

# Notes on Hebrews

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## Introduction

### DATE

The writer said that he and those to whom he wrote had come to faith in Jesus Christ through the preaching of others who had heard Jesus (2:3-4). Apparently those preachers had since died (13:7). The original readers had been Christians for an extended period of time (5:12). So probably the earliest possible date of composition was about A.D. 60.

Some scholars believe that the book must have been written before A.D. 70 since the writer spoke of the sacrifices as being offered when he wrote (7:27-28; 8:3-5; 9:7-8, 25; 10:1-3, 8; 13:10-11). However, the writer showed no interest in the temple but spoke of the sacrifices as the Israelites offered them when the tabernacle stood. He evidently used the present tense to give these reference a timeless quality rather than indicating that temple worship was still in practice. Nevertheless a date of composition before A.D. 70 seems probable.<sup>1</sup>

"The best argument for the supersession of the old covenant would have been the destruction of the Temple."<sup>2</sup>

The reference to Timothy's release from imprisonment (13:23) appears to date the book later in the life of that outstanding man.<sup>3</sup> No other New Testament writer mentioned his imprisonment. The imprisonment of Christians seems to have been a well-known fact of life (10:34; 13:3). This was true after Nero launched an empire-wide persecution in A.D. 64. All of these factors when taken together seem to point to a writing date near A.D. 68-69.

### WRITER

As to authorship, most students of this subject are not dogmatic or even certain for good reason.<sup>4</sup> As early as Origen, the Alexandrian church father who died about A.D. 255, no

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<sup>1</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1—8*, pp. lxii-lxvi; Andrew H. Trotter Jr., *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 27-38.

<sup>2</sup>H. W. Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Almost all scholars believe that the Timothy referred to in Hebrews is the same one named elsewhere in the New Testament.

<sup>4</sup>See Trotter, pp. 39-57, for a good discussion.

one knew who the writer was for sure. After careful study of the authorship of Hebrews, Origen wrote, "But who it was that really wrote the epistle, God only knows."<sup>5</sup>

"The language of the Epistle is both in vocabulary and style purer and more vigorous than that of any other book of the New Testament.

". . . The vocabulary is singularly copious. It includes a large number of words which are not found elsewhere in the apostolic writings, very many of which occur in this book only among the Greek Scriptures . . ."<sup>6</sup>

"All that can be said with certainty is that Hebrews was composed by a creative theologian who was well trained in the exposition of the Greek Scriptures. . . . He was surely a hellenistic Jewish-Christian."<sup>7</sup>

Commentators have made cases for the writer being Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, Peter, Jude, Stephen, Silvanus (Silas), Epaphras (Epaphroditus), Philip the Evangelist, Priscilla, Mary the mother of Jesus, Clement of Rome, Aristion, and others.<sup>8</sup> None of these suggestions has found enthusiastic general reception for various reasons. Probably we should be content to share Origen's agnosticism on this question and look forward to getting the answer in heaven.<sup>9</sup>

The early Christians originally accepted all the New Testament books as inspired by God because they contained apostolic teaching. For this reason the writer was probably either an apostle or a close associate of at least one of the apostles (cf. 13:23).

## **RECIPIENTS**

The original recipients of the epistle are also unknown. The title "The Epistle to the Hebrews" implies that they were Jewish Christians. This title is ancient and is probably a safe guide to the identity of the first readers. References in the epistle also suggest that the original readers were mainly Jewish. The writer assumed that they were very familiar with the institutions of Judaism. The warnings against turning away from Jesus Christ back to the Old Covenant also imply this identity. Other indications are the emphasis on the superior priesthood of Jesus and the many appeals to the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. However the brand of Judaism in view seems to have been Hellenistic rather than Palestinian.

The reference to the generosity of the readers and their helping other believers (6:10) suggests that the original audience did not live in Palestine. The Palestinian churches had a reputation for needing material assistance rather than for giving it to other Christians (cf. Rom. 15:25-31; 1 Cor. 16:3). Probably they were Jews of the Diaspora therefore.

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<sup>5</sup>*The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, p. 247.

<sup>6</sup>Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. xliv. See Trotter, pp. 117-43.

<sup>7</sup>Lane, p. xlix.

<sup>8</sup>However the masculine participle *diegoumenon* ("to tell"), which refers to the writer in 11:32, would seem to rule out a female. Ancient testimony mentioned only three possibilities: Paul, Luke, Barnabas, and Clement.

<sup>9</sup>See Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 3-21.

This conclusion has support in the writer's consistent use of the Septuagint Old Testament version. Hellenistic Jews used this translation widely, but Palestinian Jews did not use it as much.<sup>10</sup>

In most of the New Testament churches there was a mixture of Jewish and Gentile believers. The appeal of this epistle would certainly have been great to Gentiles tempted to return to paganism as it would have been to Jews facing temptation to return to Judaism. However the writer's primary concern appears to have been that his Jewish readers were failing to appreciate that Christianity is the divinely revealed successor to Judaism. He did not want them to abandon Christianity and return to Judaism.

Probably the letter originally went to a house-church outside Palestine that had a strong Hellenistic Jewish population. This church may have been in or near Galatia in view of conditions that existed there that the Epistle to the Galatians reflects. However they may very well have lived in another area. Many scholars believe that the letter went first to a church in or near Rome.<sup>11</sup> Evidently knowledge of where the original recipients lived disappeared about the same time as knowledge of who the writer was.<sup>12</sup>

### **PROVENANCE**

In view of 13:24b it has seemed to some scholars that the writer was in Italy when he sent this epistle, perhaps in Rome. However the expression "from Italy" in that verse probably refers to those living outside Italy, such as Priscilla and Aquila who were Jews forced to leave Rome by Emperor Claudius' edict in A.D. 49 (Acts 18:2).<sup>13</sup> This expression suggests that the writer was not in Italy when he wrote.

### **GENRE**

Many students of the book have observed that Hebrews is more of a sermon in written form than an epistle in the traditional New Testament sense.<sup>14</sup> The writer even described it as a "word of exhortation" (13:22). Hebrews is a sermon reduced to writing (cf. 13:22; James; Jude). Indications of this fact are the writer's references to speaking and hearing (cf. 2:5; 5:11; 8:1; 9:5; 11:32). His epistle is more typical of speech than of writing.

". . . Hebrews is a sermon rooted in actual life. It is addressed to a local gathering of men and women who discovered that they could be penetrated by adverse circumstances over which they exercised no control.

<sup>10</sup>Arguments for the recipients being Palestinian Jews include their intimate knowledge of the temple ritual and the opportunity they had to escape suffering by returning to the observance of Jewish practices and feasts. See J. Dwight Pentecost, *A Faith That Endures*, pp. 12-13. I think the arguments for their living outside Palestine are stronger.

<sup>11</sup>See Lane, pp. lviii-lx, for supporting evidence; Ellingworth, p. 29; Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, pp. 25-27.

<sup>12</sup>James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. xvii.

<sup>13</sup>See Merrill C. Tenney, "A New Approach to the Book of Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:491 (July-September 1966):234-35.

<sup>14</sup>See Lane, pp. lxi-xlxxiv, for an extended discussion of the genre, or Trotter, especially pp. 59-80.

It throbs with an awareness of the privilege and the cost of discipleship. It is a sensitive pastoral response to the sagging faith of older and tired individuals who were in danger of relinquishing their Christian commitment. It seeks to strengthen them in the face of a new crisis so that they may stand firm in their faith. It warns them of the judgment of God they would incur if they were to waver in their commitment. Exhortations to covenant fidelity and perseverance are grounded in a fresh understanding of the significance of Jesus and his sacrifice."<sup>15</sup>

There is an alternation in the genre of this epistle from exposition to exhortation to exposition to exhortation and so forth. Noting these major changes makes interpreting the book much easier. The blocks of material by genre are as follows. I shall note the changes in the notes that follow as well.

Exposition	Exhortation
ch. 1	2:1-4
2:5-18	3:1—4:14
4:15—5:10	5:11—6:12
6:13—10:18	10:19-39
ch. 11	chs. 12—13 <sup>16</sup>

### **PURPOSE**

The writer urged the original readers to persevere in their faith rather than turning from Christianity and returning to Judaism. A note of urgency and pastoral concern permeates the whole letter. This tone comes through especially strongly in the five warning passages and in the encouragements that follow these warnings.

". . . the purpose of the writer to the Hebrews is not to give us an interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. . . . Using material not from the prophets but primarily from the Psalms, with other materials added to elaborate the argument, the writer's goal was to establish the superiority of the gospel in contrast to all that went before, particularly the levitical system. The primary evidence of the supremacy of Christianity is presented in its *finality*. Coming to Christ means final access to God without any barrier."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Lane, p. xlvi. See also Ellingworth, pp. 78-80.

<sup>16</sup>Within the two parts of chapter 12 there is also alternation of exhortation and exposition, though the main genre is exhortation: exhortation (12:1-2), exposition (12:3-11), exhortation (12:12-13); and exhortation (12:14-17), exposition (12:18-24), exhortation (12:25-29).

<sup>17</sup>Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 56.

**STYLE**

Various stylistic devices enable the student of this book to identify the sections of the writer's thought. These devices include *inclusio*, linking words, the repetition of key terms, alternation between exposition and admonition, and others, which I shall point out where appropriate. These rhetorical devices were common in the writer's culture, and his use of them indicated to the original readers where his thoughts were moving.

**OUTLINE**<sup>18</sup>

- I. The culminating revelation of God chs. 1—2
  - A. The agent of God's final revelation 1:1-4
  - B. The superiority of the Son 1:5-14
  - C. The danger of negligence (the first warning) 2:1-4
  - D. The humiliation and glory of God's Son 2:5-9
  - E. The Son's solidarity with humanity 2:10-18
  
- II. The high priestly character of the Son 3:1—5:10
  - A. The faithfulness of the Son 3:1-6
  - B. The danger of disbelief (the second warning) 3:7-19
  - C. The possibility of rest for God's people 4:1-14
  - D. The compassion of the Son 4:15—5:10
  
- III. The high priestly office of the Son 5:11—10:39
  - A. The danger of immaturity (the third warning) 5:11—6:12
    1. The readers' condition 5:11-14
    2. The needed remedy 6:1-3
    3. The dreadful alternative 6:4-8
    4. The encouraging prospect 6:9-12
  
  - B. The basis for confidence and steadfastness 6:13-20
  - C. The Son's high priestly ministry 7:1—10:18
    1. The person of our high priest ch. 7
    2. The work of our high priest chs. 8—9
    3. The accomplishment of our high priest 10:1-18
  
  - D. The danger of willful sinning (the fourth warning) 10:19-39
    1. The threefold admonition 10:19-25
    2. The warning of judgment 10:26-31
    3. The encouragement to persevere 10:32-39

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<sup>18</sup>For an evaluation of three views of the structure of Hebrews, the traditional (doctrinal followed by practical sections), that of Albert Vanhoye (chiastic structure), and "patchwork," see David Alan Black, "The Problem of the Literary Structure of Hebrews: An Evaluation and a Proposal," *Grace Theological Journal* 7:2 (Fall 1986):163-77. See also Lane, pp. lxxxv-cxy; Trotter, pp. 81-94; and Ellingworth, pp. 50-62.

- IV. The proper response 11:1—12:13
  - A. Perseverance in faith ch. 11
    - 1. Faith in the antediluvian era 11:1-7
    - 2. Faith in the patriarchal era 11:8-22
    - 3. Faith in the Mosaic era 11:23-31
    - 4. Faith in subsequent eras 11:32-40
  - B. Demonstrating necessary endurance 12:1-13
    - 1. The example of Jesus 12:1-3
    - 2. The proper view of trials 12:4-11
    - 3. The need for greater strength 12:12-13
- V. Life in a hostile world 12:14—13:25
  - A. The danger of unresponsiveness (the fifth warning) 12:14-29
    - 1. The goal of peace 12:14-17
    - 2. The superiority of the New Covenant 12:18-24
    - 3. The consequences of apostasy 12:25-29
  - B. Life within the church ch. 13
    - 1. Pastoral reminders 13:1-21
    - 2. Personal explanations 13:22-25

## Exposition

### I. THE CULMINATING REVELATION OF GOD CHS. 1—2

This writer customarily began with a brief statement that presented the theme of each major section of his discourse. The first such statement appears in 1:1-4 and introduces the theme of the culminating revelation of God, which continues through 2:18.

"The final disclosure of God's mind and purpose has been made in his Son, who is far superior to the angels; beware then of taking it casually and carelessly (1<sup>1</sup>—2<sup>4</sup>)."<sup>19</sup>

#### A. THE AGENT OF GOD'S FINAL REVELATION 1:1-4

The writer began his epistle with an affirmation of Jesus Christ's greatness to introduce his readers to his subject. This section is one sentence in the Greek text. It contrasts God's old revelation with the new, specifically by presenting God's Son as superior to all other previous modes of revelation.

"It would be misleading to think of vv. 1-4 as stating a thesis to be proved, or as giving a précis of the following argument. The author proceeds rather by an interweaving of themes, as in musical composition."<sup>20</sup>

"The literary structure of the exordium [vv. 1-4] exhibits a concentric symmetry (A [vv. 1-2a] B [v. 2b] C [v. 2c] C' [v. 3a-b] B' [v. 3c] A' [v. 4]): the conceptual correspondence of vv 1 and 4 serves to frame the several statements concerning the Son in vv 2 and 3 . . ."

"The core of the exordium (B C C' B') describes Jesus in an arresting way as the royal Son, divine Wisdom, and the royal Priest."<sup>21</sup>

1:1-2a "It is significant that the subject of the first verb is 'God,' for God is constantly before the author; he uses the word sixty-eight times, an average of about once every seventy-three words all through his epistle. Few NT books speak of God so often."<sup>22</sup>

God gave many revelations of Himself to Old Testament believers, "fathers" being a shorthand way of referring to them (cf. v. 2).<sup>23</sup> He did so

<sup>19</sup>Moffatt, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>Ellingworth, p. 90.

<sup>21</sup>Lane, pp. 6, 7; cf. pp. cxxxix-cxl.

<sup>22</sup>Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in *Hebrews-Revelation*, vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup>Ellingworth, p. 92, suggested that the writer may have referred to them as "the" fathers rather than as "our" fathers because some of his readers were Gentiles. Another possibility is that "the" gives more honor than "our."

in many periods of history. He did this by various means and in various ways ("in many portions and in many ways").<sup>24</sup> For example, His means included visions, dreams, and face-to-face communication (cf. Num. 12:6-8). His ways included supernatural interventions into history as well as natural phenomena such as storms, plagues, and other historical events. They also included people, namely, the prophets, through whom He spoke (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). The writer probably used the Greek words *polymeros* ("portions") and *polytropos* ("ways") partially for their alliterative value.<sup>25</sup>

God's most recent revelation had come through His own Son. The writer was not denying divine revelation to the apostles. He was stressing the culminating character of God's revelation in Jesus Christ compared with what He had given the Old Testament prophets. His statement establishes the fact of progressive revelation and strongly suggests the cessation of revelation in the apostolic age.<sup>26</sup> Man has not taken the initiative to discover God, but God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself to man.

The translators have supplied the word "His" (v. 2a). Its absence in the original text (along with the absence of the definite article "the") stresses the character of "Son" as a vehicle of revelation. God's own Son is a superior revelation compared to "the prophets" (v. 1). There are seven references to Jesus Christ as the Son in Hebrews (1:2, 5, 8; 3:6; 4:14; 5:8; 6:6; 7:28; 10:29) plus others in some of the Old Testament passages the writer quoted.<sup>27</sup>

1:2b-3

Seven facts in these verses stress the Son's unique greatness and the culminating character of His revelation. For the writer's original Jewish readers the number seven connoted a complete work of God, as in the Creation.

1. He is the "heir of all things." All things will fall under His authority. While Jesus Christ is presently in authority over all things, in the future God the Father will subject all things to Him in a more direct sense than the one in which they are now subject to Him (cf. Phil. 2:9-11). The writer introduced the concept of inheritance here and proceeded to develop it in this epistle (cf. Ps. 2:8; Heb. 2:5-9). The believer's inheritance is a major theme in Hebrews.

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<sup>24</sup>Guthrie, p. 62, rendered this phrase "different modes . . . and . . . different occasions."

<sup>25</sup>Moffatt, p. 2, captured this alliteration in English by translating the first part of verse 1: "Many were the forms and fashions in which God spoke . . ."

<sup>26</sup>See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup>See Mikael C. Parsons, "Son and High Priest: A Study in the Christology of Hebrews," *Evangelical Quarterly* 60:3 (July 1988):192-215.

2. He "made the world" (Gr. *aiones*, lit. "ages," i.e., the whole created universe of time and space). The Son was God's agent in creation (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). He created both matter and history; both ideas are in view here.<sup>28</sup> However the emphasis is on the various dispensations through which the world has passed, is passing, and will pass.<sup>29</sup> Jesus Christ is not a created being, as Jehovah's Witnesses and some others claim. He is the Creator of all.
3. He is "the radiance of His glory." The Greek word *apaugasma*, translated "radiance," refers to what shines out from the source of light. Jesus Christ revealed the glory of God in a veiled way during His incarnation. Peter, James, and John saw that radiance revealed more directly on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-2).
4. He is "the exact representation of His nature." The Greek word *charakter*, translated "representation," occurs only here in the New Testament. Greek writers used it to describe the emperor's picture on Roman coins and the clear-cut impression made by a seal (a facsimile). It did not express a general likeness but an exact duplication of the original. Jesus Christ let humankind know exactly what the nature of God, whom no one has seen, is like during His earthly ministry.
5. He "upholds all things by the word of His power" (i.e., His mighty, enabling word). The idea is not so much that Jesus upholds the universe as a dead weight, similar to Atlas shouldering the world. Rather He carries all things forward (Gr. *pheron*) on their appointed course (Col. 1:17). Jesus Christ's word has tremendous power and authority. It is the greatest force in the universe (cf. Gen. 1:3; et al.).
6. He "made purification of sins" as no one else could. He did so by His self-sacrifice as a sin and trespass offering on the Cross and by His work as the ultimate priest. The Greek word *katharismos*, translated "purification," means both removal and cleansing (cf. Mark 1:44; 2 Pet. 1:9). "Sin" (*hamartia*) is a very common word in Hebrews occurring 25 times.<sup>30</sup>

"Hebrews views sins and their remedy in cultic terms.<sup>31</sup>  
The purification of sins by Christ's sacrifice is related, on

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<sup>28</sup>Bruce, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup>W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary*, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup>The only other New Testament book in which it appears more frequently is Romans, where Paul used it 48 times.

<sup>31</sup>"Cultic" refers to matters connected with the formal worship procedures in Israel, not in the sense of being aberrations of those procedures.

the one hand, to the establishment of a new order of relationships between God and mankind, and on the other hand to obedience (10:1-18, especially vv. 8-10) and moral effort (12:1-4). Apart from passing references to adultery and the love of money (13:4f.), Hebrews says little about individual sins, and contains no list of vices comparable to Rom. 1:29-31; Gal. 5:19-21; or 1 Pet. 4:3. The fundamental sin for Hebrews is that of unfaithfulness to God, which may superficially appear as neglect or lassitude (*amelesantes*, 2:3; or *nothroi*, 5:11), but which in essence is rebellion against God's will, and more specifically apostasy (2:1-4; 3:7-19; 6:4-6; 10:26-31)."<sup>32</sup>

7. He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" when He returned to heaven after His ascension. He took the choice place of honor and authority in relation to God the Father (cf. Eph. 4:10; Phil. 2:9; Luke 22:69). Here the writer introduced his key text, Psalm 110, which he proceeded to elaborate on in the chapters to follow.

Note that the writer referred to the place where Jesus now sits ruling as the Father's right hand in heaven. This is not the same as the Davidic throne, which will be on earth in the future (Isa. 9:6-7; Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14; et al.). Jesus will begin His rule over Israel on earth as the Davidic Messiah after He returns to the earth at His second advent (Rev. 20:1-6). Presently He rules over the church and the angelic host in heaven (Eph. 4:15; Col. 1:18; 2:10).<sup>33</sup>

"The concept of enthronement at God's right hand would convey to contemporaries an impression of the Son's royal power and unparalleled glory."<sup>34</sup>

Each one of these seven actions points to the full deity of Jesus Christ. The original Jewish audience, faced with temptation to abandon discipleship of Jesus for return to Judaism, received a strong reminder of His deity at the very outset of this epistle. The writer also presented Him as Creator, Prophet, Priest, and King.

- 1:4 These seven facts also reveal clearly the Son's superiority to any other of God's messengers, even the angels. This superiority is clear too in the fact that His name is Son (singular) rather than sons (collectively). The Old Testament writers called angels "sons of God" (e.g., Job 2:1; 38:7). Jesus

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<sup>32</sup>Ellingworth, p. 102.

<sup>33</sup>See Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Davidic Covenant in Acts-Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:601 (January-March 1994):81-82.

<sup>34</sup>Lane, p. 16.

Christ "inherited" the name "Son" before creation (v. 2, cf. 5:8). Within the Trinity, God the Son took the place of carrying out the will of God the Father in a way that corresponds to the way in which sons in biblical culture carried out the wills of their fathers.

This is the first of the writer's 13 uses of the word "better" (Gr. *kreitton*) all of which contrast Jesus Christ and His order with what preceded Him (6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 [twice]; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24).<sup>35</sup> The writer used many comparatives (e.g., "more excellent," "lesser," "better," "more," "greater," et al.) to support his argument that the new Christian order is superior to the old Jewish order. This is also the first "signpost passage" in which a brief statement (in this case "much better than the angels") identifies a main subject the writer planned to develop (cf. 2:17; 5:9-10; 10:36-39; 12:11?).<sup>36</sup> "Angel" (Gr. *angelos*) is another of this writer's favorite words. It, too, appears 13 times in Hebrews.

"Opinions differ as to what is meant here by 'the name.' Some take this to mean that in his whole character and personality Christ was superior to any angel. Others think the reference is simply to the name 'Son,' which is a better name than 'angel' because it denotes superiority in character and personality. Either interpretation is possible."<sup>37</sup>

The writer introduced several concepts in the prologue that he developed more fully later. These include the distinctive quality of the Son's revelation, the superiority of His sacrifice, and His greatness compared with the angels.

The differences in the beginning of this epistle compared with the beginnings of other New Testament epistles are striking. There is no introduction of the writer, no mention of the original readers, and no benediction, all of which were common features of letters in the first century. The writer obviously wanted his readers to give their full attention to the greatness of Jesus Christ. Some students of Hebrews have concluded that the writer did not identify himself or his readers because he wanted to make Jesus Christ primary in the readers' thinking throughout this epistle. I think this is very likely.

"In 1:1-4 the writer gave christological precision to a cluster of ideas derived from hellenistic Judaism. He boldly applied the categories of Wisdom to a historical figure, Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews was a creative theologian who brought together wisdom motifs and priestly motifs in a tightly formulated statement concerning the dignity and achievement of the Son of God. The opening paragraph establishes a firm christological foundation for all that the writer has to say concerning the

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<sup>35</sup>This word appears only six times elsewhere in the New Testament.

<sup>36</sup>David J. MacLeod, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146:582 (April-June 1989):187.

<sup>37</sup>Morris, p. 16.

character and demands of the revelation mediated by the Son. The joining together of wisdom and priestly notes in the carefully orchestrated presentation of the Son provides the readers with the assurance of Jesus' sustained concern for them and his ability to strengthen and vindicate the people of God when they become objects of contempt in a hostile world."<sup>38</sup>

### **B. THE SUPERIORITY OF GOD'S SON 1:5-14**

The writer proceeded to explain the exaltation of Jesus Christ to help his readers appreciate the fact that He fulfilled Old Testament prophecy concerning the Son of David. He did this so they would appreciate Him properly and not overemphasize the importance of angels. Angels were very important in Judaism primarily because thousands of them assisted God in giving the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai (cf. Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19).

"The internal structure of the first major segment of the address (1:5—2:18) exhibits the writer's customary style of alternating between two types of literary genre, exposition and exhortation. The chain of OT passages demonstrating the superiority of the Son to angels (1:5-13) is expository in character and lays the foundation for the solemn appeal in 2:1-4."<sup>39</sup>

The "hook-word" that connects these two sections of the epistle is "angels."

<b>PARALLELS BETWEEN 1:1-4 AND 1:5-13<sup>40</sup></b>	
<b>1:1-4</b>	<b>1:5-13</b>
A Appointment as royal heir (2b)	A' Appointment as royal Son and heir (5-9)
B Mediator of the creation (2c)	B' Mediator of the creation (10)
C Eternal nature and pre-existent glory (3a-b)	C' Unchanging, eternal nature (11-12)
D Exaltation to God's right hand (3c)	D' Exaltation to God's right hand (13)

"Christology is the central focus in all the theology of Hebrews, and two titles of Christ are central to its Christology: Son of God and High Priest. Around these two focal points all the major ideas in Hebrews concerning Christ's person and work can be located. Christ as High Priest is actually

<sup>38</sup>Lane, p. 19. For another exposition of verses 1-4, see David J. MacLeod, "The Finality of Christ: An Exposition of Hebrews 1:1-4," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:646 (April-June 2005):210-30.

<sup>39</sup>Lane, p. 22.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

the more distinctive and important idea in the theology of the book, but Christ as Son of God is foundational."<sup>41</sup>

The writer cited seven Old Testament passages to prove Jesus' superiority over the angels (v. 4). As mentioned previously, the number seven was especially significant to the Jews as representing the completeness of something (e.g., the work of creation, etc.). Probably the writer used seven facts in verses 2b-3 and seven passages in verses 5-13 to impress completeness strongly on his original readers.

"The author has an unusual method of citation; he almost always neglects the human author of his OT quotations (exceptions are 4:7; 9:19-20), though throughout the rest of the NT the human author is often noted. Instead, without actually saying 'God says,' he normally ascribes the passage he quotes to God, except, of course, where God is addressed, as in 2:6. Twice he attributes words in the OT to Christ (2:11-12; 10:5ff.) and twice to the Holy Spirit (3:7; 10:15). No other NT writer shares this way of quoting the OT. . . . The effect is to emphasize the divine authorship of the whole OT."<sup>42</sup>

"Unlike Paul, who shows a preference for the introductory formula *kathos gegraptai* ["as it is written"], the writer of Hebrews never introduces a quotation from the OT with a form of the verb *graphein*, 'to write.' His preference is for the verb *legein*, 'to say,' especially in the form of the present participle *legon*, 'saying.' The text of the OT is presented dynamically. The writer is persuaded that God continues to speak today in the biblical passages that are cited. . . ."<sup>43</sup>

The writer's contrast of Jesus Christ's authority and name with that of the angels suggests that his original readers may have regarded the angels too highly. This was true of certain first-century sects within Judaism, one of which was the Essene community that lived at Qumran. The Dead Sea Scrolls have revealed that this group had a highly developed angelology and regarded angels with more veneration than they should have. Nevertheless all the Jews regarded angels highly because God had given the Mosaic Law to them through angelic mediation (cf. Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2).<sup>44</sup>

What the writer said about angelic mediators applies to those who claim to mediate knowledge concerning God and the after-life to humankind. Such self-proclaimed mediators today include leaders of cults, Shirley MacLaine, and other advocates of reincarnation. It also applies to people who claim to reveal how human beings can find God and secure His acceptance while denying biblical revelation on these subjects.

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<sup>41</sup>Buist M. Fanning, "A Theology of Hebrews," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 370. Trotter, pp. 185-222, believed that bibliology (specifically the writer's uses of the Old Testament), eschatology, and soteriology (specifically progressive sanctification and perseverance) were also major theological emphases in Hebrews.

<sup>42</sup>Morris, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup>Lane, p. cxvii. His whole discussion of the writer's use of the Old Testament, pp. cxii-cxxiv, is very helpful.

<sup>44</sup>See *ibid.*, p. liv.

1:5 The phrase "to which of the angels" opens and closes this section of the text (cf. v. 13). This literary device (an *inclusio*) marks off a literary unit by using the same word or phrase at the beginning and at the end of a discussion (cf. 2:5-16; 3:1—4:14; 5:1-10; 5:11—6:12; 7:1-10; 12:14—13:20).

David referred to Jesus Christ as God's Son in Psalm 2:7, the verse the writer quoted first. The Old Testament writers referred to angels collectively as the "sons of God" (Job. 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), but they did not refer to any one of them as a Son of God. "Son of God" is a title that refers to one of the Davidic kings (2 Sam. 7:14) and specifically to Jesus Christ, God the Son (Mark 1:11; Luke 1:32). "Today" evidently refers to Jesus Christ's entrance into heaven. This happened after His resurrection and ascension.

The eternal Son of God ". . . entered into the full exercise of all the prerogatives implied by His Sonship when, after His suffering had proved the completeness of His obedience, He was raised to the Father's right hand."<sup>45</sup>

"The writer is clearly more concerned to demonstrate the significance of the begetting in terms of the Son's status, rather than to tie it down to a specific occasion."<sup>46</sup>

The second quotation, from 2 Samuel 7:14 or 1 Chronicles 17:13, as the first, ties in with the Davidic Covenant and advances the previous point. Not only is Jesus the Son of God, He is also the promised son of David (Luke 1:32-33, 68-69; Rom. 1:3). Even though Jesus Christ was always God's eternal Son, He became the Son prophesied to rule over David's house. He received permission to rule the whole earth after His ascension (cf. Ps. 2:8).

The title "Son" refers to Jesus in three separate respects. He was always the *pre-existent* Son (v. 3a-b; cf. 5:8), He became the *incarnate* Son at His birth (v. 2a, possibly a proleptic reference), and He became the *exalted* Son when He returned to heaven.<sup>47</sup>

Note the chiasmic style of the quotations, which begin and end with references to the Son surrounding references to the Father. This has the effect of stressing the Father but binding the Son closely to Him.

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<sup>45</sup>Bruce, p. 13. Cf. v. 3. Another view is that this day was the day of Jesus' resurrection (e.g., Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 54-55; Pentecost, p. 48).

<sup>46</sup>Guthrie, p. 73.

<sup>47</sup>See Lane, pp. 25-26.

1:6 We can see the superiority of the Son also in the third quotation from Deuteronomy 32:43 (in the Septuagint) in that the angels worship Him as Yahweh. "Again" may go with "brings" implying Jesus Christ's second advent.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, it may go with "says" implying the first advent.<sup>49</sup> In this case it would simply separate this quotation from the former one. The word order in the Greek text favors the first option, but the sense of the context favors the second. Most translators and interpreters connect "again" with "says."<sup>50</sup> The point is that the angels worship the Son. The angels did worship Jesus at His first advent and will worship Him at His second advent.

The title "first-born" reflects the sovereignty, uniqueness, and superiority of Messiah (Ps. 89:27). It does not always mean born first chronologically. This is especially clear in the case of Solomon who was really the tenth son of David chronologically (1 Chron. 3:1-5). The title describes rank and honor here. The first-born received special blessings (inheritance) from his father.

"The context requires that *oikoumene* ["world"] be understood as the heavenly world of eschatological salvation into which the Son entered at his ascension [cf. 2:5] . . ."<sup>51</sup>

1:7 Instead of being sovereign, the angels are servants. The fourth quotation is from Psalm 104:4. By describing the angels as winds the psalmist was drawing attention to their spirit nature, invisibility, power, and function as servants of a higher Power. As flames of fire they are God's agents of judgment and illumination. Wind and fire were also symbols of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. They were appropriate designations of both the Holy Spirit and angels because both served the Father in similar ways as His servants. Even though the angels are as swift as wind and as strong as fire, they are inferior to the Son.

1:8-9 By contrast, the Son's ministry is to rule. His throne is eternal, not created, and immutable. This fifth quotation, from Psalm 45:6-7, describes the final triumph of David's Son, the Messiah, who is also God. The Son is superior to angels also because He is God.

"This and the following quotation (vv. 10-12) are used to show that the Son is addressed in scripture both as God and as Lord. . . . The point of v. 8b, for the author of Hebrews,

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<sup>48</sup>Westcott, p. 22.

<sup>49</sup>Bruce, p. 15.

<sup>50</sup>See Hughes, p. 58.

<sup>51</sup>Lane, p. 27.

seems to be that the Son exercises royal power, whereas the angels are mere *leitourgoi* ("ministers" v. 7)."<sup>52</sup>

"Jesus' deity is more powerfully asserted in Hebrews than in any other New testament writing, with the exception of the Gospel of John."<sup>53</sup>

The prophets predicted that Messiah would be righteous. Jesus Christ demonstrated this quality during His earthly ministry. The anointing to which the writer referred probably took place after His ascension. Messiah is God, yet God anointed Him.

"The anointing of the Son is not to be thought of in connection with coronation rites, but as symbolizing the joy of festival occasions, when the practice of anointing was followed."<sup>54</sup>

The "companions" probably include all other righteous beings, angelic and human, including faithful Christians (cf. 2:10-11; 3:1, 14; 12:8). Part of the quotation in this verse does not argue the superiority of Christ over the angels. The writer probably included it because it makes a statement he developed later in this epistle. The term "companions" describes those who have intimate, not just superficial, association with Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 5:7).<sup>55</sup> The NASB translators rendered the Greek word, *metochos*, "partakers" everywhere else it occurs in Hebrews (i.e., 3:1, 14; 6:4; 12:8)

1:10-12 Psalm 102:25-27, the sixth quotation, also referred to Messiah. The Son is Creator (cf. v. 2). This verse looks to the past. "Lord" is master (Gr. *kurie*) and refers to God in the passage the writer quoted.

This quotation is important to the writer's argument also because it reveals the immutability of the Son. After God burns up the present earth and heavens, He will create new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:10-12; Rev. 21—22).<sup>56</sup> Even though the earth as we know it will end, the Son's rule will continue eternally and with it His joy. The millennial kingdom will only be the first phase of Messiah's endless rule.

Note that the quotations tied together with "and" begin and end with the Son's eternal nature (vv. 8, 12).

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<sup>52</sup>Ellingworth, p. 122.

<sup>53</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, p. 305.

<sup>54</sup>Guthrie, p. 77.

<sup>55</sup>See John Soden, "The Use of Psalm 45:7-8 (6-7) in Hebrews 1:8-9," *Exegesis and Exposition* 2:1 (Summer 1987):51-70.

<sup>56</sup>Many people in the Graeco-Roman world believed that the world and the universe were indestructible. J. Héring, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, p. 8, cited by Guthrie, p. 78.

