

Hebrews

The book of Hebrews is a complex, beautiful, and artistic argument on the finality and supremacy of Jesus Christ above all things. The book takes many ideas and themes from the First Testament and weaves them into Jesus Christ, thus connecting the two testaments into one complete picture of how God all throughout history was moving towards the coming of Christ.

Authorship, Audience, and Date

No one knows who the author of Hebrews was. The main arguments are that it was Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, or some kind of co-authorship. It is very unlikely that Paul is the author, as the style and vocabulary of the book are nothing like all the other writings of Paul that we have.¹ The book has the features of a homily (sermon) or letter to either a specific congregation or a group of congregations. The Greek in the book of Hebrews is one of the most polished and literary Greek in the Second Testament.

Scholars dispute whether the original readers were Jewish or Gentile Christians. If they were Jewish Christians, they were in danger of wanting to go back to Judaism. If they were Gentile Christians, they were attracted to the culture of Judaism and seeking to become Jewish. There is also the possibility that they were a mixture of the two (Heb. 2:3; 5:12; 6:10; 10:32; 13:1). Whoever they are, they would have to be very familiar with the First Testament and Jewish practices since this dominates the argument of the book. It seems from the clues in the book that they were previously under persecution but that, at the time they are reading the book of Hebrews, it had lightened up.

The date of the book is also unknown, but it would have had to have been written sometime in the 60s AD but before 70 AD since the Jewish temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. The reason is that one of the major arguments that the author makes is that the Mosaic Covenant sacrificial system is obsolete. If the temple had already fallen, it is extremely unlikely and inexplicable that he would not mention it as a proof that God had chosen Christ to replace the sacrificial system.

Purpose

The purpose of Hebrews is to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the unique God-man and king-priest who is the finality of God's revelation and superior to all things. Hebrews takes the main typologies² of the First Testament kingship and priesthood and traces them to their final fulfillment in Jesus Christ so that He is seen as the finality of all of God's revelation (Heb. 1:1-4). Therefore, Jesus Christ is superior to all things. As the author develops his argument by connecting the typologies of the First Testament into Christ, it becomes clear that part of what the author of Hebrews is doing is teaching you how to put the Bible together (Lk. 24:27) the way

¹ For a detailed discussion of the different views of authorship as well as the readers and date, see Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* and F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*.

² Typology is a special kind of symbolism (when one thing represents something else) in the Bible in which a person, place, thing, or event in the First Testament foreshadows a person, place, thing, or event in the Second Testament (most often Christ and the cross). These typologies were originally placed in the First Testament in order to paint a picture of what Christ would be like when He came and what He would accomplish in His ministry (Lk. 24:25-27). See the *Typology in the Bible* article at www.knowingthebible.net.

that God intended. The author constantly takes you back to the gospel and the cross even though he does not use that language.

The author demonstrates Christ's superiority not by simply stating that He is the *best* but rather by showing how Christ is *better* than prophets, angels, Moses, the priests, and the Mosaic Covenant. (The word *better* is used thirteen times in Hebrews, and similar wordings are seen in Heb. 2:2-4; 3:3-6; 5:4-10; 10:27-28; 12:25). By contrasting Christ's superiority to every comparison, the author uses understatement, which gives his argument a rhetorical power. A strong man does not look as strong when he is standing alone and declared to be the *best* as much as he does when he stands beside many other strong men and is declared to be *better*.

Jesus Christ is first presented as the greatest and final revelation, for He is God's own Son, whereas the prophets and angels are merely creations of God (Heb. 1:1-4). The author contrasts Christ with the angels, Moses, and the Levitical priesthood because this is the chain of revelation that God developed in the Torah. Second, as God's Son Jesus Christ is also a superior mediator between humanity and God, for He is both human and God. The angels, Moses, and the Levitical priesthood are also chosen because they were mediators between humanity and God. The author shows that they were chosen not because they were the best mediators but rather they were to serve as a typology for Christ who would come as the better mediator. As a result, the final revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and superior high priest ensures final victory for all who are in Christ since He is established in the heavenly throne and sanctuary and prepares a place for His heirs.

The secondary purpose of Hebrews is to warn those who belong to the Christian community, who have professed Christ but are not necessarily devoted to Him and are close to rejecting Christ and going back to the Jewish regulations because they are not willing to maintain their confession in the midst of persecution. The author warns them that there is a severe punishment for those who abandon the great revelation and salvation of God found in His Son Jesus Christ and who go back to the ways of the world; on the other side, there are great blessings and vindication for those who are found persevering in Christ.

There are five warning passages in the book of Hebrews, which warn against the dangers of drifting (Heb. 2:1-4), disobedience (Heb. 3:7-4:13), degeneration (Heb. 6:1-12), despising (Heb. 10:26-39), and denying (Heb. 12:25-29). Each of these warning passages builds on the previous one, progressively getting harsher and more severe in both its warning and judgment. The superiority of Christ becomes the foundation for the warning passages through the implementation of a lesser-to-greater argument. By explaining the punishment for disbelief and disobedience in the First Testament, the author demonstrates how much greater the punishment will be for those who disbelieve and disobey Christ—who is superior to the old order. Likewise, the blessing and rest from perseverance are greater and final for those who are found in Christ compared to the blessing and rest experienced by those of the old order. This becomes the exhortation to all those who read the epistle: to not take lightly one's commitment to Jesus Christ, who is superior to all things. Overall, the argument asks why anyone would choose to follow anything else the world has to offer since Christ is a superior king as God's Son and a superior mediator as the heavenly high priest.

Themes

Many themes are developed in the book of Hebrews, but the two primary ones are Jesus Christ as the Son of God (king) and Jesus Christ as high priest. It is important to know that Hebrews does not follow a strict literary argument but is more organic and tightly woven. As such, sometimes the author introduces a theme in order to develop it later. It is only after you get to the end, after reading it multiple times, that you can then see the artistry of how he developed the themes. This is why many westerners have difficulty understanding Hebrews and so unintentionally ignore it.

“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 the more distinctive and important idea in the theology of the book, but Christ as Son of God is foundational.”³

Son of God

The references to Jesus as “Son” or “Son of God” occur frequently in Hebrews and reveal Him in three vital stages of Sonship, which are theologically distinguishable but intermingled through the epistle in their development.

The first stage is Jesus as the *preexistent, eternal Son*. This is the foundation of the nature of the Son in which the following two are rooted. The author of Hebrews demonstrates that Jesus is the exact representation of God and His glory (Heb. 1:3), that it was through Him that the world was created (Heb. 1:2c, 10; 3:2-6), and that He is thus sustaining and maintaining His creation (Heb. 1:3b). This is all seen as an essential foundation to His priesthood, which is discussed in the next section.

The second stage is Jesus as the *incarnate, earthly Son*. This theme is most fully developed in Heb. 2:5-18, which begins by quoting a series of First Testament passages to show that this was ordained from the beginning and that He is the second and perfect Adam who secures the fulfillment of the God-given dominion for humanity. Jesus came to share fully in humanity and to undergo suffering and death in order to provide salvation for humanity. Thus, He has become high priest in heaven on behalf of the believers.

“In these verses the breathtaking truth of Christianity shines forth again: the eternal Son did not serve from afar but came to be one of us and to walk the costly path of obedience which leads to glory!”⁴

The third stage is Jesus as the *exalted Son of God*. This third stage could not have been accomplished without the previous two, and it is most clearly seen in Heb. 1:3b-14, where He is said to be sitting at the right hand of God—an allusion to Ps. 110:1. Because of Jesus’ faithful obedience to the Father, He is given a superior position and name (Son). Jesus as the Davidic king is not worthy of being worshiped just because He is God but also because He has done what no other has done and so has proven His right to rule.

³ Buist M. Fanning. “A Theology of Hebrews.” In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 370.

⁴ Buist M. Fanning. “A Theology of Hebrews.” In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 381.

High Priest

This section is developed less than other areas. That Jesus is our high priest should be an encouragement to us because He can show us compassion since He has been tempted like we are *yet* without sinning.

“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. As already stated, its doctrine of sonship is foundational to its teaching about Christ’s priesthood. Likewise its view of salvation, of the Christian life, and of salvation-history are all vitally connected to the theme of His high priesthood.”⁵

The First Testament gives examples of the priestly function for Israel’s king, offering prayer and sacrifices on behalf of the people (2 Sam. 6:12-23; 24:21-25; 1 Kg. 3:4; 8:22-53, 62-64; 12:32-33; Ezk. 45:17-46:17). In the intertestamental period, there was an expectation for the Messiah to fulfill the roles of priest and king, whether through one or two figures. These motifs were developed in the New Testament through Jesus’ sacrifice (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18), His intercession (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 8:34; 1 Jn. 2:1-2), His mediation (1 Tim. 2:5), and His replacement of the temple and its sacrifices (Matt. 12:6; Mk. 14:58; Jn. 2:19-21).

The author of Hebrews takes Psalm 110, with its promises of a priestly king, and uses it to develop Christ as the fulfillment of this figure, as was seen in His earthly ministry. Though it may be somewhat of an exaggeration to say that the book of Hebrews is simply a theological exposition of Psalm 110, it would not be far off.

The author shows that Christ is the only one who is truly qualified to be high priest (Heb. 5:1-10) and so supersedes all previous high priestly ministries (the Levitical priesthood). And because He is the preexistent, eternal God whose death was all sufficient, His priesthood will last forever (Heb. 7:16-17). Christ now serves in heaven, continually and forever interceding on the behalf of the believers (Heb. 6:19-20; 7:3).

From Shadow to Substance

Central to the thought of Hebrews is the idea that the First Testament foreshadowed the days of fulfillment that have begun in Jesus Christ. This is seen in three ways: First, Christ is seen as the final revelation of God, and He supersedes all previous revelations (Heb. 1:1-4). Second, because Christ is the Son and accomplished more than any other revelation (for He was the one they were speaking about), His covenant, through His death and resurrection, is superior to the old covenant. Third is the self-confessed inadequacy of the old covenant by the First Testament. The author uses quotations from Ps. 8, 95, and 110 and Jer. 31 to show that even the First Testament saw the old covenant as insufficient and so was looking forward to a better one.

Thus, the author shows that the old covenant was merely a shadow of the real thing (Jesus) that was coming around the corner. After showing that the old covenant was not sufficient to deal with the needs of humanity, the author establishes that it needed to be abolished (Heb. 10:9b) through the coming of Jesus Christ—who set up a far superior covenant that *is* sufficient to deal with the needs of humanity (Heb. 7:18-23; 8:6-7, 13).

A good illustration is that you are standing along the wall of a building and from around the corner you see the shadow of a man; this is the old covenant. Because of the shadow, you can see

⁵ Buist M. Fanning. “A Theology of Hebrews.” In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 388.

that someone is coming and can even make out a few of the details, but it is not until the man (Jesus) comes from around the corner that you see what he really looks like and can interact with him. This is the danger with the old covenant: that one gets so focused on the shadow that he does not see the man, or how much better he is, when he does appear from around the corner.

The Law is not bad, but rather it laid the foundation, established the categories and terms, and pointed to something to come. The author of Hebrews is careful not to demonize the law when he points out the faithfulness of Moses and never says anything bad about angels, Joshua, the priests, or the Law. If all one had was the Second Testament, then we would have no idea what it means for Jesus to be king, priest, temple, and lamb. The terms, categories, and types that are used to describe Christ are incoherent without the First Testament background. And there are moralizing lessons to be learned and examples of godliness and ungodliness in narrative that cannot be taught as well in the dissertation prose language of the epistles. This shows how the whole Bible fits together and that God knows where the pattern is going because He was there from the beginning as He laid down the first pieces of the puzzle.

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I. Christ as Son Is Superior to the Prophets and Angels (1:1-2:18)

The author begins Hebrews by first establishing the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the Son of God who is the Creator King over creation and heir to the throne of God. Yet this Son of God became human in order to atone for the sins of humanity. He is, therefore, the ultimate revelation of God. This makes Him superior to the prophets and angels as the final revelation of God because He is the Son of God.

A. God Has Spoken Finally in His Son (1:1-4)

The author begins by moving from God's past revelation through the First Testament prophets to the unique and final prophet and revelation in His Son Christ. The author focuses first on the divine revelation (Heb. 1:1-2a) and then on the person, work, and status of God's Son (Heb. 1:2b-4).

Hebrews 1:1-4 forms a chiasmic structure⁶ emphasizing Christ's relationship with God the Father as the central focal point (Heb. 1:3a).

1 After God spoke long ago in various portions and in various ways to our ancestors through the prophets, 2a in these last days He has spoken to us in a son, 2b whom He appointed heir of all things, 2c and through whom He created the world. 3a The Son is the radiance of his glory and the representation of His essence, and He sustains all things by his powerful word, 3b and so when He had accomplished cleansing for sins, 3c He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. 4 Thus He became so far better than the angels as He has inherited a name superior to theirs.

A The Son contrasted with the prophets (1:1-2a)

B The Son as the messianic heir (1:2b)

C The Son's creative work (1:2c)

X The Son's threefold mediatorial relationship to the Father (1:3a)

C' The Son's redemptive work (1:3b)

B' The Son as messianic king (1:3c)

A' The Son contrasted with angels (1:4)

The key statements at the center of the chiasm (Heb. 1:3a) provide the theological basis for the Son's unique ability to be the superior and ultimate revealer of who God is and the mediator of the New Covenant. The four verbs in Heb. 1:1-4 leading to the center of the chiasm have God as their subject. At the central point, there is a shift to the Son as the subject of the sentence. Likewise, at the center of the chiasm, there is a shift from the cosmological to the soteriological.⁷

⁶ A chiasm is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. The result is a "mirror" effect of the ideas. There often is a central idea at the center of the mirror that has no parallel. The parallelism is then used to emphasize this central idea in the passage.

⁷ See Peter T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 46.

1:1-2a Hebrews begins with a comparison and a contrast. First, the author connects Christ to the prophets and revelations of the First Testament, showing that they represent the same God and reveal the same plan of God.

The contrast is between the prophets through whom God *formally* spoke and Christ through whom He *now* speaks. The prophets were mere men who received visions from God, whereas Christ is God's Son—and is thus God Himself. The phrase “in various portions and in various ways” shows that the previous revelations that came through the prophets came in many parts and were fragmentary, whereas Christ is the final and complete revelation of God. Fundamental to the argument being made here is that God has not remained silent from the First Testament but has taken the initiative to reveal Himself through His Son.

1:2b-3 The author makes seven (the number symbolizing completion) statements about Christ's identity, work, and atonement. These statements are so simple and yet comprehensive of who Christ is and what He did that they must all be embraced in order to have a complete soteriology and faith in Christ.

1) “Christ is appointed heir of all things.” Christ is the rightful and worthy heir to the universe (Ps. 2:8). To be the heir to God means to have all the authority, honor, and glory over His eternal kingdom (Dan. 7:13-14; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20). We often think of a son inheriting the throne after the father has died. But in the ancient Near East, it was not uncommon for a father and a son to co-reign over the kingdom.

2) “Through Christ God created the world.” Christ being the one who created all matter and time is the idea being communicated here (Jn. 1:14; 14:9; Col. 1:15). To be creator of and over the universe gives Christ absolute sovereignty over His creation.

3) “Christ is the radiance of God's glory.” The Greek word *apaugasma* (“radiance”) refers not to the passive reflection of God's glory but to the active shining forth of one who in Himself possesses divine perfection (Jn. 1:14; 17:4-5; 2 Cor. 4:6).

4) “Christ is the representation of God's essence.” The Greek word *representation* or *character* was used of minting coins. One would take hard metal with an engraving on it and stamp it into a softer metal that would then be the coin. The coin would thus be an exact copy of the original. Similarly, Christ is an exact representation of God the Father's essence, which means He is the same essence as God. If the original is God and the Son is the exact replication of God, then how do you distinguish between the two? Even so, He is not simply the same thing as God, but He is God's image. Here, you have the same identity between the Father and the Son but also distinction. This leads to the concept of the trinity because Christ is simultaneously God and yet distinct (1 Cor. 15:27).

5) “Christ sustains all things by his powerful word.” The idea is not that He holds up the world on His back like the Greek god Atlas, but rather that He keeps all things in existence and carries them to their appointed goal (Col. 1:17) through His own word (Gen. 1:3; John 1). This connects Him to the Father since such prudential activity was attributed to God in the First Testament (Isa. 46:3-4).

6) “Christ made purification for sins.” Christ removed sin and cleansed the sinner through Himself as the sacrifice for atonement (Mk. 1:44; 2 Pet. 1:9). Christ became humanity's high priest and sacrificial lamb.

7) “Christ is seated at the right hand of God.” Christ took the highest position in relation to the Father (Lk. 22:69; Eph. 4:10; Phil. 2:9). This shows that Christ’s work is both complete and accepted by God (Heb. 10:11-12). To sit at the right hand of a king means to co-reign with that king over his kingdom. This brings us back to the first of the seven statements, wherein Christ has the right to rule because He is creator. Here, He also has the right to rule because He made atonement for the sins of humanity (Phil. 2:5-11).

The fact that Christ’s making purification for sins as high priest is what gave Him the right to return to right hand of God means that we should not just see Him currently sitting on the throne as ruler but also see Him as high priest. Throughout Hebrews there is more of a focus on the death and exaltation of Christ rather than His resurrection because these two things were primary aspects of the Day of Atonement—the shedding of blood of the sacrificial animal and its presentation in the sanctuary.⁸ Christ as Son of God (heir) and king/high priest is the foundational idea and theme of the book of Hebrews.

1:4 The result of these seven descriptions is that Christ is given the name *Son*, which has been given to no other. The title as Son makes Christ superior to the prophets because He is one with God as His Son. As such, He can better reveal God’s character and revelation than could a human, finite prophet, who is not one with God nor knows truly who God is (Heb. 1:1).

