God's dwelling place, but a "model" that reflects this greater reality. The "sketch" and "model" must be inferior to that which it is patterned after. The point here is that Christ has gone into the original itself, not the sketch of the original. This demonstrates how much more significant is that which He has done (because of where it is carried out).

Hebrews 8:6. Yet Christ has a superior ministry, because it involves Him mediating a covenant that is better and which is "enacted on better promises." All the priestly activity performed by the Levites was done in accordance with the old covenant. The promises attached to the new covenant that Jesus mediates are decidedly better than any promise associated with the old covenant given to Moses. Probably the author is thinking primarily of the promise of eternal forgiveness of sins, because that is the climactic statement of his doctrinal teaching in Hebrews 10:14-18. If the promises of the new covenant are better, then the new covenant itself must be better.

### **3. Implications of the announcement of the new covenant (Heb 8:7-13)**

Hebrews 8:7-12. In Jeremiah 31:31-34 the prophet announced that the Lord would make a new covenant with His people. Although it is not stated when this covenant will go into effect, it is clear that it will be a replacement of the old covenant that was made with the nation at Mt. Sinai when the Hebrews came out of Egypt. Without even looking at the provisions of this new covenant, the very fact that a second covenant was deemed necessary demonstrates that the first covenant was inadequate.

The timing of this announcement by Jeremiah is significant. This was made about the year 586 BC when Jerusalem and the temple were about to be destroyed by the Babylonians and the people led away into exile. God was allowing this to come upon His people because of their covenant unfaithfulness, just as He had forewarned them in Deuteronomy 28–29. Therefore in Jeremiah 31:22 he calls the people an “unfaithful daughter.” In Hebrews 8:8, the author introduces the quotation from Jeremiah with the words “showing its fault.” The invasion and destruction by Babylon in Jeremiah’s day made it clearly evident that the Lord had found fault with His people. After over 800 years of failing to live up to the terms of the old covenant, it was apparent that the people were unfaithful. This led to the implementation of the Lord’s plan to have a new covenant replace the old one, and for Jeremiah to announce it to the nation.

The New Testament is clear that this new covenant was inaugurated by the blood of Christ shed at Calvary and has been operative since that time (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6). At the cross the old covenant was replaced by the new covenant, and all believers since then are participants in the new covenant and are no longer under the Mosaic law (Rom 7:4-7; 1 Cor 9:19-21; Heb 7:18). Though inaugurated at the cross, it would be best to think of the new covenant as being progressively fulfilled since there is still an aspect of it that awaits fulfillment with Israel as a nation (see Rom 11:25-27). Although the promises of the new covenant were originally given to Israel as a nation, it became clear in the progress of revelation that the church would also participate in this covenant. This is especially true regarding the spiritual benefits of the forgiveness of sins and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit mentioned in such passages as Ezekiel 36:22-32 and Joel 2:28-32.

Hebrews 8:13. The author ends the chapter by pointing out that the mere mention of a new covenant in Jeremiah should have alerted the people to anticipate that the old covenant would one day be replaced. Since this announcement made the first obsolete, the people should have expected that a change was coming. With Christ's first advent the moment of change had arrived, and the time had now come to set aside the old covenant and all the rituals associated with the Levitical priestly ministry. With this understanding, the author is now set in chapter 9 to expound on the superior sacrifice of the new covenant.

## **B. The Perfect Sacrifice of the New Covenant Presented in the Heavenly Tabernacle (Heb 9:1-28)**

Beginning in chapter 8, the author focused on the sacrifice of the new covenant that Jesus, the High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, had to present. The sacrifice He offered is far superior to any offered by the Levitical priests, which argues even more strongly that the new covenant is superior to the old. Chapter 9 highlights this sacrifice, which is nothing less than the perfect sacrifice of Himself in the greater tabernacle, the very presence of God. Throughout this section, the author draws comparisons and contrasts to the sacrifices of the earthly tabernacle.

### **1. The sacrificial ministry of the old covenant at the earthly tabernacle (Heb 9:1-10)**

As a backdrop to speaking about Jesus’ sacrifice, the author begins by reminding his readers about the earthly tabernacle of the old covenant.

*a. The old covenant’s regulations of worship and the earthly sanctuary (Heb 9:1)*

Hebrews 9:1. The author mentions that the cultic system of the old covenant had two primary aspects: (1) regulations for worship and (2) an earthly sanctuary. He briefly describes the latter in Hebrews 9:2-5 and then the former in Hebrews 9:6-7.

*b. A brief description of the earthly sanctuary (Heb 9:2-5)*

Hebrews 9:2-3. The author points out that the tabernacle had two rooms, the outer one called the Holy Place (Gk *hagia*), and the inner one called the Holy of Holies (Gk *hagia hagiōn*). [Some translations prefer to call the latter the Most Holy Place]. Among the items placed in the outer sanctuary were the lampstand (Exod 25:31-39) and the table that held the loaves (Exod 25:23-30). Each of these items had some typological significance. For example, the lampstand reminded the people of God that their purpose was to be a light to the world, a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:5-6). This function of being a light to those in darkness is ultimately fulfilled in Christ Himself, who is the Light of the World (Jn 8:12; 9:5). In turn, Christians are to be lights in the world (Mt 5:13; Eph 5:8; 1 Thess 5:5). The oil for the lamp signified the Holy Spirit who keeps the light going. On the table of showbread were twelve loaves of bread (Lev 24:5-9), one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The loaves spoke of God's sustenance of spiritual life through fellowship with Him (which explains why Jesus would refer to Himself as the Bread of Life Jn 6:35; 6:41; 6:48-51).

Hebrews 9:4-5. Now he mentions the items that were placed in the inner room (the Holy of Holies). The key item was “the ark of the covenant, in which was (1) the golden urn containing the manna, (2) Aaron’s rod that budded, and (3) the stone tablets of the covenant. On the top side of the ark’s lid was the mercy seat, because it was here that once a year the High Priest placed the sacrificial blood on the Day of Atonement. Above the mercy seat were the representations of two angelic creatures called cherubim. Unfortunately, the author does not provide more explanation.

The mention of the golden altar of incense (Gk *chrusoun thumiātērion*) is confusing. This translation is problematic, since the author seems to associate it with the Holy of Holies, although the Old Testament clearly locates it before the veil in the main sanctuary (Lev 16:12-13). The best solution to the problem is to adopt the translation offered by the English NKJV, namely, “the golden censer” (rather than golden altar of incense). The author is speaking about the golden censer, in which were placed coals from the altar of incense and then brought inside the veil into the Holy of Holies. Incense placed on these coals would fill the room with smoke, sending forth a pleasing fragrance. As support for this interpretation, whenever the term *thumiātērion* is used in the LXX, it is clearly used for a censer (2 Chr 26:19; Ezek 8:11). Also, there is a clear reference to the altar of incense in Luke 1:11, but that verse uses a different expression in the Greek. Regardless of the translation problem, the typological significance of the incense itself should not be overlooked. In light of verses like Revelation 5:8 and Revelation 8:3-4, the incense typifies the prayers of the saints before God (see Ps 141:2 and Lk 1:10). The High Priest would take the coals from the incense altar (located in the outer sanctuary) and would bring them inside the Holy of Holies using the golden censer. As he placed incense on the coals, the fragrant smoke filled the room. Correspondingly, our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, brings our prayers into the very presence of God as a fragrant aroma.

*c. The ministry (divine regulations) of the earthly tabernacle (Heb 9:6-7)*

Since the author will show the parallels between the work of Christ and what the earthly High Priest did on the Day of Atonement (see Lev 16), he points out that access to the Holy of Holies was greatly restricted. Ordinary Levitical priests could enter the main sanctuary (i.e., the Holy Place) for daily ministry activities (e.g., keeping the lamps lit and changing the loaves of bread), but they could never enter the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and even then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. In the Holy of Holies dwelt the



*shekinah* glory of God. [The word "shekinah" refers to God's presence dwelling in the tabernacle, the Hebrew verb *shākan* meaning to "abide, dwell"; see Exod 40:34-35]. Even though God is omnipresent, He did manifest His glorious presence in this place, thus making it very sacred. Furthermore even the High Priest could not enter without taking blood from the sacrificial animals for the sins of himself and the people.

We learn several lessons from this. First, entering the Holy of Holies patterned the very presence of God in the heavenly tabernacle. The only person who was qualified to enter was the High Priest. Second, just as the Holy of Holies was entered only once a year, so Christ would enter the heavenly tabernacle on our behalf only one time. Third, just as sacrificial blood (for sins) was required for the priest to enter the Holy of Holies, so sacrificial blood was required for Christ to enter the heavenly tabernacle. In the latter case, however, the blood was not for His sins, but only for the people He represented: namely, all humanity.

*d. The significance of the restrictedness of the Day of Atonement (Heb 9:8-10)*

Hebrews 9:8-9. When the author mentions the Holy Place in verse 8, he does not mean the earthly one but the greater reality of God's very presence in heaven (see Heb 10:19). As long as the old tabernacle—the earthly one—was still standing and operational (which it was as long as the old covenant was in force from Sinai to the cross), the way into the heavenly tabernacle was not made evident. During that long period that the people were under the Law and the Levitical priesthood was practiced, they could not clearly see what God intended by all these things, that they were a symbol for that time.

With the coming of Christ, however, the types became clear, and thus could now be set aside. Everything the earthly tabernacle and its rituals were meant to portray had now been fulfilled with Christ. The earthly tabernacle was indeed characterized by its restricted access but the author is going to point out in Heb 10:19-20, that the way is now plainly open and accessible for us to enter God's presence, now that Christ has gone before us and the new covenant has been put into effect.

Furthermore there is no need to keep clinging to the sketches and the shadows because they are unable to perfect the conscience of the worshipper. The emphasis here is not on God's ability to forgive, but upon the worshipper's need for a cleansed conscience. The point is that no one could have confidence that the blood of animals had adequately dealt with his sins, especially since the ceremony was repeated year after year. But a cleansed conscience is essential for one seeking to serve God effectively.

Hebrews 9:10. The gifts, sacrifices, and other rituals under the old covenant (though willed and commanded by God) were valid only until the new order (Gk *diorthōseōs*) came. This new order refers to the new arrangements brought about by the establishment of the new covenant.

## **2. The better accomplishment of Christ in the heavenly tabernacle (Heb 9:11-15)**

In this paragraph, the author points out two primary contributions of the atoning work of Christ: (1) eternal redemption, and (2) a cleansed conscience for serving the living God.

*a. The provision of eternal redemption (Heb 9:11-12)*

What was implied before is now made explicit. The author points out three major ways in which the priestly ministry of Christ is superior to the ministry of the old covenant. First, Christ has gone not into an earthly tabernacle made with human hands, but into the more perfect tent of heaven (the actual presence of God). Second, Christ has presented His own blood for sins (based on a sinless life), not that of animals. Third, Christ has done this once for all, not year after year. As a result, He obtained eternal redemption. The word "redemption" (Gk *lutrōsin*) means releasing from obligation by virtue of payment (as with ransom money paid to release prisoners

of war). Christ has made the full payment for our sins, so as to release us forever from the debt we owe God. This is the blessing that awaits any sinner who accepts the free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus by trusting Him alone for salvation (see Rom 6:23).

*b. The provision of a cleansed conscience to serve the living God (Heb 9:13-15)*

Hebrews 9:13-14. The benefit of Christ's sacrifice is not limited to eternal redemption, for it also provides a cleansed conscience from dead works. By "dead works" the author may be referring to the person who went through the motions of the Levitical rituals without faith and thus obtained no spiritual benefit (see Heb 6:1). This type of worshipper could never escape a defiled conscience. He may go through the rituals outwardly, but inwardly he still struggled under the burden of guilt. On the other hand, the worshipper who recognizes the new covenant and thus rests in the finished work of Christ (and that alone) can enjoy a cleansed conscience altogether.

Yet this is not an end in itself. Knowing his sin is totally and eternally paid for and forgiven, he experiences the freedom to worship the living God. [Note the contrast between "dead works" and "living God"]. The word for "worship" (Gk *latreuō*) literally means to "serve." Yet this has overtones of worship and priestly service, not mundane work. The choice of this word to describe "worship" would suggest to the reader the responsibility for priestly service as an appropriate part of worship, drawing our attention back to chapter 3 where the author was concerned that the readers actively be part of the worshipping community as the "Son's house."

Hebrews 9:15. The death of Christ, by which He mediated the new covenant, sets in motion a chain of events that leads to the attainment of "the eternal inheritance he has promised." The latter part of this complex sentence is a "purpose clause" in the Greek. The purpose of His mediating the new covenant and obtaining eternal redemption for us is that we might ultimately receive an inheritance that we can eternally enjoy and benefit from. The text does not say, however, that all believers will automatically receive this. The "eternal redemption" is absolutely free, but not necessarily the "eternal inheritance." The latter appears to be conditional for at least two reasons.

