INTRODUCTION AND HEBREWS

By Ashby L. Camp

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The outline of the text is taken from George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), but it does not always follow the format of Guthrie's outline.

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Introduction

I. Preface

A. William Barclay remarked almost 70 years ago, "When we come to read the *Letter to the Hebrews* we come to read what is, for the person of today, the most difficult book in the whole New Testament."[1] More recently, Harold Attridge says it is "perhaps the most enigmatic" text of first-century Christianity,[2] and Peter O'Brien says that for contemporary readers, it "is one of the most difficult New Testament books to understand."[3] Whether you agree with that or not, if you have spent any time seriously studying Hebrews, you will know that it has more than its share of interpretive challenges.

B. Even the setting, the background of the book, is difficult to determine. George Guthrie writes in his 1998 commentary:

> Commentators have had to write tentatively concerning issues of background when it comes to this wonderfully complex document. As William L. Lane notes, "Hebrews is a delight for the person who enjoys puzzles." The author simply left us little in the way of overt remarks on his own context and the context of the recipients.[4]

C. But despite the difficulties, we can make some educated guesses regarding the probable setting and circumstances of the letter. To quote Guthrie again, "like a Sherlock Holmes mystery, clues in the text lead the interested investigator to feasible conclusions."[5]

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[1] Quoted in Guthrie (1998), 14.
[2] Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 1.
[3] Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1.
[4] Guthrie (1998), 19.
[5] Guthrie (1998), 19.

II. The Recipients

A. It is clear that Hebrews was written initially to a specific group of Christians rather than to the church at large.

1. This group had ministered generously to other Christians (6:10) and had endured in earlier days certain specific acts of persecution that are referred to in 10:32-34. The author knows the circumstances under which they had become Christians (2:3), knows their present state of mind (5:11ff.; 6:9ff.), and apparently knows their attitude toward their leaders (13:17).

2. The author knows these Christians personally and hopes to visit them again (13:19, 23). He requests that they pray for him (13:18) and mentions Timothy's release as an item of news in which they would be interested (13:23).

B. This group of Christians is being urged to hold fast to their confession, to maintain their allegiance to Christ (e.g., 3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23). It seems they were being tempted to reject Christianity and to return to some form of Judaism, which means they were (at least largely) Christians who previously had identified with Judaism.

1. Many no doubt were ethnic Jews who had converted to Christ, but the group also may have included Gentiles who before their conversion had affiliated with Judaism as proselytes or God fearers.

2. The fact this letter was known to Clement of Alexandria around A.D. 180 as having been written "for Hebrews" and the fact the earliest manuscript of the letter dating around A.D. 200 (P^{46}) is entitled "To [the] Hebrews" support this understanding of the recipients.[6]

3. That the original readers were predominantly Jewish is, in Andreas Köstenberger's view, "corroborated by the contents of the letter itself, which exhibits extensive and impressive familiarity with the minutiae of the Jewish priesthood, the OT sacrificial system, and various OT liturgical practices."[7]

III. Purpose of the Letter

A. The purpose of the letter, as I have already indicated, was to urge these Christians to hold fast to their confession of faith. What was tempting them to revert to Judaism is only hinted at, but it seems to have included being tired of bearing the shame of living outside the mainstream of their cultural heritage (13:13), a doctrinal blurring of

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[6] D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 609.

[7] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Handbook on Hebrews Through Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 2.

the distinctive place of Jesus, and possibly fear of persecution because Judaism was recognized as an official religion by the Romans but Christianity was not. Douglas Moo states:

> What can accurately be labeled the "traditional" view highlights the warnings against falling back, identifying the letter as written to Jewish Christians who are being tempted to turn away from the Christian commitment to embrace again their Jewish heritage as the locus of their religious life. Advocates of this interpretation often identify the persecution that the readers are facing (10:32-34; cf. 12:4-11) as an impetus for this regression. As a "tolerated religion" in the Roman Empire, Judaism would shield its adherents from the persecution that Jesus followers would have been experiencing. The traditional title to the book – "To the Hebrews" (ΠΡΟΣ ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ) – may reflect an early interpretation of the letter along these lines.[8]

B. The theme the writer sounds in warning the readers not to turn from the Christian faith is the unqualified supremacy of Christ. D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo state:

> The general theme of Hebrews – the unqualified supremacy of God's Son, Jesus Christ, a supremacy that brooks no challenge, whether from angelic or human beings – is not in dispute. Correlatively, the covenant he has inaugurated is superior to any covenant that has preceded it; his priesthood is better than Levi's; the sacrifice he offered is superior to those offered under the Mosaic code; and in fact, the very purpose of antecedent revelation was to anticipate him and point to him and to all the blessings he has brought with him. This theme of the supremacy of Christ is not the stuff of an abstract essay; its purpose is repeatedly disclosed by the parenetic passages (2:1-4; 3:7-4:11; 4:14-16; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:1-13:17) designed to warn the readers not to turn back from the Christian faith to the forms of piety they once knew.[9]

IV. Location of the Recipients

A. Many ancient and some modern commentators think the recipients lived in Palestine, perhaps even in Jerusalem. That conclusion is based on the repeated references to the Jewish cultus in Hebrews, but several things cut against that conclusion.

1. The letter is written in polished Greek, and none the OT quotations and allusions clearly depend on Hebrew or Aramaic; rather, they are drawn from the LXX. As Moo and Carson state, "from this we must conclude either that the author knew no

[8] Douglas J. Moo, *Hebrews*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024), 10.
[9] Carson and Moo (2005), 597.

Semitic tongue or that his readers, if in Jerusalem, were all expatriates, Greek speakers choosing to live in Jerusalem or the surrounding area."[10]

2. There were countless Jews who did not live in Palestine, but who looked to the cultus in Jerusalem for cleansing and for a secure relationship with God, so the references to the cultus do not really support Jerusalem as a destination.

B. Most modern commentators believe the recipients lived in or near Rome. They base that mainly on three pieces of evidence.

1. The statement in 13:24 that "those from Italy send you greetings" is ambiguous in that it could refer either to Italian Christians who had left their native land and were sending greetings home or to Christians who were in Italy with the author and were sending greetings to those to whom the letter was being sent. However, it seems from how the phrase "from Italy" is used in Acts 18:2 referring to Aquila and Priscilla that the former is the more likely meaning.

2. Hebrews is the only NT document that refers to the leaders of the church by the Greek term *hegoumenoi* (13:7, 17, 24; translated "leaders"). Outside the NT this designation for church leadership occurs in two early Christian documents, *1 Clement* and *The Shepherd of Hermas*, both of which were associated with the church in Rome.[11]

3. *First Clement*, which was written from Rome near the end of the first century, shows familiarity with and even direct reference to Hebrews (esp. *1 Clement* 36:1-6).[12] So the earliest evidence of Hebrews in the church ties it to Rome.

V. The Date

A. First, there is good reason for believing Hebrews was written before A.D. 70. The author is stressing the obsolescence of the old covenant and its sacrificial system in light of the new covenant instituted by Christ. If those sacrifices were no longer being offered in the temple (which sacrifices were in fundamental continuity with those established for the tabernacle) because the temple had been destroyed, it seems certain the author would have pointed that out.[13] In addition, if the sacrifices no longer were being offered, it seems unlikely the author would have written in 10:1-2 that the law-covenant "can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make

[10] Carson and Moo (2005), 608.
[11] Guthrie (1998), 21.
[12] Guthrie (1998), 21.
[13] Köstenberger (2020), 1, says, "Since the destruction of the temple (if it had already occurred) would have greatly served to advance the writer's argument that the old sacrificial system and its institutions, now that Jesus had come, had been rendered obsolete, it is highly probable that the document was written prior to AD 70."

perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered?"[14]

B. If the Roman destination is accurate, the date of the writing reasonably can be narrowed to the mid-60s A.D. This is based on the fact (1) the recipients had been Christians long enough that their immaturity was unreasonable (5:11-6:3), (2) they had faced and persevered in a time of serious persecution in the past (10:32-34), and (3) they had yet to suffer martyrdom for the faith (12:4) but were now facing a more severe time of trial (11:35-12:3; 12:7; 13:3, 12-13).[15] Guthrie writes:

> [T]he situation indicated by the data above suggests Hebrews was written in the mid-60s A.D., just prior to the extreme persecution of the Roman church under Nero. At this point the Roman church had been in existence for about three decades. The conflict with the Jews and the government in A.D. 49, which led to the expulsion by Claudius, would account for the earlier time of testing experienced by this community (10:32-39). Also, Nero's rising threat to the church accounts for the fear of death and the waning of commitment indicated in Hebrews.[16]

C. How does this square with the likely makeup of the Roman church?

1. The most likely scenario for the founding of the church in Rome is that Jews, who were converted on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:10), brought their faith in Jesus back with them to their home synagogues.

2. When Paul wrote Romans around A.D. 57, there were both Jewish and Gentile elements in the church, but it seems the Gentile Christians were in a majority large enough to justify Paul including the Christian community in Rome within the sphere of those Gentiles to whom his apostleship was especially directed (Rom. 1:5-6, 13). The church probably had shifted to a predominantly Gentile complexion through the conversion of "God-fearers" (Gentiles who were interested in Judaism and attended the synagogue without becoming Jews) and through Claudius's expulsion of Jews from Rome in A.D. 49. Roman authorities would not have distinguished between Jews and Jewish Christians.

3. As with similar expulsions of specific groups from Rome, this one did not stay in force long. Soon after Claudius's death in A.D. 54, Jews, like Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3), were able to return.

4. If Hebrews was written in the mid-60's, the Jewish population in the Roman church could have increased, but it is also quite possible that it was written to a segment of the Roman church, perhaps one or more predominantly Jewish house churches. Paul refers to several house churches in Romans 16.

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[14] Carson and Moo (2005), 607.
[15] Guthrie (1998), 22.
[16] Guthrie (1998), 22-23.

VI. Genre

A. Hebrews is not like a typical letter of the first century in that it begins without a salutation and does not name the writer and the addressees. On the other hand, it concludes in a typical letter fashion, with a benediction, some personal remarks, and a final farewell (13:20-25).

B. Many are convinced that Hebrews is essentially a sermon in written form that was sent as a letter. It is as though the author was preaching the letter in person to the recipients. As William Lane states:

> The writer skillfully conveys the impression that he is present with the assembled group and is actually delivering the sermon he has prepared. Until the postscript (13:22-25), he studiously avoids any reference to actions like writing or reading that would tend to emphasize the distance that separates him from the group he is addressing. Instead he stresses the actions of speaking and listening, which are appropriate to persons in conversation, and identifies himself with this audience in a direct way.[17]

VII. The Author

A. Though Hebrews nowhere names its author, by the second century the Eastern church held that Paul had written it. The Western church resisted that conclusion until the latter half of the fourth century, when Jerome and Augustine shifted the opinion. That long resistance to Pauline authorship may reflect knowledge in the Roman church, as the original recipients of the letter, that Paul did not write it. The notion of Pauline authorship held sway until the Reformation when countless ancient traditions were reexamined.

B. Virtually no scholars today argue that Paul wrote Hebrews. Beyond the differences in vocabulary, Greek style, and rhetoric, the fact there is no self-identifying salutation at the beginning of the letter is very hard to square with Pauline authorship. But most importantly, it is very hard to believe that the Paul who wrote Gal. 1:11-12 would identify himself as one of those who heard the gospel, not from the Lord, but from those who heard him (2:3).

C. Many have been proposed as the author of Hebrews, but the bottom line is that we do not know who wrote it. He (note masculine participle in 11:32) was a dynamic preacher, highly educated, and knowledgeable about the Old Testament and its interpretation, but who best fits that description in the early church remains a guess. Martin Luther's claim that Apollos wrote it is perhaps the most reasonable suggestion.

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[17] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), lxxiv.

D. Given that we are not sure who wrote Hebrews, Christians sometimes wonder how we can be confident that it was inspired by God. I think we can be confident that it was inspired for the following reasons.

1. By the time of Christ, the Jews had a distinct body of sacred writings, called "Scripture" or "the Scriptures," which they recognized as divinely inspired and authoritative, some of which were by unknown or uncertain authors.

2. Jesus acknowledged that this corpus of writings was indeed inspired and authoritative. For example, he made clear that what was written in "the Scriptures" had to be fulfilled (Mat. 26:24, 31, 54 and Lk. 18:31, 22:37), he said, "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail" (Lk. 16:17), he flatly declared that "the Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn. 10:35), and he cited Scripture ("It is written") as completely authoritative, as something that put an end to all discussion (Mat. 4:1-10). As John Wenham writes in the beginning of his book *Christ and the Bible*: "We shall see that to Christ the Old Testament was true, authoritative, inspired. To him the God of the Old Testament was the living God and the teaching of the Old Testament was the teaching of the living God. To him what Scripture said, God said."[18]

3. So however God brought Israel to identify the OT writings as divinely inspired, despite some being by unknown or uncertain authors, Christians can be certain that the Jewish community discerned those writings accurately because we know that Jesus is divine and infallible.

4. Since God led Israel to identify correctly the writings he inspired in association with the old covenant, there is every reason to believe he led the church to identify correctly the writings he inspired in association with the new covenant. Indeed, Paul indicates in 2 Tim. 1:13-14 (see also, 1 Tim. 6:20) that the Holy Spirit would help Timothy guard the teaching that Paul had entrusted to him, so one can expect him to be active in the preservation of that teaching in written form, in not allowing that teaching to be lost by lack of recognition and dispersed among a sea of uninspired writings.

5. The church over time came to a consensus as to the writings that were inspired and therefore authoritative. It did not *make* those writings inspired and authoritative by declaring them so but *recognized* the authority they had by virtue of being inspired by God. During that time of communal discernment, most of the books were recognized as authoritative throughout the church, and even those that were questioned in some quarters were recognized as authoritative in large segments of the church. In the words of Glenn Barker, William Lane, and J. Ramsey Michaels:

> The fact that substantially the whole church came to recognize the same twenty-seven books as canonical is remarkable when it is remembered that the result was not contrived. All that the several churches throughout the Empire could do was to witness to their own experience with the documents and share whatever knowledge they might have about their

[18] John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker 1994), 17.

> origin and character. When consideration is given to the diversity in cultural backgrounds and in orientation to the essentials of the Christian faith within the churches, their common agreement about which books belonged to the New Testament serves to suggest that this final decision did not originate solely at the human level.[19]

6. At the human level, the Spirit's work of discernment included such things as the age of a writing, how it conformed to apostolic teaching recognized as normative in the churches, its widespread and continuous acceptance and usage by churches everywhere, and its spiritual impact on the community.

VIII. Fictional Portrayal of Setting

George Guthrie portrays the setting behind the book of Hebrews through a fictional account of a young man named Antonius. I think his account really brings the situation home, so here is a lengthy excerpt:

> Antonius sat alone in a deteriorating second-story apartment located in a slum on the slope of the Esquiline hill in Rome. . . .
>
> That morning his employer, a rough, burly fellow named Brutus, once again turned from the task of pricing fruits and vegetables to ridicule this young Christian. . . . Antonius cringed against the man's emotional blows, wishing he could strike back out of his hurt and embarrassment. . . . Yet, he bit his lip, nursed his wounded pride, and again asked the Lord's forgiveness for his thoughts.
>
> Persecution of the church in Rome had yet to result in martyrdom, but since the expulsion of Jews under the Emperor Claudius, Christians had continued to be harassed to various degrees by both Jews and pagans. Upon the expulsion some had suffered imprisonment, beatings, and the seizure of their properties. That was almost fifteen years ago now. Antonius had not been part of the Christian church at that time but had heard about the conflict. In fact his own grandfather, ruler of the Synagogue . . ., had been one of the most outspoken opponents of the Christians. When at seventeen Antonius converted to Christianity, the old man almost died, declaring Antonius dead in a shouting match that ended in tears and a tattered relationship.
>
> In recent months, abuse of the church had escalated with the amused approval of the emperor himself, and now emotional fatigue was taking its toll. Footsteps in the hall, a scream in the night, meaningless events that, nevertheless, set Antonius's heart racing. He had been told the cost of following the Messiah, but somehow his experience was different than he expected. In the beginning he thought his joy would never be broken, that he would always feel the presence of God. He had been

[19] Quoted in Carson and Moo (2005), 736.

taught that the Lord, the righteous Judge, would vindicate his new covenant people. Did not the Scriptures, speaking of the Messiah, say that God had put "all things in subjection under his feet?" But the church had taken a great beating lately, and members of its various house-groups had become discouraged and were questioning whether Christ was really in control. In their hearts they wondered if God had closed his ears against their cries for relief. Some, in their disillusionment, doubted and left the church altogether.

Antonius Bardavid remembered the traditions of the synagogue and the support of the Jewish community, the joy of the festivals, and the solemn celebrations of the Jewish calendar. He appreciated the fellowship of Christ's community, but genuinely missed the traditions of his ancestors – and he missed members of his family. He watched them from a distance as they walked together to market by the Tiber River. Some of them still would not speak to him and passed him on the street as they would a Gentile. . . .

To make matters worse he was one of the poorer members of the church. When Antonius became a Christian, he lost his job as a tailor's apprentice in the Jewish quarter. He now spent his days sorting rotting produce, sweeping the floor, swatting flies, and receiving orders from obnoxious Roman slaves shipping for rich mistresses. . . . To be poor and a Christian invited double portions of ridicule.

Antonius had missed the weekly meal and worship for the past two weeks, and his heart had cooled somewhat toward the little house-group. A spiritual itch in the back of his spirit warned him, cautioning him concerning his loss of perspective, yet, in recent days he had begun to snuff such thoughts from his mind as quickly as they came. Antonius's bitterness over his current circumstances was growing and slowly obscuring the Truth.

That night the believers were to meet for worship and encouragement. Rumor had it the leaders had received a document from back east somewhere. Although discouraged and tempted to skip the meeting again, Antonius's curiosity was aroused, and he decided to travel the short distance to the neighborhood house at which the fellowship was to meet. Entering the gathering room, he spoke greetings to several friends, who also looked tired from the day's work. The hostess offered something to drink and friendly banter, but dejection hung like a cloud over the room. When the meal was finished, the group's leader, a good and godly man of almost seventy years, finally arrived. Joseph was a bit out of breath, having come from a meeting with the other leaders half way across the city. He was visibly moved as he stood smiling before the group of about twenty, his hands shaking slightly from advancing age. After a few words of introduction Joseph took a deep breath and explained he had talked the other leaders into allowing his group the first reading of the scroll. With a twinkle in his eye the elder said, "I believe you will find this quite relevant." He unrolled the first part of the parchment and began

> reading with vigor: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. . . ."[20]

IX. Structure and Argument of the Letter

A. There is no consensus regarding the development and structure of the argument in Hebrews. Different scholars outline the book in different ways.

B. George Guthrie's doctoral dissertation was on the structure of Hebrews, and that dissertation was published as a monograph in 1994. In 1998 he applied his proposed structure in his commentary. Guthrie's analysis has been well received, though debate continues. William Lane devoted an addendum to Guthrie's analysis in his commentary, and Peter O'Brien adopted it in his 2010 commentary. Carson and Moo state:

> Perhaps the most detailed and consistent outline is that of Guthrie. After surveying many other proposals, he deploys the tools of discourse analysis (= text-linguistics) to draw attention to the complex interplay of exposition and exhortation that runs through this document. His monograph is nuanced and allows for subtleties such as overlaps. In a later commentary he works out his proposal in believable and practical terms.[21]

C. Guthrie sees Hebrews as switching back and forth between expounding on the person and work of the Son of God and exhorting the congregation to a positive response. The exhortations are interspersed in the exposition. The exposition and exhortation work together to challenge the recipients to endure in their commitment to Christ. Guthrie writes:

> In the hortatory sections he offers powerful warnings, challenges, examples, and reminders of God's faithfulness to his promises, all based on God's word. He lays a solid foundation for his exhortation with a thorough exposition on the Son of God. The expository and hortatory sections in Hebrews overlap in the relationship of the hearers, to whom God has spoken his powerful word, with the Son, of whom and to whom God has also made proclamations. The ultimate bases for endurance, therefore, are their new-covenant relationship with God's superior Son and an ongoing openness to God's Word. In other words, one's endurance ultimately will depend on the health of one's relationship to Christ and faithful obedience to the Word.[22]

D. The study below follows Guthrie's outline but not always the format of that outline.

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[20] Guthrie (1998), 17-18.
[21] Carson and Moo (2005), 598.
[22] Guthrie (1998), 30.

Text

I. Introduction: God Has Spoken to Us in a Son (1:1-4)

> **Having long ago spoken to the fathers many times and in many ways by the prophets, [2]in these last days God spoke to us by [the] Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the universe; [3]who being the radiance of the Glory and [the] exact representation of his nature, and sustaining all things by the word of his power, after providing purification of the sins sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, [4]having become as much greater than the angels as the name he has inherited [is] superior to theirs.**

A. The climax of divine communication (1:1-2a)

1. Throughout Old Testament history, God spoke to the Israelites through various forms of prophetic communication. He used not only straightforward speech but also parables, allegories, symbolic actions, and recounted visions. But his final, ultimate revelation was given in the first century in and by his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the climax of divine communication, the one in whom the piecemeal and diverse revelations of the Old Testament come together and find their fulfillment.

2. The communication given by God in and by his Son was given in "these last days" in that Jesus' coming, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and pouring out of the Spirit, that complex of events, was the beginning of the last days.

a. For example, Peter in Acts 2:17 identifies the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost as an event of the "last days," and in 2 Tim. 3:1-5 Paul describes how people will be in the "last days" and then commands Timothy to avoid such people. See also, Jas. 5:3 and 2 Pet. 3:3.

b. As Douglas Moo states:

> With the death and resurrection of Jesus and pouring out of the Spirit, the "last days" have been inaugurated. This final age of salvation will find its climax in the return of Christ in glory. But – and here is the crucial point – the length of the age is unknown. Not even Jesus knew how long the "last days" would last (see Mark 13:32). What this means is that the return of Christ, as the next event in the salvation-historical timetable, is, from the time of the early church to our own day, "near," or "imminent." Every generation of Christians lives (or should live!) with the consciousness that

the *parousia* could occur at any time and that one needs to make decisions and choose values based on that realization.[23]

c. John Stott puts it like this:

> [W]hat the apostles did know is that the kingdom of God came with Jesus, that the decisive salvation events which established it (his death, resurrection, exaltation and gift of the Spirit) had already taken place, and that God had nothing on his calendar before the parousia. It would be the next and the culminating event. So they were, and we are, living in "the last days." It is in this sense that Christ is coming "soon" (16:20). We must be watchful and alert, because we do not know the time.[24]

B. The person, work, and status of the Son (1:2b-4)

1. God appointed the Son heir of all things.

a. This is an indication of the Son's greatness and glory; God appointed him heir of all things. This appointment is evident in the fact he took possession of all things, so to speak, when God exalted him to a position of universal authority, made him Lord of all, following his selfless sacrifice for humanity (see Acts 2:33, 36; 1 Cor. 15:27; Phil. 2:9-11).

b. Craig Koester writes:

> A ruler would designate the son as his heir so that when the ruler died his son would govern the kingdom. The peculiarity here is that God – the testator – does not die; instead, the Son enters into his inheritance and kingly power through his own death and exaltation (Spicq; Vanhoye, *Situation*, 62-64). The Son's inheritance of "all things" through his resurrection and exaltation points to the fulfillment of God's promise that the heir of David's throne would receive the nations as his "inheritance" (Ps. 2:8; cf. 89:27; Rom. 4:13).[25]

2. God made the universe through the Son.

a. The word translated "universe" is *aiōnas*, the plural of *aiōn*. It often has the temporal sense of "age" or "ages," but it also can refer to the physical space and its contents that exist through time. Thus, it is often translated here as "world" or "worlds." I am with HCSB, NAB, NIV, CSB, and the NLT in rendering it "universe."

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[23] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 285.
[24] John Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 352.
[25] Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, AYB (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 177-178.

b. God the Son, who became the God-man Jesus Christ, was God the Father's agent in the creation of the universe. See also, Heb. 1:10; Jn. 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16. Jesus is not one of many religious teachers in human history; he is the creator of the universe!

3. The Son is the radiance of the Glory and [the] exact representation of his nature.

a. The "Glory" is a way of referring to God because the word often is used in the OT to refer to the luminous manifestation of his being (e.g., Ex. 16:7, 33:18; Isa. 40:5). In saying the Son is the "radiance" of the Glory the writer is suggesting that the Son is so intimately associated with God the Father that to see the Son is to see the Father's glory and presence (e.g., Jn. 14:9).

b. Put another way, the Son is the exact representation of the Father's nature. In seeing the Son, one is seeing God expressed in flesh.

4. The Son sustains all things by the word of his power, or more colloquially, by his powerful word. The Son not only was the Father's agent in the creation of the universe; he sustains or governs it by his word. Apart from God, and more specifically apart from Jesus the Son, the cosmos would disintegrate. He is that powerful and significant. As Paul says in Col. 1:17, "in him [Jesus] all things hold together."

5. The Son provided purification for sins. In the sacrifice of himself on the cross, Jesus provided purification for humanity's sins. As the Apostle John says in 1 Jn. 1:7, "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." In v. 9 John says that Jesus "cleanses us from all unrighteousness."