"The attribute of permanence in the Creator corresponds to the durability of his throne and serves to reinforce the contrast between the mutability of the angels and the stable, abiding character of the Son."<sup>57</sup>

1:13 The seventh and last quotation in this series is from Psalm 110:1. Angels stand and serve, but the Son sits and rules (cf. v. 3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; Matt. 22:43-44; 26:64; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33-34; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:22). The vindication predicted here will take place when Jesus Christ returns at His second advent and at the various judgments of God's enemies that will follow that return.<sup>58</sup> Eventually every knee shall bow to Him (Phil. 2:10-11).

One writer identified a chiasm in the quotations in verses 3-13.

"A The Son's status as royal King (Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14)  
(Heb 1:5)  
B The Son's status as Divine Wisdom (Deut 32:43; Ps 104:4) (Heb 1:6-7)  
C The Son's status as royal King and Divine Wisdom (Ps 45:6-7) (Heb 1:8-9)  
B' The Son's status as Divine Wisdom (Ps 102:26-28) (Heb 1:10-12)  
A' The Son's status as royal King (Ps 110:1) (Heb 1:13)"<sup>59</sup>

1:14 God revealed a primary purpose and ministry of the angels in this verse. It is to assist human beings in reaching their final deliverance over their spiritual enemies. This includes bringing us to conversion. However, it also involves protecting and strengthening us so that we may one day obtain our full inheritance with Christ in glory. This ministry of service is obviously inferior to Jesus Christ's ministry of ruling.

Was the writer speaking of all Christians or only of faithful Christians when He wrote of "those who will inherit salvation?"<sup>60</sup> In some of his other uses of "inheritance" and "inherit" he referred to all Christians as inheriting from God (e.g., 9:15; cf. 11:8). At other times he apparently meant only faithful Christians (e.g., 6:12; cf. 11:17). I think he was

<sup>57</sup>Lane, p. 30.

<sup>58</sup>Jesus Christ's present rule on His Father's throne over the church is not the same as His rule on David's throne over David's kingdom (cf. v. 3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). See Rogers, pp. 81-82.

<sup>59</sup>Herbert W. Bateman, IV, "Two First-Century Messianic Uses of the OT: Heb 1:5-13 and 4QFlor 1.1-19," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:1 (March 1995):26.

<sup>60</sup>The word "salvation" (Gr. *soteria*) occurs seven times in Hebrews, more than in any other book of the New Testament. For a study of salvation in Hebrews, see Brenda B. Colijn, "Let Us Approach: Soteriology in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:4 (December 1996):571-86.

probably speaking of all Christians here in view of what he just said about the ministry of angels. There is no other Scripture that limits the angels' ministry to faithful Christians or indicates that angels have a special ministry to faithful Christians (cf. Matt. 18:10).

"'Inherit' is often used in the NT in senses other than the strict one of obtaining something by a will. It can mean 'obtain possession of' without regard to the means. It is used of possessing the earth (Matt 5:5), the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10), eternal life (Mark 10:17), the promises (Heb 6:12), incorruption (1 Cor. 15:50), blessing (Heb 12:17), a more excellent name (v. 4, . . .)." <sup>61</sup>

This writer spoke of the inheritance of Christians as the Old Testament writers spoke of the inheritance of the Israelites. Our inheritance refers to all that God wants to give His people. We will inevitably receive some of that (cf. 1 Per. 1:3-9). However, we can forfeit part of our inheritance through unfaithfulness, as Esau did (12:16) and as the generation of Israelites who died in the wilderness did (3:7—4:11).

"In contrast with the first part of this verse, the last three words ["will inherit salvation"] are all major concepts in Hebrews." <sup>62</sup>

Thus this section closes with a positive encouragement for the readers. The writer's array of Old Testament quotations in this pericope presents one of the most glorious Christologies in Scripture. He placed emphasis on Jesus' future reign as God's King who is also David's Son. In summary, the Son is superior to the angels in seven respects.

1. He is the Son of God (v. 5a).
2. He is the promised son of David (v. 5b).
3. He is the sovereign whom angels worship as Yahweh (v. 6).
4. His ministry is not that of a temporary servant like the angels (v. 7).
5. His ministry is that of the eternal ruler (vv. 8-9).
6. He is the immutable creator (vv. 10-12).
7. He is the sovereign who will rule as victor over all His enemies (v. 13).

"The writer of Hebrews uses seven eschatological passages in Hebrews 1:5-14 to demonstrate Jesus' right to rule in the coming millennial kingdom. Because of this extensive quoting from six psalms and 2 Samuel 7, the term *soteria* ('salvation') in Hebrews 1:14 is best understood in the Old Testament sense as deliverance from the enemies of Yahweh and participation in His kingdom.

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<sup>61</sup>Morris, p. 20.

<sup>62</sup>Ellingworth, p. 133.

"The readers of the epistle are viewed as *metochoi*, 'companions' of the coming King (1:9). This relationship assures them of an ultimate victory in the final 'salvation' provided by the King (1:13-14). His victory will be in part their victory."<sup>63</sup>

### **C. THE DANGER OF NEGLIGENCE (THE FIRST WARNING) 2:1-4**

Having just encouraged his readers with a reminder of God's help for the faithful (1:14) the writer next urged his readers to be faithful. He did so to warn them of the possibility of retrogressing spiritually and consequently losing part of their inheritance (Jacob's sons Reuben, Simeon, and Levi).

"The second step in the argument for Jesus' superiority shows him to be infinitely great because of the nature of the salvation he won. . . . The author precedes the development of this thought with a brief section in which he exhorts his readers to attend to what has been said, a feature we shall notice elsewhere (e.g., 3:7-11; 5:11-14)."<sup>64</sup>

"The author uses doctrine as a basis for exhorting believers."<sup>65</sup>

"The number of unusual words and idioms and the avoidance of the vocabulary of the LXX suggest that in this paragraph it was the writer's intention to confront the thought and life of his readers in a more arresting way than reliance upon familiar words and phrases would foster."<sup>66</sup>

2:1           The meaning of "For this reason" is that since Jesus Christ is greater than the angels we should take the revelation that has come through Him seriously. If the Israelites received severe punishment whenever they disobeyed the Law that God gave them through angels, the punishment for disregarding what God has give us through His Son will be even more severe.<sup>67</sup> Later in this epistle we learn that the original readers were slow to respond to Scriptural imperatives. They had not grown as Christians as they should have (5:11-12). The writer took this opportunity to exhort them to "pay much closer attention" (Gr. *prosechein*) to what their teachers had taught them and to what they had read in the Scriptures. This Greek word means not only to turn the mind to something but also to act upon what one perceives (cf. Acts 8:6; 16:14). The readers were apparently regarding these things too lightly.

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<sup>63</sup>T. Kem Oberholtzer, "The Warning Passages in Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:577 (January-March 1988):96-97.

<sup>64</sup>Morris, p. 21.

<sup>65</sup>Pentecost, p. 24. Cf. 3:1, 8, 12, 13, 15; 4:1, 11, 14, 16; 6:1, 11, 12; 10:22, 23, 24, 25, 32, 35; 12:1, 3, 12, 14, 15, 25, 28; 13:1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 13, 15, 17, 18, 22, 24.

<sup>66</sup>Lane, p. 35.

<sup>67</sup>Ellingworth, p. 137.

"God's speaking is the basis for the writer's own 'word of exhortation' (13:22)."<sup>68</sup>

The writer illustrated their position. It is as though they were in a boat on a river or at sea. He pictured them moored at a dock or anchored. If they continued to neglect their attachment to the truth that does not change, the currents of their age might carry them away from it. They might drift away from the truth they had heard (not their eternal salvation, cf. 6:19). "What we have heard" is the antecedent of "it." This is a warning against apostatizing, departing from truth once held. All the warnings in the Bible against following false teachers are similar to this one in their intent. If we do not diligently remain in the truth—and to do so we must know it and remember it—we will depart from it. We live in a world that is striving to separate us from it. Satan also wants us to abandon it.

". . . the [five warning] passages in question are concerned with the danger of apostasy."<sup>69</sup>

". . . apostasy . . . [is] the central concern of the entire epistle."<sup>70</sup>

"That church's experience 2,000 years ago intersects our lives in this way: *drifting is the besetting sin of our day*. And as the metaphor suggests, it is not so much intentional as from unconcern. Christians neglect their anchor—Christ—and begin to quietly drift away. There is no friction, no dramatic sense of departure. But when the winds of trouble come, the things of Christ are left far behind, even out of sight."<sup>71</sup>

". . . if you examined a hundred people who had lost their faith in Christianity, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have been reasoned out of it by honest argument? Do not most people simply drift away?"<sup>72</sup>

2:2-3a "The word spoken through angels" refers to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Deut 33:2 LXX; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19).<sup>73</sup> For the Jews, these terms were not open to debate. For them the will of God was unalterable.

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>69</sup>Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Eschatology of the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews," *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (1982):67-68. However, he believed the apostates were all unbelievers.

<sup>70</sup>George E. Rice, "Apostasy As a Motif and Its Effect on the Structure of Hebrews," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23:1 (Spring 1985):33.

<sup>71</sup>R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews*, 1:48.

<sup>72</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 124.

<sup>73</sup>See Moffatt, p. 18.

It required obedience. Under the Old Covenant the connection between sin and punishment was clear and direct. Even more so, the readers could count on the New Covenant that had come not through angels, but through God's Son, to involve punishment for sinners. This is especially true if that sin involves failing to give attention to all our responsibilities as Christians who have received such a great salvation. "Transgression" refers to overstepping bounds, and "disobedience" to the violation of God's will more generally.<sup>74</sup> The writer did not specify the punishment, but it cannot be loss of salvation since Scripture specifically states that we will not lose our salvation (John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:31-39; Eph. 1:11-14; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; et al.). In view of the context (1:8-14) the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ and their own ultimate deliverance and rewards seem to be what the readers were in danger of forgetting.

"The neglected salvation is not our final deliverance from hell, that is not the salvation 'about which we are speaking.' Rather, it is the opportunity to enter into the final destiny of man, to reign with Christ over the works of God's hands (Heb. 2:8-9)."<sup>75</sup>

"Salvation includes far more than moral and bodily regeneration, for it embraces the covenanted kingdom of God, the inheritance of David's Son, the joint-heirship and reign with Christ."<sup>76</sup>

Note that the writer himself could have been negligent. He said, "How shall *we* escape?" not "How shall *you* escape?" (cf. v. 1). The most natural conclusion is that genuine Christians are in view in this warning, not unsaved professing Christians. The writer gave us no clues in the text that he had in mind unsaved professing Christians. Everything he said can be and has been true of genuine believers.

"Unlike most modern congregations the early Christian church was an integrated community centered around the worship of God and the advancement of his kingdom. Economically it was a commonwealth, which meant that its members were not being pulled apart from one another by the pursuit of individual goals of success; they were devoting everything they were and owned to the strengthening of one another and the cause of Christ. Worshiping and eating together, the members were in constant communication [cf. Acts 2:42]. . . . Little time or

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<sup>74</sup>Another view is that "transgression" refers to sins of commission and "disobedience" to sins of omission. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:282.

<sup>75</sup>Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 131.

<sup>76</sup>George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, 3:451.

distance separated the members of this body, so there was an unhindered communication of the gifts and graces of each one to the others."<sup>77</sup>

"It is emphatically NOT the same situation a Baptist preacher in the twentieth century faces when he climbs into the pulpit before eight thousand professing Christians. We are therefore fully justified in concluding that, when a New Testament writer uses a term like 'brethren,' he is not thinking that some may and some may not really be brothers, but he assumes and believes that all his readers are in fact born again.

"Since the writers themselves never explicitly say that they feel their audience is a mixture and since they everywhere make statements to the effect that they are talking to genuine Christians, we have no warrant for reading into their otherwise clear statements qualifications which they themselves never make."<sup>78</sup>

The warning is against neglecting, not rejecting, salvation (cf. 6:19).

"He [the writer] is not encouraging sinners to become Christians; rather, he is encouraging Christians to pay attention to the great salvation they have received from the Lord.

"More spiritual problems are caused by neglect than perhaps by any other failure on our part. We neglect God's Word, prayer, worship with God's people (see Heb. 10:25), and other opportunities for spiritual growth, and as a result, we start to drift."<sup>79</sup>

Chapter 1 glorifies our great Savior, and chapter 2 exalts our great salvation.

2:3b-4 Jesus Christ spoke of these aspects of salvation during His earthly ministry (e.g., Matt. 4:17; 19:28; Luke 12:31-32; 22:29-30). The apostles taught the same truth and by doing so confirmed His word.

"By speaking of 'the hearers' (*ton akousanton*), all interest is concentrated on the message, not the office, of those who had brought the word of redemption to the community . . ."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*, p. 161.

<sup>78</sup>Dillow, p. 241.

<sup>79</sup>Wiersbe, 2:282; cf. pp. 276, 277, 278.

<sup>80</sup>Lane, p. 39.

God testified to His approval of Christ's preaching and the apostles' preaching about Christ by providing authenticating miracles that showed God was with them (cf. Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6, 13; 14:3; 15:12; 2 Cor. 12:12). "Signs" emphasizes that the miracles signify something. "Wonders" emphasizes the reaction of awe that the miracles produced in those who observed them. "Miracles" emphasizes their supernatural origin and "gifts" the graciousness of God in providing them. The writer intended that reference to these miracles would bolster the readers' confidence in the gospel they had received.

This statement does not force us to date the epistle after the apostles had died.

"It is too much to read into this verse that the writer and his readers belonged to a second generation of Christians . . . , though 5:12 shows that they were not new converts . . ." <sup>81</sup>

The original readers may have been, and I believe were, people who had heard the apostles' preaching and had observed the miracles that accompanied that preaching. This statement does not say that the signs and wonders had already ceased. They may have, but this statement does not say that. The prediction that they would cease occurs in 1 Corinthians 13:8. Ephesians 2:20 implies the temporary duration of apostolic ministry that included signs and wonders. <sup>82</sup>

"Hebrews' references to the Holy Spirit are generally incidental; much of the space occupied in Paul's theology by the Spirit is filled in Hebrews by the exalted Christ." <sup>83</sup>

I think signs and wonders are less common in developed countries today because most of these countries have the complete Word of God. God now typically validates the gospel through His Word (cf. Rom. 8:16; 1 John 5:1-13). Occasionally we hear reports of miracles that validate the gospel, but they are usually in places where the Word of God is not as available.

This is the first of five warnings in Hebrews (cf. 3:1—4:16; 5:11—6:20; 10:19-39; 12:1-29). It is the shortest and mildest one. These warnings deal with drifting from the Word, disbelieving the Word, dullness toward the Word, despising the Word, and defying the Word.

"The warning of Hebrews 2:1-5 is linked by *dia touto* ('for this reason') with the entire argument of Hebrews 1. Because of the Son's superiority to

<sup>81</sup>Ellingworth, p. 141. Guthrie, p. 82, believed the writer had not heard Jesus firsthand.

<sup>82</sup>See J. Lanier Burns, "A Reemphasis on the Purpose of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:527 (July-September 1975):245-46; Morris, p. 22.

<sup>83</sup>Ellingworth, p. 143.

angels (1:1-5), the angels' worship of and service to Him at His coming (1:6-7), His future rule and sharing of joy with His companions (1:8-9), and His future subjugation of His enemies (1:10-14), the readers would do well to heed these eschatological teachings. Neglect of this eschatological salvation (cf. 1:4; 2:3, 5) may result in individual temporal discipline similar to that experienced under the Old Covenant (2:2). The 'salvation' of 2:3 is the same as that in 1:4. Hebrews 2:5 clarifies that the *soteria* under discussion is eschatological."<sup>84</sup>

"One of the greatest dangers of the Christian life is losing interest in what is familiar (8:9; Matt. 22:5). The entire Epistle lays stress on steadfastness at almost every stage, and this is one of the essential marks of the true, growing, deepening Christian life (3:14; 4:2, 12, 13; 6:1, 19; 10:26; 12:27, 28; 13:8)."<sup>85</sup>

". . . the doctrines the epistle presents, the warnings it delivers, and the exhortations it gives all were intended to prevent regression and to encourage continuous dynamic development toward spiritual maturity."<sup>86</sup>

#### **D. THE HUMILIATION AND GLORY OF GOD'S SON 2:5-9**

Verses 5-18 present eight reasons for the incarnation of the Son: to fulfill God's purpose for man (vv. 5-9a), to taste death for all (v. 9b), and to bring many sons to glory (vv. 10-13). He also came to destroy the devil (v. 14), to deliver those in bondage (v. 15), to become a priest for men (vv. 16-17a), to make propitiation for sins (v. 17b), and to provide help for those tested (v. 18).<sup>87</sup>

Some of the original Jewish readers of Hebrews felt inclined to abandon the Christian faith because of Jesus' humanity. The writer stressed His deity in chapter one because some Jews failed to appreciate that. In this chapter he showed why Jesus was not inferior because He was a man. Jesus' humanity enabled Him to regain man's lost dominion (vv. 5-9) and to bring many sons to glory (vv. 10-13). It also equipped Him to disarm Satan and deliver us from death (vv. 14-16) and to be a sympathetic high priest to His people (vv. 17-18).<sup>88</sup>

The writer returned to his main argument (ch. 1). He did so to develop the destiny of Jesus Christ more fully so his readers would strengthen their commitment to continue following Him.

2:5 "The world to come" refers to the inhabited earth under Jesus Christ's reign (during the Millennium and from then on; cf. 1:8-9, 11-13). Some

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<sup>84</sup>Oberholtzer, p. 97.

<sup>85</sup>Thomas, p. 29.

<sup>86</sup>Pentecost, p. 31.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-68.

<sup>88</sup>Wiersbe, 2:283-84.

branches of Judaism believed Michael and his angels would rule over it.<sup>89</sup> The angels administer the present world (Deut. 32:8; Dan. 10:20-21; 12:1), but the Son will administer the world to come.

"This will occur at His second advent when He returns to this earth to sit as David's Son on David's throne and rule over David's kingdom in fulfillment of God's covenants and promises."<sup>90</sup>

In this respect, too, Jesus is superior to the angels.

The phrase "concerning which we are speaking" indicates that the writer was resuming his exposition and continuing his thought from 1:5-14.

2:6-8a The writer interpreted this passage (Ps. 8:4-6) as Messianic.<sup>91</sup> "Son of Man" is a Messianic title (Dan. 7:13-14). As a man Jesus was temporarily lower than the angels during His earthly ministry. His crowning took place at His ascension as did His receiving authority over all creation. The time when all things now under His authority will bow to that authority awaits His return to earth at His second advent and the judgments that will follow His coming.

2:8b-9 Even though believers do not yet see Jesus glorified on earth, we do see Him with the eye of faith glorified in heaven. God has crowned Jesus with glory and honor because He endured death.<sup>92</sup> He suffered death because it was God's will for Him to taste death for every person.<sup>93</sup> This was God's purpose in the Incarnation.

Jesus Christ's death was for everyone in that by dying He paid the penalty for the sins of every human being, elect and non-elect (cf. 1 John 2:2; 2 Peter 2:1; John 3:16). His death was sufficient for all, but it is efficient only for those who rest their confidence in it as what satisfied God.

"There is a profound note of anticipation in the OT teaching about humanity. The words of the psalmist look forward into the future, and that future is inextricably bound up with the person and work of Jesus. His condescension to be made for a brief while 'lower than the angels' set in motion a sequence of events in which abasement and humiliation were the necessary prelude to exaltation. His coronation investiture with priestly glory and splendor provide assurance that the power of sin and death has been nullified and that humanity will yet be led to the full realization of

<sup>89</sup>Zane C. Hodges, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 783.

<sup>90</sup>Pentecost, p. 57.

<sup>91</sup>See Donald R. Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p. 44. Guthrie, p. 84, wrote that Psalm 8 was never considered to be Messianic (by the Jews).

<sup>92</sup>See Moffatt, p. 24.

<sup>93</sup>Suffering, introduced here, becomes a dominant theme in this epistle.

their intended glory. In Jesus the hearers are to find the pledge of their own entrance into the imperial destiny intended by God for them."<sup>94</sup>

### **E. THE SON'S SOLIDARITY WITH HUMANITY 2:10-18**

The writer next emphasized the future glory that the Son will experience to heighten his readers' appreciation for Him and for their own future with Him. He did this by reflecting on Psalm 8. He wanted his readers to appreciate these things so they would continue to live by faith rather than departing from God's will (cf. James 1; 1 Pet. 1). This section concludes the first major part of the writer's address and prepares his audience for the next one (3:1—5:10).

"The three thoughts quickly made in Hebrews 2:9 are . . . filled in by further theological reflection in 2:10-18. They are not taken up in distinct sections but are interwoven in the argument of the paragraph. . . .

"The first theme . . . is that Jesus as God's Son came to earth to share fully in our humanity and thus to establish His solidarity with all people. . . .

"The second theme . . . is that in God's plan Jesus had to undergo suffering and death in order to provide salvation for humankind. . . .

"The third theme . . . is that because of His obedience in carrying out God's redemptive plan despite severe temptation, Jesus has been exalted to the honored position in God's very presence as the believers' perfected High Priest."<sup>95</sup>

2:10           The writer proceeded to give a commentary on the last clause of verse 9, particularly on the phrase "by the grace of God."

The Son of Man is not the only One God intends to glorify (v. 6). All of His sons, believers, will experience glorification. "Him" is God the Father. "Author" is Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. The unusual title "author" (Gr. *archegos*) describes Jesus as a file leader, pioneer, pathfinder, and captain of a company of followers (cf. 12:2; Acts 3:15; 5:31).<sup>96</sup> However, it also views Him as originator or personal source.<sup>97</sup> God perfected Jesus by charting His path to glory through suffering, and He does the same for Jesus' followers. We must go through suffering before we get to glory. By having experienced suffering Jesus can more perfectly help us as we suffer (v. 18). He was "perfected" in this sense.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Lane, p. 50.

<sup>95</sup>Fanning, pp. 379, 381, 382.

<sup>96</sup>See J. Julius Scott Jr., "Archegos in the Salvation History of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29:1 (March 1986):47-54.

<sup>97</sup>Moffatt, p. 31.

<sup>98</sup>"To perfect" (Gr. *teleioo*) is another favorite word of this writer, who used it nine times, more frequently than it occurs in any other New Testament book.

"Since His sinlessness is an accepted fact, it is clear that the perfection is viewed as a fitness for the fulfilling of the office assigned to Him."<sup>99</sup>

"This representation of the achievement of Jesus was calculated to recall one of the more famous labors of Hercules, his wrestling with Death, 'the dark-robed lord of the dead' (Euripides, *Alcestis*, II. 843, 844 . . .). The designation of Jesus as *archegos* in a context depicting him as protagonist suggests that the writer intended to present Jesus to his hearers in language that drew freely upon the Hercules tradition in popular Hellenism . . ."<sup>100</sup>

2:11 "He" is probably Jesus Christ. There is great unity between Jesus Christ and believers. The Old Testament taught this unity in Psalm 22:22 (v. 12), Isaiah 8:17 (v. 13a), and Isaiah 8:18 (v. 13b). Jesus will not feel ashamed to call sanctified believers His brethren when He returns and leads us to glory (vv. 5, 10).

2:12-13 These quotations illustrate that Jesus will not blush to identify with the people of God. The emphasis in the first quotation is on the character that Jesus Christ and believers share. His death has made us holy (set us apart; cf. 10:10, 14). Consequently we can have intimate fellowship with Jesus who dwells among us (by His Spirit; cf. Exod 25:8; 29:46).

The point of the second quotation is that Jesus, as well as His followers, trusted God. This is the basis for intimate fellowship. The point of the third quotation is that believers are Jesus Christ's spiritual children. As such He will provide for us and prepare us for the future as a loving parent who has had greater experience travelling the same path (cf. John 14:1-3).

"The description of Christians as the 'children' or 'sons' of Christ is peculiar to this epistle among the New testament writings . . ."<sup>101</sup>

2:14 We children share in flesh and blood with one another; we share the limitations of humanity. To free us from these limitations the Son had to assume the same limitations, which He did at the Incarnation. Jesus Christ broke Satan's power over believers by His death. Obviously Satan still exercises great power, but Jesus Christ broke his power to enslave believers (cf. Rom. 6:1-14). Furthermore Jesus Christ defeated Satan in the area of his greatest strength, his power to inflict death.

<sup>99</sup>Everett F. Harrison, "The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121:484 (October-December 1964):338.

<sup>100</sup>Lane, p. 57. Cf. W. Manson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Historical and Theological Reconsideration*, pp. 103-4.

<sup>101</sup>Bruce, p. 48. Cf. Isa. 8:18; 53:10. It stresses intimacy and tenderness as well as solidarity.

2:15 The fear of death enslaves unbelievers in that our fear of death leads us to behave in ways that please Satan (e.g., selfishly, living for the present, etc.). A believer need not have the same fear of death as an unbeliever (cf. Luke 11:21-22). Consequently we need not feel compelled to live for the present (e.g., put self first, do anything to save our lives, etc.) as unbelievers do. The fear of death tyrannizes many people both consciously and subconsciously.

"It is ironical that human beings, destined to rule over the creation (Ps 8:5-7 LXX, cited in vv 6-8), should find themselves in the posture of a slave, paralyzed through the fear of death (Kögel, *Sohn*, 80). Hopeless subjection to death characterizes earthly existence apart from the intervention of God . . ."102

2:16 Here "the seed of Abraham" probably refers primarily to believers, the spiritual descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:29), rather than to Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham (cf. Isa. 41:8-10). The original readers, saved Jews, were both the physical and spiritual descendants of Abraham. The contrast is between angelic and human believers in the context. Jesus Christ does not give help to angels in the same way He does to Christians. He helps us uniquely as an elder brother and parent (vv. 11-15).

2:17 "All things" means in every way, specifically by experiencing human life and by suffering. Jesus Christ's identification with us made possible His ministry as high priest in which He would be merciful to us and faithful to God.<sup>103</sup> The basis for this ministry was His making satisfaction (propitiation, by atonement) for sin by His self-sacrifice.

". . . the concept of high priesthood, as applied to Christ, expresses both Christ's unity with mankind in a particular historical tradition (5:1) and his leadership of God's pilgrim people into the heavenly sanctuary."<sup>104</sup>

"*O laos* ["The people"] is Hebrews' preferred term for the people of God."<sup>105</sup>

2:18 As our priest, Jesus Christ can help us because He has undergone the same trials we experience (in body, mind, and emotions) and has emerged victorious. The testing in view is temptation to depart from God's will, specifically apostasy. The picture is of an older brother helping his younger brothers navigate the pitfalls of growing up successfully. That is the role a priest plays.

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<sup>102</sup>Lane, p. 61.

<sup>103</sup>Eli is an example of a high priest who was neither faithful nor merciful (cf. 1 Sam. 2:27-36).

<sup>104</sup>Ellingworth, p. 186.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

"Think of it this way—which bridge has undergone the greatest stress, the one that collapses under its first load of traffic, or the one that bears the same traffic morning and evening, year after year?"<sup>106</sup>

The writer developed these ideas more fully later. He only introduced them here.

"It is a characteristic of this Epistle just to touch upon a truth, and then to dismiss it for a time, taking it up later for full treatment."<sup>107</sup>

". . . the writer composes like a musician intertwining one theme with another."<sup>108</sup>

The emphasis in 2:5-18 has been on Jesus Christ's present ministry whereas that of 1:5-14 was on His future reign. In both sections, however, there is a looking forward to the time when all things will be subject to Him. The writer focused on the future to encourage his readers to persevere faithfully rather than apostatizing.

"With vv 17-18 the writer prepares to lead his hearers directly into the body of the discourse devoted to the exposition of Jesus as priest and sacrifice. Common to the concepts both of champion and of high priest are the elements of representation and solidarity with a particular people. The presentation of Jesus in 2:10-18 provided assurance that the exalted Son continues to identify himself with the oppressed people of God exposed to humiliation and testing in a hostile world."<sup>109</sup>

## **II. THE HIGH PRIESTLY CHARACTER OF THE SON 3:1—5:10**

The writer proceeded to take up the terms "merciful" and "faithful" from 2:17 and to expound them in reverse order. He spoke of the faithfulness of Jesus (3:1-6, exposition) and the need for his hearers to remain faithful as well (3:7—4:14, exhortation). He then encouraged his audience with a reminder of Jesus' compassion as a merciful high priest in the service of God (4:15—5:10, exposition).

### **A. THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE SON 3:1-6**

"The author steadily develops his argument that Jesus is supremely great. He is greater than the angels, the author of a great salvation, and great enough to become man to accomplish it. Now the author turns his

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<sup>106</sup>R. Kent Hughes, 1:86.

<sup>107</sup>Thomas, p. 36.

<sup>108</sup>John Bligh, "The Structure of Hebrews," *Heythrop Journal* 5 (April 1964):171.

<sup>109</sup>Lane, p. 67.

attention to Moses, regarded by the Jews as the greatest of men. . . . The writer does nothing to belittle Moses. Nor does he criticize him. He accepts Moses' greatness but shows that as great as he was, Jesus was greater by far."<sup>110</sup>

It was important to convince the Jewish readers that Jesus Christ is greater than Moses because the entire Jewish religion came through Moses. Christianity came through Christ.

"Observing the grammatical markers supplied by the writer, we submit that the development of the author's thought reflects the following scheme:

- vv 1-2 introduction of the comparison between Jesus and Moses;
- v 3 assertion of Jesus' superiority to Moses;
- vv 4-6a explanation for this assertion;
- v 6b relevance for the congregation."<sup>111</sup>

3:1 We should give careful attention to Jesus because of our unity as brothers and our holy calling as participants in His future reign and joy (2:10-12). Our calling as Christians is not just earthly but heavenly.

Jesus Christ is the "Apostle" (lit. delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders) in that He is the One God sent to reveal the Father to humankind (cf. 1:1-2; John 1:14; 3:17, 34; 5:36, 38; et al.). Furthermore He is the "High Priest" in that He is the One God anointed to represent human beings to Himself (2:17-18). Our confession is that for which we take a public stand in water baptism, namely, Christianity (cf. 4:14; 10:23).

3:2 We should probably translate this verse to tie it in directly to verse 1 rather than making it a separate statement. The idea is that Jesus Christ is now faithful, not that He was in the past. He is faithful now as Moses was in the past. We can see Moses' faithfulness in how he served regarding God's "house," the tabernacle, and regarding God's "household," Israel. He served exactly as God instructed him (cf. Num. 12:7; 1 Sam. 2:35; 1 Chron. 17:14).

3:3-4 We can see the difference between Jesus Christ's superiority and Moses' by comparing the builder of a building with the building itself. No matter how grand a building may be its creator always gets more glory than the building itself. Whereas Moses served faithfully in the system of worship the tabernacle represented, Jesus Christ designed that system of worship. These verses are a powerful testimony to the deity of Jesus Christ. If God built everything, and Jesus Christ built God's house, Jesus Christ is God.

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<sup>110</sup>Morris, p. 31.

<sup>111</sup>Lane, p. 72.

3:5-6a Moses functioned as a servant (Gr. *therapon*, one who freely renders personal service) preparing something that would serve as a model for a later time. The tabernacle was a model of the real temple from which Jesus Christ will reign eventually (cf. 1:8-13; 2:8), first in the Millennium and then in the new heavens and earth. Messiah's rule over the earth was a revelation about which the prophets who followed Moses spoke more fully. Jesus Christ will not serve. He will reign. He is not God's servant but God's Son. As such, He sits. He does not stand like a servant. He is the possessor of all things, not one who makes preparation for things, as Moses did.

"By defining Moses' service in this way, the writer indicates that Moses' status as servant corresponds to that of the angels, who are servants to the heirs of salvation (see . . . 1:14)."<sup>112</sup>

God's house over which Jesus Christ sits in authority represents the whole system of worship that our Lord inaugurated with the New Covenant. He sits in God's place, the holy of holies of this house. The tabernacle foreshadowed this final system of worship in which Jesus rules as King Priest. The tabernacle was a microcosm of God's greater house. Moses served in the model (prototype) faithfully. Jesus rules over the larger house faithfully, not as a servant, but as God's Son with full authority.

"In some sections of Jewish Christianity Christ's role was envisaged as primarily that of a second Moses; here He is presented as being much more than that."<sup>113</sup>

3:6b God's big house consists of people, not boards, bars, and curtains. The writer was thinking of priestly functions, as is clear from the context. His concern was that his readers might not remain faithful to God (cf. Mark 4:5-6, 16-17). This would result in their losing their privilege as priests that included intimate fellowship with God and the opportunity to represent God before people and people before God. This is what the Israelites as a whole lost when they turned away from the Lord and built the golden calf at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 32). Instead of all the Israelites being priests (Exod. 19:6) God limited this privilege to the Levites who remained faithful when the other Israelites apostatized (Exod. 32:26-29; cf. Num. 3:12-13). Just so today it is possible for us to forfeit the privilege of functioning as a priest in the future (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5). The writer shifted from using "house" to refer to the place where priestly functions take place, to using "house" to refer to the people engaged in those activities, namely, a household. The same Greek word (*oikos*) means "house" and "household."

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>113</sup>Bruce, p. 58.

The writer's point in this pericope was that his readers should follow the example of faithfulness to God that Moses and Jesus set or they could lose their privilege as priests. Essentially priests represent people to God. They exercise leadership of people Godward. The writer had previously warned his readers that unfaithfulness could result in their drifting away from God's truth (2:1-4). Moreover by contrasting Jesus and Moses he helped his Jewish readers appreciate the superiority of Jesus over Moses and so discouraged them from departing from Christianity and returning to Judaism.<sup>114</sup>

"When we withdraw from the exercise of our priestly New Testament worship, we are no longer fellowshiping with the other believers. But this does not mean we are not saved or that we had salvation and lost it."<sup>115</sup>

### **B. THE DANGER OF DISBELIEF (THE SECOND WARNING) 3:7-19**

"The comparison between Christ and Moses leads to one between their followers. The writer uses the conduct of the Israelites as a means of challenging his readers to a closer walk with God."<sup>116</sup>

The writer next reminded his readers of the fate of the Israelites when they failed to go on believing God at Kadesh Barnea. His purpose was to help them realize the serious consequences of that behavior and to motivate them to persevere faithfully in the apostles' teaching. This exhortation is really a commentary on Psalm 95:7b-11 in which the writer assumed a correspondence between the successive generations of God's people and consistency in God's character.<sup>117</sup> In verse 6 the writer warned of losing our privilege of serving as priests in the present. Now he warned of losing some of our privileges as heirs in the future.