First, the author has just mentioned worshipping the living God" in verse 14 (which looks at our priestly service now enhanced by a cleansed conscience). The idea of the tabernacle-house (suggesting priestly service) was expressed in Hebrews 3:6 as a conditional matter. Proper "priestly service" is a prerequisite for this inheritance. Second, a study of the word group related to "inheritance" (Gk *klēronomias*, used eight times in Hebrews 1:2; 1:14; 6:12; 6:17; 9:15; 11:7, 8; 12:17) suggests that inheritance is a conditional matter related to faithfulness. This is highlighted in Hebrews 6:12 where the author tells his audience that they could not be sluggish if they hoped to inherit the promises but must have faith and perseverance. Thus faith and perseverance (i.e., patient endurance) are prerequisites for inheriting (see Heb 10:36).

The appropriation by faith of Christ's sacrifice grants us eternal redemption. In addition to this, believers can also have an eternal inheritance, provided they exercise faith, persevere through the trials and difficulties of their earthly pilgrimage, and faithfully render their priestly service. Obtain-ing this eternal inheritance is at the heart of what it means to "enter His rest" (see Heb 4:1-11).

### **3. The role of blood to inaugurate the old covenant (Heb 9:16-22)**

*a. The importance of death to covenant making (9:16-17)*

The author prefaces what he will teach about the inauguration of the old covenant with a brief comment about the role death plays in covenant making. The Greek word he uses for "covenant" (*diathēkē*) can mean either a biblical covenant or a last will and testament, and scholars debate which of the two is in view here. Whether the author intends a human will or a

divine covenant, the point remains the same. A death is necessary to activate it. [If a biblical covenant is in view, the death would be that of an animal as a substitute for the one ratifying the covenant].

*b. The old covenant inaugurated by blood (Heb 9:18-22)*

In the case of the old covenant, it was activated by the death of animals. That is, their blood was ceremonially used to inaugurate the covenant. The author is thinking here of the ceremony described in Exodus 24:1-8 when Moses received the Law code from God. At that time, blood was sprinkled on both the people and the altar, which foreshadowed the blood of Christ inaugurating the new covenant. Although the first covenant utilized animal blood and the second the blood of Christ, nevertheless they both taught the demand of blood as crucial for God's forgiveness.

**4. The role of blood to inaugurate the new covenant (Heb 9:23-28)**

Hebrews 9:23. Just as blood inaugurated the old covenant, so blood inaugurates the new covenant. However, the latter had to involve better sacrifices, since it was conducted in the heavenly tabernacle.

Hebrews 9:24-26. Echoing what he had said earlier (Heb 9:11-12), the author again lays out the rationale for Christ's sacrifice being better. First, it is offered in heaven in the very presence of God (v 24). Second, it involves the blood of the sinless Son of God, not animal blood (v 25). Third, it is offered only once, not yearly, thereby proving its effectiveness (vv 25-26).

Hebrews 9:27-28. Whereas the benefit of Christ's first coming was to bear the sins of many, the benefit of His second coming is to bring salvation. Obviously what the author means by "salvation" in this context is something different than the atonement for sins that Christ provided in His first coming. This salvation needs to be seen in light of the broader context of Hebrews, an eschatological salvation wherein the faithful share in the dominion over creation with Christ (see Heb 2:5-8). Yet, just as the eternal inheritance in Hebrews 9:15 was conditional, so here the author seems to imply that this "salvation" is conditional (or limited to a smaller circle than all the redeemed). It is for those believers who "eagerly await him" (from the Gk verb *apekdechomai*, used seven times in the New Testament in regard to the second coming of Christ; see esp. Phil 3:20 and 1 Cor 1:7). This term is contrasted with the "many" who benefit from His bearing their sins. In this second coming salvation, Christ will "strike the nations" (Rev 19:15), deliver the world from the bondage of Satan, and bring in a new order of righteousness in which faithful believers will reign with Him and receive their inheritance in the "greater rest." Thus they "inherit salvation," to use the words of Hebrews 1:14. Part of the secret to faithfully enduring in the Christian life is to be eagerly awaiting the return of our Lord Jesus.

**C. The Adequacy of Christ's Sacrifice for Eternal Forgiveness Contrasted to the Inefficacy of the Sacrifices under the Law (Heb 10:1-18)**

This is the author's final exposition about Christ's sacrifice for sins before exhorting the readers once again in Hebrews 10:19-39. The emphasis upon the "once for all" nature of Christ's sacrifice (see Heb 9:12; 9:26) carries over into chapter 10. The author is trying to convey that only this "once for all" sacrifice is adequate for cleansing the conscience of the worshipper and providing an assured forgiveness of sins.

**1. The repetitious cycle of sacrifices under the Law (Heb 10:1-4)**

Hebrews 10:1. The entire Law system with all its Levitical rituals and sacrifices was nothing more than a shadow of the good things to come. The word "shadow" (Gk *skian*) was used earlier in Hebrews 8:5, and conveys the typological nature of this Law system (see Col 2:16-17). "The good things to come," on the other hand, refer to the priestly ministry of Christ as He entered the heavenly

tabernacle in the presence of God the Father to present His blood once for all as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind (note the use of this phrase in Heb 9:11).

If the Law system was only a type of what Christ would do (foreshadowing His work), then obviously one should not look to the type in which to put his confidence. Furthermore the repetitive nature of the type (“continually, year after year”) reveals its inferiority. The author is probably thinking primarily of the sacrifices connected with the yearly Day of Atonement, as it is that ritual more than any other that typifies Christ’s sacrificial blood entering the heavenly tabernacle.

When the author refers to the law never making “perfect those who come to worship,” he is thinking about the inability of the Levitical sacrifices to decisively help the conscience of the worshipper. Support for this is two-fold. First, the author uses the word “perfect” in Hebrews 9:9 in stating how the gifts and sacrifices under the old covenant could not make the worshipper “perfect in regard to the conscience.” This is in contrast with the blood of Christ (Heb 9:14) that could cleanse the conscience from dead works. Second, the author refers in the very next verse (Heb 10:2) to the matter of having consciousness of sins.

Hebrews 10:2-4. There never seemed to be an end to the repetitive sacrifices under the old covenant, and the people never got to the point where they could say that the blood of bulls and goats (the animal sacrifices) had been enough. The consciousness of sin, therefore points to the worshippers’ sense of sin, which became most pronounced on the Day of Atonement when confronted with the holiness of God.

## **2. The replacement of the sacrifices anticipated (Heb 10:5-10)**

### *a. The quotation of Psalm 40:6-8 (Heb 10:5-7)*

Hebrews 10:5. Heb 10:5-7 is a quotation from Psalm 40:6-8, an Old Testament passage anticipating that a representative of God was coming who would provide something better than the old covenant animal sacrifices. In his quotation, the author seems to rely primarily on the LXX translation of these verses (Ps 39:7-9 in the LXX), which differs slightly from the original Hebrew text. The words “but a body you prepared for me” appear in the Hebrew as “ears You have dug for me.” The sense, however, is the same. The LXX translators realized that the word “dug” was a figure of speech (a metonymy). God bore out the holes in our head, as it were, putting the apparatus in our head to hear His Word. The word “ears” represented another figure of speech (a synecdoche—substitution of a part for the whole). If God has our ear, then He has our body, i.e., our whole being. Thus God “bore the ears” (for hearing) with the intention that one’s whole person (body) would hear His Word and be completely disposed to doing His will.

Hebrews 10:6-7. The author of Hebrews was apparently led by the Spirit of God to change the wording of the quotation in Hebrews 10:6 (concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin) from “You have not required” to “You took no delight.” In doing this, he may have had Psalm 51:19 in mind (50:19 in the LXX). The word for “take delight” (Gk *eudokeō*) was used in this psalm to speak about the sacrifices God is pleased with, in contrast to those He is not pleased with. So the author quotes Psalm 40, but his mind is so steeped in the terminology of God’s delight (or lack thereof) with sacrifices in the OT psalms, that he readily substitutes a word he was familiar with from similar contexts within the Psalter. Psalm 51 indicates that it is ultimately the condition of the worshipper’s heart, not the activity of bringing an animal sacrifice, that really matters with God (“a humble and repentant heart you will not reject”).

### *b. The implications of Psalm 40 (Heb 10:8-10)*

Hebrews 10:8. Whereas “the body” became a way for the LXX translators to capture the point of the Hebrew text (“ears You have dug”), the author of Hebrews seizes the rendering to identify Christ as the perfect fulfilment. He is the “body” that has come—via His incarnation—perfectly

desiring and doing the will of God (see Jn 4:34; 8:29). Furthermore with the sacrifice of His body, He has superseded the Levitical sacrifices. The quotation from Psalm 40 substantiates that God always anticipated something better than animal sacrifices, and this was recorded even while the old covenant was still in operation. The fact that this body (i.e., the One who perfectly obeyed the Father) is then itself given up as a sacrifice makes the Levitical offerings pale in comparison.

Hebrews 10:9-10. The author also finds significance in the order in which ideas are stated in the psalm. After the comments about sacrifices, we read “Then I said, ‘Here I am: I have come.’” This implies that the one who has come is superior to the sacrifices, and thus replaces the need for them. By His will—the will of God that planned the offering of the body of Jesus as a once for all sacrifice for sins—all true believers in Christ Jesus are made holy (Gk *hagiazō*). In this context, as in Hebrews 2:11, the author is thinking of our positional sanctification because of Christ’s redeeming blood, whereby we are given a righteous standing before God once for all.

### **3. The significance of Christ having sat down (Heb 10:11-14)**

The author concludes the preceding paragraph with the thought that Christ’s sacrifice (unlike animal sacrifices) was “once for all.” Now he links that thought with the matter of His having “sat down at the right hand of God.” These words are from Psalm 110:1, where David’s “Lord” was told, “Sit down at My right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.” It would be very natural to relate these words to the Messiah, since this is the very same psalm that commissioned Him as a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (vs 4). These words from Psalm 110:1 have been used earlier in the epistle to demonstrate the exalted status that the resurrected Christ has attained to (see Heb 1:3; 8:1). The author now wants to draw out an additional significance of this verse, namely, the fact that He sits rather than stands.

Under the old covenant, priests did not “sit” in their priestly ministry (so to speak). Their ministry could be summarized as “standing,” since they always had to carry out more sacrifices. In contrast, the High Priest of the new covenant sits. He can sit in His priestly ministry, precisely because He does not need to offer further sacrifices. The offering of Himself was sufficient. The fact that He “sits” is thus an anticipation from the pages of the Old Testament that by the offering of Himself He has perfected for all time those who have trusted in His sacrifice.

Furthermore He sits in anticipation of what is coming. Verse 13 indicates that He is “waiting until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet.” He has not yet received the full benefit of what the Father intends for Him. He sits (now that His sacrifice is completed and He has ascended to the Father’s right hand), but His enemies have not yet been fully subjugated. That, however, will all change at our Lord’s second coming. All enemies (whether earthly rulers, the Antichrist, or demonic forces) will be subdued and forcibly disengaged, thus setting the stage for Him to rule as King of the earth in His millennial kingdom (see Ps 2:1-2; 2:8-9; Ps 72:8-11; Rev 19:19-21).

### **4. The new covenant’s assurance of forgiveness (Heb 10:15-18)**

In the final paragraph of this section, the author returns again to the passage from Jeremiah 31 (which was quoted at length in Heb 8:8-12). This time, however, he is more selective in what he quotes, choosing to highlight that part of the new covenant prophecy which promised that God would remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. This fact obviously implies an assured forgiveness for those who participate in this new covenant. But if this is a promise of eternal forgiveness (and it is!), then this would imply that further sacrifices would not be necessary once this new covenant came into operation. This is the confirming argument that the sacrifice of Christ is the once-for-all payment of our sins. For the readers to turn back to the Levitical system with its unending demand for animal sacrifices would be to deny what we were rightfully made to expect by the announcement of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31.

In summary this section from Hebrews 10:1-18 is actually a series of proof texts from the Old Testament that argue for the once-for-all nature and superiority of Christ's sacrifice. Those trusting in His sacrifice need not have a troubled conscience, and can be absolutely assured of God's eternal forgiveness of their sins.

## **D. The Proper Response to Christ's Superior Sacrifice: Believers Must Endure in Their Allegiance and Service to Jesus Christ (Heb 10:19-39)**

These verses conclude the unit that began in Hebrews 8:1. Up to this point, the author has carefully elaborated on the superior sacrifice that the new covenant High Priest has offered in the greater tabernacle in heaven. This sacrifice is immeasurably superior to those of the old covenant, and is a once-for-all sacrifice that brings perfect forgiveness and a clear conscience. This grand truth, however, has implications which the author will now highlight in Hebrews 10:19-39. The proper response of new covenant participants is to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus, to serve Him, and to patiently endure as they await His return.