The seven descriptions of Him as the Son of God also make Him unique from and superior to the angels, who were also called the “Sons of God” (Job. 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Unlike the angels, this title was His from the beginning of creation, for He was one with God (Heb. 1:2b-3a), which cannot be said of the angels. So, on one level He did not have to become superior to the angels for He already had the name before they even existed. Yet after His death, He demonstrated even more how he had the right to be called Son in a superior way to the angels through His death, resurrection, and exaltation (Dan. 7:13-14; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 2:5-18), which none of the angels accomplished. Hebrews 2 unpacks further how Christ as the Son of God is superior to the angels (the sons of God).

⁸ See Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 60.

B. Christ as the Son Is Superior to Angels (1:5-14)

In this section the author makes the point that Christ is superior to the angels. Two reasons make this argument so important. The first has already been mentioned—that the angels were also called the Sons of God (Job. 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). So how is Christ different and superior as God's Son in contrast to the angels? Likewise, Israel (Deut. 14:1; Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1) and the Davidic King (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7; 89:27) were sometimes called God's sons, which will also be unpacked in Hebrews 1. Though these groups were collectively called sons, no individual was singled out as God's son.

The second reason is that the Mosaic Covenant/Law was mediated by angels (Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). Even though Exodus 19–24 does not mention the presence of angels when the Law was given, other places in Scripture make it very clear that the Law was given to Moses through angels as mediators. The Mosaic Law was seen as the most important governing system in Judaism (as seen in the gospels in Christ's conflict with the Pharisees). Yet the Law was never meant to be permanent or to mediate salvation (Heb. 8:7, 13; 10:1–4). One of the major points that the author of Hebrews will make is that Christ's covenant is superior to the Old Covenant (Heb. 8-10), so he starts at the top with Christ's equality with God (Heb. 1:1-4) and then moves to His superiority to the angels, who were the first mediators of the Law (Heb. 1:5-14).

The author begins to make his argument with several First Testament quotations. He does this for two reasons. First, the First Testament bears great authority among the Jewish and Greek Christian communities. Second, he wants to show that Christ with His covenant is not a brand new concept but has been God's original plan all along and that everything in the First Testament was leading to this ultimate culmination in Christ's covenant.

1:5 The first reason that Christ is superior to the angels is that He is God's Son and they are not. The author already established how Christ is the unique Son of God in Heb. 1:1-4, but now he develops this further by quoting Ps. 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14.

Ps. 2:7 is quoted three times in the Second Testament. The first is in Heb. 1:5, where he makes the point that Christ is superior to angels; the second is in Heb. 5:5, proving that Christ was appointed as high priest; and the third is in Acts 13:32, in order to authorize Christ's resurrection from the dead. What is interesting is that Ps. 2:7 in its context makes none of these points. And 2 Sam. 7:14 cannot be referring to Christ because in its context Yahweh says he would discipline the Davidic son when he sins, and Christ was without sin (Jn. 8:29; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:22; Heb. 4:14; 1 Jn. 3:15). So how can the author of Hebrews interpret Ps. 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14 in this way? We will deal with these passages in reverse order, for 2 Sam. 7:14 is the beginning of the sonship language in connection to the Davidic king.⁹

In 2 Sam. 7:14, the context is that David has become the king over the twelve tribes of Israel; he has conquered Jerusalem and has made it the capital of Israel. He then brought the tabernacle with the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. This is the first time that the kingship and the priesthood have been in the same place. From this point forward the city of Jerusalem will

⁹ The unpacking of Ps. 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14 in connection to Christ comes from D. A. Carson. *Hebrews*, video lecture from "TEDS Lecture Series."

become a symbol of the place where the kingship of God dwells with His people in tabernacle, which is in the city of the Davidic king.

As a result of his secured throne, David wants to build a temple for Yahweh (Deut. 12:4-5, 11, 13-14). Yahweh says *no* to him and makes the point that in these great turning points in history, basically, “you do not tell me what to do—I tell you what to do.” Yahweh says that “you do not make my name great; rather I will make your name great.” Yahweh is so spectacular that you can praise Him, but you do not add to Him (Acts 17:25). Yahweh is the God of aseity, existing fully within Himself. Yahweh states that He is going to build a house for David through an eternal line, throne, and kingdom.

Through this Davidic covenant that Yahweh made with David, He declared that David and his line would be sons of God (2 Sam. 7:14). It is important to understand that sonship has less to do with biology and more with function, in that in the ancient Near East you did what your father did. “Son of...” has to do with identification (Matt. 5:9; Gal. 3:6-7) and is bound up with common functionality. For God to appoint kings as the “Sons of God” means that the kings are under God’s authority, they are to have the same character as God, and they are to exercise kingship like Yahweh does. The Son of David as the Son of God elevates him above the other Israelites and makes him distinct from the angels with a more intimate relationship with Yahweh. This application of the sonship concept occurs many times in the Bible.

Heb. 1:5 quotation cannot refer immediately to Christ because 2 Sam. 7:14 goes on to say, “*When he sins, I will correct him with the rod of men and with wounds inflicted by human beings.*” Hebrews said that Christ is without sin, which means that this verse is referring to Solomon. The point is that, unlike Saul, who lost the kingship because of his sin, David’s descendants would be punished with earthly, temporal punishments. Thus the promise of an unending Davidic line rests on Yahweh’s willingness to overlook sins and only temporally punish them; otherwise the line would be destroyed like Saul’s. Therefore, the quotation refers to all the human kings in the Davidic line.

The only way, then, that Yahweh can honor His promise of an eternal dynasty in 2 Sam. 7:16 is if there is never an end to the descendants of David or if David has a descendant who lives forever, which is not even hinted here. However, it is the Psalms and the prophets who take this second possibility and begin to develop the concept of a Davidic son of God who would live forever (Isa. 9:6-7; Dan. 7:13-14; Ezk. 34:7-24). So the Davidic Son of God begins in 2 Samuel 7 and is developed in passage after passage throughout the rest of the Bible until it reaches its ultimate fulfillment in the God-man, Christ. Therefore, when the author of Hebrews is quoting 2 Sam. 7:14, he is not connecting to the idea of Davidic sonship just in the context of 2 Samuel 7 but rather to the context of Davidic sonship developed throughout all of the Scriptures, which *begins* here in 2 Samuel 7.

In the context of Ps. 2:7 the enemies of Israel are saying, “let us throw off the yoke of Yahweh and His anointed (messiah) king” (Ps. 2:1-3). The response of the psalmist is, in essence, “How can you ever hope to take on the sovereign Yahweh of the universe who has established the Davidic king forever?” (Ps. 2:4-6) Then the Davidic king says, “I will proclaim Yahweh’s decree that I will have a sovereign and eternal kingdom” (Ps. 2:7-12). The promise of the Davidic king’s sovereignty over all nations begins to push past a mere descendant of David as king and instead to an ultimate messianic figure, which begins to develop the Davidic king typology. This means

that this passage fits into the context of all the other passages in the Bible that develop this Davidic typology.

The Gospels make the point that Christ is the ultimate Davidic king and is the God-man (Lk. 1:32-33, 68-69; Rom. 1:3). In the epistles of the Second Testament, Christ becomes the enthroned Davidic king at His resurrection and ascension (Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-4). The Second Testament develops its Christology by weaving together all the typologies of Christ—Son of God, Son of man, king, priest, shepherd, sacrificial lamb, etc.—making them indistinguishable and inseparable from each other. At Christ's resurrection and ascension all these ideas come together in Him.

Therefore, Heb. 1:5, in quoting Ps. 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14, is tapping into this tightly woven typology of the messiah developed all through the Scriptures (Lk. 24:26-27). It is saying that Christ is superior to the angels because He alone is the promised Davidic king meant to rule over the earth because He is the only one who is able to rule in the way that the Davidic king was supposed to rule. In the full understanding of this tightly woven idea, of what the Davidic king is and what He does, He outstrips in His authority anything that angels can be or do.

However, as stated in Heb. 1:2b-3a, Christ is also superior to the angels because as the Son of God, He is God ontologically. Heb. 1:5 makes the point that he also is now *Son* in the fulfillment of becoming the true Davidic king who will bring all the promises of God for that office into fulfillment. Christ as the Davidic king is not worthy of being worshiped just because He is God but also because He has done what no other has done, so proving His right to rule. There is none who could better reveal the Father than the One who *is* God (Jn. 1:14-18; 14:8-9; Col. 1:15).

In this, the author has tied the sonship language of “Son of God” in a Trinitarian, ontological God use (Heb. 1:1-4) together with the “Son of God” title in a Davidic king, human use, making Christ the God-man. The author of Hebrews is stating that Christ is the Son of God on several different axes who can fulfill all those axes and bring them all together without embarrassment. And when it all comes together, no angel or competitor can measure up to Him as the God-man-Son.

1:6 The second reason that Christ is superior to angels is that they have been commanded to worship Him, whereas no one is to worship angels (Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9).

Here Christ is referred to as God's “firstborn,” an allusion to Ps. 89:27, where God declares of David, “*I will appoint him to be my firstborn son, the most exalted of the earth's kings.*” Continuing the idea of Christ as the Son of God from Heb. 1:4-5, the author states that God introduced Christ as His Son to the world at his incarnation, when He began his earthly ministry. “Firstborn” should not be interpreted as a biological birth, not referring to the creation of Christ, especially since this would contradict Heb. 1:1-4. *Firstborn* is a title given to an heir, making him the head of the family, tribe, or nation. Isaac, Jacob, and Judah were not biologically the firstborn, yet they each received the firstborn title. Nor was Israel or David “born” to God when God declared them His firstborn (Ex. 4:22; Ps. 89:27). Christ is God's firstborn in that Christ is the sovereign authority over creation (Dan. 7:13-14; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-4).

The language of “becoming” God's son, “inheriting,” or “firstborn” (Heb. 1:4-6) used in the third stage of Christ's sonship must not be misunderstood as adoptionist Christology, in that Christ was only a man but was made God's divine son after His resurrection. It is clear from Hebrews that Christ has always been the pre-existent Son of God (Heb. 1:1-3; 7:3), became the

Son of God *in His earthly incarnation* through obedience in suffering (Heb. 2:5-18; 5:7-10; 6:6), and finally was reaffirmed as God's Son when He was exalted *back* to the throne of God at His ascension and exaltation (Heb. 1:3-6; 5:5). There is no hint in Hebrews that Christ was only a man who was made God; Hebrews is very clear that Christ has always been and will always be God's Son.¹⁰

To make the point that Christ is to be worshiped by the angels, the author quotes the themes that are developed in the context of Deut. 32:43 and Ps. 97:7. In the original Hebrew Deut. 32:43 reads, "*Rejoice, you nations, with his people.*" In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew First Testament), which is what the author quotes, it reads, "*Rejoice, you heavens, along with Him, and let all the sons of God (angels) worship Him.*" It is difficult to see how the Septuagint translated "people" as "angels." However, some evidence from the Dead Sea scrolls indicates that this line was in the original Hebrew and has been lost. So, how does this fit the context? In Deut. 32:8, nations were organized according to the number of the Sons of God (angels), so a connection to angels and people is seen there (Ps. 82; Dan. 7:13-21). In Deut. 32:16-17, a connection is made between the false idols, gods, and demons (fallen angels) that Israel falsely worshiped. The context of Deuteronomy 32 is that Yahweh is sovereign creator and is above all things, so all things should bow down to Him in worship. Therefore, the Septuagint in the context makes a connection between the nations, people, and angels and commands them to worship Yahweh.

Ps. 97:7 specifically commands that all the gods bow down and worship Yahweh. Angels are referred to as gods (Deut. 32:8, 16-17; Job. 1:6; 21; 38:7), so they are commanded to worship Yahweh. And since Christ is God (Heb. 1:1-4), the angels are also to bow down and worship Him.

1:7 The author further develops the second reason for Christ's superiority over angels by quoting Ps. 104:4. In the original Hebrew Ps. 104:4 reads, "*He makes the winds his messengers, and the flaming fire his attendant.*" The Septuagint, which the author quotes, reads, "*He makes his angels spirits, and his ministers a flaming fire.*" The Hebrew word *ruach*, translated in Ps. 104:4 as "winds," can also be translated as "spirits." Likewise, the Hebrew word *malach*, translated in Ps. 104:4 as "messenger," can also be translated as "angels."

There is a parallelism in the Hebrew between "winds" and "fire," which matches up with the parallelism in the Greek between "angels" and "fire." So how do these all belong together? In the context of Ps. 104, Yahweh is said to have made the clouds and winds His chariot. We know from Ezekiel 1 that Yahweh's chariot of cloud and wind also contained fire and angels. In Isa. 6:1-4, the angelic seraphim that are next to Yahweh are literally called "the fiery ones." Therefore, in Psalm 104:4, we see the parallelism of wind and fire of the material realm next to the parallelism of angel and fire of the spiritual realm. Just like wind and fire are merely material creations of Yahweh to serve His will, so are the angels.

¹⁰ See Buist M. Fanning. "A Theology of Hebrews." In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 385-86, comment in brackets added.

1:8-12 The third reason Christ is superior to angels is that He is ruler over all creation with an everlasting kingdom, in contrast to the angels who are a part of creation as His servants of the previous verse. The author begins to make this point by quoting Ps. 45:6-7¹¹ and Ps. 102:25-27.

Psalm 45 in its context is a wedding song, where the courtier is addressing and talking about the Davidic king, who is about to get married. In Ps. 45:1-5, the courtier is talking about the person and majesty of the king. The “forever” mentioned in Ps. 45:2 points to the promise of the Davidic king (2 Sam. 7:14). In Ps. 45:6-9, the courtier is talking about the statehood of the Davidic king. But what makes this odd is that he calls the Davidic king God. One could say that he switched to addressing God; however, this does not fit Ps. 45:7 since the comment “by anointing you” shows that he is addressing the king. And in Ps. 45:7, the courtier addresses the king as God but then acknowledges that he is not the ultimate God but that there is a God (Yahweh) over the God (king) that the courtier is addressing. He also repeats the permanency of the king’s throne again in Ps. 45:6.

To address a Davidic king as God is stunning since Yahweh in many places clearly distinguishes Himself from humanity in His nature and identity (Isaiah 40-45). Calling the Davidic king God is not unprecedented, for in Ex. 7:1 Yahweh says “*See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh*.” The idea of referring to both Moses and the king as God is that they are supposed to be reigning as God, as His image (Gen. 1:26-27). Psalm 45 is portraying the ideal king and how He is supposed to operate. Thus, Psalm 45 also becomes a part of the Davidic king typology with Christ as the ultimate fulfillment, as a literal, permanent king.

Ps. 102:25-27 continues to emphasize the sovereignty of God and Christ’s sovereignty over creation, as well as the transitory nature of creation and the angels in contrast to the eternity of Christ’s kingdom.

1:13-14 The author concludes his argument by quoting Ps. 110:1 in order to make the point, “to which of the angels did Yahweh ever give such power, glory, and sovereignty over creation like He has with Christ?” (Dan. 7:13-14) Psalm 110:1 is an enthronement Psalm for the king of Israel, wherein David says, “*Yahweh said to my Lord, ‘sit down at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool!’*” This is the passage that Christ quoted in order to prove that He was God and the Messiah (Lk. 20:41-44). David, as the highest authority in Yahweh’s kingdom, has acknowledged that there is another Lord over himself, which must be the messiah. However, how can this be the messiah, Lord over David, if the messiah is one of his descendants, which would make him lower than David? Christ’s point is that the messiah pre-existed David’s son, yet 2 Sam. 7:14 says the messiah will be David’s son; therefore He is the God-man. Likewise, Yahweh seats Christ at His right hand; this is co-rulership, making Him equal to Yahweh (Heb. 1:1-4). Psalm 110 is the ultimate Davidic Son of God typology passage. It is the foundation of the book of Hebrews and one of the most quoted passages in the Second Testament. Whereas the previous quotations have shown Christ as the one who is enthroned as the true and eternal king, Ps. 110:1 goes further and shows that He is the eschatological winner over all enemies who would oppose Him. Not only is He the winner, but they are also subject to Him in dishonor and service (Heb. 10:26-29).

¹¹ The unpacking of Ps. 45:6-7 in connection to Christ comes from D. A. Carson. *Hebrews*, video lecture from “TEDS Lecture Series.”

The author ends by stating that the primary purpose and ministry of the angels is to assist humanity in reaching their final deliverance over their spiritual enemies. This ministry of service is obviously inferior to Christ's ministry of ruling.

The author has made a strong argument for the superiority of Christ to the angels because He is God's Son, He is to be worshiped by them, and He has sovereign rule over Yahweh's everlasting kingdom. This is important because the angels are the ones who mediated the Law from Yahweh to Moses, and the Law has authority over the Jews. Therefore, since Christ is greater than the angels, then the covenant that He initiates is greater than the covenant that the angels initiated.

Jesus' superiority to the angels is also important because in the eastern world, then and today, messages, events, or religions have greater significance if angels are present. They are seen as a great authority and validation of something's importance or worth. Even today, the western culture has a fascination and obsession with angels. The concepts of guardian angels appear in movies and shows like "It's a Wonderful Life," "The Bishop's Wife," "Heaven Can Wait," "Touched by an Angel," "Ghost," "Almost an Angel," "Always," "City of Angels," "Meet Joe Black," "The Preachers Wife," "Constantine," "Angels in the Outfield," "Michael," "Legion," and others, along with all the movies with mediums and spirits coming to help and guide us. Yet nowhere are the sovereign God of the universe or Christ ever the focus. All of these obsessions and fantasies about angelic guidance are inferior to Christ.

No other religion in the world has been given by the Son of God; rather they all began with a visitation from an angel or a spirit. Though some spirits have claimed to be Jesus, they claimed as Jesus they were no different from any other spiritual being. None have claimed to be the unique and sovereign Son of God. Therefore, according to Hebrews, Jesus and His covenant are far superior to any other religion, belief system, or spirit guide in the world, for He is the only Son of God.

C. The Warning Against Drifting Away (2:1-4)

This is the first in a series of warnings in the book of Hebrews. Christ's superiority to the angels means that the message given through the Son demands even more serious attention than the messages given through the angels. However, the author shows that his warning is given because he cares. By using "we" and "us" he identifies himself with his readers and brings a warmth and urgency to his audience. The point of a warning is to prevent someone from falling into harm.