3:7-11 "Today" stresses the urgency of immediate action. This writer used it eight times in Hebrews. The context of the words quoted (Psalm 95:7b-11) is very significant. The verses immediately preceding those quoted (Ps. 95:6-7a) are a call to bow down and worship the Lord. That was the writer to the Hebrews' desire for his readers. The words he quoted urge avoidance of Israel's sin. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ initiated a new Exodus.

". . . the writer of Hebrews appeals to his recipients not to become discontented because of their suffering, and not to let discontentment give way to open rebellion—lest they, like their forefathers, lose the blessings of the privileges that now were available to them as believers."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>See Brett R. Scott, "Jesus' Superiority over Moses in Hebrews 3:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):201-10.

<sup>115</sup>Dillow, p. 458.

<sup>116</sup>Morris, p. 33.

<sup>117</sup>Lane, p. 83.

<sup>118</sup>Pentecost, p. 76.

"The grand and terrible lesson of Israel's history is that *it is possible to begin well and end poorly*. In fact, this tragic human tendency dominates much human spiritual experience."<sup>119</sup>

"'Rest' (*katapausis*), as used here, points to a place of blessing where there is no more striving but only relaxation in the presence of God and in the certainty that there is no cause for fear."<sup>120</sup>

For Israel, "rest" meant the enjoyment of all that God had promised the nation, not just entrance into the Promised Land. The next generation of Israelites did enter the Promised Land and experienced rest there because they chose to trust and obey God (cf. Josh. 1:13, 15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1). For the Christian, "rest" is the enjoyment of all that God has promised us, not just going to heaven. This includes the fullness of rewards that can be ours if we follow the Lord faithfully.<sup>121</sup> Much confusion has resulted because Christians have interpreted "rest" as Canaan and heaven.<sup>122</sup>

3:12 Here is an exhortation to apply this lesson from the past. Note again that those to whom the writer addressed this epistle were believers. Their danger was apostasy, departure from God, not failure to come to God in saving faith.<sup>123</sup>

"The rebellion he warns against consists of departing from a living, dynamic person, not from some dead doctrine. Jews might retort that they served the same God as the Christians so that they would not be departing from God if they went back to Judaism. But to reject God's highest revelation is to depart from God, no matter how many preliminary revelations are retained."<sup>124</sup>

The Greek words translated "to apostatize" (lit. to stand away, *aphistemi*) and "apostasy" (defection, *apostasia*) do not indicate in themselves whether believers or unbelievers are in view. The reader must determine this by the context. Here believers seem to be in view (as in Luke 8:13; Acts 15:38; 1 Tim. 4:1; cf. Luke 2:38; 2 Tim. 2:12b; 4:4) since the writer

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<sup>119</sup>R. Kent Hughes, 1:98.

<sup>120</sup>Morris, p. 35. "Rest" is another of the writer's favorite words.

<sup>121</sup>All Christians will go to heaven and receive many blessings (Eph. 1; 1 Pet. 1), but some blessings are reserved for believers who continue to trust and obey God when faced with temptations to apostatize. The crown of righteousness, the crown of life, the crown of glory, etc., are such rewards.

<sup>122</sup>In chapter 4, the writer spoke of "Sabbath rest," which is something different.

<sup>123</sup>See Hodges, p. 787.

<sup>124</sup>Morris, p. 36.

called them "brethren."<sup>125</sup> In other contexts, unsaved apostates are in view (e.g., Luke 13:27; cf. 2 Thess. 2:11). In still other passages there is not sufficient data to pass judgment on their salvation (e.g., 2 Thess. 2:3; cf. Titus 1:14). Other Scripture seems to reveal quite clearly that genuine Christians can renounce their faith (Matt. 10:33; Mark 8:32; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 3:8). However this does not mean they will lose their salvation (John 10:28; 2 Tim. 2:13).<sup>126</sup>

"No believer today, Jew or Gentile, could go back into the Mosaic legal system since the temple is gone and there is no priesthood. But every believer is tempted to give up his confession of Christ and go back into the world system's life of compromise and bondage."<sup>127</sup>

As often in Hebrews, references to God as "living" imply that He is the giver of life.<sup>128</sup>

3:13

If a sinner continues in his sin, he may conclude that sin does not matter, as the Israelites at Kadesh Barnea did. Their unbelief there was the tenth instance of unbelief since they left Egypt (cf. Num. 14:22). This is sin's deceitfulness. That is a lie; sin matters very much. The writer counseled his readers to encourage each other to continue to walk with God. He did this to help us avoid the rationalizing that we can get into when we do not confess and forsake our sins. Meeting with other Christians for mutual encouragement regularly can be a great help to any Christian in remembering that failing to continue to trust God will bring bad consequences. Mutual encouragement in godliness is something we all need daily so we do not become hardened to sin.

"A hardened attitude is not a sudden aberration, but a habitual state of mind."<sup>129</sup>

We need to get started "today," while there is still opportunity.

"One of the best ways of keeping ourselves true is to help other people, and the duty is here set forth of exhorting one another. There is scarcely anything more striking in Christian experience than the fact that in helping others we often help ourselves."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Some people refer to Christian apostates as backsliders. However these apostates are very serious backsliders.

<sup>126</sup>See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "aphistemi, apostasia, dichostasia," by Heinrich Schlier, 1:512-13.

<sup>127</sup>Wiersbe, 2:288.

<sup>128</sup>Ellingworth, p. 654.

<sup>129</sup>Guthrie, p. 107.

<sup>130</sup>Thomas, p. 44.

3:14 Even though we are already partakers of a heavenly calling (v. 1), we can only partake of all that God wants us to enjoy in the future with the Messiah by persevering. Conversely we can lose the privilege of partaking with Christ fully if we stop trusting and obeying God. Likewise we can lose the privilege of serving as priests to the extent that we could serve as priests by proving unfaithful (v. 6; cf. Luke 19:11-27; 2 Tim. 2:12). The condition the writer stated here is the same as in verse 6. We must continue to walk by faith just as we began the Christian life by faith.

". . . A son who leaves home ceases to be an active partner in the home, though he does not thereby cease to be a son!"<sup>131</sup>

"To begin well is good, but it is not enough, it is only those who stay the course and finish the race that have any hope of gaining the prize."<sup>132</sup>

3:15 We see the example of failure in Israel's unbelief at Kadesh, which the writer repeated for emphasis.

"The allusions to Num 14 are significant because they indicate that unbelief is not a lack of faith or trust. It is the refusal to believe God. It leads inevitably to a turning away from God in a deliberate act of rejection."<sup>133</sup>

3:16-19 These verses constitute an exposition of the passage quoted. The questions indicate the diatribe style of rhetoric in which the speaker raises questions and provides answers. The Israelites who died in the wilderness were mostly redeemed believers (cf. Exod. 14:31).<sup>134</sup> They died as believers; they did not lose their salvation. However they did fail to enter into the blessing that could have been theirs because they refused to believe that God would defeat their enemies and bring them into rest in the Promised Land. If we fail to believe that Jesus has defeated and will defeat our enemies (1:13-14), we too will fail to enter into all the blessing that can be ours in heaven. We need to continue to trust and obey just like the Israelites should have done.

"By saying *So we see that* [v. 19], the writer assumes that his reasoning will be self-evident."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 76.

<sup>132</sup>Bruce, p. 68. Cf. 12:1-2.

<sup>133</sup>Lane, p. 86.

<sup>134</sup>See Randall C. Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7—4:11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:627 (July-September 2000):288.

<sup>135</sup>Guthrie, p. 110.

"The conclusion thus introduces the motif of the impossibility of a second repentance after apostasy, in anticipation of a fuller treatment later in the sermon (6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:16-17 . . .). The hearers are left with the overwhelming impression that unbelief would expose them to the same precarious situation as Israel at Kadesh."<sup>136</sup>

The apostate generation of Israelites failed to enter the Promised Land when they hardened their hearts and provoked God by their disbelief. Is the implication that Christians who do the same will not enter heaven? Many interpreters have taken this view. However, the New Testament elsewhere teaches that all who believe in Jesus Christ will go to heaven because simple faith in Christ is what saves us (e.g., Eph. 2:8-9). God has promised to complete the work of salvation that He began in us (cf. John 10:27-28; Rom. 8:30; Phil. 1:6; et al.). He will glorify us just as he justified us and just as He is sanctifying us. He will do this despite our subsequent unbelief (cf. 2 Tim. 2:13). If our subsequent unbelief resulted in our loss of salvation, the condition for being saved would have to be faith plus faithfulness, which it is not. Remember, "rest" does not equal the Promised Land (or heaven) but obtaining all the inheritance that God wants to give believers in the Promised Land (or heaven).

### **C. THE POSSIBILITY OF REST FOR GOD'S PEOPLE 4:1-14**

The writer returned again from exhortation to exposition. He now posed the alternatives of rest and peril that confronted the new people of God, Christians.<sup>137</sup> The writer warned his readers so they would not fail to enter into their rest.

"Since Moses was unable to lead the Israelites into Canaan, the writer reflects on the position of Joshua, who did lead them in. But he shows that even Joshua did not secure for his people true rest. Joshua failed for the same reason as Moses, that is, through the people's unbelief."<sup>138</sup>

4:1           The writer expressed concern in this verse that some of his readers might conclude that they had missed entering into their rest (i.e., their spiritual inheritance). Apparently some of the original readers had doubts because the Lord had not yet returned. They expected Him to return soon after He ascended into heaven (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 2:1-12). Later the writer urged his readers to wait patiently for the Lord to return (10: 36-37). None of the original readers had failed to enter their rest (inheritance) because they had missed the Lord's return.

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<sup>136</sup>Lane, p. 89.

<sup>137</sup>It seems that this section ends with 4:14 rather than 15 since 14 contains the end of an *inclusio* that begins in 3:1.

<sup>138</sup>Guthrie, p. 110.

<b>Five views of the "rest" in Hebrews</b>
1. Heaven
2. Present rest in (enjoyment of) our riches in Christ
3. Future (eschatological) enjoyment of <i>all</i> that God wants us to enjoy (i.e., our <i>full</i> inheritance)
4. Some particular blessing in the eschatological future
5. A peaceful life now as Christians

Some people interpret this verse to mean that the readers should fear that they would not go to heaven if they proved unfaithful. This cannot be the meaning because God has promised heaven to every believer regardless of our faithfulness to Him (Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:3-6; et al.).

"To equate the inheritance [only] with heaven [cf. Matt. 11:28] results in a glaring inconsistency. It would mean that believers, by entering the church, are already heirs of the kingdom. Why then are they uniformly exhorted to become heirs by faithful labor when they are already heirs?"<sup>139</sup>

Teaching that compares crossing the Jordan with the believer's death (e.g., the hymn, "I'm Just a Poor Wayfaring Stranger") has clouded divine revelation concerning the Christian's future rest. Crossing the Jordan marked the beginning of God's testing of the new Israelite generation. He had previously tested the former generation during the wilderness wanderings. Each succeeding generation throughout the history of Israel faced its own tests. The people's responses to these tests determined the amount of rest they experienced. Likewise the Christian's response to his tests (whether he will trust and obey God faithfully or depart from God's will) determines how much rest he or she will enjoy.

Another view is that rest refers to the present life of the believer who rests in the Lord: the "faith rest" life.<sup>140</sup> Having been saved, we enter into our rest as believers by surrendering our lives to Him and enjoying peace with God. This view seems unlikely because of how the writer equated rest and inheritance after the pattern of Old Testament usage, namely, as a future possession. Furthermore, if rest equals enjoying our spiritual blessings now, the writer should have warned his readers about *losing* their rest if they departed from God (3:12). The writer himself could have done this. Instead he warned them about failing *to enter into* their rest.

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<sup>139</sup>Dillow, p. 83.

<sup>140</sup>Pentecost, pp. 80-81; Wiersbe, 2:289.

The writer used the term "rest" as Moses did, as an equivalent to entering into all the inheritance that God promised His people (Deut. 3:18-20; 12:9-11; cf. Heb. 1:14; 3:11, 18; 4:3-5, 10-11; 6:12, 17). For the Christian this inheritance is everything that God desires to bestow on us when we see Him.<sup>141</sup> It is an eschatological rest, not a present rest. We enter into our rest after we cease from our labors in this life. We then enter into our "Sabbath rest," the rest that follows a full period of work (i.e., a lifetime; cf. vv. 9-11). I believe this is the correct view.

"An eschatological understanding of 'my rest' in Ps 95:11 is presupposed in v 1 and is fundamental to the exhortation to diligence to enter God's rest in 4:1-11."<sup>142</sup>

The readers might fail to enter their rest, in the sense of losing part of their inheritance, if they apostatized. Losing part of one's inheritance probably involves losing the privilege of reigning with Christ in a position of significant responsibility in the future, at least (cf. Matt. 25:14-30). As it is possible to receive a greater or a lesser inheritance (reward), it is also possible to enter into more or less rest. The generation of Israelites that crossed the Jordan with Joshua only entered into partial rest in the land due to their failure to trust and obey God completely. Israel's compromises with the Canaanites mitigated their rest. Subsequent generations of Israelites experienced the same partial rest, as the Book of Judges reveals. They apostatized, God disciplined them, they repented, and then they experienced rest until they (usually the next generation) apostatized again.

It also seems better to identify rest with our full future inheritance rather than solely with participation in the Millennium<sup>143</sup> or with our "heavenly husband"<sup>144</sup> or with some other particular blessing in the future.<sup>145</sup> God has assured all Christians of enjoying the millennial kingdom and our "heavenly husband" (i.e., Jesus Christ). The New Testament links receiving other particular blessings (crowns, rewards) with specified conditions (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:25; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11).

This passage is not talking about living a peaceful life here and now either. That is not the rest that is in view. This should be clear from the context. Throughout this epistle the writer used the terms "rest" and "inheritance" as the Old Testament used them when speaking of what the Israelites in the wilderness anticipated. These terms refer to blessings that God's people could anticipate in the next stage of their lives if they followed Him faithfully in the present stage of their lives.

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<sup>141</sup>See Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, p. 84.

<sup>142</sup>Lane, p. 98. Cf. Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 788.

<sup>143</sup>G. H. Lang, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 73.

<sup>144</sup>Bruce, p. 78. By "heavenly husband" he meant Christ.

<sup>145</sup>Gleason, p. 297, took it as the right to worship before the personal presence of Yahweh.

- 4:2 What is the "good news" that both the Israelites and the original readers of this epistle had heard preached to them? It was probably the news about their inheritance and the possibility of entering into their rest. This seems clear from the context. This is not a reference to the gospel message. The good news the Israelites heard did not profit them because they refused to trust God but rebelled against Him. Likewise the good news of our inheritance and rest may not profit us if we fail to trust God but turn from Him in unbelief. Remember that by inheritance Moses and this writer meant all that God wanted and wants to give His people. We will all receive many blessings even if we apostatize because we are God's children whom He has promised to glorify (1 Pet. 1:3-9). Nevertheless we will not enter into full rest or experience all we could inherit if we depart from God.
- 4:3 A better translation of "we who have believed" would be "we who believe" (Gr. *pisteusantes*, aorist active participle). The writer was not looking back to initial faith that resulted in justification but to present faith that would result in entering into rest (inheritance). The quotation from Psalm 95:11 emphasizes the impossibility of entering without faith. The writer added that this was true even though God had planned rest for His people when He created the world. God's purpose and provision did not guarantee that His people would experience it. This depended also on their faith. Even Moses failed to enter rest in the Promised Land because he failed to trust God at Meribah (Num. 20:12).
- 4:4-5 The writer evidently introduced the idea of God resting on the seventh day (cf. v. 3) because it illustrates the fact that rest follows work. The work God called the Israelites in the wilderness to do was trusting and obeying Him. This would have resulted in rest from wandering in the wilderness, rest in the land, if they had carried it out. The work He calls us to do is also continuing to trust and obey Him. If we do this we can look forward to receiving our full inheritance (rest) when we see the Lord, but if we turn from God we cannot. The writer stated the positive prospect in verse 4 and the negative possibility in verse 5.
- 4:6-7 All the descendants of Abraham did not lose their opportunity to receive God's inheritance because the generation of Israelites living during the wilderness wanderings failed God. In David's day God re-extended His offer of entering rest, and that generation had to respond. They had their "today" of opportunity also. Every generation of believers needs to continue to trust and obey to enter into our rest (inheritance).

*Tinas* ["Some"] is generally explained as implying a warning that not all the readers are certain to receive what God promises (cf. . . . , 3:12; also v. 13; 4:1, 11 . . . )."<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>Ellingworth, p. 250.

4:8 The prospect of rest for the Israelites, specifically the possession of the Promised Land and life in it, did not end when Joshua defeated the Canaanites. Each succeeding generation had to continue to trust and obey God to assure its own rest in the land.

4:9 The Sabbath rest in view is the rest (inheritance) that every generation of believers and every individual believer enters into when he or she, like God, faithfully finishes his or her work. That work involves continuing to trust and obey God (i.e., walking by faith daily as opposed to apostatizing). Christians will enter into our rest when we receive our inheritance from Jesus Christ at His judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10).

Millennial rest in the Promised Land will be the portion of Israel in the future.<sup>147</sup> However this passage seems to be referring to eternal rest for all believers of which the Millennium is just the beginning. Israel will be the primary people God blesses and makes a blessing in the Millennium. Neither is this Sabbath rest the present rest that Christians enjoy because God has finished His work of providing salvation for us in Christ and we have entered into it by faith. That should be clear because the rest in view is still future for us (cf. vv. 1, 6, 9, 11).

4:10 When we enter that rest we can cease walking by faith because then we will experience what we now only hope for (11:1; cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). We will cease from our work as God did from His. The Hebrew word translated "rested" in Genesis 2:2 literally means "ceased." His work of creating did not exhaust God. He simply stopped creating on the seventh day.

4:11 In the meantime we need to follow Jesus and Moses' examples of faithfulness to God. We need to carry out the work He has given us to do (i.e., to continue to trust and obey rather than turning from Him; 3:2, 6, 14). Note again that the writer said he faced the same danger as his readers: "Let us" (cf. v. 16).

"We enter into rest only when we persevere in faith to the end of life. When we do this, we will obtain a share in the inheritance, the millennial land of Canaan, and will rule with Christ as one of His *metochoi* [partners] there. Rest is not just the land itself; it also includes the state or condition of 'finished work,' of final perseverance, into which the faithful Christian will enter. God has not set aside His promises to Israel. The promise of the inheritance, the land, is eternally valid, and those Christians who remain faithful

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<sup>147</sup>Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:518 (April-June 1973):149-50, also interpreted the rest as future, but he believed that first Israel and then all believers would fulfill this promise by possessing the Promised Land in the Millennium.

to their Lord to the end of life will share in that inheritance along with the Old Testament saints."<sup>148</sup>

Notice that Christians need to be diligent to enter that rest. If the rest were just heaven, we would not have to exercise diligence because God has promised that all believers will go to heaven (John 10:27-28; Rom. 8:30; Phil. 1:6; et al.). If the rest were just the rest we presently enjoy because God has forgiven our sins, we would not have to be diligent to enter it either because we already have entered into that rest.

4:12 After we die or experience the Rapture, God will do a spiritual postmortem on us at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). He will examine our innermost attitudes and motives. The "scalpel" He will use is His Word. The Word of God is "living" because it is the word of the living God (3:12), and it is "active" (energetic, powerful). The sword in view (Gr. *machairan*) was originally a small one like a boning knife that cooks used to cut up meat. In its double-edged form it was a symbol of judges and magistrates in the Roman world. It illustrated the power of those officials to turn both ways to get to the bottom of a case.<sup>149</sup> The Word of God can express and distinguish what is "soulish" (natural) and what is spiritual in our motivation and actions. It can do so even when those elements are as close to each other as our joints and marrow. It is even able to expose our thoughts and attitudes (cf. 1 Cor. 4:5).

"What the author is saying is that God's Word can reach to the innermost recesses of our being. We must not think that we can bluff our way out of anything, for there are no secrets hidden from God. We cannot keep our thoughts to ourselves."<sup>150</sup>

Many Christians use this verse to show that God will judge unbelievers with His piercing Word, but in the context it refers to God judging believers to determine rewards (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

4:13 Our Lord will examine every Christian; not one can avoid His judgment seat. This prospect should motivate every Christian to remain faithful to God until we see Him. We should "fear" (v. 1) as we anticipate it. Will God find us faithful when we see Him?

4:14 Our "great High Priest" (2:17) has already proved faithful through suffering and is now in God's presence where He intercedes for us (cf.

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<sup>148</sup>Dillow, p. 109. Millennial rest is only the beginning of eternal rest.

<sup>149</sup>Moffatt, p. 56, believed that by the time Hebrews was written *machaira* (sword) had come to mean a sword of any size, long or short.

<sup>150</sup>Morris, p. 44.

Rom. 8:34).<sup>151</sup> He is not just a priest serving on earth, like Israel's high priests. He is our file leader (2:10), and we will follow Him through the heavens one day. This great High Priest is none other than Jesus, not an angel (1:4-14) or Moses (3:2-6). He is the Son of God (1:2).

"The picture of Jesus Christ as High Priest is the most distinctive theme of Hebrews, and it is central to the theology of the book."<sup>152</sup>

Notice that this verse does not say that since we have such a High Priest we *will* hold fast our confession. Perseverance in faith and good works is not inevitable, though perseverance in salvation is (2 Tim. 2:12-13). Since we have such a High Priest we must be careful to hold fast our confession.

This verse concludes the exhortation to enter into our rest that began in 3:12.

"The warning in Hebrews 3:1-4:13 is inextricably related to the Exodus generation and the concept of rest. By referring to Moses' and Christ's faithfulness in the house of God, the writer exhorted his readers to remain faithful to their worship function in God's house as believer-priests (Heb. 3:1-6).

"The generation in the wilderness is an example of those who failed to be faithful and as a result experienced both temporal discipline and eschatological loss. A royal enthronement psalm (Ps. 95), with its past and present perspectives, was used as the basis for explaining Israel's failure.

"Hebrews 4 begins with an application to the present readers. Four times the text says that the promise of rest remains [i.e., is future] (4:1, 6, 9, 11).

"The concept of rest in Hebrews 3:1-4:13 includes (a) a historical sense related to the Exodus generation and Joshua (Ps. 95; Josh. 21:44); (b) an eschatological sense related to the Exodus (Ps. 95); and (c) the sabbath rest related to the readers with its eschatological perspective (Gen. 2:2-3; Heb. 4:9).

"The readers' entrance into this eschatological rest depends on their faithfulness in doing good works. As *metochoi* ('companions') of Christ they must be diligent to receive eschatological reward (4:11-13) at the judgment seat of Christ. Failure to persevere may result in temporal discipline (12:4-11) along with the loss of future rewards and authority to rule with Jesus in the millennium."<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Compare our "great salvation" (2:3).

<sup>152</sup>Fanning, p. 388.

<sup>153</sup>Oberholtzer, 578:196.

"The reference to Jesus in his office as high priest in v 14 is not an afterthought, but the intended conclusion of the entire argument. The crucial issue for the community is whether they will maintain their Christian stance. The issue was posed conditionally in 3:6b, and more pointedly in 3:14. It was raised again forcefully in v 14 in the exhortation to hold fast to the confession that identified Christians as those who had responded to the message they had heard with faith (cf. v 2). The ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary as a faithful high priest in the service of God gives certainty to the promise that God's people will celebrate the Sabbath in his presence if they hold fast their initial confidence."<sup>154</sup>

#### **D. THE COMPASSION OF THE SON 4:15—5:10**

Having explored the concept of Jesus as a *faithful* high priest (3:1—4:14), the writer proceeded next to develop the idea that Jesus is a *merciful* high priest in the service of God (cf. 2:17). A high priest must be faithful to God and compassionate with people. This section is entirely exposition, except for 4:16, which is an exhortation to pray. Verses 15 and 16 of chapter 4 announce the perspectives that the writer developed in 5:1-10.

- "A The old office of high priest (5:1)
- B The solidarity of the high priest with the people (5:2-3)
- C The humility of the high priest (5:4)
- C' The humility of Christ (5:5-6)
- B' The solidarity of Christ with the people (5:7-8)
- A' The new office of high priest (5:9-10) . . .

"As a unit 4:15—5:10 lays the foundation for the great central exposition of Jesus' priesthood in 7:1—10:18, where the emphasis will be placed on his dissimilarity to the Levitical priesthood."<sup>155</sup>

- 4:15            Jesus experienced temptation in every area of His life, as we do. Obviously He did not experience temptation to waste His time by watching too much television, for example. However, He experienced temptation to waste His time and to do or not do things contrary to God's will. His temptations did not come from a sinful nature, as some of ours do, since He had no sinful nature, but He suffered temptation as we do. Since He endured every temptation successfully He experienced temptations more thoroughly than we do when we yield to them before they pass. Consequently He can sympathize (feel and suffer) with us when we experience temptation. The writer's point was that Jesus understands us, He sympathizes with us, and He overcame temptation Himself.

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<sup>154</sup>Lane, p. 105.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

As an illustration of the thoroughness of Jesus' temptations, imagine a large bolder on the seacoast. Since it does not move, it experiences the full force of every wave that beats against it. Smaller pebbles that the waves move around do not because they yield to the force of the waves. Similarly Jesus' temptations were greater than ours because He never yielded to them. Likewise a prizefighter (Jesus) who defeats the champion (Satan) endures more punishment than other contenders who throw in the towel or are knocked out before the end of the fight.

"... in this epistle as high a Christology as is conceivable is combined with an emphasis on the real humanity of Jesus. Nobody insists on the limitations of Jesus' human frame as does the writer of Hebrews."<sup>156</sup>

4:16 Since we have such a High Priest to intercede for us with God, we can approach God confidently in prayer (cf. 3:6; 10:19, 35). Every Christian can come to God's heavenly throne, not just the high priests of Judaism. The high priests of Judaism could only approach God at His earthly throne, in the holy of holies in the tabernacle or temple, once a year. God's throne of judgment has become a throne of grace (undeserved help) for us now. Our Sovereign will be merciful (not giving us what we deserve) and gracious (giving us what we do not deserve). This verse again contrasts the superiority of Christianity over Judaism.

5:1 To qualify for the high priesthood in Israel one had to be a man. He also had to stand between God and people as their representative before Him. His services included presenting gifts (offerings) of worship and sacrifices for sin.

"Although it would be natural to distinguish between *dora*, 'gifts' (i.e., peace and cereal offerings), and *thysiai*, 'sacrifices' (i.e., the sin and trespass offerings), in later statements in the OT all sacrifices pertain to the procuring of atonement and the removal of sin (cf. Ezek 45:15-17). The bloody offerings for the Day of Atonement are in the foreground of the discussion of the sacrificial ministry of the Levitical high priest here and elsewhere in Hebrews (cf. 7:27; 10:4, 12, 26)."<sup>157</sup>

5:2-3 He also had to be a compassionate person. This grew out of his own consciousness of being a sinner himself. In other words, he needed not only to carry out his duties acceptably, but he also needed to do so with the proper attitudes and feelings. "Deal gently with" (Gr. *metriopathein*) means neither indifferent to moral lapses nor harsh.

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<sup>156</sup>Morris, p. 17.

<sup>157</sup>Lane, p. 116. Exodus 28:1, 3; 29:1 stressed that the high priest was appointed for God, but in this verse the writer said that he was appointed for men. Obviously both statements are true.

"Although nothing is said in the Old Testament about moral qualities [such as compassion], the writer has deduced this quality of gentle understanding from the basic fact that the high priest is essentially a man among men."<sup>158</sup>

The evidence of Israel's high priest's sinfulness was the fact that he had to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as for those of the people. Since Jesus Christ was sinless he did not need to do this (4:15; 7:27). However, Jesus Christ's compassion exceeded that of other high priests.

5:4 Finally, a man could attain the high priesthood only by divine appointment.

"The essential nature of a high priest is that he should be chosen by God to act for his fellows in offering sacrifices related to the removal of sin."<sup>159</sup>

Only those whom God chose served in this office. These people were primarily Aaron and his successors. This ceased to be true after Israel lost her sovereignty as a nation, beginning with the Babylonian captivity. Then the high priesthood became a political appointment. However the writer was speaking of Israel as a sovereign nation. Disaster befell those individuals who took it upon themselves to perform high priestly duties without divine authorization (Korah, Num. 16; Saul, 1 Sam. 13:8-14; Uzziah, 2 Chron. 26:16-21). The writer stressed the essential humility of the high priest who stood in his privileged position only by divine appointment. He was not stressing the dignity of his office or the grandeur of his call to his office.<sup>160</sup>

5:5-6 God appointed Christ as king when He sat down at the right hand of God following His ascension (1:5).<sup>161</sup> He presumably appointed Him priest at the same time. These two offices and functions were primary in the writer's argument in this epistle. Psalm 2:7-9 and Psalm 110:1 (cf. 1:13) predicted Messiah's reign. Psalm 110:4 also predicted His priesthood.<sup>162</sup> The same God who appointed Jesus as His Son also appointed Him high priest *forever* (cf. 6:20; 7:17, 21, 24, 28). We have a great high priest, Jesus the Son of God, and it is as He is Son that He carries out His vocation of high priest.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup>Guthrie, p. 125.

<sup>159</sup>Ellingworth, p. 272.

<sup>160</sup>Lane, p. 117.

<sup>161</sup>The title "Christ" (Anointed One) stresses our Lord's humility. As the Anointed of God, Jesus (cf. 4:14) did not exalt Himself as He might well have done. Guthrie, p. 127.

<sup>162</sup>No other New Testament writer referred to Ps. 110:4, but this writer quoted it three times (cf. 7:17, 21) and alluded to it eight more times (in chs. 5—7). See D. M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>163</sup>Moffatt, p. 64.

"The appeal to Melchizedek, who as the first priest mentioned in Scripture is the archetype of all priesthood, validates Jesus' priesthood as different from and superior to the Levitical priesthood."<sup>164</sup>

"When . . . Jerusalem fell into David's hands and became his capital city (II Sam. 5:6ff.), he and his heirs became successors to Melchizedek's kingship, and probably also (in a titular capacity at least) to the priesthood of God Most High."<sup>165</sup>

"All that a priest does in offering sacrifice for men Christ does. But whereas they do it only symbolically, he really effects atonement.

"There was no succession of priests from Melchizedek and thus no 'order.' Jesus, however, was a priest of this kind—not like Aaron and his successors."<sup>166</sup>

- 5:7 The phrase "days of his flesh [Gr. *sarx*]" draws attention to the weakness that characterized Jesus' life during His earthly sojourn. Jesus' offerings to God (cf. v. 1) included His prayers and petitions. Specifically, Jesus' prayers from Gethsemane and the cross that were part of His offering of worship and expiation to God illustrate this (cf. Ps. 22:22-24; Heb. 2:12). However, Jesus' entire passion ministry is probably in view here.<sup>167</sup> God heard and granted Jesus' prayers, the evidence of which is Jesus' resurrection (cf. Ps. 22:22-31). "Piety" means reverent submission, godly fear, and trust. Jesus' prayers show His ability to sympathize with those He represents (vv. 2-3; cf. John 17).<sup>168</sup>
- 5:8 Even though Jesus was the Son of God (Son though He was), and as such perfect in one sense, He gained something through His sufferings. He gained experiential knowledge of what being a human involves. Similarly Jesus grew in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). He learned obedience in the sense that He learned to obey His father's will as a human. For Jesus, God's will involved suffering (cf. Phil. 2:6-8).

"Innocence is life untested, but virtue is innocence tested and triumphant."<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>164</sup>Lane, p. 123.

<sup>165</sup>Bruce, pp. 95-96.

<sup>166</sup>Morris, p. 49.

<sup>167</sup>Lane, p. 120.

<sup>168</sup>The writer of Hebrews said more about Jesus' priestly ministry than any other New Testament writer. See Manson, pp. 109-10.

<sup>169</sup>Thomas, p. 64.

"Here the remarkable thing is that Jesus had to suffer, not because but although he was *huios* [son], which shows that Jesus is Son in a unique sense; as applied to Jesus *huios* means something special. As divine *huios* in the sense of I<sup>1f</sup> [1:1-2], it might have been expected that he would be exempt from such a discipline."<sup>170</sup>

5:9 This experience perfected Jesus Christ in the sense that it completed Him by giving Him experiential knowledge of what human beings must endure. Obeying God means trusting Him (cf. John 6:29; Acts 6:7; Rom. 10:16; 1 Pet. 1:22). Jesus is, of course, the source of eternal, not just temporal, salvation to all who initially believe on Him. However in view of the writer's emphasis it may be that he was also referring here to the ultimate aspect of our salvation, our eternal inheritance (1:14; 9:15). We obtain this to the extent that we "obey" God, and obey Him through suffering as Jesus did (cf. Mark 8:34-35).<sup>171</sup> Jesus Christ is the source (cause) of our inheritance not only because it comes from Him, but also because as our file leader He has blazed a trail through suffering for us (2:10). He is also the source of our inheritance because as our High Priest He provides what we need to live obediently to God.

"It is a nice touch that he who learned to obey brought salvation to those who obey."<sup>172</sup>

5:10 It was for this purpose that God appointed Jesus as our High Priest. The writer developed the subject of the order of Melchizedek later (ch. 7).

Jesus Christ is not only superior to angels (1:5-14) and Moses (3:1-6) but also Aaron (5:1-10).

"The orientation given to the exposition is intensely practical. The solidarity of the heavenly high priest with the community in its weakness provides a strong motivation for earnest prayer. The demand to draw near to the one who is thoroughly familiar with the human condition, who suffers with their suffering, and who is therefore qualified to mediate renewed strength (4:15-16) is an appeal to recognize the importance of prayer in the rhythm of Christian life."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup>Moffatt, p. 66.

<sup>171</sup>Cf. Dillow, p. 132.

<sup>172</sup>Morris, p. 50.

<sup>173</sup>Lane, p. 123.