### **1. The admonition to draw near to God and faithfully participate in the community of believers (Heb 10:19-25)**

The new covenant inaugurated by the Lord Jesus has ushered in astonishingly new realities for God's children as compared with those who worshipped under the old covenant. The earthly tabernacle having served its purpose, the greater tabernacle in heaven is now the point of focus and that which believers have access to. The author now presents two primary reasons why believers ought to remain faithful to Christ and the new covenant realities, following which he sets forth several exhortations to faithfulness.

#### *a. Two reasons to draw near (Heb 10:19-21)*

The author begins by once again addressing his readers as brothers and sisters. What he has to say to them, he says as to justified (regenerated) believers. They had previously believed in Christ and now have the forgiveness of God promised in the new covenant. Despite one's past act of faith, sluggishness and immaturity that is left uncorrected (recall Heb 5:11–6:12) can make one susceptible to delusion, even to the point of abandoning one's outward confession of faith in Christ. Such a disastrous choice would invite God's chastening judgment. Yet there are good reasons to firmly hold on to new covenant truth. It is these reasons the author lays out for his readers.

Hebrews 10:19-20. In light of his presentation in Hebrews 9:1–10:18, the author affirms that believers have free access to the sanctuary, meaning the heavenly tabernacle itself. The presentation of the blood of Jesus in the heavenly "Holy Place" gives us confidence that we can enter there ourselves.

Under the old covenant only the High Priest could ever enter the Holy of Holies, and he first had to pass through the curtain which separated the two rooms of the tabernacle. Hence it could be said that one cannot enter the innermost holy area without first passing through the curtain. This curtain served two purposes: (1) it hid the *shekinah* glory of God, and (2) it gave access to the presence of God (though only for the High Priest). The counterpart under the new covenant is not a curtain at all, but rather His flesh, that is, the body of Jesus. While on earth, Christ's human body was like a shield, preventing others from seeing the glory of God (and thus being overwhelmed by it). Furthermore by coming through His flesh (i.e., trusting in Christ as our substitutionary atonement), we can have access to the presence of God. Old covenant believers never had such immediate access, and no one at that time would dare to enter the Holy of Holies except the High Priest. Yet under the new covenant, we have "confidence" (or boldness, Gk *parrēsia*) to enter there, a revolutionary thought creating an irresistible urge. The rending of the temple curtain at the time of Christ's death signified this new access (see Mt 27:51).

Hebrews 10:21. The second fact the author presents in hopes of motivating them to firmly hold on is that new covenant believers are part of a greater spiritual temple headed by Jesus Christ as priest. The phrase “house of God” reminds us of the cautionary words in Hebrews 3:6, “we are of his house, if in fact we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope we take pride in.” New covenant believers are part of a spiritual temple and are called to exercise a priestly ministry in accordance with this new reality. Turning from Christ to retreat to the shadows of the earthly temple would not only be foolish, but would be tantamount to abandoning one's priestly calling and responsibilities to the real “house of God.”

*b. Admonitions to faithfully participate in the new covenant community (Heb 10:22-25)*

With the two preceding provisions of the new covenant in mind (Heb 10:19-21), the author gives three exhortations to faithfulness.

Hebrews 10:22. First, he exhorts them “draw near with a sincere heart in the assurance that faith brings.” Earlier in Hebrews 3:12, the author had cautioned the readers of having an “evil, unbelieving heart that forsakes the living God” (as was true of so many in the wilderness generation). Now they are exhorted to have a sincere heart, a genuine heart that is fully assured, and with this to “draw near.”

In drawing near, they are to do so with a heart that has been “sprinkled clean from an evil conscience” and a body “washed in pure water.” The word for “sprinkled” (Gk *rantizō*) is used three other times in Hebrews (Heb 9:13; 9:19; 9:21) to speak of the old covenant inauguration ceremony of Exodus 24:1-8. In that ceremony, the blood of animals was sprinkled outwardly on the covenant participants, and obviously it had no inner effect on their conscience. By contrast, the blood of Christ has had a profound effect on those embracing the new covenant, for as pointed out in Hebrews 9:14, it is effective to “purify our consciences from dead works to worship the living God.” The body washed with pure water refers not to Christian baptism, but (in contrast to old covenant ritual washings) to the washing of regeneration accomplished by the Holy Spirit that leads to personal holiness in the Christian life (see Titus 3:5).

Hebrews 10:23. The second exhortation is for the readers to “hold unwaveringly to the hope that we confess.” The author issued this exhortation earlier in Hebrews 4:14 (see Heb 3:1). Of course this presumes that they had actually made a previous confession of faith in Jesus as their Messiah. They are not instructed here to make the confession, but rather not to waver as they hold fast to it. The exhortation is followed by the rationale, “the one who made the promise is trustworthy.” One would not hear these words without thinking of the references to God's promises mentioned earlier in the book, promises connected with the idea of inheritance (see Heb 6:12; 9:15) and the future coming salvation (Heb 9:28). When the Lord returns to establish His kingdom and bring the eschatological salvation, He will be faithful to render what He promised to those who persevered and actively served in the true “house of God.”

Hebrews 10:24-25. The third and final exhortation pertains to faithful participation with the new covenant community. The author wants them to take thought of ways they can spur one another on to love and good works, fostering a new covenant *esprit de corps* (see Gal 5:6). Since all of us are weak and easily falter, there is mutual benefit in communal worship and interaction. Unfortunately some had apparently already withdrawn from gathering publicly with other Christians, and thus the author warns them about not abandoning their own meetings together.

Mutual encouragement is needed, and all the more as they might see the day drawing near. It is doubtful that this refers to the time of judgment that fell on Jerusalem in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. His reference to the second coming salvation in Hebrews 9:28 and to the Lord's soon “coming” in Hebrews 10:37 suggests that the author is thinking of the period of judgment known in Scripture as “the day of the Lord” that accompanies

the Lord's second coming. Nevertheless, church history is full of many trying times when believers desperately need mutual encouragement from one another in order to remain faithful.

## 2. The warning of severe judgment for those who turn away from Christ (Heb 10:26-31)

The previous paragraph reflects the author's hope that the readers would respond positively to his exhortations. If some were not to respond positively, that would be a disastrous choice inviting the chastening judgment of God. So, the author reminds them of the consequences. The evidence from the context (both the preceding and following paragraphs) argues that those in danger of judgment are genuine believers. To suggest they only profess to being Christians while in actuality being unregenerate is to ignore the straightforward evidence of Scripture. In Hebrews 10:19, they are called "brothers and sisters" (those who have been "made holy" according to Heb 2:11), while in Hebrews 10:32-33 the author recalls past experiences of suffering for their faith.

### a. "Willful sin" under the new covenant (Heb 10:26-27)

Hebrews 10:26. The use of the first person plural ("we") in the opening conditional statement refers to those the author has been addressing in Hebrews 10:19-25. These are the ones he has exhorted to hold fast their confession. Indeed, they have received "the knowledge of the truth," a technical expression used at least four times in the pastoral epistles to speak of authentic Christian experience (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1). These genuine Christians are then warned not to keep on sinning. Unfortunately, the translation "keep on sinning" is not the best translation and misses the point altogether. The Greek text does not have the words "keep on" (compare the NASB's "go on sinning" and the NRSV's "persist in sin"). Rather, the Greek text has a verb (in the present tense) meaning to "sin." In this particular case, however, the present tense is not indicating continual action, but is simply indicating that sin has occurred. It would have been better translated "if we sin willfully" (so NKJV). The context suggests that the author is thinking of a particular sin rather than a lifestyle in which one **continues** to sin.

First, he has just admonished them in Hebrews 10:23 to "hold unwaveringly to the hope that we confess," suggesting that he was concerned they might not do that. The same concern was expressed earlier in Hebrews 3:6 and Hebrews 4:14. Second, the word he uses for "sinning" (Gk *hamartanō*), though a common verb, is only used by our author one other time, namely, in Hebrews 3:17. There it describes the precise sin committed by the wilderness generation of "rebellious" against God at Kadesh-barnea, on account of which they experienced God's temporal judgment. Third, the adverb "deliberately" (Gk *hekousiōs*) suggests a connection with what is known as "willful sin" in the Old Testament, or "sin of a high hand" (Num 15:30-31)—the case where serious violation of the Law was done intentionally (with full knowledge and purposeful transgression). Moses used the combination of *aekousios* (an antonym of *hekousiōs*) and *hamartanō* ("to sin") in Numbers 15:27 to describe the concept of "sinning unintentionally," implying that the opposite idea ("to sin intentionally") would be expressed by *hekousiōs* and *hamartanō*—which is exactly what the author of Hebrews does. This observation is significant, for the issue in Numbers 15 was not persistency in sin, but a certain kind of sin serious enough to warrant physical death.

Furthermore this helps explain why the author of Hebrews says that for this case "no further sacrifice for sins is left for us." When one had "sinned intentionally" according to Numbers 15, he should have realized he had crossed the point of no return, and there was no sacrifice to offer that would avert God's judgment. This was a temporal judgment of capital punishment, not eternal punishment in hell.

Hebrews 10:27. The probable sin that the author of Hebrews has in mind (parallel to "intentional sin" of Numbers 15) is the sin of abandoning one's confession of faith (see v 23). For this sin, there can only be a certain fearful expectation of judgment, though he does not say what form or



when this judgment will come. The words “fury of fire that will consume God's enemies” appear to be drawn from the LXX translation of Isaiah 26:11 (see Zeph 1:18). The metaphor of fire was used in the Old Testament to speak of Yahweh’s anger toward His failing covenant people, in which He brought judgment resulting in their physical death without any suggestion of hell (see Lev 10:1-3; Num 16:35). The allusion to Isaiah 26:11 suggests he is thinking of the eschatological judgment that will befall the world in the day of the Lord. Isaiah 24–27 describes this period of time (see especially Isa 24:3). Metaphorically, God’s judgment on the world at that time is compared to a burning fire (Isa 24:6). The wicked rebels among Judah at that time are warned that fire (representative of God’s judgment) would devour God’s enemies (that is, His adversaries, those who were taking sides against Him). A similar fate of God’s temporal judgment could await new covenant believers who rebel.

*b. A comparison of punishment for serious sins under the two covenants (Heb 10:28-29)*

Using a style of rabbinic argument, the author reasons that if the new covenant is superior to the old, then a greater punishment ought to await those who violate the new covenant.

Hebrews 10:28. The words “put to death without mercy” appear to be an allusion to Deuteronomy 17:6 in which the death penalty would be given for more serious sins such as murder (see Deut 19:15). In such cases, it was necessary that two or three witnesses testify against the guilty one who had committed such a flagrant sin. Committing this sin was tantamount to rejecting the law of Moses, that is, rejecting the covenant obligations.

Hebrews 10:29. Having recalled this severe penalty stipulated by the old covenant, the author reasons that if rejection of those covenant obligations resulted in the temporal judgment of death, a greater punishment ought to be due the person who lives in outright rebellion against the greater new covenant. The author does not say what form such punishment might take. Since he makes no clear statement that it might be loss of salvation and consignment to hell, we should not make that assumption.

The author does, however, describe the characteristics of new covenant rebellion in three ways. First, the rebel, in essence, has “contempt for the Son of God” (lit., has “trampled” under foot the Son of God). Although the word “trample” (Gk *katapateō*) can mean literally to trample underfoot, it also carries the figurative meaning of “to look on with scorn, to treat with disdain” (BDAG, 523). To look on Christ and what He had done on the cross with contempt would be a most grievous sin for a Christian.

Second, the rebel profanes the blood of the covenant that made him holy. Obviously, the author has in mind the blood of the new covenant, that atoning blood of Jesus which is infinitely superior to the blood of goats and bulls (Heb 9:11-14). The word “profanes” is a translation of two Greek words (*koinon hēgēsamenos*) meaning “to regard as common/unclean.” The word *koinon* can have the meaning of “common,” but can also be used in the cultic sense of that which was defiling under the Law. In Acts 10:14-15, for instance, Peter responded to the vision of the unclean animals from heaven, “Certainly not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything defiled and ritually unclean!” How ironic (and tragic!) that the very blood of Christ would be regarded similar to things considered “unclean” under the Law.

Significantly, the author points out that it is this blood “that made him [i.e., the new covenant rebel] holy.” Some have sought to dodge the seriousness of this statement by claiming that the pronoun could be translated “it” rather than “him,” implying that it is the covenant that is sanctified by Jesus’ blood, not the person. Such an interpretation overlooks the author’s use of this key term “make holy,” i.e., sanctify (*hagiazō*), in the epistle. Earlier in chapter 10 the author stated, “we have been made holy through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10; see Heb 10:14). In Hebrews 10:29, therefore, the author is clearly confronting true

believers who have been made holy or sanctified (i.e., justified) by Christ's perfect atoning sacrifice. A believer who would forsake his confession of Christ and regard His sacrificial blood so lowly is truly guilty of a great sin before God, a sin that ought to be appropriately punished.