2:1 The author begins the warning by stating that his readers must pay close attention to the argument of the previous chapter so that they do not drift away from Christ because they did not fully understand Christ's superiority to the angels. The word "drift" here communicates the idea of slowly falling away from Christ without really realizing it, out of apathy or not taking the superiority of Christ seriously.

2:2-3a The reason it is so important to pay attention to this argument is if the punishment for violating the old Mosaic Covenant given under the authority of angels was physical death (Ps. 95), then the greater punishment for violating the New Covenant given under the authority of the Son of God, who is far greater than angels, would be eternal death. Just as the blessings are greater under the New Covenant, so are the punishments. Thus, because Christ is superior to the angels, one has greater responsibilities to Him as the Son of God.

The words "binding," "just," "confirmed," and "testifying" are legal terms, communicating that these covenants were legally binding covenants that demanded responsibilities to them. The statement "every violation and disobedience" communicates the idea of a deliberate rejection of the divine will of God, and one chooses to overstep the boundary or regulation, thus transgressing the law. Though the warning is to not drift away, which is gradual, to not be close to God means that we will naturally choose to rebel against His Law, which brings a punishment. The warning is not to drift away and go back to the Jewish religion and regulations, for this would only bring a more severe punishment than that which God had for those who walked away from Him under the Mosaic Covenant before Christ.

2:3b-4 Christ proclaimed this salvation during His earthly ministry (Matt. 4:17; 19:28; Luke 12:31-32; 22:29-30), while the apostles taught the same truth, confirming His word. To all of this God testified His approval of Christ's preaching and the apostles' preaching about Christ by providing authenticating miracles that showed God was with them (Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6, 13; 14:3; 15:12; 2 Cor. 12:12).

D. Jesus and the Destiny of Humanity (2:5-18)

Hebrews 1 focused on the majesty of Christ enthroned next to God as His Son, making Christ superior to the angels. Hebrews 2 unpacks the theme of Christ as the Davidic king, who in His incarnation became human in order to redeem humanity, which none of the angels ever did. The author develops this idea because the incarnation, humiliation, suffering, and death of Christ make it seem that He is inferior to the angels. The author shows here how this, in fact, is not true.

The focus on Christ's humanity can be seen in the fact that Heb. 2:9 is the first time that the name *Jesus* appears in the book of Hebrews. The name *Christ* tends to be used in the Second Testament to emphasize His deity, whereas the name *Jesus* tends to emphasize His humanity (though this is not a strict rule in Scripture). The mention of Jesus here draws one's attention to His humanity, suffering, and death, which at first makes Him appear inferior.

2:5 Though Yahweh gave angels authority over the present world (based on Deut. 32:8), He did not give them authority over the "world to come," which is the future heavenly world that will become one with the earth (Matt. 6:9-10; Rev. 21:1-8). The only way that heaven and earth can be brought together under the image of God (humans) is through the death and resurrection of the God-man, Jesus Christ. This is what the author of Hebrews will develop in the following verses.

2:6-8a The author quotes Ps. 8:4-6 in order to make the point that Christ's incarnation and suffering do not make Him inferior to the angels. The phrase "someone testified somewhere" does not mean that the author does not know where the quote comes from; rather, it emphasizes two things. First, since God is the one who speaks Scripture, the person who wrote Psalms 8 is relatively unimportant. Second, the emphasis is put on *what* is said rather than on *who* said it. The original audience would have known exactly where this quote was found.

In its original context, the theological premise of Psalm 8 is that humans were made slightly lower than the angels and were created as the image of God in order to rule over the earth, but they failed through their sin. God did not give the rule over creation to angels but to humans. We do not see that happening; rather, we see broken humans who are bullying each other and not ruling. The psalmist expresses his wonder that God still takes notice of them and that He plans to restore them as rulers over creation one day.

The author of Hebrews makes two changes from the original passage. First, instead of using the word "humanity" as in Psalm 8, he uses the phrase "son of man," which is synonymous parallelism for "human being." *Son of man* is a term that means someone is merely a human and not a god, angel, or animal. It is used in reference to the person of Ezekiel eighty times in the book of Ezekiel. Later, in Dan. 7:13-14, the term *Son of man* was used to describe the unique being who approached the throne of God. In describing him as a son of man, Daniel was calling him a human. Yet this son of man was also approaching the throne of God without the protection of angels or the blood of Christ, which means that he is sinless. Likewise, he is coming on the clouds, a reference to deity, and Yahweh gives him all authority, honor, sovereignty, and an eternal kingdom. The unique figure is thus seen as a sinless human who is also the sovereign

God of the universe. The “Son of man” term is what Jesus called Himself more than any other title,¹² showing that He clearly viewed Himself as this unique God-man of Dan. 7:13-14.

Thus, the son of man term refers to humans as in the original context of Psalm 8 but has been transformed into something more by Dan. 7:14. Jesus is the ultimate Son of man who can be the true human ruler and reestablish order as humanity was meant to (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8; Matt 25:34; Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15:25-28). Only a human ruling over earth can fulfill Yahweh’s original plan, but only God can rule righteously. What Adam forfeited Jesus will regain as the second Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). Furthermore, humanity will rule the earth once again by being found in Christ and made heirs with Christ; this is not so with angels. This is how the author of Hebrews uses the Son of man title while remaining true to the original context of Psalm 8, which has humans in mind. Jesus is how humanity will be rulers over creation one day.

The second change the author of Hebrews makes in quoting Psalm 8 is the addition of the phrase “a little while,” which does not appear in the Hebrew. The Hebrew word for “a little less” is replaced with a more ambiguous expression in the Septuagint, which can indicate either “a little less” or “a little while.” The author takes advantage of this to show that Christ was lowered only for a short time in order to make anointment for humanity and was then returned to His exalted position (Dan. 7:13-14; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-4).

The word “angels” is the Septuagint’s translation of the Hebrew word *‘elohim*, which is the word for “god” or “heavenly beings.” Though many think of *‘elohim* as only referring to God, it is also used of the angels (Ps. 8; 82:1, 6; 86:8; 97:7) and false gods (Ex. 12:12; Jud. 11:24; 1 Kgs. 11:33). In the context of Psalm 8, it should be understood as “heavenly beings,” referring to the angelic host in heaven, especially since humans were not made a little less than Yahweh.

2:8b-9 The author of Hebrews explains the significance of Psalm 8 in relation to Jesus by stating that Jesus Christ has complete sovereignty over creation unlike the angels; yet we do not *see* that happening now because He was temporarily made lower than the angels so that He could become a human and die in order to redeem humanity. Jesus Christ wears the crown of glory and honor due to what He has accomplished, but He has not executed His total subjugation and sovereignty yet. That is yet to come in the millennial rule and the new kingdom wherein heaven and earth are brought together.

The author makes it clear that the lowering of Jesus was not due to His inferiority or weakness, but it was the will of God in order to show grace to humanity. The result was that Jesus would experience death as a substitute for humanity. Jesus’ death paid the penalty for the sins of every human being, both believers and non-believers (1 Jn. 2:2; 2 Pet. 2:1; Jn. 3:16). The phrase “taste death” (NIV, NASB) does not mean to “sample a small amount,” but rather to “experience” (NET) something cognitively or emotionally or to come to know something. The singular of “everyone” shows that Christ died on behalf of each individual, not for humanity in general. His

¹² See the following references for Jesus as the Son of Man. **Matthew** 8:20 (Lk. 9:58); 9:6 (Mk. 2:10; Lk. 5:24); 10:23; 11:19 (Lk. 7:34); 12:8 (Mk. 28; Lk. 6:5); 12:32; (Lk. 12:10); 12:40 (Lk. 11:30); 13:37, 41; 16:13; 16:27-28 (Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26); 17:9-12 (Mk. 9:9-12); 17:22 (Mk. 9:31; Lk. 9:44); 19:28; 20:17 (Mk. 10:33; Lk. 18:31); 20:26-28 (Mk. 10:45); 24:27 (Lk. 17:22-24); 24:30 (Mk. 12:26; Lk. 21:27); 24:37-39 (Lk. 17:26); 24:44 (Lk. 12:40); 25:31; 26:1; 26:24 (Mk. 14:21; Lk. 22:22); 26:45 (Mk. 14:41); 26:64 (Mk. 14:62; Lk. 22:69); **Mark** 8:31; **Luke** 6:22; 9:21-22; 12:8; 17:30; 18:8; 19:10; 21:36; 22:47-48; 24:6; **John** 1:51; 3:13; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23, 34; 13:31.

death was sufficient for all, but it is efficient only for those who place their trust in it as that which satisfied God.

2:10 The reason Jesus was made lower for a little while was so that He could redeem humanity in order to restore them to glory as rulers over creation. The word “pioneer” (NET) or “author” (NIV, NASB) carries the idea of a leader or the representative head of a family and carries the nuances of a “trailblazer,” one who clears a new path for those who follow him. It is used some thirty-five times in the Greek First Testament (Septuagint) and four times in the Second Testament, always of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb. 2:10; 12:2). Not only is Jesus the firstborn over creation as sovereign king (Heb. 1:6) but also over humanity as their redeemer.

The word “perfect” in the ancient Near East carries the idea of completion or mission accomplished. It is not that Jesus was flawed and made perfect through His suffering, rather that, after He had suffered for humanity, He completed the mission to which God set Him. His mission was to suffer and die for humanity, and He could not be their author of salvation and return to His exalted glory until He perfected/completed this task set for Him by God.

The “everyone” from Heb. 2:9 is now defined as God adopting humanity as sons and daughters through the suffering of Jesus. Just as Adam and Eve’s children should have inherited the kingdom of earth as rulers but could not due to sin, now we become heirs to the kingdom of earth and the world to come as rulers through Christ as the Son of God and Son of man.

The imagery here is Jesus Christ as the new Moses leading humanity in a new exodus. The fact that Israel was Yahweh’s firstborn (Ex. 4:22; 6:6-7) and that now “the many sons and daughters” are the new firstborn of Jesus, the high priest (Heb. 2:17) and pioneer into a new community, sets the stage for the exodus typology that will be unpacked in Hebrews 3-4.¹³

2:11-13 Those who are made holy (humanity) and the One who makes humanity holy (Jesus) are both humans, making us brothers and sisters to Jesus through His incarnation. For the author of Hebrews, the idea of being made holy (set apart) or being sanctified is that of humanity being brought into a new covenant relationship with God through the blood of the covenant (Heb. 9:13-14; 10:10, 14, 29).¹⁴

The author then quotes Ps. 22:22, Isa. 8:17, and Isa. 8:18 to make this point. Psalm 22 is the song of David crying out to Yahweh for rescue from his suffering at the hands of his enemies. The imagery of this Psalm has strong parallels to Jesus’ suffering on the cross, and it is the opening lines of Psalm 22 that Jesus quotes on the cross (Matt. 27:46). Jesus as the ultimate Davidic king fulfills this Psalm both in His suffering and in proclaiming Himself one with humanity as a human.

The context of Isa. 8:17 is that Isaiah’s message has been rejected by the king and the people. Isaiah sealed up the message of Yahweh and suffered at the hands of his own people as he trusted in Yahweh and awaited the fulfillment of the message. Jesus also trusted in Yahweh and awaited His vindication in His exaltation.

The context of Isa. 18:18 is that Isaiah’s name means “Yahweh is salvation,” and Yahweh gave him two sons—“a remnant will return” and “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil.” These were signs and reminders to the people from Yahweh of His enduring presence, power, and promises

¹³ See Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 104-5.

¹⁴ See Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 108.

seen through Isaiah's faithfulness to and trust in Yahweh. Yahweh gave the sons to Isaiah and Israel to remind them that they were a community of a distinct people in a covenant with Yahweh. Thus, Jesus is the Son who was given to Israel to become one of them and to bring them into a New Covenant with Yahweh.

The point of the quotations is, first, to emphasize Jesus' solidarity with humanity as one with humanity. Second, they define the nature of sonship not on the basis of biology but on God's salvific act toward humanity and on their response to Him. And He chose to accomplish this through His Son becoming human like them and suffering on their behalf.¹⁵ Jesus has made His congregation holy in order to call them brothers and exalt them to His side in sharing the blessings that are found by being in Christ.

2:14-16 The purpose for Jesus' death was that He might break the hold that the devil had over death and to set free those who were enslaved by their fear of death. This does not mean that the devil has been literally destroyed, for the Greek word *katargo* can mean "to deprive something of its power" (Rom. 3:31; Eph. 2:15) or "to destroy" (1 Cor. 6:13). Since Hebrews assumes that death and evil still remain (Heb. 3:12; 9:17), the sense would be that the overthrow of the devil has begun, that he has lost his hold of people's lives, but the overthrow is not yet complete.

The point is that Jesus did not come in order to save angels, but he came as a human to redeem humanity. Jesus shows not only His superiority to angels in His sovereignty over creation, but He also shows His love for humanity by coming to redeem them when He did not do the same for the angels. Likewise, it is humanity, not angels, who will rule with Christ in His future kingdom; angels are only ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14).

While Hebrews 1 makes the point that Christ is superior to the angels and Hebrews 2 makes the point that Christ cannot come as an angel but had to become a human in order to redeem humanity, a more significant point than these is to be seen. The two chapters are tied together. The Son of God is the human king who rules over the affairs of God's image bearers. That is the very nature of what God is doing: He has come to redeem a human race. He is superior to the angels, precisely because He has come as the human king to rule over them in the Davidic line. You see it as soon as you raise the question of how it is that the eternal God has raised up a redeemer for fallen human beings and not for fallen angels.¹⁶

2:17-18 The author of Hebrews has established the first reason Jesus became human: that He might suffer on humanity's behalf in order to redeem them (Heb. 2:10-16). Now he establishes the second reason Jesus became human: that through His suffering He could relate to humanity and help believers when they suffer, so becoming a merciful and faithful high priest, a role that began with His atoning for sins. If Jesus came only to redeem us, then He did not need to spend a lifetime on earth just in order to die. The life that He lived on earth was to better understand humans and thus to better relate to them with empathy and compassion. This is the first time that the author calls Jesus a high priest, which will be unpacked more in Hebrews 4-5. In the First Testament, the high priest was the one who went into the tabernacle once a year, representing the people before Yahweh in order to atone for their sins. In doing so, Yahweh's wrath would not be poured out on the people in their sin, and He would dwell with them, and they could be in His presence. The point of the high priest was to mediate between Yahweh and the people as one

¹⁵ See Peter T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 113.

¹⁶ See D. A. Carson. *How the Book of Hebrews Makes Use of the Old Testament Passages*. Audio.

holy unto Yahweh while human himself, bringing the two together through the sacrificial system. Jesus as God *and* man bridges the gap between Yahweh and humanity, and being human and suffering unto death both provides the necessary sacrifice (Heb. 7-9) and allows Him to show compassion to the people (Heb. 4-5).

Jesus is first described as a *merciful* high priest. Nowhere else in the Bible are priests said to be merciful. Yet many times in the First Testament Yahweh is said to be merciful (Ex. 34:6; Ps. 145); thus, Christ here reflects the character of Yahweh. In the Gospels, Jesus teaches on mercy (Matt. 5:7; 18:33; Lk. 16:24) and is often requested to show mercy, to which He responds with compassion (Matt. 9:27; 15:22; 17:15).

Second, Jesus is described as a *faithful* high priest. In Psalm 145, Yahweh is described as faithful, and 2 Sam. 2:35 is most likely alluding to the coming of Jesus as a faithful high priest. In the context, Jesus' faithfulness is both to God, in His faithfully accomplishing His will, and in that humanity can trust Him as He brings them closer to God.

If the readers were tempted to renounce their confession of Christ due to the suffering they were experiencing (Heb. 10:32-39; 12:1-13), then the suffering of Christ, which would bring objection, is in fact the very thing that allows Him to show understanding and compassion to them in their time of suffering.¹⁷

In Hebrews 2, the author presents eight reasons for the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God: to fulfill God's purpose for humanity (Heb. 2:5-9a), to experience death on behalf of humanity (Heb. 2:9b), to bring many sons and daughters to glory (Heb. 2:10-13), to destroy the devil (Heb. 2:14), to deliver humanity from bondage to their fear of death (Heb. 2:15), to become a high priest for humanity (Heb. 2:16-17a), to make atonement for sins (Heb. 2:17b), and to provide help for those who are suffering in trials (Heb. 2:18).¹⁸ As repeatedly seen, Jesus' suffering and obedience as the "earthly Son" gave Him the right to be given the position of the "exalted Son."

Thus, by the end of Hebrews 1-2, Christ has been established as the Son of God who is the sovereign king over the universe, as the Davidic King who is the ruler over the earthly kingdom, as the Son of man who is the sinless God-man redeeming humanity through His death in order to make them rulers, and as high priest who is one with humanity in order to make them one with God by interceding on their behalf.

¹⁷ See Peter T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 123.

¹⁸ See Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Hebrews*, p. 27

II. The Superiority of God's Rest found in Jesus Christ (3:1-4:13)

The addressing of Jesus as a high priest for the first time in Heb. 2:17-18 creates a smooth transition into the next division, which begins with the mention of Jesus as high priest (Heb. 3:1). The author moves on to the superiority of Jesus over Moses so that he can establish the superior blessings and rest that Jesus' covenant offers when compared with the Mosaic Covenant given through the angels and Moses.

A. Jesus Is Superior to Moses (3:1-6)

The Law was given through angels to Moses, who then mediated it to the people. Moses was considered the most important and godly man in Jewish history, for he saw Yahweh face to face (Ex. 33:11) and mediated the Law to the people. Moses was so great that Yahweh used him as a typological prophet for the coming messiah (Deut. 18:15-19). Only one who was like Moses could be considered the awaited messiah. Therefore, Jesus pointed to Himself as that prophet when He gave His sermon on the mount (Matt. 5-7), like Moses gave the Law on the mountain. Hebrews now points out the superiority of Jesus to Moses.