6. After providing purification for sins, the Son sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

a. This is a metaphorical reference, drawn from Psalm 109:1 LXX (110:1 MT), to the exaltation and supremacy of Christ. See also, Acts 5:30-31; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 8:1, 10:12, 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:21b-22; Rev. 3:21, 12:5.

b. The fact Jesus *sat down* (sometimes called his "session") at God's right hand signifies that his atoning work is complete and final. As Heb. 10:12-13 indicates, he now reigns while he waits "for the complete subjugation of every power that resists the gracious redemptive purposes of God."[26] It also connotes his authority. As Koester notes, "those who approached the throne normally stood while the ruler remained seated."[27]

7. The Son became as much greater than the angels as the name he has inherited [is] superior to theirs.

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[26] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 267.
[27] Koester (2001), 179.

a. Angels figure prominently in chapters 1-2, not because the original readers were overemphasizing angels, but because, as Moo notes, "the author uses them as 'measures of ontological status.' That is, they are the most exalted beings one could imagine apart from God: asserting the Son's superiority to them therefore accentuates his own status."[28]

b. There is a sense in which Jesus was for a little while lower than the angels (2:9). He not only became a human in humble circumstances; he subjected himself to sinful human authority that abused, humiliated, and ultimately crucified him, which was the most shameful death of the ancient world. He is in nature God, but he lowered himself even to the point of dying on a cross, and following that selfless service, he was exalted to the greatest height (Phil. 2:5-11). "[H]e who was superior to [the angels] as the eternal Son became superior to them in a new way at the exaltation."[29] Donald Hagner states:

> **So he became . . . superior to the angels** describes the result of the reference in the preceding clause to Christ's exaltation; it thus refers not to the character of the Son from the beginning, but to the last clause of verse 3, which refers to the ascension of Christ. In this exaltation to the right hand of the Father, the Son comes to hold a position that indeed was always his by virtue of his identity, but which was set aside during the incarnation.[30]

c. Though many believe that the name Jesus inherited that is superior to the name of angels is the name "Son," I think Luke Timothy Johnson probably is correct in concluding that it is the name "Lord."[31] It seems pretty clear that the name in Phil. 2:9 that is above every name is the name "Lord," and the statement here that the name was "inherited" points back to 1:2, which is a reference to Jesus' exaltation. In 1:8 and 1:10, the names "God" and "Lord" are applied to the Son.

II. The Position of the Son in Relation to the Angels (1:5-2:18)

A. The Son superior to the angels (1:5-14)

5For to which of the angels did he ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? And again, "I will be to him as a father, and he will be to me as a Son"? 6And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world he says, "Let all the angels of God worship him."

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[28] Moo (2024), 36.
[29] Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 98.
[30] Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 26.
[31] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 73; see also, Guthrie (1998), 50.

[7]Regarding the angels he says, "He who makes winds his angels and a flame of fire his ministers," [8]but regarding the Son [he says], "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of justice is the scepter of your kingdom. [9]You loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, your God, anointed you [with] oil of gladness above your companions." [10]And "You at the beginning, Lord, firmly established the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands. [11]They will pass away, but you continue, and [they] all will wear out as a garment, [12]and you will roll them up as a cloak, as a garment they will also be changed; but you are the same, and your years will not end." [13]And regarding which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool at your feet"? [14]Are [they] all not ministering spirits being sent for service for the sake of those who are about to inherit salvation?

1. The Son's unique relationship with the Father (1:5)

a. Jesus' exaltation to God's right hand made him greater than the angels *because* ("for") no angel has been similarly exalted. That is, God never said to any of them, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" (Ps. 2:7) or "I will be to him as a father, and he will be to me as a Son" (2 Sam. 7:14). (Note that in the OT angels occasionally are called "sons of God" in a collective sense, but no one angel was called God's "Son" in a unique sense.)[32]

b. The argument assumes an inextricable link between being declared to be God's Son and being exalted in the manner of Christ. To be exalted that way is to have God say, whether literally in association with the exaltation or symbolically by virtue of the exaltation, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" or "I will be to him as a father, and he will be to me as a Son." That is why the absence of that declaration to any angel means that no angel was similarly exalted (and thus that the Son in his exaltation was made greater than the angels).

(1) Guthrie states:

> [T]he early church understood these passages to refer to Jesus' induction into his royal position as King of the universe at the resurrection and exaltation. With these events God vindicated Jesus as Messiah and established his eternal kingdom (see Acts 13:32-34; Rom. 1:4). God's becoming the Son's Father, then, refers to God's open expression of their relationship upon Christ's enthronement, an interpretation that fits both Old Testament contexts in question.[33]

[32] Koester (2001), 200.
[33] Guthrie (1998), 69.

(2) Koester likewise notes:

> The author does not specify when the divine "begetting" occurred. Some related it to the Son's eternal generation (Augustine, NPNF[1] 8.3; Aquinas, *Ad Heb*. § 49) or to the incarnation (Chrysostom; Spicq; cf. Luke 1:35). The Synoptic gospels echo the psalm at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:11 par.) and the transfiguration (Mark 9:7 par.). Nevertheless most interpreters connect this text with Christ's resurrection and exaltation, since the quotation supports the exaltation mentioned in 1:2b . . . and since in 5:5 (cf. 7:28) it refers to the eternal high priest in heaven [cites omitted]. Similarly, Acts 13:15-41 relates Ps 2:7 to Jesus' resurrection (Acts 13:33), Acts 4:25-28 relates other parts of Ps 2 to Jesus' passion, and in Rom 1:4 Paul said that Jesus is "declared to be Son of God . . . by resurrection from the dead."[34]

(3) Psalm 2 speaks of the nations' rebellion against God and his anointed king of Israel. They rebel in vain because God, the heavenly king, has placed his king on the throne in Jerusalem, and he will provide him dominion over all the nations.

(a) Verses 6-7 make clear that God's becoming the father of the king (his metaphorical "begetting" of him) refers to the king's enthronement, his formal, public identification as Israel's king. He becomes God's son at that time in the sense he at that time assumes in a public way the new God-appointed role of ruler.

(b) Though Jesus was the unique Son of God from his divine conception (e.g., Lk. 1:35 [Gabriel's words to Mary], 3:22 [announcement at Jesus' baptism]), in his resurrection and associated ascension he, as the God-man Jesus, assumed in a public way the new God-appointed role of Israel's ultimate king, the supremely powerful Lord of lords. God at that time exalted him to a new stage or phase of his messianic career. As God became the Father of the merely human kings of Israel upon their enthronement, he in an analogous sense became Jesus' Father upon his "enthronement," upon his public exaltation to ultimate kingship. That does not mean he was not Jesus' Father before that time in a different sense; it means only that he became his Father at that time in a Ps. 2:7 sense.

(c) This resurrection-related exaltation to a new stage or phase of Jesus' messianic career is evident in Phil. 2:5-11. There we are told the Son chose to forego the prerogatives of his divinity in obedience to the will of the Father, only to have bestowed on him as a result of his faithfulness unto death the supremely powerful position of Lord of lords.

[34] Koester (2001), 191.

2. The inferior position of the angels (1:6-7)

a. In this context, the reference to the Son as "the firstborn" is a title of honor expressing priority in rank. The firstborn had special prerogatives. He had a special place in his father's heart (e.g., 2 Sam. 13:36-37; 1 Chron. 3:1), shared the father's authority, and inherited the lion's share of his property.[35] It emphasizes the preeminence of Jesus. Thus, Paul in Col. 1:15 refers to him as the "firstborn" over all creation, meaning he is "supreme over" all creation.

b. The superiority of the Son to the angels is evident from the fact that when God brings him into the "world" he says "Let all the angels of God worship him" (Ps. 96:7 LXX; see 97:7 MT). This clearly indicates the Son's deity because the angels are commanded to worship him and only God is a proper object of worship (e.g., Mat. 4:10; Rev. 19:10, 22:8-9).

c. There is a question as to when this bringing of the Son into the world takes place, the answer to which hinges on the meaning of the word οἰκουμένη, which is translated "world."

(1) The context favors understanding οἰκουμένη here as referring to the "*heavenly* world," which is why many leading commentators take it that way (e.g., Bruce, Lane, Guthrie, Ellingworth, DeSilva, Koester, Johnson, O'Brien, Cockerill, Peterson, Moo). In that case, this is another reference to Jesus' exaltation. It is at Christ's enthronement upon his ascension to heaven that all the angels bow before him. This brings to mind the heavenly worship scene of Rev. 5:6-14.

(2) Here is how Lane explains it:

> [The context] speaks of the sacrificial death of the Son followed by his exaltation (vv 3b-4). οἰκουμένη, then, concerns neither the incarnation nor the parousia but the entrance of Christ into the heavenly world following his sacrificial death. Christ's entrance into the world (εἰς τὸν κόσμον, 10:5) in his incarnation entailed the humiliation of being made "lower than the angels" (2:7, 9), but his entrance into the οἰκουμένην (v 6) signified his enthronement and exaltation above the angels (vv 3-6) [cite omitted]. The context requires that οἰκουμένη be understood as the heavenly world of eschatological salvation into which the Son entered at his ascension.[36]

(3) Johnson similarly states:

> [*Oikoumenē*] is often translated as "world" (see KJV, RSV), and can certainly bear the sense of "inhabited world." But for that meaning, Hebrews uses *kosmos* (see 4:3; 9:26; 10:5; 11:7, 38). In only one other

[35] Guthrie (1998), 69.
[36] Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (1991), 27; see also, Johnson (2006), 80.

> place does Hebrews use *oikoumenē* (2:5): "it was not to angels that he subjected the world to come (*tēn oikoumenēn tēn mellousan*)." It is reasonable to conclude, then, that *oikoumenē* here means "world" not in the sense of the empirical cosmos, but in the sense of the divine presence. If this is the case, then the introduction of the Son refers once more to his enthronement – after he had for a little while been made lower than the angels, he is now crowned with glory and honor (see 2:9). The Son's "coming into the world" refers here not to his incarnation (contrast 10:5) or to his Parousia (see 9:28), but to the precise scene envisaged by the prologue itself, the exaltation of the Son to God's right hand.[37]

(4) It is possible, however, that this is a reference to the parousia. At that time, *every* being (angels included) shall kneel in honor of Jesus' name (of Lord) and *every* tongue shall openly declare that he is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). Whenever the bringing of the Son into the "world" takes place, the fact that all the angels are commanded to worship him establishes his superiority to the angels, which is the main point.

d. The superiority of the Son to the angels is evident from the fact God "makes winds his angels/messengers and a flame of fire his ministers" (Ps. 103:4 LXX; 104:4 MT).

(1) The point is that angels, as majestic and powerful as they are, are in some way comparable to other created things that God uses for his purposes. They are but creatures sent by God as messengers and servants to others (see 1:14).

(2) This quote from the LXX is regularly translated "He who makes his angels winds and his ministers a flame of fire," but no less a Greek linguist than Paul Ellingworth opts for the translation I have given. He writes:

> The meaning of the quotation is ambiguous in the MT, which may mean either:
>
> (a) who makes winds/spirits his angels/messengers . . ., or
>
> (b) who makes his angels into winds.
>
> The LXX cannot mean (b). In the context of the psalm, which refers to "clouds" and "winds" in v. 3, it probably means "who makes winds his messengers."
>
> The point of the quotation in Hebrews is to show that the angels are (only) λειτουργοί – as v. 14 will confirm. The context in Hebrews therefore calls for the translation "he makes winds his angels, and a flame of fire his servants."[38]

[37] Johnson (2006), 79.
[38] Paul Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 120.

3. The eternality of the Son's reign and relationship to the cosmos (1:8-12)

a. In contrast to what is said about the angels, the Son is addressed as God and is said to have an eternal throne that is ruled with justice. Because he loved righteousness and hated lawlessness, God the Father exalted God the Son; he anointed him to a position above all others (Ps. 44:7-8 LXX; 45:6-7 MT).

b. The Psalm that is here cited in reference to Jesus extolled the greatness and goodness of the Israelite king, referring figuratively to him as "God" in the sense he was the divinely authorized ruler; he was God's representative on the throne.[39] But with reference to Jesus, the ultimate and promised Davidic king, the identification as God applies literally. Murray Harris states:

> The appellation ὁ θεὸς that was figurative and hyperbolic when applied to a mortal king was applied to the immortal Son in a literal and true sense. Jesus is not merely superior to the angels. Equally with the Father he shares in the divine nature (ὁ θεὸς, v. 8) while remaining distinct from him (ὁ θεός σου, v. 9). The author places Jesus far above any angel with respect to nature and function, and on a par with God with regard to nature but subordinate to God with regard to function. There is an "essential" unity but a functional subordination.[40]

c. The heavens and the earth were made by the Son in the sense already noted; he was God the Father's agent in the creation of the universe (Ps. 101:25 LXX; 102:25 MT; see also, Jn. 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16).

d. The created order as presently constituted will be brought to an end by being radically transformed into something different, into something eternal and free from decay (Rom. 8:18-25). Jesus, on the other hand, remains forever because he has overcome death through the resurrection (Ps. 101:26-27 LXX; 102:26-27 MT).

4. The Son's position in contrast with the position of the angels (1:13-14)

a. In v. 13 the writer quotes Ps. 109:1 LXX (110:1 MT) to which he alluded in 1:3. The superiority of the Son to the angels is evident in that no angel has been exalted to God's right hand, to a position of complete supremacy, as has been the Son. Moo comments:

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[39] *Elohim* probably refers to judges or rulers acting with divine authority in Ex. 21:6 and 22:8-9 (see, e.g., KJV, NAS [22:8-9], NKJV, NASU [22:8-9], HCSB, NIV, NET, CSB).

[40] Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 227.

> In verse 5a the author quoted Psalm 2:7 to refer to the divine appointment of the Son to messianic royal rule. Now he quotes Psalm 110:1 to refer to the divine invitation to assume the highest office in God's kingdom, with all things subjected to him. Occupying the position at God's 'right hand' indicates 'a real *co-enthronement* of the addressee, that is, a participation in the exercise of YHWH's own royal rule.' This notion of dominion and rule is reinforced by placing of the 'enemies' 'under the feet' of the Son – an additional link to Psalm 2, which celebrates the king's absolute rule over all the nations (Ps. 2:8-9).[41]

b. On the contrary, angels are servants rather than rulers. They are merely ministering spirits sent on behalf of the ruler to serve those who are about to inherit salvation, meaning the disciples of the exalted Lord. "Angels are sent by God to serve believers as they await the coming salvation."[42]

First Hortatory Interjection (2:1-4) – *FIRST WARNING: Do not reject the word spoken through God's Son!*

> **Therefore we must pay even greater attention to the things that were heard, lest we drift away. [2]For if the word that was spoken by angels was reliable and every transgression and disobedience received just punishment, [3]how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which having at first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard, [4]God giving further testimony both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by distributions of the Holy Spirit according to his will?**

1. A caution against drifting (2:1)

1.1. Given the superiority of Christ to the angels established in 1:5-14 ("Therefore"), it is incumbent upon him and them (and therefore upon us) to pay even greater attention than they have been to what they have heard, which is the word spoken through the Son (1:2), the message of salvation (2:3-4).

1.2. The danger of not doing so is that one will drift away from God's ultimate revelation, will gradually be pulled toward an abandonment of one's commitment to Christ. That was happening then, and it is happening today.

2. Motivation for heeding this admonition (2:2-3a)

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[41] Moo (2024), 51-52.
[42] Moo (2024), 53.

2.1. Given that every transgression and disobedience of the word spoken by angels, meaning the Mosaic law, was justly punished, it follows that those who neglect the great message of salvation that was given by the Son, who is greater than the angels, have no hope of escaping punishment. The author is warning them about the danger of being apathetic toward the gospel by telling them there are catastrophic consequences associated with that course of action.

2.2. The word spoken by angels is a reference to the Mosaic law. There are only the vaguest hints in the OT of an angelic role in the giving of the law (Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17), but it is mentioned in nonbiblical Jewish writings (*Book of Jubilees* 1:27; 2:1, 26-27; Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.36) and at several other places in the NT (Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19).

3. The message of salvation (2:3b-4)

3.1. The message of salvation came initially from Jesus and was confirmed to the author and his readers by those who heard Jesus.

3.1.1. Though that message was prophesied in the OT, it was not until Jesus that it was proclaimed as something that had arrived. The Savior, the basis of God's forgiveness, had appeared in human history, and people now are called to respond to that appearance.

3.1.2. The author and his readers were "second generation" Christians in the sense they received the word from those who heard Jesus rather than from Jesus directly. That word was "confirmed" to them by those who heard Jesus, meaning the original hearers guaranteed the accuracy or faithfulness of their message (and thereby guaranteed its truthfulness because it was from Jesus).

3.2. God himself also confirmed the truth of the message from the original hearers by the various miraculous manifestations that accompanied their preaching of it (see, e.g., Mk. 16:20 [note textual issue]; Acts 2:22, 3:1-10, 14:3-11; Rom. 15:18-19; 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 3:1-5).

B. The superior Son became positionally lower than the angels (2:5-9)

This section resumes the exposition on Christ (1:5-14) that was interrupted by the hortatory interjection (2:1-4). The author introduces Ps. 8:4-6, which contains both elements of exaltation and incarnation, and thus serves as a transition from the prior focus on the exalted status of the Son to the discussion in 2:10-18 about the Son's solidarity with humanity.

[5]For he did not subject to angels the coming world, concerning which we are speaking. [6]But someone solemnly testified somewhere, saying,

"What is man, that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that you are concerned for him? [7]You made him for a little while lower than angels, you crowned him with glory and honor, [8]you subjected all things under his feet." For in subjecting all things [to him], he left nothing [that is] not subjected to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him, [9]but we see the one who for a little while was made lower than the angels, Jesus, having been crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death on behalf of everyone.

1. Submission of all things to Christ (2:5-8a)

a. The fact noted in 1:13 that God never said to an angel that he would make his enemies a footstool for his feet is reflected in 2:5 in the statement that God did not subject to angels the coming world. That is the world about which he was speaking in 1:11-12, the eternal world that will continue after the world as presently constituted, the world subject to corruption and decay, is brought to an end at the return of Christ.

b. At that time, every being shall kneel not in honor of an angel but in honor of Jesus' name (of Lord), and every tongue shall openly declare that Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). On the part of some, this will be forced reverence, a submission to one whose power they cannot resist. F. F. Bruce remarks on the Philippians text, "Not only human beings . . . but [also] angels and demons, in joyful spontaneity or in reluctant fear, acknowledge the sovereignty of the crucified one – all beings, in fact, in heaven, on earth, and in the world below."[43]

c. Psalm 8:4-6, which the writer cites, refers not only to the Son's supreme exaltation but also to a brief time when the Son came to earth and took on a status or position (as a human being) that was lower than that of the angels. This is part of the transition to 2:10-18 where the author focuses on the incarnation.

2. What we do and do not see at present (2:8b-9)

a. There is a tension between the fact Jesus *already* has been exalted as Lord over all and the fact some things, like death, are *not yet* subjected to him (1 Cor. 15:25-28). This tension is reflected in the Psalms the writer cites. Psalm 110:1 (cited in 1:13) alludes to a future subjugation of all things to Christ ("*until* I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"), whereas Ps. 8:4-6 suggests that the subjugation of all things to Christ is an accomplished fact ("You . . . *subjected* everything under his feet"). The author here clarifies this relationship.

b. Guthrie explains this well:

[43] F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 74.

> The author, in effect, answers the question, "Which is it? Have all things been subjugated to the Son, or does his universal dominance lie in the future?" with "Both!" . . .
>
> At various points early Christian teachers present Christ's exaltation over the powers as a *fait accompli* (Eph. 1:20-22; 1 Pet. 3:22). This accomplished fact, however, might seem confusing at best and tacitly absurd at worst to someone looking at a church ravished by the forces of darkness. Persecuted Christians in Rome may have been asking, "Why are we being hurt by powers already placed under the feet of Christ? Has God not subjected all things to the Son?" The author, referring to Psalm 8, answers this question in the affirmative, but, based on Psalm 110:1, goes on to explain we have yet to see the *full* impact of his authority. This latter point aligns with other exaltation passages in the New Testament, which, also based on Psalm 110:1, speak of the subjugation of all things as a future event (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:25-26).
>
> This tension between the "now" and the "not yet," between what is present reality but not yet seen, expresses what may be referred to as "the inaugurated rule of Christ." That is, the reign of Christ and the reality of Christian experience have begun, but will not be fully actualized until a final consummation at the end of the age. The Son's rule is already a reality; that reality, however, must be confessed by faith until we see its full impact at the end of the age.[44]

c. Though we do not yet see the final subjugation of all things to Jesus, we "see" (are aware of through the gospel) Jesus, who has been crowned with honor and glory because he became a human subject to human authority (was made lower than the angels) and died as a sacrifice for humanity's sins. The reference to Christ's tasting death on behalf of mankind leads into the next unit, which deals with the Son's suffering on behalf of the heirs.

C. The Son lower than the angels to suffer for the "sons" (2:10-18)

[10]For it was fitting for him, on account of 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. [11]For both the one who sanctifies and those being sanctified [are] all of one; on account of which reason he is not ashamed to call them brothers, [12]saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will sing praises to you." [13]And again, "I will have confidence in him," and again, "Here am I and the children God gave me." [14]Since therefore the children have shared blood and flesh, he also likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might nullify the one having the power of death -- that is, the devil -- [15]and

[44] Guthrie (1998), 99.

free these, as many as were held in slavery by fear of death through all [their] living. [16]For clearly he is not concerned about angels; rather, he is concerned about the descendants of Abraham. [17]For which reason, he was obligated to become like the brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest [in] the things [pertaining] to God, in order to make atonement for the sins of the people. [18]For because he has suffered, having been tested himself, he is able to help those being tested.

1. The appropriateness of the Son's suffering (2:10)

a. Having mentioned Jesus' death on behalf of mankind, the writer proclaims that it was fitting or appropriate for God to save people, to bring many sons to glory, through the means of Jesus' death.

(1) It was fitting or appropriate because it is in keeping with his nature.

(a) Because God is absolutely holy and glorious, he cannot simply wink at sin. To forgive sin without payment of a penalty would be to condone the evil, to trivialize it, and to open God to the charge of being unjust. It would be to exercise mercy *at the expense of* justice.

(b) So, regarding our sin, there is tension between aspects of God's nature, between his justice and his mercy, between his holiness and his love. But that tension is not irreconcilable. The cross is where God's justice and mercy, his holiness and his love are manifested *simultaneously*. Because in his love he desires to forgive us of our sin, he sent Jesus, his Son, to take upon himself the punishment for that sin. He didn't wink at it; he didn't condone it; he didn't trivialize it. Far from it – he bore it!

(c) So in the cross God is able to satisfy both his holiness and his love; in other words, through the cross he is able to forgive consistently with his being, he is able to forgive *justly* or to forgive *righteously*. That is why it was fitting for God to save people through the means of Jesus' death.

(2) When the writer says it was fitting for God "to perfect" the author of their salvation through sufferings, meaning through his death, he is not suggesting that Jesus ever was "imperfect" in the sense of being flawed or errant.

(a) God "perfected" Jesus through his death in the sense it was that act that fulfilled or completed God's plan of redemption. Jesus sinlessly and flawlessly fulfilled his mission at every step, but that mission was not completed until he endured the cross. So until that time Jesus' obedience was not yet perfect in the sense it was not yet complete.

(b) As a rough analogy, a person who has bowled all strikes for 9 frames is flawless to that point, but there is a sense in which his perfection is not yet complete. It is not until the game is finished, until the intended end is reached, that he is perfect in a deeper and fuller way.

2. The Son's solidarity with the "sons" (2:11-13)

a. Both Jesus and those who are sanctified by his atoning death all share the same Father; they are all sons (and daughters) of God (Jn. 1:12-13; Mat. 5:9; Rom. 8:14; Gal. 3:26), though Jesus is the Son in a unique sense. For that reason, Jesus is not ashamed to call his disciples brothers. However the society may reject them, Jesus identifies with them.

b. In support of the assertion that Jesus is not ashamed to call his disciples brothers, the author quotes three OT texts that he reveals are properly seen as prophecies about Jesus. The quotes are from Ps. 22:22 (21:23 LXX) and Isa. 8:17-18, though the second statement ("I will have confidence in him") also appears in texts other than Isa. 8:17.

c. Psalm 22 clearly was understood by first-century Christians to be about Jesus. Isaiah 8:17-18 presumably was understood messianically because Isa. 8:14 describes the Lord as a "stumbling stone," which words were applied to Christ by other NT writers (Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8), and because Isaiah's children were considered signs and portents from God, which suggests that 8:17-18 may have a significance beyond what is obvious.

d. These texts support that Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers by the reference to "my brothers" and his close association with "the children" (he is with them and God gave them to him) and by his expressions of devotion to the Father which stress his sonship and thus link him fraternally with God's other sons (and daughters).

e. There is uncertainty as to when the author understands Jesus to fulfill these texts, to say these things, but that uncertainty does not detract from his point. Whether these are statements the Son made before the Incarnation, during his earthly ministry, after his ascension (in which case at least some of the references probably are to the parousia), or in some combination thereof, the fact he made them anywhere at any time emphasizes the solidarity of "the Son" and "the sons." The writer was not concerned to spell out the timing and location of the sayings because that was not significant for his purpose.