### **III. THE HIGH PRIESTLY OFFICE OF THE SON 5:11—10:39**

The transition from exposition (4:15—5:10) to exhortation (5:11—6:20) marks the beginning of a new division in this sermon. The structure of this division is as follows.<sup>174</sup>

- a Preliminary exhortation (5:11—6:20)
  - A The priest who is like Melchizedek (7:1-28)
  - B The single, personal sacrifice for sins (8:1—9:28)
  - C The achievement of eternal salvation (10:1-18)
- a' Concluding exhortation (10:19-39)

A central theme of Hebrews, redemptive sacrifice, now comes into prominence in this section of the text.

#### **A. THE DANGER OF IMMATUREITY (THE THIRD WARNING) 5:11—6:12**

"Dull of hearing" (5:11) and "sluggish" (6:12, Gr. *nothroi* in both cases) form an *inclusio* that frames this pericope and sets it off as a distinct textual segment.<sup>175</sup> The first two warnings in Hebrews were against drifting (2:1-4) and disbelief (3:7-19). All the warning passages in Hebrews involve actions in relation to the Word of God.

"It is commonly assumed on the basis of 5:11—6:3 that the community addressed had failed to mature in faith and understanding, and consequently required rudimentary instruction rather than the advanced exposition of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice presented in 7:1—10:18. The problem with this reconstruction of the situation is that it is not supported by the detail of the text. The biblical interpretation and the presentation of christology in 1:1—5:10 presuppose advanced Christian instruction and a level of understanding that corresponds to the adult consumption of solid food and not to a diet of milk. In addition, the writer shows no inclination to review with his hearers the foundational elements of the Christian faith [6:1]. He clearly regarded the hearers as mature. He reminds them that they have ingested over a considerable period of time the instruction that qualified them to be the teachers of others (5:12). Consequently, the portrayal of them as infants who have to be nurtured with milk is not an actual description of some or all of the members of the community. It is irony, calculated to shame them and to recall them to the stance of conviction and boldness consonant with their experience (6:4-5, 10) and hope (6:9-12). The community has deviated from its earlier course (cf. 10:32-34) by becoming sluggish in understanding (5:12). Their regression to infancy must represent a quite recent development. It was apparently an attempt to sidestep their responsibility in a world that persecuted them and held them in contempt, but it threatened their integrity. The purpose of 5:11—6:12 is to preserve the community from

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>175</sup>This Greek word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament.

such aberration by reminding them of what they have experienced and what they possess through the gospel . . ."176

"If you keep in mind that the emphasis in this section is on *making spiritual progress*, you will steer safely through misinterpretations that could create problems."<sup>177</sup>

### **1. The readers' condition 5:11-14**

5:11 "Him" refers to Melchizedek (v. 10; cf. 6:20—10:18). Evidently the original readers had begun to let their minds wander as they heard the same things repeatedly. Rather than listening carefully, hearing completely, and comprehending clearly, they had become mentally and spiritually dull in their hearing. They were not slow learners but had allowed themselves to grow lazy. A spiritual callus was growing over their ears.

"Deafness or dullness in receptivity is a dangerous condition for those who have been called to radical obedience. The importance of responsible listening has been stressed repeatedly in the sermon (2:1 . . .; cf. 3:7b-8a, 15; 4:1-2, 7b)."<sup>178</sup>

"One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression, or backsliding, is a dullness toward the Bible. Sunday School class is dull, the preaching is dull, anything spiritual is dull. The problem is usually not with the Sunday School teacher or the pastor, but with the believer himself."<sup>179</sup>

5:12 Every Christian becomes capable of instructing others when he or she learns the elementary truths of the faith. This is true whether one has the gift of teaching (i.e., the ability to communicate with unusual clarity and effectiveness) or not. However when we fail to pass on what we know we begin to lose what we know. Eventually we may need to relearn the most basic teachings of Scripture. When we stop growing, we start shrinking. We do not just stay the same.

"Christians who have really progressed in the faith ought to be able to instruct others (as 1 Peter 3:15 shows; cf. Rom. 2:21)."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>Lane, p. 135. For defense of the view that Jesus is the object of faith in this passage, and not just our model and enabler of faith, see Victor (Sung-Yul) Rhee, "Christology and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 5:11—6:20," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 2000):83-96.

<sup>177</sup>Wiersbe, 2:294.

<sup>178</sup>Lane, p. 136.

<sup>179</sup>Wiersbe, 2:294.

<sup>180</sup>Morris, p. 51.

5:13 Immature babies consume only milk. They cannot chew and assimilate solid food because they are immature.<sup>181</sup> Similarly immature Christians take in only the basics of the gospel because they cannot receive and assimilate the more advanced aspects of the faith. They cannot do this because they have not tried repeatedly (practiced) to understand and apply these more advanced truths. This is a picture of Christians who have been content to know and practice only the most elementary lessons of their faith. They are too lazy to do what is necessary to grow. Of course, even mature adults continue to need milk, which is pre-digested food, but they can also eat solid food.

5:14 The writer's point in these verses is not just that spiritual babies lack information, which they do, but that they lack experience. A person becomes a mature Christian not only by gaining information, though that is foundational, but by using that information to make decisions that are in harmony with God's will. "The word of righteousness" (v. 13) is the solid food that results in righteous behavior. In this context the "solid food" must refer to instruction about the high priestly office of Jesus Christ (cf. 7:1—10:18). Practice is essential for maturity. Consequently a new Christian cannot be mature even though he or she follows the leading of the Spirit (i.e., is "spiritual," cf. 1 Cor. 2:14—3:3).

"Spiritual maturity comes neither from isolated events nor from a great spiritual burst. It comes from a steady application of spiritual discipline."<sup>182</sup>

The readers were in danger of not comprehending what the writer had to tell them because they had not put what they did understand into practice in their lives. Instead, they were thinking of departing from the truth.

"As we grow in the Word, we learn to use it in daily life. As we apply the Word, we exercise our 'spiritual senses' and develop spiritual discernment. It is a characteristic of little children that they lack discernment. A baby will put anything into its mouth. An immature believer will listen to any preacher on the radio or television and not be able to identify whether or not he is true to the Scriptures."<sup>183</sup>

This section gives four marks of spiritual immaturity: laziness (dullness) toward the Word (v. 11), inability to teach the Word to others (v. 12), a diet of only elementary truths in the Word (vv. 12-13), and lack of skill in applying the Word (v. 14). As with the muscles in our bodies, if we do not use what we have gained spiritually we will lose it (cf. 2 Pet. 3:18).

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<sup>181</sup>Moffatt, pp. 70-71, noted that comparing milk and solid food was very common in Greek ethical philosophy. Thus the readers would have had no question about the writer's meaning.

<sup>182</sup>Guthrie, p. 136.

<sup>183</sup>Wiersbe, 2:295.

## **2. The needed remedy 6:1-3**

The writer proceeded to explain what the community of Christians that he addressed should do to change its dangerous condition.

6:1 Since they needed stretching mentally they should, with the writer, "press on to maturity." That is, they should not be content with their present condition. In this context spiritual maturity involves receiving and responding appropriately to revealed truth (5:14), zeal for the realization of hope (v. 11), and unwavering faith and steadfast endurance (v. 12).<sup>184</sup>

"It is a moral duty to grow up, and the duty involves an effort."<sup>185</sup>

The verb translated "let us press on" (*pherometha*) is in the passive voice. We could render it, "Let us be carried on" (i.e., by God's Spirit). Spiritual maturity does not come merely by striving in self-effort but by cooperating with God as we do His will while depending on His help. It comes as we follow the Holy Spirit who leads and empowers us (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16).

". . . they are saved. They are genuine believers. Thus their need is not knowledge; rather, they need to use the knowledge they possess."<sup>186</sup>

The writer proposed that his readers leave elementary teaching concerning the Messiah in the past. They did not need to learn that again, presumably by catechetical instruction.<sup>187</sup> They did not need further instruction about abandoning confidence in works for salvation (either as part of the Levitical rituals or just as legalism) and turning to God in faith. This too was foundational truth they did not need to learn again.

6:2 They did not need further instruction in four other subjects either. "Washings" evidently refers to the doctrine of spiritual cleansing. The Greek word translated "washings" is *baptismos* that refers to Jewish ceremonial washings whenever it occurs in the New Testament (Mark 7:4, 8; Heb. 9:10). A different Greek word (*baptisma*) describes Christian baptism. This means the writer here referred not to baptism but to spiritual cleansing.

The "laying on of hands" in Judaism was part of the sacrificial ritual (Lev. 1:4; 3:2; 4:4; 8:14; 16:21; et al.) and commissioning for public office (Num. 27:18, 23; Deut. 34:9; cf. Acts 6:6; 13:3). In the early church the

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<sup>184</sup>Lane, p. 140.

<sup>185</sup>Moffatt, p. 72. Cf. 2 Peter.

<sup>186</sup>Pentecost, p. 103.

<sup>187</sup>Bruce, p. 112.

imparting of the Holy Spirit sometimes accompanied this practice (Acts 8:17-18; 19:6; cf. v. 4, 2:4; 10:29).

The Old Testament taught the resurrection of the dead (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2) and eternal judgment (Gen. 18:25; Isa. 33:22).

"We are responsible people, and one day we shall rise from the dead and give account of ourselves to God. This must have been of importance to new converts in a time when many people thought of death as the end of everything."<sup>188</sup>

The writer presented the six foundational teachings in verses 1 and 2 in three pairs.

1. Repentance from dead works, and faith toward God (v. 1)
2. Instruction about washings, and laying on of hands (v. 2a)
3. Instruction about the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (v. 2b)

The structure of this sentence in Greek suggests that the last two pairs explain the first pair. Laying the foundation of repentance and faith consists of instruction regarding washings, sortilege (laying on hands), resurrection, and judgment. The first pair points God-ward, the second man-ward, and the third forward into the future.

Each of these teachings was foundational in Judaism as well as in Christianity. Most of the original readers would have come to believe these truths even before they became Christians. They are very basic.

6:3 We will press on to maturity "if God permits." The writer again (v. 1) acknowledged dependence on God for spiritual growth. We can continue to grow only as He enables us to do so.

"It seems that the apostle here addresses true Christians, as non-Christians cannot grow in their ability to experientially apply the word of righteousness to daily life and have their spiritual senses trained in spiritual discernment."<sup>189</sup>

What does a stagnant, sour believer need? He or she needs to mature. How does growth toward maturity take place? It happens when, by God's grace, the believer responds positively to further revelation beyond the basics. We see examples of the danger the writer warned his readers about all around us. Many Christians attend churches where they only hear the basics repeatedly. Their ears become dull, they stop growing, and

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<sup>188</sup>Morris, p. 54.

<sup>189</sup>Dillow, p. 434. His whole nineteenth chapter, pp. 433-55, deals with Hebrews 6.

many of them turn away from the faith. Those who put themselves under the challenge of more advanced teaching and respond properly to it grow more mature.

### **3. The dreadful alternative 6:4-8**

The writer pointed out the consequences of not pressing on to maturity to motivate his readers to pursue spiritual growth diligently (cf. 2 Pet. 1:5; 3:8).

Christians have interpreted this passage in many different ways. Some believe that those who fall away (v. 6) are believers who lose their salvation.<sup>190</sup> Others hold that those who fall away are people who have professed to be believers but really are not.<sup>191</sup> Still others take the whole situation as hypothetical. They believe that if a Christian could lose his salvation, which he cannot, it would be impossible for him to be saved again.<sup>192</sup> Another view is that only Hebrew Christians living before the destruction of the temple could commit this sin, whatever it is. The view that I believe harmonizes best with the writer's emphasis is that those who fall away are believers who turn away from God's truth and embrace error (i.e., apostates).<sup>193</sup> The vast majority of scholars view these people as genuine believers.<sup>194</sup>

"The transition from the first person (vv. 1-3) to the third person suggests that the author does not wish explicitly to identify the people described with the readers of the epistle. This may be partly out of tact; it is certainly (cf. v. 9) in part because he believes that his readers can still avoid apostasy."<sup>195</sup>

6:4           The writer could describe Christians fairly as those who were once "enlightened" (cf. 10:32; 2 Cor. 4:3-6). The "heavenly gift" of which they have "tasted" (cf. 2:9) at conversion seems to refer to salvation (cf. John 4:10; Rom. 6:23; James 1:17-18). Any attempt to interpret tasting as only partial appropriation (i.e., the idea that they tasted it but did not swallow it) is not credible.<sup>196</sup>

"This is not to explain Scripture, [but] to explain it away in favour of some preconceived doctrine."<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>190</sup>E.g., Westcott, pp. 148-53; Moffatt, pp. 76-82; I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God*; and other Arminian writers.

<sup>191</sup>E.g. Bruce, pp. 118-25; Philip E. Hughes, pp. 206-24; Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, pp. 298-320; E. Schuyler English, *Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 160-68; Homer A. Kent Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 107-15; R. Kent Hughes, 1:156-57; *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1315.

<sup>192</sup>E.g., Guthrie, pp. 140-46; Thomas Hewett, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 106-11; Thomas, pp. 72-75; Kenneth S. Wuest, "Hebrews Six in the Greek New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:473 (January 1962):45-53; Wiersbe, 2:297; *The Ryrie Study Bible: New Testament. King James Version*, p. 404.

<sup>193</sup>I have listed others who hold this view following the discussion of verse 8.

<sup>194</sup>Marshall, p. 142.

<sup>195</sup>Ellingworth, p. 318.

<sup>196</sup>E.g., John MacArthur, *Hebrews*, p. 143.

<sup>197</sup>F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, p. 82.

Elsewhere the same Greek word refers to complete appropriation (e.g., Jesus Christ tasted death for everyone, 2:9; cf. 1 Pet. 2:1-3).<sup>198</sup> Christians become "partakers" (cf. 1:9, "companions"; and 3:1, 14, "partakers") of the Holy Spirit through Spirit baptism.

6:5 Every true Christian has tasted the Word of God and found it to be good to some extent. The original readers had also tasted the powers (lit. miracles) of the coming messianic age. They had observed the apostles perform miracles (cf. 2:4). The five events listed in verses 4 and 5 view salvation from different aspects and manifestations; they do not present a succession of salvific events.<sup>199</sup>

"Together, the clauses describe vividly the reality of the experience of personal salvation enjoyed by the Christians addressed."<sup>200</sup>

"The warnings are clearly not addressed to nominal Christians, but to those who have shared, as fully as it is possible to share in the present time, in the blessings which accompany and follow entry into the Christian life (6:4f.)."<sup>201</sup>

6:6 Earlier in this letter the writer warned his Christian readers about drifting away from the truth through negligence (2:1-4). He also warned them about failing to continue trusting God and walking by faith (3:7-19). Now he referred to the same apostasy as "falling away."

"The aorist tense indicates a decisive moment of commitment to apostasy. In the LXX, the term *parapiptein* has reference to the expression of a total attitude reflecting deliberate and calculated renunciation of God (Ezek 20:27; 22:4; Wis 6:9; 12:2; cf. Michaelis, *TDNT* 6:171 . . .).<sup>202</sup> In Hebrews it is equivalent to the expression *apostenai apo theou zontos*, 'to fall away from the living God,' in 3:12. Apostasy entailed a decisive rejection of God's gifts, similar to the rejection of the divine promise by the Exodus generation at Kadesh (3:7—4:2 . . .). . . . What is visualized by the expressions in v 6 is every form of departure from faith in the crucified Son of God. This could entail a return to Jewish convictions and practices as well as the public

<sup>198</sup>This is an Old Testament usage as well (cf. Ps. 34:8). Guthrie, p. 141.

<sup>199</sup>Philip E. Hughes, "Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Peril of Apostasy," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 (1973):143.

<sup>200</sup>Lane, p. 141.

<sup>201</sup>Ellingworth, p. 75.

<sup>202</sup>Cf. Philip E. Hughes, "Hebrews 6 . . .," pp. 146-50.

denial of faith in Christ under pressure from a magistrate or a hostile crowd, simply for personal advantage (cf. Mark 8:34-38 . . .)"<sup>203</sup>

Falling away from the truth is no hypothetical possibility but a tragic reality in too many cases among believers (cf. Num. 14:27-32; Gen. 25:29-34; Heb. 3:7-19; 10:23-25, 35-39).<sup>204</sup> Christians departed from the faith in the first century (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:17-18) and they do so today (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1).

"The author repeatedly urges his readers to maintain their Christian profession and confidence (cf. 3:6, 12-15; 6:11, 12; 10:23-25). The man who falls away is evidently the one who casts that confidence, and its attendant reward, aside (10:25)."<sup>205</sup>

To what is it impossible for an apostate to be renewed? The writer said it is repentance, not forgiveness or salvation. Immediately the question arises whether this explanation is realistic since some believers who have departed from the truth have repented and returned to the fold of the faithful. I believe the writer meant that in the case of apostates, the really hard cases who are persistently hostile to Christ, it is impossible to restore such people to repentance (cf. vv. 1, 3, 7-8).<sup>206</sup> This inability to repent is the result of sin's hardening effect about which the writer had sounded a warning earlier (3:13). It is also the result of divine judgment (cf. Pharaoh, Exod. 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17).<sup>207</sup>

"God has pledged Himself to pardon all who truly repent, but Scripture and experience alike suggest that it is possible for human beings to arrive at a state of heart and life where they can no longer repent."<sup>208</sup>

"That certain persons could not repent of their sins was, e.g., an idea admitted in rabbinic Judaism."<sup>209</sup>

Even God cannot renew these apostates to repentance because He has chosen not to do so.

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<sup>203</sup>Lane, p. 142. Cf. J. C. McCullough, "The Impossibility of a Second Repentance in Hebrews," *Biblical Theology* 20 (1974):2-3.

<sup>204</sup>Lane, p. 141.

<sup>205</sup>Hodges, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>206</sup>The word "apostate" refers to extreme cases of departure from the truth. We usually refer to less serious departure as backsliding.

<sup>207</sup>This writer also wrote about three other impossible things. It is impossible for God to lie (v. 18), for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (10:4), and for someone to please God without faith (11:6).

<sup>208</sup>Bruce, p. 124.

<sup>209</sup>Moffatt, p. 77.

". . . the author does recognize the possibility that one may have regressed so far that it is impossible to again make progress toward maturity. He therefore states in verses 4-6 that it may be impossible to renew certain believers so that they can progress toward maturity."<sup>210</sup>

Would it not glorify God more for apostates to repent? Evidently by making it impossible for them to repent God will bring greater glory to Himself than if they did repent. Consider the glory that came to God because the Pharaoh of the Exodus did not repent.

God allows this hard condition because by repudiating Jesus Christ these apostates dishonor Him. The writer spoke of this dishonor as taking the side of Jesus' enemies who crucified Him and publicly humiliated Him. The apostates in view crucify Him in the sense of passing judgment against Him again, by repudiating Him and His work, as those who literally crucified Jesus did. Evidently these "hard cases" are not those who turn away from just any aspect of God's will but specifically the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

"The meaning of the vivid phrase ["they again crucify to themselves the Son of God"] is that they put Jesus out of their life, they break off all connexion [*sic*] with him; he is dead to them."<sup>211</sup>

"Anyone who turned back from Christianity to Judaism would be identifying himself not only with Jewish unbelief, but with that malice which led to the crucifixion of Jesus."<sup>212</sup>

". . . once Christ and his sacrifice have been rejected, there is nowhere else to turn. . . . The 'impossibility' of a second repentance is thus not psychological or more generally related to the human condition; it is in the strict sense theological, related to God's saving action in Christ."<sup>213</sup>

"Just as the Hebrew spies who returned from their expedition carrying visible tokens of the good land of Canaan nevertheless failed to enter the land because of their unbelief, so those who had come to know the blessings of the new covenant might nevertheless in a

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<sup>210</sup>Pentecost, pp. 105-6.

<sup>211</sup>Moffatt, p. 80.

<sup>212</sup>Guthrie, p. 144.

<sup>213</sup>Ellingworth, p. 323.

spiritual sense turn back in heart to Egypt and so forfeit the saints' everlasting rest."<sup>214</sup>

Not only did the 10 spies fail to enter the Promised Land through unbelief, but so did the whole adult generation of Israelites who left Egypt with Moses (Num. 14).<sup>215</sup> Two New Testament examples of these "hard cases" may be Hymenaeus and Alexander. Paul said he had turned them over to Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme because they had apostatized (1 Tim. 1:18-20).

6:7 "A double illustration forms a transition between the negative and positive realities described in vv. 4-6 and vv. 9-12:

vv. 4-6	v. 7	v. 8	vv. 9-12
negative reality	positive image	negative image	positive reality" <sup>216</sup>

In the illustration in this verse the ground represents believers who drink in the water of God's Word and bear fruit as a result. This kind of response leads to God bestowing a blessing on those individuals who by their fruit-bearing have been a blessing to others (cf. Matt. 13:23).

6:8 If no good fruit results, however, only dangerous and destructive thorns, God will bring judgment on this ground rather than blessing it (cf. John 15:2, 6).

"Worthless" literally means disapproved (Gr. *adokimos*). It does not mean totally rejected but failing to gain God's blessing (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27). It is "in danger of being cursed" but is not cursed as unbelievers are. "Burned" does not mean burned in hell (cf. 1 Cor. 3:13-15). In ancient times, as well as today, farmers often burned their fields to removed unwanted vegetation, not to destroy the field itself. This is evidently a judgment on a believer that God allows because of his or her apostasy (cf. Isa. 9:18-19; 10:17; John 15:6; Heb. 10:17). The judgment might result in premature death in some cases (cf. 1 John 5:16-17). However the text does not warrant concluding that this fate will befall every apostate. Some "fields" once burned turn out to be more productive in the future, and that might be what God's judgment would lead to in the case of some apostates (cf. 1 Tim. 1:19-20). The purpose of the burning (chastening) is restoration to fruitfulness (cf. 13:1-9, 18-23).

<sup>214</sup>Bruce, pp. 119-20. Cf. 3:7-11. See also Lang, pp. 98-107.

<sup>215</sup>It was impossible for them to repent in the sense that, even though they confessed their sin of unbelief (Num. 14:40), God would not permit them to enter the land (Num. 14:41-45).

<sup>216</sup>Ellingworth, p. 325.

The history of the interpretation I have offered in this passage, and in Hebrews generally, is as follows. Robert Govett was one of the earliest modern authors who wrote on the theme of the Christian's rewards.<sup>217</sup> He was also a leading figure in the school of thought that took the warnings of Hebrews as being addressed to Christians who were eternally saved and secure. However some in this school also believed that unfaithful Christians would miss the Millennium and spend 1,000 years in a kind of "purgatory." Those in this school include G. H. Lang,<sup>218</sup> R. E. Neighbor,<sup>219</sup> and probably Philip Mauro.<sup>220</sup>

Among the standard commentators B. F. Westcott, James Moffatt, and I. Howard Marshall, as well as most others, took the view that the writer addressed true Christians in the warning passages. These three men took what we would call an Arminian stance, believing true Christians can lose their salvation, but they believed the writer addressed Christians in these passages.

Students sometimes assume that the view that the writer addressed only false professors (i.e., not genuine Christians) is the majority view, but it is not. It is, however, the most popular Calvinistic interpretation.

Another modern writer who takes this passage as I do is R. T. Kendall.<sup>221</sup> He also discussed briefly the history of this interpretation in the church fathers.<sup>222</sup> Hodges also holds this view<sup>223</sup> as do Oberholtzer,<sup>224</sup> Dillow,<sup>225</sup> Gleason,<sup>226</sup> and others.

#### **4. The encouraging prospect 6:9-12**

Even though the danger his readers faced was great, the writer believed they could avoid it. Consequently he concluded this warning, as he did the ones in 2:1-4 and 3:1—4:16, with a word of hope to encourage his audience.

6:9           The "better things" in view reflect the writer's confidence that his readers would not turn away from the truth. He based his confidence on their realizing the dreadful consequences of apostasy that he had just explained. "Salvation" refers to the full salvation ahead of them about which he had been speaking throughout this epistle (cf. 1:14).

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<sup>217</sup>See his *Entrance Into the Kingdom*.

<sup>218</sup>*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 106-7.

<sup>219</sup>*If They Shall Fall Away*.

<sup>220</sup>*God's Pilgrims*.

<sup>221</sup>He has a good exposition of verses 4-6 in Appendix 2 of *Once Saved, Always Saved*, pp. 219-28; cf. pp. 175-99. Kendall succeeded D. Martin Lloyd-Jones as minister of Westminster Chapel, London, England.

<sup>222</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 224-25.

<sup>223</sup>"Hebrews," *The Gospel* . . . .

<sup>224</sup>See "The Warning . . .," 145:319-28.

<sup>225</sup>*The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 433-55.

<sup>226</sup>Randall C. Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:617 (January-March 1998):62-91.

"The things to which he refers are defined in the following verses (6:10-12): work and love, diligence to the end, and faith and patience. Salvation is the victorious participation with Christ in the coming kingdom as it is in Heb. 1:14, which only those who persevere as companions of the King will inherit. The writer obviously expects that his readers will persevere to the end, enter into rest, and obtain these blessings."<sup>227</sup>

This is the only place in the epistle where the writer referred to his readers as "beloved" (dear friends). This affectionate address softens the severity of the warning just given (vv. 4-8). Verses 9-12 provide strong evidence, I believe, that genuine Christians are in view throughout this warning passage.

6:10 God had taken note of the readers' commendable Christian conduct and would justly reward them for it. Therefore they should persevere in it and not turn aside from it (i.e., apostatize). "Not unjust" is understatement; God is eminently just.<sup>228</sup>

6:11-12 "Hope is important. Probably no movement has ever gripped the hearts of people if it did not give them hope."<sup>229</sup>

Earlier the writer had described his readers as being sluggish (lit. lazy, 5:11). Now he urged them to be diligent and to stop being lazy (v. 12; cf. Prov. 24:30-34). The same Greek word (*nothroi*) occurs in both places. He wanted them to remain faithful to God while waiting patiently for Him to fulfill His promises to them regarding their future inheritance.

"The theme of imitation recurs in 13:7, and in both instances faith is seen as steadfast persistence that pursues the divine promise . . ."<sup>230</sup>

Some commentators have used this verse to support the unbiblical idea that believers should look to their good works as evidence of their election and as the basis for their assurance of salvation. This verse is not saying that. The Greek word *plerophoria* always means "fullness" in the passive sense, not "fulfilling." The writer meant that we need to be diligent regarding something we have already obtained, not to obtain something, namely, assurance.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup>Dillow, p. 132.

<sup>228</sup>This is also litotes, a figure of speech that sets forth a positive idea by stating its negative opposite (cf. Acts 12:18; 15:2; 17:4, 12; 19:24; 27:20; et al.). For further discussion of rhetorical elements in Hebrews, see Trotter, pp. 164-77.

<sup>229</sup>Morris, p. 58.

<sup>230</sup>Lane, p. 145.

<sup>231</sup>See Dillow, pp. 293-95.

Note the linking of love (v. 10), hope (v. 11), and faith (v.12) here (cf. 10:22-24). This triad occurs often in the New Testament epistles (cf. Rom. 5:2-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6; Col. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:21-22).

### **B. THE BASIS FOR CONFIDENCE AND STEADFASTNESS 6:13-20**

Again the change in genre, this time from exhortation to exposition, signals a new literary unit within the epistle. Here the writer proceeded to expound the reliability of God's promise to Christians through Jesus Christ's high priestly ministry. Notice the repetition of key words introduced in 6:12 as the exposition unfolds. This pericope contains a strong argument for the believer's eternal security, so it is unlikely that we should understand the earlier part of the chapter as saying that we can lose our salvation.

6:13-15        The writer offered Abraham as an encouraging and supreme example of one who was strong in faith and patience.

"There is in Hebrews a sustained interest in Abraham (2:16; 6:13-15; 7:4-5; 11:8-19). The appeal to Abraham as a prototype of faithful endurance in vv 13-15 gives specific content to the exhortation in v 12."<sup>232</sup>

The promise to which the writer referred was the one God gave Abraham after he had obeyed God by offering up Isaac (cf. James 2:21). Abraham trusted God to fulfill His former promise regarding his descendants by raising Isaac from the dead (Gen. 22:16-17). The writer was calling his readers to do what God called Abraham to do when He instructed him to go to Mt. Moriah. They too needed to continue to trust and obey, as they had done in the past, even though it looked as if perseverance would result in tragedy. Having patiently waited and remained steadfast in the face of trying circumstances, Abraham received everything God wanted to give him (cf. Col. 1:11; Heb. 12:1-3, 7; James 5:11).

6:16-18        When a person wants to end an argument, one way to do so is to appeal to a higher authority with an oath. For example, some people do this by saying, "I am telling the truth so help me God." Even God used an oath to guarantee His promise to bless Abraham greatly (Gen. 22:16; cf. Exod. 32:13; Isa. 45:23; Jer. 22:5; 49:13). God swearing by Himself signifies that He binds His word to His character. Thus God gave Abraham double assurance that He would indeed deliver what He had promised. He gave him the assurance of the promise of the God who does not lie and the assurance that God specially guaranteed that particular promise. The two unchangeable things are God's promise and His oath. God's strong promise to Abraham then can be a great encouragement to us now because God has also promised us future blessings. Specifically, He has promised us the

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<sup>232</sup>Lane, p. 150.

possibility of receiving rewards when we see Him if we persevere faithfully now (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12).

The figure that closes verse 18 is an Old Testament one. In our times of temptation to apostatize we can flee to the promises of God. We can take hold of them as a fearful person in Israel could flee to the altar of burnt offerings, take hold of its horns, and be safe from his assailants. The cities of refuge also provided safety for the Israelites (Num. 35:9-15; Josh. 20). We have a better refuge than the Israelites did in Judaism.

"In Hebrews, the word 'hope' never describes a subjective attitude (i.e., 'our hope,' or 'hopefulness') but always denotes the objective content of hope, consisting of present and future salvation . . ." <sup>233</sup>

6:19-20 These verses provide another illustration of our security. When Jesus Christ entered heaven at His ascension, He took our hope of future reward with Him. In the first century, sailors would carry their ship's anchor in a small boat and deposit it on the shore so the ship would not drift away as waves beat against it (cf. Acts 27:29-30). Likewise the hope that Jesus Christ has planted firmly in heaven should serve as an anchor for our storm-tossed souls. It should keep us from drifting away from God (cf. 2:1). Our anchor rests firmly in the holy of holies, in God's presence in heaven. <sup>234</sup>

"The author is not saying simply that hope secures the 'spiritual' aspect of man. He is affirming that hope forms an anchor for the whole of life. The person with a living hope has a steadying anchor in all he does." <sup>235</sup>

The writer returned here to his view of the universe as the true tabernacle of God (3:1-6). He also returned to the thought of Jesus Christ as our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (5:10).

The writer was ready now to proceed to serve the solid food he said his readers needed to eat (5:14—6:1). This spiritual meat was exposition concerning the present high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ.

### **C. THE SON'S HIGH PRIESTLY MINISTRY 7:1—10:18**

The great resource of Christians when tempted to apostatize is our high priest, Jesus Christ. The writer therefore spent considerable time and space expounding His high

<sup>233</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>234</sup>According to Wiersbe, 2:298, at least 66 pictures of anchors appear in the catacombs under Rome indicating its popularity as a Christian symbol of Jesus Christ.

<sup>235</sup>Morris, p. 61.

priesthood to enable his readers to benefit from their resource. This section of the book continues to glorify Jesus Christ so the readers would appreciate Him sufficiently and not turn from Him.

"Here begins the longest single expository passage in the epistle. Its very length suggests its importance. Its theme is the core theme of Hebrews. The real resource of the readership, in the midst of their pressures, is the high priesthood of Christ. They must realize the greatness of that priesthood, its superiority to the Levitical institutions, and the perfect access they have to it on the basis of Christ's death."<sup>236</sup>

"In Hebrews 7, the writer argued that Christ's priesthood, like Melchizedek's, is superior in its *order*. In Hebrews 8, the emphasis is on Christ's better *covenant*; in Hebrews 9, it is His better *sanctuary*; and Hebrews 10 concludes the section by arguing for Christ's better *sacrifice*."<sup>237</sup>

### **1. The person of our high priest ch. 7**

"For the Jews of his day, it would have been axiomatic that there was no priesthood other than the Aaronic. We are now shown that the Law itself proves that there is a higher priesthood than that."<sup>238</sup>

#### **The significance of Melchizedek 7:1-10**

The writer began by explaining the significance of Melchizedek since understanding him is foundational to appreciating Jesus Christ's high priestly ministry.<sup>239</sup>

"The dominant text in 7:1-10 is Gen 14:17-20, but in chap. 7 as a whole Gen 14:17-20 is subordinated to Ps 110:4 . . .

"The limits of the first section are confirmed literarily by an *inclusio* established between vv 1 and 10 by the repeated statement that Melchizedek met Abraham."<sup>240</sup>

#### **The particulars of Melchizedek's significance 7:1-3**

7:1-2        The writer referred to Melchizedek (lit. righteous king, probably a title rather than a proper name) as the head of a priestly order. It was not uncommon for one individual to combine the roles of priest and king in antiquity.<sup>241</sup> Aaron was also the head of a priestly order. The writer explained that Jesus Christ was a member of Melchizedek's order, not

<sup>236</sup>Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 797.

<sup>237</sup>Wiersbe, 2:299.

<sup>238</sup>Morris, p. 62.

<sup>239</sup>See James Swetnam, "Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13," *Biblica* 55 (1974):333-48.

<sup>240</sup>Lane, p. 159.

<sup>241</sup>Morris, pp. 62-63.

Aaron's (6:20). Melchizedek was a prototype of Jesus Christ in two respects. He was both a king and a priest, and what characterized him was righteousness and peace (cf. 12:10-11; Ps. 85:10; Isa. 32:17; Rom. 5:1; James 3:17-18). The fact that Melchizedek was a priest is clear from two facts: he blessed Abraham, and Abraham paid tithes to him of all the spoils that he had taken in war (v. 4; cf. Gen. 14:23-24).<sup>242</sup>

These verses point out four important facts about Melchizedek: (1) he was a king-priest, (2) he was a blesser, (3) he received tithes, and (4) he had a significant name.

7:3 A literal interpretation of this verse might lead one to conclude that Melchizedek was an angelic being, but there is no indication elsewhere in Scripture that he was anything but a human being.<sup>243</sup> Consequently most commentators have adopted a metaphorical interpretation of what the writer said of him here. Limiting our knowledge of Melchizedek to what Moses specifically stated, this first priest mentioned in Scripture had no parents or children and no birth or death. In this, too, he represented the eternal Son of God. It was essential that the Levitical priests be able to prove their ancestry (cf. Ezra 2:61-63; Neh. 7:63-65). Since Moses did not record Melchizedek's death, this writer could say that he continued as a priest forever, another respect in which he was like Jesus Christ.