The author of Hebrews has just developed for his readers what Jesus had accomplished in His earthly ministry, which has given Him the right to reside in heaven on their behalf. Now in light of this ("therefore" Heb. 3:1), he calls the community of believers "holy" and "partners in a heavenly calling," and he tells them to "take note of Jesus." All this is to focus them on Jesus who resides in heaven and on what they are to be striving for (Phil. 3:12-21)—instead of on the temptations and teachings of the world that have been distracting them.

3:1 By calling his readers "holy brothers and sisters," he reminds them of their connection to Jesus as a fellow brother (Heb. 2:11-13). This, combined with their designation as "partners in the heavenly calling," is meant to remind them of the dignity God has invested in them. They have been set apart as members of His family and have become heirs to a greater kingdom and partakers of an eternal rest. The implication of these ideas will be unpacked in the following chapters.¹⁹

The conclusion of what has been developed in the first two chapters is that the readers are to think on the significance of Jesus who is both their apostle and high priest. An "apostle" is someone who is sent by God with delegated authority (Matt. 10:1-2). Jesus is an apostle because He was sent from God to man (Jn. 3:34; 5:36-37; 20:21; Gal. 4:4) in order to reveal who God is and what He is doing for man. The word "high priest" is one who represents believers before God, since humanity is too disconnected from God to do so on their own. The emphasis is not on the act of confessing but on the act of allegiance to Jesus and the content of what is being confessed. It is important to understand who Jesus is and His significance in your life if you are not to drift away.

3:2 Just as Jesus is Apostle and High Priest, Moses was also considered an apostle and a high priest (Ex. 32:7-14, 30-35; Num. 12:13-15; 14:11-20). Moses did not just receive messages from Yahweh for the people, but he stood in the presence of Yahweh (Num. 12:6-8) to intercede on behalf of Israel when they angered Yahweh or when they needed help from Him. Thus, Jesus and Moses are both considered great prophets of Yahweh who were faithful to Him in their ministry

¹⁹ See Peter T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 129.

on earth. Yet this sentence ends by making the point that Moses was a faithful servant *in* the house of God. This is an important concept for understanding the following verses.

3:3-4 The fact that Jesus is greater than Moses is not that Jesus does better things or more things, but rather it is a difference in the category that is connected to sonship language. The superiority of Jesus over Moses is that He *is* God's Son and has a greater position *over* the household of God. It is a qualitative difference, not a quantitative difference. For since there is a house, there must be a builder, and the builder of all things is God. And since Jesus as the Son of God is equal with God and is the sovereign creator (Heb. 1:1-4), then He, too, is the builder of the house. And the builder is always greater than the building. Thus, Jesus is seen as having a greater position because He is the builder of the house, whereas Moses was one who lived *in* the house.

The word "house" here can refer to a physical structure or to an extended family ("household"). The word "builder" can refer to the one who assembles the physical structure or to the person who establishes a household and gives it distinction, in the way God established the house of David (2 Samuel 7). The context shows that both meanings are in use. Jesus is the builder of a physical structure—the earth, by being the "builder of all things" (Heb. 3:4), and a household, as in "We are of his house" (Heb. 3:6).²⁰ Also in view would be the tabernacle, since Yahweh had Moses build the tabernacle in order to demonstrate His sovereignty over creation and to bring Israel into His household. (This will be unpacked more in Heb. 9-10.)

3:5-6 Moses is seen as a servant—he was in the house, and he testified to a coming reality (Heb. 3:5). This is in contrast to Jesus who is seen as a Son—He was over the house, and He is the fulfillment of prophecy (Heb. 3:6). This is all a fulfillment of 1 Sam. 2:35, where God promised that He would raise up a faithful house and high priest.

"The author had purposefully positioned his comparison to arrive at this key point only after the analogies in 3:3-4 were developed, for he refrained from including the phrase 'as a servant' from Numbers 12:7 when he first introduced Moses as 'faithful in His house' at 3:2, saving it for the second and fuller recitation of Numbers 12:7. The distinction between servant and son recalls the comparison with the angels in 1:5-14, who also were designated 'servant' (1:7, 14)."²¹

It would be very hard to overestimate how highly Moses was seen as a leader and man of God in the Jewish culture. The author of Hebrews could have highlighted Moses' faults (Num. 20:12) or emphasized Moses' fading nature as Paul does (Ex. 34:29-35; 2 Cor. 3:7-18). Instead, the author does not lower Moses but shows him as a faithful man of God. The author does this so as not to belittle or bash a great servant who was faithful to Yahweh. Jesus is exalted even higher when He is shown to be greater than the most revered figure in Jewish tradition (Num. 12:6-8).

Heb. 3:6 concludes with a conditional sentence that makes it clear that the mark of a true believer is the one who perseveres in the faith. This does not mean that one can lose his salvation if he does not remain in the faith; rather, a true believer remains in the faith. Their remaining in Christ is evidence of their belonging to Christ (Jn. 15:1-17). The author of Hebrews has a transitory sort of faith in mind, wherein one is attracted to Jesus, and his life begins to show all the signs of life, but he does not persevere into a genuine faith, like the seed in the rocky soil (Mk. 4). Several places in the Second Testament warn against this transitory or spurious faith (Matt. 7:21-23;

²⁰ See David A. DeSilva. *Perseverance in Gratitude*, p. 137.

²¹ David A. DeSilva. *Perseverance in Gratitude*, p. 138.

13:5-6, 20-21; Jn. 2:23-25; 8:31; Col. 1:21-23; 1 Jn. 2:18-19; 2 Jn. 9), which will also be unpacked more in Hebrews 6.

Here we show that we are in the household of God if we remain bold or confident and hold fast to the hope in which we boast. Confidence carries the idea of the self-assurance of who one is in Christ and the freedom to express it before God and others. Boasting has more to do with the content of one's boasts than the actual act of boasting (Rom. 4:2; 1 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:4). We do this by holding firm to what God and Christ have done for us and to the hope that we have received, which gives us the ability to persevere in the faith. Holding on to Christ as the object of our faith, despite our circumstances, is how we remain in the household of God.

The fact that Jesus is greater than Moses is another way that Jesus' covenant is greater than the old covenant, which was mediated by Moses. Because of Moses' greatness in Judaism, to be greater than Moses automatically makes one greater than Abraham and all the prophets. Likewise, Moses is the one who built the tabernacle so that Yahweh could dwell with Israel, and he led them to the rest and blessings of Yahweh found in the Promised Land. Thus, Jesus as the Son of God is a greater dwelling of God among the people, and because He is the builder of creation and dwells in the heavenly tabernacle, He can offer us greater blessings. It is this rest in the blessings of God that the author will begin to develop in the next section.

B. The Warning Against Unbelief (3:7-19)

This is the second warning passage (Heb. 3:7-4:13), warning the reader against the danger of unbelief and rebellion. We see a progression in severity from the first warning of drifting (Heb. 2:1-4) to this warning, which is more of a willful choice to walk away from the faith.

The author uses Psalm 95 in order to contrast the faithfulness of Moses and Jesus with that of the wilderness generation of Israel. That generation will become an example of ones who did not persevere and remain in the house (Heb. 3:6). They will also be used as a call to respond to God and the rest that He offers through Christ.

3:7-11 The author begins the Psalm 95 quote by emphasizing that it is ultimately the Holy Spirit that is speaking. The first part of the psalm (Ps. 95:1-7a) is a call to worship, and the second part (Ps. 95:7b-11), which is quoted here, is about the incident at Kadesh Barnea with the post-Exodus wilderness generation of Israel, found in Numbers 14. The contrast is between the two responses to Yahweh: either one worships Him, or one rebels against Him. After Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and they arrived at the Promised Land, he sent twelve spies out to investigate the land and bring back a report. Ten of the spies said that they could not do it despite the promise of Yahweh, and they instigated the people into grumbling and complaining against Yahweh. They even accused Yahweh of bringing them out of Egypt just so that He could kill them. As a judgment for their lack of faith in Yahweh and in what He had promised them, He swore that they would never enter the Promised Land and would instead wander for forty years until their generation died in the desert.

Here, the author is going to read Psalm 95, first as a moralizing lesson (Heb. 3:7-19) and later as a typological lesson (Heb. 4:1-13). The moralizing lesson is about the people who had responded to Yahweh and were rescued from Egypt but did not enter the Promised Land. They had been saved out of slavery but not saved into the blessings of Yahweh yet. Because of their ingratitude, complaining, and rebellion in the wilderness, the whole generation was wiped out and did not enter the Promised Land. Thus, the moral lesson is to make sure you persevere. The author of Hebrews picks up on the word “today” in Psalm 95 and says that as long as there is a *today*, then there is a chance to enter Yahweh’s rest; to reject it also means that the warning of judgment still applies.

Ps. 95:8 uses the names of the places where the people rebelled—*Meribah* and *Massah*—whereas the author of Hebrews uses the *meanings* of those names—“rebellion” and “testing” (Heb. 3:8). By doing this, he emphasizes the actions of the people rather than the locations of their actions.

3:12-15 The author’s exposition of Psalm 95 begins with an exhortation to his readers to not be like the wilderness generation. These people are described as evil, having an unbelieving heart, forsaking²² God, and whose hearts have been hardened by sin. The reference to “forsaking” or “apostatizing” occurs elsewhere in Scripture to denote a willful rejection of salvation and rebellion against God and His ways (Lk. 8:13; Acts 21:21; 2 Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1). Thus, the apostasy that is in view is not the struggle with sin that is characteristic of God’s people, for Christ is a merciful high priest who stands ready to provide forgiveness for this kind of struggle

²² The word *apostenai* translated “turns away” (NIV) or “falls away” (NASB) in Heb. 3:12 implies a too passive sense and should instead be translated “forsakes” (NET), “deserts,” or “rebels against” (1 Tim. 4:1).

(Heb. 4:14-16). Rather, to forsake Christ is to refuse the only sacrifice for sins, and thus a severe judgment awaits.

In the context of Numbers 14, the real issue was not the people's fear or their act of refusing to enter the Promised Land, but that they had hard hearts and did not believe in Yahweh's promises (Num. 14:11). To "harden the heart" has to do with a person's being stubborn and obstinate and not believing the truth of God (Deut. 10:16; 2 Kg. 17:14; Rom. 2:5).²³ Yahweh also called them an evil generation, which appears nowhere else in the Torah (Num. 14:27, 35). In other contexts, an "evil heart" is used of people who willfully follow their own plans rather than Yahweh's will (Jer. 16:12; 18:12). Thus, it is clear that unbelief is not simply a lack of trust or a passive disbelief but an intentional and willful refusal to believe in God and an active disobedience of Yahweh (Heb. 3:19; 4:6, 11).²⁴

Yahweh's response to these people was divine wrath, their physical death in a barren wilderness, and a refusal to allow them to enter the Promised Land, which would have been the ultimate fulfillment of entering the blessings, rest, and presence of God. Though the context is of a loving God who is slow to anger and forgiving of sin, He is also the almighty God who judges unbelief and rebellion of a people who continually showed a willful rejection of Him and a pursuit of idols (Num. 14:18). If hearing Yahweh's message of deliverance does not produce a response of trust, loyalty, and obedience, then Yahweh's anger will be provoked, with devastating consequences.

It is important to notice that the author calls the believers to encourage each other to not be deceived by sin, as was the wilderness generation of Israel. In contrast with the wilderness community, which spread unbelief with their grumbling and complaining, the believers are to be a united community encouraging belief. The author believes that the remedy for an unbelieving heart is the faith community's diligence in admonishing each other.

Heb. 3:14 is the second time that the author reminds his readers that one can be in Christ only if they persevere, to the end, in their confidence in who Christ is and what He has done for them (Heb. 3:6). Perseverance is the mark of a true believer, not how one is saved.

3:16-18 The implication of the warning to those who are in the community of believers is that one cannot assume that just because they are in the community of faith that they themselves are believers. This point is emphasized in a series of three sequential questions, followed by their answers.

The first question asks, "For which ones heard and rebelled?" The rebellion being alluded to is the one at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 14). The question makes it clear that they were people who heard the Word of Yahweh and chose to rebel against it. The answer is, "Was it not all who came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership?" The significance of this answer is that 1) they had seen the great power and judgment of Yahweh in the plagues of Egypt, 2) they had responded to Yahweh's redemption by placing their faith in Yahweh and in the lambs' blood on their doorposts to escape the judgment of Yahweh, 3) they were baptized as they passed through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2, 4), and they had received the blessings of Yahweh through the manna, the quail, and the water from the rock. It is these people who seemed to respond to Yahweh in faith

²³ See Peter T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 142.

²⁴ See Peter T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 146.

and showed the signs of faith but who eventually revealed their evil hearts and rebelled against Yahweh.

The second question asks, “And against whom was God provoked for forty years?” The forty years is a reference to both the rebellion at Kadesh Barnea that led to their judgment of wandering in the wilderness until they died and to the many times that Yahweh provided for them and blessed them during those forty years, to which they responded by testing Him, accusing Him of trying to kill them, and claiming that life in Egypt without Yahweh was better. The answer is, “Was it not those who sinned, whose dead bodies fell in the wilderness?” This is a quotation from Num. 14:33. In the Septuagint translation, the word for “unfaithfulness” in Num. 14:33 is the Greek word *porneia*, which means “adultery” or “unfaithfulness.” Their constant choice to reject Yahweh in their adultery against His acts of redemption and provision led to His wrath being poured out on them in judgment.

The third question and answer is, “And to whom did He swear they would never enter into His rest, except those who were disobedient?” The specific act of Yahweh’s judgment was that they were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, His rest, His blessings, His presence, or His dwelling. Because they did not remain in Him through obedience, He would not remain with them.

The author’s conclusion is that they were not able to rest with Yahweh in His presence because of their *unbelief*. Yahweh did not punish them because of their sin or their disobedience but because their disobedience revealed their *unbelief*. The Bible makes it clear that the righteous live by faith (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). David as a son of God—who is held to a higher standard as leader over Israel—sinned horribly when he raped Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11), yet he was forgiven by Yahweh because, overall, David had a believing heart and lived by faith and thus was declared righteous. Yet the common people of the wilderness generation were severely punished because they did not live by faith and because of “their unbelief.”

Notice that the author did not say, “they *did not* enter His rest” but “they were not *able* to enter His rest.” In Num. 14:39-45 (Deut. 1:41-44), the people, upon hearing the judgment of Yahweh, mourned and tried to do what Yahweh wanted to them to do by entering the Promised Land. But Yahweh refused to go with them because of their sin, and as a result, they were slaughtered by the people of Canaan, who lived in the Promised Land. Their sin was not just disobedience but unbelief. They did not believe Yahweh was sovereign and loving and worthy of dwelling with, so they tried to go into the land only because they were afraid of judgment. Unbelief is the real sin here.

The point is that these people had heard the gospel, had responded to His gift of redemption, and were part of the community of Yahweh, but they really did not trust Yahweh. As a result of seeing and rejecting so much, their judgment was a severe judgment. This is the warning to the readers, to not just assume because they have heard the gospel and responded that they have entered the rest of Yahweh. They are warned against drifting away (Heb. 2:1-4) and being deceived by sin (Heb. 3:13) lest they experience His judgment. They are called to trust in Christ and what He has done for them (Heb. 3:6, 14) and to persevere in their faith. It is very important to understand the point that is being made here; many people misunderstand the argument made in Hebrews 6 because they do not take into account the context of what is said in Hebrews 3-4.

The implication is since Christ is superior to Moses, then His covenant is superior to the Mosaic Covenant, and Christ's judgment for violating His covenant is greater than the judgment for violating the Mosaic Covenant. Everyone talks about how the grace that Christ brings through the cross is greater than what was experienced in the First Testament, but we must not forget that the judgment for rejecting that grace is also greater. Israel's judgment was physical death; today, judgment is eternal death.

C. The Promise of God's Rest (4:1-13)

Now that the author has used Psalm 95 in a moralizing lesson (Heb. 3:7-19), he uses it in a typological lesson (Heb. 4:1-13). The typological lesson is the sequential use of the word "today." Every day that there is a "today" you have a chance to enter the rest of Yahweh that He offered Israel. It is in this section that the author unpacks the true meaning and implications of Yahweh's rest. The focus is no longer on the judgment of the wilderness generation but on Yahweh's testimony in Scripture, that a rest truly does exist as attested to in both Genesis 2 and Psalm 95 and that the readers can enter it if they respond "today."

4:1-3a Therefore, in light of the fact that the wilderness generation missed out on the rest of Yahweh, the author now urges that his readers not miss entering the rest. In the Greek, the phrase "we must be wary" (NET) or "let us be careful" (NIV) means, "let us fear" (NASB). This is not a fear that leaves one crippled; rather, it is a godly fear that makes one aware of the reality of the imminent danger. The danger is no longer described as a negative falling away from God; instead, the danger now is missing out on the positive opportunity to enter God's rest. The fact that the rest still remains open for people to enter to this very day demonstrates the generosity and grace of God.

It is important to know that hearing and understanding the gospel message is not enough to enter Yahweh's rest, for the wilderness generation heard and understood the gospel yet did not enter. Those who entered the rest are those who responded to God in faith. The author quotes Ps. 95:11 to make this point.

4:3b-4 In the First Testament, rest for the nation of Israel was directly connected to the Promised Land of Canaan. Yahweh made a promise to Abraham and then to his descendants that He would give them a land as an inheritance wherein they would be able to find rest from their enemies (Gen. 12:1, 7; 13:15, 17; 15:7, 18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:2-3; 28:13; 49:8-12). Moses later led Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land in order to receive that inheritance, but the people did not have faith and rebelled against Yahweh, so He swore that they would never enter His rest (Ps. 95:11); only Joshua, Caleb, and the following generation could enter since they combined the promise of God with faith and obedience (Num. 14:7-9; Deut. 1:36, 39). The First Testament stated that Joshua provided rest for Israel in the land (Deut. 12:8-11; Jos. 1:13, 15; 11:23; 21:44-45; 22:4; 23:1), as did David and Solomon after Joshua (2 Sa. 7:1; 1 Chr. 22:9; 2 Chr. 14:5-6; 15:15; 20:30; 1 Kg. 8:56).