3. The reason for the Incarnation (2:14-16)

a. Since the children of God are human, made of blood and flesh, the Son also became a human in order to nullify the devil's work of death. He became a

human being to conquer human mortality, to conquer death by providing resurrection life for the children of God, and as a result to free them from the fear of death.

b. The way he accomplished this nullification of the devil's work was through his own death. By his sacrifice for sin, Jesus removed that which gives death its sting, that which makes it painful (1 Cor. 15:56). Death without the yoke of sin is a passage into the glorious presence of Christ (Acts 7:59; Phil. 1:23), which leads ultimately, at Christ's return, to the resurrection of the body. So death is no longer to be feared, the subtext of which is that the threat of death should not draw them away.

c. Donald Hagner remarks:

> The devil has been defeated in principle in and through the ministry of Jesus (Luke 10:18) and especially through the cross (cf. John 10:31), and yet he is not destroyed, but continues to have real, if limited, power (cf. Eph. 4:27; 6:11; 1 Tim. 3:7; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8). In a similar way, the NT can say that Christ "has destroyed death" (2 Tim. 1:10), and yet death continues to be a reality with which humanity must reckon. The devil and death are clearly overcome in Christ's work, even if in this interim period between the cross and the return of Christ we do not see the full effects of Christ's victory.[45]

d. For, as these Christians well understood, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was not for angels but for the descendants of Abraham, meaning humans who through faith inherit the promises of Abraham (Rom. 4:11, 9:6-8; Gal. 3:7-9).

4. Conclusion (2:17-18)

a. These verses lead into the central section of Hebrews (4:14 – 10:25) that focuses on Jesus' high priesthood. The sections are linked by a number of common words and phrases. But before developing that theme, the writer interjects another hortatory section from 3:1 – 4:13.

b. It is because of his concern for God's children, descendants of Abraham, that he was obligated to share fully in their humanity because only by doing so could he be a high priest able to offer the ultimate sacrifice, to make atonement for the sins of the people.

(1) The high priest was the preeminent religious figure in the old covenant. As Guthrie notes, "he oversaw the ritual worship of God and functioned as the main representative between the nation and Yahweh. . . . Although the high priest shared a number of duties with the other priests, he alone entered the Most Holy Place on the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:1-25)."[46]

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[45] Hagner (1990), 52.
[46] Guthrie (1998), 174.

(2) As the writer indicates in 5:1, every high priest is taken from among human beings, so for Jesus to serve in that role he needed to become a human.

c. The writer then closes this section of the address with a note of pastoral encouragement. Jesus is intimately familiar with the conflicts and tensions between faithfulness and human existence. He was tested in the extreme through his suffering of death and yet proved himself to be a faithful high priest. So he is uniquely able to help those who are facing the hardships that accompany faithfulness.

Second Hortatory Interjection (3:1 – 4:13)

1. Jesus, the supreme example of a faithful son (3:1-6)

Therefore, holy brothers, sharers of the heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, [2]being faithful to the one who appointed him, as also Moses [was] in [all] his house. [3]For this one has been considered worthy of much more glory than Moses, just as the one who built the house has much more honor than it. [4]For every house is built by someone, but the one who built all things [is] God. [5]And Moses, on the one hand, [was] faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of the things to be spoken. [6]But Christ [was faithful] as a Son over his house; whose house we are if [only] we hold fast the confidence and the boast of the hope.

1.1. Given that Jesus is intimately familiar with the conflicts and tensions between faithfulness and human existence, the writer urges the readers to consider his example in that regard. Despite all the difficulties he faced, he remained faithful to the one who appointed him.

1.2. Jesus is "the apostle and high priest of our confession" in that he was sent by God to make atonement for our sin.

1.3. Though Moses, a highly exalted figure in Judaism, also was faithful in the face of testing, Jesus has been considered worthy of much more glory than Moses – all things have been subjected to him – the difference being like the proverbial difference in honor between one who builds a house and the house that is built. It is a difference on that order.

1.4. Having appealed to the proverbial truth about the builder being worthy of more honor than the house that was built, the writer adds the truism that every house is built by someone (and thus for every house there is someone who receives greater honor). Since God, as Creator of the universe, is the one who built all things, his honor is unfathomable.

1.5. Moses was faithful as a servant *in* God's house, as a member of the house of Israel, bearing witness to the fullness of God's later revelation in the Son. "For example, when Moses speaks of the 'blood of the covenant' (9:20), he foreshadows the new covenant that God would make through Christ."[47]

1.6. Christ, on the other hand, was faithful as a Son *over* God's house, *over* the new-covenant people he founded, not *in* that house. Guthrie writes: "Servants have an obligation to faithfulness, but sons have a special, vested interest in and authority over the house. Jesus displayed a filial kind of faithfulness as the Lord and founder of his house, the new covenant people of God."[48]

1.7. The author and his readers, not the non-Christian Jews, are the new covenant people of God, but the continuance of that privilege depends on their holding fast their boldness or confidence and their holding fast their pride in the hope they profess. In other words, they must not surrender their faith under the pressure they are facing. This is a key objective of the author for his readers.

2. The negative example of those who fell through faithlessness (3:7-19)

7Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear his voice
8do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion in accordance with the
day of the testing in the wilderness, 9where your fathers tried [me]
with a test and saw my works 10[for] forty years. Therefore, I was
angry with this generation and said, 'They are always going astray in
the heart, and they did not know my ways.' 11As I swore in my anger,
'They will not enter my rest.'"
12Watch out, brothers, lest there will be in some of you an evil,
unbelieving heart resulting in falling away from the living God, 13but
encourage one another every day, so long as it is called "today," so
that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14For we
have become sharers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of [our]
confidence, firm till the end. 15As it is said, "Today if you hear his
voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." 16For who
rebelled after hearing? Indeed, was it not all those who came out of
Egypt through Moses? 17And with whom was he angry for forty
years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the
wilderness? 18And to whom did he swear that they would not enter
into his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19And we see that they
were not able to enter because of unbelief.

2.1. Given the need to hold fast to their confession of faith, the writer urges them to heed what the Holy Spirit is saying to them through Ps. 95:7c-11. They

[47] Koester (2001), 246.
[48] Guthrie (1998), 128.

must not harden their hearts as did the Israelites when they rebelled against God in the wilderness. God was angry with that generation and swore that they would not enter his rest, which there is a reference to the rest from their enemies that God had promised he would give them in Canaan (Deut. 12:10; see also, Ex. 33:14; Deut 25:19; Josh. 1:13, 15, 21:44; 22:4, 23:1). That promise of rest in Canaan ultimately is fulfilled in the life of joy and peace in the consummated kingdom.

2.2. He tells them to "watch out" lest some of them come to have an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from God, and he admonishes them to encourage one another daily so that none of them may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

2.2.1. Sin has a deceptive attractiveness that makes one resistant to the word of God. The more it lures, the less one is willing to hear what God wants. Here the sin of compromise and unfaithfulness held the promise of making life easier. In an active fellowship, the clouded vision that sin induces is challenged, which helps one stay the course.

2.2.2. He says they are to encourage one another "as long as it is called 'today'" because the Psalm says "*Today* if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts." There will be a time when the opportunity for a right relationship with God will have passed, a time marked by the Lord's return, and at that time there will no longer be a need for encouragement because the race will have been run.

2.3. It is crucial that they not become resistant to God's word through the hardening induced by sin because they (and we) must remain faithful till the end. The consequence of the Israelites' failure to remain faithful, the consequence of their refusal to continue trusting in God and his promises, was that they did not enter the Promised Land. The same will happen to his readers if they abandon their confession.

3. Transition: from problem of the wanderers to promise of rest "today" (4:1-2)

> **Therefore, let us fear, lest, while a promise to enter into his rest is remaining, any of you should be found to have fallen short. [2]For indeed we have had the gospel preached [to us], just as they also; but the word of preaching did not benefit those people because they were not united by faith with those who listened.**

3.1. Given the example of the fallen Israelites, they need to fear God, to fear the consequences of rejecting his will, lest a lack of such fear lead some of them to fall short of entering into God's promised rest, the ultimate manifestation of which is eternal glory with him. Guthrie writes, "Therefore, the 'rest' is something a believer enters (and thus experiences) now, but this rest remains a promised destination for the future." It

is another example of the fact "Christian realities have been inaugurated but have yet to be consummated."[49]

3.2. As with the Israelites, the mere fact the gospel, the good news of deliverance into rest, was preached to them will not benefit them unless they are among those who are surrendered to that gospel, who are trusting in the divine revelation. The Israelites who did not share the faith of Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who did not simply hear the word but heeded or listened to it, rejected the blessing of that word.

4. The promise of rest for those who are faithful (4:3-11)

[3]For we, the ones who have believed, enter into [the] rest, just as he said, "As I swore in my anger, they shall not enter into my rest," although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. [4]For somewhere he has said about the seventh [day] the following: "And God rested on the seventh [day] from all his works." [5]And again in this place [it says], "They shall not enter into my rest." [6]Therefore, since it remains for some to enter into it, and those who formerly had the gospel preached [to them] did not enter because of disobedience, [7]again he sets a certain day -- today -- saying by David, after so much time, as it has already been said, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." [8]For if Joshua gave them rest, he would not have spoken after these things about another day. [9]So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. [10]For the one who entered into his rest has himself also rested from his works, just as God [rested] from his own [works]. [11]Therefore let us be diligent to enter into that rest, lest someone may fall by [following] the same example of disobedience.

4.1. Those who have believed the gospel of Christ enter into God's rest, with all that that entails for the future. The fact there is an ongoing opportunity to enter that rest is evident from the fact God, long after he rested on the seventh day of creation, denied some of the Israelites the privilege of entering his rest because of their disobedience. They *could have* entered his rest but for their faithlessness, and indeed some did enter it.

4.1.1. Note that God "rested" on the seventh day in the sense he abstained or ceased from the work of creation that he completed on day six. Allen Ross writes, "The word actually means 'cease,' more than 'rest' as understood today. It is not a word that refers to remedying exhaustion after a tiring week of work. Rather, it describes the enjoyment of accomplishment, the celebration of completion."[50]

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[49] Guthrie (1998), 152.
[50] Allen Ross, *Creation & Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 113-114.

4.1.2. Note also that what probably is blessed and sanctified in Gen. 2:2-3 is not simply the seventh day as a day of the week but the seventh day as a representation of God's rest, the goal toward which creation moves. It is a sign pointing to the ultimate rest of the people of God. As Andrew Lincoln comments:

> The climax of God's creative activity is not the creation of male and female so much as his own triumphant rest. It is true that His blessing and hallowing of the seventh day are not meant to be considered simply in a vacuum but have some relation to the created world. What is crucial, however, is the nature of that relation. The seventh day is to be seen as representing the completion of the whole creation, and therefore in its blessing the whole creation is blessed. . . . Creation, therefore, is blessed with special reference to its goal, God's rest, which is set apart in some sense for all His creation including man and woman; but the precise sense awaits further unfolding. . . .
>
> The framework of Genesis 1 and 2 certainly indicates that there is a divine ordering of history, so that, as history moves toward its consummation, it moves toward the goal of God's rest.[51]

4.2. That the opportunity to enter God's rest continued beyond the conquest of Canaan is evident from the fact David, long after the conquest, wrote "*Today* if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts," the implication being that they could enter God's rest by not following the Israelites' example of disobedience. Thus the conclusion in v. 9: So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. It is not something in the past, a promise that has been exhausted. It is something that remains for them and for us.

4.3. The Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God refers ultimately to life in the eternal state. We will at that time rest from our works in that the struggle of existence in this fallen, sin-corrupt world will have ceased. Life in that state will further parallel Sabbath observances in that it will be characterized by the praising of God.

4.4. Given the blessedness of that rest, the writer urges his readers to be diligent, to exert serious effort, that none of them miss the rest by following the Israelites' example of faithlessness.

5. SECOND WARNING: Consider the power of God's word (4:12-13)

[12]For the word of God [is] living and active and sharper than every double-edged sword and penetrating as far as [the] division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. [13]And there is not a creature hidden

[51] Andrew T. Lincoln, "From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective" in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 348-349.

before him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom our account [is given].

5.1. They must be diligent in maintaining their faithfulness because the word of God he cited, which expresses the demand for faithfulness and steadfastness, is not a "dead letter," not something relegated to the past and of no ongoing applicability. On the contrary, it is a living word that has perpetual power, vibrancy, relevance, and impact.

5.2. And everything is laid bare before the eyes of him before whom we must give account. Since faithlessness and lack of trust in God's promises cannot be hidden, they must exercise diligence so as not to drift into that state.

III. The Position of the Son, Our High Priest, in Relation to the Earthly Sacrificial System (4:14-10:25)

A. Overlap: We have a sinless high priest who has gone into heaven (4:14-16)

[14]Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly the confession. [15]For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but [one] who, having been tempted in every way (in likeness [to us]), [was] without sin. [16]Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, that we may receive mercy and may find grace for timely help.

Guthrie labels these verses an overlapping transition because they serve as a conclusion to the exhortation running from 3:1 – 4:13 and as an opening for the great central exposition on the high priesthood of Christ in 4:14 – 10:25.

1. Hold firmly to the faith (4:14-15)

a. Because Christians have a *great* high priest who, in his ascension, passed through the impermanent physical heavens and into "heaven itself" (9:24), meaning the spiritual realm of God's immediate or special presence, we must hold firmly to our confession of faith. If we do not, we will not have the benefit of his work.

(1) David DeSilva writes:

> The author of Hebrews uses the term *heaven* to refer to two different realities in his cosmos. There are the "heavens" that are part of the changing, temporary creation. . . .
>
> Hebrews also speaks of "heaven itself" (Heb 9:24), the place that Jesus entered after he "passed through the heavens" (Heb 4:14) and from which vantage point he stands "exalted above the heavens" (Heb 7:26). This is the eternal and abiding realm, beyond the material and visible creation, where Jesus serves as high priest in the "greater and perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation" (Heb 9:11). The impermanent heavens are what Jesus must pass through in order to get to the true and real tabernacle (Hooke).[52]

(2) Koester notes, "Jesus passes through the heavens like a priest moving through the forecourt of a sanctuary and into the holy of holies (6:19-20; 9:11; 10:19-20)."[53]

b. We must hold to that confession for the additional reason that Jesus is a great high priest who, because of his experience of temptation, has compassion toward us in our state of weakness regarding sin. Through his identification with us, he is supremely motivated in his ministry on our behalf.

c. Though Jesus was tempted, the writer states expressly that he was without sin. Since Jesus is God incarnate, there is a question about how his being tempted fits with Jas. 1:13, which says that God cannot be tempted. The answer seems to lie in the mystery of the incarnation, the fact that Jesus is both God and man. He has two natures that though separate are united in one person. The temptation involved his human nature.

2. Draw near to God (4:16)

a. Given the great high priest that Jesus is, the author urges his readers, and thus all Christians, to approach in their prayers God's throne of grace with confidence, with a bold frankness. Koester writes: "Hebrews locates the throne of God in heaven (8:1; cf. Isa 6:1; 66:1). The idea is not that by mystical experience we should ascend into heaven, but that by prayer we should come before God, who is in heaven."[54]

b. In coming to God's throne in Jesus' name, they will receive mercy and God's gracious provision of timely help. Guthrie writes, "The author assures them that if they remain faithful to their confession and approach God through Jesus' high-priestly work, God will come through with help in a timely fashion."[55] What an

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[52] David DeSilva, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 440.
[53] Koester (2001), 282.
[54] Koester (2001), 284.
[55] Guthrie (1998), 176.

encouragement to all who are facing difficulties! Of course, the timing and nature of that help are matters of God's wisdom not ours.

B. The appointment of the Son as a superior high priest (5:1-10; 7:1-28)

1. Introduction: The son taken from among humans and appointed according to the order of Melchizedek (5:1-10)

For every high priest chosen from men is put, on behalf of men, in charge of the things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. [2]He is able to deal gently with the ones who are ignorant and misled, since he also is subject to weakness, [3]and because of it, he is obligated to offer [sacrifices] for sins for himself, just as for the people. [4]And no one takes the honor for himself but [receives it] through being called by God, just as Aaron also was.

[5]So also the Christ did not glorify himself to become a high priest. Rather, the one [glorified him] who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you," [6]since he also says in another [place], "You [are] a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." [7]In the days of his flesh, [Jesus] offered with a loud cry and tears both prayers and pleas to the one able to save him from death, and [he] was heard because of [his] piety. [8]Though being a son, he learned obedience from [the things] which he suffered, [9]and having been made perfect, he became [the] source of eternal salvation for all the ones who obey him, [10]having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

a. Universal principles of high priesthood (5:1-4)

(1) High priests are chosen by God from among human beings; a human is chosen to represent humans in dealing with their sins before God. Thus, the Son became a human being.

(2) High priests serve their fellow human beings by offering gifts and sacrifices to God on their behalf. Though high priests shared in general responsibilities performed by all priests, they alone offered sacrifice for the sins of all the people on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur; Leviticus 16). Purification from sins (1:3) is the essence of the priestly role.

(3) The high priest is able to deal gently with those who go astray through ignorance, meaning those whose sin is not "willful" or "high handed" in

the sense of Num. 15:29-31, because he himself was subject to the same kind of weakness and consequently was required to offer sacrifices for his own sins.

(a) No provision was made in the old covenant for sins committed with a "high hand," but it is not altogether clear what kinds of sins that encompasses. As Tremper Longman points out in his book *Immanuel in Our Place*, sacrifices *were* available for some sins that it seems could only be committed consciously or knowingly, so sinning "high handedly" must involve something more than that. He concludes:

> The great modern Jewish commentator Jacob Milgrom brings his extensive knowledge of rabbinic discussions to this problem. On the basis of rabbinic discussions of Leviticus 5:20-26 and Numbers 5:6-8, he persuasively argues that "repentance of the sinner, through his remorse and confession, reduces his intentional sin to inadvertence, thereby rendering it eligible for sacrificial expiation." Repentance is the key to help us understand the difference between an inadvertent sin and high-handed sin.[56]

(b) I think this understanding of "high-handed sin" fits well with the writer's purpose. Koester states: "Speaking of the high priest's moderation toward the 'ignorant and erring' allows the author to stress the mercy available to penitent sinners, while warning of the rigorous judgment to be passed upon apostates (Heb. 3:16-19; 6:4-8; 10:26-31)."[57]

(c) The reason the high priest could deal gently or patiently with such sinners was that he himself was subject to (or clothed with) the same kind of moral weakness that resulted in his own sin. In that regard, of course, the old-covenant high priest differed from the Lord Jesus. As F. F. Bruce says:

> As our author points out later in the epistle (Ch. 7:27), this is one of the features which distinguish the Christians' high priest from those of the Aaronic succession: Jesus, being "holy, guileless, undefiled", had no need to offer a preliminary sacrifice for Himself. It is in enduring the common weaknesses and temptations of man's lot, not by yielding to them, that He has established His power not only to sympathize with His people but to bring them help, deliverance and victory.[58]

(4) No one becomes a legitimate high priest by his own efforts. Rather, God grants to a person the honor of being a high priest by appointing him to that office.

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[56] Tremper Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 96. Note that Lev. 5:20-26 in the versification of the standard Hebrew text (BHS) corresponds to Lev. 6:1-7 in most English translations.
[57] Koester (2001), 286.
[58] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 92.

b. The appointment of Christ as high priest (5:5-6)

(1) As with other high priests, Jesus did not put himself in that office. Rather, God the Father, the one who declared him to be his Son, gave Jesus the honor of the high priesthood. We know that because at another place in Scripture (Ps. 110:4) God declared him to be a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. So Jesus is both the exalted and incarnate Son and a new and unique high priest.

(a) The Christ-Melchizedek parallel is discussed more fully in chapter 7. Melchizedek is the enigmatic figure who is mentioned in Gen. 14:18-20 and Ps. 110:4.

(b) Melchizedek was both a king and a priest, one who was greater than Abraham and whose priesthood was, at least typologically, everlasting.

(2) The writer does not say when Jesus was appointed high priest. But given that other passages include Christ's death in his priestly action (9:14, 26; 10:10), it seems the appointment was, at least in some sense, before his death. Hebrews 5:10 can be read consistently with this view. At the very least, I think the appointment involved a complex of events that began before his death (perhaps from his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane through his exaltation) and which are viewed as a single event.

c. The path to appointment (5:7-10)

(1) In the days of Jesus' fleshly mortality, during his earthly ministry, Jesus suffered the agony of facing death for the sins of mankind, and in that agony he cried out to God, the one who could save him from death.

(a) This seems to be a reference to the Lord's fervent prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, though the Gospels do not refer to a loud cry and tears. Jesus asked the Father to remove from him the cup of suffering that was the cross, but he did so in submission to the Father's will.

(b) In other words, he was asking the Father, who is the God of the impossible, to spare him from being crucified, but in saying "not my will but yours be done," he also was praying for strength to endure the cross in the event it could not be avoided. In subjugating his desire to the Father's will, Jesus was a paragon of piety or reverent submission, and thus the Father answered his prayer to accomplish the Father's will by sending an angel to strengthen him, as we read in Lk. 22:43. That example has great punch for those being pressured to abandon the faith.

(2) Though he is God's Son, that relationship did not, as with ancient princes, exempt him from walking a path of obedience through suffering. Rather, he learned obedience and was made perfect by enduring the cross.

(a) When the writer says Jesus "learned obedience" and was "made perfect" he is not implying that Jesus previously was disobedient or flawed in some way. He means he experienced a new stage of obedience and completed the mission to which he was called by God.

(b) Hagner writes:

> As a son, i.e., even as God's Son, Jesus was not exempt from suffering. His obedience was not accomplished in ideal circumstances, but was learned "in the school of suffering" (as NEB appropriately translates). In this sense, Jesus serves as a model for the readers. This achievement of faithfulness to the will of God in adverse circumstances is a kind of learning insofar as it means arriving at a new stage of experience. The final stage of that experience is being made perfect, that is, when he accomplishes the greatest obedience at the cost of the greatest suffering, his death (cf. 2:10).[59]

(3) Through his crucifixion Jesus became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, that being the sacrifice he offers on their behalf as one who was designated by God a high priest on the order of Melchizedek.

(a) Note that salvation comes to those who obey him. Biblical faith includes submitting to the Lord's will. It is not merely intellectual assent, merely believing something is true.

(b) This is especially relevant to those who are considering leaving Christ, ceasing to obey him. Guthrie writes:

> Just as Jesus "learned obedience" in his earthly suffering, he calls people to respond in obedience to his will. Just as Jesus persevered, reverently bending his will to that of the Father in spite of extreme suffering, so Christians are called to total abandonment to the divine will; this call does not change with the onslaught of persecution.[60]

Third Hortatory Interjection *(5:11 – 6:20)*

[59] Hagner (1990), 81-82.
[60] Guthrie (1998), 191.

1. The present problem with the hearers (5:11-6:3)

[11]About which the word is much in us, and [it is] hard to explain since you have become sluggish in hearing. [12]For indeed, though being obligated on account of the time to be teachers, you have need for someone to teach you again the beginning elements of the oracles of God, and you have become [ones] having need of milk, not solid food. [13]For every man who partakes of milk [is] inexperienced in [the] word of righteousness, for he is an infant. [14]But solid food is [for the] full-grown, the ones who, because of maturity, have powers of perception that have been trained for distinguishing both good and evil.

6 Therefore, having left the teaching of the elemental [things] of the Christ, let us be moved on toward completeness, not again laying a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, [2]of teaching of immersions and of [the] laying on of hands, and of [the] resurrection of [the] dead and of eternal judgment. [3]And we will do this, if God permits.

1.1. The author confronts the hearers (5:11-14)

1.1.1. The writer has more to say about Christ's high priesthood as a Melchizedekian kind of priesthood, but before continuing with that teaching, he challenges his readers to apply themselves by rebuking them for having regressed into a state of spiritual immaturity. He is shaming them to wake them up, to motivate them to come out of, repent of, their infant mindset, that they may absorb the solid food he is giving them.

1.1.2. Rather than being content with and only interested in an infant's diet of the basics of the Christian faith, they need to move beyond those things and allow God to lead them toward a fuller, deeper grasp of the faith. The ABCs are absolutely essential, but stopping there deprives one of spiritual resources that are valuable in withstanding the pressures and storms of this life, the kinds of pressures the first readers of this letter were facing.

1.1.3. This is the downside of those calls to reduce Christian teaching to the elementary doctrines about which there is little or no disagreement. We think that if we limit the teaching to the ABCs we can all get along. Even if that were true, which it is not, the deeper truths of God's word cannot be ignored without consequences. As Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." We need to labor, as difficult as it sometimes is, to proclaim the whole counsel of God. The body of Christ needs it, and in my opinion, is hungering for it.

1.1.4. That doesn't mean, of course, that it is not good and healthy to remind Christians of basic truths. That's all over the Bible. It simply means that there is a necessary place for going beyond that. And, of course, the need for reinforcing basic things can vary depending on the extent to which they are being undermined.

1.2. Moving on to maturity (6:1-3)

1.2.1. The writer lists three pairs of teachings that he includes among the basic things, six items that "span the journey of faith from initial repentance to final judgment."[61]

1.2.1.1. Repentance from dead works and faith toward God – This refers to the turning away from sinful conduct and turning to God in faith and obedience, which they would understand involves trusting in Christ. It is the personal and internal aspect of conversion.

1.2.1.2. Instruction about immersions and laying on of hands – This probably refers to baptism and the laying on of hands that is associated with it. It is the corporate and external aspect of conversion.

