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# HEBREWS

by

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The overriding theme of Hebrews is the absolute superiority of Christ: he is “*the radiance of His [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature*” (**Heb 1:3**). He not only “*made the world*” (**Heb 1:2**) but “*upholds all things by the word of His power*” (**Heb 1:3**). It is he who has “*made purification of sins [and has] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (**Heb 1:3**). He is “*the heir of all things*” (**Heb 1:1**). As such, he is superior to the angels and to Moses. The sacrifice he made is incomparably superior to all the sacrifices made under the Mosaic Law. The New Covenant Christ instituted is incomparably superior to the Old Covenant of Moses, which has now been superseded. Christ is our true high priest. He is the fulfillment of the entire Old Covenant, which was pointing to him. In light of that, we are to appropriate the New Covenant and the salvation Christ provides into our lives by faith. We are exhorted to live out that faith, particularly in our love for and service to others, and persevere, especially since suffering and hardship are used by God to train us up and are marks that we are his children.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### **A. Author**

In the book of Hebrews, the author is not named. There has long been dispute concerning who the author is. The earliest reference we have regarding the author is from Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215) who claimed that Paul was the author. This view was accepted by Origen (185-253), his successor in the Eastern Church, and by many others, including the most notable of the Puritans, John Owen, and the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, in the Western Church, Irenaeus (c.125-202) and Hippolytus (c.170-235) contended that Paul was not the author. Tertullian (155-220) maintained that Barnabas was the author. Later, despite doubts, both Jerome (c.342-420) and Augustine (354-430) accepted Pauline authorship, and many in the West followed their lead. At the time of the reformation, Luther proposed that Apollos was the author, and Calvin proposed either Luke or Clement of Rome. Contemporary scholarship tends to reject Pauline authorship (See Carson and Moo 2005: 600-4; Guthrie 1983: 17-22; Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 244-45; Morris 1981: 6-7; Owen 1969: 67-95).

A number of reasons make it less likely that Paul was the author. These include differences in vocabulary, Greek style, rhetoric, and thought forms between Hebrews and undoubted Pauline epistles (Carson and Moo 2005: 602; Eusebius 1890: 6.25.11, quoting Origen; Guthrie 1983: 20; Morris 1981: 6). For example, the phrase “Christ Jesus” never appears, whereas Paul uses it 90 times; similarly, the phrases “in Christ” or “in Christ Jesus” do not appear, whereas Paul uses those phrases 88 times. Further, Paul’s writings always have a self-identifying salutation at the beginning; such a self-identifying salutation is absent in Hebrews. The high priesthood of Christ, central to Hebrews, is not prominent in the acknowledged Pauline epistles, and Hebrews’ emphasis on Jesus’ exaltation rather than his resurrection also is not in keeping with Paul’s emphasis elsewhere (Carson and Moo 2005: 602; Guthrie 1983: 19-20; Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 245). Finally, as Carson and Moo point out, “It is almost impossible to believe that Paul would identify himself as one of those who heard the gospel, not from the Lord, but from ‘those who heard him’ ([Heb] 2:3; cf. Gal. 1:11-12)” (Carson and Moo 2005: 602; see also Guthrie 1983: 20).

What is clear is that the author was a Hellenistic Jewish believer (i.e., a Jew influenced by Greek culture), who knew the Septuagint (i.e., the Greek translation of the OT, also known as the LXX), since none of his quotations from the OT depend upon the Hebrew but are largely drawn from the Septuagint. The author’s vocabulary and Greek style indicate he was well educated (Carson and Moo 2005: 604; Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 245). He was familiar with Paul and Paul’s circle, since he refers to Paul’s protégé, Timothy, in **Heb 13:23**. Finally, “He is a man who has pondered long on the Christian approach to the Old Testament” and “He gives us the clearest discussion of the Christian approach to the Old Testament of any of the New Testament writers” (Guthrie 1983: 21-22).

Although there was some dispute concerning the inclusion of Hebrews into the canon of Scripture, early church leaders such as Clement of Rome accepted it as canonical. Its inclusion in major manuscripts like Codex Sinaiticus cemented its place. Later, in response to the rise of various issues and heresies, the NT canon, including Hebrews, “was ratified at the Council of Hippo in 393 CE, the Synod of Carthage in 397 CE, and the Carthaginian Council in 419 CE” (Dirks 2008: 43). “Ratified” is the operative word because, as Sproul notes, “The church recognized, acknowledged, received, and submitted to the canon of Scripture. The term the church used in Council was *recipimus*, ‘We receive.’” (Sproul 1992: 23; see Owen 1969: 25-64 for a detailed discussion of the many and clear bases for Hebrews’ canonical status)

### **B. Date**

The book of Hebrews likely was written before the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. This is indicated by different statements in the book itself. **Heb 10:1-2** states that “*the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?*”<sup>1</sup> **Heb 9:6-10** also uses the present tense regarding the ongoing temple sacrifices. Further, **Heb 8:13** says that the New Covenant “*has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.*” That language of being “*ready to disappear*” suggests that, although the Old Covenant was obsolete, its rituals were still being performed (they only ceased in AD 70 when the temple was destroyed). In this regard, an important aspect of the book is to establish the unique and exclusive efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice, in order to prevent believers from returning to the OT sacrificial rituals. The above language makes no sense if the temple rituals had ceased before the book was written. Since this issue forms such an important part of the book, the destruction of the

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (1995).

temple clearly would have been referred to had it already taken place before the book was written. The failure to mention that event thus indicates that the book was written before AD 70, not after. Finally, in approximately AD 95, Clement of Rome quoted from various portions of **Heb 1:3-13**, thus indicating his familiarity with the book and his acceptance of its authority (Clement c.95: 36). This indicates that the book was well known by that time. Although this does not rule out a date for Hebrews after AD 70, a later date is much less likely, given the time necessary for the book to gain widespread and authoritative acceptance.

### C. Background

The book is clearly written for Christians, who are exhorted to maintain their confession of Christ (e.g., **3:6, 14; 10:23**). The first manuscript of the book that has come down to us has the title, “To the Hebrews” (Carson and Moo 2005: 609; Guthrie 1983: 22). This indicates that Hebrews probably was primarily directed to Hellenistic Jews who had converted to Christianity. That is corroborated by the facts that the book repeatedly quotes the OT, primarily from the Septuagint, and frequently refers to OT religious rituals. There are more quotations and allusions to the OT in Hebrews than in any other NT book, with the possible exception of Revelation. There is no reference to paganism at all. The book recounts the history of Israel from the call of Abraham to its entry into the promised land, and the central arguments of the book relate to the Levitical priesthood, the Mosaic sacrificial system, and the Old Covenant and demonstrate how they are all fulfilled and superseded by Christ. Nevertheless, the book applies equally to all Christians of whatever background. It greatly enriches our understanding of who Christ is and what he has done, the relationship of the New Covenant to the Old Covenant, the importance of persevering faith, and the danger of apostasy. The text alternates between teaching, based largely on exposition of OT texts, and exhortation.

The author of Hebrews evidently knew his readers and their background: he knew of their background (**Heb 6:9-12**); how they had endured suffering and had shown sympathy to prisoners (**10:32-34**); and their current spiritual state (**5:11-14; 12:4**). His mention of Timothy, Timothy’s release from prison, and his statement “*with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you*” (**13:23**), indicates the author’s personal knowledge of his readers and their knowledge of Timothy. The book does not specify where the first-century readers were located. Although some have suggested either Alexandria or Jerusalem as the location of the first-century recipients, the odds favor Rome, since it was first known and quoted in Rome, and the statement in **13:24** that “*those from Italy greet you*” suggests that the author’s companions were from Italy and wanted to send greetings home (Guthrie 1983: 27; Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 243).

The book does not have the typical epistolary beginning (i.e., identification of the author, the recipients, and words of greeting). It does have a typical conclusion. **Heb 13:22** calls itself a “*word of exhortation*.” That same phrase was used in **Acts 13:15** to refer to Paul’s sermon in the synagogue during his first missionary journey. Consequently, many commentators view Hebrews as a sermon modified into letter form (e.g., Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 232-33).

### D. Themes

The overriding theme of Hebrews is the absolute superiority of Christ: he is “*the radiance of His [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature*” (**Heb 1:3**). He not only “*made the world*” (**Heb 1:2**) but “*upholds all things by the word of His power*” (**Heb 1:3**). It is he who has “*made purification of sins [and has] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (**Heb 1:3**). He is “*the heir of all things*” (**Heb 1:1**). As such, he is superior to the angels and to Moses. The sacrifice he made is incomparably superior to all the sacrifices made under the Mosaic Law. The New Covenant, which Christ instituted, is incomparably superior to the Old Covenant of Moses, which has now been superseded. Christ is our true high priest. He is the fulfillment of the entire Old Covenant, which was pointing to him. In light of that, we are to appropriate the New Covenant and the salvation Christ provides into our lives by faith. We are exhorted to persevere in that faith, especially since suffering and hardship are used by God to train us up and are marks that we are his children.

### E. Outline

The book may be outlined as follows:

#### **I. The Superiority of Christ (1:1—2:18)**

A. Christ is the revelation of God (1:1-3)

B. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-14)

C. Christ alone provides salvation (2:1-18)

1. We must take hold of salvation (2:1-4)

2. All things are subject to Christ (2:5-8)

3. Christ provides salvation through his suffering and death (2:9-18)

## **II. Christ is our great high priest (3:1—8:5)**

- A. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-6)
- B. Unlike the disobedient Israelites, if we remain faithful, we will enter the true sabbath rest (3:7—4:13)
  1. Do not be unbelieving like the Israelites were (3:7-19).
  2. We enter our sabbath rest by faith (4:1-13).
- C. As the perfect high priest, Christ gives those who are faithful eternal salvation (4:14—6:18)
  1. We must stay faithful (4:14-16)
  2. As high priest, Christ is the source of our salvation (5:1-10)
  3. We must press on to spiritual maturity (5:11—6:3)
  4. To fall away after having been exposed to the truth is fatal (6:4-8)
  5. We take hold of the hope set before us by persevering faithfulness (6:9-18)
- D. Christ is the guarantor of our hope because he is high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (6:19—8:5)
  1. We have hope because Christ is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (6:19-20)
  2. The nature of Melchizedek and his priesthood (7:1-10)
  3. Levitical priests versus Christ's priesthood contrasted (7:11—8:5)

## **III. The New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant because of the sacrifice of Christ (8:6—10:18)**

- A. Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant (8:6)
- B. The nature of the New Covenant (8:7-12)
- C. The Old Covenant is obsolete (8:13)
- D. The effects of the sacrifice of Christ (9:1—10:18)
  1. Old versus New sanctuaries contrasted (9:1-14)
  2. Old versus New Covenants contrasted (9:15-22)
  3. Old versus New sacrifices contrasted (9:23—10:18)

## **IV. By faith we appropriate the New Covenant into our lives (10:19—13:19)**

- A. Since Christ is our high priest, we must persevere in faithfulness (10:19-39)
  1. Because of Christ, we can have full assurance of faith (10:19-25)
  2. To continue to willfully sin will result in severe judgment (10:26-31)
  3. To persevere in faith will result in great reward (10:32-39)
- B. The nature and examples of true faith (11:1-40)
  1. The nature of true faith (11:1-3)
  2. Examples of true faith (11:4-40)
- C. How we are to appropriate our faith (12:1-29)
  1. We must lay aside everything that stands in our way and press on to the end, fixing our eyes on Jesus (12:1-3)
  2. We must accept the discipline of the Lord (12:4-11)
  3. We must help our brothers and sisters in Christ (12:12-17)
  4. We should recognize that we already have come to the true Mount Zion and heavenly Jerusalem (12:18-29)
- D. Final practical instructions (13:1-19)
  1. Instructions regarding social life (13:1-3)
  2. Instructions regarding private life (13:4-6)
  3. Instructions regarding religious life (13:7-19)

## **V. Conclusion (13:20-25)**

- A. Benediction (13:20-21)
- B. Exhortation (13:22)
- C. Personal greetings (13:23-25)

## II. COMMENTARY ON HEBREWS

### I. The Superiority of Christ (1:1—2:18)

The book of Hebrews begins in v. 1 by asserting the superiority of Christ. This theme continues throughout the rest of the book.

#### **A. Christ is the revelation of God (1:1-3)**

*1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,<sup>2</sup> in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.<sup>3</sup> And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

Hebrews begins by pointing out that God is a God who speaks. This was true in the past and is true now. However, in these verses we see both the doctrine of progressive revelation revealed but also the incomparable greatness of Jesus Christ and God's revelation of himself in Christ. As v. 1 makes clear, in the past, God primarily spoke through the prophets. However, his communication with us was not limited to the prophets. **Ps 19:1** shows that creation itself declares the glory of God. God also spoke to people through dreams (**Gen 28:12-15**), visions (**Is 6:1**), the Urim and the Thummim on the ephod (**Num 27:21; 1 Sam 23:9-12**), in the burning bush (**Exod 3:4-6**), angels (**Dan 9:20-22**), the "captain of the Lord's host" (**Josh 5:13-15**), Melchizedek (**Gen 14:18-24**), and the "Angel of the Lord" (**Gen 22:15-18**).<sup>2</sup>

**Verse 2** shows the contrast between God's speaking to the fathers "long ago" and his speaking to us now "in these last days." Now, he has spoken to us "in His Son." Even the use of the phrase "these last days" is highlighting the importance and greatness of Jesus Christ. The reason is that the NT makes clear that Christ's first coming (or, more specifically, the complex of his death, resurrection, ascension, and pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost) is of great eschatological significance. Specifically, Christ's first coming: (A) marks a new time of human history is confirmed by the fact that his first coming marks the beginning of the "last days" which we are now in and which will continue until his return;<sup>3</sup> and (B) fulfilled the OT prophecies concerning the "latter days" or "last days." Thus, "New Testament writers are conscious that they are already living in the last days. This is specifically stated by Peter in his great sermon on the day of Pentecost, when he quotes from Joel's prophecy as follows: 'For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day, but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh . . ."' (Acts 2:16-17). The words 'in the last days' (*en tais eschatais hēmerais*) are a translation of the Hebrew words 'acharey khēn, literally *afterwards*. When Peter quotes these words and applies them to the event which has just occurred, he is saying in effect: 'We are in the last days now.'" (Hoekema 1979: 16) Every other use of the phrase "last days" in the NT likewise presupposes that we are in the "last days" now (see **2 Tim 3:1-5; Heb 1:1-2; Jas 5:1-3; 2 Pet 3:1-4**).<sup>4</sup>

This first mention of the "Son" introduces the incomparable significance of Jesus Christ. In this and the next few verses we are told that Jesus: is "heir of all things" (v. 2); "made the world," the heavens and the earth (vv. 2, 10); is "the radiance of His [God's] glory" (v. 3); is "the exact representation of His nature" (v. 3); "upholds all things by the word of his power" (v. 3); "made purification for sins" (v. 3); "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (v. 3); is "much better than the angels" (v. 4); "inherited a more excellent name than they" (v. 4); is the Son of God (v. 5); is worshiped by the angels (v. 6); is God (v. 8); is the Lord (v. 10); and is everlasting (vv. 11-12).

A number of aspects of this description of who Christ is and what he has done are of particular significance. In v. 1, where it says that God has "spoken to us in His Son," in the Greek there is no word for "His."

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<sup>2</sup> The "captain of the Lord's host," Melchizedek, and the "Angel of the Lord" are probably pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus Christ (see Menn 2025: 51-60).

<sup>3</sup> The first coming of Jesus also has changed time from BC ("before Christ") to AD (which is an abbreviation of the Latin "anno domini"—"In the year of our Lord"). Even those who do not use the BC and AD labels—but use the "Common Era" abbreviations, "BCE" and "CE"—nevertheless are implicitly acknowledging the epoch-changing nature of Christ's first coming. The dates are all the same as the BC and AD dates, but those using the BCE and CE abbreviations do not want to acknowledge that Jesus is, in fact, Lord.

<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the "last days," see Menn 1018: 45-49.

With respect to this, Leon Morris states, “In essence the writer is saying that God spoke ‘in one who has the quality of being Son.’ It is the Son’s essential nature that is stressed.” (Morris 1981: 13) This nature of the Son is fleshed out in **v. 3**, which says that Christ is “*exact representation of His [God’s] nature*,” it is telling us that, although Christ temporarily became a human being, he was, at the same time, of the exact same nature, substance, and essence as God, i.e., Jesus was both fully God and fully man (see Menn 2025: 221-36). The thought is akin to Paul’s statement in **Col 2:9** that in Christ “*all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form*.” Although **v. 2** is translated that Christ “*made the world*,” the Greek actually says that he made the “ages” (Greek = *aiōnas*) which “is more comprehensive, including within it the periods of time through which the created order exists” (Guthrie 1983: 65). In **v. 3**, the Greek word for “upholds” is *pherō*, which in that verse implies a continuous action. In other words, the universe is being “upheld, sustained, and carried along to its appointed end by the very same orderly God who has fixed the order of the heavens and set the course of all things from eternity past (Isa 46:10; Jer 31:35). In a universe governed by such a God, uniformity of nature is to be expected, and as a result of this expectation, the scientific method and the scientific enterprise are both possible and valuable.” (Laskaris 2018: 444; see also Meyer 2021: 441-43). The conclusion of **v. 3**, that Christ “*sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*,” is a clear allusion to **Ps 110:1**. These themes, **Ps 110:1**, and Christ’s having made purification for sins (**v. 3**), will be expanded on later in the book.

## **B. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-14)**

<sup>4</sup> *having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.* <sup>5</sup> *For to which of the angels did He ever say, “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You”? And again, “I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me”? <sup>6</sup> And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.”*

<sup>7</sup> *And of the angels He says, “Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.” <sup>8</sup> But of the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. <sup>9</sup> “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness above Your companions.” <sup>10</sup> And, “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands; <sup>11</sup> They will perish, but You remain; and they all will become old like a garment, <sup>12</sup> and like a mantle You will roll them up; like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.”*

<sup>13</sup> *But to which of the angels has He ever said, “Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet”? <sup>14</sup> Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?*

Since, in the Greek, **vv. 1-4** actually form one long sentence, many commentators include **v. 4** as part of their discussion along with **vv. 1-3**. However, **v. 4** follows a comma and introduces a new thought—Christ’s superiority to angels—which is then fleshed out in **vv. 5-14**. Consequently, it is appropriate to view **v. 4** as the beginning of a new subsection.

The “*more excellent name*” Jesus has probably relates back to his being called “Son” in **v. 2**. There are three reasons for this: (1) At the time Hebrews was written, angels were highly honored and exalted. To be the “Son” implies the closest and most intimate of relationships and thus is much more exalted than angels. (2) The reference to the “name” (Greek = *onoma*) and, immediately beforehand in **v. 3**, “Majesty” (Greek = *megalōsynē*) relate back and allude to the Davidic Covenant of **2 Samuel 7**, in which God promised to raise up David’s seed after him and “*establish the throne of his kingdom forever*.” In the Septuagint, which the author of Hebrews used, the word *onoma* is found four times, in **2 Sam 7:9, 13, 23, 26**; and *megalōsynē* is found at **2 Sam 7:21, 23** and the verbal form of the word is found at **2 Sam 7:22, 26** (where it is translated “great” or “greatness”). (3) The allusion to the Davidic Covenant is confirmed in that **v. 5** specifically quotes a key statement in the Davidic Covenant, **2 Sam 7:14**, “*I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me*,” and applies it to Jesus. This quotation and these allusions are telling us, among other things, that Jesus is the true fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This is also indicated in **v. 3**, regarding Jesus’ sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Before he was born, the angel Gabriel promised Mary that the Lord God would give Jesus “*the throne of his father David; and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end*” (**Luke 1:32-33**). On the Day of Pentecost Peter explicitly explained how Jesus fulfilled the Davidic Covenant through his resurrection and ascension (**Acts 2:22-36**). Peter relates by quotation and allusion **2 Samuel 7** and **Psalms 16:8-11; 110:1**, and **132:11** and says that they those prophecies “*looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of Christ*” (**Acts 2:31**). In short, “*being seated on David’s throne is linked to being seated at God’s*

In v. 5, Hebrews also quotes **Ps 2:7**, “*You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.*” **Psalm 2** is “an inauguration psalm for the Israelite kings -- the public declaration of kingship. And most of the Kings became kings as grown men. **None** became king at his conception. And this meaning carries over into the New Testament use for Jesus just as well, that the resurrection is the public announcement by God about the true identity and authority of Jesus, Messiah, true king of Israel, representative of God among mankind.” (Katz, “You are” n.d.: n.p.) The quotation of **Ps 2:7** in v. 5 (and again in **Heb 5:5**) speaks about “the **resurrection and exaltation** of Christ. It refers to his taking office as king and priest. . . . I think Romans 1:4 says it most clearly that Jesus ‘was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.’ The resurrection was the time of public declaration of what he has been all along.” (Katz, “You are” n.d.: n.p., bold emph. in orig.; see also Guthrie 2007: 927-28). This same quotation from **Ps 2:7** is explicitly applied to Christ’s resurrection in **Acts 13:33**. This also is in line with v. 3, which speaks of Christ being seated at the right hand of God. Both **2 Samuel 7** and **Psalm 2** were understood as referring to the coming Messiah. And the phrase “*Son of God*” became, among other things, a messianic phrase as well as indicating that Jesus is the divine Son of God. It is used of Jesus in **Heb 4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29**. The repeated statements of the Sonship of Christ demonstrate that, in every way he is, indeed, “*much better than the angels.*”

The reference in v. 6 to the “firstborn” echoes **Ps 89:27**. **Psalm 89** is a messianic psalm. Thus, v. 6 is continuing the theme that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is also called the “firstborn” in **Rom 8:29** (“*firstborn among many brethren*”), **Col 1:15** (“*firstborn of all creation*”), and **Col 1:18** (“*firstborn from the dead*”). The title “firstborn” does not mean that Jesus was a created being (since he is the eternal, uncreated God and Lord and is, himself, the creator) but indicates his status above the angels and above all of creation. **Verse 6** quotes **Deut 32:43** (LXX), and echoes **Ps 96:7** (LXX). That the angels “worship” the Son again demonstrates that the Son is divine.

**Verse 7** quotes **Ps 104:4** (**Ps 103:4**, LXX). The point is that angels are ministering spirits in contrast with the Son, who is Lord (see also v. 14). The angels are contrasted with the absolute superiority of the Son, as the exalted and reigning Lord, in vv. 8-9, which quote from **Ps 45:6-7** (**44:7-8**, LXX), another messianic psalm. The quotation from **Psalm 45** affirms that Jesus is, in fact, God. The reference to “*God, your God*” in v. 9 is “an implicit Trinitarian perspective that affirms the Son as God but makes a distinction between him and the Father” (Guthrie 2007: 939). **Verses 10-12** continue to emphasize the Son’s infinite superiority by quoting from **Ps 102:25-27** (**Ps 101:26-28**, LXX). The Son is “Lord,” is the creator of heaven and earth, is unchangeable, and is everlasting, whereas the entire created order is changeable and will perish. Just as the Son created the universe, so he will end it and create a new heaven and a new earth (**Isa 66:22; Rev 21:1**).

**Verses 13-14** conclude the discussion of the superiority of Christ over the angels by including the first quotation from **Ps 110:1** (**109:1**, LXX). **Ps 110:1** is also alluded to or quoted at **Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; and 12:2**. **Ps 110:1** became a key text in the NT (there are 21 quotations or allusions to it in most of the NT writings). Jesus himself quoted **Ps 110:1** when he was debating the Pharisees. Jesus asked the Pharisees what they thought about the Christ: “*Whose son is he?*” They responded that he is “*the son of David.*” Christ then quoted **Ps 110:1** which says, “*The Lord said to my Lord.*” He then asked, “*If David [who wrote the psalm] then calls him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?*” Jesus was pointing to himself as the Messiah, David’s “greater son,” and that he was divine (see Goppelt 1982: 83 [“The term ‘Lord’ (*kurios*) makes him equal with God”]). In contrast to the exalted Lord Jesus, v. 14 states that angels are “*ministering spirits, sent out to render service*” to the body of Christ (i.e., “*those who will inherit salvation*”). Angels, in contrast with Christ, are never pictured as seated and enthroned but always are pictured in positions of subservience to Christ and service on behalf of Christ to others.

### C. Christ alone provides salvation (2:1-18)

The superiority of Christ is seen in the unique work he does: he alone is able to provide salvation and eternal life to fallen humanity.

#### 1. We must take hold of salvation (2:1-4).

**2** *For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.* **2** *For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty,* **3** *how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,* **4** *God also testifying with them, both by signs and*

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*right hand.* In other words, Jesus’ resurrection-ascension to God’s right hand is put forward by Peter as a fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.” (Bock 1992: 49, emph. in orig.) For more on how Jesus fulfills the Davidic Covenant, see Menn 2025: 142-46.

*wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*

Chapter 1 showed Jesus' absolute superiority over everyone and everything in the entire universe. These verses are an exhortation and warning to us that flow directly from what has been said of Christ in chapter 1. The exhortation in **vv. 2-4** uses the same reasoning as the comparison of Christ and the angels in chapter 1. The "word spoken through angels" is akin to what Paul said of the law in **Gal 3:19**, that it was "ordained through angels." If that was unalterable, the truths of Christ and the gospel are much more so, since the gospel was first spoken through the Lord, not just through angels, was testified to by God, and who Christ is and what he said were confirmed by signs, wonders, and miracles and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for the "gifts" of the Holy Spirit is not the usual NT word (*charismata*) but is a more general word for "distributions" (*merismoi*). Consequently, the emphasis "falls on the distributor," i.e., the Holy Spirit, who distributes gifts "according to his own will" (**v. 4**; see also **1 Cor 12:11**; Guthrie 1983: 83). Note that in **vv. 3-4** all three persons of the Trinity are involved in proclaiming and confirming the truth of the gospel. Consequently, to disbelieve it is fatal.

Because of who Christ is and how his word has been confirmed, we have absolutely no excuse to disbelieve in and disobey him. However, we can "drift away" from him, slowly, almost imperceptibly. Busyness in life, taking Jesus and the things he said for granted, our love of ease and comfort, our fleshly appetites, social and cultural influences (of which we may be entirely unaware), a lack of earnest prayer and study, and a lack of applying the Word in our lives all can lead to this drifting. In the translation of **v. 1**, the words "from it" are not in the original Greek; they tend to lessen the gravity of the issue rather than increase it. The problem can be very subtle. If the compass in an airplane is off by only one degree, one cannot tell at the beginning, but after a flight of thousands of miles, the plane will be hundreds of miles off course. Jesus' condemnation of the people living in Noah's day was not that they were violent, but that they lacked understanding, because their lives were focused on "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" and all the other concerns of this world (**Matt 24:37-39**). So here, the issue is not out-and-out disobedience but simply neglect. Drifting tends to numb our sense of danger.

The problem is compounded by the fact that no one ever drifts *toward* Christ. Remaining faithful and having a close relationship with Christ is intentional and requires conscious effort. Paying close attention to "what we have heard" are the gospel truths, facts, values, and warnings that keep us morally and spiritually grounded and healthy. **Heb 6:18-20** urges us to "take hold of the hope set before us.<sup>19</sup> This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,<sup>20</sup> where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us." A ship that is securely anchored will not drift. If Christ is truly the "anchor of our soul," and if we hold fast to him, neither will we drift.

2. All things are subject to Christ (2:5-8).

<sup>5</sup> *For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking.* <sup>6</sup> *But one has testified somewhere, saying, "What is man, that You remember him? Or the son of man, that You are concerned about him?"* <sup>7</sup> *You have made him for a little while lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of Your hands;* <sup>8</sup> *You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.*

Hebrews returns to the superiority of Christ compared to the angels. Here, the writer quotes **Ps 8:4-6** to establish that everything in existence is subject to Christ. **Verse 7** quotes **Ps 8:5**. The Masoretic (Hebrew) text for that verse uses the word *elohim* and translates it as "You have made him for a little while lower than God." The writer of Hebrews, however, follows the Septuagint, which translates it as "angels."

God's original intent was to create mankind in his own image and give mankind dominion over the entire earth (**Gen 1:26-28**; **Ps 8:4-6**). This includes not only everything that exists in the universe now but also "the world to come" (**v. 5**). Because of our sin, we do not see that happening now (**v. 8**). The context of the psalm was not specifically messianic but applied to mankind in general. However, as the perfect image of God (**Heb 1:3**), Christ came to earth and did for us what we could not do for ourselves. Just as he has been raised and lifted up to the right hand of God, where everything is subject to him (**Eph 1:20-23**; **Phil 2:8-10**), so we have been lifted up with him and he "seated us with Him in the heavenly places" (**Eph 2:4-7**). And **1 Cor 6:3** explicitly tells us that one day "we will judge angels." Thus, God's plan has been and will be fulfilled by mankind through Christ. The phrase "For He did not subject to angels the world to come," which begins **v. 5**, shows that all of this was God's plan—our sin, which began in the Garden of Eden, did not thwart his plan.

3. Christ provides salvation through his suffering and death (2:9-18).

<sup>9</sup> *But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.*

<sup>10</sup> *For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.* <sup>11</sup> *For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,* <sup>12</sup> *saying, “I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.”* <sup>13</sup> *And again, “I will put My trust in Him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me.”*

<sup>14</sup> *Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,* <sup>15</sup> *and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.* <sup>16</sup> *For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.*

<sup>17</sup> *Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.* <sup>18</sup> *For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.*

This section builds on what was just said in vv. 5-8. It uses the same language from Ps 8:5 (“*You have made him for a little while lower than the angels*”) and applies it to Jesus. Significantly, this is the first time Christ is named by name, and the name used is his common, earthly, human name, “Jesus.” This section stresses Jesus’ humanity and his complete identification with us in our humanity, including: his suffering and death (vv. 9-10, 14, 18); the fact that he calls us his brethren and his children (vv. 11-14, 17); the fact that he shared in our flesh and blood (v. 14); the fact that he was like us in all things (v. 17); and the fact that he was tempted just as we are (v. 18). In fact, it is through his temptation, suffering, and death that Jesus preeminently was made “*lower than the angels.*”

On the other hand, this section complements chapter 1 which focused on the superiority of Jesus. In this section we see, paradoxically, that it is the very suffering and death of Jesus which “*crowned [him] with glory and honor*” (v. 9). His suffering and death not only crowned him with glory and honor but brought “*many sons to glory*” as well (v. 10). This is similar to what was expressed in Revelation 5. There, the apostle John was told that only “*the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.*” (Rev 5:5). However, when John looked, he did not see a Lion but “*a Lamb standing, as if slain*” (Rev 5:6). Both images are referring to Jesus. Jesus is the triumphant Lion precisely because he was sacrificed and slain as “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). This is the gospel. The salvation that is ours (Heb 2:3) is not based on anything we did or could do; it is 100% based on who Christ is and what he has done for us: he identified completely with us; he lived the life we should have lived; and he died the death we should have died; and he paid the price for our sin that otherwise we would have to pay but never could. There is no other religion like this in the world, because there is no one else like Jesus.

In v. 10, the phrase “*for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things*” could refer to God the Father or Jesus Christ. It probably refers to the former, since a similar expression is used of God in Rom 11:36, and 1 Cor 15:24 says that ultimately the kingdom will be handed over to God the Father. On the other hand, we have already seen in Heb 1:2 that Jesus is the one “*through whom are all things,*” and it is his sacrifice on the cross that results in “*bringing many sons to glory.*” When v. 10 speaks of “*perfect[ing] the author of their salvation through sufferings,*” the word “perfect” means “bring to completion,” since, as the second person of the Trinity, Jesus already was perfect. In other words, his suffering was not necessary for himself, but it was indispensable to bring about the salvation of others. Also, his actual suffering “perfected” or completed Jesus’ suffering on our behalf, since he actually experienced it all the way to the end, instead of just being ready to suffer.

The basic meaning of “sanctify” (v. 11) is to set apart for a holy purpose. Jesus was set apart as our “*faithful high priest*” for the holy purpose of making “*propitiation for the sins of the people*” (v. 17). The people for whom he made propitiation were set apart for salvation. What is stressed in v. 11 is that God the Father is the common source of both the sanctifier and the sanctified, i.e., God set apart and sent the Son on his mission of suffering because of his love for mankind (John 3:16).

Verses 12-13 consist of three OT quotations. The first is from Ps 22:22, the second from Isa 8:17 (LXX), and the third from Isa 8:18. Psalm 22 is messianic and was prophetic, especially of the details of Jesus’ crucifixion, both physiologically and otherwise. Thus, Ps 22:14, 16b, 17a state, “*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within me. . . . They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones.*” That is exactly what happens as part of a crucifixion and what happened to Jesus. His hands and his feet were pierced (Davis 1982b: Golgotha; John 20:25, 27). Ps 22:15 adds, “*My strength is dried up like a potsherd,*

*and my tongue cleaves to my jaws.*” That accurately describes the extreme muscle fatigue, exhaustion, and dehydration caused by crucifixion (Davis 1982a: 14, 17, 33, 35, 42). Jesus’ statement in **John 19:28** (“*I am thirsty*”) alludes to **Ps 22:15** (“*my tongue cleaves to my jaws*”). The prophecies of **Psalm 22** are remarkable, particularly since the psalm was written approximately 500–600 years before the Persians invented crucifixion.

**Psalm 22** accurately prophesied other aspects of Christ’s crucifixion. **Ps 22:18** states, “*They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.*” The Roman soldiers did that with respect to Christ’s clothing, and John notes that “*this was to fulfill the Scripture*” (**John 19:24–25**; see also **Mark 15:24**; **Luke 23:34**). From the cross, Jesus quoted **Ps 22:1**, “*My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?*” (**Matt 27:46**; **Mark 15:34**) in fulfillment of what **Ps 22:1** was prophesying. The reference in **Ps 22:7** to the people’s “wagging their heads” was fulfilled while Jesus was on the cross (**Matt 27:39**; **Mark 15:29**). **Matt 27:43** reports that some of the bystanders to the crucifixion repeated the words of **Ps 22:8**, “*He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’*”

**Heb 2:12** concludes the use of **Psalm 22** by quoting **Ps 22:22**, “*I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.*” This “utterance of the risen Christ in the midst of the congregation of God’s people . . . serves to confirm the solidarity of Christ with his people, and this solidarity emerges not only from the fact that the Christ of Psalm 22 . . . calls them his brothers but also from the fact that he is united with them in suffering, as the rest of the psalm demonstrates” (Hays 1993: 126–27). The psalm began with a cry of desolation and ends with a song of praise, which reflects exactly what the writer of Hebrews is saying here: through his suffering and death, Christ brings his brethren to glory and salvation. The quotations in v. 13 from **Isaiah 8** reinforce not only Jesus’ trust in the Father but demonstrate the close linkage between Christ and his people.