Third, such a new covenant rebel insults the Spirit of grace. There is no need to equate this statement with that of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:22-30), since the contexts differ significantly. Rather, the author is probably thinking of the Spirit as the agent who dispenses grace from the heavenly throne (recall the "throne of grace" in Heb 4:16). An abandonment of one's faith in Christ and His atoning blood was an insult to the Holy Spirit who had actively worked to make grace available to the Christian pilgrim on his way to God's greater rest.

*c. Reminders that God does indeed judge His own people (Heb 10:30-31)*

The previous verses suggested that there is serious new covenant sin that should be severely judged by God. The author now recalls two Old Testament verses in which God did indeed judge His own people. Since God does not change, the principle still applies. Those who rebel should be prepared to face God's temporal judgment.

Hebrews 10:30. Both quotations are drawn from Deuteronomy 32, a lament for Israel who worships idols (other gods) rather than Yahweh who had blessed her. Although scholars debate whether these particular quotations (from Deut 32:35-36) pertain to unfaithful Israel or her enemies that afflicted her, the more natural understanding is that unfaithful Israel is in view. The following verses (i.e., 32:36-38) focus on Israel being overwhelmed by calamity, so that her "power has disappeared." This will cause her to see the futility of her trust in idols, for these idols will not be present to rescue her in the time of God's judgment. When this is sufficiently demonstrated, the LORD will proclaim to His people: "See now that I, indeed I, am he! . . . and there is no other god besides me" (Deut 32:39). If verses 36-38 describe the calamity of Israel, this would substantiate that verses 34-36 are also speaking about God's vengeance on Israel. Thus God will execute vengeance against His own covenant people Israel, and repay them for their sin of forsaking Him by turning to other gods. In doing so, He will judge His people.

Some Bible translations, however, have rendered Hebrews 10:30 differently, "God will vindicate His people" (NASB), claiming that the word for "judge" in Deuteronomy 32:36 (Heb *dîn*) can also mean "vindicate." Such a translation would change the meaning from God judging His people to God vindicating His people. Those who favor this translation argue that the following line in Deuteronomy 32:36 (NASB: "have compassion on His servants") supports this. [The NET Bible's translation "will change his plans concerning his servants" is more ambiguous]. More likely, however, these two lines are meant to be contrastive. God will first bring judgment upon unfaithful Israel, and subsequently have compassion on her. The same thought is reiterated a few verses later in Deuteronomy 32:39: "I kill and give life; I smash and I heal." This is precisely how God revealed He would ultimately deal with the nation (see Deut 4:30-31). Thus, the translation "God will judge His people" is the preferred translation, as it fits the context better.

In conclusion, the two quotations from Deuteronomy 32:35-36 are speaking about God's vengeance and judgment upon His covenant people Israel. This substantiates the principle that God does not shrink from bringing harsh judgment upon His own people. He did so with those who rebelled against Him under the old covenant, and He does so with rebels under the new covenant.

Hebrews 10:31. Finally, the author reminds his readers: "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." These words are drawn from 2 Samuel 24:14, in which case David fell into the hands of the Lord, who sent a pestilence (temporal judgment) that caused seventy

thousand Israelites to die. The expression “living God” was also used in Hebrews 3:12 to warn the brethren of the danger of succumbing to an evil heart of unbelief that might result in rebellion against the “living God.”

What then is the "terrifying thing" the apostate should expect? Since the author does not say it is loss of eternal life (which, in any case, cannot be lost), we should not presume that. Both within this paragraph and in the epistle at large, we find clues that God’s temporal judgment is in view. Also, the author has repeatedly reminded his readers of the concern for rewards (or the forfeiture thereof) at the second coming of Christ. For God to both remove a believer by physical death and for that believer to experience eternal loss of reward certainly constitutes a “greater punishment.” The remainder of the chapter confirms this. In contrast to such a punishment for rebellion, Hebrews 10:35-36 offers a blessing for the believer who endures and does not cast off his confidence. Such faithfulness will result in a "great reward" and receiving "what is promised."

### **3. An encouragement and call for endurance through faith (Heb 10:32-39)**

The stern warning in the previous paragraph is followed by words of encouragement and an admonishment to patiently endure by faith in light of the expected return of the Lord Jesus who will reward those who have been faithful.

#### *a. A call to reflect on their past sufferings (Heb 10:32-34)*

One of the strongest arguments that the previous warning is directed at genuine believers is found in these following verses. The author exhorts the readers to recall the earlier days when they had suffered so much for their faith. The exhortation for the readers to recall the earlier days of suffering for their faith strongly argues that the previous warning is directed at genuine believers. It is hard to imagine that his the author's Jewish audience (especially in the first century AD) would have been willing to suffer so much for their faith, if they had not truly already come to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah. These were sufferings after they “were enlightened” (Gk *phōtisthentes*). This is the same word used in Hebrews 6:4, and which speaks of the spiritual enlightenment brought to their souls because of regeneration. Verses 33-34 recall some specific ways they had been made to suffer for their faith. They had been willing to undergo these trials because they “certainly had a better and lasting possession” for themselves. No doubt the author is thinking of what awaits them in the New Jerusalem of Christ’s kingdom (see Heb 11:10; 11:16; 12:22; 13:14). All earthly sufferings are worth enduring, if one knows that he stands to gain so much in eternity. In the earlier days of their Christian pilgrimage they had willingly endured much suffering, and the author’s reminder of this is meant to rekindle in them that same spirit, to the end that they might finish their Christian race well.

#### *b. A call to endure in order to receive the promised reward (Heb 10:35-36)*

Hebrews 10:35. Consequently the readers were exhorted not to throw away their confidence. The word “confidence” (Gk *parrēsian*) was used in Hebrews 10:19 to speak of the confidence or boldness with which new covenant believers can enter the heavenly sanctuary by the blood of Jesus (see Heb 3:6; 4:16). Their confidence in the priestly work of Jesus should by no means be abandoned! To do so would be to invite God’s stern judgment described in Hebrews 10:26-31. On the contrary, faithful adherence to it held hope for great reward. The context of the book suggests that this reward consists of sharing in the Son’s ultimate dominion, successfully entering the “greater rest” and inheriting “the promises” mentioned in Hebrews 6:12.

Hebrews 10:36. Yet the author reminds them that such future reward is contingent on endurance. This word (Gk *hupomonēs*) speaks of the steadfastness and perseverance needed in one’s Christian pilgrimage, especially in light of the pain, difficulties and hardships along the way.

Jesus Himself set the example in this regard. One endures such challenges precisely because he is more committed to doing God's will than his own. Such commitment and endurance is a sign of maturity in the life of a Christian. All temporal pain and discomfort, however, is temporary. More importantly, one's faithful endurance entitles him to receive what is promised (see comments on Heb 11:39-40). It is not far-fetched to say that verses 35-36 are the key verses to the entire book!

*c. The need for faith in light of Christ's expected return (Heb 10:37-39)*

The thought of ultimate reward in the preceding verses is now connected with thoughts of the time of such reward, namely, when Jesus returns. Quoting from the LXX translation of Habakkuk 2:3-4, the author reminds them that "he who is coming will arrive and not delay" (recall Heb 9:28). Our Lord's return should mean good news for believers, but for some it could mean shame (see 1 Jn 2:28). Consequently he reminds them that God's righteous one is to live by faith—an enduring faith that he will illustrate in chapter 11—and not shrink back, that is, to turn cowardly from the Lord (by abandoning one's confession). The "righteous one" (Gk *dikaios*) can potentially do either, but by "shrinking back" the Lord will take no pleasure in him; that is, He will not be pleased with such an unfaithful believer. The author concludes the chapter by saying, "We, however, are not of those who cowardly turn back resulting in destruction, but we are of those who exhibit an enduring faith resulting in the preservation of the soul" (my own translation). The NET Bible translation "and thus perish" in verse 39 might better be rendered "to destruction" or "resulting in destruction." [The Greek text, *eis apōleian*, does not involve a verb, but rather a preposition followed by a noun]. In any case, there is no need to read into this the idea of perishing in hell (though the word *apōleian* can have that nuance in certain contexts, such as Rom 9:22). On the other hand, this term (*apōleian*) can be used of people (including believers) in cases where eternal damnation is not in view (such as 1 Tim 6:9 and Acts 8:20). Also, the related verb form (*apōllumi*) can refer to temporal physical destruction (e.g., Mk 4:38 where the disciples were worried that they might "perish" at sea). Most likely the author is thinking once again of the stern judgment and "worse punishment" that he had spoken of in Hebrews 10:29. Since he had just spoken of the fate of the believer when the Lord returns, this could mean not only temporal destruction but a negative experience at the judgment seat of Christ (recall the danger in Heb 4:1 of coming short of God's rest). Any thought, however, that verse 39 might have soteriological faith in view (as the NIV translation suggests) must certainly be rejected in light of the fact that the author clearly portrays in chapter 11 that the faith he has in mind is a life of walking by faith, in which one pleases God.

#### **IV. The Means and Responsibilities of new covenant Life (Heb 11:1–13:17)**

In the author's closing remarks of the previous section, he exhorted the readers to respond positively to the doctrinal exposition of Christ's perfect sacrifice by drawing near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (Heb 10:22). If, on the other hand, they "throw away their confidence," they are warned that they will face God's severe judgment (Heb 10:26-31). Yet remembering their former sufferings and faithfulness, he exhorted them to "endure" by responding in faith and living by faith. Such a life of faith results in great reward and inheriting God's promises (Heb 10:35-36; see Heb 6:12).

Hebrews 11 begins a new major unit with a focus on the means and responsibilities for the believer under the new covenant. The author wisely begins by giving examples and motivations for living a life of faith. If unbelief resulted in exclusion from God's rest for the wilderness generation under the old covenant (Heb 3:19; 4:11), then certainly faith will be critical for new covenant believers who wish to enter successfully into God's greater rest.

## **A. The Life of Faith That Pleases God and Brings Reward (Heb 11:1-40)**

This chapter is not merely a long list of examples of faith from the Old Testament. There are also several other themes woven together in the chapter that are very relevant to the overall concerns of the epistle. This would include living in such a way as to “receive God's commendation,” living as aliens in the world because of the treasure that awaits us beyond this life, willingness to suffer persecution and ill-treatment in the interim, and eventually obtaining one's inheritance and rewards in God's timing.

### **1. The prologue (Heb 11:1-2)**

Hebrews 11:1. The author begins by defining faith and the value it has. He says it is “being sure of what we hope for.” The Greek word translated “being sure” (Gk *hupostasis*) is quite flexible in meaning, but in this context it probably stresses the more active meaning of the confidence or assurance that one has in something (see LSJM II 4, 1895; see the use of the synonym *parrēsia* in Heb 10:35). This active sense would fit the description of faith in verse 6 as something that believers do that pleases God (see Heb 10:39) and is consistent with the author's concern in Hebrews 10:38 that believers “live by faith” (i.e., be confident in what God has said and act accordingly).

The word translated “being convinced of” (Gk *elegchos*) should be understood as “a conviction about” something (BDAG, 315). The NET Bible translation of verse 1 is accurate: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see.” In light of the examples cited, the author has in mind an assurance about things God has revealed or called a person to do (not things one wishes to happen).

Hebrews 11:2. The readers of the epistle should remember that it was “by faith” that the people of old received God's commendation. By “people of old” (Gk *presbuteroi*), the author means their ancestors who lived before the time of the cross (i.e., Old Testament saints). The words “received commendation” are actually one word in the Greek text (*emarturēthēsan*). This is a key term in the chapter, found in verses 2, 4, 5 and 39. (Its use in the prologue and epilogue forms an *inclusio* for the chapter). The NASB translates this word as “gained approval,” and the NKJV as “obtained a good testimony.” The point is that by their faith they obtained a good testimony in the eyes of God, thus gaining His approval and meriting His rewards (note the stress in vv 5-6 of “pleasing God” and being rewarded). Hopefully the readers will want to emulate the lives of these men and women of faith, and thereby be well commended by God.

### **2. Examples and lessons from the primordial period (Heb 11:3-7)**

Hebrews 11:3. The author begins with the biblical account of creation. Since there was no human witness to this event, only by faith can we know that the world was created by a word from God. From the beginning, then, there is this principle that we must depend on what God has revealed rather than on what we can see. The readers of the epistle would be wise to apply this principle to their own situation.

Hebrews 11:4. In the Cain and Abel story, Abel's gift to God was regarded as a greater sacrifice. The reason is not due to the substance of the sacrifice itself, but to the faith behind the gift. Abel's gift was motivated by a faith that sought to please God. Genesis 4:4 indicates that Abel “brought some of the firstborn of his flock—even the fattest of them,” i.e., he gave the best portions to God. He recognized what constituted a “greater sacrifice,” and then was obedient to offer that. Likewise, the readers should recognize and rely on the “greater sacrifice” that Christ has made for them (not on animal sacrifices).