1.2.1.2.1. The word I have translated "immersions" is often translated here as baptisms or washings or ablutions. It is the word βαπτισμός, and the Hebrew writer uses it again in 9:10 in reference to Jewish ceremonial washings (see also, Mk. 7:4). The usual word for "baptism" is βάπτισμα, though βαπτισμός refers to Christian baptism in Col. 2:12. The noun is plural here probably because the instruction about baptism distinguished Christian baptism from the various other cleansing rites of the ancient world, particularly those of Judaism.

1.2.1.2.2. Laying on of hands is associated in the NT with prayers for God's protection or blessing (Mk. 10:13-16), healings (Mk. 5:23, 6:5; Acts 28:8), appointments to certain tasks (Acts 6:6, 13:3), appointments to church office (1 Tim. 5:22), and bestowal of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-24, 19:1-7). As Everett Ferguson points out, what unites these various occasions is that they all involve the bestowal of a blessing.[62]

1.2.1.2.2.1. So it seems that the laying on of hands in this verse is (a) a basic Christian teaching, (b) that involves bestowal of a blessing, and (c) is associated with baptism. That makes me think the early church taught that the gift of the Spirit that is bestowed in baptism is in some way associated with the laying on of hands that is part of that rite.

1.2.1.2.2.1.1. An association between baptism and laying on of hands is perhaps indicated most clearly in Acts 19:1-7.

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[61] Koester (2001), 311.

[62] Everett Ferguson, "Laying On of Hands" in Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 670.

Regardless of whether the coming of the Spirit on those disciples was somehow distinct from the normal gift of the Spirit, his bestowal in that instance is linked both to baptism and Paul's laying of his hands on them, which suggests that baptism involved or included the laying on of hands.

1.2.1.2.2.1.2. As James Dunn notes, "baptism and the laying on of hands [in Acts 19:5ff.] are the *one* ceremony."[63] Indeed, the relevant verses could be translated: they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and, Paul having laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them. Dunn writes, "The laying on of hands is almost parenthetical; the sequence of events is 'baptism (resulting in) . . . Spirit.'" (I suspect Luke highlighted the laying-on-of-hands aspect of baptism in Acts 19 to parallel Paul's role with that of Peter and John in Acts 8.)

1.2.1.2.2.2. Unlike Jewish proselyte baptism (which may have been practiced at this time), in which the person immersed himself, Christian baptism is done to someone by someone else. The person being baptized is laid hold of by a saint, buried in the water, and then raised; it is a rite of human contact. (Beyond that, we hug the baptized person and then pray for him while holding his hand or shoulder.) So though we do not pay much attention today to the human-contact aspect of baptism, I think we nevertheless practice it; it is inherent in the way we understand baptism to be conducted.

1.2.1.3. Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment – Repentance and faith toward God and baptism and the laying on of hands refer to the internal and external, the personal and corporate aspects of the beginning of one's new life with God. Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment are basic Christian teachings that refer to the end of the age.

1.2.1.3.1. When Christ returns to consummate the kingdom he inaugurated at his first coming, the dead will be raised, those who are alive at the time will be transformed, and mankind, in its resurrected state, will be assigned for eternity to glorious life in the new heavens and earth or to horrible punishment in hell.

1.2.1.3.2. Resurrection refers to a new *bodily* life. It does not refer to the mere continuance of existence in some spiritual or noncorporeal state.

1.2.1.3.2.1. Having extensively studied the meaning of "resurrection" in the ancient world, the renowned theologian N. T. Wright states:

> We cannot stress too strongly that from Homer onwards the language of 'resurrection' was not used to denote 'life after death' in general, or any of the phenomena supposed to occur within such a life. The great majority of ancients believed in life after death; many of them developed, as we have

[63] James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 87.

> seen, complex and fascinating beliefs about it and practices in relation to it; but, other than within Judaism and Christianity, they did not believe in resurrection. 'Resurrection' denoted a new embodied life which would *follow* whatever 'life after death' there might be. 'Resurrection' was, by definition, not the existence into which someone might (or might not) go immediately upon death; it was not a disembodied 'heavenly' life; it was a future stage, out beyond all that. It was not a redescription of death. It was death's reversal.[64]

He says in a later book:

> In content, *resurrection* referred specifically to something that happened to the body; hence the later debates about how God would do this – whether he would start with the existing bones or make new ones or whatever. One would have debates like that only if it was quite clear that what you ended up with was something tangible and physical. Everybody knew about ghosts, spirits, visions, hallucinations, and so on. Most people in the ancient world believed in some such things. They were quite clear that that wasn't what they meant by *resurrection*. While Herod reportedly thought Jesus might be John the Baptist raised from the dead, he didn't think he was a ghost. Resurrection meant bodies. We cannot emphasize this too strongly, not least because much modern writing continues, most misleadingly, to use the word *resurrection* as a virtual synonym for *life after death* in the popular sense.[65]

1.2.1.3.2.2. As Christ was raised bodily from the grave, so will we be; he is the firstfruits of the end-time resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-23). Our resurrection is tied to his, so much so that in 2 Cor. 4:14 Paul says, "we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also *with Jesus*." We, as part of the Lord's resurrection harvest, likewise will receive glorified and immortal *bodies* in our resurrection (Rom. 8:11, 23, 29; 1 Cor. 15:35-49; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Jn. 3:2). His resurrection body is the prototype or model after which our resurrection bodies will be patterned. That is why Jesus said in Jn. 5:28-29 that "an hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good to a resurrection of life, but those who have done evil to a resurrection of judgment."

1.2.1.3.2.3. This is basic and fundamental Christian teaching.[66] Roger Olson, who specializes in the history of Christian thought, writes:

> The bodily resurrection of all people at some time after death has played a prominent role in Christian teaching throughout history. In spite

[64] N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 82-83.
[65] N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper, 2008), 36.
[66] See Ashby L. Camp, The Resurrection of the Body and On the Materiality of the Eternal State.

> of a pronounced tendency among untutored lay Christians to focus attention on immortality of souls and neglect bodily resurrection, the fathers of the church, medieval Christian thinkers, all the Protestant Reformers and faithful modern biblical scholars and theologians have emphasized the bodily resurrection as the blessed hope of believers in Christ. . . .
>
> It would be impossible to discover any single point of greater agreement in the history of Christian thought than this one: *the future bodily resurrection of the dead is the blessed hope of all who are in Christ Jesus by faith*. Over two millennia the church's leaders and faithful theologians have unanimously taught this above the immortality of souls and as more important than some ethereal intermediate state between bodily death and bodily resurrection when Christ returns. And yet, as we lamented earlier, it seems that the vast majority of Christians do not know this and neglect belief in bodily resurrection in favor of belief in immediate post-mortem heavenly, spiritual existence as ghost-like beings (or even angels!) "forever with the Lord in heaven."[67]

1.2.1.4. The readers may have camped on these particular basic teachings because they were similar to Jewish teachings. By downplaying the distinctively Christian aspects of these things, the readers could highlight similarities of Christianity and Judaism in the hope of easing the conflict. That, however, is speculation.

1.2.2. It is the writer's hope and intention, subject to God's will, that they will indeed move toward completeness, will awaken to absorb the meatier things he will share with them.

2. THIRD WARNING: The danger of falling away from the faith (6:4-8)

4For [it is] impossible to restore again to repentance the ones who have once been enlightened, who have both tasted of the heavenly gift and become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5and who have tasted [the] good word of God and the powers of [the] coming age 6and have [then] fallen away, since [they are] crucifying the Son of God to themselves and holding [him] up to contempt. 7For ground that drinks the rain often coming upon it and produces vegetation suitable for those for whom it is also cultivated, receives a blessing from God. 8But if it yields thorns and thistles, [it is] worthless and near [to being] a cursed thing, the end of which is a burning.

2.1. The "For" with which v. 4 begins connects this section logically with what he has just said. (The word is omitted in the NIV.) It is important for converts to move beyond the basics of Christian doctrine because failing to do so increases the

[67] Roger Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 311, 314.

danger not only that they will fall into sin and be alienated from God but that they will fall from God beyond the point of no return.

2.2. Churches need to hear this. The notion that we can downplay doctrine or dumb down our teaching to make the church more marketable to the lost without deleterious consequences on the body of Christ is wrong.

2.2.1. Indeed, the Willow Creek church in South Barrington, Illinois, which for decades was one of the primary promoters of what is called "seeker-sensitive services," acknowledged some years ago that its "theology-lite" approach was a failure. It essentially starved the people theologically.

2.2.2. One of the ironies of this entire marketing approach is that it was based on surveys of those who didn't go to church instead of on surveys of those who didn't use to go to church but now do. When you ask this latter group what drew them into the church, their answers are much different from the conventional wisdom of the church-growth, seeker-sensitive movement. Referring to Thomas Rainer's book, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), David Wells writes:

> What were these people looking for in a church? If we believe all the church-marketing hype, we would have to conclude that potential customers wanted, above all else, not to hear issues of truth and belief. These should be avoided like the plague. These are matters, the prevailing wisdom says, that should be hidden from seekers because they are so dreadfully off-putting.
>
> Not so! In fact, 90 percent of those in Rainer's studies said that preaching was important to them, and not just any preaching. Almost the same percentage, 88 percent, said that what they came to hear was *doctrine*. The beliefs of the church were important to 91 percent. They wanted to know what the church believed. They wanted to have this laid out for them – with conviction. This was their preeminent concern. The next issue of importance, the friendliness of the people, was far down the list – only 49 percent cited it. Should we really be so amazed that people would like to know what Christians think and whether, in this age of jaded, faded, transient beliefs, there actually is something that can be believed for all time?[68]

2.3. Those who may fall beyond the point of no return are described as:

2.3.1. Ones who have once been enlightened – They at some point in the past had accepted the light of God's revelation in the gospel (see 10:32). This quite possibly is a more specific allusion to the moment of their baptism.[69]

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[68] David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 54-55.
[69] E.g., Johnson (2006), 162; Bruce (1964), 120.

2.3.2. Ones who have tasted of the heavenly gift – They have experienced the blessings of God associated with salvation.

2.3.3. Ones who have become partakers of the Holy Spirit – They have shared in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

2.3.4. Ones who have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the coming age – They have experienced God's precious promises and the endowment of various spiritual gifts and fruit of the Spirit that accompany the inauguration of the kingdom of God, the breaking into this reality of the age to come.

2.4. Those who cannot be restored again to repentance are described as those who have "fallen away," but the fact they are beyond repentance makes clear the writer means by that something more than simply falling out of fellowship with God, as terrible as that is.

2.4.1. We know that Christians can alienate themselves from God by sinning and yet still be able to return through repentance. For example, the disfellowshipped are not in fellowship with God, but the act of disfellowshipping is intended to move them to repentance and thus back into fellowship with God and his people (see Mat. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; 1 Tim. 1:18-20).

2.4.2. The writer is here referring to a step beyond that, a state in which the person is beyond being restored to repentance. He's giving a worst-case scenario to stress the importance of moving toward maturity.

2.5. These people cannot be brought to repentance because by "falling away" in the sense he means they are crucifying the Son of God to themselves. In other words, they are ending permanently their relationship with him. In our vernacular, they are in effect declaring "Jesus is dead to me" and meaning it. In that act they also are holding Christ up to contempt, which is a further indication of their hardness toward God.

2.6. The writer reinforces the point of 6:4-6 with an illustration. Just as land that produces desired fruit is blessed by God and land that produces only thorns and thistles is burned, so those who remain faithful (and thus produce the fruit of faith) will be blessed by God and those who abandon the faith will be condemned.

3. Mitigation: The author's confidence in and desire for the hearer's (6:9-12)

[9]But we are confident of the better [things] concerning you, beloved, [things] that accompany salvation, even though we speak this way. [10]For God [is] not unjust as to forget your work and the love that you showed toward his name, in having served the saints and in [still] serving [them]. [11]And we desire each of you to show the same

diligence regarding the full assurance of the hope until [the] end, [12]so that you not become sluggish but imitators of the ones who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

3.1. Despite the grave state into which failing to move toward maturity can lead, the worst-case scenario he has just painted, the writer is confident they will receive the blessings of salvation. For they have been and continue to be living in faith. God will not ignore their faithfulness and reject them simply because they're struggling or being tempted.

3.2. His desire is that each of them be diligent to the end regarding their assurance of hope, that they not become lazy but be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. His message to these wavering brothers and sisters is that they keep the faith till the end. His desire for these readers brings to mind Paul's statement at the end of his life in 2 Tim. 4:7: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

4. God's promise our basis of hope (6:13-20)

[13]For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by [whom] to swear, he swore by himself, [14]saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." [15]And so [Abraham], having waited patiently, obtained the promise. [16]For men swear by the greater [person], and with them, the oath [given] for confirmation is an end of every dispute. [17]In the same way, God, wanting to show even more [clearly] to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of his purpose, guaranteed [it] with an oath, [18]so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled [for refuge] may have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. [19]This [hope] we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, [one] that enters into the inside of the curtain, [20]where Jesus, a forerunner, entered on our behalf, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

4.1. The example of Abraham (6:13-15)

4.1.1. For God's promise to Abraham is beyond certain, being guaranteed with an oath, and thus without doubt will be received through patient faithfulness as it was in the case of Abraham himself.

4.1.2. God's promise to Abraham, which he confirmed with an oath in Genesis 22, was that he would bless him, multiply and bless his offspring, and bless all the nations through his offspring. Abraham trusted in that promise against all appearances and lived to see the beginning of its fulfillment in the birth and preservation of Isaac and in Isaac's marriage to Rebekah.

4.1.3. Of course, there is a fuller sense of God's promise that is wrapped up in his blessing of all nations through Abraham's offspring, an aspect of that promise that Abraham and the other heroes of faith died having not yet received (Heb. 11:13, 39). It is only together with the saints of the new covenant that they will arrive at God's ultimate goal.

4.2. The finality of oaths (6:16-18) – God guaranteed his promise to Abraham with an oath sworn by his own name because he wanted to make it crystal clear to the heirs of that promise – that's us, Abraham's offspring by faith – that his intention would not change. The salvation God has planned for the descendants of Abraham was "written in stone," so to speak, given by both promise and oath, that we might have every reason to hold fast that hope that is set before us.

4.3. The encouragement of a firm hope (6:19-20)

4.3.1. This hope, this confident expectation based on God's immutable intention to bless the faithful, serves to anchor one in the faith, to keep one from drifting. It is a hope that enters into the inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, meaning it is a hope that "involves our free access into the very presence of God."[70]

4.3.2. That unrestricted access to God's presence is made possible by Jesus, who has gone there before us on our behalf as a special high priest, one on the order of Melchizedek. With that statement, the writer has brought the sermon back to the subject of 5:10-11a, back to where he was when he began this hortatory interjection. He said he had more to say about Melchizedek, and he now is getting to that task.

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2. The superiority of Melchizedek (7:1-10)

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, [2]with whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth of all [the spoils], [his name] first being translated king of righteousness and then also king of Salem, which means king of peace, [3][being] fatherless, motherless, without genealogy, having neither a beginning of days nor an end of life but having been made to resemble the Son of God -- remains a priest perpetually.

[4]Now see how great this one [was], to whom [even] the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth from the spoils. [5]And those of the sons of Levi, who received a priestly office, have a command to collect a tenth from the people according to the law, that is [from] their brothers, even though [they] have come from the loin of Abraham.

[70] Hagner (1990), 98.

[6]But the one not having his descent from them has collected a tenth [from] Abraham and has blessed the one having the promises. [7]And without any dispute, the lesser is blessed by the greater. [8]And here, on one hand, men who die receive a tenth; there, on the other hand, one of whom it is testified that he lives [receives it]. [9]And, so to speak, even Levi, the one receiving a tenth, has paid a tenth through Abraham. [10]For he was yet in the loin of [his] father when Melchizedek met him.

a. An exposition on Melchizedek (7:1-3)

(1) Genesis 14 tells how certain kings from the east defeated a confederation of local kings, plundered their cities, and took captives, including Abraham's nephew Lot. Abraham pursued those invading kings, defeated them, and recovered the property and people they had taken, including Lot.

(2) After Abraham's return, he was met by Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the most high God (and also the King of Sodom whom the writer of Hebrews does not mention). Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of all, probably meaning a tenth of all the spoils.

(3) He says that the name Melchizedek means "king of righteousness" and that the name Salem means "peace," which makes Melchizedek also the "king of peace." Guthrie writes, "These concepts of righteousness and peace are appropriate for one who prefigures the Messiah, who would make righteousness and peace possible for the people of God."[71]

(4) The nature of Melchizedek

(a) Melchizedek is a very puzzling figure. Other than Hebrews, he is mentioned only in Gen. 14:18-20 and Ps. 110:4. He clearly serves as a type (a foreshadowing picture) of Christ, as a type of perpetual, non-Levitical priest, but there is a question about the basis on which he functions as a type. Is he a mortal man who prefigures Christ because of how God chose to cast him in Scripture or is he a heavenly being of some sort who prefigures Christ because he is in fact an eternal priest?

(b) Many are convinced that Melchizedek is a mere mortal whom God casts or presents as a type of Christ by what he chose *not* to say about him.

[1] God provided no information in Scripture about Melchizedek's ancestry or his birth, so the legitimacy of his priesthood does not depend on his genealogy, his birth line. It is based on something else, so he is a *type* of non-Levitical priest, not only because he predates Levi but because his priesthood is non-genealogical. Likewise, his silence about Melchizedek's death indicates God's intent that Melchizedek serve as a *type* of eternal priest (regardless of his actual

[71] Guthrie (1998), 253.

mortality). Under this view, Melchizedek does not resemble the Son of God literally but *was made* to resemble him (v. 3), made a type or picture of a perpetual, non-Levitical priest, by the things God chose not to say about him in Scripture.

[2] What Melchizedek foreshadows as a type, Jesus fulfills as the reality. He is a symbol or representation of the coming eternal, non-Levitical priest not literally an eternal priest. He "remains" a priest forever only as a type, only as a representation of the coming Christ who is an eternal priest in fact. As Koester puts it, "Melchizedek died centuries before Christ and remains forever only as a foreshadowing of Christ."[72] Victor Pfitzner states, "A new priesthood was first prefigured in the person of Melchizedek, then promised by God's solemn oath (6:17-20), and finally inaugurated with the enthronement of the Son as heavenly High Priest (5:5, 9-10; 6:20)."[73]

[3] Bruce is an example of those who see Melchizedek as a mortal who is cast by God as a type of Christ. He writes:

> The words which follow present an outstanding example of the argument from silence in a typological setting. When Melchizedek is described as being "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life", it is not suggested that he was a biological anomaly, or an angel in human guise. Historically Melchizedek appears to have belonged to a dynasty of priest-kings in which he had both predecessors and successors. If this point had been put to our author, he would have agreed at once, no doubt; but this consideration was foreign to his purpose. The important consideration was the account of Melchizedek in holy writ; to him the silences of Scripture were as much due to divine inspiration as were its statements. In the only record which Scripture provides of Melchizedek – Gen. 14:18-20 – nothing is said of parentage, nothing is said of ancestry or progeny, nothing is said of his birth, nothing is said of his death. He appears as a living man, king of Salem and priest of God Most High; and as such he disappears. In all this – in the silences as well as in the statements – he is a fitting type of Christ.[74]

[4] I don't think the fact God uses Melchizedek as a *type* of eternal priest when Melchizedek is not literally an eternal priest means that God is testifying falsely about Melchizedek. The Hebrew writer seems to understand that God's silence about Melchizedek's ancestry, birth, and death was a technique for presenting him as a type, a method by which he was "*made* to resemble the Son of God" (v. 3) typologically rather than actually. The statement in v. 8 that it is "testified" that he lives also may point in the same direction. In saying it is "testified" that

[72] Koester (2001), 349.
[73] Victor Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 107.
[74] Bruce (1964), 136-138.

he lives rather than simply saying "he lives" the writer seems to be focusing on how God through his silence *portrayed* Melchizedek in Scripture.

(c) Others are convinced that Melchizedek is some sort of heavenly being who is literally an eternal priest rather than a mortal human who, by silence about his death, is presented as eternal for purpose of the type.

[1] For example, Attridge writes:

> It seems likely, then, that his exposition of Gen 14 is not simply an application to a figure of the Old Testament of attributes proper to Christ, but is based upon contemporary speculation about the figure of Melchizedek as a divine or heavenly being. While lack of parentage, genealogy, and temporal limits are predicated of Melchizedek to evoke the character of the true High Priest, they are qualities probably applicable to the ancient priest as the author knew him.[75]

[2] What gives me pause about this view is the uncertainty of how Melchizedek being a literal eternal priest relates to Christ's eternal priesthood. As Pfitzner notes, "A reading of Heb. 7:3, which turns Melchizedek into a suprahuman figure, runs counter to the Letter's stress on the uniqueness of Christ."[76] Likewise, Bruce Demarest objects that under this view Melchizedek would appear "as a supra-human figure whose priesthood would encroach upon the eternal priesthood of Christ."[77]

[3] Moreover, it seems Melchizedek cannot be a preincarnate manifestation of Christ because he is distinguished from the Son of God by the author's statement that he is "made *to resemble* the Son of God." The idea of him being an angel who literally serves eternally as a priest does not fit very well, if at all, with the author's stress on Christ's superiority to the angels and his indication in 5:1 that priests (at least high priests) were taken from among humans. Jesus is a real human (though also God) not merely one who *appears* to be a human.

b. The greatness of Melchizedek (7:4-10)

(1) The author makes the point that Melchizedek's priesthood is greater than the Levitical priesthood because the Levitical priesthood traces its ancestry to Abraham and Melchizedek was greater than Abraham. Since this priest was greater than the ancestor of the Levitical priests, his priesthood is greater than theirs.

(2) That Melchizedek was greater than Abraham is shown by the fact Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham paid a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek. In paying a tenth to Melchizedek, Abraham indicated his deference or

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[75] Attridge (1989), 191-192.
[76] Pfitzner (1997), 105.
[77] Quoted in Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (1991), 165.

subordination to him, and since Abraham is the ancestor of the Levites, there is a sense in which the Levites also were making that payment and thus expressing deference or subordination.

(3) When the writer says there is no dispute that the lesser is blessed by the greater, meaning that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham because he blessed Abraham, he is using the word "blessed" (εὐλογέω**)** in the sense of pronouncing a blessing upon rather than in the more general sense of praise.[78] There are clear instances in Scripture where inferiors bless superiors in the sense of praising them. For example, servants or the people sometimes blessed a king (2 Sam. 14:22; 1 Ki. 1:47, 8:66). Indeed, in Genesis 14 Melchizedek blesses God immediately after blessing Abraham (see also, Deut. 8:10; Ps. 16:7, 26:12, 34:1, 66:8).

(4) The author also notes Melchizedek's superiority to the Levitical priests because, unlike them, he is presented in Scripture as one who did not die.

3. The superiority of our eternal, Melchizedekian high priest (7:11-28)

[11]Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood – for concerning it the people have been given Law – what further need for another priest to arise, [one] named according to the order of Melchizedek and not according to the order of Aaron? [12]For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity a change of the law also occurs. [13]For [the one] about whom these things are said belonged to another tribe, from which no one has served at the altar. [14]For [it is] evident that our Lord descended from Judah, about which tribe Moses said nothing concerning priests. [15]And it is much more obvious still if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, [16]who has become [a priest] not according to a law of physical order but according to [the] power of an indestructible life. [17]For it is testified [about him], "You [are] a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." [18]For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness [19](for the law perfected nothing); on the other hand, [there is] the introduction of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

[20]And in so far as [it was] not without an oath (for those who became priests are without an oath, [21]but this one [became a priest] through the one saying to him, "[The] Lord swore, and he will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever'"), [22]so far Jesus [also] has become a guarantee of a better covenant. [23]And, on the one hand, the priests have become many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office, [24]but on the other hand, because he continues

[78] See, Moo (2024), 238.

forever, he has a permanent priesthood. [25]And so he is able also to save absolutely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

[26]For such a high priest was indeed fitting for us, [one who is] holy, innocent, undefiled, having been separated from the sinners and having become higher [than] the heavens, [27]who does not have a necessity, as the [other] high priests, to offer up daily a sacrifice, first for his own sins [and] then for the sins of the people; for this one did [this] once when he offered up himself. [28]For the law appoints as high priests men who have weaknesses, but the word of the oath that came after the law [appoints] [the] son who has been made perfect forever.

a. The rules have changed (7:11-19)

(1) If "perfection" in the sense of completion or fulfillment of God's eternal purpose could be attained through the Levitical priesthood, which priesthood was bound to the law that defined and regulated it, there would be no need for a new order of priesthood. Put differently, it is because God's ultimate goal could not be established through the Levitical priesthood that there was a need for the different kind of priest promised in Ps. 110:4, one in the order of Melchizedek rather than in the order of Aaron.

(2) And when the priesthood is changed, as it was with Jesus, the law also changes because the law's requirements governing the old priesthood necessarily are superseded in the appointment of the new priest who does not meet those requirements.

(3) The law was changed in the case of Christ's appointment to the priesthood because he descended from the tribe of Judah and the priestly requirements given by Moses made no allowance for descendants of Judah to serve as priests. The change in law associated with Christ's priesthood is all the more evident by the fact Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek in the sense he is immortal (as is Melchizedek typologically), a circumstance for which the regulations of Levitical priests make no provision.