The close linkage between Christ and his people is continued and deepened in v. 14. That Jesus “partook of the same” flesh and blood as his people sums up the perfect humanity of Christ. In **Hebrews 1-2** we therefore see Christ’s dual nature: Christ is fully God (superior to the angels) and fully man (equal with humanity). The fact that Jesus was fully man but also was fully God not only is important but is absolutely necessary to salvation. Gleason Archer states, “God as God could not forgive us for our sins unless our sins were fully paid for; otherwise He could have been a condoner and protector of the violation of His own holy law. It was only as a man that God in Christ could furnish a satisfaction sufficient to atone for the sins of mankind; for only a man, a true human being, could properly represent the human race. But our Redeemer also had to be God, for only God could furnish a sacrifice of infinite value, to compensate for the penalty of eternal hell that our sin demands, according to the righteous claims of divine justice.” (Archer 1982: 323)

Anselm of Canterbury puts it like this: Because man *cannot* satisfy his debt to God, “none but God *can* make this satisfaction. But none but a man *ought* to do this, other wise man does not make the satisfaction. If it be necessary, therefore, as it appears, that the heavenly kingdom be made up of men, and this cannot be effected unless the aforesaid satisfaction be made, which none but God can make and none but man ought to make, it is necessary for the God-man to make it. . . . Therefore, in order that the God-man may perform this, it is necessary that the same being should be perfect God and perfect man, in order to make this atonement. . . . Since, then, it is necessary that the God-man preserve the completeness of each nature, it is no less necessary that these two natures be united entire in one person, just as a body and a reasonable soul exist together in every human being; for otherwise it is impossible that the same being should be very God and very man.” (Anselm 1903: II:6-7) Only Jesus Christ meets the qualifications. It is only this mysterious union of God and man in the person of Christ that enabled God both to inflict and endure the punishment of the cross.

The statement in v. 14 that “*through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil*” goes all the way back to **Gen 3:15** (see also **1 John 3:8**). There, God told the serpent (i.e., Satan in serpent form) in the Garden of Eden after he had brought about the fall of Adam and Even into sin, “*I will put enmity Between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.*” This has been called the “protoevangelium” (“first gospel”), since it was God’s first announcement of his plan of salvation for the world. Although the prophecy contrasted “*your seed and her seed,*” the next line has a direct confrontation between one member of the “*seed of the woman*” and “you,” i.e., Satan himself. According to this prophecy, a male individual from among the woman’s seed will deal a death blow to Satan—“To crush the head of a snake is a completely decisive stroke, which will terminate its life”—while Satan will bruise man’s heel, or cause him to suffer and possibly die (Lunn 2020: 43). Jesus accomplished the defeat of Satan by dying for our sins on the cross. In doing so, he created a new humanity in which Satan no longer has any power over those who are in Christ (see **Jas 4:7**). When he comes again, he will finally and utterly destroy Satan forever (**Rev 20:10**).

In v. 15, when it talks about Christ freeing “*those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all*

*their lives,*” it is talking about humanity’s slavery to sin. The word for “*subject to*” is *enochos*, which means “ensnared, held in, constrained, bound” (Zodhiates 1993: *enochos*, 592). Because sin is an active part of our very nature which separates us from God and corrupts even outwardly good deeds, the Bible accurately describes people as being “slaves to sin” (**John 8:34; Rom 6:6, 16-17, 20; 7:14**). Or, to put it another way, “every person born into the world is tainted by the Fall such that all of humanity is ethically debilitated, and people are powerless to rehabilitate themselves, unless rescued by God” (“Original sin” n.d.: Introduction; see **John 3:3, 5; 6:44, 65; 8:34; Rom 6:16-17, 20; 8:6-8; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:1-3, 8-9; Heb 11:6**). What this section of Hebrews is doing is showing us how Christ has met and defeated the three greatest enemies that plague all of us: sin, Satan, and death. Only he, as fully God and fully man, could do this. **Verse 16** returns to the theme of angels and again emphasizes Christ’s relationship to his people by giving “*help to the descendant of Abraham.*” In **Gal 3:29**, Paul had pointed out that “*if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.*”

**Verse 17** introduces a theme that will be very prominent later in the book, namely, Jesus is our great high priest. That verse concludes by returning to the main theme of this section, that Christ provides salvation through his suffering and death, but does so in connection with Christ’s being our high priest. Christ as high priest made “*propitiation for the sins of the people.*” Propitiation is the language of the temple (**Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17**). It indicates that we were under God’s wrath but now that wrath has been satisfied and quenched. The Greek verb for propitiation is *hilaskesthai*. Zodhiates observes, “Christ is the High Priest who offers Himself, becoming at once both victim and priest, thus satisfying the justice of God and at the same time procuring forgiveness of sins whereby reconciled man is offered access to and communion with God.” (Zodhiates 1993: *hilaskomai*, 768). The language Hebrews uses here goes back to the tabernacle/temple and the Day of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrificed animal on the mercy seat within the Holy of Holies, in order to atone for the sins of the people. The “mercy seat” was the lid of the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and temple. The Septuagint translates the word for “mercy seat” as “*hilastērion*,” the noun corresponding to *hilaskesthai* (**Exod 25:17, LXX**). **Rom 3:25** calls Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross a “*propitiation*” (or “sacrifice of atonement”—NIV). The word used there for “propitiation” is *hilastērion* (see also **Heb 9:5** which refers to the mercy seat as the *hilastērion*). Thus, what we are seeing is not only the depth of what Christ has done but also how God embedded in the sacrificial system of OT Israel events and themes that Christ would bring to completion more than a thousand years later.

This section concludes with the statement that Christ “*was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.*” Christ’s being tempted like us flows from his becoming a human being like us. **Heb 4:15** expands on this, and the issue of Christ’s temptations will be discussed in more detail at that point. For now, it is sufficient to say that, since he was “*made like his brethren in all things*” (**v. 17**), including temptation, he alone could perfectly relate to us and, as “*the Lamb of God*” he could offer the perfect sacrifice to the Father and thereby “*take away the sin of the world*” (**John 1:29**). All of this reveals something profound regarding the nature of God. As Richard Bauckham puts it, “Jesus reveals the divine identity—who God truly is—in humiliation as well as exaltation, and in the connexion of the two. God’s own identity is revealed in Jesus, his life and his cross, just as truly as in his exaltation, in a way that is fully continuous and consistent with the Old Testament and Jewish understanding of God, but is also novel and surprising.” (Bauckham 1998: viii)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What shows how superior Christ is over the rest of creation and created beings?
2. How do we “take hold of salvation”?
3. How can we drift away from Christ and our relationship with him? What can we do to prevent or counteract that?
4. Heb 2:9-18 emphasizes the suffering of Jesus Christ.
  - How and why was Christ’s suffering important, and what did it accomplish?
  - Is Christ’s suffering an example for us and, if so, how?
  - Why do many Christians think that all suffering is wrong, that God has nothing to do with it, and blame it on sin, a curse, or Satan? Is that view correct and, if not, what is a more biblical view of suffering, and what

can we learn when we suffer?

5. What is the nature of God like, and how does Hebrews 1-2 reveal that nature?

6. Why is Christ's being both fully God and fully man both important and necessary?

7. Hebrews quotes or alludes to the OT more than any other NT book except, perhaps, Revelation. Chapters 1-2 quote or allude to several OT passages. What did you learn from this, and did you find any of these quotes or allusions particularly interesting or important?

## **II. Christ is our great high priest (3:1—8:5)**

Hebrews continues to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus Christ by showing that, as the true and everlasting high priest, he provides everlasting salvation rest, which the Old Covenant could not do.

### **A. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-6)**

*3 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; <sup>2</sup>He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. <sup>3</sup>For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. <sup>4</sup>For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. <sup>5</sup>Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; <sup>6</sup>but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.*

The “Therefore,” which begins v. 1, relates back to what has just been said about Christ, namely, he had to assume our nature so that, by his faithfulness in suffering and death, he could become our great high priest and thereby defeat Satan, sin, and death itself. In **2:17** the writer said that, through his suffering and death Christ “*might become a merciful and faithful high priest.*” Now, he bids us to consider Jesus, who is “*the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.*” This is the only time in the NT Jesus is called an “Apostle.” The term flows from the fact that Jesus himself said, “*As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world*” (**John 17:18**). As Donald Guthrie says, “In other words they became apostles because he was an apostle. He is the perfect fulfiller of the office. All others are pale reflections.” (Guthrie 1983: 98)

Then, in **vv. 2-6**, the writer contrasts Jesus and Moses, just as he had contrasted Jesus and the angels in chapter 1. Moses is the most important figure in the OT. He appears more than 750 times in the OT, and his story and impact are central. He is mentioned repeatedly as the lawgiver, covenant mediator, prophet, agent of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, shepherd of Israel in the wilderness, and the “friend of God” who spoke with God face-to-face and received the Ten Commandments directly from God. Despite Moses's central importance, Jesus Christ is shown to be incomparably greater. Thus, Christ is said to have “*more glory than Moses*” just as the builder of a house has more glory than the house itself (**vv. 2-4**) and just as a Son has more glory than a servant (**vv. 5-6**). The “house” here is the people of God: Jesus is “over” the house because he is its builder, but Moses is a servant within and a part of it.

The operative words in the comparison of Moses with Jesus—“Son,” “house,” and “builder”—are important. The use of “Son,” of course, goes back to chapter 1, where Jesus' position as the “Son” was emphasized. But that word, along with “house” and “builder,” does far more. All three words point us back to the Davidic Covenant of **2 Sam 7:8-17**. After David became king and the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem, David wanted to build a house (temple) for God, who up until that time had always lived in the portable tabernacle (tent) (**2 Sam 7:1-7**). In response, God told David he would not be permitted to build a house for God, but that “*the Lord will make a house for you*” (**2 Sam 7:11**). God went on to say that David's son would build a house for the Lord, that “*I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me*” (**2 Sam 7:13-14**).

In light of **2 Sam 7:14**, the phrase “*Son of God*” was a messianic phrase denoting the promised Davidic king. Although the Davidic line lasted for a few hundred years, it did not last “forever,” as God had said in the covenant. Thus, the covenant was pointing beyond David and beyond his son Solomon. It was pointing to Jesus, who, as discussed above regarding **Heb 1:4-14**, is the true fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (see especially **Heb 1:5**, which quotes **2 Sam 7:14** and applies it to Jesus). Jesus frequently is called the “*Son of God*” (**Matt 4:3, 6; 8:29; 26:63; 27:40, 54; Mark 1:1; 3:11; 15:39; Luke 1:35; 3:38; 4:3, 9, 41; John 1:34, 49; 11:27; 20:31; Acts**

**8:37; 9:20; Rom 1:4; 2 Cor 1:19; Gal 2:20; Eph 4:13; Heb 4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29; 1 John 3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12, 13, 20).** Jesus also referred to Himself as the “*Son of God*” (**Matt 26:63-64; 27:43; Mark 14:61-62; Luke 22:70; John 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4; 19:7; Rev 2:18**).

The language of “house” and “builder” also point to the those who are united to Christ by faith, i.e., the church. Paul alludes to **2 Sam 7:14** in **2 Cor 6:18** and applies the Davidic Covenant to the church. Significantly, Paul changes the wording of the promise God made concerning David’s son Solomon (“*I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me*”) to “*I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me.*” That demonstrates that the Davidic Covenant finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ and the church. Additionally, in **Eph 2:20-22**, Paul speaks of the church as “<sup>20</sup>*having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,*” <sup>21</sup>*in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,* <sup>22</sup>*in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.*” This language parallels **Heb 3:4**, which speaks of the “house” being “built” by God, and **Heb 3:6**, which says, “*but Christ was faithful as a Son over his house—whose house we are.*” The caveat at the end of **v. 6**, “*if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end,*” points to our perseverance in faith, which true saving faith entails, and which has been hinted at in the warning passage of **2:1-4**, and which will be hinted at in the warning passages in chapters 3, 6, and elsewhere.

The “house” that Solomon originally built was, of course, the temple. The NT explicitly says that the church is the true temple, which the temple building in Jerusalem only foreshadowed. The actual phrase “temple of God” is found eleven times in the NT (**Matt 26:61; 1 Cor 3:16, 17a, 17b; 2 Cor 6:16a, 16b; 2 Thess 2:4; Rev 3:12; 7:15; 11:1, 19**; see also **Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5**; and **Rev 13:6** where the church is called “*His tabernacle*”). That phrase always refers to the church, except in **Matt 26:61**, where Jesus is quoted as saying, “*I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.*” G. K. Beale observes, “Matthew sees the material temple being destroyed and rebuilt in Jesus’ resurrection body. . . . Israel’s former, physical temple was but a physical foreshadowing of Christ and his people as the temple. For, remember, the primary point of the temple was that it was the place where God’s glorious presence was manifested on earth to his people. Now that Jesus has come as God incarnate, he is now the place where God’s presence is manifested in the world.” (Beale 2004: 275-76; see also **John 2:19-22**) Significantly, in **1-2 Corinthians** “Paul was able to refer to believers in the 50s AD, *while the Jerusalem temple was still standing*, as the temple of God indwelt by the Spirit” (Sweeney 2003: 629).<sup>6</sup> Thus, in God’s eyes the Jerusalem Temple had already been replaced even before it was physically destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. In **2 Cor 6:16-7:1**, after comparing the church to a temple, Paul concludes by saying, “*Therefore, having these promises.*” The promises from which he quotes in **2 Cor 6:16-18** include **Lev 26:11-12, 2 Sam 7:14**, and **Ezek 37:27**, where God promises to build a house and establish David’s throne forever and be a father to him and to establish his sanctuary and dwelling place forever with his people. By referring to those promises in the context of calling the church “*the temple of the living God*” (**2 Cor 6:16**) Paul is saying, “The fullest realization of God’s covenant, the eternal and abiding presence of God, binding his people to himself and himself to them forever: these are the promises that are fulfilled in the church—we *are* a temple of the living God” (Clowney 1972-73: 186).

What these verses also are doing are summarizing the multiple parallels between Moses and Jesus that we see throughout the Bible, which parallels show Christ’s superiority to Moses. For example, Moses’s first public miracle was turning water into blood, a sign of judgment and death (**Exod 7:20–21**); Jesus’ first public miracle was turning water into wine, a sign of joy and life (**John 2:1–11**).<sup>7</sup> We see similar parallels demonstrating Christ’s superiority in several significant aspects of the lives of Moses and Jesus:

- *Moses was a precursor of the Messiah.* Moses was unique among the prophets, both for the mighty works he did and for the fact that God did not speak to him in visions and dreams but “*mouth to mouth*” and “*face to face*” (**Exod 33:11; Num 12:6–8; Deut 34:10–12**) as a man speaks to his friend. However, Jesus was far greater than Moses. Jesus *is* the Messiah. Jesus did greater miracles than Moses, including raising the dead and rising from the dead. Jesus surpasses Moses because he is the only one who has seen the Father, since he came from the Father (**John 6:46**) and is himself “*the exact representation*” of God (**Heb 1:3**). Jesus did not just speak God’s words from time to time; instead, he did nothing on his own initiative, but *everything* he did and said was what the Father had him do (**John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10**). The reason is that Jesus *is* the very Word of God come to earth as a man (**John 1:1, 14; Rev 19:13**).
- *Freedom from slavery.* Moses led his people out of slavery in Egypt to a new life of freedom (**Exod 12:29–32**), although he never was able to lead his people into the promised land. Jesus led his people all the way

<sup>6</sup> “The dating of 1 Corinthians in the fifth decade of the first century is not greatly debated” (Sweeney 2003: 629n.116).

<sup>7</sup> Wine, of course, is a symbol of Christ’s blood, the shedding of which inaugurated the New Covenant, through which people receive the forgiveness of their sins, a new heart, mind, Spirit, and eternal life (**Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25**).

out of the far greater slavery to sin, Satan, death, and bondage to the law, so that “*if you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*” (**John 8:30–31**).

- *Manna*. Just as the Lord provided manna while Moses led Israel in the wilderness (**Exod 16:1–21**), so Jesus said, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. . . . I am the bread of life.*” (**John 6:32, 35**) The manna was physical and temporary; the bread that Jesus gives (himself) provides eternal life to anyone who eats it (**John 6:48–58**).
- *God’s law on the mountain*. Just as God gave Moses the Law on the mountain (**Exod 19:20**), so Jesus gave his law, the “law of Christ,” on the mountain (**Matt 5:1–48**; see **1 Cor 9:21**; **Gal 6:2**). However, because Jesus is the far greater antitype, he was able to change the law of God on his own authority (**Matt 5:21–22, 27–28, 31–34, 38–44**; **Mark 7:18–19**). Further, the law of Moses and the law of Christ are qualitatively different; the Apostle John says, “*The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ*” (**John 1:17**).
- *Sacrifice and atonement*. Although Moses offered to make atonement and sacrifice himself for his people’s sin (**Exod 32:30–32**), Jesus actually made atonement and sacrificed himself for his people’s sin (**Rom 3:23–25**; **5:6–8**; **Heb 9:26–28**; **10:11–12**; **1 John 2:2**).
- *Mediators*. Just as Moses was a mediator between God and Israel (**Exod 20:19**; **Deut 5:5**; **Gal 3:19**), so Jesus is “*the one mediator between God and men*” (**1 Tim 2:5**).
- *The covenants*. Moses inaugurated the Old Covenant (**Exod 24:8**). At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the New Covenant (**Luke 22:20**; see also **Matt 26:28**; **Mark 14:24**). Moses ratified God’s Mosaic covenant with the blood of animals, but Jesus surpasses Moses by ratifying the New Covenant in his own blood (**Matt 26:28**; **Mark 14:24**; **Luke 22:20**; see **1 Cor 11:25**; **Heb 8:7–13**; **9:11–14**), which rendered the Mosaic covenant obsolete (**Heb 8:13**). The Mosaic Covenant did not forgive sins or give eternal life, but the New Covenant does forgive sins and give eternal life.
- *Salvation from death*. Jesus compared his death to Moses. Jesus said, “*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*” (**John 3:14**; see **Num 21:9**). To look to the bronze serpent in the wilderness spared a person from physical death; to look to Jesus gives one eternal life and saves a person from the second death.
- *Dead bodies*. The dead bodies of both Moses and Jesus cannot be found. **Deut 34:6** says that Moses was buried in the land of Moab, “*but no man knows his burial place to this day.*” Jesus also was buried, but his body also cannot be found because he is risen! (**Matt 28:6**)

## **B. Unlike the disobedient Israelites, if we remain faithful, we will enter the true sabbath rest (3:7—4:13)**

### **1. Do not be unbelieving like the Israelites were (3:7-19).**

<sup>7</sup> *Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “Today if you hear His voice,<sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness,<sup>9</sup> where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years.<sup>10</sup> “Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways’;<sup>11</sup> as I swore in My wrath, ‘they shall not enter My rest.’”*

<sup>12</sup> *Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.<sup>13</sup> But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.<sup>14</sup> For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,<sup>15</sup> while it is said, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.”<sup>16</sup> For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?<sup>17</sup> And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?<sup>18</sup> And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?<sup>19</sup> So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.*

This section is a warning that is based on and flows from vv. 1-6. Specifically, v. 6 had just said “*hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end,*” because now we are the house of Christ, not the house of Moses. This is a warning not to follow the example of the Israelites who provoked God for 40 years in the wilderness by their hardness of heart, disobedience, and unbelief. **Verses 7b-11** quote **Ps 95:7c-11**. The Hebrew text of **Ps 95:8** refers to Meribah and Massah, when the Israelites quarreled with Moses and demanded that he

provide them with water (**Exod 17:1-7; Num 20:2-13**). The “heart” (**vv. 8, 10, 15**) refers to the essence or core of our being, including our thoughts, feelings, and will. The references in **vv. 10** and **11** to God’s being “angry” and his “wrath” highlight that God is not impassive or indifferent to sin. That is compounded in **v. 11** by the fact that God swore an oath in his wrath. The warning of **vv. 7-11** is intensified by the introduction in **v. 7a**, “*Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says.*” In other words, the warning is from God himself, not just from the writer of Hebrews.

**Verses 12-19** provide an explanation of, and exhortation based on, **Ps 95:7c-11**, and again quote **Ps 95:7c-8**. The exhortation to remain faithful is based on the fact that “*we have become partakers of Christ*” (**v. 14**).<sup>8</sup> The Israelites’ failure to enter God’s rest was “*because of unbelief*” (**v. 19**). Note what unbelief entails. “Unbelief” is not merely an intellectual doubt or failure to believe something but includes and is characterized by: an evil, unbelieving heart (**v. 12**); falling away from the living God (**v. 12**); being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (**v. 13**); hardness of heart (**v. 15**); provoking God (**v. 16**); angering God (**v. 17**); sin (**v. 17**); disobedience (**v. 18**); failure to enter God’s rest (**vv. 18-19**); and, ultimately, death (**v. 17**). In other words, unbelief is a matter of the heart, is sinful, and always leads to bad—indeed, deadly—consequences. The seriousness of unbelief is further highlighted by **v. 12** which speaks of a person “falling away” from the living God. The Greek word for “fall away” is *apostēnai*, which is the root from which “apostasy” comes. Since Jesus has been portrayed as God come to earth, to reject Christ—even by returning to Judaism and the God of Judaism—amounts to apostasy from God himself.

The importance of maintaining faithfulness is also highlighted by the words of exhortation in these verses: “*take care, brethren*” (**v. 12**); “*encourage one another day after day*” (**v. 13**); “*hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end*” (**v. 14**); “*Do not harden your hearts*” (**v. 15**); and the repetition of the word “Today” in **Ps 95:7b**, to emphasize that maintaining our faith is imperative for us now (**v. 15**). These words of exhortation emphasize that we need to be active and diligent not only with respect to their own faith life, but also in making sure that all of our brothers and sisters in Christ do not fall away.

## 2. We enter our sabbath rest by faith (4:1-13).

*4 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. <sup>2</sup> For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. <sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, “As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest,” although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; <sup>5</sup> and again in this passage, “They shall not enter My rest.” <sup>6</sup> Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”*

*<sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. <sup>9</sup> So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. <sup>10</sup> For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. <sup>11</sup> Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. <sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.*

This section picks up on and continues the argument made in **Heb 3:7-19** and applies it to us. **Verse 2** says, “*For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also.*” However, we have had the gospel (i.e., the “good news”) preached to us in a far better way. As **Heb 1:1-2** said, “*God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.*” Charles Fritsch observes, “The ultimate goal of God’s redemptive purpose is to bring men into the divine rest which is typified by the earthly Sabbath” (Fritsch 1947: 96; Jackson 2025b: paragraphs (2)–(5)). **Heb 3:7—4:11** reveals that the divine “rest” finds its fulfillment in New Covenant salvation, which is our true “Sabbath rest.” **Heb 3:7–11, 15; 4:3, 7** all quote from **Ps 95:7–11** to the effect that the generation in the wilderness following the exodus forfeited their “rest” because of rebellion and lack of faith (**Heb 3:16–19**). Although Joshua ultimately led the Israelites into the

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<sup>8</sup> But note that being “*partakers of Christ*” is conditioned on “*if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.*” John Piper correctly observes that “perseverance in faith proves that you became a partaker in Christ. Which means that if you do not persevere in faith, it does not show that you fall out of partaking in Christ, but that you never became a partaker in Christ.” (Piper 1996: 3. Consider Hebrews 3:14 (and 3:6))

Promised Land, that did not constitute the Sabbath “rest” God intended, because “if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that” (**Heb 4:8**).<sup>9</sup> Instead, there remains a rest for us “today” (**Heb 4:7**). Everyone who has faith in Christ (**Heb 4:2–3**) has “rested from his works,” just as God did (v. 4, quoting **Gen 2:2**), and “has entered His rest” (**Heb 4:10**), just as Christ promised (**Matt 11:28–30**). In other words, “the Sabbath no longer has significance as a day; . . . For those who rest in Christ, every day is a Sabbath (cf. Rom. 14:5).” (Wells and Zaspel 2002: 236) As A. T. Lincoln concludes, since the OT Sabbath day was a type that pointed to the true Sabbath, namely, our salvation rest in Christ, “Christ brings the spiritual reality; His work fulfills the intent of the Sabbath, and with Christ comes that for which the Sabbath existed. The reality of salvation rest supersedes the sign.” (Lincoln 1982: 215) In short, when the Old Covenant was superseded by the New Covenant, so was the sign of the Old Covenant; thus, under the New Covenant the Sabbath and other “special days” of the OT are no longer binding (**Rom 14:5; Gal 4:8–11; Col 2:15–17**). As **Col 2:16–17** puts it, “Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to . . . a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

The argument in **Hebrews 3–4** is very similar to Paul’s argument concerning faith and the law in **Galatians 3–4**. In Galatians, Abraham was justified by faith, not by the law (**Gal 3:6–11**), and the promised blessings through Abraham accrue only to those who believe in Jesus Christ (**Gal 3:14, 16, 18, 22, 29**). The law was only temporary until the coming of Christ (**Gal 3:23–25**). Likewise, Hebrews argues that because of unbelief, OT Israel never truly entered the “rest” God had promised (**Heb 3:7–12, 16–19; 4:2, 5–6**). Although Israel ultimately entered the promised land, it never found rest and peace but continued to experience war, oppression, and exile. In the OT, refraining from work one day per week (i.e., “keeping the Sabbath”) reflected the temporary and partial nature of Israel’s rest from her enemies. On the other hand, Christ defeated our only permanent enemies—sin, Satan, and death. Because Christ has done all the work needed to secure our permanent salvation, our “rest” is permanent. Consequently, early church father Justin Martyr recognized that Christianity does not require keeping one particular Sabbath day; instead, we are living in a “perpetual Sabbath” (Justin Martyr 1994a: 12; see also *Epistle of Barnabas* 1989: 15.8–9).

The “Sabbath rest” (v. 9) that is being discussed here points back to the Day of Atonement and, specifically, to Jesus as our great high priest who made “propitiation for the sins of the people” (**2:17**). The language of “propitiation” goes back to the tabernacle/temple and the Day of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrificed animal on the mercy seat within the Holy of Holies, in order to atone for the sins of the people (see the discussion above of **Heb 2:17**). The Day of Atonement was called “a sabbath of solemn rest” (**Lev 16:31**) and “a sabbath of complete rest” (**Lev 23:32**). This language points to what Jesus has done, since only his atoning sacrifice gives us “complete rest.” In fact, all of the major elements of the rituals performed on the Day of Atonement were “types” that pointed to Christ: the rites were performed at the temple (**Lev 16:23, 20, 33**)—Christ is the true temple (**John 1:14; 2:18–22**); the high priest performed the rites (**Lev 16:2–3, 32–33**)—Christ is our high priest (**Heb 4:14–15; 5:5–10; 8:1–6; 9:11; 10:21**); a bull and a goat were sacrificed as sin offerings and their blood was shed (**Lev 16:8–9, 15**)—Christ was sacrificed for our sins and his blood was shed (**Heb 7:27; 9:12, 14, 26, 28**); the high priest entered the holy of holies behind the veil (**Lev 16:12–15**)—Christ’s body is the true veil (**Heb 10:19–20**) and he entered the true holy of holies (**Heb 8:1–2; 9:11–12, 24**); the blood of the goat was sprinkled on the mercy seat (**Lev 16:14–15**)—Christ is the mercy seat (**Rom 3:25**; compare **Exod 25:17, LXX**); the sins of the nation were imputed to the scapegoat (**Lev 16:20–21**)—Christ bore our sins (**Isa 53:4–5; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 2:24**) and became sin for us (**2 Cor 5:21**); the scapegoat was led into the wilderness (**Lev 16:21–22**)—Christ was led into the ultimate wilderness of separation from God (**Isa 53:8; Matt 27:46**); the bodies of the slain animals were burned outside the camp (**Heb 13:11**)—Christ “suffered outside the gate” (**Heb 13:12**).

The finality of Christ’s atonement and the “complete rest” that only he provides are seen in the following two comparisons with the Day of Atonement and Christ’s sacrifice and atonement: First, the Day of Atonement served as a “reminder” of sins every year. Through Christ’s sacrifice, the Father “will remember their sins and lawless deeds no more” (**Heb 10:3, 16–18**). Second, following his resurrection and ascension, Jesus “sat down at the right hand of God” in the true heavenly holy of holies (**Heb 1:3; 10:12, 14**; see also **Ps 110:1; Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20–21; Col 3:1; 1 Pet 3:21–22**). “Because sacrificial service entailed the posture of *standing* before God or at the altar ([Heb] 10:11; Deut 10:8; 18:7), the contrasting act of *sitting down*

<sup>9</sup> In Hebrew, “Joshua” is “Yehoshua” or “Yeshua”; the same name in English is “Jesus.” **Heb 4:4, 8** use the same Greek word, *Iēsous*, for both Joshua and Jesus. What this is telling us is that the first “Jesus” (Joshua) could not lead his people into the rest of God, but the second Jesus (Christ) could and did.

indicates the termination of Christ's sacrificial act ([Heb] 10:12). Yet, at the same time, his enthronement at God's right side gives him the access and status appropriate for ongoing, effective intercession." (Nelson 2003: 257)

Christians early-on recognized the significance of the end of the Old Covenant by transforming their understanding of the Sabbath and no longer "honoring the seventh day" as a day of rest and worship. At the Jerusalem Council (**Acts 15**) the whole point was whether it is necessary to circumcise new Gentile believers and require them to observe the Law of Moses (**Acts 15:5**). The answer was a resounding "No!" Sabbath observance (or even some alternative "Sabbath day" for Gentiles) was not required of Gentile believers by the apostolic decree of **Acts 15**. "One of the Jewish beliefs held with most tenacity is observance of the Sabbath, and yet Christian Jews transferred their worship from Saturday to Sunday, which they termed 'the Lord's Day' [**Rev 1:10**]" (Maier 1973: 122; see also *Didache* c.70-110: 14.1). Christians began gathering for worship on Sundays in honor of Christ's resurrection, and that happened early-on (**Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2**). This is confirmed by the early church fathers. Ignatius of Antioch said, "Let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days" (Ignatius 1989: 9). Justin Martyr similarly said, "We all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the universe, and Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from the dead on the same day" (Justin Martyr 1994b: 67). Evidence from the second century reveals "no trace whatever of any controversy as to whether Christians should worship on Sunday, and no record of any Christian group that did not worship on Sunday" (Bauckham 1982: 236).

Christians are not "commanded" to worship on Sundays. They are free to worship any day of the week. However, Christian worship on Sunday ("the Lord's Day") underscores the different basis of Christian worship and worship on the Jewish Sabbath. Because Christ's resurrection fulfills the rest signified by the OT Sabbath, there is a link between the seventh day (the Sabbath) and the first day of the week on which Christians worship. That link is *not* turning the first day of the week into a day of physical rest but into a day of "celebration of the true Sabbath rest of salvation brought by Christ whom believers worshipped and with whom they had fellowship." (Lincoln, 1982: 205, 215–16).<sup>10</sup> There is no warrant for applying the OT Sabbath requirement of physical rest to the NT Lord's Day.

The fact that the Sabbath Day was a "type" which finds its true fulfillment in the permanence of our Sabbath rest in Christ is even hinted at in the first mention of God's resting on the seventh day in **Gen 2:1–3**. William Dumbrell observes that it is "most remarkable" that "unlike the previous six days, the seventh day is without beginning and end [compare **Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31** with **2:2–3**]. The intention of the narrative seems to be to underline the distinctly special and unending place of the seventh day. . . . The unending Sabbath day provides the context in which the ideal life of the garden is to take place and is to be perpetuated in human society." (Dumbrell 2001: 220–21) One caveat or qualification to the above discussion is that the consummation of the believers' rest, that "ideal life," will be experienced on the new heaven and new earth, where "*they may rest from their labors*" (**Rev 14:13**), as opposed to the unbelievers, "*who have no rest day and night*" (**Rev 14:11**). That indicates that, although through faith we have entered our perpetual rest now, there is a sense in which that rest is not final in all its particulars. This is consistent with the fact that, like the ancient Israelites, there is a sense in which the church, although it has entered God's rest, nevertheless is still in the wilderness (see **Rev 12:13-17**). This parallels what is known as the "already, but not yet" of the kingdom. "Not clearly foreseen, apparently, by either Old Testament prophets or the earliest New Testament disciples, was the already-not yet complexion of the messianic age" (Yarbrough 1996: 65): i.e., the kingdom of God and reign of Christ have been inaugurated, realized in principle, and are present now (the "already" of the kingdom); however, they have not yet been fully manifested, but await a future consummation in all their glory (the "not yet" of the kingdom). Currently, good and evil co-exist, but there will come a time of harvest and of separation of good from evil. Some of Jesus' parables, such as the parable of the wheat and the tares (**Matt 13:24-30, 36-43**) and the parable of the dragnet (**Matt 13:47-50**), speak of this dual nature of the kingdom. Believers already have come to the heavenly Jerusalem (**Heb 12:22**); yet the full, glorious presence of the new Jerusalem is future (**Rev 21:10-11**).

The exhortation in **v. 11** "*to be diligent to enter that rest*" is based on God's revelation to us: "*the word of God*" (**v. 12**). God's Word "*is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the*

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Martin 1985: 459–73 provides a detailed biblical and historical refutation of the claim by Seventh Day Adventists that seventh day (Sabbath) worship is required of Christians (see also Martin 1999 n.p.). It is a fact little noted by Christian "Sabbatarians" that, both when God rested on and sanctified the seventh day in **Gen 2:1–3**, there is no command about Sabbath-day worship or observation, "nor is there any religious significance attached to the day, so far as man's obligations or behavior are concerned" (Wells and Zaspel 2002: 214n.292). The Fourth Commandment regarding the Sabbath merely says that the Israelites were to "*observe the Sabbath day,*" "*keep it holy,*" and "*not do any work*" on that day. No specific prescriptions regarding attending worship services or other behaviors are given.

*division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*” This description shows that the Word is to permeate every aspect of our being. Note that the Word is “living,” “active,” “piercing,” and “able to judge,” all the way down to “*the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*” This parallels what Jesus said about his own words to us, “*the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life*” (John 6:63), and *He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.* (John 12:48). The comparison of the Word with a sword is found in Eph 6:17 (see also Isa 49:2; Rev 1:16; 19:15, 21). The comprehensiveness of the living, active, piercing, and judging ability of the Word is found in the comprehensive nature of the aspects of our being that the Word pierces, discerns, and judges: “*soul and spirit,*” i.e., our mental, emotional, and spiritual life; “*joints and marrow,*” i.e., our physical life; and “*the thoughts and intentions of the heart,*” i.e., the deepest aspects of who we are. What v. 12 tells us is reinforced by v. 13, which emphasizes that “*there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.*” In short, God discerns and will judge everyone and everything, inside and out; nothing is or will be hidden from him. As Jesus himself said, “*But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops.*” (Luke 12:2-3; see also Matt 10:26-27; Mark 4:22; Luke 8:17)

### C. As the perfect high priest, Christ gives those who are faithful eternal salvation (4:14—6:18)

#### 1. We must stay faithful (4:14-16).

<sup>14</sup> *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.* <sup>15</sup> *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.* <sup>16</sup> *Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Although Jesus as our great high priest had been mentioned in 2:17 and 3:1, here the theme is introduced in a more formal way and will be expanded on through 8:5. In v. 14 we learn three things about our great high priest: (1) he is “great,” which makes him superior to any other high priest; (2) he “*has passed through the heavens,*” which distinguishes him far above all other high priests, who only, at most, were able to go into the holy of holies in the temple; and (3) he is the “*Son of God.*” This was first mentioned in 1:5 and was discussed earlier with respect to the Davidic Covenant and Jesus as the Messianic King. Now, it is showing that he is far above any other high priest, who were all merely men. It is precisely because Jesus is such a high priest that we should “*hold fast our confession,*” an important theme that was raised in 2:1-18, and 3:7—4:13 and will be returned to later.