"When nothing is recorded of the parentage of this man, it is not necessarily to be assumed that he had no parents but simply that the absence of the record is significant.

"What was true of Melchizedek simply as a matter of record was true of Christ in a fuller and more literal sense. So the silence of the Scripture points to an important theological truth. . . . Thus it is not that Melchizedek sets the pattern and Jesus follows it. Rather, the record about Melchizedek is so arranged that it brings out certain truths, that apply far more fully to Jesus than they do to Melchizedek. With the latter, these truths are simply a matter of record; but with Jesus they are not only historically true, they also have significant spiritual dimensions."<sup>244</sup>

<sup>242</sup>According to Moffatt, p. 91, the Jews under the Mosaic Covenant did not pay tithes from the spoils of war. This was a pagan custom.

<sup>243</sup>The Qumran Community evidently regarded Melchizedek as an angelic personage. Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 798.

<sup>244</sup>Morris, pp. 63, 64. See also Charles P. Baylis, "The Author of Hebrews' Use of Melchizedek from the Context of Genesis," (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1989); and Lane, pp. 164, 166.

"It is when the writer bases his exposition on the silence of Scripture that his method of exegesis seems strangest to modern readers.

"The idea of basing exegesis on silence is familiar in Philo's writings and would not in itself have seemed strange to Jewish readers."<sup>245</sup>

This verse highlights a fifth important fact about Melchizedek: he had a significant family history.

### **The exposition of Melchizedek's significance 7:4-10**

In these straightforward verses, which expound verses 1-3, the writer explained further how Melchizedek was superior to Abraham, the ancestor of Levi, the head of the priestly tribe under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant. He said more about three of the facts mentioned above: Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham, he blessed Abraham, and he lived longer than Abraham.

- 7:4           The writer's purpose was to show how great Melchizedek was compared to the venerated patriarch Abraham.
- 7:5-6a       The descendants of Abraham paid tithes to their priests, the sons of Levi, but Abraham himself paid tithes to Melchizedek. The writer was really contrasting Aaron and Melchizedek more than Abraham and Melchizedek in this section.
- 7:6b-7       Greater people bless lesser people, so the fact that Melchizedek blessed Abraham shows his superiority over Abraham.
- 7:8           The sons of Levi, who received tithes from their brethren, died, but Melchizedek, who received tithes from Abraham, lived on. Melchizedek was immortal as far as the specific revelation of Scripture states. In contrast, Moses wrote that Abraham, Levi, and the Aaronic priests died.
- 7:9-10       In a sense even Levi himself paid tithes to Melchizedek since he was still in the loins of Abraham when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. In the ancient oriental view of things, people regarded a descendant as in one sense participating in the actions of his ancestors (Gen. 25:23; Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:11-13). This is true to reality in certain respects (cf. Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22), though we are responsible for our own actions too (Ezek. 18:20). Levi, the head of the priestly tribe in Israel, had not yet begun his independent existence, but he was involved in everything that Abraham did.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup>Guthrie, pp. 156, 157.

<sup>246</sup>See Ellingworth, p. 369. Cf. Rom. 5:12-21.

### The superior priesthood of Jesus 7:11-25

Having shown the superiority of Melchizedek to Abraham and Levi, the writer proceeded to point out the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood and Jesus' priesthood. He did so to clarify for his readers the inferiority of the Mosaic Covenant and its priesthood. Not only was Melchizedek *greater* than Aaron, Melchizedek also *replaced* Aaron.

"Within the structure of the homily, 7:1-28 is clearly defined as a literary unit. The reference to 'the Son of God' in v 3 prepares for the climactic reference to the 'Son' in v 28. The entire chapter is concerned with the Son as priest, or high priest, 'like Melchizedek,' who is superior to the Levitical priests. The fact that v 28 summarizes and concludes the comparison of Jesus as Son with the Levitical priesthood, a subject that occupies the writer in a preparatory way in 7:1-10 and directly in 7:11-28, is of special importance . . ." <sup>247</sup>

Genesis 14:17-20 now falls into the background, and Psalm 110:4 becomes dominant.<sup>248</sup> Note also the key words "perfection" (v. 11) and "perfect" (vv. 19, 28). These two words not only form an *inclusio* but begin and end the argument of the pericope. Perfection did not come through the Old Covenant priests but through the Son.

Why would God replace the Levitical priesthood? Four reasons follow.

#### The imperfection of the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic Law 7:11-14

7:11 The writer's point was that since God promised in Psalm 110:4 that the coming Messiah would be a priest after Melchizedek's order, He intended to terminate the Levitical priesthood because it was inadequate. If the Levitical priesthood had been adequate, the Messiah would have functioned as a Levitical priest.

7:12 The priesthood was such a major part of the whole Mosaic Covenant that this predicted change in the priesthood signaled a change in the whole Covenant. This verse is one of the clearest single statements in the New Testament indicating that God has terminated the Mosaic Law (Covenant; cf. Rom. 10:4). Paul went on to say that Christians, therefore, are not under it (Rom. 6:14-15; Gal. 3:24-25; 5:1; 6:2; 2 Cor. 3:7-11). It is not what God has given to regulate the lives of Christians.

"If Christ is our high priest today, then there has to be a change in the law, since He could not qualify as a priest under the Levitical arrangement (being of the tribe of Judah). If the law has not been done away today, then

<sup>247</sup>Lane, p. 177.

<sup>248</sup>Cf. G. L. Cockerill, *The Melchizedek Christology in Heb. 7:1-28*, pp. 16-20.

neither has the Levitical priesthood; but if Christ is our high priest, we cannot be under the law. Every prayer offered in the name of Christ is an affirmation of the end of the law."<sup>249</sup>

"So by his own independent line of argument our author reaches the same conclusion as Paul: the law was a temporary provision, 'our tutor to bring us unto Christ . . . but now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor' (Gal. 3:24f.)."<sup>250</sup>

7:13-14 Further confirmation of this change is the prophecy that Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah, not from the priestly tribe of Levi (Gen. 49:10; Mic. 5:2; Isa. 11:1).

### **The need for a better replacement 7:15-19**

7:15-17 A third proof that God made a change in the priesthood is that God predicted that Messiah would live forever (Ps. 110:4). Jesus Christ did not become a priest because He met a physical requirement, namely, was born into the priestly tribe and qualified by his descent to serve as high priest. He became a priest because He would not die. In this He showed Himself to be a member of Melchizedek's "order" since Melchizedek appears from the scriptural record to have lived forever. Jesus is a priest forever because of His resurrection.<sup>251</sup>

7:18-19 These verses summarize the argument that God has superseded the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic Law (Covenant). He has replaced the old system with a system that can do what the old one could not do, namely, bring us into intimate relationship with God.

"The term *athetesis*, 'annulment,' is a stronger term than *metathesis*, 'alteration' (v 12)."<sup>252</sup>

The "better hope" we have is the assurance that this relationship is now possible for us to experience thanks to our great High Priest.

### **The inviolability of God's oath 7:20-22**

Verses 20-25 draw out the pastoral implications of the conclusion that the writer reached in verses 18-19.

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<sup>249</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):244. Cf. Morris, p. 67. See also Hal Harless, "The Cessation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):349-66.

<sup>250</sup>Bruce, p. 145.

<sup>251</sup>See Manson, p. 116.

<sup>252</sup>Lane, p. 185.

7:20-21 Another oath from God (Ps. 110:4) launched Messiah's priesthood. The Levitical priesthood had no such origin, another indication of its inferiority.

7:22 Because God promised on oath to install Messiah permanently as our priest, the writer could say that Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant. Since the old priesthood was the heart of the Old Covenant, and God terminated both of them, a new priesthood must accompany the New Covenant that is superior to the Old Covenant. Since the new Priest has come, so must the New Covenant have come (cf. Luke 22:20). This is the first mention in the epistle of the word "covenant" that will play a major role in the writer's argument to follow.

"Hebrews develops the theme of the new covenant more fully than any other NT writer, the epistle accounting for just over half the occurrences of *diatheke* ["covenant] in the NT."<sup>253</sup>

### **The mortality of the Levitical priests 7:23-25**

7:23-24 The Levitical priests had to succeed one another because they kept dying, but Christ needs no successor because He will not die.

7:25 The fact that Christ will not die and need replacement by another priest means that He can see His work of delivering His people through to the end. He can deliver completely (better than "forever," v. 25) in the sense of seeing us through to the realization of our full salvation, our rest (inheritance) in God's presence (cf. 1:14).

"Here the author is not referring to His saving work as the salvation of sinners from judgment and death, but rather using the words *to save* in the sense of 'to bring to God's desired end' . . ."<sup>254</sup>

Our trials and temptations need not separate us from our inheritance since Jesus Christ can continue to support us by providing mercy and grace (4:14-16) all the way to our ultimate reward. What a comfort and assurance it is to realize that Jesus Christ Himself is praying for us constantly!

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<sup>253</sup>Ellingworth, p. 386. The writer used this word (Gr. *diatheke*) 17 times, far more than it occurs in any other New Testament book. He preferred this word to the more common *syntheke* ("covenant") evidently because *syntheke* suggests an agreement made on relatively equal terms. *Diatheke* has the idea of a more absolute will, such as a last will and testament.

<sup>254</sup>Pentecost, p. 126. However, Pentecost viewed God's goal for every Christian as spiritual maturity in this life rather than the attainment of a full reward in the future.

This verse is not talking about eternal security but about remaining faithful to the Lord and as a result receiving our full reward. Our eternal security does rest on the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ, but that was not the writer's point here (cf. Rom. 8:33-34).

"It is important to emphasize this, for the character of our Lord's intercession has at times been grotesquely misrepresented in popular Christian thought. He is not to be thought of 'as an orante, *standing* ever before the Father with outstretched arms, like the figures in the mosaics of the catacombs, and with strong crying and tears pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God; but as a *throned* Priest-King, asking what He will from a Father who always hears and grants His request.'"<sup>255</sup>

"Despite these exhortations to faithfulness and warnings against unfaithfulness [in 6:4-6], Hebrews does not base the believer's assurance on works. The basis of ongoing assurance is Christ's high-priestly work of intercession."<sup>256</sup>

"In Hebrews 'salvation' is presented as a future eschatological inheritance (1:14; 5:9; 9:28). There is, nevertheless, a definite sense in which the community has already begun to participate in salvation as a result of the obedience and sacrificial death of Christ and his subsequent exaltation (cf. 2:3-4; 6:4-5, 9)."<sup>257</sup>

"Just as Christ's priesthood is permanent, so is the salvation which he makes possible."<sup>258</sup>

### **The summary conclusion concerning Christ's superiority as a person 7:26-28**

7:26 In view of His superior ministry it is only fitting that our High Priest should be a superior Person. "Holy" (Gr. *hosios*) stresses blamelessness.<sup>259</sup> "Innocent" means without guile or malice. "Undefined" looks at His absolute purity. "Separated from sinners" probably refers to His being in a different class from sinful people.<sup>260</sup> Jesus was not only inherently pure, but He remains pure in all His contacts with sinners.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>255</sup>Bruce, p. 155. His quotation is from H. B. Swete, *The Ascended Christ*, p. 95.

<sup>256</sup>Colijn, p. 585.

<sup>257</sup>Lane, p. 189.

<sup>258</sup>Ellingworth, p. 391.

<sup>259</sup>Another word translated "holy," *hagios*, stresses separateness.

<sup>260</sup>Manson, pp. 116-17.

<sup>261</sup>Guthrie, p. 168.

"The exposition is brought to a conclusion in vv 26-28 with a majestic statement concerning Jesus' character, achievement, and status as high priest."<sup>262</sup>

7:27 In Israel's daily sacrifices, the priest had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins before he could offer one for the sins of others (Exod. 29:38-46; Lev. 4:3-12). Also on the Day of Atonement the high priest would offer a sin offering for expiation for himself and then another one for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:6-10). Jesus Christ does not need to offer up periodic sacrifices to atone for sin either for His own sins or for those of His people. His one sacrifice of both worship and expiation on the cross completely satisfied God. No subsequent sacrifices are necessary for that purpose. The writer proceeded to develop this thought more fully in 9:11-14 and 10:1-15, after introducing it initially here.

7:28 "The profound difference between the two priesthoods is detailed in a concluding contrast summarizing the argument of the entire chapter."<sup>263</sup>

Jesus Christ is superior because He is a Son rather than a mere man, because God appointed Him more recently than He appointed the Levitical priests, and because God appointed Him with an oath (v. 21). He is "perfect" because He offered one sacrifice for sin that was adequate to satisfy God completely (cf. 2:10; 5:8-10; 7:28; 12:2; 1 John 2:2). Because He is perfect He can intercede effectively for us. Consequently we can go to Him confidently any time we need His help in overcoming trials and temptations, specifically those trials that might result in our apostatizing. "Perfect forever" has the idea of not being subject to defects. He will never fail us, and another high priest will never replace Him.

In view of the superior order of priesthood that Melchizedek foreshadowed and that Jesus Christ fulfilled, why would anyone want to go back to the old Aaronic order? The person of our high priest is superior. The order of His priesthood is superior. Christ is completely adequate in His person and preeminent in His order. We should worship His person and rely on His intercession because of His order. And we should not abandon Him.<sup>264</sup>

"One of the most distinctive themes in the theology of Hebrews is the change from old to new in God's dealings with humankind. In Jesus Christ a decisive shift in salvation-history has occurred according to God's plan. What was provisional and ineffective has been superseded by the final and full salvation in the Son of God, a change anticipated in the Old Testament itself."<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup>Lane, p. 191.

<sup>263</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>264</sup>See also David J. MacLeod, "Christ, the Believer's High Priest: An Exposition of Hebrews 7:26-28," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:647 (July-September 2005):331-43.

<sup>265</sup>Fanning, p. 398.

## 2. The work of our high priest chs. 8—9

The writer developed, in this new section of the text, topics that he had announced thematically in 7:26-28.

"The unit introduced in 8:1-2 consists entirely of exposition. Its limits are indicated by an *inclusio*: corresponding to the statement in 8:3 that every high priest is appointed to offer (*prospherein*) gifts and sacrifices is the complementary declaration that Christ was offered (*prosenechtheis*) once to take away the sins of the people in 9:28. These limits are confirmed by the observation that the theme of Christ's entrance into the heavenly sanctuary, which is announced in 8:1-2, is actually developed in 9:11-28. The new unit extends from 8:1—9:28 and constitutes the central section within the compositional structure of the sermon. Its place at the center indicates the importance that the writer ascribed to this facet of his message . . ." <sup>266</sup>

"As the writer has already discoursed at some length about Christ as high priest, it might be wondered what is still left to be expounded. But so far he has not explained how our high priest carries out his duties. This really forms the theme of the next two and a half chapters (to 10:18), but another important matter, the new covenant, is introduced in the course of the discussion. In the present chapter the ministry of Jesus and the need for a new covenant are linked together." <sup>267</sup>

The ministry of Jesus Christ as our High Priest involves a particular kind of service that includes a covenant, a sanctuary, and a sacrifice. The writer explained the service that Jesus Christ renders to help his readers understand His adequacy as our High Priest. The writer moved from explaining the person of our great High Priest to expounding His work. In all this he was contrasting the superiority of Christianity with the inferiority of Judaism.

One writer observed a chiasmic structure in 8:1—9:28 that emphasizes the contrast between worship under the Old Covenant and under the New Covenant. <sup>268</sup>

- A** The old worship, earthly and figurative (8:1-6)
- B** The first covenant, imperfect and provisioned (8:7-13)
- C** The old and powerless institution of worship (9:1-10)
- C'** The new, efficacious institutions (9:11-14)
- B'** The new covenant (9:15-23)
- A'** The entrance to heaven (9:24-28)

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<sup>266</sup>Lane, p. 202.

<sup>267</sup>Guthrie, p. 170.

<sup>268</sup>Albert Vanhoye, *A Structural Translation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 4, 20-23.

### The new ministry and covenant ch. 8

The writer's discussion of the new ministry and the New Covenant in chapter 8 introduces his fuller development of those themes in chapter 9. His flow of thought proceeded as follows.

- A Christ, the ministering priest (8:1-5)
  - 1. A new ministry (8:1-2)
  - 2. which is set in opposition to the old (8:3-5)
- B. Christ, the mediator of the new covenant (8:6-13)
  - 1. The new ministry is associated with a better covenant (8:6)
  - 2. which is set in opposition to the old (8:7-13)<sup>269</sup>

"In 7:11-28 the writer drew attention to certain deficiencies in the Levitical arrangement. Among these were the mortality of the ministering priests (7:23) and the necessity of repeating sacrifices for sins, both of the priests and the people (7:27). Two further weaknesses of the Levitical arrangement are demonstrated on the basis of Scripture in 8:1-13. First, the contrast between the heavenly and earthly tabernacle is introduced to supplement the distinction between the new and the old. Levitical priests serve only a shadowy suggestion of the heavenly sanctuary in which Christ exercises his ministry. To the degree that the earthly sanctuary with its ministry only imperfectly corresponds to the ministry conducted in the presence of God, it is marked by deficiency. Secondly, the covenant under which the Levitical arrangement was instituted has been treated by God as obsolete. The mediation of the new covenant demonstrates the eschatological superiority of Christ's ministry and the divine intention to replace the old arrangement with another that is eschatologically new."<sup>270</sup>

#### Christ's better ministry 8:1-5

In this section the writer first stated (vv. 1-2) and then explained (vv. 3-5) Jesus Christ's better ministry. It is superior in three respects. He serves as a seated priest having finished His work of offering a final sacrifice for sins (v. 1). He is an enthroned priest having taken His place at the right hand of God the Father (v. 1), and He is a heavenly priest having entered the true sanctuary where He now ministers (vv. 1-2).

8:1-2 "What has been said" (v. 1) refers to chapter 7. This is a transitional statement. The writer now moved on to explain Jesus Christ's ministry more fully. Chapter 7 was in a sense introductory and foundational to what follows.

<sup>269</sup>M. Gourgues, "Lecture christologique du Psaume CX et fête de la Pentecôte," *Revue Biblique* 83 (1976):31.

<sup>270</sup>Lane, p. 204.

". . . the doctrine of Christ's high priesthood and the pilgrimage of God's people dominate the expository and paraenetic [i.e., exhortation] sections [of the epistle]. The theme of Christ as High Priest, however, is central to the epistle as a whole."<sup>271</sup>

The writer again referred to the heavens where God abides and where Jesus Christ now serves as the real tabernacle, the only one that does not imitate something better than itself. In particular, the holy of holies is in view. These verses summarize what follows in chapter 8.<sup>272</sup>

"The throne He occupies and from which He ministers is not David's throne, which He will one day occupy here on earth as the promised Messiah (Matt. 25:31). Rather, He was identified with the throne of 'the Majesty in the heavens.' The authority assigned to the One so enthroned was to be 'a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle' (Heb. 8:2). Thus He was not appointed to be a king in an earthly domain, but rather He was appointed to function as a High priest in a new sanctuary. And the appointment as High Priest, according to Psalm 110:4, follows the enthronement of Christ at His Father's right hand."<sup>273</sup>

We not only have a high priest who has taken His seat at the Father's right hand (v. 1), but we have one who now ministers as a priest in the heavenly sanctuary (v. 2; cf. Ps. 110:1).

"There are other sons beside the Son (2:10), but no other priests subordinated to Christ as high priest."<sup>274</sup>

8:3-5

Verse 4 sounds as though the Jewish priests were presenting offerings in Herod's Temple when the writer wrote. This understanding of the text has led some students of the book to date its writing before the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. However it is more likely that we should take these present tenses as timeless.<sup>275</sup> The writer was describing what had been done in Judaism as though it was still going on for the sake of vividness (cf. 7:27-28; 9:7-8, 25; 10:1-3, 8; 13:10-11). Nevertheless it seems likely that the epistle does indeed date from before A.D. 70.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>271</sup>David J. MacLeod, "The Doctrinal Center of the Book of Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146:583 (July-September 1989):300.

<sup>272</sup>See Philip E. Hughes, "The Blood of Jesus and His Heavenly Priesthood in Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:520 (October-December 1973):305-14.

<sup>273</sup>Pentecost, pp. 131-32.

<sup>274</sup>Ellingworth, p. 403.

<sup>275</sup>See Lane, p. lxiii.

<sup>276</sup>See my discussion of the date in the introduction section of these notes.

God had explained the fact that the tabernacle was a prototype of another temple, the heavenly one, to Moses when God gave him the directions for the construction of the tabernacle (Exod. 25:40; cf. Rev. 4:5-6; 6:9-11; 8:3-5; 11:19; 21:22). Moses may have received a vision of God's heavenly dwelling place then (cf. 1 Chron. 28:19).

"Probably the conception of the *tabhanith*, the 'model' (Exodus 25:9), also goes back ultimately to the idea that the earthly sanctuary is the counterpart of the heavenly dwelling of a deity [in ancient Near Eastern thought]."<sup>277</sup>

The writer's point was that Jesus' priesthood was not an earthly priesthood but one that operated in the realm of heaven. Jesus could have functioned as a priest on earth after the order of Melchizedek, but His real priestly ministry of sacrifice and intercession began when He entered heaven.

"The contrast developed is not simply between an earthly copy and a heavenly archetype but between a historical situation in the past and one that succeeded it *in time*. During the former situation, marked by the ministry of the Levitical priests, there was no entrance into the real, heavenly presence of God; full entrance into the eternal presence of God was made possible only with the life and redemptive accomplishment of Jesus."<sup>278</sup>

"In 8:1-5 the primitive Christian confession of Jesus as the one who has taken his seat at God's right hand is reinterpreted in the light of the theme of heavenly sanctuary and liturgy. The development of this theme, which dominates the argument in 8:1—9:28, is clearly the central and most distinctive aspect of the writer's interpretation of the saving work of Christ. . . . By means of a typological interpretation of the OT, the writer asserts that Christ has achieved what the sacrificial action of the high priest on the great Day of Atonement only foreshadowed. His entrance into the heavenly sanctuary, which is the true tabernacle where he has unrestricted access to the eternal presence of God, demonstrates the eschatological superiority of his priestly service to the ministry of the Levitical high priests. The priestly ministry of Christ in the celestial sanctuary is of capital importance in the thought of Hebrews."<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>277</sup>Frank M. Cross, "The Tabernacle," *Biblical Archaeologist* 10:3 (September 1947):62. Cf. G. Ernest Wright, "The Significance of the Temple in the Ancient Near East. Part III: The Temple in Palestine-Syria," *Biblical Archaeologist* 7:4 (December 1944):66.

<sup>278</sup>Lane, p. 207.

<sup>279</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 210.

### The better covenant 8:6-13

The writer proceeded to explain the superiority of the New Covenant that Jesus Christ ratified with His blood (death) that is better than the Old Mosaic Covenant that He terminated when He died. He first explained the reason for the change in covenants (vv. 6-9), then he quoted the four superior promises of the New Covenant (vv. 10-12), and finally he underlined the certainty of the change (v. 13).

8:6 The superiority of Jesus' ministry as our High Priest rests also on the superiority of the covenant that forms the basis of that ministry. That covenant in turn rests on superior promises compared with the Mosaic Covenant promises and on a superior mediator, namely, Jesus Christ, compared with the angels and Moses (Gal. 3:19).

8:7 As with the priesthood (7:11-12), so it is with the covenant and its promises. Had the first been adequate God would not have promised a second. Add "and its promises" after "covenant," which the translators have supplied, in this verse since "them" in verse 8 is plural.

8:8-12 God gave the promise of a new covenant because the people of Israel had failed Him. He also did so because the Old Mosaic Covenant did not have the power to enable them to remain faithful to God. The New Covenant has the power whereby God's people may remain faithful, namely, the presence of God living within the believer. This is one way in which it differs from the Old Covenant (v. 9).<sup>280</sup>

God promised that the New Covenant would enable *the Israelites* to do four things. They would know and desire to do God's will (v. 10b), enjoy a privileged, unique relationship with God (v. 10c), know God directly (v. 11), and experience permanent forgiveness of their sins (v. 12). These are the "better [i.e., unconditional] promises" the writer referred to earlier (v. 6).

". . . new covenant promises are not yet fully realized. The promises in Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel describe a people who have the law written in their hearts, who walk in the way of the Lord, fully under the control of the Holy Spirit. These same promises look to a people who are raised from the dead [cf. Ezek. 37], enjoying the blessings of an eternal inheritance with God dwelling with them and in them forever."<sup>281</sup>

<sup>280</sup>For a helpful essays on the new covenant, see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, pp. 164-77; John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, pp. 176-91; Bruce A. Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 68-97.

<sup>281</sup>Craig A. Blaising, "The Fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, pp. 208, 209.

8:13 The writer contrasted the New Covenant with the Old Covenant, namely, the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant is now "obsolete" and even as the writer wrote the Book of Hebrews it was also "growing old." It virtually disappeared in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed the temple, terminated its ritual and officiants, and scattered the Jews throughout the world (cf. Matt. 24:1-2).

The New Covenant is a branch of the Abrahamic Covenant. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised Abraham a piece of real estate for his descendants, an incalculable number of descendants, and blessing for his descendants and for all people through his descendants (Gen. 12:1-7; et al.). Deuteronomy 29—30, sometimes called the Palestinian Covenant, gave more information about the land God had promised to Abraham. The Davidic Covenant gave more information about God's promises regarding descendants (2 Sam. 7). The New Covenant revealed the particulars of the promised blessing (Jer. 31). Each of these later covenants relates to the Abrahamic Covenant organically; they were outgrowths of it. In contrast, the Mosaic (Old) Covenant does not relate organically but "was added" (Gal. 3:19), as an appendage. It explained how the Israelites could maximize the benefits God had promised in the Abrahamic Covenant. Consequently when God terminated the Old Covenant it did not eliminate anything He had promised Abraham.

Dispensational commentators have taken various positions on the relationship of the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 to the New Testament references to the New Covenant. Was it the same covenant, or is a second New Covenant in view? Some believe there are two new covenants, one with Israel and one with the church.<sup>282</sup> This position rests on the fact that the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 was specifically with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jer. 31:31). Those who hold this view take the New Covenant under which Christians live as a different New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8; 9:15). They regard Jesus' references to the New Covenant as to a New Covenant with the church (Luke 22:20; cf. 1 Cor. 11:25).

Most dispensationalists believe there is only one New Covenant.<sup>283</sup> Most of those who hold this view believe that the church enters into the blessings of this covenant. Even though the New Covenant was "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31), many of the benefits promised extended to all believers after Jesus Christ died (cf. Isa. 19:24-25; 42:6; 49:6; Rom. 15:9-12). Christians experience the blessings referred to in a measure now, but God will fulfill the covenant completely in the Millennium when the Jews will experience all the blessings promised fully (Rom. 11:25-32).<sup>284</sup> According to this view, when Jesus said the cup at the Lord's Supper represented His blood that is the New Covenant, He meant the following. His death was the basis for

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<sup>282</sup>E.g., L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:325; J. F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 208-20; C. C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, pp. 105-25; John R. Master, "The New Covenant," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, pp. 93-110.

<sup>283</sup>E.g., J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 5:286; C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible*, new ed., p. 1297; J. D. Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 116-28; Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 800. Walvoord and Ryrie also adopted this view after publishing their books cited in the previous footnote.

<sup>284</sup>Thomas, p. 107.

the fulfillment of the promises that the New Covenant contained. I prefer this view mainly because I do not believe there is adequate basis in the text for applying the term "New Covenant" to two different covenants. There are few writers who hold the two New Covenants view today.

Covenant theologians explain how the church benefits from the New Covenant promises by saying that the church is spiritual Israel. These promises, they claim, belong to Abraham's spiritual seed, not his physical seed. It is clear from Galatians 3:13-29 that Christians are the spiritual seed of Abraham, but that is not the same as saying the church is spiritual Israel.

"Once we are permitted to make such plain words as 'Israel' and 'Judah' mean something else, there is no end to how we might interpret the Bible!"<sup>285</sup>

### **The heavenly sanctuary 9:1-10**

"In case any of the readers should think that the writer was underestimating the old, he now outlines some of the glories of the old tabernacle. He is impressed by the orderliness of the arrangements within the Levitical cultus, and aims to present this in order to demonstrate the greater glory of the new."<sup>286</sup>

In this pericope the writer concentrated on the tabernacle and its provisions for cultic worship.<sup>287</sup> The word "first" (Gr. *prōte*) links this section with the former one (cf. 8:13). The writer introduced two subjects in the first verse: regulations of divine worship, and the earthly sanctuary. He then proceeded to expound them in reverse order, as he often did in this homily (vv. 2-5 and 6-10).

"The writer is most concerned to stress that the disposition of the tabernacle and its cultic regulations expressed symbolically the imperfect and provisional character of the old Sinaitic covenant. His description emphasizes limited access and the inadequacy of the offerings."<sup>288</sup>

"The descriptions are based, not on the author's personal involvement in worship at Jerusalem . . . , but on scripture."<sup>289</sup>

It was natural for the writer to use the tabernacle for his lesson rather than the temple because he proceeded to associate this sanctuary with the giving of the Old Covenant at Sinai (cf. 8:5).

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<sup>285</sup>Wiersbe, 2:306.

<sup>286</sup>Guthrie, p. 178.

<sup>287</sup>"Cultic" refers to the rituals involved in religious service.

<sup>288</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 217.

<sup>289</sup>Ellingworth, p. 420.

9:1-5 The "first covenant" was the Mosaic Covenant. The writer compared it first to the New Covenant that replaced it. The outer tabernacle (lit. dwelling place) was the holy place (v. 2), and the inner tabernacle was the holy of holies (v. 3). "The table and the sacred bread" (v. 2) is a hendiadys for "the table of sacred bread."<sup>290</sup>

Many readers have understood verse 4 as saying that the altar of incense was in the holy of holies in the tabernacle. This seems to be a contradiction since the Old Testament located this altar in the holy place (Exod. 30:6; 40:3-5, 21-27).<sup>291</sup> The writer of Hebrews probably meant that the veil, not the holy of holies, had the altar of incense and the ark of the covenant connected with it (v. 3; cf. 1 Kings 6:22). These pieces of furniture were on either side of the veil. Describing it this way clarified that the writer meant the veil that hung between the holy place and the holy of holies. "Having" (Gr. *echousa*) should be understood in the sense of "belonging to" rather than "standing within."<sup>292</sup>

A second problem is that this writer described the ark as having a golden jar of manna and Aaron's rod that budded *in* it. The Old Testament says that these items were *beside* the ark in the holy of holies (Exod. 16:32-34; Num. 17:10-11).

"It would at least seem reasonable to suppose that if the urn and the rod were originally placed in front of the ark, yet subsequently, for the sake of convenience (for example, when carrying the ark from one place to another), they were placed inside it."<sup>293</sup>

"According to the rabbis, the ark disappeared at the time of the early prophets (Mishnah, *Yoma* 5:2; *Shekalim* 6:1f.); and there was a tradition that Jeremiah hid it (2 Macc. 2:4ff.)."<sup>294</sup>

The writer declined to speak of the tabernacle furnishings in more detail (v. 5) because his main purpose was to contrast the two rituals and the two covenants.

9:6-10 He passed on to the "regulations of divine service" (v. 1) in the Old Covenant to show its inferiority further. The "outer tabernacle" is the holy place (v. 6), and "the second" is the holy of holies (v. 7). The high priest

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<sup>290</sup>A hendiadys is a figure of speech in which a writer expresses a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and" rather than by using an adjective and a substantive.

<sup>291</sup>Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3:6:8, also believed that it was in the holy place.

<sup>292</sup>Guthrie, p. 180.

<sup>293</sup>Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, p. 315.

<sup>294</sup>Morris, p. 82.

entered the holy of holies only once a year on the Day of Atonement to offer the special sacrifices for that day (Lev. 16:2). His offering then covered those sins of the people that they committed ignorantly as opposed to those they committed in deliberate apostasy (cf. Lev. 4:1-2; 5:17-19). Some ignorance is culpable; sins of this kind do matter. In Israel the punishment for deliberate rebellion against the Mosaic Covenant was death. It is about this apostasy that the writer warned his audience. He also comforted them with the assurance that their High Priest would deal gently with the misguided who sin ignorantly (5:2).

The writer clarified that the Holy Spirit intended to communicate the fact that the Levitical system did not provide access for the ordinary believer. The "holy place" is God's throne-room in heaven, and the "outer [lit. first] tabernacle" refers to the earthly tabernacle and its successors, namely, the temples in Israel (v. 8).

"The 'front compartment' (*he prote skene*) becomes a spatial metaphor for the time when the 'first covenant' (*he prote diatheke*) was in force. As an illustration for the old age, which is now in process of dissolution (8:13), it symbolizes the total first covenant order with its daily and annual cultic ritual (9:6, 7). Once the first has been invalidated, the second becomes operative (see 10:9). In the figurative language of the writer, the front compartment of the tabernacle was symbolic of the present age (*ton kaipon ton enestekota*), which through the intrusion of the *kairos diorthoseos*, 'the time of correction' (v 10), has been superseded . . ." <sup>295</sup>

The Old Covenant system of worship did not meet the deepest need of God's people, namely, intimate personal relationship with God. Its rites and ceremonies extended mainly to external matters until God would provide a better system at "a time of reformation" (v. 10).

This comparison helps us keep externals in their proper perspective as secondary to inward reality with God. Relationship with God purifies the conscience. It is possible to fulfill all the outward obligations of religion and still have a conscience that is not right with God (v. 9). This is one of the tragic inadequacies of religion that does not involve relationship with God.

"The necessity of a cleansed conscience is insisted upon throughout the letter [9:9, 14; 10:2, 22; 13:18]. A conscience stained with sin is the one effective barrier to man's fellowship with God . . ." <sup>296</sup>

<sup>295</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 224.

<sup>296</sup>F. F. Bruce, "The Kerygma of Hebrews," *Interpretation* 23:1 (January 1969):12. See also Guthrie, p. 184.