Later, during the time of the monarchy, the "rest" became associated with the blessings of the Messianic rule, the full inheritance of the land, and total peace under the reign of the messiah who would bring the kingdom of Yahweh (Ps. 95; 132:8-18; 2 Sam. 7:1, 11; Isa. 11:10-16; 14:1-3; 32:17-18; Ezk. 34:15). This idea carried on into the intertestamental period (1 Enoch 45:3-6; 4 Ezra 8:52; 2 Baruch 78-86; Jubilees 4:30). The Jews saw that because Yahweh had excluded the wilderness generation from entering the land, this then implied their exclusion from participation in the kingdom of Yahweh to come (t. Sanh. 13:10; b. Sanah. 110b; y. Sanh. 10:29c).

However, the author of Hebrews begins to expand the concept of rest beyond merely a physical land. The phrase "God's works were accomplished from the foundation of the world" and the quotation of Gen. 2:2 show that the true rest is the rest that God Himself partook of in heaven after He finished creating the world. To say that God's works were accomplished does not mean that God no longer does anything in creation, but rather His work of creating a kingdom was complete, and now He was able to enjoy it and rest in it as king. One of the differences between

the first six days of creation and the seventh day of Gen. 2:2-3 is that there was no evening and morning on the seventh day. The implication is not that the seventh day literally lasted longer than the others; the theological point is that the seventh day of God's resting goes beyond a twenty-four hour day and into all the future "todays." The point of creation is that God, as spirit, would literally rest in the physical creation with humanity (Gen. 3:8); thus, they would enjoy His rest both spiritually and physically. However, this was lost in the fall (Gen. 3:22-24), so God began to restore a physical rest for Israel through the Promised Land. And now through Christ's atonement, the spiritual rest of God indwelling humanity is made available to us.

4:5-7 First, the author repeats the quotation from Ps. 95:11 to show how seriously God took the sin of the wilderness generation because their sin excluded them from the promise of entering God's rest. Second, the author focuses on the word *my* in "my rest." The one speaking is God, so this is not ultimately Moses' rest but God's rest. This is the rest of God spoken of at creation. Thus, in David's day (David being the writer of Psalm 95), God extended His offer of entering His rest in Psalm 95 by saying "today" you can enter His rest. As long as there is a "today," we have the chance to enter His rest. But there is an urgency here because just as the wilderness generation ran out of "todays" when the judgment of God came, we also do not know how many "todays" we have left to enter His rest (Ps. 95:7-8).

4:8-9 Joshua did bring Israel into the Promised Land and gave Israel rest (Deut. 12:9-11; Josh. 21:44-45). However, if dwelling in the land was the full extent of the rest, then God would not have spoken of another "today" for people to enter His rest. That God offered another "today" while Israel was in the Promised Land under David, who had given them peace from their enemies, meant that there was more to the rest than just land. Therefore, a Sabbath rest still remains. The word *Sabbath* does not refer to the specific Sabbath day of the week (the seventh day) but to the whole concept of the Sabbath celebration of resting in God. This is made clear by that fact that every day is a "today."

4:10-11 Now the author makes it clear that the rest into which we are invited is God's rest. And the place that He rests is in heaven; thus, the rest that we are to make every effort to enter is not a land or a day of the week but the heavenly presence of God. The only way we can enter this rest is through our high priest Jesus Christ, who has entered into heaven on our behalf (Heb. 4:14-16; 6:19-20; 9:11-14).

The word of God still speaks to us "today" with astonishing power as all the typologies and patterns of the First Testament come together throughout all the "todays" that God has been at work to develop His plan of redemption in people's lives. Yet we are not let off the hook, for this could be the last "today" that we can join Him in His rest.

4:12-13 The reason it is so important to respond to God "today" is that His word brings a judgment that no one can escape. God is able to see into all the immaterial aspects of humanity, psychological and spiritual, and to see every material part, for nothing is hidden from Him. The point is that all things will be brought into account before God one day, and while you may have been able to fool others with your external righteousness—as in the example of the wilderness generation—God sees you for who you really are. Just as Israel fell before the sword of the Amalekites when they tried to enter the Promised Land on their own without God (Num. 14:39-45), so too will we fall before the sword of God's eternal judgment if we try to enter heaven through our own works without the righteousness of Christ.

Thus, since Christ is superior to Moses and Joshua, the rest that He provides is also greater than the rest that Moses and Joshua offered through the Mosaic Covenant. For His rest is not just the physical land but also the heavenly rest. But once again, so too is the judgment greater for ignoring such a great rest under Christ than it was under the Mosaic Covenant.

III. The Superiority of Jesus as High Priest (4:14-7:28)

First, the author developed how Jesus was superior as the Son of God (Heb. 1:1-4:13). Now he comes to the second major theological argument of the appointment of Jesus as the unique and great high priest. He begins by laying out the basic concepts in Heb. 4:14-5:10. He then pauses to warn his readers against apostasy due to their lack of immaturity (Heb. 5:11-6:20). Finally, he unpacks fully the more advanced argument (Heb. 5:11) of the appointment of Jesus as the unique and great high priest (Heb. 7:1-10:18).

A. Jesus, Our Compassionate High Priest (4:14-5:10)

Having developed the idea of Jesus as a *faithful* high priest (Heb. 3:6), the author now develops the idea of Jesus as a *merciful* high priest in the service of God (2:17). Here, he shows that a high priest must be faithful to God and compassionate toward people.

4:14 Not only does Jesus sit enthroned in heaven as the sovereign Son of God, but He also serves in heaven as our compassionate high priest. After His earthly ministry, Jesus passed through the sky into the heavenly sanctuary like the First Testament high priest passed through the veil into the holy of holies. The Greek word *ouranos* can be translated “sky” or “heaven.” The word “heavens” should be understood as the natural sky. The author of Hebrews, when referring to the sky, uses the plural form of *ouranos* (1:10; 4:14; 7:26; 12:26), and when referring to heaven, he uses the singular form (1:3; 8:1, 5; 9:24, 25; 12:23, 25). The English translations use the words “heavens” (sky) and “heaven.” This makes sense contextually as well, since it would not make sense for Jesus to pass through heaven so that He could get into heaven on the other side.

In the First Testament, Yahweh made His presence known in the earthly holy of holies in the tabernacle/temple. Only the high priest could enter this room, once a year, with the blood of a sacrifice. However, Jesus permanently dwells in the heavenly sanctuary. Therefore, since this is our high priest, the Son of God, we are to make every effort to hold on to our confession of who Jesus is and what He has done, so that we can be brought into the presence of God through Jesus our high priest.

The reason we are to do and are able to do this is that Jesus is a compassionate high priest who has been tempted and who suffered, just as we have, and therefore can show us empathy in our struggles to persevere in the faith.

4:15 Jesus is a high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses and can relate to the attractiveness and strength of temptation, for He has faced it Himself. Because of this, we can approach Him on the throne with confidence, knowing that He will receive us as would an understanding and loving father. The word “empathy” here carries the idea of the emotional bond that a mother has for a child, a bond that causes her to actively help the child in a time of need. The empathy of Jesus is not simply the compassion that an observer has for another but the feeling of the one who enters into the suffering and makes it his own.

Though Jesus is like us in being tempted and suffering, He is unlike us in the fact that He never gave in to the temptation and never sinned. The phrase “tempted in every way” (NET, NIV) or “tempted in all things” (NASB) does not mean that Jesus has been tempted in *every situation* that all humans have been; rather, He was tempted to the full force or measure of temptation. He faced at 100% what temptation had to offer, without sinning—a measure that no human could

withstand.²⁵ The point is not that Jesus was tempted with every possible temptation but rather that He faced the full extent of the pressure and desire to sin. No matter what temptation you face, the real suffering and struggle is not with the particular sin with which you are being tempted; rather, it is in the internal conflict between the desire to give in and the desire to resist sin. It does not matter what sin it is; this conflict is also the same. Now because we are sinners, one of two things happen in this internal conflict: we either give in because we think we cannot handle the pressure anymore, or God removes the temptation because He has promised that He would never give us more than we can handle (1 Cor. 10:13). Either way, we can never face the full pressure of temptation indefinitely without breaking. It is much like a cross-country runner; the longer he runs, the more he gets tired, his body hurts, and he wants to give up. He cannot run forever. The longer we resist the desire to sin, the more the pressure builds, and the more we begin to break under the desire; we cannot resist forever. However, Jesus felt the *full* weight of temptation that the world and the devil could put on Him, and He did not break. And because He never gave in, the pressure became greater and lasted longer than anything we have ever faced.

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and in the garden the night before His crucifixion makes us ask about the nature of temptation. Who is tempted more—the one who is tempted and resists, is tempted and resists, and then gives in, or the one who is tempted and resists and never gives in? One reason we find it so easy to sin is that we have fallen into it before. But maybe sin's pull feels even stronger if you have never sinned.²⁶

This is how He empathizes with us. Because He fully understands the struggle and pressure of wanting to sin and yet not wanting to sin, He does not condemn or reject us in this struggle but enters into our suffering with acceptance, compassion, and comfort. Yet because He was victorious over temptation, He is able to give us the same enduring resistance and victory over temptation that He accomplished.

4:16 In light of this reality, our response should not be one of hiding from God in shame and fear that He will rebuke or punish us, but rather that when we are tempted, we can go boldly and confidently before the throne of Jesus' grace, knowing that He will lovingly take us into His presence, where we can find comfort, help, and release from our temptations in our great time of struggle and need. This is significant, for if Jesus were only king, then we would live in terror of His righteous judgment. But because He is also our high priest who is human, we can go confidently to Him and receive compassion.

5:1-4 Before the author speaks more specifically about Jesus as high priest, he defines the role of the high priest and lays out two general qualifications for every high priest. The high priest is selected from among the people as their representative before God. He must be like them so that he can understand them and offer sacrifices to God on their behalf, atoning for their sin. But he also mediates the atonement of God back to the people, allowing them to dwell in His presence—the tabernacle of Yahweh in the midst of Israel. The first qualification for high priest is that he must have compassion and be able to deal gently with the people. Because he also is weak he can empathize with and help those who are ignorant and who stray from God. As seen earlier, Jesus meets these qualifications (Heb. 2; 4:14-16). However, the priest's weakness is due to the fact that he is a sinner, and so he must also offer sacrifices for his own sins along with

²⁵ See Marguerite Shuster. "The Temptation, Sinlessness, and Sympathy of Jesus: Another Look at the Dilemma of Hebrews 4:15." In *Perspectives in Christology*.

²⁶ See D. A. Carson. *How the Book of Hebrews Makes Use of the Old Testament Passages*. Audio.

those of the people. The second qualification is that no one can declare himself a priest before God; he must be called by God Himself. The author will develop these points in reverse order in Heb. 5:5-6 and 5:7-10.

5:5-6 The author quotes again Ps. 2:7 and Ps. 110:4 (see Heb. 1:5, 13-14), recalling the typology of Jesus as the king-priest. This time he uses it to support the fact that Jesus did not take the high priesthood upon Himself but was appointed by God. These two passages are linked by the phrase “you are,” which emphasizes His appointment by God. This shows that the change in priesthood is due to the will of God—which will be unpacked in Hebrews 7—and not by Jesus seizing the position.

5:7 The author now develops the first qualification of Jesus as high priest. Jesus knew suffering in His life when He was tempted to avoid death, the cross, and He cried out to God for mercy. Most likely what is in view is His prayer in the garden the night before His crucifixion (Matt. 26:42). The fact that God “heard” Jesus’ request shows that He answered His prayers. Though Jesus was not delivered from death by God, He was delivered from death in His resurrection. It is important to notice that God heard Jesus because of His submissive obedience. The wilderness generation of Israel missed out on the rest of God because of their disobedience, but Jesus was lifted to the right hand of God because of His obedience. God did not rescue Jesus from the need to obey, but He did deliver Jesus from death through the resurrection after Jesus demonstrated perseverant obedience. This is like 1 Peter 1:7-9, where the believer is told that suffering leads to proven character, and then in 1 Peter 2:21-25, we find that if the believer is obedient, he will be vindicated just as Jesus was vindicated in His obedience.

5:8-10 There are two main verbs, “He learned” and “He became.” Jesus’ learning obedience does not mean that he learned to obey or previously did not obey. This is made clear in the phrase “Son though He was,” taking back to Hebrews 1 where He is shown to be God Himself as the Son of God. The learning has more to do with the experience of obedience through suffering. As the Son of God in heaven, He knows no suffering and temptation, yet as a human He learned suffering through obedience, which enabled Him to deal compassionately with us in our suffering (Heb. 4:14-16). Jesus’ learning is something that we will never comprehend.

“According to Hebrews, Jesus, who was without sin (Heb. 4:15), was obedient throughout his life. On his entry into the world he announced that he delighted to do God’s will (Heb. 10:5-10). ‘To learn obedience,’ then, meant coming to appreciate fully what conforming to God’s will involved. But this is not to suggest that Jesus had previously been disobedient, and now needed to grasp what it meant to obey the will of God. Rather, authentic obedience is practiced in particular, concrete circumstances. So, as Jesus encountered fresh situations—and the focus of the text is on his suffering—his faithfulness to God was challenged, and his unfailing obedience to the Father’s will was tested again and again. That testing occurred throughout his suffering, which culminated in his death. Hebrews makes it clear that suffering and death are fully compatible with Jesus’ status as the eternal Son, and are an essential part of his saving work (see v. 9).”²⁷

This suffering through obedience made Him perfect. Once again the word “perfect” carries the idea of a completed mission, not of morality or nature (see note for Heb. 2:10). As a result of obedience in suffering, Jesus became the only source for salvation and became the eternal high

²⁷ Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 201.

priest, which means He is the only intermediary between God and man. Notice that Heb. 5:9 says that Jesus becomes this source to those who obey—not those who only claim to belong to Him. Just as God delivered Jesus because of His obedience, so also we receive Jesus' salvation in our obedience. Not that we must perfectly obey Him, for this is impossible as sinners, but that we have a heart that pursues Him in obedience and repents in obedience instead of a heart of rebellion that walks away from Him without guilt.

“In this perfecting, Jesus was qualified or given credentials demonstrating His worthiness to act as High Priest. He became the perfect High Priest in the sense that He showed His sinlessness by full obedience to God's will despite temptation (5:7-10; 7:26-28); He became sympathetic through His identification with humanity in incarnation, temptation, and suffering (2:17-18; 4:14-16); and He ultimately went to the cross and offered Himself as the fully effective sacrifice for sin (2:9-10, 17; 5:7-10; 7:26-28)... His fully tested faith and obedience can thus be cited as the most powerful exhortation imaginable for His people who must endure their earthly pilgrimage in the face of stern difficulties and temptation (2:18-3:6; 4:14-16; 10:19-39; 12:1-2).”²⁸

The author leaves the reader with a dramatic tension when he ends by going back to Ps. 110:4 and comparing Jesus to Melchizedek, which will be unpacked in Hebrews 7.

²⁸ Buist M. Fanning. “A Theology of Hebrews.” In *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 384.

B. The Warning Against Apostasy (5:11-6:12)

The reason the author does not continue to develop the idea of Melchizedek is that he feels the need to pause in order to rebuke his readers for their lack of maturity. The concepts to come are more challenging, and they are not ready yet. This brings us to the third of the warning passages, Heb. 6:4-12 being one of the most controversial passages in the entire Bible. Once again, the author increases the severity by warning against degeneration to the point that what the readers lose or walk away from is impossible to ever regain or come back to (Heb. 6:4-6).

5:11-12 The warning passage begins with a rebuke to the reader's lack of maturity and even a lack of desire to learn and understand more about God. This does not mean that everyone he is addressing is immature (Heb. 6:9-12) but that there are enough that he sees the need for the rebuke. The problem is that they have been learning about God, Jesus Christ, the Word, and the Gospel (Heb. 6:1-3) for so long that they should be mature enough to be teaching others. Instead, they still need elementary teachings, like a baby who needs milk and cannot digest solid food yet. The author calls them "sluggish" (NET), which means they have become lazy and negligent to the point that they are resistant to the Word of God and are unwilling to work out its implications in their lives.

5:13-14 The author contrasts between what the readers should be and what they are. Like infants drinking milk, they are undeveloped when it comes to fullness of the gospel and things of righteousness. But those who eat solid food are trained and perceptive. Notice he states that they are perceptive and discerning through practice. To understand and see God, the world, and people for what they really are requires both a constant reading and studying of the Word of God as well as an intentional applying of it to our thinking (Rom. 12:1-2).

Perhaps, given the previous context, the readers are unwilling to move to solid food because of suffering. To move on to maturity requires sacrifice and discipline in the Word of God. This leads readers to take an honest look at themselves and the things of the world that they believe and are involved in. This then leads to being separate and different from the world, which leads to rejection and persecution of all kinds. All of this requires sacrifice and brings suffering for the sake of Christ.

6:1-3 The author challenges them to move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and move on to maturity. Some debate whether the author is talking about First Testament or Second Testament teachings and practices. However, the author makes no distinction, and all of these practices are mentioned in both Testaments. Likewise, this debate misses the point, for it is based on the idea that because the author calls these ideas *elementary*, he is rejecting them as old covenant ideas, calling the readers to leave them behind or to not return to their Jewish culture. The greater context makes it clear that the author values the First Testament, with his constant quotations, and sees the First Testament ideas and practices as the foundation to Christianity, for Christ is the fulfillment of the Mosaic Covenant. The point is not to leave behind or reject the Jewish practices but to build upon them in Christ and move on to maturity. Nowhere does the author state that the readers should leave these teachings behind but that they should be building upon them and progressing further, whether it is on First Testament truths (Judaism) or Second Testament truths (Christianity), and not having to be taught these concepts again.