Another reason for holding fast to our confession of faith is given in v. 15, namely, that Christ can “*sympathize with our weaknesses,*” because he “*has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.*” Guthrie notes that the word “sympathize” connotes far more than just having pity but indicates “suffer along with” (Guthrie 1983: 122). Christ’s being tempted “*in all things as we are*” is important. There is no form of temptation we face—sexual, temptations to lie, steal, covet, cheat, live a profligate life, or anything else—that Jesus did not experience. The difference is that he did not give in to his temptations. That also is important. So often, we may resist our temptations for awhile but ultimately give in. Christ did not do that. He resisted all the way to the end. We may say that we gave in because the temptation was so strong. We don’t know how strong temptation can be, because we give in before the temptation runs its course. Only Christ knows how strong temptation can be, because every time, he resisted every temptation all the way to the end.

The “Therefore” that begins v. 16 is telling us that *because* Christ has been tempted in all ways like we are, he knows what we face and what we are going through; he knows our weaknesses, but he cares about us. Therefore, we can come to him and “*draw near*” to him, not in a spirit of fear or even hesitancy, but “*with confidence,*” knowing that our great high priest not only sympathizes with us but also is full of mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. This is reinforced in that the Greek word translated “*draw near*” is *proserchomai*. In the Septuagint, that word commonly is used of priests approaching God. Now, all believers are priests in the eye of God (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6), and we do not just enter an earthly temple but the very presence of God himself who, in the person of the Holy Spirit, actually lives inside of us. What could be more reassuring than that?

2. As high priest, Christ is the source of our salvation (5:1-10).

*5 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; <sup>2</sup> he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; <sup>3</sup> and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. <sup>4</sup> And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.*

*<sup>5</sup> So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You”; <sup>6</sup> just as He says also in another passage, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

*<sup>7</sup> In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. <sup>8</sup> Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. <sup>9</sup> And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, <sup>10</sup> being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.*

The first four verses discuss the nature of the Aaronic priesthood. The introductory word “For” relates back to **4:14-16**, which discussed Jesus as our great high priest. They show, in general, the requirements for a high priest and indicate, especially when taken in connection with **vv. 5-10**, that Christ not only fulfilled all the requirements of a high priest but is far superior to the high priests of Aaron’s line. According to **v. 1**, every high priest is: (1) “*taken from among men*”; (2) “*appointed on behalf of men*”; (3) with respect to “*things pertaining to God*”; (4) in order to “*offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.*” Jesus fulfills all of those qualifications in ways no earthly high priest could. First, Jesus is fully man, but at the same time he is fully God (see Menn 2025: 221-34). Second, Jesus is the “*one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (**1 Tim 2:5**), who was called and appointed by the Father and fully “*accomplished the work which You have given Me to do*” (**John 17:4**). Third, Jesus did not only do “*things pertaining to God,*” but “*the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner*” (**John 5:19**; see also **John 8:28; 12:49**). Fourth, Jesus is the “*gift*” from God (**John 3:16**) who made “*one sacrifice for sins for all time*” (**Heb 10:12**). With respect to **v. 2**, Jesus could and did “*deal gently*” with people because he is “*gentle and humble in heart*” (**Matt 11:29**). Further, “*since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted*” (**Heb 2:18**) and can “*sympathize with our weaknesses*” since he “*has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*” (**Heb 4:15-16**). However, Jesus surpasses all other high priests, since he does not have to make sacrifices for his own sin (**v. 3**), because he was without sin. Instead, “*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*” (**2 Cor 5:21**).

**Verses 5-10** go on to show that Christ, to an even greater degree than the Aaronic high priests, was designated by God as the greatest of high priests—a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (**vv. 5-6, 10**). **Verses 5-6** show that it was God the Father who appointed Christ as our great high priest. **Verse 5** quotes **Ps 2:7** to that effect (see also **Ps 2:2**). As stated in **v. 5**, Christ did not glorify himself but is glorified by the Father (**John 8:54**). **Verse 6** also shows the Father’s appointment of Christ. It quotes **Ps 110:4** to show that Christ’s priesthood is infinitely greater than any merely human priest because it is “*forever*” and is “*according to the order of Melchizedek.*” This will be explained in more detail in chapter 7.

**Verses 7-10** then tell us of Christ’s human nature as our great high priest, since he was fully man as well as fully God. As fully human, offered up prayers and supplications to the Father, with tears, and was heard because of his piety (**v. 7**), he was made perfect through his suffering (**vv. 8-9**), and became, unlike the Aaronic high priests, “*to all those who obey him the source of eternal salvation*” (**v. 9**). When Jesus’ friend Lazarus died, Jesus wept (**John 11:35**), and his subsequent prayer for Lazarus’s revival was heard (**John 11:41-44**). Nevertheless, **v. 7** appears primarily to be referring to Jesus’ prayers and supplications in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross. Even though Jesus’ prayer in the garden, that “*if it is possible, let this cup pass from me*” (**Matt 26:39**) was not granted, he also said “*yet not as I will, but as you will.*” His prayer was heard: God sent an angel to strengthen him (**Luke 22:43**), and Jesus not only accepted the Father’s will but carried it out. Because of his perfect obedience all the way to the end, we may, from him, “*receive mercy and find grace to help in [our] time of need*” (**4:16**). Jesus’ “*learning obedience*” and his being “*made perfect*” (**v. 9**) do not imply that he had been disobedient or imperfect. That indicates that his obedience and perfection were put to the test, refined, deepened, and made manifest by his having actually acted out his obedience and having actually experienced suffering.

3. We must press on to spiritual maturity (5:11—6:3).

<sup>11</sup> Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

<sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

6 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup> And this we will do, if God permits.

The “him” referred to in v. 11 primarily relates to Melchizedek, who will be discussed at length in chapter 7. This admonition against spiritual dullness and the exhortation to press on to maturity is in keeping with the overall structure of the book. Thus, in chapter 1 the writer spoke of the superiority of Christ; he then exhorted us in 2:1-4 to “pay much closer attention to what we have heard” and to not “neglect so great a salvation.” He then discussed how all things are subject to Christ (2:5-8), how Christ provides salvation through his suffering and death (2:9-18), and how Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-6); he followed those discussions with the warning to not be unbelieving like the Israelites were (3:7-19) but to enter our sabbath rest by faith (4:1-13) and, therefore, exhorted us to stay faithful (4:14-16). Now, after discussing how, as high priest, Christ is the source of our salvation (5:1-10), he exhorts us to press on to spiritual maturity (5:11—6:3).

He says in v. 12 that “by this time you ought to be teachers.” Although being a “teacher” is a spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:29; Eph 4:11), every believer should always be “to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). This section is telling us that we all have an obligation to grow in our understanding of God’s Word. The spiritually mature have an obligation to teach the spiritually immature. Further, as 5:14 points out, spiritual maturity and our understanding of God’s Word is not merely a matter of reading and study. Instead, spiritual maturity and understanding occurs “because of practice.” The ESV puts it like this: mature believers are “those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” The thought is like that stated by Paul in 1 Tim 4:7b, “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.” Spiritual discipline requires not only regular and consistent study but also regular and consistent application. There are four keys to spiritual maturity that are discussed in vv. 13-14—and all of them are connected. They are: (1) “solid food”; (2) “practice” or “constant practice”; (3) powers of discernment; and (4) the ability to distinguish good and evil.

(1) *Solid food.* Verse 13 equates the one who partakes only of milk as being unskilled in the word of righteousness. Verse 14 begins with the word “But,” which is showing a contrast, and then talks about “solid food.” Both “milk” and “solid food” are metaphors that stand for skill or lack of skill in handling the “word of righteousness” referred to in v. 13. The “word of righteousness” is referring to God’s Word—the Bible. That is made clear in Psalm 119 and Isaiah 45 which also connect God’s word and righteousness. Why is the Bible called the “word of righteousness”? Righteousness means holiness; perfection; rightness in all ways. For us as human beings, “righteousness” deals largely with our ethical and moral conduct. When our conduct is called “righteous,” it means that our actions are justified; we are leading a life that is pleasing to God. The Bible is called the “word of righteousness” because God himself is perfectly righteous. It is also called the “word of righteousness” as a way of helping us see that God’s Word is designed to transform our lives in practical ways and make us righteous, just, and holy, even as Christ is righteous, just, and holy. The “word” (what God says) and “righteousness” (how we act) go together. By connecting the Word of God with righteous living, and by talking about one’s skill in handling the Word, the writer of Hebrews is telling us that God’s Word needs to become a part of us. We need God’s word in us primarily to change us, to change our attitudes, to change our actions. God’s word reflects who he is and his will for us. If we love God we will want to please him and be like him. As his word becomes a part of us, the Holy Spirit will take the word and work in us so that we will start thinking and acting like Jesus himself (see Phil 2:12-13). The contrast between the spiritually immature and the spiritually mature person is one’s ability to handle, digest, absorb, and apply the “word of righteousness.” When it becomes a part of us it begins affecting us and changing how we think, how we feel, how we act, how we treat people. It becomes living and real.

(2) *“Practice or “constant practice.”* The Christian faith is holistic—it is designed to affect every area of our lives. In John 3:36, John says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” John has done the same kind of thing that is going on in Hebrews. In the first part of John 3:36 he uses the common word for “believe.” But then in the second part of the verse he does not say “but the one who disbelieves will not see life.” Instead, he uses the word “obey,” which is

talking about disbelief but mainly is conveying the idea of disobedience in how one lives. In other words, real belief in Jesus is not just something that takes place in the mind—although that is very important. Rather, real belief affects our life; it affects how we act; it affects how we treat people.

(3) *Powers of discernment*. This again is where what we know and what we believe is intimately connected with how we live. **Verse 14** is telling us that the important thing is not just knowing a lot of things, but “discernment” implies *wisdom*; judgment; understanding; the ability to distinguish and apply what we know. Discernment, wisdom, judgment, and understanding can only come as we learn what God says in his Word, think about it, meditate on it, and then apply it.

(4) *The ability to distinguish good and evil*. This is the fourth key. It is deeper than we may think. What I mean is that there is both *substantive* good and evil and *procedural* good and evil. By “substantive” good and evil I mean some things are right or wrong, good or bad, in and of themselves. Murder and abortion are evil. Why? Because to do that is wrongfully taking the life of an innocent person, a life that God gave, the life of a person made in the image of God. Showing love to people is good. Why? Because “*God is love*” (**1 John 4:8**). That may seem very basic, but in order to discern right from wrong and good from evil, we need to know God and we need to know his Word. The reason is that in order to determine whether anything is good or evil, right or wrong, moral or immoral, there needs to be a standard for deciding—and the only adequate ground and standard is God. Even non-Christian philosophers recognize this. Non-Christian philosopher Richard Taylor says, “The modern age, more or less repudiating the idea of a divine lawgiver, has nevertheless tried to retain the ideas of moral right and wrong, without noticing that, in casting God aside, they have also abolished the conditions of meaningfulness for moral right and wrong as well. . . . The concept of moral obligation [is] unintelligible apart from the idea of God.” (Taylor 1985: 2-3, 84) If right and wrong, good and evil are merely social or cultural constructs, then there is no basis for saying that anything the Nazis did or anything the Islamic jihadists are doing is wrong. A Nazi or a Muslim would simply say, “But that’s just our Nazi or Islamic culture—don’t lay your own cultural notions of right and wrong on us.” There is also what I call “procedural” good and evil. For example, **Eph 4:15** says that we should “*speaking the truth in love*.” “Truth” is the substantive part—things are either true or they’re false. But “love” is the procedural part. How we say or do something is often as important as what we say or do.

**6:1** includes a two-fold exhortation: (A) what to stop doing, i.e., “*leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ*” and “*not laying again a foundation*”; and (B) what to do, i.e., “*press on to maturity*.” **Verse 2** lists the “elementary teachings” he is referring to. These things all need to be known and understood. They are all important. On the other hand, while Christianity begins here, it does not end here. Instead, Christianity applies to all areas of life, and we need to know and understand the Word well enough to be able to apply the Christian faith to all areas of life. The end result will be that the entire body of Christ will be built up such that “*we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*”<sup>14</sup> *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;*<sup>15</sup> *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,*<sup>16</sup> *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*” (**Eph 4:13-16**). That is what the writer is getting at.

Another important aspect of these “elementary teachings” is this: it is possible that all these things could have been learned from OT Judaism (Guthrie 1983: 140; Morris 1981: 53; Rayburn 1989: 1137). If, as is likely, Hebrews was written primarily to Jewish believers who were being tempted to return to Judaism, it makes sense that the writer chose these six elements. His warning to leave these elementary teachings and press on to maturity may be far more pointed than may appear on the surface, and his first-century readers may have been in a far more dangerous spiritual condition than may appear on the surface. This is a warning that, if the people stay the way they are—“*dull of hearing*” and clinging only to the “*elementary principles*”—it will reveal that they never were really saved at all. The reason is that, in **v. 12**, the Greek word translated “*elementary principles*” is *stoicheion*. That term is used four other times in the NT in referring to doctrinal or spiritual matters: **Gal 4:3** says that “*we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.*” **Gal 4:9** says, “*But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?*” **Col 2:8** uses the same term when it says, “*See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.*” **Col 2:20-21** uses the same term when it says, “*If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living*

in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’”<sup>11</sup> Each of those uses of *stoicheion* indicates that holding on to these “elementary teachings” or principles does not indicate that a person is saved or will become saved, even though such teachings can mimic, are also found in, and are foundational to, Christianity. As Paul says in **Col 2:23**, “*These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.*” Thus, when the writer of Hebrews is comparing those who call themselves Christians to infants (“dull of hearing . . . you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food”) he is making a very damning comparison. When a child is born, he or she is very small and knows nothing. Some of the people Hebrews is addressed to may have been professing Christians for five, ten, or fifteen years. If a person is the same height and weight and still knows nothing when he or she is five, ten, or fifteen years old as he or she was when a newborn, that person would be monstrous. It would indicate a terrible pathology. That is why failure to “press on to maturity” is more than just an exhortation—it is a warning that the spiritual condition being discussed in this section of Hebrews is far worse than the readers may realize, because still being infants after so much time indicates that the people are not a genuine, born again believers at all.

4. To fall away after having been exposed to the truth is fatal (6:4-8).

*<sup>4</sup> For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. <sup>7</sup> For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; <sup>8</sup> but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.*

This section is one of the most controversial sections in the book of Hebrews, if not in the entire NT. The warning here against “falling away” follows from the previous section’s warning against failure to progress in the faith and the use of the term *stoicheion*. The connection between this and the previous section is seen in the introductory word “For.” There are five main views of who is being talked about and what is going on:

<b>Arminian view</b> <sup>12</sup>	<u>People involved</u> = Genuine Christians	<u>End result</u> = They are not saved, but are lost	<u>Implication</u> = It is possible for genuine, born again Christians to lose their salvation
<b>Spiritual Impoverishment view</b> <sup>13</sup>	<u>People involved</u> = Genuine Christians	<u>End result</u> = They are saved but suffer spiritual impoverishment in this life and loss of rewards in the age to come	<u>Implication</u> = It is impossible for genuine, born again Christians to lose their salvation
<b>Hypothetical view</b> <sup>14</sup>	<u>People involved</u> = Genuine Christians	<u>End result</u> = They are not saved, but are lost	<u>Implication</u> = This view holds that it is impossible for

<sup>11</sup> The same term is also used in **2 Pet 3:10, 12** to refer to the physical “elements” which will be destroyed when Christ comes again.

<sup>12</sup> This view is advocated by McKnight 1992.

<sup>13</sup> This view is advocated by Hurtado 1999. Although not advocated for here, the “Spiritual Impoverishment view” has merit as a warning to regularly assess ourselves and our lives to make sure we are living lives of true repentance and faith.

<sup>14</sup> The “Hypothetical view” means that apostasy “is something that could be, but for the elect will not be. Thus it is an unactualized theoretical possibility.” (DeWaay 1998: Position Three) This view appears to stem from the KJV which begins v. **6**, “*If they shall fall away.*” That translation is not correct. The actual words are “*and have fallen away,*” which implies that such persons might, and/or did, fall away. This view appears to be advocated by Guthrie 1983: 145-47 and Johnson 2006: 160-64. Bob De Waay comments, “If we have assurance of salvation and evidence in our lives of truly being children of God, surely it is true that we will not apostatize. But if we were to do so we can be sure that we would be facing eternal damnation with no hope of repentance. It is legitimate to introduce the possibility of something that will not happen to motivate one to avoid it. We regularly warn children about things they hopefully never do. For example we tell them that if they play on a busy freeway they will be killed. If this never happens, the warning is still valid. As long as the danger is something within the realm of things possible for humans in the world as we know it, the warning has motivational currency.” (DeWaay 1998: Position Three) One author discusses this view as follows, “First, it does not make sense to have a warning revolve around a straw man

			genuine, born again Christians to lose their salvation, but presents an impossible situation as a stark warning against apostasy
<b>Covenant Community view</b> <sup>15</sup>	<u>People involved</u> = Not individuals, but the Christian community as a whole	<u>End result</u> = The community as a whole will be rejected by God, but there may still be faithful individuals within the community who are not rejected	<u>Implication</u> = This view says that this passage does not say one way or another whether a genuine, born again Christian can lose his or her salvation
<b>Reformed view</b> <sup>16</sup>	<u>People involved</u> = Professing, but not genuine Christians	<u>End result</u> = They are not saved, but are lost	<u>Implication</u> = It is impossible for genuine, born again Christians to lose their salvation

Of these different views, the last one appears to be the most biblically correct position.<sup>17</sup> In order to see why, we need to discuss what true, saving faith is, what it entails, and the broad and immediate Scriptural contexts of **vv. 4-8**. That background should enable us to see why the Reformed view is the most biblically accurate view of **vv. 4-8**.

- **The elements of true, saving faith**

True, saving faith includes a number of elements. First is God’s election. Election is God’s choosing to save some people based on his own purposes and his desire to show grace to undeserving sinners (see **Acts 13:48; Rom 8:29-30; Eph 1:4-5, 11**). Those whom he has chosen to save are referred to as “the elect” (see **Mark 13:20**). Second is regeneration. Regeneration is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, often called being “born again” (**John 3:3-8**), where God transforms a person's heart, giving them new spiritual life and divine nature (see **Ezek 36:26; John 1:12-13; 2 Cor 5:17; Titus 3:5**). Regeneration is not human self-improvement but a sovereign act that makes salvation possible, allowing a dead soul to repent and believe. Third is conversion. Conversion is the response to regeneration; it involves the person repenting for his or her sins, believing the gospel, turning from his or her sin, turning in faith to, and believing in, Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior (see **Mark 1:14-15; Acts 3:19; 11:21; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Pet 1:5**). Fourth is justification. Justification is the legal, instantaneous act of God declaring a sinner righteous through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than by human works (see **Rom 3:24-26; 5:1; 2 Cor 5:21**). Fifth is adoption. Adoption is God’s grace in welcoming believers into his family as his children and co-heirs with Christ (see **Rom 8:15-17; Gal 4:4-7, Eph 1:5**). Sixth is sanctification. Sanctification is being set apart by God for his purpose and transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. It involves a three-fold process: (A) immediate positional holiness at salvation; (B) ongoing practical growth in grace; and (C) future perfection (glorification) (see **John 17:17-19; Acts 13:39; Rom 8:29-30; 1 Cor 1:2, 30; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 12:14**). Sanctification is a work of God through the Spirit; the second element of sanctification requires the active participation of the believer in pursuing obedience and righteousness.

Note that elements 1, 2, 4, 5, 6(A) and 6(C) are entirely works of God. Element 3 is entirely the work of people. Element 6(B) is a work of God in which believers cooperate. All six elements go together as part of a single complex of events. A person cannot have one of the elements without the others.

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argument. Secondly, the participle ‘if they shall fall away’ (*parapesontas*) is not really conditional. It is joined to the preceding description by ‘and.’ Grammatically, it is parallel to the four aorist participles of verses four and five and is just as ‘real’ as they are. Third, the urgent tone here makes it unlikely that the writer dealt only in hypothetical but unrealizable situations. The repetition of a similar warning in Hebrews 10:26-31 seems to oppose any attempt to interpret this passage as hypothetical.” (Taylor 2020: The Offence of “Falling Away”) Art Hurtado similarly says that it is not likely the term for “*have fallen away*” in **v. 6** is “a conditional participle expressing a hypothetical situation that could never obtain in reality” (Hurtado 1999: And Have Fallen Away). Nevertheless, this view does have merit as a warning to regularly assess ourselves and our lives to make sure we are living lives of true repentance and faith.

<sup>15</sup> This view is advocated by Verbrugge 1980.

<sup>16</sup> This view is advocated by Grudem 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Although the people specifically referred to in **vv.4-8** are professing but not genuine, born again Christians, this passage should, nevertheless, serve as a stark warning passage to genuine, born again Christians to stay on the proper path of faithfulness and to “*press on to maturity*” (**6:1**).

- **The nature of true, saving faith: 1—Perseverance**

**Heb 6:4-8** (like all passages) cannot be read in isolation but must be read in light of the immediate and broader context of Scripture. With respect to the broad context of Scripture, one of the most well-attested doctrines concerning the nature of true, saving faith is the certainty of God’s perseverance of the saints, i.e., God is actively working to ensure that genuine, born again believers ultimately will persevere in their faith and will not be lost.

Here is a small sample of such passages:

- **John 6:39, 44**—<sup>39</sup> *This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. . . .* <sup>4</sup> *No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.*
- **John 10:27-29**—<sup>27</sup> *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;* <sup>28</sup> *and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.* <sup>29</sup> *My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.*<sup>18</sup>
- **Acts 13:48**—*When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*
- **Rom 8:29-30**—<sup>29</sup> *For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;* <sup>30</sup> *and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*
- **1 Cor 1:7-8**—<sup>7</sup> *...you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,* <sup>8</sup> *who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- **Eph 2:4-7**—<sup>4</sup> *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,* <sup>5</sup> *even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),* <sup>6</sup> *and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,* <sup>7</sup> *so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*
- **Eph 1:13-14; 4:30**—<sup>13</sup> *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,* <sup>14</sup> *who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory. . . .* <sup>30</sup> *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*
- **Phil 1:6**—*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*
- **1 Thess 5:23-24**—<sup>23</sup> *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* <sup>24</sup> *Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.*
- **Heb 7:24-25**—<sup>24</sup> *but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.* <sup>25</sup> *Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*
- **Heb 10:14**—*For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*
- **Heb 13:20-21**—<sup>20</sup> *Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord,* <sup>21</sup> *equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*
- **1 Pet 1:3-5**—<sup>3</sup> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* <sup>4</sup> *to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,* <sup>5</sup> *who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*
- **1 John 5:18-20**—<sup>18</sup> *We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.* <sup>19</sup> *We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.* <sup>20</sup> *And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.*

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Finney comments on this passage by saying, “This implies, that while they might or are able to apostatize and be lost, yet, as a matter of fact, they never will. What could be made out of all he says of himself as a shepherd in this passage, if, after all, he loses some of his sheep?” (Finney 1878: 570-71)

On the other hand, there are also a number of texts that appear to be conditional. Those texts include the following:

- **Mark 13:13**—*You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.*
- **John 8:31**—*So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.”*
- **Rom 11:22**—*Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.*
- **1 Cor 9:26-27**—<sup>26</sup> *Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;* <sup>27</sup> *but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.*
- **1 Cor 10:12**—*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.*
- **1 Cor 15:1-2**—<sup>1</sup> *Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,* <sup>2</sup> *by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.*
- **Col 1:21-23**—<sup>21</sup> *And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,* <sup>22</sup> *yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—* <sup>23</sup> *if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard...*
- **Heb 3:6**—*...Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.*
- **Heb 3:14**—*For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.*
- **Heb 10:36**—*For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.*

These so-called “conditional” passages are not, in fact, contrary to the “certainty” passages. The reason is that, while the “conditional” passages stress that true believers need to endure, continue, and hold fast to faithful obedience in order to be sure of their salvation, the point is that those who are *not* true, born again believers will *not* so endure, continue, and hold fast. Or, to put it another way, true salvation is both conditional and certain: it is conditional in that a person must persevere to the end to be saved; it is certain in that, by God’s sovereign grace and working in the person’s life, he will ensure that the person will persevere to the end to be saved. Thus, in Hebrews, genuine, born again believers are described in terms that imply their permanent status. They are described as “those who will inherit salvation” (1:14), God’s sons (2:10; 12:5), Christ’s brethren (2:12, 17), children “whom God has given Me” (2:13), “seed of Abraham” (2:16),<sup>19</sup> “holy brethren” (3:1), Christ’s house (3:6), “partakers of a heavenly calling” (3:11), “partakers of Christ” (3:14), those who have entered God’s rest (4:3, 9), “people of God” (4:9; 8:10), those who have “eternal salvation” (5:9), “heirs of the promise” (6:17), those whose hope is “both sure and steadfast” (6:18-19), those who have “obtained eternal redemption” (9:12), those who will “receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (9:15), those who are sanctified and “perfected for all time” (10:10, 14), and those “who are enrolled in heaven” (12:23). In that regard, God in Christ is described as sovereign over all (1:2-3) and active in fulfilling his will (2:4). He is “bringing many sons to glory” (2:10), is rendering the devil powerless (2:14), is freeing those who were subject of slavery, i.e., the true “seed of Abraham” (2:15-16), is a “faithful high priest” who makes propitiation for the sins of his people (2:17), is the “guarantee” of a “better covenant” (7:22), is able “to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25), by is one sacrifice “has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (10:14), is “the author and perfecter of faith” (12:2), and is the shepherd of his sheep, who will “equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ” (13:20-21). In other words, it is Christ who is at work in his saints to cause his saints to persevere in their faith.

In short, the *condition* or *means* of our salvation is our faith, and true, saving faith perseveres and is *manifested by how we live*. Charles Finney explains that “if the end is certain, so are the means; and if one is revealed as certain, so is the other; and that therefore it is absurd, and implies unbelief, to fear that we shall neglect the means, or that either the end or means will fail” (Finney 1878: 602). The certainty of our salvation is like the “certainty that a farmer would raise a crop upon condition of his diligent, and timely, and persevering use of the appropriate means, would encourage him to neglect those means. If the farmer had a knowledge of the certainty

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<sup>19</sup> Although the word is translated as “descendant,” the actual word is “seed.”

with its conditions, it would be no temptation to neglect the means; but, on the other hand, this knowledge would operate as a powerful incentive to the required us of them. So neither can the knowledge of the certainty of the salvation of the saints, with the condition of it, be to them a temptation to live in sin; but, on the contrary, this knowledge must act as a powerful incentive to the exercise of confidence in God, and perseverance in holiness to the end.” (Finney 1878: 551-52) The situation is akin to Paul’s shipwreck in **Acts 27**. An angel told Paul that the ship he was on would be wrecked, but there would be no loss of life (**Acts 27:22-25**). However, some of the sailors were trying to escape from the ship. Paul then said, “*Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved*” (**Acts 27:31**). In other words, the angel had promised that there would be no loss of life, but that promise came with a condition, namely, that no one leave the ship. When the condition was met, “*they all were brought safely to land*” (**Acts 27:44**).

Similarly, we actively live our lives. Consequently, the Bible is full of warning passages to help keep us on the “straight and narrow” path (**Matt 7:13-14**). That is why Hebrews repeatedly exhorts the saints to “*pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away*” (**2:1**), to “*be diligent to enter that rest*” (**3:11**), to “*hold fast our confession*” (**4:14**), to “*draw near with confidence to the throne of grace*” (**4:16**) and to “*press on to maturity*” (**6:1**). Indeed, **6:4-8** constitutes a very pointed warning passage for true saints to *not* “*become dull of hearing*” (**5:11**) and to demonstrate that they are *not* among those who have “*fallen away*” and are “*impossible to renew*” (**6:6**). By meeting the condition of persevering faith, which is manifested by living faithful lives, the end (our salvation) is certain.<sup>20</sup> But we must also remember that, as we saw above, we are not alone. God-in-Christ is active in our lives to cause us to persevere. “No saint then keeps himself, except in so far as he is kept by the grace, and Spirit, and power of God. . . . There is not a ground of probability, that any one of them will ever be saved, unless the doctrine in question [i.e., of the perseverance of the saints] be true, that is, unless the promised grace and faithfulness of God in Christ Jesus goes before, and from step to step secures their perseverance.” (Finney 1878: 555, 587) There is a dynamic interaction between God and true Christians which causes us not only to come to faith in Christ in the first place but also to persevere in that faith. As **Phil 2:12-13** says, “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*”

- **The nature of true, saving faith: 2—Three Axes of Faith**

Many people use phrases such as “eternal security” and “once saved, always saved” without understanding what those phrases really mean and imply. Those phrases, although true, are not “magical” phrases. The issue is whether genuine, born again believers—i.e., those who possess the six elements of true, saving faith (discussed above)—can lose their salvation. The answer is that they cannot. The misunderstanding and misuse of these phrases stem from the fact that some people say or imply that, if a person goes forward at an evangelistic meeting and makes a profession of faith in Christ, then he or she is said to be saved forever, regardless of what he or she does or believes thereafter. That is not correct. The reason that is not correct is that it misunderstands the gospel; it misunderstands the nature of true, saving faith itself. That is the central issue.

Because the gospel—and people’s salvation—is based on what Christ has done, salvation cannot be “earned” by doing “good deeds.” Rather, salvation is *given* by God to people as a *gift* of his *grace*; it is *received* by people solely by *faith* in Christ. As **Eph 2:8-9** says, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*” To be saved means to repent of our sins, accept what Christ has done for us, and turn to Christ as the Lord of our life (**Matt 11:28; Mark 1:14-15; John 1:12; 3:16; 17:3; Acts 26:20; 1 John 1:8-9**). In Christ, we are as free from the guilt and penalty of sin as if we had paid the full price for our sin ourselves (**Rom 6:3-7; Gal 2:20**). In fact, when we turn to Christ in faith, he not only takes our sin onto himself and pays the price for our sin that we should have paid, but he also imputes to us his righteousness so that we can stand before God (**Isa 53:5-6, 10-11; Rom 10:4; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 2:17-18; 1 Pet 2:4; 3:18**).

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<sup>20</sup> Here again we see how the “certainty” and the “conditional” passages interact. Perseverance is “certain” from God’s point of view but is “conditional” from mankind’s point of view. Finney explains, “With God, there is not, and never was any contingency, in the sense of uncertainty, with regards to the final destiny of any being. But with men almost all things are contingent. God knows with absolute certainty whether a man will be converted, and whether he will persevere. A man may know that he is converted, and may believe that by the power of God he shall persevere. . . . But this knowledge of this fact is not at all inconsistent with his idea of his continuance in a state of trial till the day of his death, inasmuch as his perseverance depends upon the exercise of his own voluntary agency; and also, because his perseverance is the condition of his final salvation.” (Finney 1878: 470)

True, saving faith is not simply saying certain “magic words” such as “I accept Jesus into my heart as my personal savior.” Although we are saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone (**Eph 2:8-9**), the faith that saves is not alone. Here is what that means: From the *human perspective*, there are, one might say, three “axes” of true, saving faith. They are all interrelated; all must be present for a person to have true, saving faith. One can think of them like this: the X axis is the cognitive, doctrinal, belief component of Christian faith (see, e.g., **Acts 2:22-24, 32-36; Rom 1:1-4; 10:9; 1 Cor 15:1-8**)—we can summarize this axis with the statement, “Jesus is Lord over all, and he proved it by his resurrection from the dead”; the Y axis is the behavioral component (see, e.g., **Matt 28:18-20; John 14:23-24; Eph 2:8-10; Jas 2:14-20**)—we can summarize this axis with the statement, “How we live proves what we believe”; the Z axis is the affective, devotional component of Christian faith (see, e.g., **John 15:4-15; 17:3; 21:15-17**)—we can summarize this axis by saying, “Love and devotion to Christ are central to true, saving faith.” While we cannot work our way to heaven and are saved only by God’s grace through faith in Christ (**John 3:16-18; 6:28-29; Rom 2:16-17; 10:8-13; Gal 3:1-14; Eph 2:8-9**), we are saved for a *purpose*: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (**Eph 2:10**) In short, the works we do after we receive Christ by faith “are an index of the spiritual condition of a person’s heart. . . . The judgment is not a balancing of good works over bad works. Rather, works are seen as unmistakable evidence of the loyalty of the heart; they express belief or unbelief, faithfulness or unfaithfulness. The judgment will reveal whether or not people’s loyalties have been with God and the Lamb or with God’s enemies.” (Ngundu 2006: 1576; see, e.g., **Matt 24:45-51; 25:31-46; John 3:19-21; 1 Tim 6:18-19**).

To only have one or two of the three axes means that the person does not have true, saving faith, is not saved, and, hence, is not a genuine, born again believer. For example, James says, “*The demons also believe, and shudder*” (**Jas 2:19**). In other words, the demons believe and could say the words that “Jesus is the Son of God,” but they do not have the behavioral or devotional axes of faith; hence, their faith is not true, saving faith. Similarly, Jesus said, “*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word*” (**John 14:23**). In other words, he was linking the devotional and the behavioral axes. A person can say that he or she loves Jesus, but if he or she does not do what Jesus says, he or she really does not love Jesus and, therefore, does not have true, saving faith (see also **Matt 7:21-23; 25:31-46; Acts 8:13, 18-23; 1 Cor 13:1-3; 1 John 4:20** for similar linkages of the axes of faith and examples of nonsaving faith).<sup>21</sup>

When we believe the gospel and turn to Christ as our Lord with true, saving faith, all aspects of our lives are affected: (1) All those who are united to Christ by faith have assurance of their salvation. If salvation depended even in part on our own efforts, we could never have the assurance that we had “done enough” to merit salvation. However, because God-in-Christ did for us what we could not do, Christians can and do have assurance that they are and forever will remain saved (**John 3:36; 6:37, 47; 11:25; 1 John 5:11-12**). (2) Being saved and united with Christ changes the legal status of Christians. “The cross liberates from the power of sin, propitiates God’s wrath, washes away the guilt and stain of sin, reconciles believers to God, and achieves cosmic victory over deadly spiritual foes” (Demarest 1997: 196). (3) Being saved and united with Christ changes Christians on the inside. When one comes to Christ, he or she receives a new heart (**Ezek 36:26; 2 Cor 3:3**), the mind of Christ (**1 Cor 2:16**), and the Spirit from Christ (**Ezek 36:26; John 14:17**). (4) Being saved and united with Christ gives Christians an intimate, personal relationship with God through Christ. Christians can “*draw near with confidence to the throne of grace*” (**Heb 4:16**; see also **Heb 7:19**) because Christ is “in” believers (e.g., **Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17; Col 1:27; 1 John 3:24**) and believers are “in Christ” (e.g., **Rom 8:1; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 1:21; 5:17; 1 Pet 5:14**). (5) Being saved and united with Christ creates a new humanity (**John 3:3; Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15**); believers are adopted into God’s family as his children (**John 1:12; Rom 8:14-17, 23; 9:4; Gal 3:26; 4:5-7; Eph 1:5; 2:19; 1 John 3:1**) and become deeply related to each other as brothers and sisters (e.g., **Matt 12:50; Acts 1:16; Rom 14:10; 1 Tim 5:1-2**).