Hebrews 11:5. God's favor on Enoch was evident, because he was taken up by God rather than experiencing death. In Genesis 5:24 we are told that he “walked with God.” The author of Hebrews, however, followed the Greek LXX, which translated these words as “he was pleasing to God.” The

sense, however, is the same: the fact that he walked with God resulted in his pleasing God. We should not expect the same outcome as Enoch (God used Enoch to demonstrate a theological point that He was master over death), but we should seek to please God as Enoch did through a life of faith.

Hebrews 11:6. The author extends the example of Enoch by emphasizing that “without faith it is impossible to please” God. Yet, what does it mean to “approach God”? This is the same word (Gk *proserchomai*) translated “draw near” in Hebrews 10:22 (see Heb 4:16), and pertains to those who are already Christians. The author is not talking about non-Christians coming to God for personal salvation from sin, but how Christians draw near to their God. Christians can draw nearer to God by believing not only that God is, but that “he rewards those who seek him.” This reinforces what the author had said about rewards and receiving God’s promises in Hebrews 10:35-36 (see Heb 6:11-12). The one who lives by faith can expect God’s eternal reward(s) in the kingdom of His Son.

Hebrews 11:7. Throughout this epistle, the author has warned the readers to hold fast their confession of faith in Jesus and follow in the ways of the new covenant. Noah is a good model of a man who heeded God’s warning and acted in faith (though his actions put him at odds with the world). The ark he built provided for the deliverance of his family, that is, their physical deliverance and escaping God’s judgment. For this act he became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. This does not mean that his obedience gained him a righteous standing with God. Like Abraham, God’s righteousness could be secured only by faith (Gen 15:6). Genesis 6:9, on the other hand, bears witness that Noah was already a righteous man before he ever built the ark, and (like Enoch) he walked with God. So Noah already had the “righteousness that comes by faith.” But his faithful obedience to God in building the ark enabled him to also become an “heir,” that is, an inheritor. This same Greek word for “heir” (*klēronomos*) was used in Hebrews 1:2 of Christ, the **heir** of all things. Furthermore use of this term (and the related verbal form) in Hebrews 6:12 and Hebrews 6:17 reminds us that Christians become heirs with Christ as a result of a life of enduring faith (see Titus 3:7). The idea of becoming an “heir” complements what the author has said about rewards in verse 6.

### **3. Examples and lessons from Abraham and the patriarchs (Heb 11:8-22)**

The author now turns to Abraham and the patriarchs. He introduced Abraham earlier in the epistle as an inheritor of God’s promises (Heb 6:13-20). The mention of Noah as an “heir” in the previous verse forms a natural transition to Abraham. The latter was particularly important, for he was considered by Jews as the father of the nation. Of all the men whose life they might wish to emulate, certainly Abraham’s would be foremost.

#### *a. The quest of Abraham and Sarah (Heb 11:8-12)*

Hebrews 11:8-10. Abraham’s quest for an inheritance in the land of promise sets the pattern for those under the new covenant. It was a challenge for Abraham to leave that which was familiar (Ur of the Chaldeans) and obey God’s calling. The readers face something similar as they embark on their new covenant undertaking (leaving behind the trappings of the old covenant). Likewise they have an inheritance, but in the Son’s kingdom. They also need to see themselves as “sojourners” (those dwelling in a foreign country) who live in temporary dwellings (tents). That is, their real home is elsewhere, and their time here on earth is only a temporary pilgrimage.

Yet Abraham and Sarah were not alone, for Isaac and Jacob were “fellow heirs” (Gk *sugklēronomōn*) of the same promise. In all this, Abraham realized that earthly Canaan was not his ultimate destiny. He was waiting for the city with firm foundations, whose architect and builder is God. In light of Hebrews 11:16, the author has in mind the “heavenly Jerusalem”—a city beyond this earthly life (Heb 3:14)—to be realized in Jesus’ messianic kingdom (see Heb 12:28). Abraham may not have clearly understood his, but the author of Hebrews realizes that this was the real destiny to which God was taking him.

Hebrews 11:11-12. Female readers of the epistle would take particular encouragement in Sarah, the woman of faith who accompanied Abraham. In her old age she bore Isaac, the child of promise. Despite her moments of doubt (note Gen 18:9-15), she “regarded the one who had given the promise to be trustworthy.” [Some English Bibles (e.g., The NET Bible and NIV) translate this verse in such a way to suggest that it was Abraham, not Sarah, who regarded God as trustworthy. A number of modern commentators (e.g., Lane, Bruce, Ellingworth, and Koester) also argue that verse 11 has Abraham’s faith in view. The discussion is too technical and complex to treat here, and thus is best left an open question for now]. Regardless how verse 11 should be translated, it is remarkable that Abraham and Sarah (at an age when most people would be dead) finally received the son in whom God would fulfill His promise of a great seed! This is a good lesson that God is always faithful to fulfill His promises. If Abraham and Sarah could follow the One faithful to His promises, certainly the readers of Hebrews should be confident that their own endurance in faith—doing the will of God—would result in obtaining His promises at Jesus’ second coming (Heb 10:36).

*b. The author’s commentary on Abraham and Sarah (Heb 11:13-16)*

Verses 13-16 form an interlude in the author’s presentation of Abraham and the patriarchs. Here he highlights some of the important implications from their lives of faith.

Hebrews 11:13. What was implied in the previous verses is now made explicit. Abraham and the patriarchs regarded themselves as strangers and foreigners on the earth. This is how the person of faith must see himself, for God’s ultimate promises are not meant to be received in this life. That is why the author states, “These all died in faith without receiving the things promised.” The author concludes this chapter on the same thought (see Heb 11:39).

Hebrews 11:14-16. Though Abraham by his own confession was a stranger and a pilgrim even after reaching the land of Canaan (Gen 23:4), he certainly did not regard Ur (or Haran) as his true homeland. Had that been the case, he could have easily returned. There was a better land for him, a heavenly one (the author is thinking again of the “heavenly Jerusalem”). Such an attitude wins God’s approval, and thus the author can say that “God is not ashamed to be called their God” (see Heb 2:11). This is evidenced by the fact that God has prepared a city for them, a city that will be an integral part of the Son’s kingdom (see Heb 12:22; 12:28). A city prepared by God Himself is undoubtedly a wonderful destiny. These heroes of the faith, headed for New Jerusalem, stand in contrast to the wilderness generation that rebelled at Kadesh-barnea and failed to enter God’s “rest” because of unbelief.

*c. A faith that looks beyond death (Heb 11:17-22)*

In the previous paragraph, the author pointed out that Abraham and the patriarchs were people who lived life in light of their ultimate destiny in the eternal city of God. Because of this perspective, their faith evidenced itself in ways that looked beyond death.

Hebrews 11:17-19. Abraham’s offering up of Isaac (Gen 22) is a case in point. Testing in the Christian life is not unusual, for even Abraham himself was subjected to God’s testing. Furthermore, much was at stake in this test. The Abrahamic covenant and God’s whole theocratic program to bring universal blessing (see Gen 12:1-3) were contingent on the promised “seed” to Abraham. After waiting so long to finally have the promised son, would he really be able to obey God’s command to sacrifice Isaac?

Prior to the testing itself in Genesis 22, Abraham was given the specific promise in Genesis 21:12, “Through Isaac your descendants will be counted.” How could he reconcile this promise with God’s command? Most likely, he did not know how God would fulfill this promise if he were to sacrifice Isaac. Yet he had learned over the years that God keeps His word. From this he apparently reasoned that even if he were to sacrifice Isaac, God would somehow miraculously

bring him back to life. [He need not have fully understood the doctrine of resurrection to have reasoned to this conclusion]. As the test progressed, however, Abraham did not actually have to kill Isaac. Thus in one sense Abraham received the gift of having his son back. It was as though he received him back from the dead. Even this aspect (receiving back his son) became a type of what would come later, when God the Father would receive back His only Son by virtue of His resurrection from the grave. Hence the author of Hebrews could say of Isaac's virtual death, in a sense he received him back from there. To pass this test, Abraham needed a faith to trust God for life beyond death. Furthermore, his successfully passing the test brought great blessing from God and hope for the future (see esp. Gen 22:15-18).

Hebrews 11:20-22. Having considered Abraham's faith—a faith that looked beyond this life—the author now presents similar examples from each of the next three patriarchs, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Isaac, for example, blessed both Jacob and Esau concerning the future. That is, just before he died, Isaac uttered a blessing for each of his sons regarding their future (Gen 27:27-29 for Jacob and Gen 27:39-40 for Esau). In both cases the fulfillment would come after Isaac's own death. The promised blessing for Jacob included the words, "May peoples serve you and nations bow down to you" (Gen 27:29). These words went far beyond the lifetime of both Isaac and his son Jacob, finding their ultimate fulfillment in Christ Jesus (see Ps 72:8-11; Dan 7:13-14).

The author then recollects Jacob's dying moments. The words, "worshipped as he leaned on his staff," reflect the LXX translation of Genesis 47:31. Some translations of Genesis 47:31 have "bed" rather than "staff," but the word for staff (Heb *mittah*) is easily confused for "bed" (Heb *matteh*). The translation "staff" in Genesis 47:31 is favored by the NIV, and this seems preferable (recall the importance of Jacob's staff in Gen 38:18). The main point is that Jacob, at the end of his life, was still a worshipper (not one who turned from God). Also in his blessings for Joseph's two sons (Gen 48:8-22), he looked ahead to the future.

Finally Joseph, looking ahead to God fulfilling His promises to Abraham, at the end of his life requested his bones be carried up to Canaan when the nation left Egypt (Gen 50:22-26).

#### **4. Examples and lessons from Moses and the conquest period (Heb 11:23-31)**

The main point of this section is that faith confronts (rather than retreats from) opposition and hostility.

Hebrews 11:23. Even the parents of Moses "were not afraid of the king's edict" to kill the newborn infants (Exod 2:1-4). Rather, they obeyed God in the face of such hostility.

Hebrews 11:24-26. As he grew older, Moses himself had to make a difficult choice, namely, what he would live for. He could retain the honor and privileges of being the son of Pharaoh's daughter, or he could identify with the people of God. The author of Hebrews is subtly suggesting to the Jewish Christians reading this epistle that they needed to identify with new covenant worshippers. That choice was not an easy one for Moses and caused him to be ill-treated. [When Pharaoh tried to kill Moses, he had to flee the country in disgrace; Exodus 2:15]. Obviously Moses needed a strong motivation to give up the treasures of Egypt he could have had. The reproach (or disgrace) that he suffered was anticipatory of what Christ would later have to undergo, though not nearly to the same extreme.

Yet he could do it, because his eyes were fixed on the reward. The book of Exodus does not clearly say what reward he hoped for, but it may have been the future of the nation in the land promised to Abraham. At the birth of his first son, Moses named him Gershom," to reflect that he had been a sojourner (Heb *gēr*) in a foreign land. Also the emphasis of Exodus 3 is on God calling Moses to lead this people to the Promised Land (see Exod 2:24 and compare Exod 3:7-10). Moses realized in this



that a faith that endures is rewarded by God, and the rewards of God meant more to him than anything Egypt had to offer.

Hebrews 11:27-29. These three verses all relate to the Exodus event. Like his parents, Moses chose to obey God regardless of the opposition. Thus he left Egypt without fearing the king's anger. One should recall that Moses' encounters with Pharaoh were many, not just a single face off, thus necessitating his endurance as God brought plague after plague on Egypt. But Moses had encountered the invisible God (Exod 3), and by faith could see the one who is invisible (kept his focus on God), and thus was able to endure.

In the Passover event (Exod 12), Moses learned the value of the sprinkling of blood on the doorposts and lintel. Similarly the author of Hebrews hopes the readers will place their confidence in "sprinkled blood," namely, the superior blood of Christ typified by the Passover lamb (Heb 9:23-24). By putting their confidence in the sprinkled blood, Moses and the Hebrews avoided judgment. The one who destroyed the firstborn did not touch them (recall the warning in Heb 10:26-31!).

Finally, Hebrews 11:29 indicates that they journeyed on to cross the Red Sea, whereas the Egyptians were drowned in their attempt to do so. They lived to experience God's salvation-deliverance, which vindicated them. How much more glorious will it be, then, for new covenant believers who live to experience Christ's "salvation" at the second coming (recall Heb 9:28).