The following six concepts are tied together in three pairs.²⁹

- 1) “Repentance from acts that lead to death” does not refer to the Law or to the sacrificial system. Even though the author knows that the sacrifices under the Law were ineffective (Heb. 10:3-4), God would never refer to *His* covenant as leading to death. Works that lead to death are what we do while living according to the flesh, which is how it is used in Heb. 9:14. Repentance is rooted in the First Testament and is a turning away from sin (Matt. 3:2; Mk. 1:4-5; Lk. 3:8; 5:32) and from the practices and attitudes that lead to death. This is the foundational starting point for one who wants to draw near to God.
- 2) “Faith in God” is a turning toward God, and this joined with repentance (the previous point) is conversion. This is not simply a belief in the truth of God but a trust in God for your life, future, and salvation (Isa. 7:9; Hab. 2:4; Heb. 11:6).
- 3) “Instructions about washing” does not seem to refer to baptism, since the plural points to ritual washing rather than the singular baptism. Likewise, the Greek word used here is *baptismos*, whereas the word used for baptism other places in Scripture is *baptisma*. The only other two times that this noun is used in the Second Testament is when it is clearly describing Jewish washings (Heb. 9:10; Mark 7:4). However, the washings of the First Testament were the foundation for baptism in the Second Testament. And even though baptism is a one-time ritual, it is the beginning of a daily washing that happens throughout the life of a Christian who is being continually sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 13:6-11). The plural could also be because the whole community has been baptized, as the plural is used of “washed” in Heb. 10:22.
- 4) “Laying on of hands” is used in the Second Testament in association with healing and prayer (Matt. 19:13, 15; Mk. 5:22; 8:23; Lk. 4:4; 13:13; Acts 28:8) and the appointment to a task or office (Acts. 6:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6). It is also used in connection with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17-19; 9:12, 17; 19:6), which strengthens the argument that the washings (of the previous point) referred to baptism since washings is linked to the laying on of hands. Whereas the first pair refers to conversion, this second pair refers to the rite of initiation.
- 5) “The resurrection of the dead” is by far a major concept in the Second Testament. There are only two resurrections in the First Testament (1 Kg. 17:22; 2 Kg. 4:34), and its teachings on the resurrection are about the future resurrection (Is. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). Christ’s resurrection is foundational to Christianity and makes our resurrection possible (Rom. 6:4-8; 1 Cor. 15; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:12-13; 2 Tim. 2:11). The fact that the word “dead” is plural means it is pointing to the future resurrection of many (Heb. 13:20).
- 6) “Eternal judgment” is where all humanity will stand before God and give an account (Dan. 7:9-14; Heb. 4:12-13; 9:27; 10:25-30; 13:4), but the believer has hope (Heb. 5:9).

These are elementary teachings because salvation in Christ is so much more than just initial conversion and escaping judgment. This is where we all begin in our initiation into Christianity, but we should not be content to remain here, for we are called to press on to maturity. Christ is the king-priest who is the fulfillment of all the typologies of the First Testament in order to weave us into the great redemption of humanity and creation that God is unfolding.

6:4-5 Before we deal with these controversial verses, it is very important that we interpret them in the context of the previous warning passages (Heb. 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13) and the warning passages

²⁹ See Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 213-16.

that come after this one (Heb. 10:26-39; 12:25-29). Since all scholars agree that each warning passage gets progressively harsher through the book, then this passage would be greater than the previous one (Heb. 3:7-4:13), wherein the wilderness generation was excluded from entering God's rest and was condemned to physical death. That means the sin that the readers are in danger of committing in this passage is greater than that of the previous warning passage, and thus the judgment is greater as well.

The warning passage states, to make it simple for now, that it is impossible for those who have experienced certain things of God and who then have fallen away from God to ever be brought back to repentance. Before we look at what these people have experienced and what are they losing, it is important to understand that if this type of person falls away from God, they can never repent of this. No matter what view you take, the author is saying repentance at this point is impossible. This *impossible* is strengthened and emphasized even more by the author saying that this repentance would require Christ to be crucified again, which is never going to happen (Heb. 10:12, 14). This word *impossible* is clearly defined in other passages in Hebrews, stating that it is "impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18), "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4), and "impossible to please God without faith" (Heb. 11:6). This is what most people struggle with—that God does not allow repentance in this scenario. No matter what view you take, this point never changes.

The dispute among scholars is over who these people are and what they have experienced whereby their walking away brings such great judgment. Four descriptions of these people make it clear that they have experienced the things of God, but the question is, to what degree?

1) Some say that to have once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift (which they say is salvation), and shared in the Holy Spirit makes it clear that these people truly were saved and would have gone to heaven. Therefore, it is possible for them to lose their salvation, and they can never get saved again. Others within this view say it is possible to be saved again, but that is a direct contradiction of the meaning and strength of the word "impossible" used here.

Though these descriptions do look very Christian in their use, an eternal condemnation of believers conflicts with the eternal assurance of the believers taught elsewhere in Hebrews (Heb. 6:17-20; 7:25; 9:14-15; 10:14) and in the Bible (Rom. 5; 8:1, 29-30; 2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Tim. 2:11; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; Jn. 6:39-40, 44). Likewise, this indirectly teaches a "works salvation" theology. Though they may say that one is saved by grace, the implication of this view is that maintaining one's salvation is dependent on works rather than on faith or God's grace. Likewise, if you read the context, it states that perseverance is necessary in order to demonstrate genuine salvation (Heb. 3:6, 14; 10:36; 12:1). Therefore, one cannot lose salvation because genuinely saved people *always* persevere.

2) Some say it is clear that these are believers and that this is not a loss of salvation, rather a loss of service or rewards.³⁰ The readers are seen as true believers who have become sluggish in their walk and are in danger of falling away into apostasy if they do not press on to maturity. This would lead to the loss of their rewards in heaven but not a loss of their salvation.

However, those taking this view water down the judgments of Heb. 6:7-8, 10:26-31, and 12:25-29 and ignore the lesser-to-greater argument that is employed by the author concerning the

³⁰ For a defense of this view, see Randall C. Gleason. "The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8" and Thomas K. Oberholtzer. "The Warning Passages in Hebrews."

possible judgment of the readers in contrast to the wilderness generation. This judgment of lost rewards is not greater than the physical death that the wilderness generation experienced. A mere physical death cannot then be the same judgment for the readers of Hebrews, since the author says that their judgment will be more severe (Heb. 10:29; 12:15).

It is clear that eternal salvation is the issue here, since the word for “salvation” in Heb. 2:3 (the first warning passage) is the same word used in Heb. 1:14, which clearly means “salvation” in the eternal sense. It is clear from its other uses in the book that it has a future sense (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28; 11:7). Likewise, the author states in Heb. 2:5 that he has been talking about the “world to come,” a clear reference to the heavenly dwelling that awaits believers in the future. The author could not refer to salvation in Heb. 2 and then change the topic in Heb. 6:4-6, without a clear indication, to the rewards of the believer.

3) Some others say that these are believers but that the warning and judgment are hypothetical.³¹ The passage is saying that it is possible to lose your salvation, but the warning is so effective that the genuine always respond, and therefore no one loses salvation (Heb. 6:9). God is just trying to fill them with fear so that they will not go into apostasy, but they will never lose their salvation because this goes against the character of God.

The problem is that the more you believe the warning to be hypothetical, the less plausible it becomes because you think it is hypothetical and could never happen. And the more you believe this is the right interpretation, the less effective it becomes because you believe that you can never lose your salvation. Nowhere in the Bible does God ever give hypothetical warnings or judgments. God means what He says, and He does what says He will do. This is actually an insult to His character because now His words are empty, and He has no follow-through. Then, when one realizes that God’s warnings are empty, one loses respect for Him and ignores Him. The warning loses its effectiveness. This view also ignores the fact that the author of Hebrews makes it clear that God *will* act upon this warning and indeed has in the past—seen in the examples of the wilderness generation and of Esau. God swore in His anger that the wilderness generation would never enter His rest (Num. 14:23; Ps. 95:11; Heb. 3:11; 4:3, 5) despite the fact that they repented of their disobedience (Num. 14:20-23; 40-45). Likewise, Esau was evil and gave up his birthright, and when he repented, the promise of God was not given to him (Gen. 27:34-41; Heb. 12:16-17).

The context also connects the nature of this impossible repentance to the crucifixion of Christ, which relates to *receiving* eternal salvation, instead of to an event connected to the *sanctification* of the believer. Repentance is thus impossible because one is making light of the one-time, all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ for the sin that condemns humanity (Heb. 9:25-28). If the author were referring to sanctification, then why does he mention the cross rather than describe the kind(s) of sin(s) of the believer that can lead to such a harsh judgment and inability to repent?

4) Others say (and the view of this commentary is) that these are not genuine believers, but they participate in the Christian community and so look like they are believers. But if they decided to walk away from the gift of salvation, then they could never come back.³² The author in Heb. 6:1-

³¹ For a defense of this view, see David A. DeSilva. *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 219-44.

³² For a defense of this view, see D. A. Carson. *How the Book of Hebrews Makes Use of the Old Testament Passages*. Audio; Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 216-29; Buist M. Fanning. “A Theology of Hebrews”; and

3 uses the first person (*we, us*) in order to identify with his readers, yet here in Heb. 6:4-6, the author switches to the third person (*those who*) in order to make it clear that those people are not part of his community.³³ This gives a strong impression that these people are not truly part of the salvation community. The context of Hebrews has already defined the four descriptions of this type of person. The type of people who are in view are the wilderness generation (Num. 13-14; Ps. 95), for this is the connection to the warnings that the author himself makes (Heb. 3:7-4:13).

“Those who have once been enlightened” is in the passive voice, implying that God is the one who enlightens. “Enlightened” was used in the Mystery Religions to refer to the rite of initiation, wherein one received esoteric knowledge. Later, Christians used the rite of baptism as a symbol of coming into the light.³⁴ The antecedent to this phrase is the wilderness generation who lived in the light of Yahweh’s Shekinah pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21; Neh. 9:12). They clearly were enlightened to who Yahweh was through the plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, and literally seeing and living in the physical glory and light of God, yet they were not saved (Heb. 3:16-19).

“Who have tasted the heavenly gift” means understanding and experiencing God’s gracious gift of salvation. Tasting does not mean to get a sample but is a common metaphor for experiencing something fully (Ps. 34:8; Prov. 31:18). Although it can refer to experiencing specific things (Rom. 5:15, 17; Acts 2:38), it is better understood comprehensively.³⁵ Once again, the wilderness generation tasted the gift of Yahweh when they were saved from Egypt and the death of the firstborn. Specifically, they literally tasted the bread that Yahweh rained down from heaven for them. Yet this generation rejected Yahweh because they never truly belonged to Him in the first place.

“Who have shared in the Holy Spirit” does not necessarily mean the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as we think of it post-death and -resurrection of Christ. Many people—Abraham, Moses, Elijah—shared in the Holy Spirit and yet never had it dwelling within them. Saul shared in the Holy Spirit when he was anointed as king and prophesied (1 Sam. 10:9-13), yet the Holy Spirit was taken from him because he had turned away from Yahweh (1 Sam. 15:24-31; 16:14). The point is not that we can lose our salvation today but that a sharing in the Holy Spirit does not necessarily mean sealed salvation.

“Who have tasted the goodness of the word of God” refers to the hearing of the preached word (Deut. 8:3; Amos 8:11). “And the powers of the coming age” refers to the signs and miracles of God that validate the message of God. Once again, the wilderness generation experienced this and yet rejected it (Heb. 3:16-19).

Though these descriptions are hard to fully understand, the point is that they do not automatically mean a conversion experience. It is better to see their meaning as of a false believer who has understood quantitatively the initial Christian experience, which aligns with the rest of Scripture, than to see them as believers who lose their salvation, which contradicts many passages in Scripture.

Wayne Grudem. “Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from Hebrews 6:4-6 and Other Warning Passages in Hebrews.” In *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, vol. 1, pp. 133-182.

³³ See Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 219.

³⁴ See Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 221.

³⁵ See Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 222.

6:6 “Who have fallen away” can mean “to sin” or “to go astray,” but given the context and severity of the rest of Heb. 6:6, it must mean a deliberate turning away from God (Heb. 3:12), being destroyed through disobedience (Heb. 4:11), and committing willful sin after receiving the knowledge of truth (Heb. 10:26), which is what the wilderness generation did. Thus, the warning is not that the readers should return from their apostasy, but that they should at all costs avoid going into apostasy because once there, they can never come back.

“To be brought back to repentance” must mean the rejection of Christ’s sacrifice because for this sin to be forgiven means that Christ would have to be crucified again. If Christ’s sacrifice paid for all sins except for the rejection of His salvation, then for Him to be crucified again means that the sin of rejecting His sacrifice has been committed. This is not the believer’s gradual decline into a sinful lifestyle but a willful rejection of the heart and foundation of Christ and His work of salvation. Therefore, it is impossible to restore such a person, for Christ will not be crucified again, which is unthinkable. Likewise, the impossibility of a believer to repent shows up nowhere else in Scripture; in fact, the author of Hebrews makes it clear that the opposite is true for the believer (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:24-27; 10:19-23).

“The most satisfactory suggestion, then, is that it is impossible for God to restore the apostate to repentance. What is meant by this? It does not imply that God does not have the power to bring back an apostate, since he is the one ‘for whom all things and through whom all things exist’ (Heb. 2:10), and his word is able to shake the foundations of the universe (Heb. 12:26). But he may refuse to restore an apostate. To say that it is ‘impossible’ for God to lie (Heb. 6:18) does not suggest that he lacks the power to lie, but that he refuses to do so. He shut the wilderness generation out of the Promised Land after they repeatedly tested him (Heb. 3:7-4:13). Likewise Esau was rejected after he sold his birthright even though he showed remorse (Heb. 12:17). By not restoring those who commit apostasy, God allows their firm decision to stand. He does not force men and women against their obstinate resolve but allows them to terminate the relationship.”³⁶

It is interesting that Scripture never mentions that angels can be redeemed (Heb. 2:16) giving us the sense that they cannot be redeemed. Perhaps, unlike Adam and Eve, the fallen angels rejected Yahweh with full knowledge of who He was. Thus, the one who has come to a full knowledge of Christ and His sacrifice for sin and yet rejects it intentionally has fully put himself in the same status of fallen angels, who cannot be redeemed.

The readers are addressed as those who have knowledge of Christ (Heb. 2:1; 6:1; 10:26) but are sluggish and infantile (Heb. 5:11; 6:12) and are on the verge of falling into apostasy. They are warned not to neglect salvation (Heb. 2:3) or to have an unbelieving heart that forsakes God (Heb. 3:12), has contempt for Christ (Heb. 10:29), and refuses God (Heb. 12:25), which would cause them to crucify Christ again and subject Him to public disgrace (Heb. 6:6).

This concept is not new in Scripture, for in the First Testament it was referred to as the high-handed sin (Deut. 17:2-7; Num. 15:22-31). This was the sin of a person who lived in the covenant community of Yahweh and knew and had accepted the covenant of Yahweh and then willfully chose to shake a fist at Yahweh and reject His covenant over them. For this sin, there was no substitutionary sacrifice, and this person had to die. Once again, we see this with the wilderness generation, who, after being judged by Yahweh and excluded from the Promised

³⁶ Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 225-26.

Land, they tried to repent and enter the Promised Land. But Yahweh did not go with them, and they were killed by the Amalekites and Canaanites (Num. 14:39-45). It is not an accident that the very next chapter in Numbers is about the high-handed sin. This is the proper context for interpreting this warning passage. It is clear that the wilderness generation had experienced Yahweh and His salvation (Heb. 3:16) yet willfully rejected Him in disobedience and unbelief (Heb. 3:19), and so Yahweh in His anger rejected them from His covenant promises and rest (Heb. 3:17-18). And it was impossible for them to repent (Num. 14:39-45), for they had already been delivered from Egypt (Heb. 3:16).

This high-handed sin is the blaspheming of the Holy Spirit discussed in the Second Testament. It is one who knows fully who God is and chooses willfully to reject the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a sin for which there is no sacrifice (Matt. 12:31-32; 1 Jn. 5:16-17). Paul mentions that he was only forgiven of this sin because he had acted in ignorance (1 Tim. 1:13). There is this sense of a transitory faith, where one must be saved from his past life of sin and saved to a very real trust and faith in God (Heb. 6:1). Jesus taught that there are some who receive and accept the Gospel but who, when the trials of life come, do not persevere and so fall away from God (Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21). He also stated that not all those who call upon His name will be saved because they did not have faith (Matt. 7:21-23). Many passages in Scripture make it clear that true faith perseveres (Matt. 10:22; Jn. 8:31; 15:1-8; 1 Cor. 15:2; Col. 1:21-23; Heb. 3:6, 14; 10:36; 12:1; Jam. 1:2-4; 2:18-26; 2 Jn. 1:9). This is why John states that there are those who call themselves Christians but really are not, and their inability to persevere shows them to be the unbelievers they really are (1 Jn. 2:18-19). Once again, it is important to know that God is not making the point that perseverance is what grants one salvation; rather, the one who truly is saved and has the Holy Spirit indwelling him will produce fruit and persevere until the end because he is sealed in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:38-39).

One must understand that this sin of rejecting God and His Son, in full understanding of what they did for us through the cross, is an incredibly grievous sin. If the sin of rejecting God's salvation through His Son is such a grievous sin that the justice of God demands He send them to hell, then how much more grievous an offense is the sin of someone who grew in the community of believers and came to a full understanding of God, His love, His salvation, and His sovereign justice and still chooses to spit on it all by rejecting it.

6:7-8 The contrast is between the land that drinks up the rain of God and produces fruit and the land that produces thorns and thistles and is worthless and will be cursed and burned (Matt. 13:1-23). Those who accept the Word of God and produce fruit will experience life, and those who do not will be cursed and burned. This contrast between the blessed and cursed land should be interpreted within the framework of Deut. 11; 28-29; 32, with which there are many parallels. Yahweh declared to Israel that if they remained with Him in obedience, then He would bless their land and give them long life, but if they willfully lived in disobedience, then He would curse the land with plagues, oppression, and exile. There is also an allusion to the cursed land after the fall in Gen. 3:17-18 and to Yahweh's judgment of Israel in Isaiah 5:1-7.