- **The nature of true, saving faith: 3—“Transitory” or False Faith**

As we have said, we are saved only by God’s grace through faith; that transformation from being an unsaved person to a saved person occurs in a moment of time. We also have seen that true, saving faith is not simply intellectual assent to certain propositions, but consists of three axes that affect all of a person’s life, and that, to be true, saving faith, such faith will persevere to the end of one’s life. One other aspect of faith is indicated in Jesus’ parable of the sower of the seeds and the soils (**Matt 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15**). The same seeds of the gospel were sown but were received in different ways by different people. The first fell by the road; Jesus explained, “*When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and*

<sup>21</sup> See the sermon series “The 3 Axes of Faith” by Jonathan Menn at <https://www.eclia.net/sermons.html#topical>.

*snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.” (Matt 13:19). The second fell in rocky places; Jesus said, “The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.” (Matt 13:20-21) In Luke’s account, Jesus adds that “they believe for awhile” but then fall away (Luke 8:13). The third fell among thorns; Jesus said, “And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Matt 13:22). Only one fell on “good soil”; Jesus said, “And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty” (Matt 13:23).*

In light of this parable, D. A. Carson highlights an aspect of faith that is often overlooked. Carson observes that “like other New Testament books the Epistle to the Hebrews allows a kind of transitory faith, a form of conversion which, like the seed sown on rocky soil, has all the signs of life, but which does not persevere. The Spirit brings initial enlightenment; the person enjoys the word of God (like the one . . . who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy), and tastes something of the power of the coming age: perhaps old habits fall away, and a new love for holiness and for God and his reign emerge. But according to the description of genuine Christianity already provided by the book, none of this is enough: there must also be perseverance.” (Carson 2000: 267) Thus, the parable indicates that people can hear and receive the gospel, experience joy in the gospel, and give every indication of being converted to Christ. However, they lack perseverance and, consequently, at some point they fall away from the faith they had embraced. It is not that they had true, saving faith and then lost it, but—despite appearances—they never had been truly converted at all.

There are other biblical examples of this kind of temporary, nonsaving faith or belief. In **Acts 8**, Simon the magician heard Philip’s preaching and observed miracles taking place. As a result, he believed, was baptized, and “continued on with Philip” (**Acts 8:13**). However, his “belief” evidently was not true, saving faith, since later he offered money to try to obtain the authority to bestow the Holy Spirit (**Acts 8:17-19**). Peter then said to him, “*May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!* <sup>21</sup> *You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.* <sup>22</sup> *Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.* <sup>23</sup> *For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity.*” (**Acts 8:20-23**) Jesus observed other cases of such temporary, false faith or belief. **John 2:23-25** says, “<sup>23</sup> *Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.* <sup>24</sup> *But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men,* <sup>25</sup> *and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.*” In **John 6**, Jesus said that “*unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves*” (**John 6:53**). Therefore, “*many of His disciples, when they heard this said, ‘This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?’*” (**John 6:60**), and “*As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore*” (**John 6:66**). Similarly, **1 John 2:18-19** points out that apostates, who had every appearance of being genuine, born again believers, and may even have been teachers within the church, nevertheless, were *not* genuine, born again believers—not that they had once been genuine believers and had lost their salvation, but that they never had been genuine, born again believers at all. Those verses state, “<sup>18</sup> *Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.* <sup>19</sup> *They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.*”

This is one reason why, throughout the NT, there are multiple warning passages. For example, in Hebrews there are warnings and admonitions against “drifting away” (**2:1**), “neglecting salvation” (**2:3**), “falling away” because of “an evil, unbelieving heart” (**3:12**), being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (**3:13**), disobedience (**3:18; 4:6, 11**), “coming short” of entering his rest (**4:1; 12:15**), “growing weary and losing heart” (**12:3**), having a “root of bitterness” (**12:15**), “refusing and turning away from Christ (**12:25**). However, these warnings and admonitions do not assert that those who fall away, are hardened, disobedient, come short, grow weary and lose heart, have a root of bitterness, or refuse and turn away from Christ were ever genuine, born again believers. In fact, some of these examples are based on disobedient Israelites (**3:16-19; 12:25**) and Esau (**12:16-17**), who clearly were *not* genuine, born again believers.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, genuine, born again Christians should consider and heed the warning passages as they “pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away” (**Heb 2:1**) and “hold fast our confession” (**Heb 4:14**).

• Analysis of Heb 6:4-8

This detailed contextual discussion has been necessary to properly understand **Heb 6:4-8**. **Verses 4-6** contain six statements concerning the people under discussion: (1) They “*have once been enlightened*” (v. 4); (2) They “*have tasted of the heavenly gift*” (v. 4); (3) They “*have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit*” (v. 4); (4) They “*have tasted of the good word of God*” (v. 5); (5) They “*have tasted . . . of the powers of the age to come*” (v. 5); but despite all of this (6) They “*have fallen away, [from which] it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put him to open shame*” (v. 6).

One reason this passage has been controversial is that these descriptions of the persons under consideration *may* be applied, and sometimes are applied in the Bible, to genuine, born again Christians. Significantly, however, the people discussed in **Heb 6:4-6** are not said to possess the six elements of true, saving faith, discussed above. In fact, there is an important shift from the “personal” (first and second person) language in what came immediately before in **5:11—6:3** (“you,” “us,” “we”) and what immediately follows in **6:9-12** (“we,” “you,” “your”) to the “impersonal” (third person) in **vv. 4-8** (“those,” “them,” “they,” “it”). A. W. Pink points out, “It is of first importance to note that the apostle does not say, ‘*us* who were once enlightened’, nor even ‘*you*’, instead, he says ‘*those*’. In sharp contrast from them, he says to the Hebrews, ‘Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you’.” (Pink n.d.: ch. 24) Although, as noted above, these people had received five great benefits, Pink observes, “Yet were they not true Christians. This is evident from what is *not* said. Observe, they were not spoken of as God’s elect, as those for whom Christ died, as those who were born of the Spirit. They are not said to be justified, forgiven, accepted in the Beloved. Nor is anything said of their faith, love, or obedience. Yet these are the very things which distinguish a real child of God.” (Pink n.d.: ch. 24)

Further, each of the descriptions in **vv. 4-5**, either individually or as a whole, do not necessarily apply to genuine, born again Christians (see Grudem 2000: 139-48). For example, although the word for “enlightened” sometimes is applied in the context of salvation (e.g., **2 Cor 4:6**; **Eph 1:18**; **5:8**), other cases speak of persons being exposed to the light but not coming to true, saving faith (**John 1:9-11**; **3:19**; **9:39-41**; see also **Matt 4:16-17**; **2 Cor 4:4**; **2 Pet 2:19-21**). In the parallel passage of **Heb 10:26**, such people are said to have “*receiv[ed] the knowledge of the truth*” (see also **2 Pet 2:20-21**). In the Septuagint the term is used for Jehoiada the priest (**2 Kgs 12:2** [**2 Kgs 12:3**, LXX]) and unfolding God’s words to give understanding to the simple (**Ps 119:130** [**118:130**, LXX]). A. W. Pink states, “Thus, “enlightened” here means to be instructed in the doctrine of the gospel, so as to have a clear apprehension of it. . . . [But such ‘enlightenment’] falls far short of that spiritual enlightenment which *transforms* (2 Cor. 3:18).” (Pink n.d.: ch. 24). The “*heavenly gift*” of v. 4 has been variously thought of as Christ, the Holy Spirit, or the blessing associated with salvation. It is not necessary to resolve that issue to observe that the operative word here is that they “*have tasted*.” The same is true of their having “tasted” of “*the good word of God*” and “*of the powers of the age to come*” in v. 5. Tasting sometimes means to ingest fully (e.g., **Heb 2:9**, Jesus came to “*taste death for everyone*”). In other cases, it means to take a small amount of something to test whether it is suitable (**Matt 27:34**; **John 2:9**). In v. 5, to “*have tasted of the good word of God*” seems most compatible with having been exposed to it but to have not fully taken it in. Likewise, they “*have tasted . . . of the powers of the age to come*.” The “*powers of the age to come*” probably are those powers referred to in **Heb 2:4**. Although having “tasted” of those powers possibly could refer to people who have received eternal life, it is more likely that the phrase describes “people who had been in contact with the supernatural power of the gospel (cf. Matt 11:20; Mark 9:1; Luke 17:21), or some who had accomplished miracles (*dynameis*) in Christ’s name without bearing true allegiance to him (Matt 7:22,23)” (Nicole 1975: 361). The situation is similar with those who “*have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit*” (v. 4). The Greek term for “partakers” is *metochoi*. Sometimes it indicates a very close connection, such as “partaking” of milk (**Heb 5:13**) or Christ’s partaking of human nature in the incarnation (**Heb 2:14**). On the other hand, it may refer to mere external participation, without being truly converted (**1 Cor 10:21** [“*you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons*”]; **Heb 12:8** [“*if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons*”]).<sup>23</sup> In one way or another, the five descriptions indicate that the people under discussion did have personal experience with Christian teaching and the Holy Spirit and his gifts. However, since each of these descriptions may be applied to regenerate and unregenerate people, the determination of who is being

<sup>23</sup> **Heb 6:4** thus distinguishes, at least in this context, being a “partaker of the Holy Spirit” from being truly born again. This distinction is indicated by **Heb 3:14**, which says, “*For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.*” In other words, **Heb 3:14** is saying that one can be a “partaker of Christ” *only if* we persevere to the end; however **Heb 6:4** says that a person can be a “partaker of the Holy Spirit” even if he or she does *not* persevere to the end, but falls away.

talked about has to be based on the immediate and broader context of Scripture. As we have discussed in detail above, since persons who have true, saving faith (i.e., are genuine, born again believers) will persevere in their faith and not apostatize, the persons being described in **vv. 4-5** have to have been people who were exposed to the truth, probably attended church, and may even have been teachers (as in **1 Pet 2:19**), but who never truly were converted to Christ.

In **v. 6**, the Greek word for “*have fallen away*” is *parapesontas*. That term also reveals that those who “*have fallen away*” clearly were not genuine, born again Christians. This is the only place this verb is used in the NT. However, it is found in the Septuagint. There, each time it is used, it signifies a deliberate act of abandonment of God (**Ezek 15:8; 18:24; 20:27; 22:4**). The term appears to be equivalent to *apostenai*, used in **Heb 3:12**, which speaks of “*an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.*” The people being described in **6:4-8** appear to be equivalent to those being described in the parallel passage of **10:26-29**, “*For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,<sup>26</sup> but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.<sup>27</sup> Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.<sup>28</sup> How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?*” This is not a matter of committing some sin, even a gross sin such as adultery or murder. As DeWaay points out, “We need to understand that this is not about backsliding. If it were, many, if not most of the readers of Hebrews, would lose hope. What is being described is a willful renunciation of the faith, not a Christian having through weakness, carelessness, or temporary indifference fallen into serious sin.” (DeWaay 1998: Fallen Away) What is being discussed here is a decisive and deliberate rejection and abandonment of God. That is not something which a person who possesses true, saving faith can do; a person may claim to be “born again,” and may give many indications that he or she is, but to deliberately reject and abandon God would reveal that such a person never was truly saved at all.

The word “impossible” (**v. 6**) may have a number of connotations, depending on the context. Some things are “impossible” according to God’s nature, e.g., “*it is impossible for God to lie*” (**Heb 6:18**). On the other hand, other things may be possible within God’s nature yet are rendered impossible by the means or order of things that God has established, e.g., it is impossible to come to faith without hearing the Word of Christ (**Rom 10:13-17**), it is impossible to be saved without repentance (**Luke 13:3**), and it is impossible to please God without faith (**Heb 11:6**). The “impossibility” in **v. 6** is similar to these latter uses of the word. Because the people being discussed here had repudiated Christ and rejected the gospel, the question is: For whom is it impossible to “*renew them again to repentance*”?<sup>24</sup> Renewal to repentance is not contrary to the character of God (see **Matt 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 8:27**). Consequently, William Mounce states that “we must take the position that it is impossible *for us as human beings* to draw such people back to the faith” (Mounce 2006: 354). Although the reason why it is “impossible” is not given, A. W. Pink explains, it was impossible “for the *servants* of God to ‘renew them again unto repentance’, for the all-sufficient reason that they had no other message to proclaim to them. They had no other Gospel in reserve, no further motives to present. Christ crucified had been set before them. Him they now denounced as an Imposter. . . . Their public renunciation of Christ rendered their case hopeless so far as God’s servants were concerned. ‘Let them alone’ (Matthew 15:14) was now their orders: . . . Whether or not it was possible for God, consistently with His holiness, to shame them, our passage does not decide.” (Pink n.d.: ch. 24)

This is reinforced by the fact that these people “*again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame*” (**v. 6**). The word for “crucify” is a present, active participle, i.e., “*they are crucifying again.*” The same is true for the word “put”; it is a present, active participle, i.e., “*putting him to open shame.*” Piper puts it this way, “It is one thing for a stranger of the faith to resist Christ. But it is another thing for a person who has been in the church and has been enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift and become a partaker of the Holy Spirit and tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come — it’s another thing for that person to say after

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<sup>24</sup> Because **v. 6** talks about renewing them *again* to repentance, that suggests that the subjects of this passage had previously, at least in some sense, “repented.” The Bible distinguishes true versus false repentance. False repentance is a counterfeit, emotional, or self-serving remorse that focuses on escaping consequences of one’s sin rather than true remorse for wrongdoing or a change of heart and abhorring and putting away the sin itself. In false repentance, the individual is sorry that he or she got caught, or is sorry for the punishment, but not for the act itself. True repentance is a change of mind resulting in a change of life, i.e., a turning away from sin and a turning to God. Thus, **2 Cor 7:10** says, “*For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.*” **Matt 3:8** exhorts people, “*Therefore bear fruit in keeping with [true] repentance.*” The people discussed in **Heb 6:6** evidently had had a false repentance, which, because of their decisive and deliberate rejection and abandonment of God, rendered them impossible to renew to true repentance (see Grudem 2000: 148-50).

all those blessings and all those experiences, ‘I think what the world offers is better than Christ.’ That is a re-crucifying of Jesus and a putting him to public shame worse than any outsider could, who never tasted the truth.” (Piper 1996: Why it is Called Re-crucifixion) No one in such a state of active hatred and renunciation of Christ can possibly be saved, since they are in an active state of unbelief, unrepentance, and are shaming Christ. In such a state they are not seeking repentance but are repudiating the only basis upon which repentance could be extended to them. As Grudem says, it is impossible to restore such people to true repentance probably because their hearts are “hardened and their consciences calloused” (Grudem 2000: 154). The situation is similar to that in 1 Timothy. In **1 Tim 1:5** the goal of Christian instruction (and true, saving faith) is “*love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*” **1 Tim 4:1-2** speaks of some people “falling away,” which results in their being “*seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.*” The Greek word for “fall away” in **1 Tim 4:1** is different than the word for “fall away” in **Heb 6:6**, but the effect is the same. Zodhiates points out that those who fall away in **1 Tim 4:1** “does not refer to those who had at one time been believers, but to those who refuse to believe, who stand aloof” (Zodhiates 1993, *aphistēme*, 301). Such persons do not have the “good conscience” of true, saving faith, but a “seared conscience,” thus making it impossible for them to repent and believe the gospel. This is further indicated in **Heb 9:14** and **10:22**, both of which indicate that those who have true, saving faith have had their evil consciences cleansed by Christ and now have clean consciences.

Although Christ prayed for those who were actively crucifying him, “*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*” (**Luke 23:34**), absent true repentance and faith, it was impossible for the Father to forgive them, just as it is impossible to renew those who have fallen away in **v. 6**. As Peter O’Brien notes, “By not restoring those who commit apostasy, God allows their firm decision to stand” (O’Brien 2010: 226). Further, those who crucified Jesus acted in ignorance (**1 Cor 2:8**); those who are the subject of **vv. 4-8** were not ignorant but had been the recipients of significant understanding of, and involvement with, the gospel and the church. The situation is akin to the person in **Heb 10:29**, who has “*trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified.*” The people in **vv. 4-8** are similar to the “*immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.*” (**Heb 12:16-17**) They are like Judas Iscariot, who had been with Jesus for three years and had all the blessings mentioned in **vv. 4-5**, yet he betrayed Jesus. After doing that, “*he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders . . . and he went away and hanged himself*” (**Matt 27:3, 5**), but he never truly repented and turned to the Lord.

**Verses 7-8** elaborate on what has just been said and demonstrate their connection with the preceding verses by the word “For.” These two verses describe not “a field that had life and vegetation and then lost it. The picture is of two different kinds of fields — one is fruitful and blessed; the other is barren and cursed. I think the point is this: if we have sat in church with the light and the Spirit and the word and the work of God coming to us and blessing us and even shaping us in some degree, but then turn our back on it, we are like a field without vegetation and will come into judgment. The rain we have drunk (light, Spirit, word, powers) produced no life in the field.” (Piper 1996: 1. Consider verse 7-8) The contrast is between two different harvests from the land. William Lane points out, “In the parable [**vv. 7-8**] all interest is concentrated on the harvest, rather than on preliminary stages of growth. What is decisive is what is produced.” (Lane 1991: 143) Again, this points to the issues of fruitfulness and perseverance. This entire passage is similar to Jesus’ parable of the sower and the seeds (**Matt 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15**). The same seeds of the gospel were sown but were received in different ways by different people. Only one fell on “*good soil*”; it alone bore fruit and persevered. The others were “worthless” to the sower, just as **v. 8** says of those people being discussed in **vv. 4-6**.

When we looked at the most immediate context prior to our passage, **5:11—6:3**, we saw that the term *stoicheion* (“*elementary principles*”) was used in **5:12**. As we discussed above, all of the other uses of *stoicheion* in the NT indicate that holding on to these elementary teachings or principles does not indicate that a person is saved or will become saved, even though such teachings are also found in, and are foundational to, Christianity. That may be why the warning passage of **vv. 4-8** follows **5:11—6:3**: those who only hold to the “elementary principles” may appear to be Christians but are not. On the other hand, the most immediate context after our passage begins at **6:9**. That verse distinguishes “you” from the people being discussed in **vv. 4-8**. **6:9** says, “*But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.*” **Verses 10-20** then go on to speak of the power of God to preserve us in our faith. **10:39** adds, “*But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*” Thus, the writer of Hebrews indicates that genuine, born again believers will not, in fact, fall away and “*again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame*” (i.e., be hardened, disobedient, come short, grow weary and lose heart, have a root of bitterness, or refuse and turn away from Christ) and thus be “*impossible to renew*

them again to repentance” (v. 6).<sup>25</sup> In sum, the people described in **Heb 6:4-8** had many spiritual blessings but never had been truly saved in the first place.

5. We take hold of the hope set before us by persevering faithfulness (6:9-18).

<sup>9</sup> *But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.* <sup>10</sup> *For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.* <sup>11</sup> *And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,* <sup>12</sup> *so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

<sup>13</sup> *For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,* <sup>14</sup> *saying, “I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you.”* <sup>15</sup> *And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.* <sup>16</sup> *For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.* <sup>17</sup> *In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,* <sup>18</sup> *so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.*

These verses contrast the writer’s audience with the people he had been discussing in **vv. 4-8**. These verses also highlight the difference between true, saving faith and temporary, nonsaving faith. Thus, **v. 9** calls the subjects now being addressed “beloved,” and says “*we are convinced of better things concerning you.*” The statements in **v. 9** concerning “*things that accompany salvation,*” **v. 10** concerning “*your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints,*” **v. 11** concerning showing “*diligence,*” and **v. 12** concerning not being “*sluggish,*” and being “*imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*” all point to the active and comprehensive nature of true, saving faith, as discussed earlier concerning the “three axes” of faith. In particular, **v. 10** shows that ministry and service to others (“*ministering to the saints*”) flows out of devotion to God (“*the love which you have shown toward His name*”). This shows that true, saving faith manifests itself in fulfilling what Jesus said were the two great commandments, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*” and “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (**Matt 22:37-39**). It is love which is the true and great demonstration of the reality of salvation, not knowledge (enlightenment), miraculous powers (the powers of the age to come), or spiritual experience (tasting the heavenly gift, the good word of God, and being a partaker of the Holy Spirit). The love of God and others (**v. 10**) constitutes the “*better things concerning you . . . that accompany salvation*” (**v. 9**). That implies that the people in **vv. 4-5** do not possess salvation. The statements in **v. 11** concerning realizing the full assurance of hope “*until the end*” and **vv. 12** and **15** concerning “*patience*” highlight that perseverance is part of true, saving faith.

The exhortation in **v. 12** to “*not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*” goes back to the admonition and exhortation in **5:11—6:3**. The word “*sluggish*” is the same Greek word translated “*dull*” in **5:11**. The exhortation to be “*imitators*” of those who “*through faith and patience inherit the promises*” is a prime way in which the readers of Hebrews can “*press on to maturity*” (**6:1**). Being imitators of Godly examples is frequently recommended in the NT (**John 13:15; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14**). Being imitators has great practical value and, again, shows the active nature of true, saving faith.

**Verses 13-18** are emphasizing the seriousness of God’s promises, his unchangeable purpose, and, therefore, the certainty of his word. This should act as a great encouragement and motivator for us to remain faithful and not fall back, because, by remaining faithful, we will “*realize the full assurance of hope until the end*” (**v. 11**), “*inherit the promises*” (**v. 12**), and will “*take hold of the hope set before us*” (**v. 18**). **Verse 14** quotes **Gen 22:17**. The reference to oaths in **v. 16** reflects people’s natural need to bolster their reliability and trustworthiness by swearing an oath. Oaths are regularly used in the most solemn areas of life, such as testifying in court, entering into marriage, or assuming an official position. God does not need to swear an oath, since “*it is impossible for God*

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<sup>25</sup> All of these contextual matters eliminate the Arminian view as a viable possibility. One other problem with that view is that, in light of **6:6**, it would entail the implication “once lost, always lost.” That is contrary to basic Arminian doctrine. Similarly, the Spiritual Impoverishment view fails to account for the imagery of **vv. 7-8**, which speaks of being cursed and burned, as opposed to simply losing out on certain benefits. It also does not appear to take seriously the “impossibility” of being renewed to repentance (**v. 6**), which, again, goes well beyond simply losing out on certain spiritual benefits. The Hypothetical view appears to be incongruous with tone of the warning in **vv. 6** and **8**, which uses language that seems much stronger than would typically be used for something that could never happen. Finally, the Covenant Community view appears to be inconsistent with the “personal” language of **Hebrews 6** and the emphasis on individuals in such places as **Hebrews 11**.

to lie” (v. 18). Nevertheless, he swore an oath to Abraham to guarantee the certainty of the covenant he made with Abraham. The statement in v. 13 that “since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself” and the reference in v. 17 to God’s interposing with an oath go back to **Gen 22:16-18**, where God said to Abraham “By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. <sup>18</sup> In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” Those promises apply to us (see **Gal 3:7, 13-14, 16, 29**). The “two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie” (v. 18)—the unchangeableness of his purpose (i.e., his promise) and his oath—guarantee that, if we persevere in faith, we will inherit all that God has promised us, since we have “taken refuge” in Christ.

#### **D. Christ is the guarantor of our hope because he is high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (6:19—8:5)**

##### 1. We have hope because Christ is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (6:19-20).

*<sup>19</sup> This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

Although many commentators include these two verses as the conclusion of the last section, they actually are a transition and introduce the next section concerning Melchizedek. **Verse 19** speaks of the “hope” that had been referred to in v. 18; v. 20 speaks of Jesus who has entered the true holy of holies as our forerunner and who has become “a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” That theme will be expounded in **7:1—8:5**.

Our hope is not just a desire or wanting something to be true or to happen. It is more than that. Christian hope is a desire with the confident expectation of fulfillment. We can have that confident expectation of fulfillment because our hope is based on the unchangeableness of God’s purpose (i.e., his promise) and God’s oath. Consequently, v. 19 describes our hope as “an anchor of the soul.” An anchor remains firmly set on the bottom of the sea, regardless of how rough and stormy the sea itself is. The anchor of our hope should act to stabilize our entire life, regardless of our circumstances. That is why, particularly in difficult circumstances and changing times, it is so important to know and remember that God’s purpose is “unchangeable” (v. 17). Thus, our hope is absolutely “sure and steadfast.”

The last part of v. 19 and v. 20 do more. They describe our hope as “one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” This not only introduces Melchizedek but also ties our hope to Jesus Christ. **Heb 9:24** tells us that “Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” More than that, our great high priest “is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (**Heb 7:25**). Because Jesus is our “forerunner,” we are guaranteed to follow him into the presence of God behind the veil in the holy of holies. As a result, until that day “we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” (**Heb 10:19-23**) Consequently, our hope indeed is “sure and steadfast,” because it is not based on us, or our circumstances, but on Jesus Christ, who is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (**Heb 13:8**).

##### 2. The nature of Melchizedek and his priesthood (7:1-10).

*<sup>7</sup> For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, <sup>2</sup> to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. <sup>3</sup> Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.*

<sup>4</sup> Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. <sup>5</sup> And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. <sup>6</sup> But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. <sup>7</sup> But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. <sup>8</sup> In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. <sup>9</sup> And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, <sup>10</sup> for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Several scholars consider Melchizedek to be a "type" of Christ, as opposed to being a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ (see, e.g., Duncan 2013; Jackson 2025a; "Was Melchizedek" n.d.; "Jesus Is Better" 1993-1994; Hanson 1965: 66-68; Carson 2013: 162-72). However, for the following reasons, I think it is better to view Melchizedek as a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, rather than simply being a type of Christ. Melchizedek makes his one appearance, in **Genesis 14**, after Abram defeated four kings in battle. **Heb 7:1-3** describes him in extremely elevated terms, as the "king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually."

The writer of Hebrews does not call Melchizedek a "type" of Christ or Christ an "antitype" of Melchizedek, although he did use the Greek word *tupon* ("type") in **Heb 8:5**, where it is translated as "pattern," regarding the archetypal tabernacle. He also used the word *antitupa* ("antitypes") in **Heb 9:24**, where it is translated as "copy," regarding the holy place in the temple. He also called the gifts offered according to the Law by the priests "a copy and shadow of heavenly things" (**Heb 8:5**; *hupodeigma* for "copy" and *skia* for "shadow") and called the law itself "a shadow of the good things to come" (**Heb 10:1**, *skia* for "shadow"). In **Heb 9:23** he refers to "copies [*hupodeigmata*] of the things in the heavens" as opposed to "the heavenly things themselves." He used the Greek word *parabolē* (a figure, type, or similitude) in **Heb 9:9** for the tabernacle or temple as a "symbol" for the present time and in **Heb 11:19** for Isaac, whom Abraham received back as a "type" of the resurrection. Because the writer used this language on several occasions, his not doing so with respect to Melchizedek is significant and indicates that he did not view Melchizedek merely as a type, but as the true reality, which could only have been Jesus Christ himself in a pre-incarnate appearance.

Second, according to **Gen 14:18**, Melchizedek "brought out bread and wine." That clearly points to Christ who instituted the ceremony of the bread and wine (the Lord's Supper) at the "Last Supper" (**Matt 26:26-28**; **Mark 14:22-24**; **Luke 22:14-20**; **1 Cor 11:23-26**). The other descriptions of Melchizedek in **Heb 7:1-3** likewise correspond to Christ. For example, Melchizedek is the "king of Salem" (**Heb 7:2**). "Salem" means "peace." Jesus is the "Prince of Peace" (**Heb 9:6**), who gives "My peace . . . not as the world gives" (**John 14:27**). **Eph 2:14** adds, "He Himself is our peace." Salem often is considered to be Jerusalem (see **Ps 76:2**). Jesus was, in fact, "the king of the Jews" (e.g., **Matt 2:2**; **27:11, 29, 37**), whose capital was Jerusalem. Further, Jesus was the prophesied Messiah, one role of which was to be king—the final king of the world—and to rule from Zion (**Ps 110:1-2**; **Jer 23:5-6**). Melchizedek is also described as the "king of righteousness." Jesus is the ultimate righteous one (**Rom 3:25**; **10:4**; **Phil 3:9**; **1 John 2:1**); **Heb 1:9** specified of Jesus, "You have loved righteousness." Tesfaye Kassa notes that Melchizedek's name "means 'king of righteousness' and his title 'king of Salem' means 'king of peace' (7:2). Both of these titles were associated with the Messiah, and specifically with Jesus (Isa 9:6-7; 2 Tim 4:8)." (Kassa 2006: 1498) A. M. Stibbs adds, "Note that Scripture pictures him as one who is a king as well as a priest. The combination of these two offices was to be a distinguishing characteristic of the Messiah Cf. [Heb] 8:1 and Zc. 6:13." (Stibbs 1970: 1203) That also reinforces the identity of Melchizedek with Jesus.

**Heb 7:3** describes Melchizedek as being "without father, without mother." D. A. Carson observes, "While Jesus is the son of Mary, his ultimate ancestry is grounded in the God of eternity: without father, without mother" (Carson 2013: 170). Since **Heb 7:3** also describes Melchizedek as having "neither beginning of days nor end of life," he "can hardly be reckoned as less ancient than Christ" (Hanson 1965: 66). Having neither a beginning or an end of life means that Melchizedek is uncreated, immortal, and eternal. That rules out any created being, even an angel. Consequently, Melchizedek must be a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ, who alone, as God the Son, is uncreated, immortal, and eternal. **Heb 7:3** says he was "made like the Son of God." Although that wording does not explicitly say that he was the Son of God, it does not preclude identifying Melchizedek with Christ, since in **Dan 3:25** the fourth figure in the fiery furnace is described as "like a son of the gods." The fourth figure in the furnace clearly is intended by Daniel to not merely be "like" a son of the gods, but to actually be a son of the gods,

i.e., an angel, as he is described in **Dan 3:28**, or a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. In the same way, **Phil 2:6–8**, says that Jesus “*existed in the form of God . . . but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man. . .*” Jesus really was God and did not just “appear” to be a man but was, in fact, fully man.

In **Heb 7:3**, the description of Melchizedek concludes by saying that “*he remains a priest perpetually.*” This fact clearly identifies Melchizedek as Jesus, since **Ps 110:4** says about Jesus, “*The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’*” (see also **Heb 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 15, 17**). Christ appeared to Abraham in the person of Melchizedek “thereby indicating the superiority of the coming messianic priesthood to the coming Levitical priesthood” (Hanson 1965: 72). That is cemented in **Heb 7:8**, which, referring to the tithe Abraham gave to Melchizedek, says, “*In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on.*” This is saying that Melchizedek is superior to Levi, because Levi’s line of priests is mortal, but Melchizedek lives forever. Anthony Hanson comments that “we only know that Melchisedech lives for ever because of Psalm 110.4, where God promises Christ an eternal priesthood. Therefore Melchisedech is identical with Christ.” (Hanson 1965: 70) This is confirmed in **Heb 7:25**, which identifies one of the qualities of a perfect priesthood as the priest’s ability to perpetually intercede on behalf of his subjects. “Melchizedek is said to abide a priest continually so his priesthood definitely has this quality of perfection; yet, only God inherently possesses the power of an endless life therefore only God can truly meet this criteria” (“13 Reasons” 2014: 7, Melchizedek’s priesthood). Similarly, **Heb 7:27–28** points out that the Levitical high priests first offer sacrifices for their own sins; however, because Jesus was and is without sin, he did not have to offer sacrifices for his own sin but is “*perfect forever.*” Since Jesus is a priest forever “*according to the order of Melchizedek,*” Melchizedek himself must have been without sin. Therefore, Christ and Melchizedek must be one and the same.

Additionally, he blessed Abraham, which showed his superiority to Abraham, because “*the lesser is blessed by the greater*” (**Heb 7:7**). Other than the blessing given by Melchizedek, the only person in the Bible to bless Abraham was God, which indicates the correspondence of Melchizedek and God. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek. That not only showed Melchizedek’s superiority but also indicated Melchizedek’s identity, since “*all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s; it is holy to the Lord*” (**Lev 27:30**).

Finally, “one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (11QMelch) portrays Melchizedek as a heavenly being who will bring salvation (in fulfillment of Isa. 52.7–10 and 61.1–3) and judgment (in fulfillment of Pss. 7.7–8; 82.1–2) at the conclusion of the final Jubilee (Lev. 25)” (Nelson 1993: 511). Salvation and judgment preeminently are the roles of Christ. Jesus even quoted **Isa 61:1–2** as applying to himself (**Luke 4:18–19**). All of this strongly indicates that Melchizedek was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ.

All of this is in keeping with what we saw in **1:1–2:18**, which discussed and demonstrated the superiority of Christ: Christ is the revelation of God (**1:1-3**); Christ is superior to angels (**1:4-14**); Christ alone provides salvation (**2:1-18**).

### 3. Levitical priests versus Christ’s priesthood contrasted (7:11–8:5).

<sup>11</sup> Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? <sup>12</sup> For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. <sup>13</sup> For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. <sup>14</sup> For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. <sup>15</sup> And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, <sup>16</sup> who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. <sup>17</sup> For it is attested of Him, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

<sup>18</sup> For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness <sup>19</sup> (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. <sup>20</sup> And inasmuch as it was not without an oath <sup>21</sup> (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever’”); <sup>22</sup> so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

<sup>23</sup> The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, <sup>24</sup> but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood

permanently. <sup>25</sup> Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

<sup>26</sup> For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; <sup>27</sup> who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

<sup>28</sup> For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

8 Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, <sup>2</sup> a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. <sup>3</sup> For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. <sup>4</sup> Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; <sup>5</sup> who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “See,” He says, “that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”

**Heb 7:11** begins with the standard of “perfection.” It then contrasts the OT Levitical priesthood with the priesthood of Christ, “according to the order of Melchizedek” (**vv. 15-17**). Although Jesus did not become a priest “on the basis of a law of physical requirement” (i.e., that he be from the tribe of Levi), there was one “physical requirement” necessary for Christ’s priesthood, namely, his incarnation, in which “he had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (**Heb 2:17**). This section, and other parts of Hebrews, then demonstrates that Christ provides the standard of perfection mentioned in **v. 11**: He fulfilled the entire basis of the sacrificial system and fulfilled and superseded the entire OT priesthood, because he alone had the capacity to act as our sacrificial substitute, since he alone was without sin (**7:26**; see also **Heb 4:15**). This section ends with **8:5** quoting **Exod 25:40**. The quotation is emphasizing that the entire Old Covenant system, with its priesthood, tabernacle, and offerings, is earthly and inferior to, “a copy and a shadow” of, the New Covenant system of Christ, which is heavenly. Christ, the true and everlasting high priest, offered himself in the true, heavenly tabernacle (**Heb 9:11, 23-24**), which is the prototype for the earthly tabernacle, which is a mere copy and shadow.

Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and his resurrection and ascension, far exceed what all of Israel’s sacrifices and priests, including the high priest on the Day of Atonement, could ever have hoped to achieve:

- Because of human sin, including his own, the high priest on the Day of Atonement had to first make a sin offering for himself and then for the people (**Lev 9:7; 16:6, 11, 15–16, 19–22, 24**). On the other hand, “He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (**2 Cor 5:21**).
- Because of the imperfections of the Aaronic priesthood, **Heb 7:1–8:5** tells us there was need for a new and greater priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek. Therefore, **Heb 7:21** quotes **Ps 110:4**, “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever’,” and **Heb 7:28** says, “The Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.” Since the Son is “perfect forever,” the “weak” OT priesthood has been forever superseded. Jesus is a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek, and not . . . according to the order of Aaron” (**Ps 110:4; Heb 5:6; 7:11**). Although God had sworn an oath to Abraham over 400 years before the Law (see discussion of **6:3-18**, above), “the word of the oath, which came after the Law” (**7:28**) is referring to Christ’s appointment as high priest in connection with his incarnation, recorded in **Ps 110:4**, which followed the promulgation of the Law.
- **Heb 7:12** says that, because the coming of Christ resulted in a new priesthood, “when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.” T. D. Alexander summarizes that “the reference here to ‘a change in the law’ indicates that the regulations associated with the Levitical priesthood were no longer in force once the church became the new temple of God” (Alexander 2008: 150). The fact that Jesus is called both a “priest” and a “high priest” (**Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14–15; 7:11, 15–17, 24, 26, 28; 8:1–2; 9:11**) indicates that the entire OT sacrificial system and priesthood have been replaced because, according to the OT law, Jesus was not able to be a priest at all since he was not descended from Aaron or the tribe of Levi but from the tribe of Judah (**Heb 8:4**; see **Matt 1:2–3; Luke 3:33–34**). Instead of an entire priesthood acting as mediators between God and mankind, now there is “one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (**1 Tim 2:5**). In contrast to the OT priesthood being limited to the tribe of Levi (**Num 18:1–24; Jer 33:19–22**), as a result of the sacrifice of Christ, all

believers in Jesus Christ are now priests in the eyes of God (**1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10**).

- Christ not only superseded the old priesthood and brought about a change of law, from the law of Moses to the law of Christ (**1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2**), he also ushered in “*a better hope, through which we draw near to God*” (**Heb 7:19**); this “*better hope*” ultimately is because “*Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant*” (**Heb 7:22**). Our “*better hope*” was discussed at **Heb 6:19-20**. The New Covenant is the subject of the next section, **Heb 8:6—10:18**. The amazing difference between the Old and New Covenants may be summarized as follows:

<u>Old Covenant</u>	<u>New Covenant</u>
1. Under the OC, the people had to continually make sacrifices for their sins ( <b>Lev 4:1-5:13; 5:14-6:7; 6:24-30; 7:1-8; 8:14-17; 16:3-22; Num 5:5-10; Heb 7:27</b> ).	1. In the NC, Christ has made the one sacrifice that is sufficient to forgive all of His people’s sins forever ( <b>John 1:29; Heb 7:26-28; 9:11-12, 28; 10:1-18</b> ).
2. Under the OC, only some of Israel’s sins were covered, and only for 1 year ( <b>Num 15:30-31; Heb 9:7; 10:1-3</b> ).	2. In the NC, <i>all</i> of our sins—past, present, and future—have been forgiven <i>forever</i> ( <b>Jer 31:34; Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; Heb 10:1-18</b> ).
3. The OC did not give eternal life ( <b>Rom 3:21; Gal 3:11, 21</b> ).	3. In the NC, we are given eternal life ( <b>John 3:14-16, 36; 17:2-3; Heb 5:9</b> ).
4. Under the OC, God’s presence only dwelt in the temple, and the people had to go to the temple to get close to the presence of God ( <b>1 Kgs 8:10-11; 2 Chron 5:11-14; 7:1-2</b> ).	4. In the NC, we <i>are</i> the temple, and God has come to us ( <b>1 Cor 3:9, 16-17; 2 Cor 6:16-7:1; Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 3:12</b> ).
5. Under the OC, only the priests could enter the temple ( <b>Num 18: 22-23; Heb 9:6</b> ).	5. In the NC, all Christians <i>are</i> priests ( <b>1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10</b> ).
6. Under the OC, only the high priest could enter the holy of holies to be in the presence of God ( <b>Lev 16:2-34</b> ).	6. In the NC, Christ is our high priest ( <b>Heb 4:14-5:10; 7:1-10:25</b> ).
7. Under the OC, the high priest could only enter the holy of holies one day each year ( <b>Lev 16:34; Heb 9:7</b> ).	7. In the NC, Christ is continually in the presence of God interceding for us ( <b>Heb 7:25; 9:24</b> ).
8. Under the OC, the Holy Spirit left the temple, never to return ( <b>Ezek 9:3; 10:1-19; 11:22-23</b> ).	8. In the NC, Jesus promised that He would “never leave us or forsake us” ( <b>Heb 13:5</b> ).
9. Under the OC, the Holy Spirit never indwelt people but only came upon certain people and then would leave ( <b>Exod 31:3; Num 11:16-29; Judg 3:10; 6:34; 14: 6, 19; 1 Sam 10:1-11; 16:13-14; 19:20-24</b> ).	9. In the NC, the Holy Spirit has come to live inside all believers and will never leave us or forsake us ( <b>Ezek 36:27; John 14:16-17; 16:7; Acts 2:14-18, 38-39; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19</b> ).
10. Under the OC, the people were in bondage to the law which they could never fulfill ( <b>Acts 15:10; Rom 7:6, 23; 8:2-3; Gal 3:23; 5:1</b> ).	10. In the NC, Christ has fulfilled the law for us and has written His law (the law of Christ) on our hearts ( <b>Jer 31:33; Matt 5:17; Rom 10:4; Col 2: 13-15; Heb 8:10; 10:16</b> ).
11. Under the OC, the people had hearts of stone ( <b>Zech 7:12</b> ).	11. In the NC, God has replaced our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh ( <b>Ezek 11:19; 36:26; 2 Cor 3:3</b> ).

In the NC we have a direct, personal relationship with God that OT believers never had (**Jer 31:34; Heb 4:16; 7:19**). We have unlimited access to God our Father, through Jesus Christ, that the OT believers could only dream about (**Matt 27:51; Heb 10:19-22**). God has even adopted us into His own family (**Rom 8:14-17; Gal 3:26; 4:6-7; Eph 1:5**). All of this was done, and could only be done, by Christ.

- The old sacrificial system required multiple sacrifices and priests (**Heb 7:23; 9:25; 10:1, 11**). The former priests existed in great numbers “*because they were prevented by death from continuing*” (**Heb 7:23**). But “*because [Jesus] continues forever, [he] holds His priesthood permanently*” (**Heb 7:24**), and he had to make only one sacrifice for all people and for all time (**Heb 7:24, 27; 9:12, 25–28; 10:10–14**).
- **Heb 8:3** states, “*For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer.*” This, again, points to the incomparably greater value of what Christ has done compared to the earthly priests. **Leviticus 16-17** stresses the importance of sacrificial blood in order to make atonement for sin. The shedding of the sacrificial animal’s blood was necessary for the high priest to have the blood he needed to bring into the holy of holies and sprinkle on the mercy seat. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was what the Day of Atonement had always pointed to. “The cross meant there could be ‘something to offer’ so that Christ could function as priest (8:3). . . . The extraordinary nature of Christ’s sacrifice consisted of him taking on the roles of priest and victim at the same time, offering himself in a sacrifice that benefited his followers (7:27; 9:14, 26).” (Nelson 2003: 254, 257).
- The old sacrificial system could not change people on the inside or make them perfect. By his sacrifice, Christ does that (**Heb 7:11; 9:9–10; 10:1–2, 14–16**).

- The Day of Atonement served as a “reminder” of sins every year. Through Christ’s sacrifice, the Father “*will remember their sins and lawless deeds no more*” (**Heb 10:3, 16–18**).
- Christ did what no earthly priest could do. The earthly priests just ministered in the earthly tabernacle and temple and “*serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things*” (**Heb 8:5**). Christ ascended into heaven itself, where he continually intercedes for his people with the Father (**Heb 7:24–25**). This is stressed in **Heb 8:1-2**, which states that Christ “*has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.*”
- **Heb 7:25** also says that “*He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him.*” The word translated “forever” actually is a Greek phrase *eis to pantelēs*, which means “completely, wholly, entirely, as referring to time, always, forever” (Zodhiates 1993: *pantelēs*, 1093). In other words, the salvation Christ provides is perfect and complete in every way.
- By his death, resurrection, and ascension Christ now enables every believer to do what only the OT priests could do. In the OT, only the priests could enter the holy place of the Temple. Jesus has enabled all of his people with “*confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus*” all of the time (**Heb 10:19–22; 4:16**).

In sum, the contrasts between the OT Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Christ are clear from the words used to describe them: the OT Levitical priesthood is described as “weakness” (**7:18**), “uselessness” (**7:18**), “made nothing perfect” (**7:19**), priests were “without an oath” (**7:21**), “prevented by death from continuing” (**7:23**), had to sacrifice for their own sins” (**7:27**), “high priests who are weak” (**7:28**), they “serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (**8:5**); the priesthood of Christ is described as “perfection” (**7:11**), “according to the power of an indestructible life” (**7:16**), a “priest forever” (**7:17, 21, 24**), brings in “a better hope” (**7:19**), “with an oath” (**7:21**), “the guarantee of a better covenant” (**7:22**), “is able to save forever” (**7:25**), “always lives to make intercession” (**7:25**), “holy” (**7:26**), “innocent” (**7:26**), “undefiled” (**7:26**), “separated from sinners” (**7:26**), “exalted above the heavens” (**7:26**), “made perfect forever” (**7:28**), “his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (**8:1**), “a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (**8:2**).

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is Christ superior to Moses?
2. Why did Jesus Christ have to assume our nature and become a human being?
3. Discuss the fact that the church is the true temple, or what the temple was always pointing to. Why is that important?
4. What is the nature of “unbelief,” what does it entail? Why is it so serious?
5. What is our “sabbath rest”? What are the implications of this for how we treat Sunday *and the other days of the week*?
6. How did the Day of Atonement point to Jesus, and how did he fulfill it?
7. Why is it important that Jesus “*has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*” (**Heb 4:15**)?
8. Discuss the importance of Jesus as our great high priest. What does this entail?
9. Heb 5:11—6:3 talk about the importance of “pressing on to maturity,” as opposed to simply clinging onto the “elementary principles.” Why is it so important to “*press on to maturity*” and not cling to the “elementary principles? How do we “*press on to maturity*”?
10. What is the nature of true, saving faith? What does it entail? What does it look like? What are “the three axes of faith”?
11. What is transitory or false faith? How can we distinguish it from true, saving faith?

12. What can and should we do to help people become genuine, born again Christians with true, saving faith, as opposed to “professing” Christians who only have transitory or false faith?
13. Heb 6:4-8 is one of the most controversial passages in Hebrews and the NT. Discuss this passage. Who do you think it is talking about, and why?
14. Discuss Melchizedek. This book takes the position that he was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. Others view him as a “type” of Christ. How do you come down on this, and why?
15. How is Christ and his priesthood superior to the entire OT Levitical sacrificial system and priesthood?
16. How is the New Covenant superior to the Old, Mosaic Covenant?

### **III. The New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant because of the sacrifice of Christ (8:6—10:18)**

In the OT, God had promised to make a “New Covenant” with his people (**Jer 31:31-34**). At the last supper, Jesus took the cup and said, “*This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood*” (**Luke 22:20**). The New Covenant is what the entire OT had been leading up to. This section of Hebrews discusses the New Covenant and how and why it is superior to everything that had gone before.

#### **A. Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant (8:6)**

*But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.*

Most commentators include v. 6 as the conclusion of the previous section. However, this verse really is transitional. The introductory phrase “*But now*” contrasts the old, Mosaic Covenant and priesthood referred to in v. 5 with what Christ does in having “*a more excellent ministry*”; it also introduces the New Covenant, which has been “*enacted on better promises.*” This will be the focus of this entire section which will end at **10:18**. Consequently, it is appropriate to have this verse as the beginning of this section concerning the effects of the sacrifice of Christ and the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant.

Christ’s “*more excellent ministry*” and the New Covenant’s being “*enacted on better promises*” demonstrate once again the superiority of Christ and what he has done over every other created being or system. Christ’s being the “mediator” of the New Covenant reflects what Paul says in **1 Tim 2:5**, “*For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*” The importance of the New Covenant is indicated in **2 Cor 3:5-6**, which says “*Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant.*”

#### **B. The nature of the New Covenant (8:7-12)**

<sup>7</sup> *For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.*  
<sup>8</sup> *For finding fault with them, He says, “Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; <sup>9</sup> Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; For they did not continue in My covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord. <sup>10</sup> “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>11</sup> “And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. <sup>12</sup> “For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”*

In v. 7, the “first covenant” is the Old or Mosaic Covenant. The “second” covenant is the New Covenant. **Verses 8-12** quotes in full **Jer 31:31-34** (**Jer 38:31-34**, LXX). This is the longest OT quotation in the NT. **Verses 8-9** quote **Jer 31:31-32**. They repeat the history of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God, thus establishing the necessity of a new covenant. The essence of the New Covenant is stated in **vv. 10-12** (**Jer 31:33-34**). The New Covenant is an everlasting covenant in which God writes his law in his people’s hearts; God’s people will truly know the Lord; and God will forgive his people’s sins and remember them no more (see also **Jer 32:38-40; 50:4-5; Ezek 11:14-20; 36:24-32; 37:15-28**). At the Last Supper Jesus explicitly stated that he was inaugurating the New Covenant in his

blood (**Luke 22:20**; see **1 Cor 11:25**). “The allusions to both the forgiveness anticipated by Jeremiah (Matt. 26:28; Jer. 31:34) and the blood associated with the establishment of the original Mosaic covenant (Luke 22:20; Exod. 24:7) further underline that Jesus understood his death as the inauguration of the new covenant” (Williamson 2007: 184). Indeed, “In so many of his [the writer of Hebrews] references to the ‘new’ or ‘better’ covenant, it is the blood of Jesus that is stressed by our writer (10:29, 12:24, 13:20). He interprets the oracle of Jeremiah in priestly and sacrificial terms because he views the Old Covenant in those terms and sees the work of Christ as *the reality towards which the cult and the prophecy were both pointing.*” (Peterson 1979: 77) The covenant was confirmed and finalized on the cross (**Heb 9:12-17**). It was ratified when Jesus rose from the dead, then ascended to heaven and sat down on the throne with the Father (**Heb 10:11-18**). Thus, “He is not simply the mediator of God’s New Covenant; he is the incarnation of it” (Goppelt 1982: 116).

Although **v. 8 (Jer 31:31)** says that in its *form* the New Covenant is “*with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,*” the NT affirms that the New Covenant actually is fulfilled in Christ and the church, not with the physical nation(s) of Israel and Judah. Thus, the rest of **Hebrews 8-10** applies the New Covenant to the church. It is quoted again at **10:15-18** and applied to “us” [i.e., Christians, the church]. **Heb 8:6, 9:15, and 12:24** all state that Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant. The fact that he “is” (present tense) the mediator shows that the New Covenant is now in effect. **Heb 9:12-17** points out that Christ’s blood confirmed and finalized the New Covenant. **Heb 10:9** similarly says that “*He takes away the first in order to establish the second.*” “The point is supported by the fact that the New Covenant is called an everlasting covenant [**Isa 55:3; 61:8; Jer 32:40; 50:5; Ezek 16:60; 37:26**] whereas the term ‘everlasting’ is never used of the Sinai [Mosaic] covenant” (Gentry 2010: 38; see also at 43n.33 [“Nowhere is the Sinai covenant called a ‘permanent’ covenant”]). The whole argument of **Hebrews 8-10** is that the Mosaic Covenant, the temple, priesthood, law, and the entire Israelite sacrificial system, were simply the “symbol” (**Heb 9:9**), or “copies” (**Heb 9:23-24**), or “shadow” (**Heb 10:1**; see also **Col 2:16-17**) of the “*better covenant*” which is based on “*better promises*” (**Heb 8:6**): i.e., the true and permanent reality found in Christ and the New Covenant.

Paul likewise applies the New Covenant to the church. In **2 Cor 3:5-6** (written to the largely Gentile church in Corinth) Paul says that “*God . . . made us . . . servants of a new covenant.*” The entire argument of **2 Corinthians 3** contrasts the Mosaic Covenant with the New Covenant: (1) It is the difference between the letter and the Spirit (**2 Cor 3:3, 6, 17-18**). (2) The first is the ministry of death and condemnation; the second is life, hope, liberty, and Spirit (**2 Cor 3:6-9, 12, 17**). (3) It is the difference between something written on tablets of stone and the writing on human hearts (**2 Cor 3:2-3, 7**). (4) Each has its own glory, but the second has an incomparably greater glory (**2 Cor 3:7-11, 18**). (5) The first fades away, but the second remains forever (**2 Cor 3:7, 11, 13**). (6) The first is veiled, but in the second the veil is taken away (**2 Cor 3:13-16, 18**). Consequently, only the New Covenant gives us boldness and transforms us into the image of Christ (**2 Cor 3:2-3, 12, 18**). Similarly, in **2 Cor 4:3-6** Paul “identifies the ‘new covenant’ as the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:3-6), and the Christian community as those in whom the blessings of the new covenant have been realized (2 Cor. 3:3; cf. Jer. 31:32-33; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26-27). . . . Clearly, these verses unpack the life-giving, liberating and more glorious ‘ministry of the Spirit’ (2 Cor. 3:8) associated with ‘ministers of a new covenant’ (2 Cor. 3:6).” (Williamson 2007: 192, 192n.33) In **Gal 4:21-31** “Abraham’s wives, Hagar and Sarah, are interpreted as representing two different covenants. The first of these (represented by Hagar) is identified as the Mosaic covenant (‘from Mount Sinai . . . in Arabia’ Gal. 4:24-25 ESV). The second covenant (represented by Sarah), while not explicitly identified, is clearly associated with Mount Zion and the promises of the new covenant (Gal. 4:26-27; cf. Isa. 54:1). Thus Hagar represents a covenant of enslavement (to the law), corresponding to ‘the present Jerusalem’ (Gal. 4:25 ESV), whereas Sarah represents a covenant of freedom and promise connected with ‘the Jerusalem above’ (Gal. 4:26 ESV).” (Ibid.: 199)

The New Covenant changes people from the inside-out. Because the New Covenant is based on what Christ has done for us, rather than what we have to do, it does for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. Whereas under the Old Covenant we had unclean consciences, in the New Covenant “*the blood of Christ . . . cleanse(s) your conscience from dead works to serve the living God*” (**Heb 9:14**) and “*has perfected for all time those who are sanctified*” (**Heb 10:14**). “By that cleansing of the conscience Christ consecrates his people to God in the relationship of heart-obedience envisaged by Jeremiah (9:4, 10:10, 22). By dealing decisively with the sin problem Christ has made it possible for those who are called to receive the promised eternal inheritance (9:15).” (Peterson 1979: 81) We now have unhindered access to God and can draw near to Him with confidence (**Heb 4:16**), because Christ has “*entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle*” (**Heb 9:11**), is in the presence of God Himself (**Heb 9:24; 10:12**), and “*always lives to make intercession for [us]*” (**Heb 7:25**). In the New Covenant God removes our hearts of stone and gives us hearts of flesh (see **Heb 10:22**, which alludes to **Ezek 36:25-26**).

### C. The Old Covenant is obsolete (8:13)

*When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.*

When Christ inaugurated the New Covenant in his blood, **Eph 2:15** says that the law of Moses (i.e., the Old Covenant) was thereby “abolished.” A number of passages in Hebrews itself similarly state that the Old Covenant and the entire Mosaic system were abolished as a result of what Christ has done. Wayne Jackson gives four such examples:

1. “Now if perfection *had been* [imperfect tense — activity in the past] attainable through the Levitical priesthood. . .” (Heb. 7:11).
2. The oath by which Christ was appointed high priest was “after the law,” i.e., in the post-Mosaic period (Heb. 7:28).
3. “If the first covenant [law of Moses] *had been* faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second” (Heb. 8:7).
4. The first covenant “*had* ordinances” (Heb. 9:1), etc. These phrases obviously view the Mosaic regime as a by-gone system — *from the divine viewpoint.*” (Jackson 2002: No Conflict)

On the other hand, the statement in **Heb 8:13**, “*When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear*” is in the present tense. Why? There are probably two reasons for this:

First, the use of the present probably implies that the temple and its rituals were still in place when Hebrews was written. This means that Hebrews was written before AD 70, when the temple was destroyed. Although the date when Hebrews was written cannot be established with certainty, much evidence supports a date before AD 70 (O’Brien 2010: 15-20). **Verse 13** is implying that the temple ritual “is outmoded and pointless and therefore cannot last long. If the author writes in the early sixties, he may well be thinking of the prophecy of Jesus about the fall of Jerusalem (Mark 13:2). In any event, had he written after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, he could hardly have avoided referring explicitly to the historical confirmation of his theological argument.” (Hagner 1990: 124) The last phrase of **v. 13** (“*ready to disappear*”) in Greek is *eggus aphanismou*. “Though the word *aphanismos* occurs only here in the NT, it is used frequently in the LXX (56x) to describe the physical destruction of Israel (Je. 12:11; Ezk. 6:14; Mi. 7:13; Joel 2:13), Jerusalem (Je. 19:8) and the Temple (Dn. 9:26; Jdt. 4:12). It is never used to denote a gradual disappearance as suggested by most English renderings of Hebrews 8:13 (e.g. ‘ready to disappear’ NASB). To the contrary, it always denotes the demise of persons or things by violent means usually due to God’s judgement. The author’s point is that the superiority of the New Covenant would soon be sealed by the complete destruction of the Old Covenant including its priests, sacrifices and Temple.” (Gleason 2002: 108-09)

Second, the use of the present tense is a grammatical form to affirm a general, timeless truth. Jackson states, “Hebrews 3:4 is a good example from this same document. ‘Every house is built by someone.’ The present tense form, ‘is built,’ does not refer to a particular house being built at that time; rather, it simply states a propositional truth — the building of a house always requires a house-builder.” (Jackson 2002: Timeless Truth) As R. C. H. Lenski summarizes, “‘near to vanishing away,’ like the descriptive present participles, does not refer merely to the present time of writing but to anything that at any time is in such a condition of decrepitude” (Lenski 1966: 272).

### D. The effects of the sacrifice of Christ (9:1—10:18)

In this section, the Old and New Covenants are contrasted, and the New is shown to be superior in every respect, since it has, and is based on, a better sanctuary, a better nature, and a better sacrifice.

#### 1. Old versus New sanctuaries contrasted (9:1-14).

*9 Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. <sup>2</sup> For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. <sup>3</sup> Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, <sup>4</sup> having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; <sup>5</sup> and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.*

<sup>6</sup> Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, <sup>7</sup> but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. <sup>8</sup> The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, <sup>9</sup> which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, <sup>10</sup> since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

<sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; <sup>12</sup> and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Verse 1 begins by talking about the “regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.” Those regulations are then described in vv. 2-10. Since the regulations of the Old Covenant were established by God, and the New Covenant was also established by God, the New Covenant does not contradict the Old Covenant, but is its fulfillment. Vern Poythress points out, “The earthly tabernacle was a copy or shadow of the true dwelling place of God in heaven (Hebrews 8:5; 9:24). It showed what God was like and what was needed to deal with sin. In this way it symbolized what the Messiah was to do for our salvation. . . . The shadow was always inferior to the reality. The earthly tabernacle was made of earthly things, and could never equal the splendor or holiness of God in heaven. The earthly sacrifices of bulls and goats could never equal the blood of Christ, who cleansed us from sin forever. . . . In fact, the tabernacle foreshadowed the fact that Christ would become incarnate and dwell among us. ‘The Word became flesh and lived for awhile [tabernacled] among us’ [John 1:14]. . . . [With respect to Solomon’s building the permanent temple in Jerusalem] What does Solomon foreshadow? Why, the work of Christ, of course. Solomon was the son in David’s line, the line leading to the Messiah. He built a dwelling place for God, foreshadowing Christ who builds His church (Matthew 16:18) and who is Himself the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20) or foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11). Christ builds not on the earthly Mount Zion but on a heavenly site: ‘But you [Christians] have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God’ (Hebrews 12:22).” (Poythress 1991: 12-14)

Although v. 4, appears to indicate that the “golden altar of incense” was behind the second veil in the Holy of Holies, it was actually in the Holy Place, immediately outside of the Holy of Holies. This was necessary, since it was in daily use by the priests, who were not permitted to go into the Holy of Holies (see **Exod 30:6-8**). The language used in v. 4 probably reflects the intimate connection between the altar and the Holy of Holies (see **1 Kgs 6:22**). That is indicated by the fact that v. 4 speaks of the Holy of Holies “having” the altar, rather than that the altar was “in” the Holy of Holies. The close connection between the Holy of Holies and the altar also is indicated by the fact that on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was to offer incense, using coals of fire from the altar (**Lev 16:12-13**).

In v. 5, the “mercy seat” was the lid of the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and temple. The word translated “mercy seat” is *hilastērion*, which means to propitiate or expiate. “Propitiation” indicates that we were under God’s wrath but now that wrath has been satisfied and quenched. This is an appropriate word for the mercy seat, because on the Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled the blood of both a young bull (for the high priest’s sins) and a sacrificial goat (for the sins of the people) on the mercy seat for atonement of sins (see v. 7). **Rom 3:25** calls Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross a “propitiation.” The word used there for “propitiation” likewise is *hilastērion*. This shows, as Poythress stated above, that the tabernacle/temple, and its various aspects, was a “type” or “shadow” of heavenly and New Covenant realities, specifically that Christ is the true mercy seat.

In v. 6, the focus shifts to the rituals performed in the temple/tabernacle, as opposed to the components of the temple/tabernacle themselves. The point of vv. 6-10 is that the Old Covenant rituals were external and were mere “types,” not the truly effective realities. The true reality of effective atonement only came with Jesus Christ and the New Covenant (vv. 11-14). The temporary and, ultimately, ineffective Old Covenant rituals are contrasted with effective and permanent atonement brought by Christ. Thus, vv. 9-10 say that the “gifts and sacrifices . . . relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.” That “time of reformation” began with the coming of Jesus Christ. Verse 12 contrasts the “blood of goats and calves” with Christ’s “own blood.” Further, the external and ultimately ineffective nature of the Old Covenant rituals is emphasized in v. 9, which points out that the Old Covenant “gifts and sacrifices . . . cannot make the

worshiper perfect in conscience.” **Verse 14** contrasts this with the internal effect of what Christ has done, by saying “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience.” That verse adds that what came before Christ was ultimately ineffective, because all that came before Christ amounted to “dead works.” The finality and effectiveness of what Christ has done is shown in the contrast between the priests under the Old Covenant, who are “continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship” (v. 6) and Jesus Christ, who “entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (v. 12).

Significantly, **Hebrews** never specifically refers to the “temple” but always to the “tabernacle.” Walker points out why: “The author of Hebrews, however, was not wanting to cast any aspersions on the contemporary Temple in practice, but rather making a far more fundamental point concerning the very essence of the Temple. By concentrating his attention on the ‘tabernacle’ in the wilderness, he could argue that the Tabernacle system of worship, even when considered in its most pristine and pure form under Moses (before any human sin might have twisted the divine intention), had been declared redundant by God through Jesus. His critique of the present Temple was not bound up with any political issues or personal disenchantment, but rather with God’s eternal purposes.” (Walker 1996: 207-8) Jesus is the final spiritual reality. The entire OT tabernacle/temple-system is no longer valid. Thus, **Heb 9:11** says that Christ “entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation.” **Heb 9:12** adds that he entered the holy place “through his own blood.” The true, heavenly “tabernacle” is equated with Christ himself (i.e., with “his blood”).

## 2. Nature of Old versus New Covenants contrasted (9:15-22).

<sup>15</sup> For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. <sup>16</sup> For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. <sup>17</sup> For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. <sup>18</sup> Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. <sup>19</sup> For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, <sup>20</sup> saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.” <sup>21</sup> And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. <sup>22</sup> And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

The phrase “For this reason” which begins v. 15 shows that this section flows from and is dependent upon what has just been said about the Old versus the New Covenant in the preceding section. It specifically is picking up on the reference to “the blood of Christ” in v. 14. This section then goes on to stress the importance of blood as necessary to ratify a covenant and as necessary to effect forgiveness. Christ’s blood is of infinitely greater value than “the blood of the calves and the goats” (v. 19). Christ’s shedding his blood qualifies him to be “the mediator of a new covenant” (v. 15), guarantees our redemption (v. 5) and forgiveness (v. 22), and guarantees that we will “receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (v. 15). In v. 16, although the word “covenant” is used, the meaning appears to be that of a “will,” since a will only comes into effect with the death of the testator. **Verse 20** quotes **Exod 24:8** to reinforce the idea that covenants are established through the shedding of sacrificial blood. That is made explicit in vv. 21-22.

## 3. Old versus New Covenant sacrifices contrasted (9:23—10:18).

<sup>23</sup> Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. <sup>24</sup> For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; <sup>25</sup> nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. <sup>26</sup> Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. <sup>27</sup> And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

<sup>10</sup> For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? <sup>3</sup> But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. <sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. <sup>5</sup> Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, “Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me; <sup>6</sup> In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure. <sup>7</sup> “Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.’”

<sup>8</sup> After saying above, “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the Law), <sup>9</sup> then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

<sup>11</sup> Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; <sup>12</sup> but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. <sup>14</sup> For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. <sup>15</sup> And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, <sup>16</sup> “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them,” He then says, <sup>17</sup> “And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” <sup>18</sup> Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

There is some question concerning what “*the heavenly things themselves*” in v. 9:23 are referring to. It may refer to the heavenly counterparts of the earthly sanctuary or to Christ’s people who are said to be in heaven (Eph 2:6; Rev 20:4) and whose “*citizenship is in heaven*” (Phil 3:20). Some contend that it is referring to “*the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (Eph 6:12; see also Col 1:20; 2:15). In any event, the reference to “*the heavenly things themselves*” and this entire section are making the point that the Old Covenant and its sacrifices were simply temporary and imperfect “copies” (9:23) and “shadows” (10:1) of the permanent and eternally effective “*one sacrifice of sins for all time*” (10:11) which Christ made. Thus, Christ did not enter a copy of the true holy place but entered heaven itself (9:24). He is now continually in “*the presence of God for us*” (9:24). He did not have to make repeated sacrifices as in the Old Covenant, “*but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*” (9:26). His sacrifice “*takes away the first [covenant and tabernacle] in order to establish the second [covenant and true tabernacle]*” (10:9). This indicates that the Old Covenant has been abolished and superceded by what Christ has done when he inaugurated the New Covenant. Whereas the sacrifices under the Old Covenant could not take away sins or perfect or sanctify people, Christ’s sacrifice of himself did all of those things (10:11-18).

This section is showing how what Christ did surpasses and is the fulfillment of what Israel’s holiest day of the year—the Day of Atonement—was pointing to.<sup>26</sup> First, the OT sacrifices took place in an earthly tabernacle; Christ entered heaven itself (9:23-24). Second, **Leviticus 16–17** stresses the importance of sacrificial blood in order to make atonement for sin. The shedding of the sacrificial animal’s blood was necessary for the high priest to have the blood he needed to bring into the holy of holies and sprinkle on the mercy seat. **Hebrews 7–10** demonstrates that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was what the Day of Atonement had always pointed to. Christ’s own blood infinitely exceeded in value the blood of animals (10:4-10). Third, the OT rites, using animal blood, had to be endlessly repeated (Heb 10:1-4); Christ’s sacrifice involved his own blood and only had to be done once (Heb 7:27; 9:25-26; 10:5-14). Further, his blood is “the polar opposite of anything physical or temporary ([Heb] 9:12). The redeeming and purifying effect of his blood is interior and eternal rather than external and impermanent ([Heb] 9:12-14; cf. 10:1-4).” (Nelson 2003: 256)

<sup>26</sup> The Day of Atonement was a “type” that pointed to Christ’s death on the cross. All of the major elements of the ritual performed on the Day of Atonement were “types” that pointed to Christ: the rites were performed at the temple (Lev 16:23, 20, 33)—Christ is the true temple (John 1:14; 2:18-22); the high priest performed the rites (Lev 16:2-3, 32-33)—Christ is our high priest (Heb 4:14-15; 5:5-10; 8:1-6; 9:11; 10:21); a bull and a goat were sacrificed as sin offerings and their blood was shed (Lev 16:8-9, 15)—Christ was sacrificed for our sins and his blood was shed (Heb 7:27; 9:12, 14, 26, 28); the high priest entered the holy of holies behind the veil (Lev 16:12-15)—Christ’s body is the true veil (Heb 10:19-20) and he entered the true holy of holies (Heb 8:1-2; 9:11-12, 24); the blood of the goat was sprinkled on the mercy seat (Lev 16:14-15)—Christ is the mercy seat (Rom 3:25, cp. Exod 25:17 LXX); the sins of the nation were imputed to the scapegoat (Lev 16:20-21)—Christ bore our sins (Isa 53:4-5; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 2:24) and became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21); the scapegoat was led into the wilderness (Lev 16:21-22)—Christ was led into the ultimate wilderness of separation from God (Isa 53:8; Matt 27:46); the bodies of the slain animals were burned outside the camp (Heb 13:11; see Edersheim 1988: 324)—“Therefore, Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate” (Heb 13:12).

The essential element on the Day of Atonement was the high priest's entering God's presence in the holy of holies, behind the curtain, and applying the sacrificial blood to the mercy seat to purify the holy things and the nation from pollution and sin (**Lev 16:2–19**). By contrast, through his resurrection and ascension Christ entered "heaven itself" (**Heb 9:24**; see also **Heb 4:14; 8:1–2**), into "the inner shrine behind the curtain" (**Heb 6:19–20**, RSV). Thus, Christ acts both as victim and as high priest: as victim his blood was perfect because he led a perfect life and was without sin (**Heb 9:12–14; 10:4–10**); as high priest he was also perfect because he did not have to atone for himself (**Heb 7:26–27; 9:7**). The high priest sprinkled the blood in the holy of holies behind the veil; Jesus died in full public view, and at his death "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (**Matt 27:51**). These two facts signify that Jesus achieved atonement for sins for everyone who has faith in him, instead of just covering the sins of the nation for a year. Additionally, when **v. 24** says that Christ entered "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us," it is pointing out that what Christ has done and is doing far surpasses anything the OT high priest or the entire OT priesthood could do. The high priest could only enter the holy of holies one day per year. Christ is "now" and forevermore in heaven itself, in the actual presence of God (not just a "copy"), and he is there and acting "for us." We could have no greater assurance and advocate than that.