(4) So the introduction of the new priesthood in Christ results, on the one hand, in a setting aside of the Mosaic law which was weak and useless in the sense it did not perfect anything, that is, it did not complete or fulfill God's eternal purpose. That was not its designed role; it was temporary and provisional. On the other hand, the introduction of the new priesthood in Christ brings a better hope, a hope through which we draw near to God.

b. The power of a divine oath (7:20-22)

(1) Unlike the Levitical priests, Jesus' call to the priesthood includes an irrevocable oath that his priesthood will last forever (Ps. 110:4), which means he has become a guarantee of a better covenant.

(2) Guthrie writes: "In the present context the author pictures Jesus as the one who guarantees God's covenant promises. The hearers, as new covenant people, have a covenant that is 'better' because, by virtue of God's oath, Jesus, the mediator of that covenant (cf. 8:6), holds an unalterable position. Our hope, therefore, rests on the most secure of terms."[79]

c. The permanent priest (7:23-25)

(1) Whereas mortality keeps the Levitical priests from remaining in office, which is why there have been so many of them since Aaron, Jesus has a permanent priesthood because he is immortal. In the words of Rom. 6:9, "death no longer has mastery over him." He will never hand the high priesthood over to someone else, someone who might be unreliable in his discharge of it.

(2) And because his priesthood is permanent, he is able to save fully (or for all time) those who come to God through him since he is always there to make intercession for them. This brings to mind Paul's statement in Rom. 8:31-34:

> [31] What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over on behalf of us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things? [33] Who will bring charges against the elect of God? God is the one who pronounces righteous; [34] who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died and, more than that, was raised up, who also is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

d. A summary and transition (7:26-28)

(1) These verses sum up the discussion of the Son's appointment as a superior high priest that began in 5:1 (and was interrupted by the hortatory interjection from 5:11 – 6:20). Jesus is the kind of high priest we need, one with a character and status greater than that of earthly priests. Unlike the earthly priests, he is sinless and has no need to offer sacrifices for his own sin. Rather, he offers himself as a sacrifice for the sins of others.

(a) The reference in v. 27 to "daily" sacrifices of high priests for their own sin and then for the sins of the people raises a question because this double sacrifice was specified for the high priest only on the annual Day of Atonement.

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[79] Guthrie (1998), 267.

(b) The answer seems to lie in the fact that on many occasions during the year the high priest involved himself with the other priests as they officiated, including the week preceding the Day of Atonement. Josephus mentions this (*Jewish War* 5.231), and Philo suggests that the high priest offered sacrifices daily. Neil Lightfoot states:

> Josephus relates that on many occasions during the year the high priest involved himself with the other priests as they officiated – on the days of weekly sabbath, of new moon, of national festivals and annual gatherings of all the people. The law instructed the priest that if he committed "sins unwittingly in any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done," he was to offer a young, unblemished bull to the Lord for a sin offering (Lev. 4:2-3). . . . Remembering other super-precautions of the Jews to avoid sin, it is probably correct to say that the later high priests *did* make daily offerings, just as the author says. Philo is in agreement, describing the high priest as one who "day by day offers prayers and sacrifices" for the people.[80]

(2) And unlike the earthly priests whose ministry is confined to the earthly tabernacle, Jesus ministers in heaven itself where he sits at the right hand of God. This point is emphasized in the next two verses.

(3) "The old priests were appointed by virtue of the law but were weak (i.e., sinful, 5:2; mortal, 7:23), but the Son was appointed by God's oath and has been 'made perfect forever.'"[81] Regarding his having been "made perfect forever," Hagner comments, "Thus, the Son, having accomplished his once-and-for-all sacrifice, has brought God's saving purposes, as well as his own personal calling, to their goal, all of which produces a state of completion and permanence – this is in contrast to the law (7:19) that could bring nothing to this stage of completeness and fulfillment."[82]

C. Transition: We have such a high priest, who is a minister in heaven (8:1-2)

> **Now [the] main point of the things being said [is this]: we have such a high priest who sat down at [the] right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, [2]a minister of the sanctuary, of the true tabernacle, which the Lord, not man, put up.**

1. The main point of what he is saying is that Christians have the kind of high priest he has described, one who is sinless, eternal, sympathetic, and was appointed by an oath.

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[80] Neil R. Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today: A Commentary on the Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 148.
[81] Guthrie (1998), 269.
[82] Hagner (1990), 114-115.

2. And this high priest, Jesus Christ, ministers not in an earthy sanctuary but in heaven itself where he sits at the right hand of God. He ministers in the true sanctuary in the sense it is "the only one which is not an imitation of something better than itself."[83] It is the reality that is reflected in the earthly tabernacle.

D. The superior offering of the appointed high priest (8:3-10:18)

1. Introduction: More excellent ministry of the heavenly high priest (8:3-6)

> **[3]For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so [it was] necessary for this one also to have something which he might offer. [4]Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the law, [5]who minister in a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned when he intended to complete the tabernacle, for He says, "See that you will make it according to all the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain." [6]But now he has obtained a superior ministry, in as much as he also is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted upon better promises.**

a. Since every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, Jesus, being a high priest, also must have something to offer. His offering was specified in 7:27: he offered *himself* once for all as a sacrifice for sin. Koester remarks, "The fact that Jesus sat down (8:1) shows that the need for sacrifice has ended (10:11-18), although Christ's intercession on behalf of others continues."[84]

b. If Jesus was still on earth, he would not be a priest, because the shadow, earthly tabernacle (or temple) was a dedicated part of the old covenant system that was reserved exclusively for Levitical priests (or more specifically, descendants of Aaron). He ministers as a high priest in the true tabernacle of heaven, a ministry that is part of the new covenant, not on the basis of his genealogy, not as a Levite, but on the basis of God's appointment and his immortal life.

c. Jesus has obtained a heavenly ministry that is superior to that conducted by the Levitical priests in conjunction with the fact he is the mediator of a better covenant that was enacted or founded on better promises. He elaborates on this new covenant in the following verses.

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[83] Bruce (1964), 163.
[84] Koester (2001), 382-383.

2. The superiority of the new covenant (8:7-13)

[7]For if that first covenant was faultless, a place [for] a second would not have been sought. [8]For finding fault [with] them, he says:

> **Look, days are coming, says [the] Lord, and I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, [9]not like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took their hand to lead them from the land of Egypt, for they did not continue in my covenant, and I had no concern for them, says the Lord. [10]For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their mind and write them upon their hearts. And I will be God to them, and they will be a people to me. [11]And they shall not teach, each one his fellow citizen and each one his brother, saying "Know the Lord," for all will know me, from the least to the greatest of them. [12]For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will not remember their sins any longer.**

[13]When he says "new," he has made the first obsolete, and what is becoming obsolete and is becoming old is on the verge of disappearance.

a. The superiority of the new covenant is evident in the fact there would have been no need for God to announce in Jeremiah's day the coming of a new covenant if the first covenant, meaning the Mosaic covenant established at Sinai (v. 9), had been sufficient for achieving God's ultimate purpose.

b. As v. 13 makes clear, the key for the author in the Jeremiah text is the use of the word "new" to describe the covenant God was going to establish. By calling that covenant "new" God indicated that the Mosaic covenant, with its mandated priesthood and sacrifices, was destined for obsolescence. It was something transitory that would be replaced. What is in that category, what has been destined by God for obsolescence, is expiring and thus is on the brink of disappearing, however long it may totter there.

(1) As Attridge states, "In Hebrews's eyes, the old covenant was near its end as soon as the oracle of a new was spoken."[85] Bruce says "that by predicting the inauguration of a new covenant Jeremiah in effect announced the impending dissolution of the old order."[86] Pfitzner says, "[T]he Sinai covenant was antiquated ('growing old') from the moment that the promise of Jer 31 was uttered."[87]

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[85] Attridge (1989), 229.
[86] Bruce (1964), 179.
[87] Pfitzner (1997), 122.

(2) We know from what the author has already written that the old covenant in fact passed away in the crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ (7:18-22, 8:6). This is confirmed in numerous other places in the New Testament (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:5-6; Gal. 4:21 – 5:1). Indeed, the writer of Hebrews has stressed the fact that Jesus is serving as the great High Priest under this new covenant.

c. The new covenant is made with the "house of Israel" (v. 10), which in v. 8 is described in terms of the divided monarchy. The church, of course, is Jewish at its root. The apostles and the first Christians were true Israel, meaning they were ethnic Jews who also shared the faith of Abraham in that they believed God's testimony about his Son Jesus Christ.

(1) That's almost certainly why Jesus chose 12 apostles; they signified the righteous remnant, the faithful subset of the twelve tribes of Israel. As Robert Stein notes, "The symbolic nature of their number was not accidental. Jesus' audience could not have helped but notice the number. 'Twelve' conjured up in the mind of any Jew the twelve tribes of Israel."[88]

(2) As Paul explains in Rom. 11:17-24, Israel is the olive tree into which Gentiles have been grafted. The faith by which we enter into the new covenant is the faith that marks us as children of Abraham (e.g., Rom. 4:11-12, 9:6-8; Gal. 3:7-9, 3:29). Similarly, he says in Eph. 2:11-13 that Gentiles, who once were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

(3) Paul almost certainly refers to the church as "the Israel of God" in Gal. 6:16, and in Phil. 3:3 he says, "it is we who are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God."

d. Aspects of the new covenant

(1) Unlike the Mosaic covenant which the Israelites broke, those in the new covenant will have God's laws put in their minds and written on their hearts.

(a) What I think this means is that *all members* of the new covenant will have the indwelling Spirit. By virtue of his transforming work in our hearts, we will be more internally motivated to obey, and by virtue of his empowerment, we will be better able to obey, generally speaking. I say "generally speaking" because select old-covenant saints were filled with the Spirit, and we remain free to resist the Spirit's work in our lives.

(b) Paul refers to this work of the Spirit when he writes in Rom. 8:9, 12-13:

[88] Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 114.

> [9] But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this one is not of him. . . . [12] Now, therefore, brothers, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh, [13] for if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die; **but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the practices of the body**, you will live.

(c) Paul says in 2 Cor. 3:1-3 that the Corinthians' existence as a group of Christians is his letter of recommendation, a letter authored by Christ himself but brought into being through the agency of the apostle (just like one who writes what is dictated). Christ used Paul to write Paul's own letter of recommendation through the transforming work of the Spirit in the Corinthians' hearts that accompanied the presentation of the gospel in Corinth.

(d) O'Brien comments: "[Jeremiah's] words imply the people's receiving of a new heart, and this is expressly promised in the parallel prophecy of Ezekiel: 'I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws' (Ezek. 11:19-20; also 36:26-27)."[89]

(e) Though profound in its present effect, our transformation by the Holy Spirit is subject to the "now/not yet" dichotomy. That is, it will not result in our complete sanctification, our being morally perfect and completely righteous acting, until Christ's return. At that time, we shall be like him (1 Jn. 3:2) in that our bodies will be changed to be like his glorious and immortal body and the sanctification that began at our conversion, our transformation into Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18), will be brought to completion. But until then, we struggle with life in this fallen world (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:11).

(2) All members of the new covenant will "know the Lord" in the sense they will experience a level of relationship with him that previously had been exceptional, something experienced by relatively few.

(a) This covenant-wide "knowing of the Lord," this generalized experience of intimacy with God, will happen because all members of the new covenant will have been forgiven in the full and complete sense accomplished by Christ, the great high priest.

[1] The "For" that begins v. 12 is significant. All in the new covenant will "know" God (v. 11) *because* of the forgiveness that is available there. Lightfoot notes, "[F]orgiveness of sins, as the author later emphasizes, is the very heart of the new covenant (10:16-18); for real forgiveness was, above all, what the first covenant lacked (9:9; 10:1-2; 10:11)."[90]

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[89] O'Brien (2010), 299.
[90] Lightfoot (1976), 160.

[2] That does not mean there was no forgiveness under the old covenant. Forgiveness was provided in conjunction with the prescribed sacrifices (e.g., Leviticus 4-6, 17:11, 19:22; Numbers 15). It means there is something distinctive, something fuller, about the forgiveness available under the new covenant. The forgiveness available through the reality of Christ in some way surpasses that available through the shadow of old-covenant sacrifices. In my comments on chapter 9, I address the difference in forgiveness that I think the writer has in mind.

[3] When this Jeremiah text is cited again in 10:16-17 the focus is on the significance of Jer. 31:34 and how the forgiveness referred to makes unnecessary any further offering for sin. The forgiveness procured by Christ is uniquely efficacious.

(b) As all in the new covenant experience perfect forgiveness, they all experience an intimacy with God. There is a covenant-wide "knowing of God" that flows from the distinctiveness of forgiveness in the new covenant. And since they all "know the Lord" in that sense, there is no need for some to instruct others toward that goal. That clearly does not mean members of the new covenant are not to be instructed in doctrine and exhorted to live out the implications of what they already know. The writer of this very letter is doing that, not to mention it is all over the NT.

3. The superior new covenant offering (9:1-10:18)

a. Introduction: The pattern of old covenant worship (9:1-10)

Now [even] the first covenant had regulations for ministry and the earthly sanctuary. [2]For [the] tabernacle was constructed, the front [room], in which were both the lampstand and the table for the presentation of the loaves, which is called [the] Holy Place. [3]And behind the second curtain [was] a room that is called [the] Holy of Holies, [4]having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant, having been covered on all sides with gold, in which [were] a golden jar having the manna, Aaron's rod that sprouted, and the tablets of the covenant. [5]And above it [were] the cherubim of glory overshadowing the place of atonement, about which things it is not now [possible] to speak in detail.

[6]And these things having been prepared in this way, the priests enter continually into the front room, performing ministry duties, [7]but into the back [room] only the high priest enters once a year, [and] not without blood which he offers for himself and [for] the people's sins of ignorance. [8]By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way [into] the [real] sanctuary had not yet been disclosed while the front room still had standing, [9]which [is] an illustration for the present time,

according to which [arrangement] both gifts and sacrifices are offered that are not able with respect to [the] conscience to perfect the one ministering [10][but deal] only with foods and drinks and different washings, regulations of flesh imposed until the time of [the] new order.

(1) The author provides a brief description of the sacrificial worship carried out under the old covenant. He says in v. 1 that there were regulations for ministry, meaning there were commands regarding how the priestly ministry was to be conducted, and he also mentions the structure in which that ministry was performed, the "earthly sanctuary." He then expounds on those two themes in reverse order in vv. 2-10.

(2) He says that the lampstand and the table and loaves were *in* the front room of the tabernacle, the Holy Place. Then he describes the inner room, the Holy of Holies, as *having* the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant and the various items it contained. Though he says now is not the time to discuss these things in detail, his description raises some questions.

(a) It appears from Ex. 30:1-10 and 40:1-5, 20-27 that the altar of incense was located in the front room of the tabernacle, the Holy Place, right in front of the curtain into the Holy of Holies, rather than in the Holy of Holies itself. That is how it was understood by Philo, Josephus, and in the Mishnah. So why does the writer of Hebrews describe the Holy of Holies as having the golden altar of incense?

[1] There is no obvious answer and opinions vary, but I think the writer probably means that the Holy of Holies "has" the altar of incense in the sense the altar was specially associated with the Holy of Holies. It was the source of the material that produced the incense cloud that allowed the high priest to enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement without being killed, as explained in Lev. 16:12-13. The Lord in Ex. 40:5 commands that the altar be placed in front of the ark of the covenant, making no mention of the intervening curtain, and in 1 Ki. 6:22 this altar is said to "belong" to the inner sanctuary.

[a] Cockerill states:

> Riggenbach is correct in his contention that one so schooled in the OT would not misplace this altar. Rather, the author draws on those OT passages cited above that connect this altar with the Most Holy Place. In making this connection he joins his contemporaries, also cited above, who made a like association. Note the difference between the way he locates furniture "in" the Holy Place but speaks of the Most Holy Place as "having" the Incense Altar and the Ark of the Covenant. He does not "relocate" this altar within the sanctuary but closely associates it with the Most Holy Place in accord with its function.[91]

[91] Cockerill (2012), 376-377.

[b] Peterson states:

> Hebrews picks up this close association of the altar of incense with the inner sanctuary, particularly in relation to the Day of Atonement ritual (Exod. 30:10; Lev. 16:12-13, 18-19). Indeed, it could be said that 'the altar of incense bore the same relation to the Holy of Holies as the altar of burnt offering to the Holy Place. It furnished in some sense the means of approach to it' (Westcott, p. 249).[92]

[c] Moo states, "[T]he author may not locate the altar in the inner room at all. He uses the rather vague verb 'having' (ἔχουσα) to describe the altar's placement vis-à-vis the inner room: he might mean that the inner room 'has' the altar in the sense that one must approach the inner room by means of it."[93]

[2] Others resolve the issue by appealing to the fact the word translated "golden altar" may be translated "golden censer." In that case, no statement is made about the location of the altar of incense. Some others argue that the altar may have been moved into the Holy of Holies for service on the Day of Atonement.

(b) It appears from Ex. 16:32-34 and Num. 17:10-11 that the jar of manna and Aaron's rod were located *in front* of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies rather than *in* the ark of the covenant. If that is indeed where they originally were located, then as presupposed by certain rabbinic evidence,[94] they subsequently were placed inside the ark. However, by the time of 1 Ki. 8:9 (see also 2 Chron. 5:10), after the ark had spent seven months in the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam. 6:1) and the people of Beth Shemesh had looked into it (1 Sam. 6:19; removed anything?), they had been removed. At that time, the only thing in the ark was the two stone tablets of Moses.

(3) Above the ark of the covenant were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the place of atonement.

(a) The cherubim were winged figures made of gold (Ex. 25:18-22). They were at each end of the ark facing each other, and their wings extended out over the ark. They are here called "cherubim of glory," which probably means cherubim of God's glory. "God promised to meet with Moses 'from between the two cherubim' (Exod 25:22; Num. 7:89), and God was said to be 'enthroned on the cherubim' (e.g., 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; Ps 80:1)."[95]

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[92] Peterson (2020), 202.
[93] Moo (2024), 303.
[94] See, Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (1991), 221.
[95] Koester (2001), 396.

(b) The place of atonement, which sometimes is translated "mercy seat," was the top of the ark (Ex. 25:22; Num. 7:89).

(4) The writer explains in vv. 6-10 that under the old-covenant cult access to the Holy of Holies was restricted to the high priest, and even he could only enter once a year and could do so only with sacrificial blood which he offered for his and the people's sins.

(5) This Spirit-given arrangement symbolized the truth that access to the real sanctuary, true intimacy with God, was not available while the old-covenant arrangement still was applicable (expressed as "while the front room still had standing," meaning still had cultic status). The reason is that the offerings under that covenant – the regulations of flesh imposed until the time of [the] new order – were unable to resolve fully one's sense of guilt because there was an intuitive awareness of their inherent inadequacy for atonement. Guthrie comments:

> The outer room of the tabernacle, therefore, illustrates the whole era managed by the older covenant. It was a time in which the general populace could not draw near to God because provision had yet to be made for their consciences to be cleansed.
>
> . . . The problem under the old covenant consisted of the sacrificial system's inability to resolve one's awareness of personal guilt. Thus, the outer room of the tabernacle illustrated the inner, spiritual condition of the people. Ultimately the conscience, not a material, earthly space, keeps a person from intimacy with God. Consequently, more than external regulations that dealt with practices regarding food, drink, and certain washings would be required to make entrance to the presence of God possible. These rituals simply were provisional, given until the new covenant system could be established.[96]

b. Introduction to Christological arguments concerning superiority of offering (9:11-12)

> **[11]But when Christ appeared [as] high priest of the good things that have come,* [passing] through the greater and more perfect room not made with hands (that is, not of this creation) [12]he entered once for all time into the [real] sanctuary, not by the blood of goats and calves but by his own blood, thus securing eternal redemption.**

(1) When Christ appeared as the great high priest of the new covenant that he ushered in, the good things that have come, he passed through the front room of the heavenly tabernacle and entered once for all time into the true Holy of

[96] Guthrie (1998), 300.

Holies, into the very presence of God in heaven. (The asterisk notes a textual variant yielding the translation "good things to come" or "about to come").

(2) Unlike the high priests of the old covenant who each year entered the earthly Holy of Holies with the blood of animals, Jesus entered once for all into the heavenly Holy of Holies by his own blood, by his sacrificial death on the cross. Through that offering he has secured eternal redemption; he has provided for all eternity deliverance from sin's penalty.

c. Christ's superior blood (9:13-22)

[13]For if the blood of goats and bulls, with sprinkling ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled for the purity of the flesh, [14]how much more will the blood of Christ, who through [the] eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works in order to minister to the living God.

[15]And for this reason he is [the] mediator of a new covenant, in order that, a death having occurred for redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, those having been called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. [16]For where there is a will, it is necessary to establish the death of the one who made it. [17]For a will is effective in the case of dead persons, since it is never in force when the one who made it is living. [18]Therefore not even the first [covenant] was instituted without blood. [19]For when every command of the law had been spoken to all the people by Moses, 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 [20]saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." [21]And in the same way, he sprinkled with the blood the tabernacle and also all the vessels of the ministry. [22]Indeed, according to the law nearly everything is purified by blood, and without [the] shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

(1) The reference in v. 12 to "the blood of goats and calves" points to the double sacrifice on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 (LXX) – an offering for the high priest and an offering for the people. Cockerill suggests that the use of "bull" in v. 13 instead of "calf" expands the scope to include all the sacrificial system.[97]

(2) Given that the blood of bulls and goats was accepted by God as purification for people, albeit purification at an external level, something that restored a formal degree of fellowship but which left a barrier to intimacy in the form of a

[97] Cockerill (2012), 396.

lingering sense of guilt, then certainly the blood of Christ will *utterly* purify, will purify even our consciences from sin that we might serve God in a greater state of intimacy.

(3) Sprinkling ashes from a heifer is a reference to the procedure described in Numbers 19. A specially prepared mixture of water and ashes from a burned cow were sprinkled to cleanse the people from the ritual contamination of touching a dead body.

(4) As the sacrificial animal under the old covenant was to be without blemish or defect (Lev. 4:28, 9:3; Deut. 17:1), so Jesus offered himself without blemish to God in the sense he was morally flawless, absolutely sinless.

(5) Jesus offered himself through the eternal Spirit in the sense that the Holy Spirit strengthened and empowered him throughout his ministry, including his sacrificial death. Gerald Hawthorne writes:

> Understood in this way the phrase, "through the eternal Spirit," means that it was by the aid of, through the morally strengthening support of, by the power of the Spirit that Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God. It thus is possible to conclude that the Holy Spirit even now at the end of Jesus' life, as throughout the whole of it, was playing a tremendously vital part in his ministry. For the Spirit was the instrument, the agent, the enabler by whose power Jesus achieved his greatest work on earth, that of providing eternal redemption for all (Heb. 9:12).[98]

(6) The writer says in v. 15 that Jesus is the one through whom God's new covenant was brought into effect, and it was brought into effect in order that those having been called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

(a) The new covenant was necessary for people to receive the promised eternal inheritance because the forgiveness available under the old covenant was based on the coming sacrifice of Christ. God forgave sins under that covenant on credit, so to speak, because Christ, the true efficacious sacrifice to which all the shadows of the old covenant pointed, was coming into the world.

(b) If Christ had not in fact become the sin offering, which act inaugurated the new covenant, there would be no eternal inheritance because the essential basis of all divine forgiveness, including that available under the shadows of the old covenant, would not exist. Put differently, the forgiveness of the old covenant required the coming of the new covenant because it required the Son's efficacious sacrifice, and forgiveness is necessary to receive the promised eternal inheritance. See also, Rom. 3:24-26.

(c) Hagner writes:

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[98] Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence & the Power* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 183-184.

> The real answer to sins against the commandments of the Mosaic law is found not in the sacrifice of animals, but in the sacrifice of Christ. The new covenant thus contains within it the answer to the failure to abide by the requirements of the old covenant (cf. 8:12; 10:17-18). And, forgiveness experienced during the OT period depended finally – although this was hardly understood at the time – upon an event that was to take place in the future. The sacrifice of Christ is the answer to sin in every era, past and present, since it alone is the means of forgiveness.[99]

(7) Verses 16-17 emphasize the link between Christ's death and the establishment of the new covenant. The writer does so by analogizing a covenant to a will, which analogy is invited by the mention of inheritance at the end of v. 15 and the fact the Greek word *diathēkē* meant both covenant and will. (In seeing a shift in meaning from covenant to will, I am in agreement with Bruce, Lightfoot, Thompson, Attridge, Koester, Ellingworth, Hagner, Johnson, Pfitzner, DeSilva and Moo and in disagreement with Lane, Guthrie, O'Brien, Cockerill, and Peterson.) As a death is necessary for a will to become operational, so a death was necessary for the new covenant to take effect.

(8) Verses 18-20 show how this was true even of the first covenant, meaning the Mosaic covenant. Given the necessity of a death for the operation of a will, which is analogous to a covenant, not even the first covenant took effect without a death. As Ex. 24:3-8 shows, that covenant was instituted with the blood of a sacrifice.

(a) It is doubtful that the words "and the goats" were part of the original text of Hebrews, which is why the phrase is omitted in the REB, NIV, and LEB. The earliest manuscript of Hebrews (P^{46}) does not contain them.

(b) The Hebrew writer reveals some details about the institution of the covenant in Exodus 24 that are not mentioned there. Specifically, he notes that water, scarlet wool, and hyssop were involved in the sprinkling and that the book of the covenant from which Moses read was sprinkled in addition to the people. Presumably the writer's audience was familiar with these additional details by way of tradition, and the Spirit, through the writer, confirms that tradition as accurate.