Hebrews 11:30-31. The final two verses of this paragraph highlight the Jericho victory under Joshua's leadership. God's way of victory against Jericho (the walls were encircled for seven days may have seemed unorthodox, but it proved true. What seems reasonable to human logic, however, does not always match God's ways. Rahab the prostitute (a sinful Gentile) probably seemed out of place among God's people, yet her faith had gained her that privilege. This was a good reminder to the Jewish Christians reading Hebrews of God's love for Gentiles and their place in His program. Gentile inclusion in the new covenant is no reason to shy from association with it (and Gentiles can be encouraged in reading this!)

#### **5. Examples and lessons from the post-conquest period (Heb 11:32-38)**

In this final paragraph before the conclusion, the author looks beyond the time of the conquest to consider other heroes of the faith before the time of Christ. Obviously there are too many to highlight. The author first considers those who were victorious in faith (Heb 11:32-35), and then difficulties encountered by people of faith (Heb 11:35-38). His point is that faith is valiant, but also is prepared to suffer.

##### *a. Examples of victorious faith (Heb 11:32-35)*

Hebrews 11:32-34. The author begins by mentioning four names from the period of the Judges, one king (David) and then Samuel and the prophets. Certain deeds of faith are enumerated, most of which are readily apparent. The one who shut the mouths of lions was obviously Daniel (Dan 6:22-23), and those who quenched raging fire were Daniel's three friends (Dan 3:25-28).

Hebrews 11:35. Worth noting is the concluding note that women received back their dead raised to life. This is a reference to two incidents from the Old Testament, 1 Kings 17:17-24 and 2 Kings 4:17-37, one involving Elijah and the other Elisha. In both cases, an only son of a woman unexpectedly dies, but is subsequently resuscitated by a prophet (in the case of Elijah in 1 Kings 17, a Gentile woman of Sidon is the recipient of God's grace). By concluding on this note, the author suggests to his readers that resurrection was the grand hope and the supreme achievement of faith. Our hope ought to be firmly fixed in the God who resurrects people of faith and can give them a life beyond death.

*b. Persecution and hardships encountered by heroes of faith (Heb 11:35-38)*

With verse 35 the tone quickly changes, and the remainder of the paragraph discusses challenges that might be considered defeats. Heroes of faith often encountered persecution and hardships, but these were really not defeats. Why? Because they looked to the distant future to see their sufferings in light of the resurrection and the reward that awaited them. This provides a lesson for the readers of Hebrews: present-day sufferings can be endured in light of expected rewards in the future world!

Hebrews 11:35. When the author mentions those who were tortured, not accepting release, he may have had in mind certain individuals from the intertestamental period during the persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (see 2 Maccabees 6:19, 28; 7:9, 11, 14). Rather than recanting their faith (that might have brought their deliverance), they remained faithful to God at the cost of their own lives. Yet they were motivated by hopes of obtaining a resurrection to a better life, not merely resuscitation. In this resurrection to come, they were consoled in knowing that God would reward them for having suffered for their faith.

Hebrews 11:36-38. The author then lists numerous ways in which their ancestors had suffered for their faith. The reference to being stoned may refer to Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24:21. Being sawed apart may be a reference to the death of Isaiah, as there is a tradition recorded in one of the books of the Pseudepigrapha that the famous prophet died in this way (see *Ascension of Isaiah 5:1-16*). The author honors such heroes of the faith who suffered for the Lord by saying that they were people of whom the world was not worthy. By saying this, the author is inviting the readers to join their elite company, and thus to endure all hardships in hopes of entering God's greater rest.

**6. The epilogue (Heb 11:39-40)**

Hebrews 11:39. What the heroes of old did gain by virtue of their faith was being commended in the eyes of God—they gained His approval (recall Heb 11:2). What they did not gain, however, was that which “was promised” (lit., “the promise”}<sup>i</sup>)—a noun in the Gk text). At least they have not gained “the promise” yet, though it will be something they receive in the future. The use of the definite article with the word for promise (Gk *tēn epangelian*) suggests that the author may have something specific in mind. Just as Abraham died in faith without receiving the promises of the land inheritance of Canaan—an earthly rest (Heb 11:13)—so the other faith heroes are made to wait for the ultimate realization of what God has promised them. In Hebrews 4:1 the author had called to their attention the promise that remained of entering His rest. The conclusion was reached that this “rest” will involve a share (as one's inheritance for faithfulness) in the dominion over God's creation as described in chapter 2. It is this promise of God's greater rest in the messianic kingdom that the author seems to have in mind.

Hebrews 11:40. This verse explains why God's faith heroes have not yet received this promise. God has something better in mind, namely, that the saints of the Old Testament would be made perfect together with us of the new covenant. The words “be made perfect” are actually one word in the Greek text (Gk *teleiōthōsin*). This word (from *teleiōō*) means being brought to completion or reaching an intended goal. Although the author had said earlier in Hebrews 10:14 that Christ's sacrifice “has perfected forever those who are being sanctified,” he seems to have something more in mind in Hebrews 11:40. Since this verse implies that these Old Testament saints have not yet been perfected, this would indicate that it is not something attained in the present life but awaits consummation in the future.

In light of the context of the epistle stressing Messiah's kingdom and in light of the promise itself in verse 39 of God's greater rest, the author seems to be thinking about that final state that we will be brought to in Messiah's kingdom when our full salvation is realized. The saints of God throughout the

ages will enter this new era together, having been sanctified as a result of Christ's sacrifice, resurrected and glorified, and finally rewarded (individually) to live and serve in Christ's kingdom. Perhaps the greatest perfecting work of God in us will be that which is expressed in 1 John 3:2, "Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that whenever it is revealed we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is." God's grand work in us will then be complete, all to the praise of His glory!

## **B. The Benefit of Discipline in the Quest to Endure (Heb 12:1-13)**

Because the readers of the epistle had experienced difficulties in their Christian pilgrimage, they were tempted to turn away from the faith. The author was concerned that a retreat into unbelief could jeopardize their future and the rewards in store for them at Christ's return. So in Hebrews 10:36 he reminded them that they needed endurance in order to receive God's rewards. Having considered the role of faith for Christian endurance in chapter 11, the author now turns to highlight another benefit of enduring trials. Though painful at times, the Christian who sees this as being from God and submits to it will grow in holiness.

### **1. The call to endurance (Heb 12:1-3)**

Hebrews 12:1. The author likens the Christian pilgrimage to an endurance race. The threefold repetition of "endure" emphasizes this theme. As we run, a great cloud of witnesses watch us, as though we are running before them in a stadium. These are the Old Testament heroes of chapter 11 whose victorious lives inspire us on. Because this race is so important, any unnecessary weight and hindrance must be eliminated. In antiquity, runners in the Greco-Roman world often removed their clothing before running so nothing would impede them. This metaphor teaches us to discard everything that might interfere with a total commitment to Jesus Christ, especially any distracting sin.

Hebrews 12:2. As inspiring as these Old Testament heroes are, the author carefully points the readers to the supreme example of persevering faith, Jesus Christ. Our eyes must stay fixed on Him in our Christian pilgrimage, for He is "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." The word "pioneer" (Gk *archēgos*) was used earlier in Hebrews 2:10, and carries the idea of one who is a "leader" or who "pioneers" the way. He has blazed the trail before us pointing us in the right way and to the right goal. The Greek word for "perfecter" (*teleiōtēs*) occurs only here, but is related to the verb *teleioō*, "to perfect or bring to completion." This suggests that Christ is the perfect example of enduring faith we are called to live out, and the One who perfects it in us.

His endurance of the cross has become the model for the endurance we are called to undertake. Christians feeling shame should remember that the shame of the cross did not deter Jesus from His mission. If shame is felt in the Christian life, we must remember that He despised all the shame that the cross brought Him. This shame did not deter Him from His mission. He was eventually victorious, for He "has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God" (a reference to Ps 110:1; see Heb 1:3). Likewise, eschatological victory and joy await the believer who endures in faith.

Hebrews 12:3. The author (with great pastoral concern) yearns that his readers not grow weary and give up—to tire before completing their race. He urges them, therefore, to contemplate the opposition by sinners that Jesus Himself had to endure. They may face hostile opposition to their faith, but so did our Lord.

### **2. Instruction about the positive value of discipline (Heb 12:4-11)**

"Rough" experiences in the Christian life should not be construed to mean that their new covenant commitment has been a mistake. Such experiences are a normal part of the Christian life and are actually beneficial for growth in Christlikeness.

*a. Trials must be put in perspective (Heb 12:4-6)*

The readers had indeed suffered for their faith (Heb 10:32-34), but their sufferings need to be put into perspective lest they overreact or draw the wrong conclusions.

Hebrews 12:4. “Resisted to the point of bloodshed” probably speaks of martyrdom, but the author reminds them that they had not suffered to this extent (as their Lord did). Every believer is engaged in a struggle against sin, and ultimately it is this battle that is connected with our sufferings. [Some think that “sin” in this verse looks at sinful men who oppose believers, but the following context dealing with holiness suggests that personal sin is in view]. None of us has fought this battle as vigorously as we should, and we need God’s intervention in our life (in the form of discipline) to help us overcome the sin that impedes our running the race.

Hebrews 12:5-6. God’s love for His children includes not only the forgiveness of our sins, but also His efforts to free us from sin’s bondage. The author quotes Proverbs 3:11-12 (from the LXX) to reinforce this point. Though discipline may sometimes reflect God’s displeasure, it is primarily a mark of sonship.

The word “discipline” (Gk *paideia*) has the sense of child training. Proverbs 3:11-12 reminds us that troubles should be seen as a training ground, providing lessons that help us to move ahead and mature in the Christian life. Submitting to them not only leads to maturity, but also (since faith and obedience are involved) to eventual reward.

*b. Discipline is a good sign (Heb 12:7-8)*

Hebrews 12:7. The word “endure” can be understood as an imperative (so NET Bible: “Endure your suffering as discipline”) or as a simple statement of fact (NASB: “It is for discipline that you endure”). In either case, the end result is the same. There is a relationship between endurance and discipline, for in the process of enduring, we receive discipline, that is, we are trained. By giving up prematurely, we miss out on the discipline-training that God intends for us and which we so desperately need. On the other hand, by enduring, we get the full benefit of the training God wants us to have.

Hebrews 12:8. Discipline should not be viewed negatively, since all true sons partake of this. The words translated “shared in” are actually not a verb but a noun in the Greek text, which could be translated “participants” (Gk *metochoi*)—“of which all have become participants.” Earlier the author used the word to speak of our “participation” in the heavenly calling (see Heb 1:9; Heb 3:1). If we are to be *metochoi* with Jesus on the pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem, then we must also willingly become *metochoi* of God’s discipline that helps us successfully arrive there.

*c. Appreciation of the benefits of discipline (Heb 12:9-11)*

Hebrews 12:9. Earthly fathers corrected us with discipline without our losing respect for them. How much more we should respect our heavenly Father and welcome His discipline. In this context, the words “submit ourselves” (from Gk verb *hupotassō*) have the idea of voluntarily submitting oneself to what God has chosen to bring into one’s life as divine training. This implies a right attitude toward discipline and cooperation with God’s Spirit in the process. As James 1:2-4 suggests, we need to count God-given trials with joy in light of the positive things God will accomplish in us as we endure them.

Hebrews 12:10. In the relatively short time “a little while”) that our earthly fathers “disciplined us,” they did so as seemed best to them—though they were not perfect and made many mistakes. In contrast, God’s discipline is always perfectly administered, without mistakes. Furthermore, our earthly fathers may have disciplined us at times with impure motives or wrong attitude (e.g., uncontrolled anger). Yet our heavenly Father always acts with the purest of motives, doing what

is “for our benefit.” This benefits us because ultimately it is designed that we may “share his holiness.” Though holiness is one of the greatest possessions in life, it does not come easy. Money certainly cannot buy holiness. This comes only as we endure God’s discipline and subject ourselves to Him, seeking to learn what He wants to teach us.

Hebrews 12:11. The author acknowledges that God’s discipline seems at the time to be more painful than joyful. Yet by cooperating with God, we are trained by it and experience the resulting benefits. The word “trained” is from the Greek verb *gumnazō*, from which we get the word “gymnasium,” a place of training. Like any athlete who has learned that the pain of grueling workouts eventually pays off, so God’s sons must focus on the long-term benefit rather than the immediate pain. This benefit is not larger biceps, but the fruit of peace and righteousness. This righteousness conforms us to be more like the Lord Jesus, who loves righteousness and will rule over His kingdom with a scepter of righteousness (Heb 1:8-9).

### **3. The call to render mutual help and encouragement (Heb 12:12-13)**

The word “therefore” signals an inference from the preceding discussion. Since God’s discipline is good for all, we should be concerned for one another’s successful participation in it. These two verses look at the mutual care and concern that new covenant believers should give one another (see Heb 3:13; 10:24-25). The temptation to give up under discipline can be offset by helping others (especially those who are weak and struggling).