In **9:26**, it says that Christ's one sacrifice has occurred "a the consummation of the ages." Christ's first coming and what he did mark a new time of human history. Throughout the NT, the writers speak of the "two ages": "this age," and the "age to come." "This age" is characterized by marriage and things temporal (e.g., **Mark 10:30; Luke 20:34; Rom 12:2**), evil (**Gal 1:4; Eph 2:2**), and worldly wisdom (**1 Cor 1:20; 2:6–8**). On the other hand, "the age to come" is characterized by resurrection life and immortality (e.g., **Mark 10:30; 1 Cor 15:50**), the lack of marriage (**Luke 20:35**), and absence of evil (**1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5**) (Riddlebarger 2003: 82–83). The two ages are related to the inauguration and consummation of the Messianic Kingdom. Even though the eschatological kingdom of God is future and awaits Christ's coming again in glory, Christ's first coming inaugurated that same eschatological kingdom. This is known as "the already-not yet complexion of the messianic age" (Yarbrough 1996: 65): i.e., the kingdom of God and reign of Christ have been inaugurated, realized in principle, and are present now (the "already" of the kingdom); however, they have not yet been fully manifested, but await a future consummation in all their glory (the "not yet" of the kingdom). The first coming of Christ brought with it the inauguration of the Messianic Age—the age to come—in Christ and among those who are his. Consequently, the two ages currently overlap. Since the reign of Christ has already begun (**Heb 2:9; Eph 1:21**), in a certain sense the age to come also has begun. As this age is the age of the old creation, and the age to come is the age of the new creation, in a sense the new creation has already been inaugurated (**2 Cor. 5:17; Gal 6:15**). "This age" will end and the "age to come" will be fully consummated in all its glory at the Second Coming of Christ (**Heb 9:28**; see **Matt 24:3; Titus 2:12–13**). The monumental effect of Christ's first coming in changing the times also is confirmed by the fact that his first coming marks the beginning of the "last days" which we are now in and which will continue until his return (see **Acts 2:16–17; Heb 1:2; Jas 5:1–3; 1 Pet 1:20; 1 John 2:18**).

With respect to the Second Coming of Christ, **9:28** says that whereas Christ came the first time "to bear the sins of many," he will "appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin." In other words, he dealt with sin finally in his first coming. There is nothing further that he need do with respect to sin. When he returns, he will bring "salvation." Of course, there is a sense in which he brought salvation to those who repent and turn to him in faith, as a result of what he accomplished in his first coming. However, our salvation will be brought to its consummation at his second coming, just like the age to come will be brought to consummation at his second coming. It is then that we shall receive our new, glorified bodies (**1 Cor 15:52–54**); the "new heaven and the new earth" will be inaugurated (**Rev 21:1–2**), God will dwell with his people (**Rev 21:3**), we will see him as he is (**1 John 3:2; Rev 22:4**), and "there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain" or curse (**Rev 21:4; 22:3**).

**Heb 10:1–4** stresses the inadequacy of the OT atonement rituals. **Heb 10:3**, which says that "in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year" makes that inadequacy explicitly clear. **Heb 10:5–9** quotes from **Ps 40:6–8a (Ps 39:7–9a, LXX)**. The psalm "presents the posture of obedience and resolute intention to die on the cross, embraced by Christ in the incarnation. This fulfillment, moreover, probably should be seen as a fulfillment of indirect typological prophecy, the experience of David the king [author of the psalm] being understood as a pointer to the experience of Christ." (Guthrie 2007: 977) The use of the psalm emphasizes the discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants, the inadequacy of the OT sacrifices, and how Christ perfectly submitted himself to the Father's will, thus fulfilling perfectly his role as both high priest and that of sacrifice. **Heb 10:12–13** quotes from **Ps 110:1**. Christ's sitting down at the right hand of God (**10:12**) underscores the finality of his sacrifice of atonement and the fact that it does not need to be repeated. Further, to sit "at the right hand of God" is the place of highest honor. When Jesus claimed this place for himself in his trial before the high priest, the high priest tore his robes, because he said that this was blasphemy, i.e., Jesus was claiming to be God (**Mark 14:62–64**).

Craig Blomberg discusses this, “Alleging messiahship was no capital offense; otherwise, the Jews could never have received a messiah! But claiming to be the exalted, heavenly Son of Man, one who was Lord and next to the Father himself in heaven, transgressed the boundaries of what most of the Jewish leaders deemed permissible for mere mortals.” (Blomberg 2007: 93)

Now, Christ is reigning at the right hand of God “*until his enemies be made a footstool for his feet*” (**Ps 110:1; Heb 10:13**). Christ has been exalted and is ruling from heaven now in the “already” phase of his kingdom. According to **Ps 110:1**, Christ will continue to rule from heaven *until* all foes are subdued. It is the *parousia* (Second Coming of Christ) which manifests the completion of Christ’s final victory (i.e., ushers in the consummation—the “not yet,” eternal phase of the kingdom). The quotation of **Ps 8:6** (“*He has put all things in subjection under His feet*”) in **1 Cor 15:27** similarly shows that Christ’s “reign” is a present phenomenon. The verb “has put” (*hupotasso*) in that sentence is in the past (aorist) tense (*hupetaksen*). Waldron comments, “The unavoidable impression with which one is left is that Paul felt that the beginning of Christ’s reign of conquest was a matter of past history. Certainly the manner in which Paul brings in this quotation is misleading if this is not the implication.” (Waldron 2000: sec. II.B.2; see also **Acts 2:29-36**) George Eldon Ladd summarizes the nature of Christ’s reign, “The New Testament does not make the reign of Christ one that is limited to Israel in the millennium [quoting **1 Cor 15:24-26**]. It is a spiritual reign in heaven which has already been inaugurated, and its primary purpose is to destroy Christ’s spiritual enemies, the last of which is death. . . . Lordship and kingship are interchangeable terms. . . . When this has been accomplished and he has destroyed ‘every rule and every authority and power,’ Jesus the Lord will deliver the *kingdom* to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24).” (Ladd 1977: 30) All of this is in keeping with the superiority of Jesus Christ over all angelic and earthy persons and entities, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2.

**Heb 10:9** and **14** speak of our sanctification. **Verse 9** says that “*we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*” **Verse 14** adds, “*For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*” Sanctification is being “set apart” by God for his purpose and transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. On the cross, Christ took our sin and the punishment we deserve onto himself. As a result of what he has done, he also imputes to us his righteousness and the good that he deserves (**2 Cor 5:21**; see also **Rom 3:22; 1 Cor 1:30**). Recall, from our discussion of **Heb 6:4-8**, that sanctification is one of the aspects of true, saving faith. It involves a three-fold process: (A) immediate positional holiness at salvation, i.e., the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us; (B) ongoing practical growth in grace; and (C) future perfection (glorification) (see **John 17:17-19; Acts 13:39; Rom 8:29-30; 1 Cor 1:2, 30; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 12:14**). Sanctification is a work of God through the Spirit, based upon what Christ has done. The second element of sanctification requires the active participation of the believer in pursuing obedience and righteousness.

The author closes this section in **10:16-17** by again quoting the New Covenant passage of **Jer 31:33-34**. Among other things, this rounds off this entire section (**8:6—10:18**) concerning the superiority of the New Covenant, since he began the section by quoting **Jer 31:31-34**. The quotation in **10:17** and his concluding statement in **10:18** emphasize the forgiveness of sin and the finality of Christ’s sacrifice, i.e., since “*it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*” (**10:4**), but by Christ’s “*one sacrifice for sins for all time*” (**10:12**) which has “*perfected for all time those who are sanctified*” (**10:14**), “*there is no longer any offering for sin*” (**10:18**) that is necessary or that could possibly be effective.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean that Christ is the “mediator” of the New Covenant (8:6)?
2. Heb 8-12 quotes Jer 31:31-34, which is the longest OT quotation in the NT. Why is Jer 31:31-34 so important, and what does it tell us?
3. What are the main components of the New Covenant, and how does it differ from the Old (Mosaic) Covenant?
  - What does the New Covenant do that the Old Covenant did not and could not do?
4. The Mosaic Covenant, the temple, priesthood, law, and the entire Israelite sacrificial system, were simply the “symbol” (Heb 9:9), or “copies” (Heb 9:23-24), or “shadow” (Heb 10:1; see also Col 2:16-17) of the New Covenant; what does that mean?

5. Discuss the similarities and differences between the sacrifices under the Old Covenant and Christ's sacrifice in connection with the New Covenant.
6. What was the "mercy seat" and what is "propitiation"?
7. How does Christ fulfill and surpass the rituals of Israel's holiest day, the Day of Atonement?
8. Discuss the relationship between the "two ages" (this age and the age to come) and the "already/but not yet" nature of the Messianic Kingdom.
9. Heb 10:12-13 (see also Ps 110:1) indicate that Christ is reigning now. Discuss the nature of his reign.
10. What is "sanctification," and how does it relate to what Christ has done, and is doing, for us?

#### **IV. By faith we appropriate the New Covenant into our lives (10:19—13:19)**

So far, we have seen the superiority of Christ over everyone and everything in the universe, Christ is our great high priest, and the forgiveness and eternal life which Christ gives us through the New Covenant, which he inaugurated through his sacrifice. Now, we turn to how to appropriate the New Covenant into our lives. We do that by faith. This entire section describes how we are to live by faith and gives us examples of those who faithfully endured while waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise.

##### **A. Since Christ is our high priest, we must persevere in faithfulness (10:19-39)**

1. Because of Christ, we can have full assurance of faith (10:19-25).

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

There are parallels between the exhortation to hold fast to our faith here and the similar exhortation found in **Heb 4:14-16**. Both are based on the high priestly position of Jesus Christ, but the intervening discussion has made clear all that Christ has done for us as our great high priest. Consequently, we are exhorted to draw on all the blessings he has given us for our own sake and to encourage our brothers and sisters.

Preceding sections of the epistle have told us of Christ's sacrifice and the infinite superiority of his blood compared to the blood of sacrificial animals. Now, we are shown that we can draw on his blood and his sacrifice in personal and practical ways. It is "a new and living way" for Christ's people to "enter the holy place" with "confidence" and "full assurance." The way is new and living because Jesus is the way (**John 14:6**). Unlike the OT animal sacrifices, Jesus is alive, seated at the right hand of the Father (**Heb 10:12**), and intercedes for us (**Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25**). Verse 20 specifies that the "new and living way" to "enter the holy place" was inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh." The "veil" refers to the great veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies in that tabernacle and temple. By saying that the veil really is Christ's flesh, v. 20 is, again, telling us that the tabernacle/temple and all its particulars were "types" and "shadows" pointing to the true reality, namely, Jesus Christ.

The typology is even deeper than that. The typology between the veil and Christ goes all the way back to Abraham, long before the plans for the tabernacle were given by God to Moses. God entered into a covenant with Abraham. The Abrahamic Covenant is stated in somewhat different terms in **Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17, and 22**. When you put them all together, we find that there are three core promises that God makes: (1) promises relating to "seed" or descendants; (2) promises relating to "land"; and (3) promises relating to blessing the people of the world through Abram's seed. This covenant unfolds throughout the rest of the Bible. In many respects, the Abrahamic Covenant is the theological backbone of the entire Bible. In **Genesis 15**, the covenant was ratified. In **Gen 15:7** God promised to give Abraham the land, and in **Gen 15:8** Abraham replied, "O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?" In response, God said to Abraham, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female

goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds.” (**Gen 15:9-10**) Typically, in the Ancient Near East, that is how a covenant was ratified. Various animals were killed and cut in two, and then the parties to the covenant would walk through the pieces of the dead animals, symbolically saying, “If I violate this covenant, may I become just like these dead animals.”

In the case of the Abrahamic Covenant, however, only God, in symbolic form, walked through the pieces of the animals. He did not make Abram pass through the pieces. What God was saying was, “Abram, if I violate the terms of this covenant, may I become like these dead animals.” But because God alone passed through the pieces, he was also passing on behalf of Abram. In other words, he was also saying, “Abram, if *you* violate the terms of this covenant, by not believing me, or by not following me, may *I*, not you, become like these dead animals.” The history of both Abraham and his descendants, the nation of Israel, showed that, for much of the time, their lives were characterized by unfaithfulness to God. Although God acted out the curse of the covenant when he walked through the pieces of the animals, approximately 2000 years later, on a hill called Calvary, in the person of Jesus Christ, God did it for real. Just like the animals were cut in two, **Matt 27:51** tells us that when Jesus died, “*the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*” **Heb 10:19-20** tells us the meaning of that. It tells us that we can “*enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh.*” Since the veil was a “type” pointing to Jesus’ flesh, the tearing of the veil when Jesus died was showing that, on the cross, Jesus Christ fulfilled the Abrahamic Covenant.

All that Christ has done for us should speak to us and transform us. Consequently, **vv. 22, 23, and 24** contain three exhortations for us: “*let us draw near,*” “*let us hold fast,*” and “*let us consider.*” We are first exhorted to “*draw near*” to God “*with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.*” We can do this and can have “*full assurance of faith,*” because our faith is not, ultimately, dependent on us; Christ has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. Our faith is a gift from God (**Eph 2:8-9**) and, since “*it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (**Phil 2:13**), we are assured that our faith will persevere. We can “*draw near*” with a “*sincere heart,*” because God assured us that, as part of the New Covenant, “*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh*” (**Ezek 36:26**). Further, **Heb 10:22** reminds us that we have had “*our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*” That also is repeating New Covenant language from **Ezek 36:25**, in which God said “*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean.*” It also recalls that, unlike the OT sacrifices, which “*cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience*” (**Heb 9:9**), “*how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*” (**Heb 9:14**) In short, in Christ we have all we need and more.

Our “*full assurance of faith*” is not limited to the here-and-now. Instead, we are to “*hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.*” Hope speaks of the future. We can hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, because “*he who promised is faithful.*” As with our faith, our hope ultimately is not grounded in ourselves, but in God through Christ. This is of huge importance, because it is setting the stage for the last part of chapter 10 and the examples of chapter 11, all of which focus on patiently enduring in faith while waiting for God to fulfill his promises. Many in chapter 10 endured “*a great conflict of sufferings, . . . reproaches and tribulations, and . . . the seizure of your property*” (**Heb 10:32-34**). Many in chapter 11 “*died in faith, without receiving the promises*” (**Heb 11:13**; see also **v. 39**). Nevertheless, they were able to “*hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,*” knowing that “*he who promised is faithful.*” They also knew that they had for themselves “*a better possession and a lasting one*” (**Heb 10:34**). Ultimately, God will vindicate his people. That vindication will last forever. Compared to eternity, even the worst that this life has to offer is nothing. Consequently, by drawing on God’s Word, our new heart, mind, Spirit, and our brothers and sisters in Christ, we who are in Christ can “*hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.*” We can even hold fast the confession of our hope, not with gritted teeth, but with confidence and even joy, and “*all the more as you see the day drawing near*” (**Heb 10:25**).

This leads to the third great exhortation, to “*consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another*” (**Heb 10:24-25**). This exhortation takes us outside of ourselves and turns us to our brothers and sisters in Christ. We all face hard times. We need each other. We need each other for encouragement, for assistance, and as examples. That is why Christ founded his church—the body of Christ here on earth. These three exhortations act something like a commentary on **1 Cor 13:13**: “*But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.*” The first exhortation, to “*draw near,*” focused on faith; the second exhortation, to “*hold fast,*” focused on hope; and this third exhortation, to “*consider,*” focuses on love. It is the most practical and relational of the exhortations. The mention of “*good deeds*” at the end of **v. 24** reminds us that, although we cannot earn our way to heaven by doing good deeds, the deeds we do after we come to Christ are the outward and visible signs of our inward and spiritual

state. They demonstrate whether the faith we profess is true or not. One reason is that, although we are not saved by works, but are only saved by God's grace through faith, "*we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them*" (Eph 2:10). In short, true, saving faith takes us where we are, but it does not leave us where we are. Verse 25 adds the important reminder that we are not to forsake "*our own assembling together.*" Corporate worship is important. In fact, regular formal and informal get-togethers among those who are in Christ are important since they foster accountability, comradery, community, fellowship, and friendship. All of those traits, and more, are important in helping us realize that the church is more than just an organization: it is a family. We need to remember that, in any good and loving family, the family members take care of their own.

2. To continue to willfully sin will result in severe judgment (10:26-31).

*<sup>26</sup> For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup> How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." <sup>31</sup> It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Heb 9:23—10:18 established that the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the only effective and final means of atonement for our sins. Heb 10:19-25 then showed how Christ is the "living way" to God, that he had been God's plan from the beginning, and then showed the implications of what Christ has done for us, namely, we are exhorted to faith, hope, and love. This section is similar to Heb 6:4-8, concerning false believers who fell away after having been enlightened, having tasted the heavenly gift, the word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and who had been partakers of the Holy Spirit. To "*go on sinning wilfully*" (10:26) is the equivalent of "falling away" (6:6). That follows from the fact, as we saw in 10:24, that our deeds are the outward and visible signs of our inward and spiritual state. "Trampling under foot the Son of God, regarding as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and insulting the Spirit of grace" (10:29) are equivalent to "crucifying to themselves the Son of God and putting Him to open shame" (6:6). That section, like this one, followed a discussion of how Christ, as our high priest, is the source of our salvation and an exhortation to press on to spiritual maturity (Heb 5:1—6:3).

The judgment discussed in v. 27 follows from, or is the counterpart to, what was said in vv. 24-25 about "*stimulat[ing] one another to love and good deeds, . . . and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*" In other words, Christ is coming again, and the judgment he will bring will be a time of great reward for those who are faithful, but great, consuming fury for those who are not. Verse 27 alludes to Isa 26:11. Verses 28-29 are arguing "from the lesser to the greater." They are alluding to Deut 17:2-7 and Deut 13:8. They are showing the implication of what already has been discussed, namely, that Christ is superior to Moses (Heb 3:1-6) and the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant because of the sacrifice of Christ (Heb 8:6—10:18). Verse 30 quotes Deut 32:35-36. Since Christ's sacrifice has done away with all other sacrifices, to turn away from him leaves no hope of forgiveness but only the surety of judgment.

3. To persevere in faith will result in great reward (10:32-39).

*<sup>32</sup> But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, <sup>33</sup> partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. <sup>34</sup> For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. <sup>35</sup> Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup> For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. <sup>37</sup> For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. <sup>38</sup> But My righteous one shall live by faith; And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. <sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*

The word "But" to begin this section contrasts this with the previous section, just as was true with the contrast between 6:9-18 and 6:4-8. The word translated "conflict" in v. 32 is actually *athlēsis*, from which we get the word "athletics." It indicates a contest or exercise and "denotes the act of meeting a difficult situation which

necessitates a fight and exercise of one's power" (Zodhiates 1993, *athlēsis*, 90). The phrase "*conflict of sufferings*" tells us that, although these believers had been enlightened by the light God gave them, they were not exempt from sufferings brought about by someone else. Those sufferings are explained in **vv. 33-34**. They include reproaches, tribulations, the seizure of their property, and sharing in the similar sufferings of others. Showing sympathy to prisoners is reminiscent of what Christ said in **Matt 25:36** ("*I was in prison, and you came to Me*"). In **v. 34**, the statement that the believers "*accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one*" anticipates what is said of Moses in **11:25-25**, that he chose "*to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.*"

"Therefore" (**v. 35**) connects the exhortations of what to do now with the endurance of hardship which has just been mentioned. In other words, "In light of your faithful endurance, continue in faith and, if you do, you will have a great reward," which is mentioned in **vv. 35-36**. **Verses 37-38** include quotations from **Isa 26:20** ("*a very little while*") and **Hab 2:3-4** ("*is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith*"). These quotations serve to contrast the faithful and the unfaithful and put the exhortations to endure and not "*throw away your confidence*" and not "*shrink back*" into the context of Christ's second coming. The "great reward" (**v. 35**) and "receiving what was promised" (**v. 36**) will occur when Christ comes again. Hence, it is necessary to endure and continue to live by faith, but as the writer points out, in the grand scheme of things, such endurance is only for "*a very little while*" and "*will not delay*" (**v. 37**). **Verses 38-39** point out that those who "*shrink back*" give no pleasure to God and do so to their own destruction. In other words, they reveal themselves to be the false professors of **6:4-8** and the wilful sinners of **10:26-31**. The contrast between the faithful and the unfaithful is seen in the context of **Isa 26:20**, which is the Lord's coming to punish the wicked and the context of **Hab 2:3-4**, which is the righteous person's living by faith.

## **B. The nature and examples of true faith (11:1-40)**

This section has been called the "hall of faith." It flows from the exhortations in **10:32-39** to remain faithful and not "shrink back." **Heb 10:38-39** concluded, "*But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*" Chapter 11 shows what those who "*live by faith*" and "*those who have faith*" look like and provides multiple examples of individuals who remained faithful and did not shrink back, even though they often endured horrific persecution and suffering, and even though they did not live to receive the promises. In its most general sense, the chapter is composed of five sections: (1) **vv. 1-3**—the definition and description of the nature of true faith; (2) **vv. 4-12**—particular examples of true faith; (3) **vv. 13-16**—summary concerning those discussed in **vv. 4-12**; (4) **vv. 17-38**—particular examples of true faith; (5) **vv. 39-40**—summary concerning those discussed in **vv. 17-38**.

### 1. The nature of true faith (11:1-3).

*11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.<sup>2</sup> For by it the men of old gained approval.<sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.*

These verses define and describe the nature of true faith. Faith is defined in **v. 1** and described in **vv. 2-3**. In a physical sense, we tend to equate what we see with what we know (see **2 Cor 4:18; 5:7**); what we hear is what we believe (**Rom 10:14**). As **v. 1** tells us, "*faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" Consequently, we are to "*walk by faith, not by sight*" (**2 Cor 5:7**). However, there is a connection between seeing, hearing, and faith. **Rom 10:17** says, "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*" Noah heard from God and acted in faith "*about things not yet seen*" (**v. 7**). God spoke to Abraham (**Gen 12:1**) and appeared to him (**Gen 15:1**), yet he "*died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance*" (**v. 13**). Moses spoke with God "*face to face*" (**Exod 33:11**), yet he "*was looking to the reward*" (**v. 26**), which he did not live to receive, and "*endured, as seeing Him who is unseen*" (**v. 27**). In other words, it is hearing the word of the Lord, and believing it, that enables us to walk by faith in "*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*"

The *Africa Bible Commentary* comments on this classic passage of faith, **Hebrews 11**, by observing, "The writer starts by defining faith as the ability to be *sure of what we hope for* and certain of things that cannot be seen (**11:1**) and then lists many OT examples of what faith makes possible (**11:2**)" (Kassa 2006: 1504). The examples of faith in **Hebrews 11** signify the following (Kassa 2006: 1504-5):

- (1) Faith sees what others cannot see (**11:3-4**).
- (2) Faith enables believers to walk closely with God (**11:5-6**).
- (3) Faith enables believers to foresee danger and destruction (**11:7**).
- (4) Faith enables believers to obey God when they do not know their own way (**11:8-10**).
- (5) Faith enables believers to receive God's promise in impossible situations (**11:11-12**).
- (6) Faith enables believers to persevere even when the promise is not immediately fulfilled (**11:13-16**).
- (7) Faith enables believers to sacrifice the promise (**11:17-19**).
- (8) Faith enables believers to recognize and pass on the blessing of God (**11:20-22**).
- (9) Faith enables believers to take risks (**11:23**).
- (10) Faith enables believers to refuse the pleasures of worldly life (**11:24-28**).
- (11) Faith enables believers to overcome fear and other barriers (**11:29-31**).
- (12) Faith enables believers to endure many other difficulties (**11:32-39a**).

## 2. Examples of true faith (11:4-40).

<sup>4</sup> *By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.* <sup>5</sup> *By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.* <sup>6</sup> *And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.* <sup>7</sup> *By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.*

<sup>8</sup> *By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.* <sup>9</sup> *By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;* <sup>10</sup> *for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.* <sup>11</sup> *By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.* <sup>12</sup> *Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.*

<sup>13</sup> *All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.* <sup>14</sup> *For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.* <sup>15</sup> *And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.* <sup>16</sup> *But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.*

<sup>17</sup> *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;* <sup>18</sup> *it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called."* <sup>19</sup> *He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.* <sup>20</sup> *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.* <sup>21</sup> *By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.* <sup>22</sup> *By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.*

<sup>23</sup> *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.* <sup>24</sup> *By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,* <sup>25</sup> *choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,* <sup>26</sup> *considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.* <sup>27</sup> *By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.* <sup>28</sup> *By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.* <sup>29</sup> *By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were <sup>[s]</sup>drowned.*

<sup>30</sup> *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.* <sup>31</sup> *By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.* <sup>32</sup> *And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,* <sup>33</sup> *who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,* <sup>34</sup> *quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.* <sup>35</sup> *Women received back their dead by*

*resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their<sup>[u]</sup> release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;<sup>36</sup> and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.<sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated<sup>38</sup> (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.<sup>39</sup> And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,<sup>40</sup> because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.*

Abel is the first example of faith: “By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks” (v. 4). Abel’s offering was “to God,” and through it he “obtained the testimony that he was righteous.” John Cross argues that the crucial difference was that Abel’s offering was a blood sacrifice for sin and Cain’s was not, since **Heb 9:22** says that “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Cross 2014: n.p.) However that may be, the key is that Abel’s offering was “by faith”; Cain’s was not. Necessarily, therefore, Cain’s offering was by “works,” i.e., an attempt to exalt himself and manipulate God. Further, Abel’s offering was first-fruits, a recognition that the productivity of the flock is from the Lord and that all of it belongs to the Lord; Abel’s offering also was of the best portions of the flock (i.e., “their fat portions”) (**Gen 4:4**). Implicitly, therefore, Cain’s was not of his first-fruits, but was simply some of “the fruit of the ground”—evidently, in contrast to Abel’s offering, a thoughtless offering, done without faith, and for improper motives (**Gen 4:3**). Hence, **1 John 3:12** calls Cain’s deeds (in context referring to the offerings) “evil” and Abel’s “righteous.” Abel’s sacrifice “by faith” indicates that God had spoken concerning the nature of sacrifices, and Abel had obeyed what God had said, whereas Cain had not (Bullinger 1979: 34-35).

Interestingly, in the account of Cain and Abel, there are several important commonalities between the Abel and Christ. Abel was a shepherd (**Gen 4:2**); Jesus is the “good shepherd” (**John 10:11**). Abel brought as an offering to God “of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions” (**Gen 4:4**). Jesus is “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (**John 1:29**); he was “like a lamb led to slaughter” (**Isa 53:7**). “The Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering” (**Gen 4:4**). The Father had regard for Jesus’ sacrifice by raising him from the dead, seating him at the right hand of the Father, and making him Lord and Christ (**Acts 2:22–36; Heb 10:12**). Just as Abel’s sacrifice was “to God . . . through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous,” Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was “to God” (**Eph 5:2**), and “when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent [the Greek word literally is “righteous”]’” (**Luke 23:47**; see also **Rom 5:18; 2 Cor 5:21**). Abel was rejected by his brother (**Gen 4:8**); Jesus “came to his own, and those who were his own did not receive him” (**John 1:11**; see also **Isa 53:3; Matt 13:53–58; Mark 6:1–6; John 7:5**). Abel was violently killed and shed his blood (**Gen 4:8–10**); Jesus was violently killed and shed his blood (**Matt 27:27–54; Luke 22:20; 1 Pet 1:18–19**). With respect to Abel, v. 4 says that “through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.” God told Cain, “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground” (**Gen 4:10**). **Heb 12:24** alludes to this by speaking of those who come “to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.” Timothy Keller concludes, “Jesus is the true and better Abel, who, though innocently slain, has blood that cries out for our acquittal, not our condemnation” (Keller 2015: 77).

The second example of faith is Enoch, who “by faith . . . was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God” (v. 5). **Gen 5:22, 24** say that “Enoch walked with God” and “God took him.” The phrase “God took him” is repeated in v. 5. The only other persons of whom that is said that they “walked with God” are Noah (**Gen 6:9**) and David (**1 Kgs 8:25; 2 Chron 6:16**). Enoch also prophesied God’s judgment on the ungodly (**Jude 14–15**). Since Enoch prophesied, God must have spoken to him and told him what to say. In fact, Enoch prophesied “also about these men,” i.e., ungodly men in Jude’s day who “have gone the way of Cain” (**Jude 11**). In other words, Enoch’s prophesied the coming judgment. Interestingly, Enoch was the father of Methuselah who, in turn, was the father of Noah. Methuselah means “his death shall bring it,” i.e., the coming judgment. Enoch’s prophecies of judgment applied equally in his own day, in Jude’s day (thousands of years after Enoch lived), and in our day. Jude’s reference to Enoch’s prophesying about those who “have gone the way of Cain” links Enoch with Abel. The Lord “had regard” for Abel and his sacrifice (**Gen 4:4**) and, through it, Abel “obtained the testimony that he was righteous” (**Heb 11:4**); Enoch “walked with God” (**Gen 5:22, 24**) and, through his faithful walk and prophesying, Enoch “obtained the witness that . . . he was pleasing to God” (**Heb 11:5**). Likewise, if we “walk by faith, not by sight” will be “pleasing to Him” (**2 Cor 5:7. 9**). Since “by faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death” (v. 5), we must conclude that God had promised to “take up” Enoch so that he would not see death, and

Enoch believed that promise, similar to how God promised Noah that he and his family would be safely delivered through the Flood in the ark and how God promises us that, at the Second Coming of Christ, “*we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord*” (1 **Thess 4:17**). Finally, **v. 6** concludes by stating that, as was true of both Abel and Enoch, “*without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*” Most people take the statement “*he who comes to God must believe that He is*” as referring to the foundational belief that God exists. On the other hand, Donald Hartley contends that the phrase “*he is*” is an ellipsis that implies a qualifying adjective such as “faithful” or “trustworthy,” i.e., *he who comes to God must believe that He is faithful/trustworthy and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him,*” as in **Heb 3:6; 10:23; and 11:11** (Hartley 2006: 289-307).<sup>27</sup> He notes that **Heb 11:1** “offers a definition of faith consisting of a confidence and certainty about the things hoped for and the things not seen” (Hartley 2006: 306). However, **11:1** does not answer the question of *why* we can be assured of things hoped for and confident of things not seen. We can have that assurance and confidence precisely because of the trustworthy, faithful character of God, which is the “overriding motif, basis, and catalyst for this type of human faith and faithfulness” (Hartley 2006: 306). Contextually, Hartley’s interpretation of **v. 6** thus makes sense. In short, Enoch’s faith was more than simply believing that God exists. Instead, his faith “pleased” God because Enoch “*walked with God.*” His faith was akin to the “three axes of faith,” discussed earlier.

The third example of faith is Noah, who “*By faith . . . being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith*” (**v. 7**). As with Abel and Enoch, God spoke to Noah, and Noah faithfully acted upon what God had told him. Just as Abel’s offering was “*to God*” and “*by faith,*” Noah prepared the ark “*in reverence.*” His faithful preparation of the ark “*condemned the world,*” which was similar to Enoch’s prophesying that the Lord was coming “*to execute judgment upon all.*” Just as Abel “*obtained the testimony that he was righteous*” and Enoch “*obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God,*” so Noah is called “*a preacher of righteousness*” (**2 Pet 2:5**) and “*became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.*” The word “preacher” is the Greek work *kēruka*, which means a “herald.” As E. W. Bullinger points out, Noah, like Enoch, “was not a preacher of the present grace of God, but a herald of the coming judgment of God” (Bullinger 1979: 120). One important aspect of Noah’s preaching is that, by all outward appearances, his preaching was a failure. Unlike the preaching of Jonah in Nineveh, no one repented at the preaching of Noah. This should remind us that we are called to be faithful witnesses, it is God who determines the results of what we say and do (see **1 Cor 3:6**).

With respect to the ark, we see another example of typology pointing to Jesus. The idea and plan for the ark as the way to save Noah and his family was from God, not Noah. Similarly, Jesus as the means for salvation through his crucifixion and resurrection was the predetermined plan of God (**Acts 2:22–24; 4:27–28; 1 Pet 1:20**). There was only one ark, not a fleet of arks from which Noah could choose. Likewise, there is only one way of salvation; Jesus said, and “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me*” (**John 14:6**). The ark had one door (**Gen 6:16**). Jesus said, “*I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved*” (**John 10:9**). **Heb 11:7** says that Noah prepared the ark “*by faith.*” Similarly, we are saved only by God’s grace “*through faith*” (**Eph 2:8**). The ark was covered inside and out with pitch, to make it watertight (**Gen 6:14**); thus, the waters of God’s judgment fell onto the ark but could not get into the ark. Likewise, Christ bore the judgment we deserved, so that we who are “in Christ” no longer are condemned. In fact, the Hebrew words translated “cover” or “pitch” as a verb and “pitch” as a noun are not the usual words for pitch or tar. Rather, the basic meaning of pitch as a verb is “atonement,” which is how it is almost always translated, and pitch as a noun is usually translated as “ransom” or “redemption” (Koehler and Baumgartner 2001: *kaphar, kopher*, 493–94). Christ is our propitiation or atoning sacrifice (**Isa 53:4–12; Mat 26:26–28; Rom 3:25; 5:6–11; 1 Cor 15:3; Heb 9:12–14; 1 John 2:2; Rev 5:9**). He gave his life “*a ransom for many*” (**Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45**); in him we have “redemption” (**Luke 1:68; Rom 3:24; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Heb 9:12, 15**). Noah and his family had to be in the ark to escape the waters of the Flood (**Gen 7:7**); similarly, we are saved only if we are “in Christ” (**Rom 8:1**). God closed the door of the ark after the eight people and the animals had entered (**Gen 7:16**); thus, all those in the ark were secure. The same is true of all those who are in Christ: we have been “*sealed for the day of redemption*” (**Eph 4:30**; see also **Eph 1:13–14**) and “*neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (**Rom 8:38–39**). After the Flood, the ark

<sup>27</sup> **Heb 3:6** begins “*but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house.*” The words “*was faithful*” are not in the Greek but are implied. In **Heb 10:23** and **11:11**, the faithfulness of God is explicitly stated.

“rested upon the mountains of Ararat” (**Gen 8:4**). This typifies Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, since Jesus, after bearing our judgment, “ascended on high” (**Eph 4:8**). Jesus even extends the typology of Noah and the Flood to his second coming: “For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.” (**Matt 24:37–39**; see also **Luke 17:26–27**)

The fourth example of faith is Abraham who is commended for two things. First, “<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; <sup>10</sup> for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” (**vv. 8-10**) Second, “<sup>17</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; <sup>18</sup> it was he to whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your descendants shall be called.’ <sup>19</sup> He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.” (**vv. 17-19**)

Abraham is “the father of all who believe . . . those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all” (**Rom 4:11, 16**; see **Rom 4:1–5, 9–25**; **Gal 3:1–18, 29**). We see that faithfulness in his obedience to the call to leave his home and relatives and go to a land which God would show him (**Gen 12:1**; **Heb 11:8–10**). God called Abraham when Abraham lived in Mesopotamia, while he was still an idolator (**Acts 7:2**; **Josh 24:2**). In other words, God did not choose and call Abraham for any merit of his own, but simply because God willed to do so (see **Neh 9:7**). **Josh 24:3** says that God “took . . . and led . . . and gave” to Abraham. God acted in his grace, and Abraham obeyed the calling and leading of God by leaving his home in the land of the Chaldeans and eventually going to Israel. His obedience is all the more remarkable in that God called him to “leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you. . . . But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him.” (**Acts 7:3, 5**) Consequently, when Abraham arrived at the land God said he would give him, Abraham, along with Isaac and Jacob, “by faith . . . lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land,” because it was the land of Canaan and inhabited by Canaanites (**Gen 12:5-6**). He even learned from God that his descendants would be strangers and enslaved in yet another land for 400 years before they finally would enter the land God had promised to Abraham (**Gen 15:7, 13-16**). Abraham was walking by faith, not by sight. His faithfulness in leaving his home, traveling to a foreign land, and then sojourning there was because “he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” Abraham’s faithfulness typifies the ultimate faithful person, Jesus, who, like Abraham, “answered the call of God to leave the comfortable and familiar and go out into the void ‘not knowing whither he went’ to create a new people of God” (Keller 2015: 77), and who actually sacrificed himself in obedience to God.