(9) Verse 21 focuses on the cleansing effect of blood in the later dedication of the tabernacle. It is not clear when Moses sprinkled the tabernacle and vessels with blood.

(a) Presumably it was in Exodus 40 where the Lord tells Moses (v. 9) to "take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, *and consecrate* it and all its furniture, so that it may become holy." He was told at that same time (v. 13) to anoint *and consecrate* Aaron that he might serve the Lord as a priest. The anointing and consecration of Aaron reported in Leviticus 8 includes the application

[99] Hagner (1990), 141.

of both oil and blood. Bruce writes, "But as Aaron and his sons were hallowed with the blood of the ram of consecration as well as with the oil of anointing when they were installed in their sacred office (Lev. 8:23f., 30), it might be inferred that the tabernacle and its furnishings, which were hallowed at the same time, were sprinkled with the blood in addition to being anointed with the oil."[100]

(b) That this was a current understanding is clear from Josephus who remarked that Moses purified "the tabernacle and its vessels, both with oil . . . and with the blood of bulls and rams."[101] The Spirit is confirming through the author of Hebrews that this understanding is correct.

(10) The bottom line is given in v. 22. The purifying effect of sacrificial blood is all over the OT, and it is central to divine forgiveness. See Lev. 17:11.

d. A sacrifice in heaven (9:23-24)

> **[23]Therefore it was a necessity [that] the copies of the things in the heavens be purified with these things, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. [24]For Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a representation of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God on our behalf.**

(1) Given the purifying effect of blood, it was necessary for the earthly tabernacle and vessels to be purified with animal sacrifices, but purifying the heavenly sanctuary required better sacrifices than those. Just as the high priest on the Day of Atonement sprinkled blood on and in front of the ark cover to make atonement for the Holy of Holies because of the defiling effect of the Israelites' uncleanness (Lev. 16:15-19), thereby making that space fit for continuing interaction between God and his people, so access to God's heavenly presence was opened by Christ's supremely efficacious sacrifice for human sin that affected all creation.

(2) He appeared on our behalf in heaven itself paving the way for us to enter into God's presence (10:19-22). Guthrie notes: "Attridge makes the important observation that the Day of Atonement analogy breaks down at this point. Our author says nothing about Christ sprinkling the blood in the heavenly realm since he does not wish to speak of the heavenly offering as separate from his death on the cross; they are one and the same."[102]

e. The once-for-all offering (9:25-28)

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[100] Bruce (1964), 216.
[101] Bruce (1964), 216.
[102] Guthrie (1998), 315.

> **[25]Nor [was it] so that he would offer himself repeatedly, like the high priest [who] enters into the sanctuary with blood belonging to another, [26]for then it would have been necessary for him to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages for removal of sins through the sacrifice of himself. [27]And just as it is destined for men to die once, and after this judgment, [28]so also Christ, having been offered up once in order to bear the sins of many, will appear for a second time for those who are eagerly waiting for him, without relation to sin [but] for salvation.**

(1) Christ's entrance into the heavenly sanctuary was not to offer himself repeatedly, as in the earthly ritual of the Day of Atonement in which the high priest entered the Holy of Holies each year with the blood of animals, for in that case he, having existed eternally, would have had to die repeatedly from the foundation of the world, which obviously had not happened. Rather, he appeared at one time in history, in the first century, to provide forgiveness for all sinners through the sacrifice of himself. As Guthrie remarks, "His sacrifice, because of its superior quality, is able to reach back to the time of creation and forward to the time of the consummation of the ages, fully cleansing the people of God."[103]

(2) Christ appeared "at the end of the ages" in the sense his appearance marked the arrival of the last days, the inauguration of the final stage of redemptive history. As I said regarding Heb. 1:2, Jesus' coming, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and pouring out of the Spirit, that complex of events, was the beginning of the last days.

(a) For example, Peter in Acts 2:17 identifies the outpouring of the Spirit as an event of the "last days," and in 2 Tim. 3:1-5 Paul describes how people will be in the "last days" and then commands Timothy to avoid such people. See also, Jas. 5:3 and 2 Pet. 3:3.

(b) To repeat two quotes I gave earlier, Moo states:

> With the death and resurrection of Jesus and pouring out of the Spirit, the "last days" have been inaugurated. This final age of salvation will find its climax in the return of Christ in glory. But – and here is the crucial point – the length of the age is unknown. Not even Jesus knew how long the "last days" would last (see Mark 13:32). What this means is that the return of Christ, as the next event in the salvation-historical timetable, is, from the time of the early church to our own day, "near," or "imminent." Every generation of Christians lives (or should live!) with the consciousness that

[103] Guthrie (1998), 316.

the *parousia* could occur at any time and that one needs to make decisions and choose values based on that realization.[104]

(c) Stott puts it like this:

> [W]hat the apostles did know is that the kingdom of God came with Jesus, that the decisive salvation events which established it (his death, resurrection, exaltation and gift of the Spirit) had already taken place, and that God had nothing on his calendar before the parousia. It would be the next and the culminating event. So they were, and we are, living in "the last days." It is in this sense that Christ is coming "soon" (16:20). We must be watchful and alert, because we do not know the time.[105]

(3) In verses 27-28 the writer compares Christ's death to that of ordinary humans and asserts that it is both similar to and different from the normal pattern.[106] Like other people, Christ died once; but unlike other people who after death face judgment, Christ after his death returns to bring salvation to others, that is, to deliver them from a negative judgment of condemnation.

f. An eternal sacrifice (10:1-18)

(1) The limited abilities of the law (10:1-4)

> **For the law, being a shadow of the good things that are coming not [the] very form of the things, is never able, by the same sacrifices which they offer continuously every year, to perfect those who approach. [2]For otherwise would they not have ceased being offered, since the worshipers, having been cleansed once for all, would no longer have consciousness of sins? [3]But in them [there is] a reminder of sins every year. [4]For [it is] impossible [for] blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**

(a) The annual sacrifices on the Day of Atonement prescribed by the law of Moses were unable to perfect the people in the sense indicated in 9:9; they were unable to perfect them with regard to the conscience, unable to resolve fully one's sense of guilt because there was an intuitive awareness of their inherent inadequacy for atonement. There was a lingering sense of guilt that was an impediment to intimacy with God.

(b) The law's sacrificial system was only a shadow of the real substance, a shadow of the true efficacious sacrifice it represented, the

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[104] Moo (2021), 285.
[105] Stott (1994), 352.
[106] Koester (2001), 429.

sacrifice of Christ. That sacrifice and the good things connected to it were in the future when the law was given to Moses – the law was a shadow of the good things that are coming – but as the writer made clear in 9:11, those good things have now come in Christ. As Pfitzner remarks, "The 'good things' to which the Law pointed, like the cult upon which it was based, have become a reality (9:11). They are the 'better things . . . that belong to salvation' (6:9): a better covenant based on better promises and sacrifices (8:6; 9:23). They are the true 'form' (literally, 'image') in which God's will finds expression."[107]

(c) If the sacrifices of the law had been the genuine basis for atonement for sins rather than simply a shadow of that genuine basis then there would be no need for them to be repeated annually because the first time would have been sufficient to get the job done. The assumption is that the substance, the true sacrifice, is perpetually effective and thus requires no repetition.

(d) The fact of the matter is that it is impossible for the blood of animals to be the actual basis of divine forgiveness. They do not have atoning efficacy; rather, the offering of them is merely the occasion for which forgiveness was granted under the old covenant on the basis of Christ's future sacrifice. Because they are shadows that lack atoning efficacy, animal sacrifices are inadequate to deal finally and fully with one's conscience, one's sense of guilt, and thus their repeated offering serves as a reminder of sins rather than as an ultimate cleansing.

(2) The superior sacrifice of Christ (10:5-10)

> **[5]Therefore, when entering into the world he says: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but you prepared a body for me. [6]You did not take pleasure in burnt offerings and [offerings] for sin. [7]Then I said, Look, I have come – it has been written about me in [the] scroll of [the] book – to do your will, O God." [8]Saying first that sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and [offerings] for sin, which are offered according to [the] law, you did not desire or take pleasure in, [9]then he said, "Look, I have come to do your will." He takes away the first in order to establish the second, [10]by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

(a) Because the sacrificial system of the law was a shadow that lacked atoning efficacy, Christ entered the human world in the incarnation, speaking the words of Ps. 39:6-8 (LXX; 40:6-8 MT) to God the Father as he embarked from heavenly glory.

(b) The point of the quotation is that, though God through the law prescribed offerings for sin, those offerings were never the fulfillment of his purpose, never what he desired in a final, ultimate sense. Rather, his ultimate intention was the complete and perfect forgiveness provided through Christ's obedient offering of

[107] Pfitzner (1997), 136.

his own body in sacrifice. The shadows were unsatisfactory in the sense they were not the substance.

(c) In accomplishing his ultimate purpose in Christ, God supplanted the old covenant's sacrificial system with the true sacrifice of Christ. In the words of v. 9b, he took away the first to establish the second. And as a result of that divine will, we have been sanctified through the offering of Jesus' body once for all. Praise God!

(3) Christ's priestly activity contrasted with that of the Levitical priests (10:11-14)

> **[11]And every priest stands day after day ministering and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which never are able to take away sins. [12]But this one, having offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, sat down at [the] right [hand] of God, [13]waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. [14]For by one offering he has perfected for all time those being sanctified.**

(a) Unlike the old-covenant priests whose ministry has a perpetually unfinished character, who stand day after day to offer repeatedly shadow sacrifices that lack true efficacy, Jesus sat down at the right hand of God after offering himself as the one-time, supremely efficacious sacrifice for sin. By that one offering he has perfected for all time those who come to God through him.

(b) Having completed his sacrificial offering, Jesus is at the right hand of the Father where he intercedes for us (7:25; 8:1-2). Lane writes, "Although no priest of Aaron's line ever sat down in the presence of God in the earthly sanctuary, Christ has done so in the heavenly sanctuary (8:1-2)."[108]

(c) Jesus will remain in the heavenly realm until his second coming, referred to in 9:28, at which time the kingdom he inaugurated at his first coming will be consummated. All things that in the interim have been allowed to resist his rule, all that has been allowed to conflict with God's ultimate will for creation, will be removed, including death itself through the resurrection. It is at the second coming that the victory won at the cross will be fully manifested, but the writer does not here dwell on the matter.

(4) A reflection on the finality of Christ's sacrifice in light of the new covenant (10:15-18)

> **[15]And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying,**
> **[16]"This [is] the covenant which I will make with them after those days,**

[108] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (1991), 267.

says the Lord; I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds," [17][then he adds] "I will not remember their sins and lawless deeds any longer." [18]Now where [there is] forgiveness of these things, [there is] no longer an offering for sin.

(a) Returning to Jer. 31:33-34, the writer asserts that what he has argued is in precise accord with what the Spirit said earlier through the prophet Jeremiah. God promised to make a new covenant after the making of the Mosaic covenant. As I said when commenting on 8:10, I think the statement that God's laws will be on the hearts and minds of the members of the new covenant means that all members of the new covenant will have the indwelling Spirit and by virtue of his transforming work have a greater desire and ability to obey the will of God. We will be more internally motivated and empowered to live godly lives than were those under the Mosaic covenant, generally speaking.

(b) The effect of v. 17 is to connect the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah with the experience of a new level of forgiveness, the fuller, perfect forgiveness provided by Christ's atoning death.

(c) Where a sacrifice has been provided that achieves full and perfect forgiveness, there is no need for any further sacrifice. They are all rendered obsolete and superfluous.

E. Overlap: We have a great priest who takes us into heaven (10:19-25)

Hebrews 10:19-25 contains numerous verbal parallels with 4:14-16 which signals that this is the end of the section on Christ's appointment and work as a high priest that began in 4:14-16. Guthrie states, "an *inclusio* is a literary device by which an author marks the beginning and ending of a section by verbal parallels."[109] These verses also serve as a transition to the fourth and final hortatory interjection that runs from 10:26–13:19.

1. Let us draw near to God (10:19-22)

[19]Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence for entering the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, [20]a new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, [through] his flesh, [21]and [since we have] a great priest over the house of God, [22]let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, the hearts having been sprinkled [clean] from an evil conscience and the body having been washed with pure water.

[109] Guthrie (1998), 340 (fn. 2).

a. The writer in these verses exhorts his hearers to approach or draw near to God. He bases that exhortation ("since") on the fact (a) they as Christians ("brothers") have confidence for entering into God's presence because of Christ's sacrifice (vv. 19-20) and (b) they have a great high priest over the house of God (v. 21).

(1) The fact Christ died as the true and fully efficacious sacrifice for sins and serves as Christians' great high priest in the immediate presence of God in heaven provides all the confidence we need to heed the exhortation to draw near to God, to relate to him, especially in worship (including prayer), with a new level of intimacy.

(2) Christ opened for mankind unprecedented access to God's presence, a way through the curtain into the Holy of Holies, and he did so by his blood, by means of his flesh or body offered in sacrifice. This is a "living way" because Jesus, who is the way, is living.

b. The manner in which we are exhorted to draw near to God is with a true heart and in full assurance of faith. We come with the new heart produced by God's Spirit, a heart that wants the things of God, and with a deep conviction about the truth of heavenly realities and the certainty of God's promises.

c. The exhortation to draw near to God assumes that certain conditions have been met, namely that the hearers' hearts have been sprinkled clean from a bad conscience and their bodies have been washed with pure water.

(1) To draw near to God one must have had one's heart purified from guilt by the sprinkling of Christ's blood, by the personal appropriation of his all-sufficient, fully efficacious sacrifice. He purifies even our consciences from sin so as to remove that last barrier to intimacy with God.

(2) To draw near to God one also must have had one's body washed with pure water in the rite of baptism, which is where one receives the sprinkling of blood that cleanses the conscience.

(a) As Ellingworth observes, "Almost all commentators . . . see here a reference to baptism."[110]

(b) For example, Lane states:

> The reference in v. 22b is almost certainly to Christian baptism, which replaces all previous cleansing rites. Christian baptism belongs to the new covenant because it is accompanied by the reality it symbolizes. Both clauses of v. 22b provide complementary interpretations of the event of

[110] Ellingworth (1993), 523.

baptism. The washing of the body with water and the purging of the heart are complementary aspects of Christian conversion.[111]

(c) Dunn observes:

> The close complementary nature of the two cleansings (of heart and body) [referred to in Heb. 10:22] remind us that we cannot separate Christian baptism from conversion. It is related to the cleansing of the heart as the body is related to the heart. It is the outward embodiment of the spiritual transformation which is taking place inside a man. It would simply not occur to the writer, or to early Christians generally, that the two could be separate. The popular idea that conversion precedes baptism, and that baptism is a confession of a commitment made some time previously is not to be found in the N.T. Baptism is the act of faith, part of the total cleansing which enables the convert to draw near and to enter the Holy of Holies by the way opened up for him by Jesus.[112]

2. Let us hold to our hope (10:23)

[23]Let us hold firmly the confession of the hope without wavering, for he who promised [is] faithful.

a. The writer encourages his hearers to hold firmly to their confession of the Christian faith, the confession of hope, without wavering under the pressures they were facing. As Hagner notes, "This is the faith that would have been confessed by these Christians at their baptism."[113]

b. God is faithful in all things, so those who remain steadfast in their allegiance to Christ can be certain that they will receive all that has been promised.

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[111] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (1991), 287.

[112] Dunn (1970), 213-214. See also, Attridge (1989), 289 (the writer "is no doubt alluding . . . to baptism where the effects of Christ's death and exaltation were regularly understood to be appropriated by believers"); Pftizner (1997), 144 ("The language of cultic washing almost certainly refers to Christian baptism [cf. Titus 3:5]"); Bruce (1964), 250-251 ("the present reality which he has in mind is surely Christian baptism"); James Thompson, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Living Word Commentary (Austin, TX: Sweet, 1971), 138 ("The reference is undoubtedly to the readers' experience of Christian baptism"); Lightfoot (1976), 190 ("That he is here referring to baptism seems unquestionable"); Leon Morris, "Hebrews" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 12:104 ("The washing of the body with pure water is surely a reference to baptism"); Hagner (1990), 165 ("Bodies washed with pure water refers . . . almost certainly to Christian baptism"); DeSilva (2000), 340 ("The addressees, then, are reminded of their identity as those who have been cleansed by baptism and the blood of Jesus from every external and internal defilement that bars safe access to God"); Koester (2001), 449 ("the listeners have their bodies washed with pure water [10:22d] through baptism").

[113] Hagner (1990), 165.

3. Let us encourage one another (10:24-25)

> **[24]And let us consider one another for stimulation of love and good works, [25]not neglecting our own assembly, as [is the] habit [of] some, but encouraging [one another], and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

a. The writer urges his hearers to pay attention to, to observe or be aware of, *one another* "for stimulation of love and good works." I think he is exhorting them to be conscious of the group so as to be moved by that awareness, that corporate consciousness, to stimulate love and good works among the members (maintaining or deepening what already existed – 6:10), which things serve to strengthen the bonds of fellowship and thus to bless the group by helping to counteract the forces that seek to pull one from the faith.

b. Rather than neglect the meetings of the saints, as some were in the habit of doing, they are to encourage one another. The fact he contrasts "not neglecting our own assembly" with "encouraging one another" indicates that his focus is on the discouraging aspect of neglecting our assembly. He's combating the temptation some may have to join the ranks of the defectors by cutting off the rationalization that withdrawing from church meetings is a matter solely between the worshiper and God. It also has potentially harmful consequences for other believers.

(1) Neglecting the congregation's gatherings works in conjunction with the forces that seek to pull one from the faith. It does so because it is inherently discouraging to those gathered and it prevents the absent member from giving or receiving encouragement in that forum. We understand the inherently discouraging aspect well in terms of the military. Desertion crushes the morale of the troops, which is why enemies always try to incite it and why armies punish it so severely.

(2) DeSilva writes:

> Withdrawing from the community does not merely mean that the individual falls short of God's gift; withdrawing discourages those who remain and diminishes the group as a whole. To paraphrase John Donne's well-known apophthegm, "each member's defection diminishes me" and my determination to hold on to the costly hope. When one's fellow believers begin to defect, it makes one wonder about the value of the enterprise and the wisdom of remaining faithful. The other believers enjoyed the same advantages and knew the same God through the same mediator. Now they decide that society's acceptance is worth more after all. On what basis should I persevere when our common experience was not sufficient to make them regard perseverance as the advantageous (or self-evident) course of action?[114]

[114] DeSilva (2000), 342.

(3) Koester writes:

> The call to show love calls for resistance to tendencies to abandon the Christian assembly in the face of reproach from outsiders (10:25a). Few people can maintain their beliefs, values, and hopes without social reinforcement, for their ties are mutual: Social bonds reinforce belief just as expressions of belief strengthen social bonds. Both personal commitment and community support are needed for people to maintain their convictions and manner of life within a larger society that does not share their views.[115]

c. Of course, a lack of faithfulness on the part of others does not justify or excuse a lack of faithfulness on our part. We are called to abide in Christ if we're the last person on earth doing so. The Hebrew writer would not dispute that in the least, but if I'm reading him correctly, he's here shining a light on an underappreciated harm of abandoning the meetings of the saints.

d. We're not told why some members were making a habit of neglecting the congregation's gatherings, but it probably had to do with social pressure from the Jewish community and looming persecution from the Romans.

e. They are to be all the more conscious of encouraging one another, a subset of which is continuing to attend the gatherings of the saints, *as they see the Day of Judgment approaching*, the Day of Christ's return. I think he means that they see the Day of Judgment approaching when they see Christians suffering for their faith because Christ will return at a time of intense persecution. So, whether the persecution they witness is part of the final birth pains that will accompany Christ's return, they are a reminder that we are in a time of labor that eventually will result in his arrival. In seeing those pains, we in a sense see the Day of Judgment approaching, which needs to motivate us even more to be serious about encouraging one another in the faith.

Fourth Hortatory Interjection (10:26 – 13:19)

1. FOURTH WARNING: Danger of rejecting God's truth and Son (10:26-31)

[26]For if we deliberately keep on sinning after we received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins [27]but a certain, fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the adversaries. [28]Anyone who has rejected the law of Moses dies without mercy on [the testimony of] two or three witnesses.

[115] Koester (2001), 450.

[29]How much severer punishment do you think the one who trampled on the Son of God and considered a common thing the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and insulted the Spirit of grace will deserve? [30]For we know the one who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "[The] Lord will judge his people." [31][It is] a fearful thing to fall into [the] hands of [the] living God.

1.1. Encouragement is so important in light of the coming judgment because a Christian who is lured from the faith into rebellion, who turns his back on God and walks in impenitence, will be condemned to hell. By rejecting Christ, which is implicit in being devoted to sin, one rejects the only sacrifice that exists for sin.

1.2. The writer is not concerned here with the finer question of whether the damnation under which one puts oneself by abandoning Christ is in all cases unalterable. He is using the danger of eternal damnation to exhort his hearers to take seriously the need to encourage (and indirectly to warn the wavering), and all he needs for that purpose is for his hearers to appreciate that the default consequence of abandoning Christ is damnation. The fact that consequence becomes unalterable for some (those who fall beyond repentance – 6:4-8) only increases the urgency of helping the saints to remain faithful.

1.3. Given that rebellion against the law of Moses, rejection of the old covenant, was punished by death (see especially Deut. 13:6-9, 17:2-7), then certainly those who rebel against God under the more glorious new covenant deserve even greater punishment. In doing so, they are showing contempt for Jesus (trampling on the Son of God), who is worthy of greater honor than Moses (3:1-6), treating the blood of his sacrifice as if it is not the least bit special, and insulting the Holy Spirit whom God graciously gave to them. Who in his right mind wants to be in that position?

2. The positive example of the hearer's past and an admonition to endure to receive the promise (10:32-39)

[32]But recall the earlier days in which, after having been enlightened, you endured a struggle of suffering, [33]sometimes being made a public spectacle, by both insults and afflictions, and [at] other times being partners with the ones who were so treated. [34]For indeed you sympathized with the prisoners and welcomed with joy the seizing of your possessions, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an enduring one. [35]Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. [36]You have need of endurance, then, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise. [37]For "Yet in a very little while, the coming one will come and will not delay; [38]but my righteous one will live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." [39]But we are not

[people] of timidity resulting in destruction but of faith resulting in [the] saving of [the] soul.

2.1. Remember the past (10:32-34)

2.1.1. The writer encourages them to remain firm in the faith by calling them to remember their past commitment, that earlier time of hardship they had endured after having received the gospel. Some had personally experienced public ridicule and persecution and others had suffered through their solidarity with brothers and sisters who were so treated. They cared for their fellow saints in prison and accepted with joy the confiscation of their property.

2.1.2. With Bruce, Lane, and Hagner, I think this probably is a reference to mistreatment suffered around the time of Claudius's expulsion of the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49, which expulsion is mentioned in Acts 18:2.

2.1.2.1. The Roman historian Seutonius (A.D. 69-140) reports that the Jews were expelled because "they constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus." Most scholars recognize that "Chrestus" is a reference to Christ. The Jews were expelled because of the conflict between Jewish disciples of Christ and Jews who rejected him as the Messiah. As is evident from the Book of Acts, Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah vigorously persecuted the disciples. Though Jews generally were expelled, Seutonius' statement that the riots were "at the instigation of Chrestus" suggests the Jewish Christians were the focal point.[116]

2.1.2.2. Lane writes:

> The size of the Jewish community in Rome made it impossible to enforce the decree completely, but certainly both Jewish and Jewish Christian leadership had been affected. Sporadic persecution of those who remained undoubtedly followed. In the case of the Jewish Christian leaders, Aquila and Priscilla (cf. Acts 18:1-2), the Claudian decree meant banishment from Rome and almost certainly the loss of property. Others in the same house church experienced various indignities, including imprisonment, injury, and deprivation for the sake of their commitment to Christ.[117]

2.1.3. Guthrie remarks:

> A key to the author's use of his hearers' past stance as a present example is the attitude of "joy" attendant on these circumstances. This manner in which they accepted the theft of their properties describes a spiritual condition by which one sees and celebrates greater realities than those immediately observable. The hearers had joy in the midst of their persecution because they knew that "better and lasting possessions" were

[116] Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (1991), lxvi.
[117] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (1991), 301.

promised them by virtue of their identification with the Lord and his church.[118]

2.2. Encouragement to persevere (10:35-39)

2.2.1. The author is encouraging these saints, who were under pressure, not to retreat from their earlier pattern of public identification with Christ, not to be intimidated into disassociating from him and his body of disciples. If they remain faithful to him, they will receive the promised blessings of salvation; if they abandon him, they will face condemnation.

2.2.2. Verses 37-38 are a reference to the LXX of Isa. 26:20-21 and Hab. 2:3-4, which texts the inspired writer has put together (though the reference to the Isaiah text is less certain). He applies what was said of the certain judgment coming on Babylonia to the certain judgment that is coming at the return of Christ. He appeals to them to endure in faithfulness in light of the fact Christ will come in a little while, at which time their eternal destiny will be sealed according to their faithfulness or lack thereof.

2.2.2.1. No one knows the time of Christ's return (Mat. 24:36; Mk. 13:32), but whatever time God has set for that return will not be delayed; God will not be pushed off his schedule. The statement that he will come in a "very little while" is best understood as an expression of *the perspective* with which this future event of unknown timing is to be viewed. It means something like, "Because the time of Christ's return is not known, you are to live in the expectation that he may come at any time." We are to live like he is coming soon, in a very little while.