The result of not producing fruit is being cursed, which is a judgment of condemnation, and burning is often associated in Scripture with judgment (Isa. 4:4; 29:6; 34:9; 66:16; Jer. 15:14; 51:58; Ezk. 28:18; 30:8; 38:22; Joel 2:3; Amos 1:14-12; 2:2-5; 7:4; Zech. 12:6; 13:9; Matt. 3:12; 1 Cor. 3:13-15; Heb. 10:27; 1 Pet. 4:12; 2 Pet. 3:7, 10, 12; Rev. 8:7; 11:5). Notice that there is no plan of restoration for those things that are cursed by God. This analogy reinforces the point that those who fall away are condemned forever.

6:9-12 Here is the encouragement after the harsh warning. The author does not want to falsely scare those who are truly saved into questioning their salvation. And so he encourages them that he is convinced that there are better things in store for the readers and not the judgment just described. The author is hopeful of this because the majority of them have demonstrated a life of one belonging to God; he is hopeful that they are genuine believers who are not putting up a façade. The others he exhorts to stop being lazy and to persevere in the pursuit of Christ that they have begun and to be faithful until the end. The result is that they would inherit the promise that comes only to those who are found in Christ, demonstrated by the fruit they produce.

This passage fills many people with fear that causes them to question their assurance of salvation. But just because the Bible asks us to take a serious look at our faith, maturity, and obedience from time to time (Ps. 139:23-24) does not mean we ignore or explain away these passages just because they make us uncomfortable. The real problem with our uneasiness is that we have made conversion so easy and shallow. Just say a prayer, and now you are saved. First, this is not the Bible's definition of salvation. The Bible is full of stories of people who demonstrated their faith through trust and obedience (Abraham, Joseph, David) or who said they were part of the covenant community of faith but demonstrated no trust and obedience (Cain, Saul, Judas). Read the gospels and the epistles, and before you can get halfway through, you read so much about trust, obedience, fruit, and perseverance that you have to embrace the truth that true conversion produces results and is not just a belief in biblical facts. Salvation is not a confession of a factual truth but rather trusting in God and holding to a confession of truths about who God is because you know Him.

Traditionally in Church history, the Catholics believed that one can never know.³⁷ The reformers said that Christ's work was sufficient then and therefore is always sufficient (1 Jn. 5:13). Luther said that all assurance is in trusting Christ, so if you lack faith, then you need more Gospel. Calvin believed that assurance was resting on the work of Christ, the confirming voice of the Holy Spirit, and transformation of life (1 John). Calvin believed that the more dominant proof was the transformed and works-producing life.

What you must understand is that Christian assurance is not interested in a mere raw epistemological stance; it is interested in a life that is being transformed into the image of Christ. On one hand are people who have just been saved, and they struggle with whether they are saved or not based on some sin they have committed. They are trying to justify themselves based on their works and behavior. What they need to understand is the gospel of Jesus' finished work on the cross because they are immature in their understanding of God and His Word.

On the other hand are those who have been committed believers in the Church for a long time but who are starting to lose their faith. The Gospel answer will not work for them, for they have it memorized.

The first question they should ask themselves is, "What has my reading in the Bible and scholarly work been like lately?" In some ways, they have had a genuine faith but a simplistic faith. They have never been faced with difficult questions or thought deeply about the Word of God. So they are intellectual late bloomers, then they read the skeptics and get thrown off. They

³⁷ The following paragraphs are taken from D. A. Carson. *How the Book of Hebrews Makes Use of the Old Testament Passages*. Audio.

need to be challenged with deep holistic Bible study that deepens their understanding of God and His redemption of humanity and creation.

Their second question would be, “Do I have some kind of unconfessed sin? Am I holding on to some idol? When was the last time I prayed?” In some cases, they repent and get back on track because they just needed the sin in their life to be called out and brought into the light (2 Sam. 12; Jn. 21:15-19), but in other cases, they show themselves to having never been regenerated and fall into apostasy and never come back (1 Sam. 28; Matt. 27:3-10). And unfortunately in the end, it is clear that whatever the apostasy is, if you fall into it, you cannot get out (Heb. 6:4-6). But until that time, we do not know which one they are, and always they are to be treated with love and the desire that they know God fully and experience the blessings of a redeemed and transformed life. There is rebuke but no condemnation. And we must remember that no one knows when this point of no return is.

There are those who are moving from their public stance and what grace they have already tasted but are not moving away from their salvation in the absolute sense. It is also possible to drink of grace deeply enough that your life is changed but not deeply enough that you persevere to the end (lots of non-Christians can become “better” through their own works).

Where then is Christian assurance? The Bible provides you with rich, thick, and abundant assurance as long as you are walking with Jesus. But it is not interested in providing you with absolutist, epistemological certainty when you are living in a way that is indistinguishable from the way of the world. To that the Bible asks, “Are you really a Christian?” If so, you will repent and return; if not, then God have mercy on your soul. What we often do not understand in our feel-good society is why God would ever be interested in assuring someone of a relationship with Him when they are blatantly sinning, pursuing idols, or just plain apathetic towards Him and studying His Word. Assurance is real, but it is based on the witness of fruit grounded in the finished work of Christ. It is not a one-time confession and then not worrying about it ever again; rather, it is continually confessing and pursuing God (Jn. 15).

This feel-good assurance is more of an American problem because witnessing is based on a four-step process and Romantic emotionalism. In the 27 cases of conversion in the book of Acts, nowhere do the apostles take the next step of trying to give assurance. Assurance comes through discipleship, not evangelism. “Once saved always saved” is true, but it has become a false cliché. Also, most people do not know their Bibles well enough in context.

The heart of the issue is that genuine Christians learn to obey out of gratitude and joy. As the gospel becomes more and more precious to them, the supernatural response is that they want to know Him and serve Him more. You cannot do this or sustain it out of mere duty. When you see a culture that backslides, people resort to beating people down with warnings and behaviorism. You defeat it instead with glorying in Christ so much that sin loses its attractiveness.

C. The Certainty of God's Promise for Our Hope (6:13-20)

After such a harsh warning to some of his readers (Heb. 6:1-8), the author wants to assure his readers of genuine faith (Heb. 6:9-12) of the promises of God and that they can trust Him to fulfill them. To do this, he goes back to Abraham and the covenant that Yahweh made with him.

6:13-15 God wants to make a promise to Abraham, so He swears an oath. The author quotes Gen. 22:17, where God swears that He will give Abraham multiple descendants and makes the Abrahamic Covenant unconditional after He restored Isaac back to Abraham. Abraham inherited the promise through his perseverance and obedience, and that is why God made the promise unconditional. The point is that not only does God make promises, He keeps them.

6:16-18 Oaths were used to establish the trustworthiness of the promises, covenant, or treaty that one was making with another. The one party swore by a greater authority than himself, most likely a god, so that the other party would know that there would be consequences if the promise were broken. The expectation was that God would vindicate the righteous and punish the guilty party (1 Kgs. 8:31). Unlike humans, God could not appeal to something greater than Himself, so He swore by His own character to indicate that He was bound by His own Word and character (Ex. 32:13; Isa. 45:23; Jer. 22:5).

The two unchangeable things are God's promise and His swearing an oath by Himself, both of which are secured by the fact that He cannot lie. Thus, the believers who are fleeing the fallen and sinful world, like the Israelites fleeing Egypt in the exodus (Ex. 12-15), can take hold of the hope that is found in Christ as their high priest and be encouraged that God's promise to them will be fulfilled as was His promise to Abraham.

6:19-20 This hope becomes an anchor that enters through the curtain, which separated the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, and into the sanctuary, which is the Holy of Holies. In Hebrews, the word "hope" never refers to the one doing the hoping but always refers to the focus of one's hope, which is the believer's future salvation found in Christ.³⁸ And hope as defined in the Bible is desire plus expectancy, which means that we can expect to receive what has been promised since God promised it; therefore, our desire for the promise is valid.

The imagery of the anchor is not of an anchor that is thrown down into the water to keep a ship from moving but rather the process of kedging, which is the throwing of an anchor out in front of a ship and then pulling on the anchor to move the ship forward. Thus, the hope of Christ as our high priest is our anchor in heaven pulling us into our promised and expected salvation. Jesus is the believer's forerunner, who goes before the believer through the curtain, which is the sky, and into the Holy of Holies, which is heaven, and sits on the right hand of God (Heb. 1:1-4) as our high priest. There He intercedes on our behalf as a compassionate high priest (Heb. 4:14-16). The language of entering has already been used of believers entering God's rest on the final day (Heb. 3:11, 18, 19; 4:1-11), and later it will be used of the high priest entering the Holy of Holies (Heb. 9:12, 24-25).

The author used Abraham as a model of the kind of faith, obedience, and perseverance we are to demonstrate in God so that we may receive the promises of God. The author also uses God's promise to Abraham as evidence of how He deals with His covenant community and that the Abrahamic covenant is the foundation for salvation history. Abraham knew that God's promises

³⁸ See William L. Lane. *Hebrews 1-8*, p. 158.

were valid because God is trustworthy, and thus we can have our hope in God as well. It is Christ who came as the king-priest and secured the promise of God for all time.

The author then returns to the idea of Christ as a high priest in the order of Melchizedek that he introduced in Heb. 5:10 but could not discuss until he had first exhorted his readers to move on to maturity (Heb. 5:11-20). Now he is ready to unpack this idea in Hebrews 7.

D. The Superiority of Melchizedek's Priesthood (7:1-10)

After concluding his digression (Heb. 5:11-6:20), the author now returns to the central theological argument that he began in Heb. 5:1-10, that of Jesus the Son of God being a superior high priest to the Levitical priesthood.

7:1-2 Melchizedek shows up in only three places in Scripture. The first is his historical appearance in Gen. 14:18-20. The second is his mention in Ps. 110:4, in that the Messiah will be in the order of Melchizedek. And the third is the theological extrapolation in the two passages here in Hebrews 7. In Gen. 14:18-20, Melchizedek was the king and high priest of the city of Salem in Canaan (which would later be called Jerusalem) during the time of Abraham. Abraham had just returned from rescuing his nephew Lot from five military nations in the north, and to praise Yahweh he gave a tithe to Melchizedek, and Melchizedek blessed him in return.

During the time of Abraham, it was not uncommon for one to hold both offices of king and priest. It would not be until the Law came that one could not be both king and priest, for Gen. 49:10 made it clear that the kings were to come from Judah, and Num. 3:10, 38; 16:40 made it clear that the priests were to come from Levi. The fact that Melchizedek is a king-priest causes the author to spend so much time connecting Christ to his order.

The author makes the point that by Melchizedek's name and the name of his city he is the king of righteousness and peace. Both righteousness and peace prefigure the coming Messiah (Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 9:9-10) and have already been connected to Christ in Heb. 1:8-9.

7:3 The author then makes the point that because Melchizedek has no genealogy, no beginning, and no end, he resembles the Son of God in that he is a priest forever. This is significant because anybody who is anybody has a genealogy in the Bible, but this king and high priest, to whom even the great Abraham pays a tithe, does not have a genealogy. In a book about genealogies, the absence of one is significant, for there is a theological significance to what is left out. Basically, what this sounds like is that this Melchizedek has always existed and will always exist as a high priest.

Some say that Melchizedek is a pre-incarnate appearance (theophany) of Jesus Christ, that he appeared to Abraham and pre-figures Christ's future coming as king-priest. The problem with this view is that the author of Hebrews would have, in that case, said that this *is* the Son of God but instead uses the word "like." This is a simile, wherein two things that are different are compared. If Melchizedek and Christ are the same being, then this would be an illogical and ridiculous argument to make—saying that Christ is a priest forever like Christ is a priest forever and that Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood like Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood. This makes no sense and proves no point. Likewise, the text does not say that Christ is like Melchizedek but the opposite—that Melchizedek resembles the Son of God, who is Jesus (Heb. 7:2).

Others say that Melchizedek is an angel who came to Abraham. But this also does not work since the author just spent Hebrews 1-2 making the point that Christ is not only not an angel but that He is superior to the angels. It is not logical to make that point and then turn around and say that Christ is like an angel. The author's argument in Hebrews 1-2 would then be undone. Nowhere in Scripture is Christ ever called an angel or said to be like one. Likewise, if Christ had appeared as a theophany in the First Testament, then why doesn't Christ or any Second Testament author

make this point? This would be such an ironclad argument to make to the Jews, proving that not only has Christ always existed but that He was also approved and used by Yahweh.

If Melchizedek was some mythological being, then surely he would have been more prominent in Scripture and given more than three verses (Gen. 13:18-20). Moreover, the problem with this view is that as a super-human, eternal king-priest, Melchizedek's priesthood would be a threat to Christ's, and the author would have to spend time dethroning Melchizedek in order to lift Christ up as superior.

The most likely view is that Melchizedek is a literary type of Christ as king-priest. It is not that Melchizedek *literally* had no parents, genealogy, or beginning and end but that because this information was left out of the Genesis account, he *literarily* has no parents, genealogy, or beginning and end. For example, no matter how many generations—your parents, you, your children, grandchildren, etc.—watch *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Snow White is always the same. Every time you watch the movie, she has no birth or final death, and she never ages. She is forever young and beautiful, immortalized in a classic story for all generations. This does not make her immortal but a literary type.

Because no earthly thing resembles Christ's coming (like comparing the Trinity to three-leaf clover), God used types in the First Testament to foreshadow Christ in the Second Testament. God used types such as Isaac, Joseph, David, the tabernacle, the sacrificial lamb, and others to foreshadow Christ, yet none of them are literally Christ. In the same way, God intentionally left out Melchizedek's genealogy in a book full of genealogies to serve as a type of Christ who would come as an eternal king-priest, yet Melchizedek is not Christ nor is he eternal. And the fact that he is the only king-priest in the Bible also makes him a further type in that Christ is the only true king-priest over creation as the Son of God. As mentioned before, the author emphasizes this point when he states that Melchizedek resembles Christ, not the other way around.

“The final clause of v. 3 asserts that Melchizedek ‘remains a priest for all time (or in perpetuity).’ This has often been taken to mean that his priesthood is eternal (so many EVV, ‘he remains a priest *forever*’). It is said that the language used here is synonymous with the expression ‘forever’ of Psalm 110:4 But the author has continued the literary argument, drawn from Genesis 14, which signifies that Melchizedek remains a priest continually, that is, for the duration of his appearance in the biblical narrative. The Old Testament does not posit eternal priesthood for him. Even Psalm 110:4 grants this status only to the king who is made a priest forever according to Melchizedek's order, and for Hebrews that eternal priest is Christ. The phrase used of Melchizedek here in 7:3, *eis to dienekes*, is different from that of Psalm 110:4, *eis ton aiona* (‘forever’ or ‘for eternity’), which is consistently reserved for Christ and his priesthood. The expression *eis to dienekes* appears on three other occasions in Hebrews (10:1, 12, 14), and it means ‘without interruption’ or ‘continuous,’ but not ‘eternal.’ In relation to Melchizedek *eis to dienekes* means that ‘he is a priest continually,’ that is, without interruption or in perpetuity. But this is different from suggesting that it is ‘forever.’ Christ the antitype remains a priest continually without qualification.”³⁹

7:4-7 The author continues to point out the greatness of Melchizedek by stating the fact that Abraham paid a tenth to Melchizedek, and Melchizedek blessed Abraham in return. The word

³⁹ Peter T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 250.

tenth in Gen. 14:20 is literally top of the heap, meaning that Abraham gave him the best of the spoils he had obtained. Even though all the tribes of Israel came from Abraham, the Mosaic Law required that the tribe of Levi as priests collect a tenth from the people (Num. 18:21-24; Lk. 1:9). In contrast, Melchizedek, who did not come from Levi, collected a tenth from Abraham. All Jews not only saw ancestors as being superior to descendants, but they saw Abraham as the greatest patriarch, since all Jews came from him. The author emphasizes this by pointing out that Abraham had the promises, but all Levi had was the Law (Heb. 7:6). Every Jew would also know that the greater always collects the tenth and blesses the lesser (Job 31:20; 2 Sam. 14:22; 1 Kg. 1:47; 8:66). So if Melchizedek collected a tenth from Abraham, then that not only makes him greater than the great patriarch but also greater than the Levitical priesthood who came from Abraham.

The point of Melchizedek's having no genealogy is not that he had a miraculous birth but that it disqualifies him from being a Levitical priest (Num. 3:10, 15-16) and therefore puts him in a different order from them. The Jews believed, according to the Mosaic Law, that there was no legitimate priesthood other than the Aaronic (Levitical) priesthood. Yet now the author has shown that the Torah itself proves that there is a higher priesthood.⁴⁰ Therefore, if the lack of Levitical genealogy did not prevent Melchizedek from collecting a tenth from Abraham, then Christ's lack of Levitical genealogy cannot disqualify Him from being high priest.⁴¹

7:8 The author points out a second contrast between the lifespans of the two priesthoods. Whereas the Levitical priests were subject to death and had to be replaced, Melchizedek is declared to be a living priest in a literary way. But what is true of Melchizedek in a limited literary way is true of Christ in an absolute literal way. If Melchizedek as a non-Levitical priest has been immortalized in Scripture, then how much more significant is the priesthood of Christ, who truly is eternal?

“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.”⁴²

7:9-10 The author concludes by pointing out that Levi was, in a way, a seed or DNA in the body of Abraham when he gave a tenth to Melchizedek. In this sense, it is as if Levi himself gave a tithe to Melchizedek as well. In the ancient Near Eastern view of things, people regarded a descendent as participating, in a sense, in the actions of his ancestors (Gen. 25:23; Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:11-13). This is another way Levi is inferior to the order of Melchizedek.

⁴⁰ See Leon Morris. “Hebrews.” In *Hebrews-Revelation*. Vol. 12 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 62.

⁴¹ See Peter T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 252.