The reference in **v. 9** to Isaac and Jacob as “fellow heirs of the same promise” is highlighting the fact that Isaac was not depending on Abraham for the promise, nor was Jacob depending on Isaac. Instead, both Isaac and Jacob received the same promise directly from God (**Gen 26:3-4**; **28:13-14**; **35:12**). Isaac himself was a son of promise, whose birth was foretold and supernatural (**Gen 17:19**; **18:10–15**; **21:1–2**; cp. **Matt 1:20–21**). Thus, **vv. 11-12** state, “By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead <sup>[k]</sup>at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.” When the birth of Isaac was foretold to Sarah, she thought it would be impossible to conceive (**Gen 18:11–12**). When God told Abraham that he would have a son in his old age, he laughed (**Gen 17:17**). When Sarah heard God say that she would conceive and bear a son in her old age, she laughed (**Gen 18:10-15**). When her son was born, he was named Isaac. The name Isaac originates from the Hebrew (*Yitzhak*) and means “he laughs” or “laughter.” In fact, after Isaac was born, Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me” (**Gen 21:6**). Since **Heb 11:11** says that Sarah received the ability to conceive “by faith,” we must conclude that, although her original laughter may have been from disbelief and joy, her disbelief turned into belief, particularly since God told Abraham at the time, “Is anything too difficult for the Lord?” (**Gen 18:14**) It is not surprising, therefore, that Sarah is cited as an example of the “holy women” of former times (**1 Pet 3:5-6**). By following her example, Christian wives also are called “fellow heirs of the grace of life” (**1 Pet 3:7**). Jesus’ birth, like that of Isaac, was foretold and supernatural; when the birth of Jesus was foretold to Mary, she, like Sarah, thought it would be impossible to conceive (**Luke 1:26–38**).

In concluding the discussion of the birth of Isaac, it should be noted that Isaac was the “only” (i.e., unique) and beloved son (**Gen 22:2, 12, 16**). In that way, he was a “type” of Christ. The references in **John 1:14, 18**; **3:16, 18**; **1 John 4:9** to Jesus as God’s “only begotten Son” and in **Rom 8:32** (he “did not spare his own Son”) are clear

allusions to Isaac in **Gen 22:2, 12, and 16**. Isaac was the physical “seed” promised Abraham. However, the promises made to Abraham actually extended far beyond Isaac and really pertained to Christ, as Paul points out in **Gal 3:16**, “*Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ.*” **Heb 11:12**, therefore, quotes from **Gen 15:5; 13:16; and 32:12** in comparing Abraham’s descendants to “*the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.*” This may be symbolic of the descendants of Abraham: some were believers, but many were unbelievers. Bullinger contends that “those who were like the ‘sand’ and ‘dust’ of the earth walked by sight, with their eyes fixed on the earth; and did not believe God as to what he had prepared to be enjoyed in eternal life. . . . But those who were like the ‘stars’ were ‘partakers of a heavenly calling (Heb. iii. 1). They believed God—and manifested ‘the obedience of faith.’” (Bullinger 1979: 153)

**Verses 13-16** summarize the faithfulness of all of the persons and events discussed in **vv. 4-12**. In each case, the persons “*died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. . . . But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.*” That “heavenly country” has got to be the “heavenly Jerusalem” referred to in **Heb 12:22** and **Revelation 21-22**. That is clear from the fact that **Heb 11:39-40** says that the OT saints discussed throughout chapter 11 “*having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.*” However, in Christ, we “*have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*” (**Heb 12:22**; see also **Gal 4:21-31**).

With respect to Abraham’s willingness to offer up his son Isaac to God as a sacrifice (**Gen 22:1-14; Heb 11:17-19**), when **v. 17** says that Abraham “*offered up Isaac,*” the word “offered” is in the perfect tense. This “shows that God reckoned his faith as his act; and imputed the result to him as though he had actually completed it” (Bullinger 1979: 162). The same is found in the account of this event in **Gen 22:16**, where God says “*By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son...*” Again, God regarded Abraham as actually having done the act of sacrifice. Since **v. 17** says that Abraham offered up Isaac “*by faith,*” this is showing that obedience demonstrates faith; or, to put it another way, the failure to obey demonstrates a lack of faith. This is also reflected in **Gen 22:5**, in which, after God told Abraham to go to the land of Moriah to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham told the young men who were with him “*Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.*” Ultimately, our obedience is an act of worship of God. The second half of **v. 17** uses the imperfect tense (“*was offering up*”) to show that the act of offering was not completed, because God stopped its consummation.

The entire account of Abraham and Isaac prefigured Christ’s crucifixion. That is probably another reason why the perfect tense is used in **Gen 22:16** and the beginning of **Heb 11:17**. Thus, Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac in the land of Moriah (**Gen 22:2**). That is where Jerusalem and the temple were located, and where Jesus was crucified (**2 Chron 3:1**). Just as Abraham showed his love for God by his willingness to offer his son, so God the Father showed his love for the world by actually offering his Son for our sin. Just as the wood to burn the sacrifice was laid on Isaac (**Gen 22:6, 9**), so Jesus had to carry the cross to which he was nailed (**John 19:17; 20:25-27**). Just as Abraham said that “*God will provide for Himself the lamb*” (**Gen 22:8**) for the sacrifice, so God provided Jesus Christ, “*the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (**John 1:29**; see also **Rev 5:6**). Just as Isaac was obedient to the will of his father, even to the point of death, so Jesus was obedient to the will of his Father, even to death (**Matt 26:39; Phil 2:8**). In other words, the fulfillment is always greater than the shadow: Isaac was obedient at the *risk* of his life; Christ was obedient at the *cost* of his life. Just as Abraham would have considered Isaac dead for the three days of their journey, since Abraham clearly intended to complete the sacrifice of Isaac’s life (**Gen 22:4, 9-10**), so Jesus was in the grave for three days (**Matt 12:40; Luke 24:21; Acts 10:39-40**). Finally, just as Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead, “*he also received him back as a type*” (**Heb 11:19**), so Jesus literally was resurrected from the dead (**Matt 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-13; Luke 24:1-6; John 20:1-28**).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Many also have seen the ram as type of Christ (see Greidanus 1999: 310). Augustine states, “Since Isaac was not to be slain . . . who was that ram by the offering of which that sacrifice was completed with typical blood? For when Abraham saw him, he was caught by the horns in a thicket. What, then, did he represent but Jesus, who, before He was offered up, was crowned with thorns by the Jews?” (Augustine 1950: XVI, 32) The ram was an innocent substitute, sacrificed so that Isaac could have *physical* life; Christ was an innocent substitute, sacrificed so that his people could have *eternal* life. With types and shadows, the OT person or object may typify more than one NT reality. That is the case with Isaac who, in addition to being a type of

**Verses 20-22** give short accounts of how, “*by faith*,” Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh and worshiped, and Joseph mentioned the exodus of Israel from Egypt and gave orders concerning his bones. In each case, their faith looked beyond death; each one was confident that God would carry out his will, even after they themselves were dead, but the fulfillment of God’s will could only be known through faith. At first, it might appear strange that those acts are included in list of the faithful acts and persons recounted in chapter 11. The account of Isaac’s blessing of Jacob and Esau is found in **Genesis 27**. Jacob connived with his mother and pretended to be Esau, seeking favoritism through an act of the flesh. The fact that Isaac blessed Jacob “*by faith*” indicates that, despite Jacob’s deception, Isaac must have discerned his true identity before he bestowed the blessing. His blessing of Jacob was in accordance with God’s will, since the Lord had decreed before both Jacob and Esau were born that “*the older [Esau] shall serve the younger [Jacob]*” (**Gen 25:23**). When Esau learned of the blessing Isaac had given Jacob, although he cried out with a bitter cry, he could not change Isaac’s mind or the blessing he had given. Isaac did bless Esau, but in accordance with what the Lord had said before the two boys were born (**Gen 27:34-40**). As Bullinger concludes, “In this sad business, ‘the will of the flesh’ overcame Rebekah and Esau and Jacob, but it did not overcome Isaac, though his conflict with it was great. Isaac’s faith overcame all, and carried out ‘the will of God.’” (Bullinger 1979: 196)

Jacob’s blessing Ephraim and Manasseh and worshiping is stated in **v. 21**. The blessing is found in **Genesis 48**, and the account of Jacob’s worshiping is found in **Gen 47:31**. In the Ancient Near East, the older son typically was favored over the younger son. That is why, when Jacob blessed Joseph’s sons, Joseph wanted Jacob to bless Manasseh (the older son) with his right hand and Ephraim (the younger son) with his left hand. Jacob did it the other way around, in accordance with God’s will (**Gen 48:17-20**). Although the Jacob/Esau blessing and the Ephraim/Manasseh blessing each involved blessing the younger son over the older son, the bases of the blessings were different. The first involved the will of the flesh in attempting to obtain something to which Jacob was not entitled, which in fact was God’s will, and the second involved the will of man, i.e., a manmade system of favoritism, which God overrode. The fact that Jacob’s worshiping is mentioned in conjunction with his blessing Joseph’s sons, even though his worshiping occurred some time before he gave the blessings, brings the blessings under the umbrella of worship. In **Gen 47:31**, Jacob’s worshiping was in the context of Joseph’s agreeing to not bury Jacob in Egypt (where they were when these events took place) but to take his body out of Egypt after he died. Immediately after he blessed the boys, Jacob again spoke of his death to Joseph (**Gen 48:21**). Thus, Jacob’s faith and worship permeated the entire episode between Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh.

**Heb 11:22** says, “*By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.*” Joseph’s prophecy and orders concerning his bones are found at **Gen 50:24-25**. God originally had prophesied to Abraham Israel’s enslavement and subsequent exodus in **Gen 15:13-14**, and Joseph either knew of this. It is amazing that, despite Joseph’s eventful life—God sending him dreams as a youth, his being sold into slavery, his interpreting dreams, his rising to power in Egypt and saving thousands from starvation, and God’s obvious orchestrating the events of his life—none of that is mentioned. The one thing that is mentioned is that God clearly spoke to Joseph concerning Israel’s enslavement in Egypt and their ultimate exodus. In other words, God spoke, Joseph heard, and by faith told what God had said. Joseph’s faith is based on his knowledge of an trust in what God had said. In **Gen 50:24**, he told his brothers, “*God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.*” In other words, he was not merely stating his opinion; his statement “*God will surely*” reflects his absolute belief and trust in God, based on the fact that this was what “*He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.*” There could be no greater assurance than that. That is why, since **Hebrews 11** is all about faith and examples of enduring faith, this is the one great example from Joseph that is recorded. This should speak to us and encourage us to place our undying faith and trust in God’s Word.

The next examples of faith are the examples of Moses’s parents and Moses himself. The Pharaoh of Egypt had decreed that all Hebrew newborn sons were to be cast into the Nile River and killed (**Exod 1:16, 22**). **Heb 11:23** states, “*By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.*” This is an example of faith overcoming the fear of man. Since “*faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*” (**Rom 10:17**), God undoubtedly had spoken to Moses’s parents and told them to hide the child. Had the parents hidden the child because he was beautiful or because of their love and affection for him, their fear would have increased. However, it is because of

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Christ, also is a type of the church. Gal 4:28–29 says, “*And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.*”

their faith and trust in God that “*they were not afraid of the king’s edict.*” As we have seen, faith enables us to overcome the will of the flesh, the will of man, and the fear of man.

The faith of Moses himself is commended for two sets of events: (1) events before his call by God to set God’s people free; and (2) events after his call by God to set God’s people free. Regarding the first set of events, **Heb 11:24-26** tell us, “<sup>24</sup>*By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,* <sup>25</sup>*choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,* <sup>26</sup>*considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.* The events recounted here are found in **Exodus 2**. Just as faith can overcome the fear of man, these verses show us that faith can overcome the praise of man and the pleasure, power, position, and riches that man has to offer. In rejecting the pleasure, power, position, and riches of Egypt for ill-treatment with the people of God, Moses was not choosing “the lesser of two evils.” Instead, he positively valued faithfulness to God and his identification with the people of God, “*considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.*”

With respect to the events after God called Moses to set his people free, **Heb 11:27-29** say, “<sup>27</sup>*By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.* <sup>28</sup>*By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.* <sup>29</sup>*By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.*” As was true with Moses’s parents, faith enabled Moses to overcome fear of the wrath of the king. Many people believe that Moses’s fleeing from the king was when he left Egypt after he killed the Egyptian who had been beating a Hebrew (**Exod 2:12-15**). However, **Exod 2:14** says, “*Then Moses was afraid and said, ‘Surely the matter has become known,’*” and **Exod 2:15** adds that Moses “fled” from the presence of Pharaoh who tried to kill Moses. On the other hand, **Heb 11:27** says, “*By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.*” Although it is possible that God spoke to Moses at some point after he killed the Egyptian before he left Egypt, his leaving Egypt likely is referring to when Moses and the people left Egypt in the exodus (**Exod 13:17—14:31**).<sup>29</sup> Thus, Moses’s first leaving of Egypt was characterized by fear and fleeing, whereas his second leaving of Egypt was characterized by faith and leaving. It was at the time of the exodus, when Israel was camped before the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s army was pursuing Israel, that Moses told the people, “*Do not fear!*” (**Exod 14:13**) If this is the reference in **v. 27**, it is technically out of chronological order, since **v. 28** refers to keeping the Passover, which occurred immediately before Israel left Egypt. The persons listed in **v. 32** also are not in chronological order, which indicates that the author had some other reason for ordering things as he did. The reason here may be that the Passover, leaving Egypt, and passing through the Red Sea are all intimately connected, and Moses’s telling the people “*Do not fear!*” occurred on the banks of the Red Sea, immediately before the waters were parted. Additionally, all of the actions described as being “*by faith*” in these verses—leaving Egypt, keeping the Passover, and passing through the Red Sea—were not personal to Moses but involved the entire nation.

Although **v. 28** is translated that Moses “*kept the Passover,*” the word translated “kept” is *poieō*, which typically means to make or do, here in the sense of “instituting” the Passover (Zodhiates 1993, *poieō*, 1187-88). Instituting the Passover indicated Moses’s great faith, because it was on the very night of Passover that Israel left Egypt (**Exodus 11-12**). Moses’s faith is demonstrated in that he explained to the people of Israel all the detailed requirements of how the Passover was to be kept, even though such matters may not have made any sense to the people and even though the people probably were far more concerned about preparing to leave rather than perform various religious rituals (**Exod 12:3-32**). Faith is also seen in that it is not obvious why putting blood on the lintels and doorposts would cause the angel of death to pass over the house and, when the people were at the Red Sea, the idea that they could escape from Pharaoh’s army was contrary to what they could see with their own eyes. In all of these matters, Moses and the people were walking by faith, not by sight.

The next examples of faith pertain to the walls of Jericho and Rahab. **Heb 11:30-31** state, “<sup>30</sup>*By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.* <sup>31</sup>*By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.*” Joshua’s plan for encircling the city of Jericho and its walls falling down on the seventh day appears in **Josh 6:1-21**. This plan would have required great faith on the part of Joshua and the Israelite army, since it was unprecedented and contrary to every other campaign against any city by any any army, Israelite or otherwise. Further, there was no obvious reason why marching around a city for seven days and then blowing trumpets and shouting should cause the city’s walls to fall down. The only basis for the success of this plan was that the Lord had given it to Joshua, and Joshua and his army believed the Lord.

The account of Rahab’s sheltering the Israelite spies is found in **Josh 2:1-21**. In **Josh 2:11**, she testified, “*the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.*” Her actions in protecting the Israelite spies

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<sup>29</sup> Leon Morris gives arguments for both sides of this issue (Morris 1981: 126-27).

were done “by faith” (**Heb 11:31**). The inclusion of Rahab in the “hall of faith” is important in that she was neither from Israel nor was she an Israelite, but she was a Gentile from Jericho and was a prostitute. People of every background can have faith. The scarlet thread which she tied in her window to identify her house to the Israelites (**Josh 2:18-21**) has an association with the original Passover in Egypt. There, blood was placed on the lintels and door posts of the homes, and all who were inside were protected from the angel of death. Here, the scarlet thread in the window served as the sign that protected all who were inside. The analogy points to the saving of both Jews (the Hebrews in Egypt) and Gentiles (Rahab and her family in Jericho) by the blood of Christ (see Lunn 2020: 127). Although not a true “type,” Rahab herself was a pointer to Christ, the gospel, and the church. As a Canaanite from Jericho (**Josh 2:1-2**), she is a foreshadow of the church which consists of people “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (**Rev 5:9**). Just as Gentiles became part of the church early-on (see **Acts 10**), so Rahab was a resident of Jericho, the first city taken by the Israelites after they crossed the Jordan River. Further, **Matt 1:4-5** says that she was the mother of Boaz through Salmon and, thus, is part of the line that led to Jesus Christ. Hence, Canaanite blood flowed in the veins of the Son of God.

The next section names six individuals and a reference to “the prophets.” It then lists several unnamed groups of people, all of whom manifested faith, often in the face of terrible hardship. **Verses 32-38** state, “<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, <sup>33</sup> who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; <sup>36</sup> and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated <sup>38</sup> (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.” Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah were all judges or, in the case of Barak, associated with a judge (Deborah). Gideon and Jephthah are each introduced as “a valiant warrior” (**Judg 6:12; 11:1**). In both cases, their relative insignificance is emphasized: Gideon was the youngest son in his family “which is the least in Manasseh” (**Judg 6:15**); Jephthah was the son of a harlot and was driven out of, and not given an inheritance from, his father’s household (**Judg 11:1-2**). Nevertheless, God used both of these men to deliver Israel from the hand of their oppressors.<sup>30</sup> That is one of the marks of faith: it is not based on worldly riches or power. Instead, “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, <sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no man may boast before God.” (**1 Cor 1:27-29**)

Barak and Samson are listed out of their chronological order and are thus brought together. The reason is that both Barak and Samson are associated with women. Barak was associated with Deborah, who began his mission of defeating the Canaanites, and with Jael, who completed his mission (**Judges 4-5**). Women were part of God’s plan because the Canaanites had been exploiting women when they were oppressing Israel (**Judg 5:30**). Samson was betrayed by his wife and by Delilah, both of whom were Philistines. Those betrayals were part of God’s plan to use Samson to defeat the Philistines, who had been oppressing Israel (**Judges 13-16**).

The next group listed in **Heb 11:32** is David, Samuel, and the prophets. They are connected in that David was both king and a prophet, and Samuel was the last of the judges and also was a prophet. David was the last person Samuel anointed before he died, when he anointed David as king (**1 Sam 16:12-13**). When Samuel did this, “the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward” (**1 Sam 16:13**). That is a prefigure of the

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<sup>30</sup> With respect to Jephthah’s vow (**Judg 11:29-40**), many commentators think that this resulted in Jephthah’s offering his daughter as a burnt offering. That is not the case. **Judg 11:30-31** say, “Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, ‘If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.’” First, nowhere does it state that God condemned Jephthah’s vow or his actions, and it is virtually impossible to believe that God would not condemn Jephthah if he, in fact, sacrificed his own daughter. Second, the word “and” in the last clause of the vow grammatically can and should be translated as “or.” Third, **Judg 11:37-39** say, “<sup>37</sup> She said to her father, ‘Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions.’”

<sup>38</sup> Then he said, ‘Go.’ So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. <sup>39</sup> At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man.” All of this has nothing to do with human sacrifice. Instead, it relates to the first part of the vow to dedicate whatever first came out of Jephthah’s house to the Lord. In other words, Jephthah dedicated his daughter to the Lord, which included her living a life of perpetual virginity (see Bullinger 1979: 325-30).

Holy Spirit coming and remaining upon Jesus at his baptism (**John 1:31-34**). In fact, David was a “type” of Christ. Jesus recognized this. When Jesus’ disciples picked heads of grain on the Sabbath (**Matt 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5**), they were accused by the Pharisees of breaking the Sabbath. Jesus cited **1 Sam 21:1-6**, where David and his followers ate the consecrated “bread of the Presence” from the tabernacle. Jesus noted the illegality of what David did (it *“is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone”*). Jesus was making a Messianic claim: his unexpressed premise is that “a greater than David is here” (France 1971: 46). R. T. France concludes, “The argument from the authority of David to the greater authority of Jesus is best explained by an underlying typology. If David, the type, had the authority to reinterpret the law, Jesus, the greater antitype, must have that authority in a higher degree.” (France 1971: 47) A number of OT statements speak of God’s raising David up again as the promised Messiah and king (**Jer 30:8-9; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24; Hos 3:5**). Walter Kaiser states, “This does not mean that David will be reincarnated as king once again. Instead, the Messiah will come in David’s line and fulfill everything that has been promised to him.” (Kaiser 1995: 189) The NT clearly shows that Jesus Christ fulfills the Israelite expectations of a king sent by God (see, e.g., **Matt 2:4-11; 16:16, 20; 22:42-45; 26:63-64; Mark 8:29; 12:35-37; 14:61-62; Luke 4:41; 20:41-44; 22:67-70; 23:2-3, 39; 24:26, 46; John 4:25-26; 11:25-27; 20:30-31; Acts 2:30-36; 9:22; 17:3; 18:5, 28; 1 John 2:22; 5:1**). This was prophesied by the angel Gabriel to Mary, before Jesus was born, *“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end”* (**Luke 1:32-33**). This was recognized at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (**John 1:49**, *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel”*). When Jesus entered Jerusalem the final time, all four Gospels interpret that as the coming of the prophesied Davidic king (**Zech 9:9; Matt 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-16**). David prophetically spoke of the resurrection of Jesus, and Christ’s kingship and his sitting on the “throne of David” were proclaimed by Peter on the day of Pentecost as having been fulfilled by Jesus’ resurrection and ascension (**Acts 2:29-36**).

Following this, ten positive, overcoming, and victorious characteristics of faith are listed in **vv. 33-35**:  
<sup>33</sup> *who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,*  
<sup>34</sup> *quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.* <sup>35</sup> *Women received back their dead by resurrection.”* These examples of faith are not limited to David, Samuel, and the prophets but were performed by many people of faith. The primary issue of the entire chapter is examples of enduring faith. Consequently, when **v. 33** says *“by faith conquered kingdoms,”* although most people probably think in military terms, the word for “conquered” “is not the word for fighting with weapons, as soldiers, in war; but it is the word used for contending or wrestling, as athletes in the arena. . . . It implies the entering into (successful) conflict with kings and kingdoms; not with weapons to obtain material issues; but with moral weapons for the upholding of spiritual truth.” (Bullinger 1979: 334-35) Similarly, *“from weakness were made strong”* (**v. 34**) has to do with spiritual, not physical, strength (see **Acts 9:22; Rom 4:20; Eph 6:10; Phil 4:13; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 2:1; 4:17**). The phrase in **v. 34**, *“from weakness were made strong,”* reflects what God told Paul in **2 Cor 12:9**, *My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”* The fact that some *“escaped the edge of the sword”* (**v. 34**) does not show the superiority of their faith over that of their brethren who *“were put to death with the sword”* (**v. 37**) because of their faith. Instead, it shows God’s grace.

After the positive, overcoming examples of faith are multiple examples of faith resulting in persecution, suffering, and death: <sup>35b</sup> *and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;* <sup>36</sup> *and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.* <sup>37</sup> *They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated* <sup>38</sup> *(men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.”* Although **v. 35b** is translated *“and others,”* in the Greek it actually reads *“but others,”* i.e., it is distinguishing and contrasting those who conquered and prevailed because of their faith and those who suffered and were overcome, yet remained faithful in spite of their suffering. Indeed, they suffered because of their faith, just like Christ’s disciples all suffered because of their faith. It might seem strange that, in **v. 37**, it includes *“they were tempted”* after talking about people who remained faithful despite being stoned and sawn in two. The word for “tempted” is *peirazō*, which is the verbal form of the word for “trial” (*peirasmos*). God uses temptation, persecution, and suffering to test our faith and our confidence in him. Temptation can be a severe trial. The temptations referred to include the temptation to sin, but the emphasis probably concerns the temptation to renounce the faith and disbelieve God’s Word. Such temptations can be particularly severe when one is experiencing persecution, pain, and suffering, especially when one is promised that, if you renounce your faith, you will no longer suffer but will even be rewarded. The high value that God places on faithfulness in persecution and suffering is indicated at the beginning of **v. 38** which says of those who remained faithful in persecution and suffering that they are *“men of whom the world was not worthy.”* That commendation is

not given to any of the saints who experienced success and blessings as a result of their faith. This should cause us to reevaluate our own attitude toward suffering and faith.

**Hebrews 11** concludes by saying. <sup>39</sup>*And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup>because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.* **Verse 39** begins like the earlier summary (vv. 13-16) began, by observing that the persons referred to remained faithful despite the fact that they “*did not receive what was promised.*” That “*something better*” is the “*better possession*” (10:34), the “*better country*” (v. 16), the “*better resurrection*” (v. 35). All of these are found only in Jesus Christ. God’s great promise, which was not provided in the OT, was his own coming to earth in the person of Christ and doing for us what we never could do for ourselves. The OT saints could look forward to Christ, but they did not have him and could not know him personally as we can. Consequently, they could “*not be made perfect.*” In v. 40, where it says that God “*provided*” something better for us, the word translated “*provided*” is *problepromai*, which typically means “*foreseen.*” **Verse 40** is telling us that, even when God commenced his great plan of redemption, beginning with Abraham, he had us in mind. However, even we have not experienced the fullness of what we will have in Christ. Similar to the OT saints, we must remain faithful and look forward to Christ’s coming again. It is at Christ’s Second Coming that the consummation will occur. This takes us back to **Heb 10:37**, “*For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.*” In Christ, “*God had provided something better for us.*” Through him, we all—OT and NT saints alike—can be “*made perfect*” together.

### C. How we are to appropriate our faith (12:1-29)

This chapter flows from the definition and examples of enduring faith in chapter 11 and exhorts us to live out that faith ourselves. We do that by keeping our focus on Jesus Christ, “*the author and perfecter of faith.*” We do that also by recognizing that we are not alone. The church is a family, and families take care of their own. Consequently, we are to accept the discipline of the Lord, which leads to Christlikeness, and to help and encourage each other to remain faithful, not to fall back into sin, and not to get off of the “*straight path*” that leads to life.

There are a number of interesting differences between chapters 11 and 12: chapter 11 includes only indicatives; chapter 12 is characterized by imperatives and exhortations. Chapter 11 was almost all in the third person (he, she, it, they); chapter 12 is largely in the first (I, me, we) and second (you, your) persons. Chapter 11 was largely historical, concerning Israel’s past; chapter 12 pertains to the struggles Christians currently face.

#### 1. We must lay aside everything that stands in our way and press on to the end, fixing our eyes on Jesus (12:1-3).

*12 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

“Therefore,” which begins this chapter, shows how chapter 12 flows from and is connected to chapters 10:32-39 and chapter 11. In 10:32-39, the readers were exhorted to remember their former days of enduring faith and to not shrink back. Chapter 11 defined and described faith and gave multiple examples of enduring faith of OT saints, the last several persevering to the death. 11:39-40 then provides the transition to chapter 12, as the focus of attention is shifted from “them” to “us.” Now, chapter 12 exhorts us, in light of the examples of the enduring faith of OT saints, to press on in enduring faith ourselves. However, the primary basis for our enduring faith is not the faith of others, but the example of Jesus Christ, the ultimately faithful one. We are surrounded by a “*great cloud of witnesses.*” The image is not primarily that they are watching or witnessing what we are doing, as if they were spectators in a stadium. That image may be in view, since v. 1 speaks of us running the race that is before us, as if we were participants in an athletic contest. However, the word for “witnesses” is *marturōv*, from which we get the word “martyrs.” Thus, the emphasis is on their having been faithful witnesses on behalf of Jesus Christ. Their faithful witness is an example for us and should be an inspiration to us. But, as v. 2 says, our eyes need to be fixed, not on the great cloud of witnesses, but on Jesus. He is the ultimate “*faithful witness*” (Rev 1:5). He gave us our faith (Eph 2:8-9) and will bring it to completion (Phil 1:6). If we keep Jesus—who he is, what he has done, and what he is continuing to do—in the forefront of our minds, and draw on him through his Spirit and his Word, we will be able to faithfully endure to the end. **Verse 2** (“*and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*”) alludes to **Ps 110:1**. As we fix our eyes on Jesus, it is important for us to remember that he is “*at the right hand of*

the throne of God,” because “Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). Verse 2 shows us that Jesus *humiliated* is our supreme example of perseverance and endurance; Jesus *enthroned* is our supreme guarantor of our eventual glorification.

This passage is designed to be a practical exhortation and admonition to us as we run the race of life. As v. 1 reminds us, we are, in fact, running “the race that is set before us” (by God). We have to “run with endurance,” as the examples in chapter 11 of those whose faith endured has told us. In order to run with endurance, we have to “lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us.” Note that v. 1 distinguishes between “encumbrances” and “sin.” Our “encumbrances” are not necessarily sins. Our encumbrances may become sin, but generally they are all the aspects of life which can take up so much of our time and effort and can divert us from “fixing our eyes on Jesus.” Those “encumbrances” can include our job, money, our desire for success, i.e., all the things we are living for. They may be *good* and *important* things which we turn into *most important* and *ultimate* things.

The remedy is to “fix our eyes on Jesus” and to “consider him” because he is the “author and perfecter of faith.” That phrase is comprehensive. It indicates that Jesus perfectly walked the walk of faith himself, bringing it to completion, as stated in the rest of v. 2. It also indicates that Jesus originated our faith and will bring it to perfection, as stated in Phil 1:6 (“He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus”). But it additionally suggests that, even though Jesus followed the heroes of faith in chapter 11 chronologically, he is the one who inspired their faith. That is so given the fact that Abraham was looking ahead (Heb 11:10) and, as Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). Further, the OT saints, although they did not receive the promises, “but having seen them [they] welcomed them from a distance” (Heb 11:13).

The words “fix our eyes” and “consider” are important. To “fix our eyes” (*aphoraō*) is an intensive form of the verb to “look,” signifying to look “steadfastly and intently” and, metaphorically, “to behold in the mind, to fix the mind upon” (Zodhiates 1993: *aphoraō*, 302). To “consider” (*analogizomai*) means “to reckon, think. To consider accurately and distinctly or again and again” (Zodhiates 1993: *analogizomai*, 154). In short, the answer to how we can successfully endure and run the race of our lives well is to have Jesus constantly as the most important thing in the forefront of our minds. Frank Laubach, a noted missionary to the Philippines, who developed the “Each One Teach One” literacy program, discussed how to do this. His plan consists of two parts. First, we should “read and reread the life of Jesus recorded in the Gospels thoughtfully and prayerfully at least an hour a day. . . . Thus we walk with Jesus through Galilee by walking with Him through the pages of His earthly existence.” Second, he came up with the “Game with Minutes.” In it, we make Jesus our inseparable friend: “We try to call him to mind at least one second of each minute. We do not need to forget other things nor stop our work, but we invite Him to share everything we do or say or think.” (Laubach 2007: 89) Laubach said that this activity “is the most strenuous discipline which any man ever attempted”; it cannot be done perfectly, but he found that, to the extent he succeeded, “I think more clearly, I forget less frequently. Things which I did with a strain before, I now do easily and with no effort whatever. . . . And I witness in a way in which the world reacts.” (Laubach 2007: 35, 32-33) Rebecca Pippert had a similar suggestion, to “begin to read the Gospels, every day. Each day as you read, something will probably hit you and make sense. Whatever that is, do it as soon as you can.” (Pippert 1979: 97) It is the acting on what strikes us that demonstrates our sincerity and our trust in Jesus.

By not “fixing our eyes on Jesus” and considering him, and by not “lay[ing] aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us,” we will “grow weary and lose heart.” The end result will be as stated in v. 4, “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.” Jesus shed his blood in the struggle against sin. He resisted sin all the way to the end. To truly show the light of Christ, we have to draw on his mind, spirit, and strength, keeping him in the forefront of our mind. If we do that, we also can run with endurance, not grow weary, and not lose heart, but, instead, run well and run victoriously.

## 2. We must accept the discipline of the Lord (12:4-11).

<sup>4</sup> You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; <sup>5</sup> and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov[ed] by Him; <sup>6</sup> For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.” <sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? <sup>10</sup> For they

*disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.* <sup>11</sup> *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

This section can be divided into two halves: **vv. 4-8** concentrate on sonship; **vv. 9-11** contrast human versus Godly discipline. **Verse 4** is transitional. It completes the thought of **vv. 1-3** by noting that enduring faithfulness is costly, even to the point of shedding blood. But **v. 4** also leads to the subject of the trials of our faith, which God sends us as a form of discipline. Our trials are relatively light compared to what Jesus endured, because, unlike Jesus—whose sweat “*became like drops of blood*” in the Garden of Gethsemane (**Luke 22:44**), and who shed his blood profusely when he was scourged and on the cross—we have not yet shed our blood in our striving against “*the sin which so easily entangles us*” (**v. 1**).

The subject of spiritual discipline is introduced in **vv. 5-6**, which quote **Prov 3:11-12**. This is then expounded in **vv. 7-11**: **vv. 7-8** indicate that discipline shows that we are God’s legitimate children; **v. 9** indicates that our response to discipline should be to respect and be subject to God the Father, just as we would to our natural father; and **vv. 10-11** note that the purpose and result of spiritual discipline is to lead us to holiness; they tell us that God “*disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness*” and “*it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*” The “discipline” referred to can involve any kind of suffering, persecution, or hardship. Particularly since discipline is combined with the athletic imagery of running the race (**v. 1**), which requires training and discipline to succeed—and in light of who is doing the discipline and the purpose and result of the discipline—the discipline referred to is not punitive, but has a nonpunitive, educational, and training function. Suffering and hardship, therefore, are not necessarily signs of punishment or indicate that we lack faith. Instead, they are signs of God’s involvement in our lives and as stimulators for us to grow in Godlike character and grow closer in our relationship with God through Christ. For those reasons, such discipline can even be celebrated (**Rom 5:3-5**; **Jas 1:2-4**; **1 Pet 3:14**; **4:14**). All of this, again, shows us the importance of keeping our focus on Christ, not on our external circumstances.

We are all tempted to turn away from faithfully keeping our commitment to Christ, particularly when we encounter hardship and suffering. In those times, we need to keep our eyes fixed on Christ, and consider him, his resurrection, and the example he set. We need to reflect on his presence in us and the great change he has already made in us. We need to remember how short our race really is and the great, everlasting joy and rewards that are ours if we remain faithful now. Finally, we need to remember that the very things—our circumstances, hardships, and sufferings—that make us want to turn back are the *very things* that God is using in our lives to grow us up and make us just like Jesus.