2.2.2.1.1. It is like someone saying to leaders of a city that must maintain levees to prevent flooding in the event of a catastrophic storm, "The storm will come in a very little while." That is not intended as a literal assertion of timing, because nobody knows when a catastrophic storm will come. Rather, it is a statement about the need for constant readiness in light of the uncertainty as to when the storm will come.

2.2.2.1.2 The nearness of the *parousia* is indicated in a number of places in the New Testament. From the time of Jesus' death, resurrection, and Pentecost, each generation lives on the verge of Christ's return. The next and final step in salvation history is the consummation, and though we do not know the day or hour of his coming, we know he could come swiftly in any generation. So in that sense, Christ's coming has been soon or "in a very little while" in every generation, even though it still has not happened.

2.2.2.1.3. As Alan Johnson states in his commentary on Revelation, "Therefore, 'soonness' means imminency in eschatological terms. The

[118] Guthrie (1998), 359.

church in every age has always lived with the expectancy of the consummation of all things in its day. Imminency describes an event possible any day, impossible no day."[119]

2.2.2.1.4. Craig Keener states in his commentary on Revelation:

> [T]he rhetorical function of the language [of imminent fulfillment in chapter 22] is not to give times or seasons (no date is offered), but to summon us to preparedness. The text teaches what many of us mean by imminence: Until he comes, Jesus' return is always potentially near, and we must always remain watchful, for inevitably he will come, catching the morally unprepared.[120]

2.2.2.1.5. Robert Shank writes:

> Christ, the apostles, and the entire NT enjoin upon us no other attitude than to expect Jesus to return in our time. Whether he returns in our day is God's responsibility; whether we expect his return is our responsibility, for which we must give account. Whether he returns in our generation or not, we are wrong if we fail to expect him. In every generation of the Church, "the Lord is at hand." This is the time frame of the NT, including the Revelation.[121]

2.2.2.2. Verse 39 is a declaration of Christian character, the kind of people we are called to be. We are not people who are timid and who, as a result, abandon the faith under pressure, so as to be condemned. Rather, we are people of steadfast faith, the result of which is our salvation on the Day of Judgment.

3. The positive example of the Old Testament faithful (Heb. 11:1-40)

3.1. Overture (11:1-3)

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. [2]For by this the elders were commended.

[3]By faith we understand the universe to have been created by [the] word of God, so that what is seen did not come into being from visible things.

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[119] Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation" in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 13:595.
[120] Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 519.
[121] Robert Shank, *Until: The Coming of Messiah and His Kingdom* (Springfield, MO: Westcott Publishers, 1982), 395-396.

3.1.1. Faith is described here as a confidence in things hoped for, a confidence in the fulfillment of God's promises, and a conviction of things not seen, a conviction about spiritual realities and the future. It was for lives lived in such confidence and conviction that the Old Testament saints were commended.

3.1.2. Faith being a conviction of things not seen is illustrated in the case of the creation of the universe. It is through faith not sight that they understand that God through his word created the universe from nothing. Johnson states: "This is the most fundamental of insights, the one that distinguishes believers and atheists: this sensory world is not self-contained, self-derived, or self-sufficient, but derives from a power greater than itself, which remains inaccessible to the senses, even as it brings forth everything that the senses encounter."[122]

3.2. First examples of faith (11:4-12)

[4]By faith Abel offered a greater sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as being righteous, God commending his gifts; and by it, he still speaks though having died. [5]By faith Enoch was taken up so as not to see death, and he was not found because God took him up. For before [he was] taken up, he was commended as having been pleasing to God. [6]And without faith it is impossible to please [him], for it is necessary for the one who approaches God to believe that he exists and is a rewarder of those who seek him. [7]By faith Noah, having been warned about things not yet seen, was reverent [and] built [the] ark for [the] salvation of his house, by which he condemned the world and became an heir of righteousness [that is] according to faith.

[8]By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was destined to receive for an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where he was going. [9]By faith he migrated to the land of promise, as a foreign land, living in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, the fellow-heirs of the same promise. [10]For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, the designer and builder of which is God. [11]By faith he received power for [the] sowing of seed, even though beyond [the] time of age – and Sarah herself [was] barren – because he considered faithful the one who promised. [12]Therefore also from this one man, and him as good as dead, were born [descendants] as the stars of heaven in number and as the innumerable sand along the shore of the sea.

3.2.1. It was faith that motivated Abel to offer a better sacrifice than did Cain – it presumably motivated him to offer the best of what he had – and through that faith he was commended by God as being righteous through God's

[122] Johnson (2006), 280.

acceptance of his sacrifice. And though he was killed by Cain in reaction to his demonstration of faith, he continues to bear witness to the power of faith in an unseen God.

3.2.2. By faith Enoch was taken out of this world without experiencing death (Gen. 5:24). Though the Genesis text does not mention Enoch's faith, Gen. 5:22, 24 say that he "walked with God," which commendation implies that he brought God pleasure. The fact he brought God pleasure testifies to his faith because, as the Habakkuk text cited in 10:38 makes clear, God has no pleasure in those who shrink back (do not exhibit faith). As 11:6 declares, without faith it is impossible to please God. One must have the conviction that God exists and rewards those who seek him.

3.2.3. By faith Noah acted reverently when warned by God about a future flood and built the ark to save his family. His faith-based conduct stood as testimony against the world's unbelief and thus as a demonstration of the propriety of its condemnation. As Guthrie remarks, citing Lane, his building the ark "constituted a stark, prophetic rebuke to that godless generation."[123] The author says that, in addition to condemning the world, Noah became *an heir* of righteousness in connection with faith. Though "the author does not appear elsewhere to use 'righteousness' (δικαιοσύνη) to refer to a righteous status before God,"[124] he here seems to be saying that Noah received a *status* of being righteous because of the faith that was manifested in his obedience to God. Sigurd Grindheim comments:

> Strikingly, the author describes Noah's righteousness not as inherent with him, or as associated with his conduct, but as an inheritance. This use of the term presupposes that righteousness is a status that is bestowed by God's verdict, a use of the term that has obvious affinities with the apostle Paul, who explained that God's verdict in Jesus Christ meant that righteousness was granted on the basis of faith.[125]

3.2.4. By faith Abraham obeyed God's call to move to a place with which he was completely unfamiliar. Though that land remained for him only a promised land, not a land over which actual ownership had been secured, he endured living there as a nomad, living as a tent dweller between the time of promise and fulfillment, because his eyes were set on a city of true permanence, an eternal city built by God.

3.2.5. And by faith Abraham was enabled to do what naturally was impossible, to father a child at a very advanced age. He trusted God to fulfill his promise that he would give him a child by Sarah, and the result was a multitude of descendants. (With NIV and NRSV and with numerous commentators, I understand Abraham rather than Sarah to be the subject of v. 11.)

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[123] Guthrie (1998), 377.
[124] Moo (2024), 416.
[125] Sigurd Grindheim, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 558-559. Moo similarly observes (p. 416), "the claim that Noah is an 'heir' to righteousness points to the idea of status. The author's phrase may not, then, be distant from the meaning of the language in Paul."

3.3. Interlude (11:13-16)

[13]In conformity with faith all of these died, not having received the promises but having seen them and having welcomed [them] from a distance and having acknowledged that they are strangers and sojourners on the earth. [14]For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. [15]And if they had been thinking of that [country] from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. [16]But as it is, they desire a better [country], that is, a heavenly [one]. Therefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

3.3.1. Though Abraham saw the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise to bless him, to multiply and bless his offspring, and to bless all the nations through his offspring (Heb. 6:15; Jn. 8:56) in the birth and preservation of Isaac, in Isaac's marriage to Rebekah, and in his sojourning in Canaan; he, Isaac, and Jacob all died prior to actual possession of the promised land, the multitude of descendants, and the blessings of all nations. It is only together with the saints of the new covenant that they will arrive at God's ultimate goal. Yet, they lived with faith in the complete fulfillment of these promises.

3.3.2. Their perception of themselves as aliens and sojourners (or strangers) on the earth (1 Chron. 29:15; see Gen. 23:4; Ps. 39:12) was because their focus and longing was God himself and his city. You see this concept in 1 Pet. 2:11. Because God and life with him was their deepest commitment, their highest priority, God is not ashamed to be called their God, as evidenced by the fact he has prepared a heavenly city for them.

3.3.3. Guthrie writes:

> The message to the original hearers must not be missed, for their circumstance must be seen as analogous to that of the patriarchs. Perhaps their current experience of persecution has highlighted the alien nature of their earthly existence. They cannot perceive the fulfillment of God's promises to them; all they can see is the difficulty of their present crisis. The writer's point is that this is normal for people of faith. The promises of God must be embraced even though their fulfillment lies in the future. Life must be lived in our challenging, terrestrial cities in light of a better, heavenly country that will be experienced in the future. God is not ashamed of identifying with those who live in this way.[126]

[126] Guthrie (1998), 379.

3.4. More examples of faith (11:17-31)

[17]By faith Abraham, when being tested, offered Isaac; indeed, the one who received the promises was offering his only son, [18]about whom it was said, "Through Isaac your seed will be called." [19]He reckoned that God is able even to raise [someone] from [the] dead, from which he also in a figure received [him] back. [20]By faith Isaac, also regarding things to come, blessed Jacob and Esau. [21]By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshiped, [leaning] on the top of his staff. [22]By faith Joseph, when at the end of life, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel and gave instructions regarding his bones.

[23]By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden [for] three months by his parents because they saw [that] the child [was] beautiful and were not afraid of the king's edict. [24]By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, [25]choosing instead to be mistreated with the people of God than to have [the] temporary pleasure of sin, [26]considering the reproach of the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. [27]By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the anger of the king, for he persevered as seeing the invisible one. [28]By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that the one destroying the firstborn would not touch them. [29]By faith they went through the Red Sea as through dry land, regarding which, when the Egyptians made an attempt, they were drowned. [30]By faith the walls of Jericho fell after being encircled for seven days. [31]By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, having welcomed the spies with peace.

3.4.1. Abraham had such faith in God that he was willing to obey the command to sacrifice Isaac, the very heir through whom God had said the promises would be fulfilled! He trusted that even Isaac's death would not prevent God from fulfilling his promises through him; rather, God would raise Isaac from the dead.

3.4.2. As an old man, Isaac, like Abraham, trusted God's control of the future and in that faith blessed Jacob and Esau regarding their future.

3.4.2.1. Esau did not receive the covenant blessing, the blessing of being in the covenant lineage, being the child of promise. On the contrary, he sold that right to Jacob for a bowl of stew and was unable to inherit it despite crying aloud for it as the Hebrew writer notes in 12:15-17 (see Gen. 27:34-35).

3.4.2.2. He did, however, in Gen. 27:40 receive a blessing of sorts regarding the future. Isaac told him in response to his plea for a blessing in 27:38 that though he would serve his brother Jacob, the brother of the covenant blessing, he

would at some point break his yoke from his neck. To bestow even this somewhat backhanded blessing regarding the future is to express faith in the God of the future.

3.4.3. Jacob continued the pattern of being faithful throughout life by blessing Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh from his death bed (Gen. 48:8-22). The statement that he worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff refers to an earlier incident in Gen. 47:29-31. (The Hebrew word in v. 31 means either "bed" or "staff" depending on how it is vowel pointed. The LXX translators took it as "staff.") In that incident, Jacob bows in worship after Joseph swore to carry his body out of Egypt. Jacob's request looks forward to God's deliverance from Egypt, as does Joseph's request in the next verse.

3.4.4. Joseph at the end of his life expressed his continuing faith in God when he gave instructions about the relocation of his bones in connection with Israel's future exodus from Egypt. Guthrie says of vv. 20-22, "In each of these events death confronted the person of faith, who spoke of things that were as yet unseen."

3.4.5. It was by faith in God's purpose for their child, which purpose they perceived from something about the child's appearance that was taken as a sign of God's favor, that Moses' parents hid him despite the risk of doing so. His parents were motivated by faith in light of some kind of spiritual insight into his significance.

3.4.6. By faith Moses chose to identify with the people of God and thus to share in their mistreatment rather than to enjoy the temporary luxury and prestige that could have been his if he had sinfully ignored the plight of the Jews and identified with Pharaoh's house. In doing so, he considered "the reproach of the Christ," the hardship and contempt that he, like Jesus, chose to suffer through identification with the people of God, of greater value than the treasures of Egypt (since he chose that reproach above those treasures). He had that perspective because his eyes were focused on the eternal reward that comes only to the faithful of God.

3.4.7. By faith Moses left Egypt in that he by faith was used by God in bringing about Israel's release from Egyptian bondage. Not fearing the anger of Pharaoh in their encounters (Ex. 10:10-12, 28-29), he pressed on boldly ("persevered as seeing the invisible one") as God's representative in the contest with Pharaoh. His faith in the presence and purpose of God was essential to his fulfilling his role as God's representative, and that role was part of God's means of freeing the Israelites.

3.4.8. By that same faith Moses led the Israelites in keeping the Passover and smearing the blood on their doorposts so that they would be spared the death of their firstborn. He trusted that this future event would occur just as God had promised and acted accordingly.

3.4.9. By faith the Israelites walked through the sea with a wall of water on their left and their right trusting that God would keep that path open for them, as he did not do for the Egyptians who followed them.

3.4.10. By faith the walls of Jericho fell in that it was by faith that the Israelites marched around Jericho for seven days, which marching was the obedience on which God had conditioned his promise to collapse the city's walls.

3.4.11. By faith Rahab the prostitute, knowing that the Lord had given the land to the Israelites (Josh. 2:9), hid the spies to protect them, and as a result she and her family were spared (Josh. 6:25).

3.5. Crescendo and conclusion (11:32-40)

[32]And what more should I say? For time will fail me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, about both David and Samuel and the prophets, [33]who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, [34]quenched the power of fire, escaped [the] edges of [the] sword, were made strong from weakness, became mighty in war, put armies of foreigners to flight. [35]Women received [back] their dead by resurrection. But others were tortured, not accepting release, that they might obtain a better resurrection. [36]And others received a trial of mockings and whippings and even of chains and prison. [37]They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they died by murder of [the] sword; they went about in sheepskins [and] in skins of goats, being destitute, afflicted, mistreated – [38]of whom the world was not worthy – wandering in deserts and mountains and in caves and the holes in the ground.

[39]And all these, though commended through [their] faith, did not receive the promise, [40]God having provided something better for us so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

3.5.1. It would take too long to detail other men and women of faith under the old covenant, so the author gives a sample of six individuals from the time of the judges through the united monarchy and adds the general category "the prophets." Through faith these men experienced great triumphs in God's cause, which he summarizes in vv. 33-35a. But through that same faith others experienced and endured great hardship and suffering, which he summarizes in vv. 35b-38.

3.5.2. These men by faith won numerous military victories, governed the people, and saw various divine promises fulfilled (at least in a provisional sense). It was through faith that the prophet Daniel was unharmed by the lions and his associates were untouched by the flames of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. David and several prophets, including Elijah, Elisha, and Jeremiah, "escaped the edge of the sword." Men like Gideon, who was fearful, and Samson, who was captive and blind, were made strong despite their weakness. And through the faith of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, the widow of Zarephath and the Shunammite woman received back their sons from the dead (1 Ki. 17:17-24; 2 Ki. 4:17-37).

3.5.3. Whereas faith brought triumphs in this world, it also brought suffering and the heroic endurance of it. The women of v. 35a received back their sons from the dead by a temporary resurrection that left their sons still subject to death, but there were other people in Jewish history who when being tortured refused to be released at the cost of renouncing their faith so that they might share in a better resurrection, the end-time resurrection in which one is raised no longer subject to death (see Rom. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:20-23).

3.5.3.1. Hagner writes:

> It is of great importance for the readers, and for all Christians, to understand that the life of faith does not always involve success by the world's standards. The faithful person does not always experience deliverance; faith and suffering are not incompatible. Faith, however, sanctifies suffering, and there is in the midst of apparent defeat the appropriation of the promise of the future. The author offers his readers no guarantee of an easy Christianity. If in their "struggle against sin" they have "not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood" (i.e., being killed), as the author will say in 12:4, there can be no assurance that they may not yet have to do so. The immediate, temporal outcome (which after all can *only* be temporary) is not the important thing. Faith is what finally matters.[127]

3.5.3.2. The author probably has in mind here certain martyrs during the period of the Maccabean Revolt, specifically Eleazar and the seven brothers and their mother whose stories are recounted in 2 Maccabees 6-7 and 4 Maccabees 5-12, writings dating from the early second century B.C. to the early first century A.D. Koester writes:

> Among those who were tortured (11:35b) was the aged martyr Eleazar, who was told that he would "be released from death" if he violated the Law by eating pork (2 Macc 6:18, 22). When he refused, he was beaten to death. Seven brothers were martyred after him, each by hideous means. Voicing hope for a superior resurrection (Heb 11:35c), they declared that "the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life," (2 Macc 7:9; cf. 7:23).[128]

3.5.3.1.1. Here is a quick background of the Maccabean Revolt. Following Alexander the Great's death in 323 B.C., his kingdom was divided among his four generals. Ptolemy I gained Egypt, and Seleucus I gained Syria and Mesopotamia, but for some years they contended for control of Palestine. The Ptolemies succeeded in controlling Palestine until 198 B.C., at which time it fell into the hands of the Seleucid rulers.

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[127] Hagner (1990), 206.
[128] Koester (2001), 519.

3.5.3.1.2. From 198-165 B.C., Palestine was under Seleucid control. In 175 B.C. Antiochus IV Epiphanes began to rule and sought to force the Jews to adopt Greek ways, which were contrary to their religion. This sparked a successful Jewish revolt, which began in 166 B.C., known as the Maccabean Revolt (named for one of its prime figures, Judas Maccabeus).

3.5.3.1.3. Beginning in 142 B.C., Simon completed the work of his brothers Judas Maccabeus and Jonathan in securing for Israel autonomy and freedom from paying tribute (even if not independence from Syrian influence and authority). This autonomy endured until the Roman intervention in 63 B.C. This period of relative autonomy is generally referred to as the Hasmonean Kingdom or Hasmonean Rule.

3.5.3.3. Appealing to heroic acts of faith outside the OT canon to encourage and inspire the people is the same thing we do when we cite the stories of Christian martyrs that are not recorded in Scripture.

3.5.4. Others, including prophets like Jeremiah (Jer. 20:2, 7, 37:15-16, 38:6), endured insults, beatings, and imprisonment. See also, 1 Ki. 22:24; 2 Chron. 16:7-10, 36:16; 2 Macc. 7:1.

3.5.5. Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was stoned to death after prophesying against the people (2 Chron. 24:20-22). In Mat. 23:37 Jesus describes Jerusalem as "the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it."

3.5.6. According to the tradition documented in *Martyrdom of Isaiah* 5:11ff., a Jewish writing composed no later than the first century A.D., Isaiah was sawn in two.

3.5.7. Many prophets in Elijah's day were killed by the sword (1 Ki. 19:10), as was the prophet Uriah in the time of King Jehoiakim (Jer. 26:20-23), who reigned in Judah from 609-597 B.C.

3.5.8. Elijah, Elisha, and other prophets wore animal skins (2 Ki. 1:8; 2 Ki. 2:11-13; Zech. 13:4) rather than fine clothes, and their itinerant ministries included more than their share of destitution, affliction, and mistreatment (1 Ki. 17:2-16, 19:1-19; 2 Ki. 1:3-15).

3.5.9. During Jezebel's persecution, a hundred prophets hid in a cave (1 Ki. 18:4) and Elijah fled into the wilderness (1 Ki. 19:4). Faithful Jews also fled into the wilderness following the seizing of Jerusalem by Antiochus IV Epiphanes and lived like wild animals (2 Macc. 5:27). The world judged them as unworthy, but the reality was that the world was not worthy of them!

3.5.10. Despite the fact their faith spoke highly of them, commended them as examples, none of these heroes of Jewish history received the ultimate goal, a permanent dwelling in a permanent homeland. That ultimate goal is realized only through Christ's work. Because of Christ, all the faithful of God throughout history will share together in resurrection life in eternal glory. Hagner comments:

> Herein lies a paradox. God's faithful people of the past, remote and recent, have lived their lives in accordance with the promise of a great unseen, future reality. Although some experienced a degree of fulfillment in history, none have arrived at the ultimate goal, "the promise." That final, eschatological fulfillment has been delayed until the present. The reason for this is now given. God's people of every age constitute a unity and must arrive at the perfection of the *telos* together. . . .
>
> Of course a basic aspect of the delay is the newness of what God has accomplished through the work of Christ. Since for our author all that preceded Christ is related to him as promise is related to fulfillment, no attainment of the *telos* has been conceivable until the present. God has planned (lit. "foresaw" [or provided]) something better for us. That something better is the new covenant with all of its blessings, which is "for us" in distinction from those of the past only because we are the privileged who have received it through the historical process. But in a more fundamental sense, it belongs to all the faithful from every age. We have begun to taste of its fruit already in the present – these "last days" (cf. 1:2) of the already present age to come – but we together with those faithful people of the past will yet experience the consummation of God's purposes, which may now, all being prepared, occur at any time.[129]

4. Reject sin and fix your eyes on Jesus, supreme example of endurance (12:1-2)

> **Therefore, since we have such a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also, having laid aside every weight and the easily entangling sin, run with endurance the race set before us, [2]fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**

4.1. Given this great cloud of predecessors who through their faith bear witness to the church that God's promises are to be trusted, the author urges his hearers (and us) also to run with endurance the race set before them.

[129] Hagner (1990), 207-208.

4.2. Doing so involves laying aside every weight, everything that might wear us down in the marathon of the Christian life, things like fear and doubt, and laying aside sin that easily entangles and thus makes running the race a tremendous chore.

4.3. Running with endurance the race set before us also involves fixing our eyes on Jesus, the ultimate example.

4.3.1. He is described as the author and perfecter of the faith. He is the "author" or "originator" of the faith in that he is the object of Christian faith and thus the one who brought it into being. He also is the author of the faith of preceding generations in that he is the one who made that faith effective for salvation; the blessings associated with that faith were underwritten by his blood. That also is the sense in which he is the "perfecter" of the faith. He is the one who brought faith to its goal, the one who secured the eternal blessings that are appropriated through faith.

4.3.2. He also is the ultimate example of endurance, having looked beyond the horror of the cross, scorning its shame, to the exaltation that was on the other side, his exaltation to the right hand of God.

5. Endure discipline as sons (12:3-17)

5.1. The discipline of children (12:3-13)

[3]By all means consider the one who endured such hostility against himself by sinners so that you not grow weary, giving out in your souls.

[4]In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of blood. [5]And have you forgotten the exhortation which he addresses to you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose heart when rebuked by him; [6]for [the] Lord disciplines whom he loves, and he chastises every son whom he accepts." [7]Endure trials for [the sake of] discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son [is there] whom a father does not discipline? [8]But if you are without discipline, of which all have become sharers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. [9]Moreover, we had the fathers of our flesh [as] correctors, and we respected [them]. Should we not much more subject ourselves to the Father of the spirits so that we will live? [10]For they indeed disciplined [us] for a few days according to what seemed good to them, but he [disciplines us] for [our] benefit in order [for us] to share in his holiness. [11]But all discipline for the moment does not seem to be pleasant but painful, but later it yields [the] peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

[12]Therefore strengthen the hands that are drooping and the knees that are weak [13]and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be dislocated but rather be healed.

5.1.1. In v. 3 he restates the need to focus on Jesus who endured the ultimate abuse from sinners and specifies the reason: so that they not grow weary from the struggle and give up the faith. As he was blessed through his patient endurance, so will they (and we) be.

5.1.2. Unlike what Jesus endured, they had not yet shed their blood in their struggle against sin, in their struggle against denying him in the face of hostility. Given what Jesus endured, they can endure the lesser pressure they were facing.

5.1.3. He asks if they have forgotten the exhortation God addressed to his children in Prov. 3:11-12 (LXX). The essence of these verses is that God's discipline should not be considered insignificant or be a source of discouragement because it is an expression of God's love and an indication that the objects of that discipline are true sons and daughters.

5.1.4. The author says in essence in v. 7b-8 that the mistreatment they are facing because of their allegiance to Christ is not an indication of God's absence or inattention; on the contrary, it is a sign that they truly are children of God.

5.1.5. He says in v. 9 that given how they respected their human fathers in response to their discipline, they should much more submit to their heavenly Father in response to his discipline. In other words, rather than wavering in loyalty to him because of persecution they should be all the more surrendered to him, which is the path of life. For our human fathers disciplined us from a fallible perspective and for more limited and mundane objectives – according to what seemed good to them – but God disciplines us with perfect insight into our benefit in order that we may share in his holiness.

5.1.6. The writer acknowledges that all discipline is painful when being administered, but what it produces is worth the pain. The Lord's discipline yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Hagner remarks:

> The fruit of righteousness is called peaceful (*eirēnikos*) because it is the resolution of the "struggle" (v. 4) brought about by the sufferings of the present time. The latter must always find their truest answer in the final consummation of all things, but this cannot be allowed to weaken the author's emphasis on the experience of realized eschatology, to which he will turn in 12:18ff.[130]

5.1.7. Verse 12 calls the hearers to renew their determination to live faithfully for Christ in the face of their spiritual and emotional fatigue represented in

[130] Hagner (1990), 219.

the description from Isa. 35:3 (LXX) of hands that are drooping and knees that are weak. The call in v. 13 to make straight or level paths for their feet is a call for them to choose God's way of holy living so that the lame, meaning those having been crippled by spiritual discouragement, will be healed rather than experience the more serious spiritual condition described as being disabled or dislocated. They need to rededicate themselves to living the Christian life, with all that entails.