"The reason for detailing the arrangement of the tabernacle and its furnishings in 9:2-5 is manifestly to show the lack of access to God under the old cultus. This, in turn, provides a framework for the development of certain deficiencies in the cultic regulations that had been imposed under the terms of the Sinaitic covenant in 9:6-10."<sup>297</sup>

"The greatest festival of the Jewish year paradoxically shows most clearly the limitations of the old dispensation and its high priesthood."<sup>298</sup>

The Old Covenant sanctuary was inferior for five reasons. It was an earthly sanctuary (v. 1), it was a type of something greater (vv. 2-5), and it was inaccessible to the people (vv. 6-7). Furthermore it was only temporary (v. 8) and its ministry was external rather than internal (vv. 9-10).<sup>299</sup>

### **The final purging of sin 9:11-28**

The writer now focused on the issue of sacrifice.

"The argument moves a stage further as the author turns specifically to what Christ has done. The sacrifices of the old covenant were ineffectual. But in strong contrast Christ made an offering that secures a redemption valid for all eternity. In the sacrifices, a good deal pertained to the use of blood. So in accord with this, the author considers the significance of the blood of animals and that of Christ."<sup>300</sup>

In verses 11-14 the writer introduced Christ's high priestly ministry, which climaxes in verse 15. Verses 16-22 are parenthetical explaining verse 15. Then verses 23-28 resume the discussion of Jesus' priestly ministry in heaven.

"The conception of Christ's death as a liturgical high priestly action is developed as a major argument in 9:11-28. Prior to this point in the homily, the high priesthood tended to be linked with Christ's present activity as heavenly intercessor (cf. 2:18; 4:15-16; 7:25; 8:1-2)."<sup>301</sup>

### **The superior priestly ministry 9:11-15**

9:11            A better translation might be, "He entered in connection with the greater . . . tabernacle." Jesus Christ did not pass through heaven in the sense of going on to some other place. He is there now.

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<sup>297</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 226.

<sup>298</sup>Ellingworth, p. 434.

<sup>299</sup>Wiersbe, 2:308-10.

<sup>300</sup>Morris, p. 85. "Blood" in Scripture is frequently a metonym (a figure of speech in which one thing stands for another) for "death."

<sup>301</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 235. A type is a divinely intended illustration of something else, the antitype. A type may be a person (cf. Rom. 5:14), a thing (cf. Heb. 10:19-20), an event (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11), a ceremony (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7), or an institution, as here.

9:12 Blood is a symbol of life (Lev. 17:11). The point is that the lives of innocent animal substitutes were sufficient only to atone for sin temporarily. However the life of Jesus Christ, because He was a perfect human substitute, adequately paid for the redemption of all people forever. Having died "once for all" (7:27; 10:10) He was able to enter God's presence "once for all."

"There have been expositors who, pressing the analogy of the Day of Atonement beyond the limits observed by our author, have argued that the expiatory work of Christ was not completed on the cross—not completed, indeed, until He ascended from earth and 'made atonement "for us" in the heavenly holy of holies by the presentation of His efficacious blood'."<sup>302</sup>

9:13-14 Old Covenant sacrifices for sin on the Day of Atonement only provided temporary cleansing, but the sacrifice of Jesus Christ provided permanent cleansing. The reference to "the eternal Spirit" is unique in Scripture. The Holy Spirit had empowered and sustained Jesus in His office.

"It seems that the writer has chosen this unusual way of referring to the Holy Spirit to bring out the truth that there is an eternal aspect to Christ's saving work."<sup>303</sup>

Notice that all three persons of the Trinity had a part in redemption (v. 14). The "dead works" in view are evidently those of the Mosaic Covenant (cf. 6:1), though some commentators take them as referring to works that result in spiritual defilement.<sup>304</sup> They are dead in that they did not impart spiritual life but only removed sin. Thus there is a contrast between ceremonial and conscience cleansing as well as between temporary and permanent cleansing in these verses. We should not feel conscience-bound to follow the Old Covenant in view of Jesus Christ's perfect sacrifice but should serve God under the terms of the New Covenant.

". . . for the author of Hebrews *syneidesis* [conscience] is the internal faculty within man that causes him to be painfully aware of his sinfulness and, as a result, to experience a sense of guilt."<sup>305</sup>

<sup>302</sup>K. M. Monroe, *EQ* v (1933), p. 404 (in an article 'Time Element in the Atonement', pp. 397ff., which was answered by T. Houghton, 'The Atonement', *EQ* vi [1934], pp. 137ff.). Monroe argued that our Lord, after His resurrection, ascended immediately into heaven to sprinkle His blood on 'the heavenly capporeth [mercy seat]' and therefore could not allow Mary Magdalene to hinder Him (John 20:17) until He had completed this essential stage of His atoning work. The ascension of John 20:17 is thus quite distinct from the ascension of Acts 1:9." Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, pp. 200-201. Chafer, 4:118; 5:262-63; and 7:20 also held this view. See Philip E. Hughes, "The Blood . . .," 519:195-212, for refutation and further discussion.

<sup>303</sup>Morris, p. 87.

<sup>304</sup>E.g., Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, pp. 206-7.

<sup>305</sup>Gary S. Selby, "The Meaning and Function of *Syneidesis* in Hebrews 9 and 10," *Restoration Quarterly* 28:3 (Third Quarter 1985/86):148.

"The sacrifice that inaugurated the new covenant achieved the cleansing of the conscience that all worshipers lacked under the former covenant and that all had sought through prescribed gifts and offerings (10:1-2 . . .).<sup>306</sup>

"The implication (which underlies all the epistle) is that even in his earthly life Jesus possessed eternal life. Hence what took place in time upon the cross, the writer means, took place really in the eternal, absolute order. Christ sacrificed himself *ephapax* [once for all], and the single sacrifice needed no repetition, since it possessed absolute, eternal value as the action of One who belonged to the eternal order. He died—he had to die—but only once (9<sup>15</sup>—10<sup>18</sup>), for his sacrifice, by its eternal significance, accomplished at a stroke what no amount of animal sacrifices could have secured, viz. the forgiveness of sins."<sup>307</sup>

9:15 Since we have obtained "eternal redemption" (v. 12) through the death of our Mediator and the "eternal [Holy] Spirit" (v. 14), we can have hope in an "eternal inheritance." In contrast, believers under the Old Covenant enjoyed mainly temporary blessings and had little understanding of their eschatological rewards.

"With a play on the double meaning of *diatheke* (both 'a covenant' and 'a testament'), the author goes on to bring out the necessity for the death of Christ just as the death of the testator is required if a will is to come into force."<sup>308</sup>

The readers should not feel guilty about abstaining from the rituals of the Old Covenant. Instead they should appreciate the accomplishments of Jesus Christ's death.<sup>309</sup> They should also turn their attention to obtaining what God had promised them as a future inheritance and continue to follow the Lord faithfully and patiently (6:12).

The New Testament revelation concerning the inheritance that believers can merit by faithful perseverance in the faith and good works is extensive. Some passages indicate that it involves participation in the wedding banquet at the beginning of the messianic kingdom (e.g., Matt. 25:1-13; et al.). Others present it as involving an especially honorable resurrection (Luke 20:35; Phil. 3:10-14). Still other passages speak of it as

<sup>306</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 241.

<sup>307</sup>Moffatt, p. 124.

<sup>308</sup>Morris, p. 88.

<sup>309</sup>See Rodney J. Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):290-305; 608 (October-December 1995):431-56.

reigning with Christ (Matt. 19:27-28; Luke 19:17-19; 22:28-30; Rom. 8:17-21) or as treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21, 30; 19:21; Luke 12:32-33; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). It also involves receiving praise and honor from Jesus Christ and the Father (Matt. 6:1, 5, 16; 25:21; John 12:26; 1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:6-7; 2 Pet. 1:10-11). These honors are sometimes spoken of as crowns (Phil. 4:1; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Rev. 2:10; 4:9-10).<sup>310</sup>

### **The superior sacrifice for sin 9:16-28**

"The author has made it clear that Christ's death has instituted a better covenant (vv. 11-15) which is superior to animal offerings (vv. 12-14). But the need for such a sacrifice has yet to be explored. So a key word in this subunit [vv. 16-28] is 'necessary' (*ananke*, vv. 16, 23). In the process of exploring this point, the author clearly underscored the measureless superiority of the sacrificial death of Christ."<sup>311</sup>

9:16-17 In certain respects the covenants God made with humankind are similar to wills. With all wills, the person who made the will must die before the beneficiaries experience any effects of the will.

9:18-21 The Old Covenant went into effect when the Levitical priests shed the blood of animal substitutes and applied that blood to the covenant beneficiaries. The beneficiaries were the Israelites (Exod. 24:6-8) and the tabernacle (cf. Exod. 40:9-15). The New Covenant went into effect when God shed Jesus Christ's blood and applied it to its beneficiaries spiritually (cf. Matt. 26:28).

"The central thrust of the argument is that there is an intimate relationship between covenant and sacrificial blood."<sup>312</sup>

9:22 The exception to which the writer alluded was God's provision for the poor in Israel. He allowed them to bring a flour offering in place of an animal if they could not afford two doves (Lev. 5:11; cf. Num. 16:46; 31:22-23; 31:50). As a principle, God required the shedding of blood (death) for forgiveness under the Mosaic Law. The Israelites saw this most clearly on the Day of Atonement. The principle expressed is true of the New Covenant as well. Blood (death) is essential for decisive purgation.

9:23 Whereas animal blood adequately cleansed the prototype on earth under the Old Covenant, a better sacrifice was necessary to cleanse the realities in heaven (cf. 8:5; 9:24). Thus Jesus Christ's death was essential. The

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<sup>310</sup>See Dillow, pp. 551-83.

<sup>311</sup>Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 802.

<sup>312</sup>Lane, *Hebrews* 9—13, p. 244.

"heavenly things" may refer to the consciences of men and women.<sup>313</sup> It seems more likely, however, that they refer to the things connected with the heavenly tabernacle. This may include angels that need cleansing (cf. Job 4:18; 15:15)<sup>314</sup> and or "wickedness beyond this earth"<sup>315</sup> (cf. Rom. 8:38-39; 1 Cor. 2:8; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:20; 2:15).

"As sinful pilgrims on their way to the heavenly city, God's people defile all they touch, even their 'meeting place' with God, and they need the constant efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ their High Priest to remove that defilement."<sup>316</sup>

9:24-26 Jesus Christ's ministry required a once-for-all, sufficient sacrifice. The "consummation" refers to the end of the Old Covenant. Jesus Christ entered the presence of God rather than an earthly tabernacle (v. 24). He made His offering only once rather than repeatedly (v. 25). Furthermore He put away sins forever rather than removing them only temporarily (v. 26; cf. 1 Pet. 1:20).

"Copy" (v. 24) is the Greek word *typos* ("type"). The writer identified a type (a divinely intended illustration) here. The holy place in the tabernacle and temple was a type of heaven.<sup>317</sup>

"At His ascension Christ was formally installed as High Priest and began His present high priestly work. In the heavenly tabernacle today He represents His people (i.e., He secures their acceptance with God); obtains free access for them into God's presence; intercedes in prayer for them and grants them help; mediates their prayers to God and God's strength to them; anticipates His return to earth to reign; and, at the end of the present session, will bless His people by bringing them deliverance into the kingdom."<sup>318</sup>

9:27-28 Because Jesus Christ died for our sins we do not need to fear condemnation after death (v. 27; cf. Rom. 8:1), but we can look forward to ultimate deliverance (v. 28). He provided the first benefit of salvation, deliverance from the penalty of sin, at the end of His first advent. He will provide the second, deliverance from the presence of sin, at the end of His second advent.

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<sup>313</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 218.

<sup>314</sup>Pentecost, *A Faith . . .*, pp. 156-57.

<sup>315</sup>Morris, p. 91.

<sup>316</sup>David J. MacLeod, "The Cleansing of the True Tabernacle," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:605 (January-March 1995):71.

<sup>317</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 60-63. See Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11; and 1 Pet. 3:21 for other New Testament identifications of types. See also Philip E. Hughes, "The Blood . . .," 131:521:26-33.

<sup>318</sup>David J. MacLeod, "The Present Work of Christ in Hebrews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):200.

"There is a finality about it [death] that is not to be disputed. But if it is the complete and final end to life on earth, it is not, as so many in the ancient world thought, the complete and final end. Death is more serious than that because it is followed by judgment. Men are accountable, and after death they will render account to God."<sup>319</sup>

This is one of only two references to sin-bearing in the New Testament (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24), but the concept is common in the Old Testament (cf. Num. 14:34; Isa. 53:11-12; Ezek. 18:20).

"Reference to the 'many' is not . . . to be understood as limiting the effects of Christ's sacrifice to those who accept it in faith. The implied contrast, as in Is. 52:12; Heb. 2:10; Mk. 10:45; 14:24||, is rather between the one sacrifice and the great number of those who benefit from it."<sup>320</sup>

When the Lord returns at the Rapture all Christians will enter into His presence, but only believers who have remained faithful to Him will enter into their full inheritance (cf. 1:14; 3:14; 9:15). "Those who eagerly await Him" (v. 28) evidently refers to faithful believers.<sup>321</sup> Specifically what will take place is that at the Rapture all believers will go to be with Christ. However only those who have not apostatized will receive a full reward at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:14-15; cf. 1 Thess. 5:9-10).<sup>322</sup>

". . . his appearance will confirm that his sacrifice has been accepted and that he has secured the blessings of salvation for those whom he represented. For those who are the heirs of salvation (1:14; cf. 2:3, 10; 5:9; 6:9), it will mean full enjoyment of their inheritance. The parousia is thus the key event in the realization of salvation."<sup>323</sup>

"On one day of the year alone only the high priest could pass through the curtain to appear before God (9:7). That he must do so year after year indicated that the atonement he secured was merely provisional in character. The sacrifices he offered were inadequate to accomplish a decisive purgation of the defilement of sin. Against this backdrop the writer contrasts the efficacy of the unrepeatable action of Christ, whose single offering secured eschatological salvation and provided access to the inaccessible presence of God. The key to the typological exposition of salvation in 9:11-28 is that entrance into the heavenly sanctuary pertains to an eschatological and eternal order of salvation.

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<sup>319</sup>Morris, p. 93.

<sup>320</sup>Ellingworth, p. 487.

<sup>321</sup>Cf. Dillow, p. 129.

<sup>322</sup>See Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, pp. 165-77, for refutation of the partial rapture view.

<sup>323</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 251.

"The writer's primary concern in this section is with objective salvation. The exposition is focused upon the saving work of Christ in relation to God in behalf of the redeemed community rather than upon salvation realized subjectively in Christians."<sup>324</sup>

The New Covenant sanctuary is superior for five reasons. It is heavenly (v. 11), and its ministry is effective in dealing with sin (vv. 12-15). Its ministry also rests on a more costly sacrifice (vv. 16-23), represents fulfillment (v. 24), and is final and complete (vv. 25-28).<sup>325</sup>

### **3. The accomplishment of our high priest 10:1-18**

This section on the high priestly ministry of Christ (7:1—10:18) concludes with this pericope in which the writer emphasized the perfecting effect of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on New Covenant believers. He wrote this to impress his readers further with the superiority of their condition compared with that of Old Covenant believers.

As pointed out previously, 7:1—10:18 constitutes an exposition of distinctive features of the high priestly office of the Son. These are its similarity to the priesthood of Melchizedek (ch. 7), the fact that it involved a single, personal sacrifice for sins (chs. 8—9), and its achievement of eternal salvation (10:1-18).

". . . in 10:1-18 the writer elaborates the 'subjective' effects of Christ's offering for the community that enjoys the blessings of the new covenant. Christ's death is considered from the perspective of its efficacy for Christians."<sup>326</sup>

The argument is again chiasitic.

- A** The inadequacy of the Old Covenant: repeated sacrifices were necessary (vv. 1-4)
- B** The one sacrifice of Christ: supersedes the repeated sacrifices (vv. 5-10)
- B'** The priesthood of Christ: supersedes the Levitical priesthood (vv. 11-14)
- A'** The adequacy of the New Covenant: no more sacrifice for sins is necessary (vv. 15-18)

10:1           The very nature of the Mosaic Law made it impossible to bring believers into intimate relationship with God since it dealt with externals.

"Both Paul and our author speak of the law as 'a shadow'; but whereas Paul in Col. 2:17 has in mind the legal

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<sup>324</sup>Ibid.

<sup>325</sup>Wiersbe, 2:310-12.

<sup>326</sup>Lane, *Hebrews* 9—13, p. 258.

restrictions of Old Testament times (food-laws and regulations about special days), our author is thinking more especially of the law prescribing matters of priesthood and sacrifice in relation to the wilderness tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple."<sup>327</sup>

"The 'shadow' [Gr. *skia*] then is the preliminary outline that an artist may make before he gets to his colors, and the *eikon* [lit. image, "form"] is the finished portrait. The author is saying that the law is no more than a preliminary sketch. It shows the shape of things to come, but the solid reality is not there."<sup>328</sup>

"Make perfect" does not mean to make sinless but to make perfect in our access to God. Jesus Christ provided perfect cleansing for us by His death, as the following verses show.

"This verse (and in fact the whole chapter) continues our writer's argument regarding the superiority of the sacrifice of Christ over the Mosaic rites."<sup>329</sup>

10:2-4        The Israelites never enjoyed the extent of freedom from sin's guilt that we do. The Day of Atonement reminded them yearly that their sins needed removing so they could continue to have fellowship with God. We do not have a yearly reminder since Jesus Christ's sacrifice made us perfectly acceptable to God (cf. John 13:10; Acts 15:9).

"'Take away' (*aphaireo*) is used of a literal taking off, as of Peter's cutting off the ear of the high priest's slave (Luke 22:50), or metaphorically as of the removal of reproach (Luke 1:25). It signifies the complete removal of sin so that it is no longer a factor in the situation. That is what is needed and that is what the sacrifices could not provide."<sup>330</sup>

"Some one has well said: 'The blood of animals cannot cleanse from sin because it is non-moral. The blood of sinning man cannot cleanse because it is immoral. The blood of Christ alone can cleanse because it is moral.'"<sup>331</sup>

10:5-7        This writer liked to clinch his argument by appealing to Scripture.

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<sup>327</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 226.

<sup>328</sup>Morris, p. 95

<sup>329</sup>Jeffrey R. Sharp, "Typology and the Message of Hebrews," *East Asia Journal of Theology* 4:2 (1986):100.

<sup>330</sup>Morris, p. 96.

<sup>331</sup>Thomas, pp. 117-18.

"His argument up till now has been the negative one that the animal sacrifices of the old covenant were unavailing. Now he says positively that Christ's sacrifice, which established the new covenant, was effectual. It really put away sin. And it was foreshadowed in the same passage from Jeremiah."<sup>332</sup>

The passage he quoted first (Ps. 40:6-8) expresses Messiah's commitment to offer His body as a sacrifice to God (at His first advent) because animal sacrifices of all types were inadequate. God's will was the perfection (i.e., thorough cleansing) of believers. Jesus was not some dumb animal that offered its life unthinkingly. He consciously and deliberately offered His life in obedience to God's will.

"The psalmist's words, 'Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God,' sum up the whole tenor of our Lord's life and ministry, and express the essence of that true sacrifice which God desires."<sup>333</sup>

The "role of the book" is the written instruction (*torah*) of God.

10:8-10 God took no delight in sacrifices as such if they were not the product of a proper attitude. He took away the first Mosaic Covenant and its sacrifices to establish the second New Covenant. Psalm 40 announced the abolition of the old sacrificial system. This was God's will, and it satisfied Him. The writer's view of sanctification here, as elsewhere in this epistle, is positional rather than progressive. God sets aside all believers to Himself at conversion. That is what is in view here.

"Indeed it can be said that sanctification in Hebrews is almost equivalent to justification in Romans, both referring to our position, not to our condition. But there is this vital difference of standpoint: that justification deals with position in relation to God as Judge, while sanctification deals with position in relation to our fellowship with God and our approach to Him in fellowship."<sup>334</sup>

". . . we must be on our guard lest we read this epistle with Pauline terminology in mind."<sup>335</sup>

10:11-14 The writer stressed the finality of Jesus Christ's offering further with the contrast in these verses.<sup>336</sup> The Levitical priests never sat down because

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<sup>332</sup>Morris, p. 97.

<sup>333</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 234.

<sup>334</sup>Thomas, p. 125. Cf. Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 804.

<sup>335</sup>Morris, p. 99.

<sup>336</sup>See William David Spencer, "Christ's Sacrifice as Apologetic: An Application of Heb 10:1-18," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:2 (June 1997):189-97, for a response to resurgent contemporary paganism that encourages self-sacrifice and other types of blood sacrifices.

they never finished their work, but Jesus Christ sat down beside His Father because He finished His work.

"A seated priest is the guarantee of a finished work and an accepted sacrifice."<sup>337</sup>

He now awaits the final destruction of His enemies. Those who "are sanctified" (v. 14) are those whom Jesus Christ has perfected and are consequently fully acceptable to God (i.e., all believers).<sup>338</sup>

Jesus Christ's sacrifice has accomplished three things for us. It has cleansed our consciences from guilt, it has fitted us to approach God as worshippers, and it has fulfilled what the Old Testament promised.

10:15-18 The Holy Spirit testified through Jeremiah (Jer. 31:33-34; cf. Heb. 8:8-12), and continues to testify, the writer said, that final forgiveness meant the end of sacrifices for sin. God promised this forgiveness in the New Covenant. Consequently no more sacrifices for sin are necessary.

"In Ch. 8 the oracle of Jer. 31:31-34 was quoted in order to prove the obsolescence of the old economy; now it is quoted again in order to establish the permanence of the era of 'perfection' inaugurated under the new covenant. 'God has spoken in His Son'; and He has no word to speak beyond Him."<sup>339</sup>

The statement that God will remember sins no more (v. 17) means that He will no longer call them back to memory with a view to condemning the sinner (cf. Rom. 8:1). Since God is omniscient He remembers everything, but He does not hold the forgiven sinner's sins against him or her. This verse has been a great help to many sinners who have found it hard to believe that God really has forgiven them.

The long section on the high priestly ministry of Jesus ends here (7:1—10:18). The writer showed that Jesus is a superior priest compared with the Levitical priests, and that His priesthood supersedes the Levitical priesthood. He also pointed out that Jesus serves under the New Covenant that is superior to the Old Covenant. Furthermore His sacrifice is superior to the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant. Finally, Jesus' priesthood brings the believer into full acceptance with God, something the former priesthood could not do. Therefore the readers would be foolish to abandon Christianity to return to Judaism. Contemporary believers are also foolish to turn away from Christ and the gospel.

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<sup>337</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 239.

<sup>338</sup>See Kendall, pp. 180-82.

<sup>339</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 242.

### **D. THE DANGER OF WILLFUL SINNING (THE FOURTH WARNING) 10:19-39**

From this point on in the epistle the writer made application from the great truths concerning Jesus Christ that he had now finished explaining. He followed his exposition of Jesus Christ's superior high priestly ministry (6:13—10:18) with exhortation, another stern warning against apostatizing, and an encouragement to remain faithful to the Lord (10:19-39).<sup>340</sup> The Greek word *parresia*, which appears in verse 19 ("confidence") and in verse 35 ("confidence"), frames the section and forms an *inclusio* tying the thought together.

"With 10:19-39 the great central division of the sermon (5:11—10:39) is drawn to a conclusion. Viewed from the perspective of the homiletical and literary structure of Hebrews, this concluding exhortation is symmetrical with the preliminary exhortation found in 5:11—6:20 . . . . The great exposition of Christ as priest and sacrifice is thus framed by parallel parenthetic units . . ." <sup>341</sup>

This warning passage is in a sense central to all the hortatory passages in Hebrews. It echoes former warnings (cf. 2:1-4 and 10:28-31; and 6:4-8 and 10:26-31) and repeats characteristic expressions (cf. 3:6b and 10:23; and 3:17 and 10:26). Yet it also anticipates what is to come by introducing the triad of Christian virtues, which the writer developed in chapters 11—13 (cf. 6:10-12). He spoke of faith in 10:22 and developed it in chapter 11, hope in 10:23 and developed it in 12:1-13, and love in 10:24 and developed it in 12:14—13:21.

#### **1. The threefold admonition 10:19-25**

The writer began with a three-fold admonition, which is all one sentence in the Greek text. The long sentence intensifies the writer's appeal.<sup>342</sup>

"In view of all that has been accomplished for us by Christ, he says, let us confidently approach God in worship, let us maintain our Christian confession and hope, let us help one another by meeting together regularly for mutual encouragement, because the day which we await will soon be here."<sup>343</sup>

"A loyal response to Christ is the logical correlate of the magnitude of Christ's redemptive accomplishment [cf. Rom. 12:1-2]."<sup>344</sup>

10:19-20 "Therefore" sums up the entire argument to this point but especially the affirmation of 8:1-2 and its exposition in 9:1—10:18. "Brethren" recalls

<sup>340</sup>Even though chapter 11 is exposition, it is full of application.

<sup>341</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 279.

<sup>342</sup>Ellingworth, p. 516.

<sup>343</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 244.

<sup>344</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 281. Lane entitled this warning passage "The Peril of Disloyalty to Christ."

the writer's address of his audience of believers in the earlier parenetic units (cf. 3:1, 12; 6:9). All believers now have an open invitation to come into the holy place. Under the old covenant that privilege was reserved for the priesthood.

There are two reasons we can and should approach God (v. 22). First, we can have confidence to enter God's presence now and in the future because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

"It is striking that whenever the writer makes his most emphatic assertions concerning the saving work of Christ, he makes an explicit reference to the blood of Jesus (9:12, 14; 10:19, 29; 12:24; 13:12, 20). This fact is indicative of the importance of the cultic argument developed in 9:1—10:18, where the blood of Jesus is a graphic expression for Jesus' death viewed in its sacrificial aspect. That cultic argument is clearly presupposed here."<sup>345</sup>

We can enter God's presence through Jesus' crucified flesh as though we entered the holy of holies through the torn temple veil (Matt. 27:51).<sup>346</sup> His sacrifice provided a new and living way compared with the old dead way of the Old Covenant.<sup>347</sup>

"The way to God is both 'new' and 'living.' It is 'new' because what Jesus has done has created a completely new situation, 'living' because that way is indissolubly bound up with the Lord Jesus himself.

"The author is saying in his own way what the Synoptists said when they spoke of the curtain of the temple as being torn when Christ died (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45)."<sup>348</sup>

10:21-22      Second, we can have confidence to enter God's presence because we have a great High Priest (cf. 7:1—10:18).

We should draw near with freedom from guilt and with holy conduct (cf. 4:16). This is the first of three admonitions (in vv. 22-25) that together

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<sup>345</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>346</sup>This is an example of a thing (i.e., the veil in the temple) being a type of another thing (i.e., Christ's flesh). See my comment on types that precedes my comments on 9:10-11 above.

<sup>347</sup>The way is not Jesus Himself, in the sense of John 14:6, but the way He opened for us through His death. Guthrie, p. 211.

<sup>348</sup>Morris, p. 103. The "living" way also connotes the fresh, vitalizing realities of the New Covenant. Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 804.

constitute the main exhortation in the epistle.<sup>349</sup> This first one refers to personal devotion.

"Sincere" means true, dependable. We should approach God with the assurance that Jesus Christ's death has removed our guilt for sin and has made us acceptable to God (9:13-14; Num. 8:7; Rom. 5:1; 8:1; cf. 1 John 1:9). The writer believed Christians can have full assurance of our faith since our confidence rests in the sufficiency of what Christ has done for us (cf. 1 John 5:13).

". . . the specific imagery of the 'sprinkling of the heart from a burdened conscience' has been anticipated in 9:18-22. There the writer reminded the community of the action of Moses, who sprinkled the people with blood during the ratification of the old covenant at Sinai. The thought that Christians have been made participants in the new covenant by the blood of Christ is forcefully expressed in the immediate context (v 19). This suggests that the 'sprinkling with respect to the heart' in v 22b is to be associated with Jesus' inauguration of the new covenant through his death . . ." <sup>350</sup>

The reference to the washed body (v. 22) probably is to water baptism as the outward sign of inward cleansing (cf. 1 Pet. 3:21).<sup>351</sup>

10:23-25 We should not only exercise faith (v. 22) but also hope (v. 23) and love (v. 24). The admonition to hold fast to our hope is the one the writer emphasized most strongly in this epistle. It is an exhortation to perseverance. The basis of our steadfastness is the fact that God is faithful to His promises concerning our future.

The third admonition (v. 24) moves from the vertical to the horizontal dimension of Christian living. This admonition to love one another, our social obligation, was also necessary since some were abandoning the faith. The readers needed to stimulate one another to remain faithful to the Lord. This type of love is the product of communal activity; we cannot practice it in isolation from other believers.

"Any early Christian who attempted to live like a pious particle without the support of the community ran serious risks in an age when there was no public opinion to support him. His isolation, whatever its motive—fear,

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<sup>349</sup>Guthrie, p. 213.

<sup>350</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 287.

<sup>351</sup>See J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, pp. 211-14.

fastidiousness, self-conceit, or anything else—exposed him to the danger of losing his faith altogether."<sup>352</sup>

Regular attendance at church meetings facilitates love for one another because there we receive reminders and exhortation to persevere. It is only natural for one who has abandoned his faith to absent himself or herself from the meetings of his or her church. However this is the very thing such a person should not do. We need each other.

"Whatever the motivation, the writer regarded the desertion of the communal meetings as utterly serious. It threatened the corporate life of the congregation and almost certainly was a prelude to apostasy on the part of those who were separating themselves from the assembly . . ."<sup>353</sup>

The writer was urging mutual accountability since we will have to give an account of ourselves to God. The "day" that is approaching is the day we will give an account of ourselves to God (cf. v. 37). This may have been an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 for the original readers.<sup>354</sup> But it is definitely an allusion to the judgment seat of Christ.

## **2. The warning of judgment 10:26-31**

The writer turned from positive admonition to negative warning to highlight the seriousness of departing from the Lord.

"Between the imperatives of vv. 22-25 and 32, 35, the author describes, more fully than in 2:2f.; 6:4-6, the nature and consequences of apostasy, previously described as 'falling away from the living God' (3:12)."<sup>355</sup>

10:26-27 "The word 'we' cannot refer to any other group of people than his readers and himself [cf. 2:1]."<sup>356</sup>

Willful sin in the context of Hebrews is deliberate apostasy, turning away from God (2:1; 3:12; 6:4-8). If an apostate rejects Jesus Christ's sacrifice, there is nothing else that can protect him or her from God's judgment (cf. 6:6). The judgment in view will take place at the judgment seat of Christ, not the great white throne. It is the judgment of believers (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10), not of unbelievers (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). It will result in loss of reward, not

<sup>352</sup>Moffatt, p. 147. Cf. Guthrie, p. 216.

<sup>353</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 290.

<sup>354</sup>J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Apostles' Use of Jesus' Predictions of Judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 140-41.

<sup>355</sup>Ellingworth, p. 530.

<sup>356</sup>Marshall, pp. 141-42.

loss of salvation. The same fire (judgment) that will test believers will also consume unbelievers.<sup>357</sup>

"The motif of inescapable judgment is developed with an allusion to Isa 26:11. The imagery of 'raging fire ready to consume God's adversaries' is vividly suggestive of the prospect awaiting the person who turns away from God's gracious provision through Christ. The apostate is regarded as the adversary of God. The description of judgment as a fire that devours and utterly destroys recalls the actual experience of the followers of Korah who were consumed by fire because they had shown contempt for God (Num 16:35; 26:10). The consequence of apostasy is terrifying, irrevocable judgment."<sup>358</sup>

"Knowledge" (v. 26) is full knowledge (Gr. *epignosis*).

10:28-29 The point of these verses is this. Since an Israelite who spurned the Old Covenant suffered a severe penalty, we will suffer a greater penalty if we spurn the superior New Covenant. Apostasy under the New Covenant has the effect of walking roughshod over the Son of God by despising Him. Also it involves despising the superior blood of Jesus Christ that "sanctified" the apostate (who is a Christian; cf. vv. 10, 14). Furthermore the apostate insults the Holy Spirit who graciously brought him or her to faith in Christ. These three parallel participial clauses in the Greek text stress the serious effects of apostasy.

"Taken cumulatively, the three clauses in v 29 define persistent sin (v 26a) as an attitude of contempt for the salvation secured through the priestly sacrifice of Christ. Nothing less than a complete rejection of the Christian faith satisfies the descriptive clauses in which the effects of the offense are sketched."<sup>359</sup>

"It is an extreme case of apostasy which is being envisaged."<sup>360</sup>

Willful rebels under the Old Covenant only lost their lives (cf. Deut. 17:2-7; 13:8), but willful rebels under the New Covenant lose an eternal reward. Not only so but God often begins to punish modern apostates in this life.

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<sup>357</sup>Fire is a frequent symbol of God and His work in Scripture (Exod. 3:2; 19:18; Deut. 4:24; Ps. 18:8-14; Isa. 33:14; Ezek. 1:4; Mal. 3:2), and it often indicates His judgment (Mal. 3:2; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).

<sup>358</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 293.

<sup>359</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>360</sup>Guthrie, p. 219.

"It was commonly inferred [incorrectly] in the Early Church from this and other passages in the epistle that forgiveness for all kinds of post-baptismal sin, inadvertent as well as deliberate, was ruled out."<sup>361</sup>

10:30-31 In Deuteronomy 32, which the writer quoted here twice (Deut. 32:35-36, 40-41), Moses warned the Israelites against apostatizing. That was this writer's point here as well. It is a terrifying prospect for a believer who has renounced his or her faith to fall under God's hand of chastisement. Note that the writer addressed this warning to believers, though many interpreters have applied it to unbelievers.<sup>362</sup>

"Actually, Heb. 10:30, 31 forms a parallel reference to II Cor. 5:10, 11, and the preceding verses (vv. 26-29) provide additional information concerning that facet of the judgment seat associated with the 'terror of the Lord.'"<sup>363</sup>

Verse 31 is not so much a logical conclusion from what precedes as it is a summary recalling the context of the Deuteronomy quotations.<sup>364</sup>

### **3. The encouragement to persevere 10:32-39**

The writer concluded his warning by reminding his readers of their former faithfulness when tempted to encourage them to endure their present and future tests (cf. 4:12-16; 6:9-20).

"The juxtaposition of 10:26-31 and 32-35 suggests that it may have been the experience of suffering, abuse, and loss in the world that motivated the desertion of the community acknowledged in v 25 and a general tendency to avoid contact with outsiders observed elsewhere in Hebrews (see . . . 5:11-14)."<sup>365</sup>

10:32-34 In the past the original readers had proved faithful in severe trials of their faith. They had stood their ground when others had encouraged them to abandon it. They had withstood public shame and persecution for their faith. They had also unashamedly supported other believers who had undergone persecution in the same way.