### 3. We must help our brothers and sisters in Christ (12:12-17).

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,* <sup>13</sup> *and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.* <sup>14</sup> *Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.* <sup>15</sup> *See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;* <sup>16</sup> *that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.* <sup>17</sup> *For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.*

The word “Therefore,” which begins this section, follows up on what has just been said regarding resisting sin to the point of shedding blood and being subject to God’s discipline. It is saying that our resisting sin is not simply a personal matter for ourselves alone. Even celebrating God’s discipline as a sign of God’s involvement in our lives and as a stimulator to grow in Godlike character and grow closer in our relationship with God is not merely a personal matter. Rather, because the church is a family, we are all intimately connected with our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. Therefore, part of resisting sin and celebrating God’s discipline is the necessity of strengthening and encouraging others in their resistance against sin and in their celebrating God’s discipline. “*Hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble*” connotes discouragement in the faith. In **v. 12**, the exhortation to “*strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble*” echoes the words of Eliphaz to Job, in **Job 4:3-4** (“*Behold you have admonished many, and you have strengthened weak hands. Your words have helped the tottering to stand, and you have strengthened feeble knees*”) and **Isa 35:3**, (“*Encourage the exhausted [lit. ‘slack hands’], and strengthen the feeble [lit. ‘tottering knees’]*”). The exhortation in **v. 13** to “*make straight paths for*

*your feet*” indicates that we should help our brothers and sisters to choose the right route and stay on the right path, no matter what the hardships they may be passing through.

**Verse 13** alludes to **Prov 4:26** (“*Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established*”). Some indication of what “*straight paths*” are is found in **vv. 14-16**. In **v. 14** we are told to “*pursue peace with all men*” and grow in “*sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.*” The “*peace*” we are to pursue is not “*peace at any price.*” Rather, peace is coupled with sanctification. Peace is not automatic; it must be pursued. That indicates that the peace at issue is not simply bending to the will of an adversary in order to avoid conflict but is a real peace, a lasting peace. That kind of peace can only be found in Christ (**John 14:27; 16:33; Acts 10:36; Rom 5:1; Eph 2:14; Col 3:15**) through the Holy Spirit (**Rom 8:6; 14:17; Gal 5:22; Eph 4:3**). This is the only kind of peace that can bind people together at the deepest level and the only kind of peace that can last. Only by focusing on Christ—exhibiting his heart (**Ezek 36:36**), using his mind (**1 Cor 2:16**), and walking in his Spirit (**Gal 5:16**)—can we bring about this true, lasting peace “*with all men*” (**v. 14**). Further, **vv. 15-16** add, “*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God*” and make sure “*that there is no immoral or godless person like Esau*” among you. Esau’s tears showed his remorse for the consequences of his rash act, but they did not exhibit the godly sorrow leading to a change of heart, which leads to a decisive turning away from sin and a transformed life which manifests the fruits of true repentance (**Matt 3:8; 2 Cor 7:10**). Again, what is being discussed here are people who, in Christ, have put off the old man and put on the new (**Eph 4:22-24**). In these verses, the first two exhortations (**v. 14**) are “*positive,*” i.e., attributes that the body of Christ should have and demonstrate. The second two exhortations (**vv. 15-16**) are “*negative,*” i.e., attributes that the body of Christ should not have or demonstrate. Both the positive and negative exhortations echo **Ps 34:14**, which says, “*Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*” These exhortations again are showing that we are a body, we need to stay focused on Christ, and we need to be closely connected with each other so that we all can remain on the “*straight path.*”

In **v. 15**, the “*root of bitterness*” alludes to **Deut 29:18** (“*there will not be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; that there will not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood*”). The context in Deuteronomy was Moses’s renewing the Old Covenant before Israel crossed into the promised land. George Guthrie observes, “The author of Hebrews uses the imagery to challenge the hearers not to turn away from the superior, new covenant offered by Christ” (Guthrie 2007: 988). Once again, faithfulness—not just of individuals but of the entire community—is being emphasized and exhorted.

4. We should recognize that we already have come to the true Mount Zion and heavenly Jerusalem (12:18-29).

<sup>18</sup> *For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,* <sup>19</sup> *and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them.* <sup>20</sup> *For they could not bear the command, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.”* <sup>21</sup> *And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, “I am full of fear and trembling.”* <sup>22</sup> *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,* <sup>23</sup> *to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,* <sup>24</sup> *and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.*

<sup>25</sup> *See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.* <sup>26</sup> *And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.”* <sup>27</sup> *This expression, “Yet once more,” denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.* <sup>28</sup> *Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;* <sup>29</sup> *for our God is a consuming fire.*

The events alluded to in **vv. 18-19**, and the quotations in **vv. 20-21** all relate to God’s coming down to Mount Sinai when he gave Moses the Ten Commandments (see **Exod 19:12-20; Deut 4:11; 19:19**). However, **vv. 22-24** are telling us that the events of Mount Sinai were a “*shadow*” or “*copy*” to denote the true Mount Zion, “*the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,*” and the greater living and spiritual reality of Christ himself (**Col 2:16-7; Heb 8:1—10:22**). In his ministry on earth, and after his resurrection, Jesus completely reoriented OT prophecy. In **Ps 2:6, 8** God had declared, “*But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.*

. . . *Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.*” At the end of his answer to the disciples concerning restoring the kingdom to Israel, Jesus told them to go “*to the ends of the earth*” (**Acts 1:8**). That recalls the Great Commission (**Matt 28:18-20**), and echoes **Ps 2:8**, which says that the “*ends of the earth*” have been given to the Messianic King as his possession. Jesus takes OT concepts and reformulates them to demonstrate his redefinition of the kingdom: “In Jesus’ charge to the disciples to go to all the nations ‘until the ends of the earth,’ the prophetic vision of the nations coming to Jerusalem (Isa 2:2-5, Mic 4:1-5; Zech 8:20-23) is replaced by the reality of Jewish missionaries going to the nations. The anticipated movement from the periphery to the center is redirected in terms of a mission from the center (Jerusalem, where Jesus had died and was raised from the dead) towards the periphery (the ends of the earth).” (Schnabel 2002: 47) While the Old Covenant was still in effect, even during Jesus’ earthly ministry, Jerusalem was called the “holy city” (**Isa 48:2; Dan 9:24; Neh 11:1, 18; Matt 4:4; 27:53**). However, after Jesus’ resurrection “the term ‘holy city’ no longer occurs, for God took up residence not in Jerusalem but in the church; and at Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled not the temple or Jerusalem but the apostles and all those who repented and were baptized (Acts 2:1-4, 38-39)” (Kistemaker 2000: 437).

Christ’s first coming *inaugurated* the eschatological kingdom. **Heb 12:18, 22** therefore concludes by saying that in Christ we have “*not come to a mountain that can be touched . . . but you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*” (see also **Gal 4:21-31**). When **v. 22** says that we “*have come*,” the perfect tense is used. That points to both an accomplished and a continuing state. The reference to the “*church of the firstborn*” (**v. 23**) indicates “the privileged station of the saints as set apart to God (Exod. 4:22; 13:2) and heirs of all things” (Rayburn 1989: 1147). There is a nuance to this: the kingdom of God and reign of Christ have been inaugurated, realized in principle, and are present now (the “already” of the kingdom); however, they have not yet been fully manifested, but await a future consummation in all their glory (the “not yet” of the kingdom). Currently, good and evil co-exist, but there will come a time of harvest and of separation of good from evil. Some of Jesus’ parables, such as the parable of the wheat and the tares (**Matt 13:24-30, 36-43**) and the parable of the dragnet (**Matt 13:47-50**), speak of this dual nature of the kingdom. Thus, while believers already have come to the heavenly Jerusalem (**Heb 12:22**), the full, consummated, glorious presence of the new Jerusalem is future (**Rev 21:10-11**).

In **v. 24**, the reference to Jesus’ blood speaking “*better than the blood of Abel*,” shows that Abel also was a type or shadow pointing to Christ. **Verse 25** warns us to “*not refuse Him who is speaking . . . who warns from heaven*.” Contextually, this refers to Jesus, since **v. 24** says that he is “*the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel*.” Further, **v. 25** speaks of Jesus who first “*warned them on earth*” and now “*warns from heaven*.” As **Eph 1:21** reminds us, Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, “*far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come*” (see also **Ps 110:1; Acts 2:32-36**).

**Verse 26a** begins, “*And His voice shook the earth then*.” That probably is an allusion to God’s descending on Mount Sinai in **Exodus 19**, as discussed in **Heb 12:18-21**. In **v. 26**, God then goes on to say, “*Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven*.” This is a quotation from **Hag 2:6**. The original context in Haggai had to do with the rebuilding of the temple following the exile. God’s original “shaking” involved calling out Israel from among the nations and the destruction of such worldly powers as Egypt and the Canaanites. All of that, however, was typological of the true temple (Christ) and the true, spiritual kingdom (the church). By moving from shaking the earth to shaking heaven indicates that this coming shaking will be cosmic in scope. The expression “*Yet once more*” in **v. 27** implies finality. Thus, the “shaking” referred to in **v. 26** will take place in connection with the second coming of Christ. **Rev 6:12-17; 16:17-21; 19:11-21; and 20:9-11** all describe the shaking of the cosmos that accompanies the coming of Christ and his exercise of judging the nations. In **Rev 6:12-14; 16:18-20; and 20:11** the cosmic destruction is explicit. In **Rev 19:11-21** it is implicit by virtue of the reference to God’s “wrath” (**19:15; compare 6:16; 16:19**). **Verse 27** explains that this shaking involves “*removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain*.” **Verse 28** then says that “*we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken*.” In other words, Christ’s kingdom, of which we are a part, is absolutely secure. It is a spiritual kingdom, with an eternal foundation, and a secure relationship with God that withstands the chaos and trials of life. Consequently, believers should stand firm in their faith, anchoring themselves in Christ rather than relying on worldly security. As Paul said in **Rom 8:38-39**, “*neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*.”

In light of what God will do when Christ returns, we are exhorted “*let us show gratitude, by which we may*

*offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe*” (v. 28).<sup>31</sup> Our gratitude for the great grace God has poured out on us should lead to an attitude of “*reverence and awe*” toward God, which results in our “*acceptable service*” in the name of God and by his Spirit to others. In other words, we are to persevere in faith; persevering faith will manifest itself in how we live. **Verse 29** adds to this a warning as a further reason for our persevering in faith, “*for our God is a consuming fire.*” That statement is an allusion to **Deut 4:24**. As Leon Morris observes, “It is easy to be so taken up with the love and compassion of God that we overlook his implacable opposition to all evil. . . . The writer is stressing that his readers overlook this wrath at their peril.” (Morris 1981: 145) This warning is particularly appropriate since the church faces the same tests of faithfulness as OT physical Israel faced. As the new, true, spiritual Israel, the church is called to protect its purity before the Lord. “By focusing upon Jesus as the fulfillment of the covenant relationship, the NT is able to resolve the tension of the OT between ‘the kindness and the severity of God’, as Paul puts it in Romans 11:22. Israel experienced both: God’s kindness in that they became ‘Israel’ at all, and his severity in so far as they remained unredeemed ‘Jacob’. And now, because it is Jesus, rather than the church, who fulfills the covenant relationship, the church faces the same moral demand as Israel did, to ‘put to death what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry’ (Col. 3:5, author’s translation). Paul knows that Israel’s besetting sin of idolatry is an option for the church too, disguised, as always, as inordinate desire which is not longing and love for God. Christians live with the tension between Israel and Jacob within themselves until the final redemption comes (Rom. 8:23, *etc.*)” (Motyer 2000: 596) When we lay aside everything that stands in our way and press on to the end, fixing our eyes on Jesus (**12:1-3**), accept the discipline of the Lord (**12:4-11**), help our brothers and sisters in Christ (**12:12-17**), and recognize that we already have come to the true Mount Zion and heavenly Jerusalem (**12:18-29**), we will persevere in true faith and be offering to God “*an acceptable service with reverence and awe.*”

#### **D. Final practical instructions (13:1-19)**

**Hebrews 12** closed with the exhortation, “*let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.*” **Hebrews 13** now shows, in practical ways, what our “*acceptable service*” looks like. It shows the practical outworkings of faith in all major areas of our day-to-day lives—our social lives, our private lives, and our religious lives—including our relationships with fellow believers and with strangers, concern for prisoners and the ill-treated, marriage, money, church leadership, our relationship with God, and prayer.

##### 1. Instructions regarding social life (13:1-3).

**13** *Let love of the brethren continue.*<sup>2</sup> *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.*<sup>3</sup> *Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.*

Christ summarized the entire Bible in two commands, “<sup>37</sup> *And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’*<sup>38</sup> *This is the great and foremost commandment.*<sup>39</sup> *The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*<sup>40</sup> *On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*” (**Matt 22:37-40**) Paul said that “*the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’*” (**Gal 5:14**). Consequently, **Hebrews 13** begins with love: love for our brothers and sisters in Christ; hospitality to strangers; and care for prisoners and the ill-treated. This mirrors what Jesus said concerning the judgment, “<sup>34</sup> *Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*<sup>35</sup> *For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;<sup>36</sup> naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’*” (**Matt 25:34-36**)

In v. 2, the word translated “hospitality” is *philoxenia*, which literally means “love of strangers.” Entertaining angels without knowing it reminds us of Abraham (**Gen 18:1-8**) and Lot (**Gen 19:1-3**). Although we may have contact with our brothers and sisters and strangers by happenstance or in the regular course of our affairs, prisoners and the ill-treated generally have to be sought out. Richard Wurmbrand, who himself endured many years of prison in Romania for his faith, reminds us, “Whenever you happen to meet a man who has suffered, you should

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<sup>31</sup> The phrase “*let us show gratitude*” literally is “*let us have grace.*” If interpreted literally, the meaning appears to be that we need to hold onto the grace God offers, because it is only by grace that we can serve as we should. By our realizing the extent to which we are the recipients of his grace, our reverence and awe of God will increase.

never be astonished that his faith is weak. You should instead marvel that he still has faith at all. In China, Laos, and North Korea, and in the Muslim world, Christians sit in prison where faith can be eroded and shattered. They need your love and understanding. The New Testament saints preached from their experiences in prison. Remember the saints who are in prison today. Imagine yourself to be in their situation and pray for them.” (Wurmbrand 1998: 10) All of which indicates that Christian compassion and love for others is an active and all-encompassing process that should be central to our lives and who we are.

## 2. Instructions regarding private life (13:4-6).

<sup>4</sup> *Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.* <sup>5</sup> *Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,”* <sup>6</sup> *so that we confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?”*

God ordained marriage (**Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-6**). The marriage relationship, particularly with its sexual component, is the most intimate relationship human beings can have. It is equated with Christ’s relationship with the church (**Eph 5:31-32**). Indeed, Christ is called the “bridegroom” (**Matt 9:15; 25:1, 5, 6, 10; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35; John 2:9; 3:29**), and the church is called the “bride” and the “wife” of Christ (**Rev 21:2, 9**). The intimacy of the marriage relationship is a reflection of the intimacy of the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Consequently, **v. 4** begins by saying “*Marriage is to be held in honor among all.*”

According to the Bible, sexual relations are only to take place within the context of a permanent (i.e., life-long), monogamous, marital relationship (see **Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-6; 1 Cor 7:1-2, 8-14, 36; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:9, 11, 14; Titus 1:6; Heb 13:4**). Thus, **v. 4** goes on to say that “*the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*” The Bible condemns all forms of sexual immorality (**1 Cor 6:18; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3-5; Heb 13:4**). This includes: sex by unmarried people (fornication) (**Deut 22:13-21; 1 Cor 7:2, 8-9; 1 Thess 4:3**); sex by married people with persons other than their spouse (adultery) (**Exod 20:14; Lev 18:20; 20:10; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Jas 2:11**); prostitution (**Lev 19:29; Deut 23:17-18**); homosexuality (**Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10**); incest (**Lev 18:6-17; Deut 27:20, 22-23; 1 Cor 5:1**); rape (**Deut 22:23-27**); and bestiality (**Exod 22:19; Lev 18:23; 20:15-16; Deut 27:21**).

Sexual fidelity within marriage is more important than many people may realize. Remaining sexually faithful in marriage, and abstaining from sexual relations outside of marriage, is a fundamental way in which we practice faithfulness to God. The Bible recognizes the spiritual significance of sex and sexual fidelity by frequently equating idolatry, forsaking God, unfaithfulness to God, and pursuing other gods and ungodly practices with adultery and prostitution (**Exod 34:14-16; Lev 17:7, 20:4-6; Deut 31:16-18; Jer 3:6-10; Ezek 16:15-22; 23:1-20; Hos 2:2; 4:12; Jas 4:4; Rev 2:18-22; 14:8; 17:1-5; 18:1-3; 19:1-2**). In **1 Cor 6:15-18** Paul warns: “<sup>15</sup>*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!* <sup>16</sup>*Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, ‘THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.’* <sup>17</sup>*But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.* <sup>18</sup>*Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.*” In this passage, Paul is showing us that we cannot do something with our bodies that does not affect our spirits. This is true for all people, but is especially acute for Christians. The reason is that we have been joined with Christ, both spiritually and physically. We are his body (**1 Cor 12:12-27**), and our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor 6:19-20**, see also **John 14:16-17; 1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16**). Consequently, when we engage in sexual immorality, it is as if we were making Christ engage in immoral acts. Sexual sin has spiritual consequences. On the other hand, sexual fidelity keeps an open channel of fellowship with God which is not blocked or quenched by sin (see **Isa 59:2; Mal 2:13-16; 1 Thess 5:19**).

Maintaining sexual purity also is the most important thing people can do to prevent contracting and spreading sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS (see **Prov 3:1-8; 5:1-11; 7:1-27; 1 Cor 7:34**). STDs and HIV/AIDS are very widespread throughout the world. As they are spread, new strains of STDs arise which are resistant to existing medications. STDs and HIV/AIDS can cause great pain, medical expense, infertility, disability, and death. Thus, practicing the biblical sexual ethic of no sexual relations before or outside of marriage has profound physical, as well as spiritual, consequences.

From the powerful and important issues of marriage and sex, **v. 5** then turns to the equally powerful and important issue of money. Sexual immorality and greed are linked elsewhere in the NT (**Eph 5:5; Col 3:5**). The reason is that money is equally as spiritual as are sex and marriage. Thus, in **2 Corinthians 8-9**, the Bible uses “spiritual” terms to describe the giving of money to help the poor and needy: *charis* typically means “grace” and is

translated as “grace” or “gracious work” in **2 Cor 8:1, 6, 7, 9, 19, 9:8, and 14**, is translated as “favor” in **2 Cor 8:4**, and is translated as “thanks” in **2 Cor 8:16 and 9:15**; *koinonia*, which usually refers to “communion” or “fellowship,” is translated as “participation” in **2 Cor 8:4** and is translated as “contribution” in **2 Cor 9:13**; *leiturgia*, from which we get the word “liturgy,” is translated as “service” in **2 Cor 9:12**; and *diakonia*, which means “service” or “ministry,” is translated as “ministry” in **2 Cor 9:1, 12-13**. What we do with our money and possessions affects us spiritually now and in eternity (**Pss 41:1-3; 112:5-6; Prov 19:17; 22:9; Matt 6:3-4; 19-21; 19:21; 25:19-30; Luke 12:33-48; 16:9, 19-31; 19:15-26; Acts 10:4; Phil 4:17; 1 Tim 6:18-19**). The issue is not the money itself, but our attitude toward it. Our attitude and priorities toward our material possessions are perhaps the most significant indicator of what our true attitude and priorities are toward God (see **Jas 2:14-18; 1 John 3:17**). The love of money is probably the thing that can turn our heads from the Lord easier than anything else. The seriousness of this is indicated in **Eph 5:5** and **Col 3:5**, where greed for money is equated with idolatry. The warning in **v. 5** to be “free from the love of money” echoes **1 Tim 6:10**, “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

**Verse 5** then ends with a quotation from **Deut 31:6; Josh 1:5**, and **v. 6** includes a quotation from **Ps 118:6 (Ps 117:6, LXX)**. The quotations appear to be words of encouragement, which reinforce the exhortation in **v. 5** to be “content with what you have.” Both contentment (**v. 5**) and confidence (**v. 6**) come from being in the presence of the Lord and trusting in him. The quotation in **v. 6** is an exact match of **Ps 117:6, LXX**. The quotation in **v. 5** is close, but not an exact match with **Deut 31:6; Josh 1:5**, although Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC-AD 50) used the same quotation in one of his writings. Therefore, some think that the quotation is from a version of the Septuagint that no longer exists (Morris 1981: 147; Guthrie 2007: 992).

### 3. Instructions regarding religious life (13:7-19).

<sup>7</sup> Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. <sup>9</sup> Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. <sup>10</sup> We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. <sup>11</sup> For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. <sup>12</sup> Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. <sup>13</sup> So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. <sup>14</sup> For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come. <sup>15</sup> Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. <sup>16</sup> And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. <sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. <sup>18</sup> Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. <sup>19</sup> And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.

In **vv. 7-9**, the subject turns to doctrinal faithfulness. **Verse 7** takes us back to **Heb 2:3** (“how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard”). Note that it is not simply true teaching that indicates doctrinal faithfulness, but faithful conduct. The “result of their conduct” probably refers to the righteous character of the lives of the leaders “who spoke the word of God to you.” In living a faithful life that should be imitated, those who taught the Hebrews to whom this book was written were following in the footsteps of Jesus, who is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (**v. 8**). The exhortation to “remember those who led you,” to consider their conduct and “imitate their faith” is coupled with the warning to “not be carried away by varied and strange teachings” (**v. 9**). This is similar to Paul’s instruction to Timothy to “instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines” (**1 Tim 1:3**). The references to the “heart” and to “foods” in **v. 9**, and the emphasis in these verses on maintaining true faithfulness and relying on God’s grace rather than focusing on certain foods is akin to Jesus’ teaching in **Mark 7:14-23** that what comes out of the heart is infinitely more important than what goes into the mouth (see also **Col 2:16-17**).

**Verse 10** picks up on the reference to food to make an important point. Specifically **vv. 10-14** show that continuing to worship in the OT manner in the physical temple and worshipping Jesus are *mutually exclusive*. “Jesus had inaugurated a new Temple-system (symbolized by the term ‘altar’) which stood in stark contrast to the Temple-system associated with the ‘tent’. In fact the two systems were mutually exclusive: those involved in the earlier system were effectively excluded from this new system (‘those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat’: **v. 10**); by implication those who now believed in Jesus were equally to regard themselves as excluded from that former

system ('let us go to him *outside* the camp': v. 13). . . . This forces a new sense of contrast. Jesus' death had taken place 'outside the city gate' (v. 12), not (as for the sacrificial animals) in the 'sanctuary' (v. 11). A choice was therefore required—either go to Jesus 'outside the camp' (v. 13) or remain, as it were, within the city and focused on the Temple. To use alternative 'geographical' language, were one's loyalties with the Temple mount or with 'the place of the skull'? The contrast between the two was plain. A new means of approaching God had been established; a choice had to be made." (Walker 1996: 206-7) The reference in v. 13 to "*the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp*" is drawn from the rituals that were part of the Day of Atonement (see **Lev 16:14-15, 27**). As we saw with respect to **Heb 2:17; 7:11; 8:3; and 9:23—10:18**, the Day of Atonement was typological of, and fulfilled by, Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The references in v. 14 to not having a "*lasting city*" here on earth but our "*seeking the city which is to come*" take us back to Abraham who "*was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God*" (**Heb 11:10**), i.e., the city God has prepared for us (**Heb 11:16**), "*the heavenly Jerusalem*" (**Heb 12:22**).

The contrasts between the Old Covenant system and the New Covenant are clear. Old Covenant ritual foods were earthly and not lasting; our true New Covenant "food," which lasts forever, is Jesus Christ himself (**John 6:48-58**). Old Covenant animal sacrifices were temporary and could not change people on the inside (**Heb 9:9**); Christ's sacrifice of himself was permanent and cleanses our conscience (**Heb 9:14**). The Old Covenant tabernacle and temple were temporary physical structures; Christ and the church are the true, everlasting tabernacle and temple of God (**John 1:14; 2:19-22** [Christ "tabernacled among us" and is the true temple]; **1 Cor 3:16, 17a, 17b; 2 Cor 6:16a, 16b; 2 Thess 2:4; Rev 3:12; 7:15; 11:1, 19** [the church is the true "temple of God"]; **Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5; and Rev 13:6** [the church is "*His tabernacle*"]). In the Old Covenant, animal sacrifices regularly were made, but they could not take away sins (**Heb 10:11**); Christ offered himself as the one sacrifice to atone for our sins (**Heb 10:12**). Now, in the New Covenant, a completely different form of sacrifice is called for. That is "*the sacrifice of praise to God*" (v. 15). That sacrifice of praise is to be offered "*through Him*" and is to be offered "continually." It is "*the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.*" The fact that praise is the "fruit" of the lips shows that it originates inside the believer and reveals the character of the believer (see **Matt 7:17-20; Luke 6:43-45**). Verse 16 augments the description of "sacrifices" by adding "*do not neglect doing good and sharing.*" The early church exemplified this. **Acts 4:32-35** states, "<sup>32</sup> *And the <sup>[v]</sup>congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.* <sup>33</sup> *And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.* <sup>34</sup> *For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the <sup>[aa]</sup>proceeds of the sales* <sup>35</sup> *and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.*" In short, in Christ our entire lives are reoriented. No longer are our lives to be governed by external rituals. Instead, our lives are changed from the inside-out, and we manifest this, spontaneously and continually, in thanks and praise to God, both verbally and practically.

**Verses 17-19** close this section with ecclesiastical and personal instructions. **Verse 17** returns to the topic of church leaders. Whereas v. 7 had spoken about those who originally had taught the Hebrew believers, v. 17 speaks about their current leaders. The phrase "*they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account*" echoes **Jas 3:1**, "*Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.*" Church leadership, with its paramount responsibilities of teaching and leading by example, is of vital importance (see **Acts 13:1; Rom 12:6-7; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11-12**). The church is only as good and strong as its leadership. If done poorly or for the wrong motives, leaders can bring heresy into the church and lead many astray. The warnings regarding the accountability of leaders in **Heb 13:17** and **Jas 3:1** are in accord with the principle stated by Jesus in **Luke 12:48**, "*From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.*" In **Mark 12:38-40** Jesus applied that principle to the Jewish scribes who were motivated in their position of authority by the desire to wear long robes, receive respectful greetings in the market place, and sit in the chief seats in synagogues and places of honor at banquets. They used their position to "*devour widows' houses.*" In other words, as Victor Babajide Cole explains, "They preyed on the innocent and the vulnerable, represented by defenceless widows. Worse still, they tried to mask their evil with pretentious, lengthy public prayers (12:40). Jesus warned that people who act like this will be judged harshly. Unfortunately, this warning still rings true in our day. Both the people of God and ministers of the gospel must beware of falling into habits like these that will surely incur God's wrath." (Cole 2006: 1193)

The exhortation in v. 17 that the congregation should let leaders lead "*with joy and not with grief*" is exemplified by the apostle Paul, especially in his epistle to the Philippians. Paul wrote that epistle from prison. Nevertheless, he could say that he always is "*offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all*" (**Phil 1:4**); he

saw that even his imprisonment had “*turned out for the greater progress of the gospel*” (Phil 1:12), and “*in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice*” (Phil 1:18); and he could say that “*even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all*” (Phil 2:17). In other words, even though the outward circumstances of the church and the leaders may be very trying, when the leaders and the congregation are united, the Holy Spirit can give true joy and “*the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension*” (Phil 4:7).

The exhortation to have a joyful and united relationship between leaders and congregation is rounded off by the request in vv. 18-19 to “*Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.*” Prayer of the congregation for its leaders (and *vice versa*) is important. It helps to cement togetherness and unity; it helps to insure honorable conduct; and it helps to bring about restoration of relationships.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do the ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant and the veil in the temple point to and find their fulfillment in Christ?
2. Why can we have full assurance of our faith and salvation if we are in Christ?
3. Why is “our own assembling together” (Heb 10:25) as a church important?
4. What does our continuing to willfully sin say about our inward, spiritual state, and why “*if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth*” does “*there no longer remain a sacrifice for sins*” (Heb 10:26)?
5. Heb 10:32-39 contrasts the sufferings we may endure in this life with the “great reward” we will receive if we persevere in faith.
  - Even though Christ has conquered death, and we have been adopted into his family, why do you think that faithful believers still suffer, and sometimes suffer terribly?
  - That passage connects our great reward with the Second Coming of Christ and indicates that it will occur “in a very little while.” How can we look at his second coming as being only in a very little while when it has now been over 2000 years since his death, resurrection, and ascension.
6. Describe what faith is, according to the definition, description, and examples found in Hebrews 11.
7. Discuss the faith of Abel, Enoch, and Noah, as discussed in chapter 11, and how their faiths compare with ours and with the faith of people you see in the church?
8. What does walking by faith and not by sight mean and imply? Is doing that hard or easy?
9. In Hebrews 11, a number of “types” and “shadows” of Christ are mentioned, including Abel, the ark, and Abraham’s offering to sacrifice Isaac. What do you think of the issue of typology?
  - How does typology affect your view of the Bible?
  - Can typology sometimes be taken too far (give examples of that, if you have any)?
10. The last part of Hebrews 11 gives examples of people who remained faithful despite suffering severe temptation, persecution, suffering, and death, and who did not receive what had been promised.
  - Why do you think God uses such negative things in our lives?

- Why do we so often think that, if we have faith, we will not experience such things or that, if we do experience such things, they are a sign either that we do not have faith or that God is punishing us?

11. What are the “encumbrances” that tend to cause us not to persevere in faith or divert us from the race we are to run? How can we overcome those encumbrances?

12. One of the things emphasized in chapter 12 is the body of Christ—how we should help our brothers and sisters in Christ to resist sin and celebrate God’s discipline. How can we do this?

13. One aspect of resisting sin is to be honest about our sin with a brother or sister in Christ whom we respect and trust. Many Christians do not have such a relationship and do not confess their sins to one another, even though we are commanded to do so (Jas 5:16). Why do you think that is the case, and how can we develop such relationships?

14. Discuss the “already, and not yet” nature of the kingdom of God and the fact that we already have come to the true Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem. What implications might these facts have for our lives?

15. What is God’s attitude toward sin and evil? What difference should that make in our lives?

16. Chapter 13 shows the practical outworkings of faith in all major areas of our day-to-day lives—our social lives, our private lives, and our religious lives—including our relationships with fellow believers and with strangers, concern for prisoners and the ill-treated, marriage, money, church leadership, our relationship with God, and prayer. In light of this, why do so many churches not have discipleship programs to help believers understand and practically apply their faith to all the major areas of life? What can we do to develop such programs?

17. What can we do to show the love of Christ to people in prison?

18. Marriage is an intimate and, ultimately, a spiritual relationship. What can we and individuals and churches do to strengthen our marriages?

19. Money is also spiritual. What can we as individuals and churches do to help our people (and our churches) use their money more wisely and biblically?

20. What is the relationship between what we believe and how we live? If the two contradict each other, what does that tell us?

21. Discuss the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

22. All Christians, and especially church leaders, will be held to account for what we have done in this life. What can we as individuals and churches do to help our people, especially our leaders, become more biblical and faithful in their teaching and life?

- What should we as individuals and churches do when church leaders stray from sound biblical teaching and/or from living a holy life?

## **V. Conclusion (13:20-25)**

This conclusion summarizes a number of themes that have been important throughout this book: the blood; the eternal (New) covenant; the Lordship of Christ; and the importance of doing his will. It also, for the first time, calls Jesus “*the great Shepherd of the sheep*” and explicitly refers to the resurrection.

### **A. Benediction (13:20-21)**

*<sup>20</sup> Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, <sup>21</sup> equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

This benediction in essence summarizes what Christianity is all about. As we discussed with respect to Melchizedek in **Heb 7:1-10**, while God is “*the God of peace*,” Jesus is the “*Prince of Peace*” (**Heb 9:6**), who gives “*My peace . . . not as the world gives*” (**John 14:27**). **Eph 2:14** adds, “*He Himself is our peace.*” Only Christ brings such peace: peace between us and God; peace with other people; and peace within. This was all brought about by the fact that God “*brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep*,” Jesus Christ (see **John 10:1-18**). Christ’s resurrection validated who Jesus is, namely “*Jesus our Lord*” (i.e., God come to earth as a man) and revealed that the Father accepted Jesus’ sacrifice of himself on our behalf, by not leaving Jesus dead and buried in the ground. The “*blood of the eternal covenant*” is referring to the New Covenant, which Christ inaugurated on the cross. As Jesus said, when he took the cup at the Last Supper, “*This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood*” (**Luke 22:20**). The New Covenant is eternal in that it alone provides eternal life, and it will never become obsolete or be invalidated or superceded as was the Old (Mosaic) Covenant (see **Heb 8:8-13**). With respect to our being equipped “*in every good thing to do His will*,” we previously have seen that when a person comes to Christ, he or she receives a new heart (**Ezek 36:26; 2 Cor 3:3**), the mind of Christ (**1 Cor 2:16**), and the Spirit from Christ (**Ezek 36:26; John 14:17**). In other words, we are equipped in all ways, with the heart, mind, and Spirit of Christ himself, to do his will. And the statement that he is “*working in us that which is pleasing in His sight*,” echoes **Phil 2:12-13**, where Paul urges us to “*work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*” Christ has done all of this for us. It is no wonder, therefore, that the benediction ends that to him “*be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*”

### **B. Exhortation (13:22)**

***22 But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.***

The phrase “*word of exhortation*” is also found in **Acts 13:15**, where means a sermon or homily. Consequently, many commentators view Hebrews as a sermon modified into letter form (e.g., Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 232-33). That also is indicated by the fact that the book does not have the typical epistolary beginning (i.e., identification of the author, the recipients, and words of greeting), although it does have a typical epistolary conclusion. Although Hebrews is one of the longer books of the NT, it was “*brief*” given the vastness and importance of the themes with which it deals.

### **C. Personal greetings (13:23-25)**

***23 Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. 24 Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. 25 Grace be with you all.***

The author of Hebrews evidently knew his readers and their background: he knew of their background (**Heb 6:9-12**); how they had endured suffering and had shown sympathy to prisoners (**10:32-34**); and their current spiritual state (**5:11-14; 12:4**). His calling them “*brethren*” (v. 22) indicates that the author personally knew his readers. The mention of Timothy, Timothy’s release from prison, and the statement “*with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you*” (**13:23**) indicates that the readers of the book also knew Timothy. The book does not specify where the first-century readers were located. Although some have suggested either Alexandria or Jerusalem as the location of the first-century recipients, the odds favor Rome, since the book was first known and quoted in Rome, and the statement in v. 24 that “*those from Italy greet you*” suggests that the author’s companions were from Italy and wanted to send greetings home (Guthrie 1983: 27; Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002: 243). The mention of “*grace*” is a fitting conclusion in light of the fact that the letter is so full of what God in Christ has done for his people and the fact that grace is the basis of our faith and of Christianity itself.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Summarize the essence of Christianity and what makes it different from all other religions.
2. Jesus is called “the great Shepherd of the sheep.” What implications does that description have with respect to Jesus and with respect to us?
3. Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ of pivotal importance?

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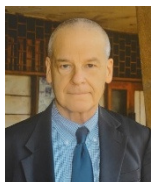
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