Hebrews 12:12. The mention of “listless hands” and “weak knees” should be understood in light of the opening metaphor of the chapter depicting the Christian pilgrimage as an athletic race. The proper response is commitment to enduring the struggles of the race, being ready with flexed arms and strong knees. Yet some in the community of faith are already struggling and “sluggish” in their readiness (see Heb 5:11; 6:12). Those who are stronger spiritually need to strengthen these weaker members. Verse 12 is an allusion to Isaiah 35:3. In that context, Isaiah 35:3-4 are words of encouragement offered in light of the coming “eschatological salvation” that follows the Lord’s “day of vengeance.”

Hebrews 12:13. The terms “feet,” “lame,” and “healed” in this verse are simply metaphorical, helping paint a word picture for the readers. Making “straight paths” is an allusion to Proverbs 4:26. The context of Proverbs 4:25-27 deals with single-mindedness of purpose in remaining committed to the will and way of the Lord. Likewise, we must not swerve from the track of faithfulness, if we are to finish our race well! As we do, we must remember those around us who are weaker (“lame”) and in danger of falling out of the race altogether (“put out of joint”). By our example of rightly responding to hardship and discipline and by our helping them, they might even be “healed,” that is, made spiritually well again and moving on to maturity and endurance.

### **C. A Final Warning to be Faithful to the new covenant (Heb 12:14-29)**

The author wants all the readers to finish their Christian pilgrimage well. Despite the difficulties involved, they should endure them because rewards from God await those who finish well. If the readers would commit themselves to a life of faith (as the heroes of old did) and see their struggles and trials as part of God’s beneficial discipline for them, this would help them endure the difficulties of their Christian pilgrimage. Furthermore eternal rewards would await them for finishing well. For those tempted to respond negatively, the author issues a final “warning passage.”

#### **1. A word of caution for the disobedient (Heb 12:14-17)**

The author had called upon the readers to set their feet on straight paths and to help the “weaker” ones of the community (vv 12-13). So the whole community has a responsibility to look out for any who might drift away from the Lord.

Hebrews 12:14. The author exhorts them to “pursue peace with everyone.” By “everyone,” he means all in the community of faith, since both the preceding and following contexts have these in view. By the word “peace,” the author may have in mind the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, which to the Jewish mind is not merely peace but one’s whole welfare. To pursue peace with everyone in God’s family would be to seek their total welfare, especially their spiritual well-being. The words translated “pursue” and “peace” are also found in combination in Romans 14:19, in a context calling for mutual concern and edification among believers. “So then, let us **pursue** what makes for **peace** and for building up one another” (see Ps 34:14).

Each believer also needs to pursue “holiness” (or “sanctification,” Gk *hagiasmos*). This is the only occurrence of this particular word in Hebrews (though the related verbal form occurs several times). This normally denotes progressive sanctification (e.g., Rom 6:19), and the preceding context confirms that meaning here (note those who “share his holiness” in Heb 12:10). This is essential for one to see the Lord.

In light of the epistle’s eschatological concerns (Christ’s return was referred to in both 9:28 and 10:37), “seeing the Lord” probably looks forward to that future moment that completes the sanctification process when each believer will see the Lord face to face and be like Him (see 1 Jn 3:2). Though none of us will become completely like Christ in this life, yet because this is our ultimate destiny, we ought to pursue sanctification now (cooperating with God in His discipline of us).

Just as all true sons partake of God’s discipline (Heb 12:8), so also all enter the sanctification process, progress to some degree, and ultimately see the Lord. The text is not saying that people will be saved in the final analysis because they attain to a certain level of holiness. Simple faith in Christ and His atoning work is the sole basis by which people go to heaven, not the extent of their sanctification.

Hebrews 12:15. The spiritual concern for the community of believers includes being on the lookout for anyone who comes short of the grace of God. The stress on progressive sanctification in this chapter suggests that this does not mean a failure to believe the gospel (coming short of “salvation in Christ”). In light of the context of Hebrews (especially the weak and failing ones mentioned in Heb 12:12-13), this probably looks at the failure to appropriate God’s grace for successfully completing one’s Christian pilgrimage (see Heb 4:16). This can lead to a bitter root in the believer’s life (see Deut 29:18-21), that furthers a hardened unbelieving heart and eventually leads to withdrawal from the community into apostasy. Like a bad disease, this can spread to others and defile them.

Hebrews 12:16-17. These two verses focus on the tragedy of Esau (see Genesis 27) to illustrate the lesson that community concern must include being on the lookout for immoral believers. Immaturity in the Christian life (and spurning the grace of God) can degenerate into an immoral lifestyle that further hardens a believer’s heart. In Esau’s case, he was the first-born son and therefore entitled to the first-born’s inheritance rights. Later on he wanted that privilege back, but found it was too late. Hence, “he found no opportunity for repentance,” i.e., Isaac, his father, would not change his mind. Not even tears could change his father’s mind and restore the privilege that he, Esau, had forfeited (Gen 27:34; 27:38). One must be careful not to follow in Esau’s footsteps in light of the future eschatological “rest” (and inheritance) at stake.

## **2. The contrast of two covenants (Heb 12:18-24)**

The thought of Esau forfeiting his inheritance is analogous to any who might jeopardize his future by turning back to the old covenant. The author carefully contrasts the old and new covenants in preparation for one final warning against forsaking the new covenant.

*a. The old covenant and Mount Sinai (Heb 12:18-21)*

The author draws from four passages of the Old Testament that describe the fearful giving of the old covenant at the mountain “that can be touched,” that is, Mount Sinai (see Exod 19:16-20; 20:18-21; Deut 4:10-13; Deut 5:22-27). This scene was terrifying to the people, not inviting at all. In Hebrews 12:21 the author also includes the occasion when Moses came down from the mountain and beheld the golden calf that the people had made (see Deut 9:19). The situation was so terrifying that Moses expressed how fearful he was. The author’s point is this: the very conditions and mood at the time of the old covenant’s inauguration reflect the nature of the covenant itself. Though the laws of the covenant witnessed to the holiness of God, the covenant itself fostered fear and distance from God.

*b. The new covenant and Mt. Zion (Heb 12:22-24)*

Hebrews 12:22. The new covenant is far more inviting, and Mount Zion (the heavenly Jerusalem) stands in stark contrast to Mount Sinai. By the words “you have come to Mount Zion,” the author means that this is the destiny for those of the new covenant. The idea of God’s city as the believer’s hope occupies much attention in the closing chapters of the book (Heb 11:10; 11:16; 12:22; 13:14). That this is the blessing awaiting new covenant believers in the future is confirmed in Hebrews 13:14, “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” This city is the very same “New Jerusalem” as portrayed in the Book of Revelation (see Rev 3:12; 21:2; 21:10-27) to be introduced in the messianic kingdom. According to Revelation 21:23, the city is illumined by the glory of God and therefore needs no other light.

Hebrews 12:23. The attractiveness of the new covenant is also affirmed by those in attendance in the heavenly Jerusalem. Certainly God and the angels will be there, but also many people who have been redeemed throughout the ages. Possibly the author intends to differentiate people within this list. Although the expression “assembly” in verse 22 (Gk *panēgurei*) is used only here in the New Testament, the historian Josephus uses the term for a public festival, in which everyone’s participation was expected (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 2, Chap. 4.3). Included among these is the congregation of the firstborn. The word “firstborn” (Gk *prōtotokōn*)—here an adjective used substantively—is very similar to the noun form in Hebrews 12:16 for “birthright,” that is, firstborn inheritance rights (Gk *prōtotokia*). This may suggest those faithful believers who have gained their eternal inheritance, and thus a more restricted group. [Although the Greek word for “congregation” is the word often translated “church” (Gk *ekklēsia*), most commentators agree that this is not a technical expression for “the church” (the body of Christ), but an “assembly” of people in general. Therefore, the NET Bible is quite correct to translate it “congregation”].

Hebrews 12:23-24. The reference to “God, the judge of all” reminds us that even believers must face the scrutinizing judgment of God (at the judgment seat of Christ). Highlighting this heavenly city will be the Lord Jesus Christ, the very One who mediated the new covenant. The sprinkled blood is, of course, His blood shed at Calvary, which inaugurated the new covenant (see Heb 10:22). Though Abel’s blood cried out to God for justice and judgment (Gen 4:10), the blood of Christ speaks of something better. It speaks of redemption and eternal forgiveness for sinners.

**3. The final warning and expected response (Heb 12:25-29)**

By portraying the new covenant in terms of the New Jerusalem in which it results, the author in one last bold stroke has implied that it is utterly foolish to turn back from this covenant to the old covenant. A choice must now be made.

*a. The warning not to disobey (Heb 12:25-27)*

Hebrews 12:25. The exhortation “Take care not to refuse the one who is speaking” hearkens back to the epistle’s opening words, “in these last days he has **spoken** to us in a son.” There is only one logical alternative: God has clearly revealed His will—the old covenant has served its purpose, and the new covenant based on the perfect sacrifice of Jesus has been inaugurated. To refuse God’s plan in Christ Jesus, however, is to choose God’s judgment from which there is no escape. Under the old covenant those who refused God at Kadesh-barnea met stern judgment (barred from entering the “rest” of Canaan). How much more, then, should those who rebel against the heavenly new covenant expect His judgment (recall Heb 10:26-31). Those doing so will certainly be subject to temporal judgment in this life and eventually be denied their inheritance rights and reward when they stand before the Lord.

Hebrews 12:26-27. Whatever shaking of the earth was experienced at Sinai is not nearly as earth-shattering as that to come in the future. The author now turns to the promise (from Hag 2:6; 2:21) that God will shake the earth once more. This is a reminder that the present world order is not always going to continue as it has. At some point, God is going to intervene and radically change things. In the context of Haggai, this will include a political shaking of the kingdoms of the nations (note Hag 2:22).

*b. The demand of a response (Heb 12:28-29)*

Hebrews 12:28. The one thing that will remain after God’s future “shaking”—His judgment upon the nations of this world—will be Messiah’s kingdom, just as the Old Testament had foretold (see Dan 2:44). This kingdom is unshakable and cannot be destroyed (see Dan 7:13-14). This kingdom will be formally inaugurated at the second coming of Christ, and at that time all things will be put “under control” of Jesus (recall Heb 2:8), the “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2). This is “the world to come” that the author has sought to impress on the readers of the epistle (see Heb 2:5).

Hebrews 12:28-29. The thought that God has graciously destined us for this everlasting kingdom ought to arouse a thankful spirit in us. If indeed we are thankful, then we will respond obediently and be responsible believer-priests acting in faith as we “offer worship pleasing to God.” The verb translated “offer worship” (Gk *latreuō*) is often used of those engaged in priestly spiritual service (see Heb 13:10; 9:14). On the other hand, if we are not thankful but refuse Him, we must remember that “our God is indeed a devouring fire.” These words (drawn from Deuteronomy 4:24) warn that He is a jealous God who judges those who turn from His covenant. He should not be provoked to anger!

## **D. Spiritual Sacrifices Appropriate for new covenant Believers (Heb 13:1-17)**

In Hebrews 3:6, the author had used the expression “We are of His house” to speak of those believers who remained faithful and held fast their confidence. By “house,” the author is thinking of the worshipping community of believers and their active participation in it. This is the new covenant counterpart to the Old Testament temple, and of which Jesus serves as “a great priest over the house of God” (Heb 10:21). The use of the verb *latreuō* in the call to “offer worship pleasing to God” (see Heb 12:28) underscores that those under the new covenant are all “believer-priests” with responsibilities for spiritual service (see Rev 1:6). Hebrews 13 provides some clues as to the type of spiritual sacrifices appropriate to the new covenant (vv 15-16).

Furthermore the reference to prisoners (Heb 13:3), having no fear of man (Heb 13:6), Jesus’ suffering (Heb 13:12), and “bearing the abuse he experienced” (Heb 13:13) were appropriate remarks for those who might be discouraged and tempted to withdraw because of opposition they faced. The type of



communal spirit and brotherly love to which they are commended in this chapter would certainly strengthen them for the challenges they would face as a believing community.

### **1. Personal morality and social responsibilities (Heb 13:1-6)**

Throughout the epistle, we have seen repeated emphasis on the responsibility for brotherly concern (Heb 3:12-13; 10:24-25; 12:12-13, 15).

Hebrews 13:1. The author begins with a general exhortation, “Brotherly love must continue,” which sets the tone for all that follows in the chapter. A strong, loving fellowship was essential to counter the temptation to forsake their assembling with other Christians on account of persecution and hardships. Such brotherly love ought to manifest itself in good deeds and sharing, which indeed are true sacrifices before God (see Heb 13:16).