"In the world of the first century the lot of prisoners was difficult. Prisoners were to be punished, not pampered. Little provision was made for them, and they were

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<sup>361</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 260.

<sup>362</sup>See Fanning, pp. 407-8.

<sup>363</sup>Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, p. 31.

<sup>364</sup>Ellingworth, p. 543.

<sup>365</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 297.

dependent on friends for their supplies [including food<sup>366</sup>]. For Christians visiting prisoners was a meritorious act (Matt 25:36). But there was some risk, for the visitors became identified with the visited. The readers of the epistle had not shrunk from this. It is not pleasant to endure ignominy, and it is not pleasant to be lumped with the ignominious. They had endured both."<sup>367</sup>

They had also been willing to suffer material loss because they looked forward to a better inheritance in the future (cf. Luke 21:19). Moreover they had done this joyfully, not grudgingly.

"The eternal inheritance laid up for them was so real in their eyes that they could lightheartedly bid farewell to material possessions which were short-lived in any case. This attitude of mind is precisely that 'faith' of which our author goes on to speak."<sup>368</sup>

10:35-36 Now was not the time to discard that confidence in a better reward (cf. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19). They needed to persevere, to keep on keeping on. By doing this they would do God's will and eventually receive what He promised, namely, an eternal reward (1:14; 3:14; 9:15; Matt. 6:19).<sup>369</sup> This exhortation is a good summary of the whole message of Hebrews.<sup>370</sup>

"What they had endured for Christ's sake entitled them to a reward. Let them not throw it away. The NT does not reject the notion that Christians will receive rewards, though, of course, that is never the prime motive for service."<sup>371</sup>

"The safeguard against degeneration, isolation, and consequent failure is to make progress in the Christian life, and to proceed from point to point from an elementary to the richest, fullest, deepest experience."<sup>372</sup>

If the writer's concern had been the salvation of those readers who were unbelievers, this would have been an opportune time for him to exhort them to believe in Christ. He could have written, "For you have need of regeneration." Instead he exhorted his readers to endure rather than apostatize.

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<sup>366</sup>Moffatt, p. 154. Cf. Guthrie, p. 222.

<sup>367</sup>Morris, p. 110.

<sup>368</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 270.

<sup>369</sup>Cf. Dillow, p. 129.

<sup>370</sup>Cf. Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 806.

<sup>371</sup>Morris, pp. 110-11.

<sup>372</sup>Thomas, p. 11.

10:37-38 After all, we will not have long to persevere. The Lord's return is near (Rev. 22:20). In the meantime we need to keep walking by faith. If we abandon that purpose, we will not please God.

"This observation [in v. 38b] is a figure of speech called litotes in which a positive idea is expressed by negating the opposite. As the larger context makes plain, he means, 'God will be severely angered' (see verse 27)."<sup>373</sup>

The allusions in these verses are to Isaiah 26:21 and Habakkuk 2:3-4 in the Septuagint. The writer took all his Old Testament quotations from this version except the one in 10:30, which he took from the Hebrew Bible. "My righteous one" is a believer. "Shrinking back" refers to apostasy.<sup>374</sup>

"Paul is concerned with the way a man comes to be accepted by God; the author [of this epistle] is concerned with the importance of holding fast to one's faith in the face of temptations to abandon it."<sup>375</sup>

10:39 The writer assumed that his readers, along with himself, would not apostatize. "Destruction" (or ruin) could refer to either eternal damnation in hell or to temporal punishment. In view of what has preceded, the latter alternative is probably in view (cf. Matt. 26:8; Mark 14:4; Acts 25:16). The writer did not want his readers to be the objects of God's discipline.<sup>376</sup>

"I personally believe that 'waste' is the best translation for this word ["destruction"] in Hebrews 10:39. A believer who does not walk by faith goes back into the old ways and wastes his life."<sup>377</sup>

Likewise the positive alternative set forth at the end of this verse is not a reference to conversion. It refers to the preservation of the faithful believer until he receives his full reward (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). The "preserving of the soul" is equivalent to "saving the life" (cf. James 5:20).<sup>378</sup>

"This meaning agrees well with the exposition of 10:32-39. The readers were to live by faith in the midst of difficult times. The result of obedience to the Word of God would be a life-preserving walk instead of temporal discipline, the loss of physical life."<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>373</sup>Hodges, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 74.

<sup>374</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 305; Moffatt, p. 158.

<sup>375</sup>Morris, p. 111.

<sup>376</sup>See Dillow, pp. 336-37.

<sup>377</sup>Wiersbe, 2:317.

<sup>378</sup>Moffatt, p. 158.

<sup>379</sup>Oberholtzer, 145:418.

This is the most direct and severe of all the warnings in Hebrews. In view of the Son's priestly ministry (5:1—10:18), apostasy is a sin that will draw terrible consequences for the believer. It will not result in the loss of eternal salvation but the loss of some eternal reward.

"The nature of the writer's response to the men and women he addressed confirms the specifically pastoral character of the parenthesis, in which he closely identifies himself with his audience. The severity with which he writes of apostasy and of the destructive lifestyle of those who have deserted the house church expresses anguish and compassionate concern that Christians should not be subverted by a form of worldliness that would separate them from the life and truth they have received from Christ and from one another."<sup>380</sup>

#### **IV. THE PROPER RESPONSE 11:1—12:13**

"In chapter 10:22-25 there were three exhortations, respectively to Faith, Hope and Love. These are elaborated in turn: chapter 11 dealing with Faith; chapter 12 with Hope; chapter 13 with Love."<sup>381</sup>

In this fourth major section of the epistle, the writer concentrated on motivating his readers to persevere in their faith with steadfast endurance. He continued the idea that he introduced in 10:35-39.<sup>382</sup> Having introduced "faith" and "endurance" in 10:39, the writer proceeded to develop these concepts further. He celebrated the character of faith in chapter 11 and then summoned the readers to endurance in 12:1-13. The first of these sections is exposition and the second exhortation.

"The characteristic vocabulary of this section relates to the vital issue of enduring disciplinary sufferings. Anticipating the subsequent development in 12:1-13, the writer underscored the community's need for *hypomone*, 'endurance,' in 10:36. That note is resumed in 12:1, when the commitment required of the Christian life is reviewed under the metaphor of an athletic contest, and the key to victory is found in 'endurance.'"<sup>383</sup>

"The story of God's people includes a succession of examples of persistent, forward-looking faith. The story is not complete without us. We, in our turn, must submit to God's fatherly discipline and stand firm together in the faith."<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>380</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 311.

<sup>381</sup>Thomas, p. 140.

<sup>382</sup>Some writers do not acknowledge this connection in the flow of the writer's argument. They view chapter 11 as a revelation of what faith will inevitably do rather than what faith should do. E.g., John MacArthur, *Faith Works*, pp. 37-54.

<sup>383</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 313.

<sup>384</sup>Ellingworth, p. 558.

### A. PERSEVERANCE IN FAITH CH. 11

The writer encouraged his readers in chapter 11 by reminding them of the faithful perseverance of selected Old Testament saints.<sup>385</sup> The section is expository in form but parenetic in function, inviting the readers to emulate the example of the heroes listed. The linking word that ties this section to what precedes is "faith" or "faithfulness," which the Habakkuk 2:4 quotation introduced (10:38-39; cf. 10:20).<sup>386</sup> The writer repeated this word (Gr. *pistis*) 24 times in chapter 11. It occurs in the first and last sentences of the section forming an *inclusio*. Classical orators and authors frequently used lists of examples to motivated their hearers and readers to strive for virtue.<sup>387</sup> These lists also appear in Jewish and early Christian literature indicating that this was a distinctive literary form.<sup>388</sup>

"As J. W. Thompson has observed, 'a catalogue of heroes of *pistis*, introduced as patterns of imitation, is unthinkable in any Greek tradition.'<sup>389</sup> The reason for this is that to the formally educated person, *pistis*, 'faith,' was regarded as a state of mind characteristic of the uneducated, who believe something on hearsay without being able to give precise reasons for their belief. The willingness of Jews and Christians to suffer for the undemonstrable astonished pagan observers.<sup>390</sup> Yet this is precisely the conduct praised in Heb 11:1-40. This fact constitutes the note of offense in this section of the homily."<sup>391</sup>

Another feature of this chapter is the anaphoric use of *pistis*, "faith."<sup>392</sup> *Pistis* occurs 18 times without an article (anarthrous) in verses 3-31 but nowhere else in Hebrews. This literary device serves to stress the importance of faith and to unite the chapter.<sup>393</sup>

This chapter is one of the strongest proofs that eschatological reward is the full inheritance (rest) that the writer urged his readers not to sacrifice. The reward of these saints in the past lay beyond the grave (cf. vv. 1, 13).

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<sup>385</sup>The only other historical characters beside Jesus that the writer mentioned so far were Abraham, Melchizedek, Moses, Aaron, and Joshua. Of these the only one mentioned in connection with faith was Abraham (6:13-15).

<sup>386</sup>The Habakkuk quotation gives "faith" the nuance of "faithfulness."

<sup>387</sup>See M. R. Cosby, "The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11 in Light of Example-lists in Antiquity" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1985), pp. 45-106.

<sup>388</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 114-61.

<sup>389</sup>J. W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 53.

<sup>390</sup>Cf. E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, pp. 120-22.

<sup>391</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 316.

<sup>392</sup>Anaphora is the rhetorical repetition of a key word or words at the beginning of successive clauses to give unity, rhythm, and solemnity to a discourse.

<sup>393</sup>See also Victor (Sung Yul) Rhee, "Chiasm and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:619 (July-September 1998):327-45.

### **1. Faith in the Antediluvian Era 11:1-7**

The writer began by stating three facts about faith. These are general observations on the nature of faith, some of its significant features. He then illustrated God's approval of faith with examples from the era before the Flood.

11:1            Essentially faith is confidence that things yet future and unseen will happen as God has revealed they will. This is the basic nature of faith. Verse 1 describes faith rather than defining it.

"This word *hypostasis* [assurance, NASB] has appeared twice already in the epistle. In Ch. 1:3 the Son was stated to be the very image of God's *hypostasis*; in Ch. 3:14 believers are said to be Christ's associates if they hold fast the beginning of their *hypostasis* firm to the end. In the former place it has the objective sense of 'substance' or 'real essence' (as opposed to what merely seems to be so). In the latter place it has the subjective sense of 'confidence' or 'assurance.' Here it is natural to take it in the same subjective sense as it bears in Ch. 3:14, and so ARV and RSV render it 'assurance.'"<sup>394</sup>

"Faith is the basis, the substructure (*hypostasis* means lit. 'that which stands under') of all that the Christian life means, all that the Christian hopes for."<sup>395</sup>

". . . faith celebrates *now* the reality of the *future* blessings that constitute the objective content of hope."<sup>396</sup>

Someone else described faith as the spiritual organ that enables a person to perceive the invisible realities of life.

11:2            God has approved such confidence, as is clear from His commendations of Old Testament men and women who walked by faith.

11:3            However faith is a way of viewing all of life, what lies ahead as well as what is in the past. It involves accepting God's viewpoint as He has revealed it in His Word. This extends to how the universe came into being (cf. 1:2-3) as well as how it will end.

"Belief in the existence of the world is not faith, nor is it faith when men hold that the world was made out of some preexisting 'stuff.' (In the first century there were people

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<sup>394</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 278.

<sup>395</sup>Morris, p. 113.

<sup>396</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 328.

who did not believe in God but who held to some kind of 'creation.') But when we understand that it was the Word of God ('God's command,' NIV) that produced all things, that is faith."<sup>397</sup>

Notice that the writer did not say that God created the universe out of nothing (*creation ex nihilo*), an idea that the Greeks rejected.<sup>398</sup> He simply said that the universe did not originate from primal material or anything observable. His description does not rule out *creation ex nihilo*, but neither does it affirm it. Genesis 1:1-3 and logic seem to indicate that God did indeed create the universe, something visible, out of His word, something invisible.

11:4 The readers could identify with Abel because he, too, had a better sacrifice. Those who based their hope of God's acceptance on an inferior sacrifice would experience disappointment, as Cain did.

By the way, what made Abel's offering superior to Cain's was evidently its being an offering of the "firstlings" (first-born) and its including the "fat" (Gen. 4:4). Ancient Near Easterners commonly held that a deity deserved the first of whatever man, beast, or crop brought forth. The fat likewise represented the best part of an animal offering. Abel's offering shows the respect he gave God as worthy of the best whereas Cain's offering, as Moses described it in Genesis 4, indicates that he did not so reverence God.<sup>399</sup>

"The general tenor of Scripture indicates that the superior quality of Abel's offering derived from the integrity of his heart rather than from the nature of the offering itself. This is the clear implication of Gen 4:7, where the Lord says to Cain, 'If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?'"<sup>400</sup>

". . . what gave Abel's offering greater value was his faith, not the fact that it was an animal sacrifice."<sup>401</sup>

Faith must inspire any worship that God will accept. Even though Abel died long ago, he still speaks to us, through the scriptural record, and so challenges us to continue to worship (show reverence for) God by believing His promises.

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<sup>397</sup>Morris, p. 114.

<sup>398</sup>Guthrie, p. 227.

<sup>399</sup>See Bruce K. Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48:2 (Fall 1986):363-72.

<sup>400</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 334.

<sup>401</sup>Ellingworth, p. 571.

11:5 Whereas Abel suffered murder, Enoch never died, and both demonstrated faith. Enoch set an example of walking by faith all his life that readers would do well to follow.<sup>402</sup> The Lord may return at any time to take modern Enoch's into His presence just as He took that great saint.

11:6 Walking by faith involves not only believing that God exists but also believing that he will reward the faithful. The original readers faced temptation to abandon that hope, as we do. Note that those He will reward are those who "are seeking after Him" (present tense in Greek), not believers who have stopped seeking after Him. Ultimately we know God's will by faith.

In almost all of the following exemplars of faith that the writer cited, there is a clear and direct relationship between faith and reward.<sup>403</sup>

"The best way to grow in faith is to walk with the faithful."<sup>404</sup>

11:7 Noah prepared for things to come. He did not live for the present. By continuing to believe the promises of God, even when everyone else disbelieved them, Noah inherited a new world after the Flood. The writer had promised the readers "the world to come" (2:5-8). Noah's faith led to the preservation of his family. Likewise as we continue to trust God we will encourage others to do so and they will also enter into their inheritance if they follow our example of faithful perseverance.

## **2. Faith in the Patriarchal Era 11:8-22**

11:8-10 Like Abraham we should look forward to our inheritance in the coming world and should live as strangers and pilgrims in this world (1 Pet. 1:1).<sup>405</sup> Abraham demonstrated faith in three phases: when God called him to leave Mesopotamia (v. 8), when he reached the Promised Land but still had to live in it as a foreigner (vv. 9-10), and when God called him to sacrifice Isaac (vv. 17-19).

"Abraham's faith accepted God's promises and acted on them even though there was nothing to indicate that they would be fulfilled."<sup>406</sup>

As Abraham later received the land he formerly lived in as a stranger, so we will, too. The city Abraham looked for was a city God would provide

<sup>402</sup>See Timothy J. Cole, "Enoch, a Man Who Walked with God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:591 (July-September 1991):288-97.

<sup>403</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 339.

<sup>404</sup>Wiersbe, 2:318.

<sup>405</sup>See Daniel J. Estes, "Looking for Abraham's City," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:588 (October-December 1990):399-413, for evidence of Abraham's pilgrim character in Genesis.

<sup>406</sup>Morris, p. 117.

for him. A city with foundations offered a permanent, established home in contrast to the transient existence of a tent-encampment.

"To cultured men in the first century, the city was the highest form of civilized existence."<sup>407</sup>

We look for such a habitation as well, namely, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1, 9-27).<sup>408</sup>

11:11-12 Sarah believed God would fulfill His promise and provide something (a child) totally beyond the realm of natural possibility. God wants us, too, to believe that. God rewarded her faith far beyond what she imagined, and He will reward ours in the same way (cf. Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17-18).

11:13-16 "All these" probably refers to Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob (vv. 8-9, 11) who lived as exiled strangers by faith, not all whom the writer had listed to this point.<sup>409</sup> Verses 13-16 interrupt the recital of Abraham's acts of faith. Evidently the writer decided to "preach" a little at this point, the middle of his exposition of the patriarchs' example. He emphasized the eschatological perspective that is the point of this entire unit (vv. 8-22).

These patriarchs all continued to live by faith, and they died believing God would fulfill His promises to them eventually. They looked forward to possessing a land that God promised to give them. They did not turn back to what they had left; they did not apostatize. In the same way we should not abandon our hope. God was not ashamed of them because they were not ashamed to believe Him and to remain faithful to Him. Likewise we will not shame Him if we resist the temptation to turn from Him in shame (1 Sam. 2:30; 2 Tim. 2:12). God prepared a heavenly habitation for them, and He has done so for us (John 14:1-3).

Each example of faith that the writer cited so far is a positive one involving a believer who kept on trusting God and His promises in spite of temptation to stop trusting. That is what the writer was urging his readers to do throughout this epistle. In every case God approved and rewarded the continuing faith of the faithful.

11:17-19 Here the writer began to develop the idea that he expressed in verse 3, that faith should be the way the believer looks at all of life and history. He did so to help his readers see that continuance in faith is the only logical and consistent attitude for a believer.

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<sup>407</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>408</sup>This writer referred to Abraham 10 times; his example is especially helpful for those tempted to abandon faith in God. Only two other books mention him more: Luke (15 times) and John (11 times).

<sup>409</sup>"Strangers and exiles" is probably a hendiadys meaning "exiled strangers."

"A new movement, the author's exposition of the life of faith, begins here. In a multiplicity of varied experiences faith remains the constant factor by which these experiences are met and understood. Faith constitutes a Christian's true 'world view' (cf. v. 3)."<sup>410</sup>

It is the belief that God could and would raise the dead that is the key element in these verses. From Abraham's perspective God's promise and His command seemed to conflict.

"We are apt to see this as a conflict between Abraham's love for his son and his duty to God. But for the author the problem was Abraham's difficulty in reconciling the different revelations made to him."<sup>411</sup>

Abraham was willing to continue to trust and obey God because He believed God could even raise Isaac, his unique (Gr. *monogenes*) son, from the dead to fulfill His promises of an heir. Similarly we need to continue to trust and obey God even though He may have to raise us from the dead to fulfill His promises to us. Isaac's restoration was a type (Gr. *parabole*, parable, figure, illustration) of the fact that God will give us what He has promised if we continue to trust and obey Him. When Isaac rose from the altar, it was as though he had risen from the dead.

11:20-22 Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all demonstrated confidence in God's word in the ways mentioned. They believed He would provide for them what He had promised. We should do the same. The faith of all three of these patriarchs affected their descendants. Ours should as well.

"With all three the significant thing was their firm conviction that death cannot frustrate God's purposes."<sup>412</sup>

### **3. Faith in the Mosaic Era 11:23-31**

Here the writer began to focus on the way faith deals with hostility and persecution, a subject of special interest to his audience, which was facing opposition from Jewish brethren.

"Moses and Abraham hold the most prominent places in the roll of faith; and the central event of both their lives, as Hebrews presents them, is a journey."<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>410</sup>Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 808.

<sup>411</sup>Morris, pp. 121-22.

<sup>412</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>413</sup>Ellingworth, p. 608.

11:23 Faith confronts hostility in a characteristic way that the writer began to emphasize in this verse. We see Amram and Jochebed's faith in God in their placing His will above Pharaoh's command. Moses was no ordinary child among other ways in that His parents saved his life even though Pharaoh had ordered all Jewish male babies killed.<sup>414</sup> Amram and Jochebed regarded God's will concerning the sanctity of life as more important than obedience to the state when national law required disobeying God's will (cf. Acts 4:19). God honored their faith.

11:24-26 Moses had a true appreciation for the promises of God. This led him to choose the reward associated with Israel's promised Messiah over the temporary material wealth he could have enjoyed had he stayed in Egypt. We should also be willing to suffer temporary disgrace, reproach, and loss as we continue to cast our lot with God's faithful disciples.

"As with Abraham and Moses of old, the decisions we make today will determine the rewards tomorrow. More than this, our decisions should be motivated by the expectation of receiving rewards. . . . The emphasis in the Epistle to the Hebrews is: 'Don't live for what the world will promise you today! Live for what God has promised you in the future! . . .'"<sup>415</sup>

11:27 Moses persevered in spite of the king's wrath, and so should we in spite of the wrath we may experience from ungodly opponents. Probably Moses' departure for Midian 40 years before the Exodus is in view here. This seems likely in view of the chronological sequence the writer followed in this passage. The reference to the king's wrath is appropriate because Moses left Egypt then because Pharaoh sought to kill him (Exod. 2:15).

"The emphasis . . . falls not on endurance but on continually seeing, as it were, the unseen God . . . The reference is not to the awesome event at the burning bush . . . , as if to say that Moses saw one who is invisible, but to a fixed habit of spiritual perception. . . .

"From the pastoral perspective of the writer, the firmly entrenched habit of Moses in keeping God continually in view establishes a standard for imitation by the community in its experience of fear and governmental oppression."<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>414</sup>The writer mentioned Moses 11 times, more than in any other New Testament book except for John and Acts.

<sup>415</sup>Wiersbe, 2:279.

<sup>416</sup>Lane, *Hebrews* 9—13, p. 376.

"The courage to abandon work on which one's heart is set, and accept inaction cheerfully as the will of God, is of the rarest and highest kind, and can be created and sustained only by the clearest spiritual vision' (Peake)."<sup>417</sup>

11:28 Furthermore, as Moses continued to demonstrate confidence in the blood of the lamb that God provided, so should we. He avoided and we avoid God's judgment by doing so.

In this verse there is a subtle transition from emphasis on exemplary persons to exemplary events (cf. vv. 29-30, 33-38).

11:29-30 The people of Israel experienced victory over their enemies as they trusted God, and we can, too. At the Red Sea the Israelites willingly went forward at God's word rather than turning back. Trust and obedience resulted in the Israelites' preservation and eventual entrance into their inheritance. The believing community that originally received this homily could identify with a group of people who persevered, not just individuals.

11:31 Even though Rahab was a Gentile sinner (i.e., a secular prostitute), God spared her when he destroyed all those around her. Likewise God will preserve the faithful, not because they are personally worthy, but because of their faith in Him.

"Although a foreigner to the covenant people, she manifested a faith that was oriented toward the future and that found specific content in the acts of the God of Israel (Josh 2:11). She was prepared to assume present peril for the sake of future preservation (Josh 2:12-16)."<sup>418</sup>

#### **4. Faith in subsequent eras 11:32-40**

11:32 The rhetorical question, "And what more shall I say?" suggests that the writer did not consider that there was much point in citing more examples.<sup>419</sup> The Old Testament is full of good models of persevering, living faith. Nevertheless, the writer selected these few additional Israelites for brief mention along with what their faith accomplished.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>417</sup>Moffatt, p. 181.

<sup>418</sup>Ibid., p. 379.

<sup>419</sup>Guthrie, p. 243.

<sup>420</sup>This is the only New Testament reference to Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah. The writer employed the rhetorical device of *paraleipsis* here. In *paraleipsis* the speaker or writer suggests that he is not going to mention something but then does so. This technique stresses the suggestiveness of what he has omitted. In this case the writer suggested that he could have cited many more examples of persevering faith.

Each individual that the writer mentioned was less than perfect, as is every believer. Yet God approved the faith of each one.

"The order of names here may be understood if they are read as three pairs, Gideon-Barak, Samson-Jephthah, David-Samuel, the more important member of each pair being named first."<sup>421</sup>

11:33-35a Joshua conquered kingdoms. Daniel shut the lions' mouths (Dan. 6:17-22), as did Samson (Judg. 14:5-6), David (1 Sam. 17:34-37), and Benaiah (1 Chron. 11:22). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego escaped fiery deaths (Dan. 3:23-27). David, Elijah, Elisha, and Jeremiah avoided execution. Women even received their dead back because they believed God could and would do what He had promised (cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:17-37).<sup>422</sup>

11:35b-38 Faith does not result in deliverance in every case, however. These verses refer to many different forms of persecution, which would have been particularly comforting to the original distressed readers. Traditionally Isaiah suffered death at King Manasseh's hand by being sawn in two.<sup>423</sup>

"According to . . . mutually complementary rabbinic sources, Manasseh, enraged because Isaiah had prophesied the destruction of the Temple, ordered his arrest. Isaiah fled to the hill country and hid in the trunk of a cedar tree. He was discovered when the king ordered the tree cut down. Isaiah was tortured with a saw because he had taken refuge in the trunk of a tree . . ."<sup>424</sup>

Sometimes the faithful person's reward comes on the other side of the grave. Some of the readers, and we, might have to endure death. Those who accept death without apostatizing are those the world is not worthy of because they do not turn from following God even under the most severe pressure.

11:39-40 Those faithful believers who died in Old Testament times have not yet entered into their inheritances. This awaits the future, probably the Second Coming when Christ will judge Old Testament saints (Dan. 12:1-2; cf. Isa. 26:19). We will have some part in their reward. We will do so at least as Christ's companions who will witness their award ceremony. Their

<sup>421</sup>Ellingworth, p. 623. Cf. 1 Sam. 12:11.

<sup>422</sup>Some commentators (e.g., Moffatt, pp. 186-87) have seen allusions in verses 34 and 35 to experiences that the Israelites underwent during the Maccabean struggle (1 Macc. 2:7; 3:15; et al.).

<sup>423</sup>*The Martyrdom of Isaiah* 5:1-14.

<sup>424</sup>Lane, *Hebrews* 9—13, p. 390.

perfection refers to their entering into their final rest (inheritance) and rests, as ours does, on the sacrificial death of Christ (cf. 9:15).

"God's plan provided for 'something better for us.' The indefinite pronoun leaves the precise nature of the blessing undefined. The important thing is not exactly what it is but that God has not imparted it prematurely. 'Us' means 'us Christians' . . ." <sup>425</sup>

Verses 39-40 summarize the chapter by relating the list of exemplary witnesses to the audience's experience, and they provide a transition to the argument of 12:1-13.

God intended this wonderful chapter to encourage us to continue to trust and obey Him in the midst of temptations to turn away from following Him faithfully. The implication is that our reward, as theirs, is eschatological.

". . . it is the future, and not the past, that molds the present. . . .

"The men and women celebrated in the catalogue of attested exemplars all directed the capacity of faith to realities which for them lay in the future (cf. 11:7, 10, 13, 27, 31, 35-38). They found in faith a reliable guide to the future, even though they died without experiencing the fulfillment of God's promise (11:23, 39). . . .

"The most distinctive aspect of the exposition is the development of the relation of faith to suffering and martyrdom." <sup>426</sup>

### **B. DEMONSTRATING NECESSARY ENDURANCE 12:1-13**

The writer followed up his scriptural exposition with another final exhortation (chs. 12—13). This is a pattern he followed consistently throughout this epistle. He first called on his readers to persevere faithfully so they would not lose any of their reward. This section is chiasmic.

- A** A call to run with endurance (vv. 1-3)
- B** Explanation of the role of suffering (vv. 4-11)
- A'** A call to renew commitment to endure (vv. 12-13)

#### **1. The example of Jesus 12:1-3**

One writer observed a chiasmic structure in verses one and two.

"Therefore we,

<sup>425</sup>Morris, p. 132.

<sup>426</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, pp. 394-95.



meaning that faithful witnesses to the faith are watching us as we run the race.<sup>434</sup>

In view of this encouragement we should lay aside everything that impedes our running the Christian race successfully (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24; 2 Tim. 4:7-8). Popular moral philosophers who spoke on the streets of every sizeable Hellenistic community in the first century commonly used an athletic contest as an illustration of life.<sup>435</sup> "Encumbrances" are weights that may not be sins but nevertheless make perseverance difficult.

"Some one is recorded to have asked whether a certain thing would do a person harm, and the reply was given, 'No harm, if you do not wish to win.'"<sup>436</sup>

We should also lay aside sin. "The sin" that the writer warned his readers against especially in Hebrews is unbelief, apostasy. In view of the immediately preceding context, it might refer to discouragement. However many different kinds of sin can trip us up, and we should avoid all sin for this reason.<sup>437</sup>

"This might have reference to the love of wealth, attachment to the world, preoccupation with earthly interests, or self-importance."<sup>438</sup>

The reason for this self-discipline is so we can keep on running the Christian race effectively. Here the writer returned to the thought of 10:28: "You have need of endurance." He conceived of the Christian life as an endurance race, a marathon, not a 50-yard dash.

". . . the real test of life is the steady, normal progress of the soul—not paroxysms of effort but steady endurance."<sup>439</sup>

12:2-3 As a runner keeps looking toward his or her goal, so we should keep looking to Jesus, not primarily to the other witnesses (v. 1). When we take our eyes of faith off Jesus, we begin to sink, like Peter (Matt. 14:22-33). Jesus should be our primary model when it comes to persevering. The writer used the simple personal name "Jesus" to accent our Lord's humanity, especially His endurance of pain, humiliation, and the disgrace of the cross.

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<sup>434</sup>Cf. Morris, p. 133.

<sup>435</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 408.

<sup>436</sup>Thomas, p. 156.

<sup>437</sup>Guthrie, p. 249.

<sup>438</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 409.

<sup>439</sup>Thomas, p. 156. See Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.

"The writer now returns to the duty of *hupomone* [endurance] as the immediate exercise of *pistis* [faith] (10<sup>36f.</sup>), as the great Believer, who shows us what true *pistis* means, from beginning to end, in its heroic course (*ton prokeimenon hemin agona*) [the race that is set before us]."440

He is our "author" (lit. file leader, captain, pioneer; 2:10). It was by looking to Him in faith that we were saved. Jesus set the example of living by faith for us, the evidence of His faith being his prayers. Jesus perfected faith in the sense that He finished His course of living by faith successfully (cf. 2:13).

"As the 'perfecter of faith' Jesus is the one in whom faith has reached its perfection."441

"He alone is the source of hope and help in their time of need. Looking to Him in faith and devotion is the central theological and practical message of Hebrews."442

The joy of the prospect of His reward, namely, His victory over death, glorification, inheritance, and reign motivated Him, too (1:9, 13-14; 8:1; 10:12). This is the only occurrence of "cross" outside the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles, and its presence here stresses the shame associated with Jesus' crucifixion. What we look forward to is very similar to what Jesus anticipated. Such a prospect will help us endure suffering and despise the shame involved in living faithful to God.

12:3 The readers should think upon Jesus so they might not grow tired of persevering and lose heart. Meditation on Jesus and the cross encourage us to continue to follow God's will faithfully. It is natural for us to overestimate the severity of our trials, and the writer did not want us to do this.

"The clear implication for the audience is that if they were to relinquish their commitment to Christ under the pressure of persistent opposition they would express active opposition against themselves (as in 6:6!), just as did Jesus' tormentors [cf. 10:38-39]."443

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<sup>440</sup>Moffatt, p. 192.

<sup>441</sup>D. G. Peterson, "An Examination of the Concept of 'Perfection' in the 'Epistle to the Hebrews'" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manchester, 1978), p. 298.

<sup>442</sup>Fanning, p. 415.

<sup>443</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, pp. 416-17.

## **2. The proper view of trials 12:4-11**

The writer put his readers' sufferings in perspective so they might not overestimate the difficulty they faced in remaining faithful to God.

"Suffering comes to all; it is part of life, but it is not easy to bear. Yet it is not quite so bad when it can be seen as meaningful. . . . The writer points out the importance of discipline and proceeds to show that for Christians suffering is rightly understood only when seen as God's fatherly discipline, correcting and directing us. Suffering is evidence, not that God does not love us, but that he does."<sup>444</sup>

12:4 The readers had not yet resisted sin to the extent that their enemies were torturing or killing them for their faith, as had been Jesus' experience. Evidently there had been no martyrs among the readers yet, though the writer and the readers undoubtedly knew of Christians elsewhere who had died for their faith (e.g., Stephen, James, et al.). Their striving against sin probably refers to both resisting sinful opponents and resisting temptations to sin in their own lives (v. 1).

12:5-8 We need to remember, too, that God allows us to experience some opposition to make us stronger in the faith (Deut. 8:5; Prov. 3:11-12; James 1).<sup>445</sup> Another value of divine discipline is that it prepares us to reign with Christ (cf. 2:10). God's discipline assures us that we are His sons. All believers are "partakers" (cf. 1:9; 3:1, 14; 6:4) of discipline. The "illegitimate children" in view seem to be genuine children of God but not approved sons.<sup>446</sup>

"A father would spend much care and patience on the upbringing of a true-born son whom he hoped to make a wealthy heir; and at the time such a son might have to undergo much more irksome discipline than an illegitimate child for whom no future of honor and responsibility was envisaged, and who therefore might be left more or less to please himself."<sup>447</sup>

Ishmael is an Old Testament example of an illegitimate child. He was the true child of Abraham. Yet because he was illegitimate (i.e., the son of Hagar rather than Sarah, Abraham's wife) he did not receive the inheritance that Isaac, the legitimate child, did (cf. Gen. 17:19-21; 21:12-14). Ishmael received some blessing because he was Abraham's son, but he did not receive the full inheritance because he was an illegitimate child.

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<sup>444</sup>Morris, p. 136.

<sup>445</sup>Verses 5-11 constitute an exposition of Proverbs 3:11-12.

<sup>446</sup>See Rom. 8:14-17 for the contrast between children and sons.

<sup>447</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, pp. 357-58.

The approved sons in view here in Hebrews are evidently those who persevere through discipline to the end of their lives whereas the illegitimate children do not but apostatize.<sup>448</sup>

"In the Roman world, an 'illegitimate child' had no inheritance rights."<sup>449</sup>

God deals with apostate believers in judgment, but He deals with persevering believers in discipline (cf. 5:8). The writer seems to be saying that God disciplines all Christians, but when a believer apostatizes God may let him go his own way without disciplining him further. God disciplines Christians to prepare us for future service, but when we apostatize He stops preparing us for future service. This is probably true only in extreme cases of departure from God and His truth (cf. 6:6, where we read that it is impossible to renew these apostates to repentance).