5.2. The importance of choosing holiness (12:14-17)

> **[14]Pursue peace with everyone and [pursue] the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. [15]Take care that no one falls short of the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble and by it many become defiled, [16]that no one is sexually immoral or godless like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. [17]For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he did not find a place for repentance, though he sought it with tears.**

5.2.1. In living the Christian life, they are to pursue peace, harmonious relationships, with everyone. This echoes Paul's statement in Rom. 12:18, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people." In addition, they are to pursue the holiness that is necessary to "see the Lord." Without sanctification of life, without a transformed life that is dedicated to God, one will not "see the Lord" in the sense one will not enter the heavenly city, will not enter into God's presence for eternity. That is not because works are the basis of one's salvation but because works are an inherent and inevitable byproduct of the faith that receives salvation (see, Saved by Grace but Not Without Works).

5.2.2. He urges the community to take care that none of them turns from the faith so as to miss the grace of God, and then he reinforces that appeal by referring to Deut. 29:18 and the story of Esau from Genesis 25 and 27.

5.2.2.1. The exhortation for them to take care that no bitter root spring up causing trouble and defiling many is a reference to Moses' charge to the people in Deut. 29:18. The bitter root in that context is the person who turns from the Lord to serve other gods. The Hebrew writer is telling the church to work to prevent those in its midst from turning away from Christ. That not only will cause those individuals to miss the grace of God, but it may cause others to become defiled, to become unacceptable to God, by influencing them to turn from Christ.

5.2.2.2. Though intertestamental literature developed a picture of Esau as being sexually immoral for having married Hittite women (Gen. 26:34), the reference here to his being "sexually immoral" may be a metaphor for his being faithless. The point is that Esau allowed something as insignificant as brief physical hunger to cause him to surrender something of great value, his inheritance rights, and the

consequences of that choice became irrevocable when Isaac blessed Jacob. He could not find a place for repentance, a way to undo the blessing, despite seeking it with tears. Guthrie writes, "The author of Hebrews wishes to drive home the point that only tears and rejection await those who sell out the inheritance that God promises to his children."[131] It brings to mind Lk. 13:22-28.

5.2.3. Brothers and sisters in Christ have a duty to be involved in one another's lives, to "be up in one another's business." It is unspiritual to meet loving and appropriate acts of concern with resentment or hostility.

5.2.4. Guthrie cites in his commentary a letter from the persecuted believers of Vienna and Lyons to the churches of Asia and Phrygia, dated A.D. 177. We know of the letter because Eusebius quotes it in Book 5, chapter 1 of his early fourth-century work *The History of the Church*. After praising the faith and strength of a martyr named Vettius, the Christians wrote:

> Then the rest fell into two groups. It was clear that some were ready to be the first Gallic martyrs: they made full confession of their testimony with great eagerness. It was equally clear that others were not ready, that they had not been trained and were still flabby, in no fit condition to face the strain of a struggle to the death. Of these some ten proved stillborn, causing us great distress and inexpressible grief, and damping the enthusiasm of those not yet arrested. However, in spite of the agonies they [the martyrs] were suffering, these people [the unprepared] stayed with the martyrs and did not desert them. But at the same time we were all tormented by doubts about their confessing Christ: we were not afraid of the punishments inflicted, but looking to the outcome and dreading lest anyone might fall away.

Guthrie concludes with these powerful words:

> The emotional grief and dread caused by the specter of apostasy in this ancient church should cause us to pause for reflection. How do we respond to the apostasy of those from within our churches? Is there an intensity of grief and dread over this problem? If not, why not? What is there in our theological or cultural makeup that tempts us to accept apostasy as of minimal importance? If you as an individual are struggling with following the example of Esau, treating God's promised inheritance as if it was of little consequence, have you stopped to consider the impact of that decision on those around you? Your close associates in the church? Those in your Bible study? Your spouse and closest friends? Your children? Your pastor? Please stop and consider the curse of being one who introduces a bitter root to the church of the living God! In doing so

[131] Guthrie (1998), 405.

you not only affect yourself, but you also contaminate others in such a way that will mark your life and theirs forever.[132]

6. The blessings of the new covenant (12:18-24)

6.1. The old covenant mountain (12:18-21)

[18]For you have not come to a thing that can be touched, and to a blazing fire, and to darkness, and to gloom, and to a storm, [19]and to [the] noise of a trumpet and to a sound of words which those who heard begged that a word not be added to them, [20]for they could not bear the thing commanded: "If even an animal should touch the mountain it shall be stoned." [21]Indeed, what appeared was so frightening Moses said "I am terrified and trembling."

6.1.1. Turning from God always is inexcusable and tragic, but it is even more so in light of the glory of the new covenant. Christians have not come to a covenant like the Mosaic covenant that, as was symbolized in the events at Sinai, so emphasized God's distance, his fearsomeness, and the sternness of his commands. That emphasis served a teaching function for the people of Israel until the time of the new covenant that Jesus introduced.

6.1.2. The imagery is drawn from the covenant assembly recorded in Exodus 19 – 20 and Deuteronomy 4 – 5. Moses is not reported to have said "I am terrified and trembling," but Ex. 19:16 states that "all the people in the camp trembled." The Hebrew writer, under inspiration of God, makes clear that this included Moses. Deuteronomy 9:19 (see Exodus 32) registers Moses' fear at Sinai of God's wrath against sin in relation to the incident involving the golden calf. Some think the writer may have had this in mind, as it confirms the fearsomeness of God in the same general setting.

6.2. The new covenant mountain (12:22-24)

[22]But you have come to Mount Zion and to [the] city of [the] living God, to [the] heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels in a joyful gathering, [23]and to [the] church of the firstborn ones who are enrolled in [the] heavens, and to [the] judge, the God of all, and to [the] spirits of [the] righteous made perfect, [24]and to Jesus, [the] mediator of a new covenant, and to [the] blood of sprinkling that speaks a better [word] than the [blood] of Abel.

[132] Guthrie (1998), 415.

6.2.1. The surpassing glory of the new covenant is expressed in its contrast with the Sinaitic symbolism of the old. The distance and trepidation of the old covenant, the frightening scene of Mount Sinai, has given way to the nearness, warmth, openness, and celebration of the new. Lane comments:

> Every aspect of the vision provides encouragement for coming boldly into the presence of God (cf. 4:16). The atmosphere at Mount Zion is festive. The frightening visual imagery of blazing fire, darkness, and gloom fades before the reality of the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem. The cacophony of whirlwind, trumpet blast, and a sound of words is muted and replaced by the joyful praise of angels in a festal gathering. The trembling congregation of Israel, gathered solemnly at the base of the mountain, is superseded by the assembly of those whose names are permanently inscribed in the heavenly archives. An overwhelming impression of the unapproachability of God is eclipsed in the experience of full access to the presence of God and of Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant.[133]

6.2.2. Those in the new covenant have been linked with the heavenly reality, God's true dwelling place, and with its countless angels in joyful worship.

6.2.3. They have been made part of, and thus brought into relationship with, the church of the firstborn ones. The firstborn ones are those who share the inheritance of the Son, *the* firstborn (Heb. 1:6), and whose names are written in heaven.

6.2.4. They have come to the judge, the God of all who will vindicate them on that Day, and have entered into fellowship with the godly men and women who already died, those who in the intermediate state between death and resurrection are in God's immediate presence because of Christ. He not only is the basis for their reconciliation with God; he also, I am convinced, brought to heaven the spirits of those who formerly were in the blessed portion of Hades (Paradise).

6.2.5. And, of course, those in the new covenant have come to Jesus, the mediator of that covenant. His blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel in the sense that Abel's blood cried out to God for judgment (Gen. 4:10) bearing witness to Cain's guilt. Christ's blood has won our forgiveness; it cries out that we are guilty no more.

7. FIFTH WARNING: Do not reject God's word (12:25-29)

[25]See to it that you do not refuse the one who is speaking, for if those who refused the one who warned [them] on earth did not escape,

[133] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (1991), 464-465.

how much less [will] we who turn away from the one [who warns] from [the] heavens, [26]whose voice then shook the earth, but now he has promised saying "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." [27]Now the [phrase] "Yet once more" makes clear the removal of the things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, so that the things that are not shaken may remain. [28]Therefore, since we are receiving an unshakeable kingdom, let us have gratitude, with which let us worship God in an acceptable way, with reverence and awe, [29]for indeed our God [is] a consuming fire.

7.1. In light of all of this, the writer warns them not to turn from the Christian faith, the truth of Christ. As Guthrie expresses the point, "If those of the old covenant did not escape the wrath of God when they turned from his Word, the judgment on those who reject the message of salvation received in the new covenant era is even more certain (2:1-3)."[134]

7.2. The one whose voice shook the earth at Sinai has promised in the future to remove or "shake out" from all of creation whatever is not destined for eternity, whatever is inconsistent with that perfect eternal state. This is the Hebrew writer's way of describing the redemption or "heavenization" of creation that will occur at the end. He is speaking about the making of the new heavens and new earth referred to in Isa. 65:17, 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13, and Rev. 21:1 (see especially Rev. 21:1-4).

7.2.1. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes puts it this way:

> *Then*, at Mount Sinai, the *voice* of God *shook the earth* in such a way "that the whole mountain quaked greatly" (Ex. 19:18; cf. Judg. 5:5; Ps. 68:7f.). This awesome moment when God communicated his law before which our fallen and disobedient world stood condemned, portended the much greater terror of the last judgment when, in the words borrowed from Haggai 2:6, God *will shake not only the earth but also the heaven*, that is to say, the whole created order (as in Gen. 1:1, where "heaven and earth" stand for the totality of creation; . . .). But, terrifying though such a prospect is, it is also good news for those who are God's faithful people, for the final shaking, which is the completion of judgment, is also the completion of salvation. . . .
>
> Our author adds the explanation that the expression "*Yet once more*" points clearly to *the removal of what is shaken*, and therefore of what is shakable and as such unreliable and impermanent, by which the created order in its fallenness is intended (*as of what has been made*). This accords well with the passage from Psalm 102 cited earlier in the epistle (1:10-12), which declares that earth and heaven, the work of God's hands, will perish, that is, as they are presently known to us, and will be changed, whereas God remains eternally the same (cf. Heb. 13:8). The purpose of

[134] Guthrie (1998), 422.

> this ultimate shaking is *in order that what cannot be shaken may remain*. For the people of God, who belong to the order of things which are unshakeable, the removal of all that is insecure and imperfect, is something to be eagerly anticipated; for this final shaking of both heaven and earth is necessary for the purging and eradication from the universe of all that is hostile to God and his will, for the establishment of all that, being in harmony with the divine mind, is permanent, and for the inauguration of the new heaven and the new earth, that is, the renewed or "changed" creation, in which all God's purposes in creation are brought to everlasting fulfillment at the consummation of the redemption procured in and by Christ (Rev. 21:1ff.; 2 Pet. 3:10-13); and this will take place with the return of Christ in glory and majesty (Rev. 19:11ff.). Thus Gregory of Nazianzus [Bishop of Constantinople 379-381] explains that "this last shaking is none other than the second coming of Christ, when the universe will be transformed and changed to a condition of stability which cannot be shaken."[135]

7.2.2. Not only will our bodies be transformed to be suitable for eternity with God, but all of creation will be transformed. That's what Paul says in Rom. 8:18-23. Douglas Moo says of Rom. 8:18-23:

> . . . [C]reation has been "frustrated" and is in "bondage to decay." . . .
>
> . . . What can be affirmed on the basis of Romans 8 is that the natural world itself has been affected in some way by the human fall into sin and is therefore no longer in its pristine created state. . . . Human sin has affected the state of nature itself and will continue to do so until the end of this age. . . .
>
> . . . If creation has suffered the consequences of human sin, it will also enjoy the fruits of human deliverance. When believers are glorified, creation's "bondage to decay" will be ended, and it will participate in the "freedom that belongs to the glory" for which Christians are destined. Nature, Paul affirms, has a future within the plan of God. It is destined not simply for destruction but for transformation. . . . The reversal of the conditions of the Fall includes the created world along with the world of human beings. Indeed, the glory that humans will experience, involving as it does the resurrection of the body (8:9–11, 23), necessarily requires an appropriate environment for that embodiment. . . .

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[135] Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1988), 557-558. See also, Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 862; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 459-461; and George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 620-621.

. . . The hope for the liberation of creation that Paul expresses in Romans 8 clearly implies that the destiny of the natural world is not destruction but transformation.[136]

7.2.3. This same concept is expressed in Revelation 21-22. N. T. Wright puts it this way:

> We thus arrive at [Revelation 21-22,] the last and perhaps greatest image of new creation, of cosmic renewal, in the whole Bible. . . . This time the image is that of marriage. The New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven like a bride adorned for her husband.
>
> We notice right away how drastically different this is from all those would-be Christian scenarios in which the end of the story is the Christian going off to heaven as a soul, naked and unadorned, to meet its maker in fear and trembling. As in Philippians 3, it is not we who go to heaven, it is heaven that comes to earth; . . . This is the ultimate rejection of all types of Gnosticism, of every worldview that sees the final goal as the separation of the world from God, of the physical from the spiritual, of earth from heaven. It is the final answer to the Lord's Prayer, that God's kingdom will come and his will be done on earth as in heaven. . . . [I]t is the final accomplishment of God's great design, to defeat and abolish death forever – which can only mean the rescue of creation from its present plight of decay.[137]

7.3. Since they (and we) are receiving an unshakeable kingdom, an eternal dwelling of a heavenized creation, they are to be grateful, and with that heart of gratitude they are to worship God in an acceptable way, meaning with reverence and awe. Those who turn from him in ingratitude, who like Esau spurn their inheritance, need to know that our God is a consuming fire.

8. Practical exhortations (13:1-19)

8.1. General guidelines for Christian living (13:1-6)

Let brotherly love continue. [2]Do not neglect hospitality, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. [3]Remember the prisoners as having been imprisoned with them [and] the ones being mistreated as being yourselves also in the body. [4]Marriage [is to be] held in honor by all, and the [marriage] bed [is to be] undefiled, for

[136] Douglas J. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (3, 2006), 460-463.
[137] N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 104-105.

God will judge [the] sexually immoral and adulterers. [5]The way of life [is to be] free from love of money, being content with the things you have, for he himself has said, "I will in no way leave you; neither will I in any way forsake you." [6]So being confident we say, "[The] Lord [is] my helper, I will not be afraid; what will man do to me?"

8.1.1. The writer urges them to continue loving fellow Christians and then commands two specific expressions of that love: not to neglect hospitality and to remember the prisoners.

8.1.1.1. The command not to neglect hospitality probably is focused on traveling Christian workers (see 3 Jn. 5-8). There is a tendency to shrink from hosting Christian workers when the society is hostile to Christianity because hosting them raises one's public identification with the faith. The temptation is to want to keep one's head down and not attract attention. The statement that by showing hospitality some have entertained angels probably is a reference to OT examples of people who entertained angels unwittingly, e.g., Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:1-22), Lot (Gen. 19:1-4); Gideon (Judg. 6:11-22).

8.1.1.2. As there is a tendency to shrink from hosting Christians when the society is hostile to Christianity, so there is a tendency to forget about fellow believers who are in prison. The writer tells them that they are to remember those in prison as if they were right there with them, having them always before their eyes, and he says they are to remember those being beaten as if their own bodies were receiving the blows.

8.1.2. He says in v. 4 that *marriage* is to be honored by all. It is a God-given institution that is to be considered precious and valuable by the Christian. If without being married you relate to another person in a way that is reserved for marriage, if you're sexually involved without being married, you are dishonoring marriage. By creating your own immoral arrangement you are saying, in essence, that marriage is misconceived, that it is a burden rather than a blessing and that you have designed a superior structure for male-female relationships.

8.1.3. He also says in v. 4 that the *marriage bed*, which is a euphemism for the sexual relationship, is to be undefiled, which as the next clause makes clear, means there is to be no sexual involvement of any kind with anyone other than your husband or wife. Though you may conceal your betrayal from your spouse and your family and friends, God is fully aware of what you're doing, and he will judge you for it. As Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 (ESV):

> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [11] And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were

sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

8.1.4. The writer may have included this admonition about sexual sins simply as a general reminder, but it possibly is tied more closely to the situation of his hearers. Koester remarks:

> [T]hose who show hospitality bring strangers into their homes (13:2), making it important to observe rigorous standards of propriety. Imprisonment of a spouse left the other spouse without marital companionship for an indefinite period (13:3). Economic difficulties (13:5; cf. 10:34) sometimes led to the exchange of sexual favors in return for benefits.[138]

8.1.5. He tells them in vv. 5-6 that the proper way to live is to be free from the love of money, being content with one's present possessions.

8.1.5.1. A Jew who was being ostracized by the Jewish community for his faith in Christ would be tempted to turn away from Christ to expand his economic possibilities. When that temptation strikes, they need to hold firm to the Lord, remembering his faithfulness as exemplified in his statement to Joshua in Josh 1:5 that he would not leave or forsake him.

8.1.5.2. Being confident that God is with them, Christians can say with the Psalmist in Ps. 118:6 (LXX) "[The] Lord [is] my helper, I will not be afraid; what will man do to me?" The point is that with confidence of the Lord's supporting presence, Christians can face any situation. Even if they are called to surrender their lives (12:4), God is big enough to bless them through it, big enough to trump even that evil.

8.2. Guidelines on church leadership and doctrine (13:7-19)

[7]Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you, [and] considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith. [8]Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday and today and forever. [9]Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for [it is] good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, in which those who walk are not benefited. [10]We have an altar from which those who serve in the tabernacle do not have authority to eat. [11]For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin are burned outside the camp. [12]Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the gate that he might sanctify the people by his own blood. [13]So then let us go out to him outside the camp, bearing his

[138] Koester (2001), 565.

reproach. [14]For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the one that is coming. [15]Through him, then, let us always offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips praising his name. [16]But do not be neglectful of the doing of good and fellowship, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

[17]Obey your leaders and submit, for they are keeping watch on behalf of your souls as [ones] giving an account, that they may do this with joy and not groaning, for this [would be] unprofitable for you.

[18]Pray for us, for we are convinced that we have a good conscience, wanting in everything to act honorably. [19]And I urge you to do this even more that I may be restored to you quickly.

8.2.1. He calls them to remember the earlier leaders who decades ago preached the gospel in the founding of the church there and, in light of the outcome of their lives (which implies they are deceased), to imitate their faith. They function like the heroic examples from biblical history.

8.2.2. The Jesus whom those leaders preached, in whom they trusted, and through whom and for whom they lived noble lives, has not and will not change, so their example of faithfulness to him has permanent relevance. However circumstances appear, one need not fear that Jesus has changed and is no longer aware of one's situation or serving on one's behalf.

8.2.3. Verses 9-14 are especially thorny. Lane says they "constitute one of the most controversial passages in Hebrews."[139] That's a clue that one must tread lightly here. I'll just offer my understanding without chasing all the rabbits.

8.2.3.1. The author tells them in v. 9 not to be misled by all kinds of strange permutations of Jewish law that attribute a false spiritual significance to dietary regulations. Since grace in Christ is the genuine basis of one's relationship with God, it is good to have one's heart strengthened by grace. That strengthening is beneficial because it is based on and reinforces the truth. On the other hand, since dietary regulations do not provide the spiritual benefit its advocates claim, do not create or sustain one's relationship with God, it is not good to have one's heart strengthened by those things. That strengthening is harmful because it is based on and reinforces the deception about one's standing with God.

8.2.3.2. He says in v. 10-11 that these and other Jews, those who continue to relate to God under the old covenant, described symbolically as those who serve in the tabernacle, have no authority to eat from the Christian or new-covenant altar. An altar is a place of sacrifice, so in saying they have no authority to eat from the Christian altar, he is saying that they have no right to participate or share in Christ's sacrifice and therefore are excluded from its spiritual benefits.

[139] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (1991), 530.

8.2.3.3. Since, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 10:16, sharing in the Lord's Supper is a participation in the blood and body of Christ, a participation in his sacrifice, it is tempting to think the writer is depicting their exclusion from the benefits of Christ's sacrifice in terms of their having no right to eat of the Lord's Supper. David DeSilva says, "For hearers accustomed to participating in this ritual [the Lord's Supper], an allusion to it here in 13:10 is unavoidable."[140] If he is alluding to the Lord's Supper, it is simply a way of saying they are not connected to the sacrifice, which connection carries authority to participate in the Supper.

8.2.3.4. Their disconnection from Christ's sacrifice for sin, their lack of authority to "eat" of that sacrifice, is paralleled by their (the priests) lack of authority to eat of the sacrifice made for the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement. Rather than being eaten, those sacrifices were taken and burned outside the camp (Lev. 4:13-21, 6:30, 16:15-16, 27). And since those sacrifices for sin that sanctified the people were taken outside the camp, Jesus in parallel to that shadow was taken outside the city, not to be burned but to suffer there that he might sanctify people by his own blood (v. 12).

8.2.3.5. The writer is saying, in other words, that the old and new covenants are mutually exclusive in terms of relating to God so that returning to Judaism is abandoning Christ (see, Gal. 5:2-4). One can either be a Christian, or one can be an old-covenant Jew; one cannot be both.

8.2.3.6. In vv. 13-14 the writer calls his hearers to join Jesus outside the camp, meaning to join him outside of bounds of old-covenant Judaism, and to be willing to share his reproach as an outcast from that community. He is exhorting them to accept that rejection rather than to seek the temporary comfort and security of returning to Judaism. The strength to do so lies in the fact the Christian's eyes are fixed not on this passing world but on the eternal dwelling that is coming (v. 14).

8.2.4. Through whatever hardships their faith may lead them, they are urged to always offer up to God verbal praises through Christ, meaning on the basis of his sacrifice and ongoing intercession. Lane remarks, "The writer draws upon a tradition of a song of praise which the community offers to God."[141]

8.2.5. In addition to verbally praising God, they must not neglect Christian ethics, acts of kindness to those in need and sharing within the community of faith, because such obedience is pleasing to God. It is tempting to separate praising God from living for him, but that is unbiblical. Praise is only a sweet aroma to God when it arises from a life that is surrendered to him.

8.2.6. The writer commands his hearers to obey their leaders and submit or yield to them. They are to obey the word of the Lord it is assumed the leaders are presenting (as did their former leaders – 13:7), and they are to cooperate or go along

[140] DeSilva (2000), 499-500.
[141] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (1991), 524 (see, also, p. 551).

with the leaders in their exercise of spiritual oversight. This is especially important when the church is under pressure because stress heightens the need for mature direction and increases the tendency to fragment.

8.2.6.1. They are to do that because the leaders have the God-given responsibility of caring for the flock's spiritual welfare and will give an account to God for their discharge of that responsibility.

8.2.6.2. Given that the leaders are acting under a divine duty to look out for their benefit, they are to be the kind of people who are a pleasure to shepherd, not the kind of people who leave the leaders groaning. Indeed, they are warned that being a grief to the leaders is unprofitable for them.

8.2.7. The writer solicits their prayers on his and his companions' behalf (though the plural may be a formulaic, an "authorial plural" that refers only to the author), noting that they are serving Christ with genuineness and integrity. He asks specifically for their prayers that he may be restored to them, which indicates he had some prior connection with this congregation.

IV. Benediction and Closing (13:20-25)

A. Benediction (13:20-21)

[20]Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by [the] blood of [the] eternal covenant, [21]equip you with every good thing to do his will, working in us the thing pleasing before him through Jesus Christ, to whom [be] the glory forever [and ever], amen.

1. He prays that the God of peace may equip them with every good thing to do his will and through Jesus Christ work in them (and him) what is pleasing in his sight.

2. God is referred to as the one who brought the Lord Jesus back from the dead, and Jesus is called the great shepherd of the sheep. God brought Jesus back from the dead by or through the blood of the eternal covenant in that, as Bruce says, "His resurrection is the demonstration that His sacrifice of Himself has been accepted by God and the new covenant established on the basis of that sacrifice."[142]

[142] Bruce (1964), 411.

3. The last clause is a doxology – "to whom [be] the glory forever [and ever], amen" – may refer either to God, the primary actor in vv. 20-21, or to Jesus Christ, the nearest antecedent.

B. Closing (13:22-25)

> **[22]Now I urge you, brothers, bear with the word of exhortation, for indeed I have written to you in few [words]. [23]Know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. [24]Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. [25]Grace [be] with all of you.**

1. The writer closes by urging the hearers to put up with what he's written, meaning not to consider it an imposition because of its length, because it is in fact relatively short in terms of a sermon.

2. Guthrie writes:

> The "Timothy" of verse 23 is commonly assumed to be Paul's missionary companion. If so, his "release" indicates an incarceration not mentioned in Acts or elsewhere in the New Testament. In any case, Timothy is a companion of the author and is known to this church. The author expects him to arrive soon and anticipates that they will travel together to see the recipients of Hebrews.[143]

3. The author greets the leaders and all the saints and sends to them greetings from those from Italy. As I noted in the introduction to the letter, "those from Italy" probably refers to people from Rome who now are residing elsewhere with the writer of Hebrews and are sending greetings back to those in Rome.

4. The closing blessing is simply "Grace [be] with all of you."

[143] Guthrie (1998), 443.