Hebrews 13:2. To “not neglect hospitality” meant the readers ought to enthusiastically practice Christian hospitality, which ought to be done “without complaining” (see Rom 12:13; 1 Pet 4:9). Practicing hospitality was important in the first century when mission work was expanding, travel was difficult, and many had to flee persecution as refugees. In fact, it was considered a mark of spiritual leaders (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8). In Genesis 18:2 and Genesis 18:16 Abraham and Sarah literally “entertained angels” (without being aware of it) by their hospitality. The author's point is not that we should expect angels to also visit us, but that we may have the honor of helping someone who is on a divine mission for God.

Hebrews 13:3. “Those in prison” are clearly those who had been imprisoned for their witness and service to Christ (recall Heb 10:34), and who had suffered under extremely unpleasant conditions. [Perhaps it was Timothy’s recent imprisonment that spurred this comment (see Heb 13:23; see Col 4:18).] To “remember” them suggests more than praying for them (though that is a good starting point). After all, the readers were also human and ought to be able to feel “their torment” (lit., are in the body). Because those imprisoned (and their families) might be in need of material help, believers were not to be handicapped by the love of money.

Hebrews 13:4. Sexual temptation was as severe a problem in the first century as it is today. Those who turn from covenant faithfulness are in great danger of going off into a lifestyle of sin (recall Esau in Heb 12:16). Hence believers need to guard themselves against two extremes. First, there are those who look upon marriage negatively, as an indication of weakness or carnality (a sub-Christian interest in the pleasures of this world). Such an attitude led some to “prohibit marriage” (see 1 Tim 4:3) and to foolishly advocate celibacy for all. To this the author counters that “marriage must be honored among all” (which could be translated as an exhortation, as does the NIV). Marriage, conducted God’s way, is a wonderful gift from the Lord, and this is the norm to be expected.

The other extreme is to seek sexual gratification illicitly, outside the bounds set by God. To these the author warns that “God will judge sexually immoral people and adulterers.” Christians who disobey God in this vital area are warned that God will bring judgment on them (recall Heb 10:30).

Hebrews 13:5-6. In these verses the author addresses the subject of money and possessions. Contentment is the goal of the Christian life, not accumulation of wealth (see 1 Tim 6:6-10). Hence we are to be “free from the love of money.” This is a requirement of spiritual leaders, for their affections must be on the things of the Lord in order to lead God’s people (1 Tim 3:3). This does not mean, however, that being rich is wrong. God at times may choose to greatly prosper certain individuals to help fund His work. These must learn to be generous in giving (see 1 Tim 6:17-19).

The author combines a quotation from Deuteronomy 31:6 with another from Psalm 118:6. The point of both is to alleviate fears and help one find his security in the Lord. Since the Lord will never leave or abandon us, we can be comforted in knowing that whether we have money or not, we can always have the greatest treasure of all, namely, God's fellowship. Those in the community who feared what

man might do (e.g., persecution and loss of possessions), could claim the promise, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid.”

## **2. Community religious life (Heb 13:7-17)**

The references to leaders in verse 7 and again in verse 17 mark the boundaries of the paragraph and unify this section.

### *a. Dismay over the passing of former leaders (Heb 13:7-8)*

Hebrews 13:7. The readers are to “remember your leaders.” The word “leaders” here is actually a participle used substantively. The tense, however, should be understood from the second verb “who spoke” (aorist tense in Gk) and translated “those who led you.” That is, this is probably referring to previous leaders (who are no longer alive) who had formerly preached the Word of God to them. They had apparently been faithful, and the readers would do well to carefully observe “the outcome of their lives” (i.e., how they finished their earthly pilgrimage) and thus imitate the faith they had lived out.

Hebrews 13:8. The departure of these early leaders need not be unsettling or disruptive for those left behind. There is security in knowing that Jesus Christ is the same always. The king over all remains on the throne, and our focus must be on Him, not His subordinates.

### *b. A warning about false legalistic teachings (Heb 13:9)*

In contrast to the faithful teachings of these early leaders, the readers were apparently encountering “all sorts of strange teachings.” Such teachings may have promoted legalism (as was true of first-century Judaism), and the reference to ritual meals (lit., foods) would tend to confirm this (see Heb 9:10). Under the old covenant, priests partook of certain foods as part of the sacrificial system, though this in itself did not benefit them spiritually. Yet the author is thinking not merely of the food aspect but also of the entire Levitical cultus and old covenant regulations. By the first century AD, the Pharisees had turned God’s law into a dismal legalistic system that brought people into bondage. Jesus came to teach the true way of God and to free the people from the bondage of legalism (see Mt 11:28).

Thus the author reminds them that it is “good for the heart to be strengthened by grace.” Teachings that emphasize the grace of God are what strengthen the heart. We come to know God through the gospel of grace, and we are to draw on His grace for our spiritual pilgrimage to God’s rest (Heb 4:16). Above all, we must guard against those who distort the gospel of grace. The gospel that is all of grace—offering eternal life as a totally free gift from God for the undeserving sinner—is meant to be followed by a commitment to discipleship that results in a righteous lifestyle. Failure in the latter, however, does not negate God’s gift, though it could result in temporal judgment and eventual loss of rewards.

### *c. The contrast of priestly systems (Heb 13:10-16)*

Hebrews 13:10. The thought about old covenant legalism in verse 9 prompts an extended discussion contrasting the two systems. Hence the author reminds them that we have an altar that those who serve in the tabernacle (adhering to the old covenant) have no right to. This “altar” is a figure of speech (metonymy) for the “sacrifice of Christ” and the benefit to believers of eternal forgiveness. The priests of the old covenant had certain benefits, including the right to eat some of the sacrifices (see Lev 7:35-36), but they are not entitled to the benefits of the cross and the new covenant.

Hebrews 13:11-12. The author now turns for a final time to the ceremony of the Day of Atonement (see Lev 16:27). On this occasion the blood of the animals was brought into the tabernacle, but the bodies (i.e., carcasses) were taken outside the camp to be burned. The very animals that provided blood for the atonement were regarded as “unclean” (rejected) and

therefore “burned” (made to suffer) outside the camp. The author recognizes a divine typology in this. The Lord Jesus was led outside the city of Jerusalem to be crucified by those who rejected Him as Messiah.

Hebrews 13:13-14. Consequently the author exhorts the readers to go out to him, outside the camp, bearing the abuse he experienced. In this play on words, to go “outside the camp” would mean to decisively leave the camp of Judaism, choosing to align oneself with God’s Son and the new covenant He has inaugurated “in these last days.” Such a choice may entail reproach or persecution from those remaining steadfast in Judaism, but one can do this when he knows the Lord Himself bore such reproach.

The idea of reproach and rejection by first-century Judaism would be painful for those who loved the earthly Jerusalem. Yet their hopes need to be set on something of more enduring value, namely, the city that is to come. This is the heavenly New Jerusalem that awaits new covenant believers and in which they can share in Christ’s dominion and enjoy His rewards for a life faithfully lived. Like Abraham who left his earthly city, we should seek this city that God has prepared for us (recall Heb 11:8-10).

Hebrews 13:15-16. To leave behind the old covenant, however, does not mean we are left with no sacrifices to offer to God. There are appropriate (and better) new covenant sacrifices than that of animals. (Of course, the foundational sacrifice has already been offered once for all by Christ Himself). Even old covenant sacrifices were meaningless, unless the worshipper was praising God in his heart. So, to offer praise to God is to capture the heart of real sacrifice. The phrase “acknowledging his name” is literally “confessing His name” (see Heb 3:1; 4:14; 10:23). The first aspect of our “sacrifice of praise” is the willingness to confess His name—not just to hold fast this confession, but openly to confess Jesus as Messiah and Savior. Further sacrifices that please God are to do good and to share. Such brotherly acts of love encourage one another and foster that sense of “family” that helps believers withstand the pressures and persecution coming from outside.

*d. Submission to spiritual leaders (Heb 13:17)*

Hebrews 13:17. The author now turns to consider the relationship of the readers to their leaders; that is, their present spiritual leaders (contrast v 7). This call to obey the leaders seems to imply that it was the followers, not the leaders (possibly house-church leaders), who were wavering in their faith and being tempted to withdraw from the worshipping community of believers. The author urges them to obey and submit to these leaders. God has raised them up that they might “watch over your souls.” This exhortation implies that a certain tension had developed between the two parties, and in light of the preceding context (note v 9) this would most likely be the readers’ attraction to false teaching and legalism. Specifically, this is the false teaching that rejected Jesus as Messiah and called for adherence to the old covenant. The readers should remember the responsibility that these leaders carry as those who “will give an account” to God. Hence the followers should not make their task more difficult, but should faithfully endure and thus bring joy to the leaders rather than complaints!

## **V. The Epilogue to the Epistle (Heb 13:18-25)**

In these last eight verses, the author concludes this beautiful epistle with a request for prayer, the pronouncement of a benediction, and the extending of greetings.

### **A. The Author’s Request for Prayer (Heb 13:18-19)**

Hebrews 13:18. By imploring the readers “Pray for us,” the author aligns himself with the leaders mentioned in verse 17, suggesting that he had had a close relationship with them. This might imply he

had once lived or ministered in their area. His confidence in their clear conscience is uttered in defense of their integrity of motive and behavior, for they desired to conduct themselves rightly, that is, in a commendable way, as had the former leaders mentioned in verse 7. Furthermore both he and these leaders had sought God's will for the readers and their ultimate welfare so that they might be numbered among those "who through faith and perseverance inherit the promises" (Heb 6:12). Just as the leaders should lead in a godly way (with a good conscience that they are shepherding the sheep in the will of God), so the flock needs to be in continual prayer on behalf of them.

Hebrews 13:19. The author urges special prayer that he might be restored to them as soon as possible, implying he must have known them personally.

### **B. A Benediction for Their Spiritual Progress (Heb 13:20-21)**

Hebrews 13:20. The author's request for prayer is balanced with a benedictory prayer on their behalf. "The God of peace [the Father] has brought back from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus," which calls to mind His resurrection, the solid evidence of His messiahship (see Rom 1:4). This resurrected Jesus is also the great shepherd of the sheep, whose rejection by the nation was anticipated in the Old Testament (see Zech 11:4-14; 13:7), but who nevertheless "lays down His life for the sheep" (Jn 10:11). In doing so, His blood provided the basis for the eternal covenant. The latter is certainly a reference to the new covenant. The same expression (in the Greek) is used in the LXX of Ezekiel 37:26 to refer to the new covenant that God will establish with His people and that eventually culminates with Messiah coming to reign as king (see Isa 55:3). [The latter phrase in Ezek 37:27—that the LORD will be their God and they His people—is drawn from the new covenant announcement in Jer 31:33].

Hebrews 13:21. The very same God who resurrected Jesus also stands ready to equip the readers in every good thing to do His will. The reference to doing "God's will" hearkens back to Hebrews 10:36, where the reader was assured that he might "receive what is promised" on the basis of endurance in doing the will of God.

For God to accomplish in us "what is pleasing before him," there must be a cooperative exercise of faith. In Hebrews 10:38, the reader was told that God is not pleased with the one who "shrinks back" (cowardly in unbelief). Rather, God looks for faith, for that is what pleases Him (Heb 11:6). The words "through Jesus Christ" also remind us of our need for Christ as our High Priest. Through Christ's High Priestly help and by our response in faith to God and His Word, we can live to do His will.

### **C. An Epistolary Closing with Greetings to Be Extended (Heb 13:22-25)**

Hebrews 13:22. The author calls this epistle "my message of exhortation." The use of a similar expression in Acts 13:15 suggests that the author was thinking of an edifying discourse that followed the public reading of Scripture in the synagogue. This implies that the author wanted this read as a homily in the public assembly.

Hebrews 13:23. He alerts them that "our brother Timothy has been released." The word "released" (from Gk *apoluō*) is commonly used for the release or pardon of a prisoner (e.g., Mt 27:15; Acts 16:35). This is apparently the same Timothy who ministered with Paul, and implies that Timothy was imprisoned for his faith (though this is not recorded elsewhere in the NT). Paul had once exhorted Timothy not to be ashamed of the fact that he (Paul) was a prisoner and to be willing to suffer for the gospel (2 Tim 1:8), words Timothy faithfully heeded.

Hebrews 13:24. Greeting "your leaders" would hopefully foster reconciliation with the community leaders. Greetings are also extended from "those from Italy." This might mean fellow Christians currently in Italy (implying the author wrote from Italy), although it could also mean those who had

once been in Italy but who had been forced to relocate—such as those affected by Claudius’ expulsion of the Jews from Rome (see Acts 18:2).

Hebrews 13:25. The epistle ends on a grand note, “Grace be with you all,” reminding them of the inexhaustible grace of God available to them in their spiritual pilgrimage to God’s “greater rest” and the heavenly New Jerusalem. Such grace is available daily from God’s “throne of grace” (Heb 4:16) and the endless mercy of our High Priest over the house of God (Heb 7:25).

Those who avail themselves of this precious grace can faithfully endure, and (having once done the will of God) will one day reign with His Son, the Heir of all things, through whom God has spoken in these last days.