"The author does not specify what, in literal terms, would be involved in being an illegitimate member of God's family. The context does not refer, even indirectly, to 'false brethren [i.e., non-Christians] secretly brought in' (Gal. 2:4). The wider context does suggest that such illegitimate offspring are apostates such as Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, probably alluded to in v. 3; or more generally, those who do not keep faith firmly to the end (10:39)."<sup>450</sup>

Another view of the terms "sons" and "illegitimate children" is that they refer to true Christians and only professing but not genuine Christians respectively.<sup>451</sup> The reason I do not favor this view is that throughout this epistle I believe the writer is urging true Christians to remain faithful and not apostatize. In other words, the context favors this interpretation. Moreover an illegitimate child is, after all, still a child of his father. We need to understand the legitimate and illegitimate distinction in the light of Jewish and Roman culture.

"The ancient world found it incomprehensible that a father could possibly love his child and not punish him. In fact, a real son would draw more discipline than, say, an illegitimate child for the precise reason that greater honor and responsibility were to be his."<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>448</sup>Ellingworth, p. 651; Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 810.

<sup>449</sup>Ibid.

<sup>450</sup>Ellingworth, p. 651.

<sup>451</sup>E.g., Morris, p. 137.

<sup>452</sup>R. Kent Hughes, 2:173.

Perhaps this explains why committed Christians seem to experience more difficulties than non-committed Christians. God is preparing committed Christians for greater honor and responsibility in the future.

"A *father* who neglects to discipline a *son* is deficient in his capacity as father, and a son who escapes all discipline is losing out on his sonship. This is a principle which would not be recognized by all schools of thought in this modern age where permissiveness has such powerful influence. The authority of parents has been so eroded that discipline rarely if ever comes into play. It has generally ceased to be a part of sonship. It is small wonder that those brought up in such an atmosphere find genuine difficulty in understanding the discipline of God."<sup>453</sup>

12:9-11 As Christians we need to submit to God's discipline in our lives because it will result in fullness of life and greater holiness and righteousness with peace.

". . . there may be an implied contrast between temporary human punishment and the permanent reward which is given to those who submit to divine discipline."<sup>454</sup>

God always designs discipline for our welfare even though it may not be pleasant to endure.

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."<sup>455</sup>

The title "Father of spirits" (v. 9) occurs only here in the New Testament (cf. Num. 16:22; 27:16). It probably means something like "our spiritual Father," as some English versions translate it (TEV, NEB, JB), in contrast to our physical (earthly) fathers.

This is one of the great sections in the New Testament that clarifies the reason for the Christian's trials (cf. James 1; 1 Peter). It is essential that we view our sufferings as the Lord's discipline rather than as an indication of His displeasure, or worse, His hatred (cf. Deut. 1:26-27) if we would persevere faithfully. There is a real as well as a linguistic connection between "discipline" and "disciple" and "discipleship."

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<sup>453</sup>Guthrie, p. 253.

<sup>454</sup>Ellingworth, p. 654.

<sup>455</sup>Lewis, p. 81.

### **3. The need for greater strength 12:12-13**

The writer next urged his readers to take specific action that would enhance their continuance in the faith.

This word of exhortation, as well as the others, reveals that the original readers were spiritually weak. Consequently, the writer urged them to build up their strength so they could work effectively and walk without stumbling (cf. Prov. 4:25-27). The Greek word *ektrepo*, translated "be put out of joint" (v. 13), has the technical medical sense of a foot turning so as to become dislocated.<sup>456</sup> This power comes as we draw upon our resources for strength, namely, the Word of God and the ministry of our great High Priest (4:12-16). The readers also needed to level the path of discipleship they trod by removing impediments to their progress. Then the lame among them (i.e., the very weak) might recover as they proceeded to walk. The writer probably intended this exhortation to include laying aside sin (v. 1) and compromising associations with apostates who might throw unneeded barriers such as false teaching in the Christians' path.

This encouragement completes the thought of verses 1-13. The writer began with an exhortation, expounded the value of discipline, and ended with another exhortation.

"A depth of pastoral concern is evident throughout this section. The writer understood that faith can be eroded by constant exposure to harsh circumstances."<sup>457</sup>

### **V. LIFE IN A HOSTILE WORLD 12:14—13:25**

This final major section of the book apparently grew out of the writer's reflection on the Greek text of Proverbs 4:26-27. He specified how his readers could "make straight paths for your feet" (12:13).

"In the final division of the homily the writer provides the members of the house church with a fresh orientation for life as Christians in a hostile society. The new people of God are engaged in pilgrimage to the city of God. This world is not their home; their goal is 'a kingdom that cannot be shaken' (12:28) or 'the city that is to come' (13:14). The metaphor of the journey to the city of God characterizes men and women of committed faith as pilgrims and implies an understanding of Christian life as commitment to pilgrimage. It also implies fidelity to the covenant."<sup>458</sup>

The sections of this final division all contain these themes of pilgrimage and covenant privilege and obligation. As in the first division (1:1—2:18), there is much emphasis on God speaking and the importance of listening to His voice.

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<sup>456</sup>Ellingworth, p. 659.

<sup>457</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 428.

<sup>458</sup>Ibid., pp. 433-34.

"The writer offers his readers advice on how to live as a community of faith, between well-founded hope and the dangers which surround them."<sup>459</sup>

### **A. THE DANGER OF UNRESPONSIVENESS (THE FIFTH WARNING) 12:14-29**

The writer now turned from the hearers' responsibility as they experienced suffering (vv. 1-13) to the peril of rejecting God who continues to speak to us through His Son using the Scriptures. As the preceding pericope (vv. 1-13), this one is also a chiasm.

- A Exhortation (vv. 14-17)
- B Exposition (vv. 18-24)
- A' Exhortation (vv. 25-29)

"The synthesis of so many significant themes and motifs within a single section identifies 12:14-29 as the pastoral and theological climax of the sermon . . ."<sup>460</sup>

#### **1. The goal of peace 12:14-17**

These verses summarize what the writer said previously about irrevocable loss through disobedience, unbelief, apostasy, and contempt for New Covenant privileges (cf. 6:4-8). The fearful warning about Esau brings these earlier warnings to an awesome head.

12:14        We need to live peaceably with all people as much as we can (cf. Matt. 5:9; Mark 9:50; Rom. 12:18; 14:19) because peaceful interpersonal relationships foster godliness (James 3:18). However this writer's emphasis was more on the objective reality that results from Christ's death than on our subjective enjoyment of peace. Since we will one day see the Lord, and since no sin can abide in His presence (1 John 3:2), we must pursue holiness in our lives now. A better translation than "sanctification" here is "holiness" (Gr. *hagiasmos*; cf. *hagiatetos* in v. 10, and *hagiasomenoi* in 10:10).<sup>461</sup> As with peace, holiness is our present state, and we need to continue to manifest it by remaining faithful when tempted to depart from the Lord.

This statement may seem at first to contradict the fact that Satan saw God and appeared in His presence in Job 1 and 2. While Satan did and probably still does have access to God's presence, that will not be his permanent privilege. The writer of Hebrews spoke here of the permanent privilege of human beings.

<sup>459</sup>Ellingworth, p. 661.

<sup>460</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 448.

<sup>461</sup>In Koine Greek, nouns ending in *mos* in the nominative case describe action.

12:15 Negatively the writer warned against neglecting God's grace (help). God's grace enables us to persevere (cf. 3:12), but here it is almost synonymous with the Christian faith. This neglect would result in unfaithfulness spreading as a poison among God's people (cf. Deut. 29:17-18). The writer pictured departure from the truth here as a root that produces bitter fruit in the Christian community. It results in the spiritual defilement of many other believers eventually. The writer was not implying that most of his readers were in danger of apostatizing (cf. 6:9) but that the failure of only one individual can affect many other believers.

"Stubbornness, when it grows, produces the noxious fruit of apostasy, which is equivalent to excluding oneself from the grace of God. . . .

"The sin of one individual can corrupt the entire community when that sin is apostasy, because defilement is contagious. One who is defiled by unbelief and apostasy becomes a defiler of others."<sup>462</sup>

"The writer has just referred to the need for helping those who are weak and failing in their faith. It would be logical that this still is in reference to them, providing a more specific instance in which some are failing. It is a failing with reference to the grace of God, especially as it relates to seeking forgiveness for failure. It is uncalled for to take this reference and make it a general designation of the plan of salvation."<sup>463</sup>

12:16-17 Esau is a clear example of someone who apostatized; he despised his inheritance and forfeited it to satisfy his immediate desires. That is precisely what the writer warned his readers not to do in this letter. Esau could not regain his inheritance later when he repented. His decision had permanent consequences; he could not repent (cf. 4:1; 6:4-6).<sup>464</sup> His inability to repent was not a matter of forgiveness but of consequences.

"To take a very simple example—if a young man loses his purity or a girl her virginity, nothing can ever bring it back. The choice was made and the choice stands. God can and will forgive, but God Himself cannot turn back the clock and unmake the choice or undo the consequences."<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>462</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, pp. 453, 454.

<sup>463</sup>Duane A. Dunham, "An Exegetical Examination of the Warnings in the Epistle to the Hebrews" (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1974), p. 227.

<sup>464</sup>See Ellingworth, pp. 668-69; Moffatt, p. 212.

<sup>465</sup>Barclay, p. 210.

The writer warned against two things in verse 16: immorality (Gr.  *pornos*) and being godless (*bebelos*) like Esau. The Old Testament makes no mention of Esau's immorality, so probably the writer understood this term metaphorically in the sense of "apostate."<sup>466</sup> Esau was "godless" in that he relinquished his covenant rights for the sake of immediate gratification.<sup>467</sup> He is "the prototype of all who throw away the heavenly reality for the sake of the earthly one."<sup>468</sup>

"Whether or not Esau was saved is not relevant to this discussion. The writer uses him as an illustration of the fact that the saved can lose their firstborn inheritance rights. His example is applied to those who have come to the church of the firstborn ones (Heb. 12:23).

"True Christians fully parallel the description of Esau. We are children of God and we are firstborn sons. Because of that we possess the rights of the firstborn. We do not have to earn these rights. They are given to us through the grace of God. However, we must value and keep these rights and are warned by Esau's example regarding the possibility of not doing so. But even though we cannot forfeit eternal life, we can forfeit our firstborn rights."<sup>469</sup>

"Esau's willingness to give up all that was his as the firstborn son reflected a contempt for the covenant by which his rights were warranted. By descriptive analogy, he is representative of apostate persons who are ready to turn their backs on God and the divine promises, in reckless disregard of the covenant blessings secured by the sacrificial death of Jesus. The immediate reference is to the objective blessings of 'peace' and 'holiness,' specified in v 14. With the example of Esau, apostasy is further defined as a decisive rejection of God's gifts."<sup>470</sup>

"In Jewish history, the birthright belonged to the firstborn son in a family simply by right of birth and consisted of three things: 1) *ruler* of the household under and for the father, 2) *priest* of the family, and 3) the reception of a *double portion* of all the father's goods. Although a

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<sup>466</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 445.

<sup>467</sup>Some translators rendered *bebelos* "profane," which means "before (outside) the temple." This paints Esau correctly as a man who lived his life by avoiding God. Today we might know him as a man who did not attend church.

<sup>468</sup>Thompson, p. 43.

<sup>469</sup>Dillow, p. 85.

<sup>470</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, pp. 445-46.

firstborn son did nothing whatsoever to come into possession of the birthright, he could conduct his life in such a manner so as to forfeit the birthright. He could not forfeit his *position* as firstborn in the family, but he could forfeit the *rights* of the firstborn."<sup>471</sup>

## **2. The superiority of the New Covenant 12:18-24**

The writer proceeded to reiterate the superiority of the New Covenant by comparing it with the Old Covenant using the figure of two mountains: Sinai and Zion.

"As vv. <sup>14-17</sup> recall the first warning of 6<sup>4-8</sup>, so he [the writer] now proceeds to reiterate the second warning of 10<sup>26-31</sup>, reminding his readers that they stand in a critical position, in which any indifferences or disobedience to God will prove fatal."<sup>472</sup>

12:18-21 These verses describe the giving of the Old Covenant at Mt. Sinai (cf. 2:2-4; Exod. 19:9-23; Deut. 4:11; 9:8-19).<sup>473</sup> The writer made Sinai and Zion metaphors to show the difference in quality between relationship to God under the Old and New Covenants (cf. Gal. 4:24-26).<sup>474</sup> The emphasis in this comparison is on the holiness of God and the fearful consequences of incurring His displeasure (cf. Judg. 13:20; 1 Kings 8:12; 18:38; Nah. 1:3; Matt. 24:30-31; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16). God was far from the Israelites, and even Moses felt terror.

12:22-24 The giving of the New Covenant and the things associated with that covenant are more impressive because they are the heavenly realities. These realities include the heavenly city and heavenly beings (i.e., angels and believers). Everything about this vision encourages us to come boldly into God's presence (cf. 4:16).

The phrase "the general assembly and church of the first-born"—the Greek construction suggests one group—probably refers to all those believers who had died but will receive their full inheritance.<sup>475</sup>

"To come to the 'church of the firstborn' means to be called to the privilege of being a firstborn son. All Christians are called to be part of that assembly and by birth have a right

<sup>471</sup>Chitwood, p. 139.

<sup>472</sup>Moffatt, pp. 213-14.

<sup>473</sup>See J. M. Casey, "Eschatology in Heb 12:14-29: An Exegetical Study" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of Leuven, 1977), p. 318.

<sup>474</sup>See D. G. Peterson, "The Prophecy of the New Covenant in the Argument of Hebrews," *Reformed Theological Review* 38 (1979):79-80.

<sup>475</sup>Hodges, "Hebrews," p. 811. Others (e.g., Morris, p. 142) believe it refers to all the saints on earth and in heaven.

to be there. However, they may forfeit that right and never achieve their calling. That is the thrust of all the warnings of the book of Hebrews."<sup>476</sup>

The firstborn was the son who received the greatest amount of inheritance. This is another reference to Christ's companions (1:9; 3:12) who are partakers of His glory (3:14; 6:4; 12:8), namely, those who faithfully persevere in their faith.<sup>477</sup> Their names are on a heavenly roll as those who died cleaving to the Lord (cf. Exod. 32:33; Ps. 69:28; Isa. 4:3; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 20:12).<sup>478</sup>

"The spirits of righteous men made perfect" evidently refers to all the glorified redeemed, faithful and unfaithful, whom Christ's sacrifice has perfected (cf. 10:10, 14; 11:40).

Jesus' blood is better than Abel's because it did not cry out for justice and retribution as Abel's did (cf. 11:4; Gen. 4:10).<sup>479</sup> It satisfied God's demands and secured God's acceptance of New Covenant believers (cf. 9:12, 26; 10:10, 14, 19). It cried out to God for mercy and pardon for those for whom Jesus shed it.

"It must be acknowledged that the reference to Abel in v. 24b is unexpected, because it does not belong to the developed comparison between Sinai and Zion. It may have been suggested by the reference in v 23b to the presence of *pneumasi dikaion*, 'the spirits of righteous persons,' in the heavenly city, since the writer had specified in 11:4 that Abel was attested by God as *dikaios*, 'righteous.' It may also have been the writer's intention to evoke the whole history of redemption, from the righteous Abel to the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus, mediator of the new covenant . . ."<sup>480</sup>

This sevenfold comparison (vv. 18-21 and 22-24) should motivate us to remain faithful and thereby realize the superior blessings of the New Covenant.

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<sup>476</sup>Dillow, p. 85, n. 73.

<sup>477</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 469.

<sup>478</sup>Others see the group in view as all Christians already in heaven (e.g., Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, pp. 376-77) or as all Christians on earth (e.g., Moffatt, p. 217; I Howard Marshall, "New Wine in Old Wine-Skins: V. The Biblical Use of the Word '*Ekklesia*,'" *Expository Times* 84:12 (1973):364; Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, pp. 115-16).

<sup>479</sup>Their "blood" is a metonymy for their "death." Both deaths were violent and involved the shedding of blood.

<sup>480</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 474. Cf. Casey, pp. 380-82.

A mountain that may be touched	Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem
Blazing fire	Myriads of angels
Darkness	The general assembly and church of the firstborn
Gloom	God, the Judge of all
Whirlwind	The spirits of righteous men made perfect
The blast of a trumpet	Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant
The sound of words	The sprinkled blood that is better than Abel's

### **3. The consequences of apostasy 12:25-29**

The writer shifted again from exposition to exhortation. The hook word "speak" (Gr. *lalounti* and *lalounta*) in verses 24 and 25 ties the two sections together.

12:25           The One speaking probably refers to God. "Him who warned them on earth" probably refers to God when He spoke from Mt. Sinai. The contrast is not primarily between the persons who spoke but between the places from which God spoke (cf. v. 26).<sup>481</sup> It would have been especially impressive to Jewish Christians. The present warning came from God in heaven and dealt with failure to continue to cleave to His Son (cf. 1:1-2; 2:2-3).

12:26-27       God's voice shook the earth at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19:18; Judg. 5:4-5; Ps. 68:8; 77:18; 114:4, 7). It will shake the earth and the heavens at the end of the Millennium. That shaking will lead to the creation of new heavens and a new earth that will remain (Ps. 95:9-11; Hag. 2:6; Rev. 21:1).

"The 'shaking' is a metaphor for the judgment of God executed in history, as in the case of the fall of Babylon announced in Isa 13:1-22."<sup>482</sup>

12:28-29       Our kingdom is eternal. Our motive should be gratitude. Our activity should be the service of God. Our attitude toward Him should be reverence and awe in view of His ability to judge the unfaithful (cf. 1 Cor. 3:14-15).

"As a consuming fire, God purifies all that is unworthy and unacceptable in those who serve Him and all that is unfit to abide in His presence."<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>481</sup>The other view is that the contrast is between a human oracle of God (Moses) and the divine Voice (Christ). Moffatt, p. 220.

<sup>482</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 479.

<sup>483</sup>Pentecost, *A Faith . . .*, p. 225.

Many readers of Hebrews associate the figure of God consuming with His judging unbelievers in hell, but this figure also occurs in the Old Testament with reference to judgment of His people (cf. Exod. 24:17; Lev. 10:2; Num. 16:35; Deut. 4:24; 1 Cor. 3:15).

The reference to fire in verse 29 completes an *inclusio* begun with another mention of fire in verse 18. The whole section that these references to fire enclose deals with how important it is to respond properly to God.

"The warning proper is found in 12:25-29. The readers are called to heed Yahweh, for an eschatological shaking is coming in which the earthly material order will pass away, leaving only an eternal kingdom. The faithful readers who endure will have a part in the eschatological kingdom—the millennium and the New Jerusalem as 'companions' of Jesus, the Messiah-King (1:9, 13-14). This kingdom will become an eternal kingdom. . . .

"All five warnings in the epistle have a positive thrust and a negative impetus. . . . Disobedience to God and His Word will result in a forfeiting of eschatological rewards; obedience to God and His Word will result in a gaining of eschatological rewards."<sup>484</sup>

This chapter contains three resources that encourage and enable us to run the Christian race with endurance. They are the example of Jesus (vv. 1-4), the assurance of the Father's love (vv. 5-13), and the enablement of God's grace (vv. 14-29).<sup>485</sup>

### **B. LIFE WITHIN THE CHURCH CH. 13**

The writer concluded his written sermon with specific exhortations, requests, and greetings to enable his readers to continue to worship God acceptably under the New Covenant (cf. 12:28).

"The emphasis in this last section of the book is on *living by faith*. The writer presented the great *examples* of faith in Hebrews 11, and the *encouragements* to faith in Hebrews 12. In Hebrews 13, he presented the *evidences* of faith that should appear in our lives if we are really walking by faith and not by sight."<sup>486</sup>

The last chapter has two parts. Verses 1-21 develop the idea of thankfulness expressed in service motivated by the fear of God, which the writer introduced in 12:28. Verses 22-25 constitute a personal note to the readers that lies quite outside the argument of the homily proper.

<sup>484</sup>Oberholtzer, 146:75.

<sup>485</sup>Wiersbe, 2:322-26.

<sup>486</sup>Ibid., 2:326. The four evidences he identified are enjoying spiritual fellowship (vv. 1-6), submitting to spiritual leadership (vv. 7-9, 17, 24), sharing in spiritual wisdom (vv. 10-16, 18-19), and experiencing spiritual Lordship (vv. 20-21).

### **1. Pastoral reminders 13:1-21**

This section consists of parenthesis, reminders of what the readers already knew or were doing or of what they knew they should avoid. As in the Mosaic Law, moral directions (vv. 1-6) precede religious instructions (vv. 7-19).

#### **Instructions regarding morality 13:1-6**

13:1 When love for Jesus Christ falters, love for the brethren normally fades as well (cf. Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2 Pet. 1:7; 1 John 2:9).

13:2 Abraham entertained angels when he showed them hospitality (Gen. 18). Hospitality (Gr. *philoxenia*, lit. love to strangers) is a concrete expression of Christian love today as it was in the first century (cf. 3 John 5-8).<sup>487</sup> Abraham received a special blessing because he showed hospitality, and we may, too (cf. Matt. 25:35). All Christians should practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13), especially Christian leaders (Titus 1:8).

Have you ever entertained an angel? Since the word "angel" means "messenger," in one sense any time we entertain someone who brings a message from God (e.g., a visiting preacher or missionary) we entertain an angel. In the sense of entertaining a spirit being who comes to us in human form with a message from God, perhaps some have that privilege even today.

13:3 The prisoners in view were evidently Christians who were suffering for their testimonies (cf. 10:34; Matt. 25:36, 40). Often prisoners in the Roman world had to depend on friends on the outside to provide them with food. The existence of a significant number of prisoners supports a date for writing after A.D. 64. The readers might suffer the same fate themselves one day since they were still leading a mortal existence. Paul urged Timothy not to be ashamed of him when he was a prisoner (2 Tim. 1:8). All the Christians in the province of Asia had abandoned Paul then except for those in Onesiphorus' household (2 Tim 1:15-18).

13:4 Christians also need to maintain a high regard for marriage and to remain sexually pure. God's judgment will follow the sexually impure (cf. 12:29). Under the Old Covenant the Israelites were to punish fornicators and adulterers, but under the New Covenant God does it.

"How does God judge fornicators and adulterers? Sometimes they are judged in their own bodies (Rom. 1:24-27). Certainly they will be judged at the final judgment

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<sup>487</sup>For an overview of hospitality in the early church, see J. H. Elliott, *Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter*, pp. 145-50, 165-200; and G. Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, pp. 123-93.

(Rev. 21:8; 22:15). Believers who commit these sins certainly may be forgiven, but they will lose rewards in heaven (Eph. 5:5ff). David was forgiven, but he suffered the consequences of his adultery for years to come; and he suffered in the hardest way: through his own children."<sup>488</sup>

13:5-6 Greed has lured many believers away from a life of faithful discipleship, as has sexual temptation. We need to cultivate a spirit of contentment so we do not apostatize. Contentment really has nothing to do with how much money we have, though the world generally disagrees. We have the Lord, and with Him we have all we need (cf. Luke 12:15; Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:6-10). Furthermore, He will never abandon us (Matt. 28:20).

"One of the results of persecution has been the loss of property (10:34). In these circumstances, the Christian response is not to grasp all the more eagerly at material wealth, but to rely quietly on God's provision, even in the face of human opposition."<sup>489</sup>

### Instructions regarding religious duties 13:7-19

"Within the structure of 13:7-19, vv 7-9 and vv 17-19 constitute the literary frame for the central unit of explanatory parenthesis in vv 10-16."<sup>490</sup>

13:7 The example of our spiritual leaders is one we should follow (cf. 12:1; 13:17, 24). They, as the heroes of faith in chapter 11, set a good pattern. The outcome of their life, if they had died, was that they were now with the Lord and already beginning to enjoy some of their eternal inheritance. They may have been the founders of the church to which this letter went.<sup>491</sup> People tend to forget or to worship their former leaders, but we should remember them and their godly teachings and examples (cf. 1 Thess. 5:12-13).

13:8 Jesus Christ is the content of the message that the leaders had preached to these hearers (cf. v. 7).<sup>492</sup> That message and its hero is what this writer had urged his readers not to abandon. The leaders had preached the Word of God to these readers, and that preaching culminated in Jesus Christ.

"Jesus is not the object of faith [in this verse or in Hebrews, according to this writer], but the supreme model of it."<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>488</sup>Wiersbe, 2:327.

<sup>489</sup>Ellingworth, p. 698.

<sup>490</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 526.

<sup>491</sup>Guthrie, p. 270. Cf. v. 17.

<sup>492</sup>Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, pp. 570-71.

<sup>493</sup>G. W. MacRae, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 12 (1978):194.

"Yesterday' the original leaders preached Jesus Christ, even as the writer does now; the present time can tolerate no other approach to the grace of God (2:9). 'Forever' recalls the quality of the redemption secured by Jesus Christ (5:9; 9:12, 14-15; 13:20) and of the priesthood of Christ (7:24-25): it is 'eternal.'"<sup>494</sup>

Another less probable interpretation of this verse sees Jesus as the leader who is perpetually available in contrast to the leaders who had preached to these readers but who were now dead.<sup>495</sup> Jesus had also died and gone to heaven (cf. 12:2). His example of faithfulness, as expounded in this epistle, should be a continuing encouragement to all believers. He is as faithful to His promises now as He ever was, and He always will be faithful to them.

- 13:9 We should reject teaching that deviates from apostolic doctrine. This, too, is a safeguard against apostasy. The terms "varied and strange" describe a variety of heretical positions. Rather than accepting these ideas we should receive strength by taking in God's grace that comes through His Word (4:12-13; 1 Pet. 2:2). This strength comes from spiritual rather than material food. Evidently one of the strange teachings prevalent when this letter originated was that certain foods or abstinence from certain foods resulted in greater godliness (cf. Col. 2:16; 1 Tim. 4:1-5). This was, of course, what Judaism taught too. Judaism taught that eating food strengthened the heart in the sense that when the Jews ate they gave thanks to God and thus brought Him into their experience (cf. Ps. 104:14-15).<sup>496</sup> However, Jesus' death on the cross is the source of both the saving and sustaining grace of God by which we experience strengthening.

"This, I think, is the key message of Hebrews: 'You can be secure while everything around you is falling apart!'"<sup>497</sup>

- 13:10 Believers under the Old Covenant ate part of what they offered to God as a peace offering (Lev. 7:15-18). However believers under the New Covenant feed spiritually on Jesus Christ who is our peace offering. Those still under the Old Covenant had no right to partake of Him for spiritual sustenance and fellowship with God since their confidence was still in the Old Covenant.

"Christians had none of the visible apparatus which in those days was habitually associated with religion and worship—no sacred buildings, no altars, no sacrificing priests. Their

<sup>494</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 530.

<sup>495</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 395.

<sup>496</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, pp. 533-36.

<sup>497</sup>Wiersbe, 2:278.

pagan neighbors thought they had no God, and called them atheists; their Jewish neighbors too might criticize them for having no visible means of spiritual support."<sup>498</sup>

Roman Catholics have tended to see in this "altar" a reference to the mass, whereas Protestants have viewed it as a reference either to Christ Himself or His cross or a heavenly altar. I prefer Christ Himself since it is through Him that we are to offer a sacrifice of praise to God (v. 15; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5).

- 13:11 Far from defiling those who associated with Jesus Christ, our sin (purification) offering, associating with Him leads to holiness. Here the writer compared Jesus to the sin offering that the Jewish high priest offered on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16:27).

". . . in Hebrews the expression 'high priest' customarily signals that the field of reference is the annual atonement ritual (cf. 5:3; 7:27; 8:1-3; 9:7, 11, 12, 24-26)."<sup>499</sup>

- 13:12 Jesus' death outside Jerusalem fulfilled the Day of Atonement ritual in that the high priest burned the remains of the two sacrificial animals outside the precincts of the wilderness camp. It also fulfilled the ritual of that day in that Jesus' execution outside the city involved the shame of exclusion from the sacred precincts. It symbolized His rejection by the Jewish authorities.<sup>500</sup>

- 13:13 "This verse may be regarded as the crux of the conclusion, a final direct appeal to the readers to identify themselves wholly with Christ."<sup>501</sup>

Christians bear Jesus' reproach when we identify with Him. He suffered reproach, and so do we, when we identify with Him. This was especially true of the original Jewish recipients of this epistle. They needed to sever their emotional and religious ties to Judaism.<sup>502</sup> Jerusalem was no longer their special city (cf. v. 14).

"The exhortation to leave the camp [i.e., official Judaism] and to identify fully with Jesus introduces a distinctive understanding of discipleship. Jesus' action in going 'outside the camp' (v 12) set a precedent for others to follow. The task of the community is to emulate Jesus,

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<sup>498</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 400.

<sup>499</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 540.

<sup>500</sup>Morris, p. 151.

<sup>501</sup>Guthrie, p. 274.

<sup>502</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle . . .*, p. 403; Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary . . .*, pp.580-82. There is nothing wrong with Jewish Christians maintaining Jewish customs provided they do not rely on them for favor with God.

leaving behind the security, congeniality, and respectability of the sacred enclosure [cf. the Israelites' camp in the wilderness wanderings], risking the reproach that fell upon him. Christian identity is a matter of 'going out' now to him. It entails the costly commitment to follow him resolutely, despite suffering.

"In the context of the allusion to Golgotha in v 12, this summons to discipleship implies following Jesus on the way to the cross . . ." <sup>503</sup>

13:14 The city we seek is the heavenly Jerusalem. Our present habitation on earth is only temporary (cf. 11:26).

13:15-16 Even though God does not require periodic animal and vegetable sacrifices from us, we should offer other sacrifices to Him. These sacrifices include praise (cf. Hos. 14:2), good works, and (even, especially) sharing what we have with others (as well as giving Him ourselves, Rom. 12:1). We should offer these sacrifices of the New Covenant continually.

"In systems like Judaism sacrifices were offered at set times, but for Christians praise goes up all the time." <sup>504</sup>

13:17 The leaders in view are church elders (pastors; cf. vv. 7, 24). These shepherds will have to give account to God one day for their stewardship over us. We should make their work now easier for them by being obedient and submissive to them. Will the leaders of your church be able to tell God that leading you was a pleasure when they stand before Him?

13:18-19 The writer confessed to needing the prayers of his brothers and sisters in the faith. He faced the same pressure to depart from the Lord that they faced. He longed to return to them again wherever they may have been living. He believed their prayers could affect God's timing of his return to them. Hebrews was not originally anonymous since the writer and the readers knew each other.

### **Doxology 13:20-21**

These verses express the writer's prayerful wish for his readers.

13:20 Elsewhere John and Peter called Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd (John 10:14) and the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). Here He is the Great Shepherd, greater than any in Judaism. This is another expression of Jesus' superiority over the Mosaic system.

<sup>503</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 543. Cf. Guthrie, pp. 274-75.

<sup>504</sup>Morris, p. 151. Cf. Moffatt, pp. 236-37.

"As the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ *died* for the sheep (John 10:11). As the Great Shepherd, He *lives* for the sheep in heaven today, working on their behalf. As the Chief Shepherd, He will *come for the sheep* at His return (1 Peter 5:4). Our Shepherd cares for His own in the past, present, and future. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever!"<sup>505</sup>

Likewise the "eternal covenant" is the New Covenant in contrast to the temporary Old Covenant. Jesus' blood (death) was superior to animal blood (death) offered under the Old Covenant. This pastoral prayer brings the sermon to its conclusion. Many of the emphases expounded in the epistle come together in this benediction: peace, resurrection and ascension, shepherding, blood, covenant, Jesus, and glory.

13:21 "Equip" means to prepare for use (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The same Greek word, *katartidzo*, describes elsewhere a doctor setting a broken bone, a general preparing his army for battle, and a fisherman mending his net (cf. Matt. 4:21). It was the writer's concern that his readers be ready to reign with Jesus Christ. This is the purpose for remaining faithful to God throughout the epistle. Part of our full inheritance (full rest, full salvation) is the privilege of reigning with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). To attain this privilege we must continue to mature by following Jesus Christ faithfully rather than turning from Him.

## **2. Personal Explanations 13:22-25**

The closing verses of Hebrews are an addendum to the body of the homily. The writer added them because he felt concern for his addressees and wanted to add a few personal remarks.

13:22 The writer urged his readers again to accept the word of exhortation contained in this epistle rather than rejecting it. It is, after all, a brief word.

"The definite expression 'the exhortation' is a synonymous designation for the sermon. It referred specifically to the exposition and application of the Scripture that had been read aloud to the assembled congregation. In a fourth-century description of the liturgy for the consecration of a bishop the homily is designated *logous parakleseos*, 'words of exhortation' (*Apost. Const.* 8.5). This appears to be a fixed expression for the sermon in early Christian circles . . ." <sup>506</sup>

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<sup>505</sup>Wiersbe, 2:330.

<sup>506</sup>Lane, *Hebrews* 9—13, p. 568. See also L. Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* 77 (1984):280 and n. 10.

13:23 The writer obviously composed this epistle during the lifetime of Timothy and after some confinement that Timothy had experienced. Evidently the writer and Timothy were close associates in the Lord's work. This is almost certainly a reference to the Timothy referred to elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>507</sup>

13:24 The term "leaders" refers to local church leaders (cf. vv. 7, 17). The letter probably went to one house-church. The evidence indicates that most first-century churches had more than one leader (cf. Tit. 1:5; Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1). It would be strange if the writer sent this letter to someone in a church who was not a leader.

"The multiplicity of house churches suggests why diversity, disunity, and a tendency toward independence were persistent problems in the early Church. Unity and organization became matters of urgent concern. The members of the several house churches in a particular center needed to keep in touch with one another. It was of vital importance that the greetings of the writer be conveyed to 'all the saints' . . ." <sup>508</sup>

"Those from Italy" probably refers to Christians who had left Italy rather than to believers currently living there (cf. Acts 18:2).<sup>509</sup> If this is true, the writer probably wrote from somewhere other than Italy.

13:25 The writer closed with a final benediction and prayer that God's grace would be with his readers in the sense that they would receive strength from it (cf. 2:9; 4:16; 10:19; 12:15; 13:9). This would happen as they persevered faithfully in the truth.

This entire last chapter is an admonition to worship God acceptably, according to the New Covenant.

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<sup>507</sup>This is the only Christian that the writer mentioned by name in the entire epistle.

<sup>508</sup>Lane, *Hebrews 9—13*, p. 570. Cf. F. V. Filson, *"Yesterday": A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13*, p. 76.

<sup>509</sup>Westcott, pp. 451-52. Cf. Tenney, pp. 234-35.

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