⁴² Leon Morris. “Hebrews.” In *Hebrews-Revelation*. Vol. 12 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 63-64.

E. The Superiority of Jesus' Priesthood in the Order of Melchizedek (7:11-28)

Having shown the superiority of Melchizedek to Abraham and Levi in Heb. 7:1-10, the author now points out the superiority of Melchizedek and Jesus' priesthoods. He does this in order to clarify for his readers the inferiority of the Mosaic Covenant and its priesthood. The author demonstrates this by unpacking the theological significance of God's declaration of the Davidic king in Ps. 110:4.

After the priesthood of Melchizedek in Genesis 13, a century and a half later Yahweh established the Levitical priesthood. And then once the Levitical priesthood had been firmly established in Israel for half a century, Yahweh calls the Davidic king from Judah, not Levi, a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4). This implies that the Levitical priesthood is not enough if Yahweh is naming a new type or order of priesthood from a different tribe. How can Yahweh, who instituted the Levitical priesthood, come along and announce another priesthood? Does that not make the older Levitical priesthood obsolete? This argument depends on sequencing the order of the events—of the Genesis account of Melchizedek being a long time before the Law, then the establishment of the Levitical priesthood, and then the announcement of a king-priest in the order of Melchizedek going back to something before the giving of the Law, which jeopardizes any claims to exclusivity that the Levitical priesthood could advance.⁴³

7:11-12 The author begins by saying that not only did the Levitical priesthood, which was ordained by God, not make Israel perfect but that God never intended it to do so, since He later ordained a different priesthood in Ps. 110:4, separate from the Levitical priesthood.

The parenthetical statement here should be understood as that the Law-covenant was *established on* the priesthood (NET, NASB, ESV, RSV), not that the Law given to the people *established the* priesthood (NIV). This is supported by the context of the author's statement in Heb. 7:12. The point the author is making is that the Law was built on the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system. So, if the sacrificial system failed to make people righteous, then the Law failed to as well. Therefore, something better is needed to make people righteous.

This makes sense because so much of the Law is based on the ceremonial sacrificial law in contrast to the small amount of space given to the Ten Commandments. The priestly system is the whole basis of the Law, so that if you change the priestly system, you change the Law. The other (and most important) reason this makes sense is that it was the priestly system that established the basis on which people could be reconnected to God. The Law all turns on the fact that God is righteous and that we are all defiled, thus how we become clean. The logic of the author's argument is completely dependent on the parenthetical statement.⁴⁴

“This is the first time in Hebrews that the concept of “perfection” is applied to believers rather than to Christ (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28). Our author typically introduces the notion, which is tantalising in its brevity, and anticipates the later development of the theme. By not explaining the meaning of “perfection” here he allows ‘the term to evoke previous images for the goal of God’s actions.’ Earlier passages have spoken of the hope of being crowned with glory and honour (Heb. 2:5-10), entering God’s promised rest (Heb. 4:9-10), and inheriting the blessing promised to Abraham and his heirs (Heb. 6:7, 12). In the light of Heb. 7:19, which asserts that the law made nothing perfect but in Jesus Christ a better hope is

⁴³ See D. A. Carson. *How the Book of Hebrews Makes Use of Old Testament Passages*, audio.

⁴⁴ See D. A. Carson. *How the Book of Hebrews Makes Use of Old Testament Passages*, audio.

introduced, by which we draw near to God, it is suggested that the perfecting of believers ‘involves “qualifying” them to draw near to God or enabling them to enjoy the certainty of a new covenant relationship with God... Christ’s sacrifice deals with the problem of sin in a way that the Levitical priesthood and the law of Moses could not.’”⁴⁵

7:12-14 The author emphasizes the logical conclusion of his point by stating that if God has replaced the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system with Jesus, then He has also replaced the Law with Jesus. The reason there has to be a change in the Law is that only Levites were allowed to serve as priests under the Law (Gen. 49:5-7; Ex. 28:1-4; Num. 1:47-54). Thus, in order for Jesus, who is from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Mic. 5:2; Isa. 11:1), to legally serve as a priest, God has to do away with the Law. Nothing was wrong with Melchizedek’s being king and priest because the Law had not been given yet. But under the Law, one who acted as both king and priest was rejected by God and executed, as in the example of Saul (1 Sam. 15; 28). Jesus cannot be a righteous priest under the Law. The author’s previous statement, that God’s purposes were unchangeable (Heb. 6:18), means that the change in the Law and priesthood was God’s purpose all along (Gal. 3:24).

7:15-17 The author makes the point that Melchizedek is not the same as Jesus when he states that Jesus has come in the *likeness* of Melchizedek. God’s declaration that Jesus is our high priest and that He did not descend from Levi makes even clearer the point of God’s having done away with the Law. Jesus’ high priesthood is greater than the Levitical priesthood because they were priests according to the regulations of the Law and their physical descent, whereas Jesus was declared a priest by the oath of God, as stated in Ps. 110:4. Additionally, unlike the priests, Jesus’ priesthood is an indestructible priesthood.

7:18-19 The author concludes his point by contrasting the weakness of the Law with the hope of Jesus’ priesthood. In the first case, the author shows that his argument has revealed the Law to be weak and useless and to have been set aside. Since the priesthood failed to make people perfect, that means the Law also failed to make people perfect, since the two are intimately connected. The temporal nature of the Law seen in Heb. 7:12 is far more emphatic here with the phrase *set aside*. This term was used for an official annulment of a decree or the cancelation of a debt.⁴⁶ For anyone to abolish the Law was sinful (Isa. 24:16; Ezek. 22:26), but because God is God and He gave the Law, He has the right to set it aside.

In contrast to this, Jesus’ priesthood brings a better hope of our actually entering into the righteous presence of God. The word “introduced” was used of “bringing something in addition to” or “instead of something.”⁴⁷ The act of drawing near was used in the First Testament of the priest’s purification and his entering the tabernacle (Ex. 3:5; 19:22; 24:2; Lev. 10:3; 21:21; Ezk. 40:46; 42:13).

This contrast serves as a transition from the author’s argument that the Law is weak and has been set aside into his argument of Jesus’ priesthood being superior to that of the Levitical priesthood.

7:20-22 The first reason Jesus’ priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood is that Jesus was sworn in as high priest by the unchangeable oath of God, whereas the Levitical priests were merely priests because of a temporal law and their ancestry. Thus, Jesus’ covenant is better than

⁴⁵ Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 257.

⁴⁶ See Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 265.

⁴⁷ See Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 266.

the Mosaic Covenant. When God swore that the wilderness generation would not enter the Promised Land, He kept His oath, and they died in the wilderness (Heb. 3:11, 16-19). On the other hand, when God swore to Abraham that He would give him many descendants, He kept His oath (Heb. 2:16; 3:13-20). Therefore, the readers can be assured that God will keep His oath about Jesus as high priest.

7:23-25 The second reason Jesus' priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood is that the Levitical priests are finite in their priesthood, since they were always replaced by others when they died. However, since Jesus is the Son of God, His priesthood will last forever. This also means He is able to save people completely because His priesthood and atonement have no end.

7:26-28 The third reason Jesus' priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood is that the other priests were sinners and had to sacrifice for their sins as well as for those of the people (Lev. 4:1-3; 16:6), and they had to continually offer sacrifices for the same sins. However, Jesus is holy, innocent, undefiled, and separate from sinners, so He does not have to sacrifice for His own sins first. He makes a *one-time* sacrifice for all humanity, which will permanently atone for humanity's sin since He was without sin. The phrase "once and for all" does not mean only that it happened one time but that it is definitive and unrepeatable. However, since Jesus is holy, innocent, undefiled, and separate from sinners, He is able to offer a better sacrifice than they did—one that is sufficient to offer real atonement. Additionally, His office is in heaven, whereas theirs was on earth. In summary, the law appointed weak men as high priests, but the word of God appointed Jesus, a Son who is perfect.

If the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic Law failed to make people perfect and was never intended by God to last forever, why would people want to put themselves under the Law for their hope of drawing near to God when Jesus is a far superior priest whose sacrifice actually makes people perfect forever? Therefore, if Jesus' priesthood and atonement are superior and save people completely, then His covenant is superior to the Mosaic Covenant.

IV. The Superior Offering of Jesus Christ as High Priest (8:1-10:18)

Now that the author has made an argument for Jesus' appointment as unique high priest (Heb. 5:1-7:28), he comes to the heart of his Christological exposition by arguing for the efficiency, sufficiency, and superiority of Christ's sacrifice (Heb. 8:1-10:18). Here the author will link Christ to the sanctuary, covenant, and sacrifice in order to demonstrate the superiority of Christ's covenant to the old.

A. Jesus, the High Priest of a Superior Covenant (8:1-13)

The author begins to transition from the superiority of Jesus's priesthood to the superiority of His covenant. The author begins by introducing the concepts of Jesus' superior sacrifice and sanctuary, but before he unpacks those ideas (in Hebrews 9-10), he uses the First Testament once again by quoting Jeremiah to show that the Law is now obsolete because God never intended the Law to be permanent. Since the full significance of Jeremiah's oracle can only be understood in light of Christ, the positive nature of the oracle will not be unpacked until Heb. 9:11-15, when Christ is specifically connected to the oracle.

8:1-2 The point of the author's argument in Hebrews 1-7 is summarized in Heb. 8:1-2. Jesus is the only true high priest who can save completely and who *sits* at the right hand of God as the Son of God in the true heavenly sanctuary. The significance of "sat down" is that His work is completed, whereas the Levitical priests' work was never complete. The Levitical priesthood and the Law could not come close to presenting a high priest like Jesus.

8:3 In order to be a high priest and to enter the Holy of Holies (the inner room of the tabernacle where the presence of Yahweh was), one must bring a gift, a sacrifice, granting him entrance into the presence of Yahweh. Though the author will not mention the nature of the gift until Heb. 9:14, he makes it clear that Jesus also entered into the sanctuary with a gift.

8:4 The author made the point in Heb. 7:13-16 that Jesus was not allowed to hold the office of priest in Israel, according to the Law, since he was not a Levite. Now he develops that idea further and states that this means Jesus is not allowed to serve as a priest in the earthly sanctuary. This next step in logic prepares the readers for the argument that Jesus has to serve in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:1-2; 9:11-28), since He is a priest according to God (Heb. 7:18-21) and the Law forbids Him to serve on earth (Heb. 7:13-16).

8:5 The contrast is between the earthly tabernacle and the heavenly sanctuary. The earthly tabernacle was only a manmade copy of the one in heaven. The author quotes God in Ex. 25:40 to back up his point, that the earthly sanctuary is not the real one and is therefore not the important or ultimate sanctuary. The heavenly one is the real and complete tabernacle, and that is the one in which Jesus not only ministers but the one in which He sits enthroned.

"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."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ William L. Lane. *Hebrews 1-8*, p. 207.

8:6 Therefore, if Jesus serves as priest in a different priesthood and in a different sanctuary, then He mediates a different covenant. Since Jesus' priesthood and sanctuary are superior to the Levitical priesthood and sanctuary, then so are His ministry and covenant.

8:7 The author quotes Jer. 31:31-34 to make the point that if the old covenant had no fault, then why would Yahweh Himself speak of the need and the coming of a new covenant? The context of the Jeremiah passage is that Yahweh is going to send Israel into exile because of their constant sin and rebellion against the Mosaic Law, which could not make them perfect or want to love Yahweh (Heb. 7:19). In this passage, Yahweh promised that after He restored Israel from exile, He would initiate a new and better covenant with His people, a covenant that would actually perfect His people.

8:8 Yahweh specifically states that He is going to make a new covenant with Israel, not renew or ratify the Mosaic Covenant. The author uses the word "complete" instead of "establish," which is the word used in the Hebrew translation. This most likely is a stylistic choice to parallel the author's use of the words "completion" and "perfection" (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28). Jesus' covenant would bring the completion of Israel's perfection that the old covenant could not. Jeremiah also uses the word "complete" of covenants in other places in his book (Jer. 34:8, 15).

8:9 Yahweh continues to emphasize that this new covenant is a different and better covenant, stating that it will not be like the old one. Jesus' covenant is not simply a new covenant that repeats the form and content of the old and obsolete covenant, but rather it is drastically different. The old one could not change the hearts of the Israelites or prevent the rebellion in the wilderness that led to their judgment of death. The Law demanded perfection but did not give one the power to meet the requirements of perfection. Therefore, judgment *always* came to those who lived under the Law.

8:10 The new covenant is better in that the law will no longer be an external, powerless list of regulations; rather, it will be a living power that is engraved on their living minds and hearts rather than on lifeless stone tablets. Because of this, they will become even more intimately connected to Yahweh. This involves more than just memorization of the Law, which was already present in the old covenant (Deut. 6:6-9). Memorization without the Holy Spirit's indwelling did not guarantee putting into action the truths and commands of God written in the Law. The people's hearts were so hardened and engraved with sin that they could not put God's Law into practice (Jer. 17:1). Now, their hearts would be changed and empowered by the Holy Spirit as their new and living Law (Ezk. 11:18-21; Joel 2:28-29; Hosea 2:14-20). The statement "I will be their God and they will be my people" (Ex. 6:7; 29:45; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 26:17-18) was the whole point of the Law. But now, with Christ, it could be applied on a greater level (2 Cor. 6:16; Rev. 21:3).

8:11 The point is that the old covenant was structurally tribal and representative. Yahweh had established and gave special authoritative responsibilities to the king and the priests, who were the only people anointed with Yahweh's Spirit. Their job was to know Yahweh and then to lead and teach the people of Israel in His ways. Therefore, when the king or the priests failed to know Yahweh and execute His will (which is pretty much the whole First Testament), then all the people suffered and went astray. Thus, the Law was lost and failed to lead the people in the ways of Yahweh. However, the New Covenant, through the superior sacrifice of the blood of Jesus as high priest, brings the outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit to all people (Joel 2:28-29)

so that Israel will not need to be taught to know Yahweh since He will be actively residing and speaking in them.

This does not mean that there is no place for teachers or that people are self-sufficient in their understanding of God (Heb. 10:25). Rather, one no longer needs someone to mediate his relationship with God. There is no special class of Christian who has an inside track on God. This is why Paul refers to us as different body parts of the same body.

“At one level the people of Israel knew their God, because he had revealed himself to them, in contrast with the surrounding nations, which did not know him. But Hebrews recalls that the works God performed for Moses’ generation (Heb. 3:9; Ps. 95), which displayed his power, did not result in the people knowing his ways (Heb. 3:10). After the generation that entered Canaan under Joshua died out, the following generation ‘did not know the LORD’ (Judg. 2:10). Later Hosea complained that there was no ‘knowledge of God in the land’ of Israel (Hos. 4:1, 6). Jeremiah’s prophecy envisages not simply a national knowledge of God. Rather, it is a personal knowledge of him that is in view, such as Jeremiah himself possessed.”⁴⁹

8:12 And through this new covenant, Israel’s sin will be completely dealt with, and there will be no more judgment (Rom. 8:1). People could receive forgiveness under the Law if they threw themselves at the mercy of God (2 Sam. 11-12; Ps. 51). However, the Law made no provision for a lasting forgiveness of sins. This is only made possible through the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 25-27), which is able to save Israel completely (Heb. 7:25).

This is not a renewal of the covenant. First, the old covenant and priesthood could not obtain perfection (Heb. 7:11, 19; 8:7), so that covenant could not deal with the disobedience of the people (Heb. 8:9). Second, Christ’s sacrifice cleanses the consciences of His people (Heb. 9:14; 10:16-18), whereas the Levitical sacrifices could only remind the people of their sin (Heb. 10:1-4). And, unlike the old covenant, the New Covenant cannot be broken, for God will not remember their sins (Heb. 8:12).

8:13 The author’s conclusion is that Yahweh’s promise of a new covenant (Heb. 8:8) that is not like the old (Heb. 8:9) means the old covenant is obsolete, needs to be done away with, and is to be replaced by the newer and better one found in Jesus. The word “disappear” does not mean a vanishing but an intentional destroying—usually due to the judgment of God because of sin (Deut. 7:2; 1 Kig. 9:7; Jer. 9:11; Ezk. 6:17; Joel 1:7; Mic. 1:7).

You cannot go back to the Law because you would be going back to a covenant that was pointing forward to something greater. It is like going back to elementary math after learning trigonometry. The Law was not bad, because it laid the foundation for better things. We would not know who Jesus is as king, priest, sacrificial lamb, etc. without the Law. Just like we would not know trigonometry without basic math.

This is the reason for the warning passages, because our relationship with God is no longer based on an obedience to the written Law but on an obedience born out of a relationship with and a love for Christ, which cannot be measured as easily. This was what the kind of relationship God always desired but the Law could not provide it. Yet this is what the blood of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can provide. This is maturity because it is more complex.

⁴⁹ Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 300.

B. Christ Enters the Heavenly Sanctuary as a Superior Sacrifice (9:1-28)

The author now moves from the need for a new covenant in Hebrews 8 to explaining how Christ serves in the superior sanctuary in heaven. The fact that He serves in a different and superior sanctuary is another reason the old covenant is no longer relevant.

9:1 The author begins by stating that the old covenant had its own regulations, or what was required to observe the Law correctly. And these regulations pertained to the earthly sanctuary, the implication being that they said nothing about the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ serves.

9:2-5 The author begins by describing the layout of and the articles of service in the tabernacle. He describes the tabernacle rather than the temple mostly likely because the tabernacle was directly connected to the giving of the Mosaic Law in the wilderness, which has been the focus of the entire book. Likewise, it was the tabernacle that was the copy of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:5), and the temple was a duplicate of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a tent that was divided into two rooms, detailed in Exodus 25-30. The first room was the Holy Place, where only the Levitical priests were allowed to minister. The second and inner room was the Holy of Holies, where only the high priest was allowed once a year on the Day of Atonement. The author describes the first room and then the second.

In Heb. 9:4, the author states that the altar of incense was inside the Holy of Holies, whereas the Torah seems to place it before the curtain in the Holy Place (Ex. 30:6; 40:26). The altar of incense was directly connected to the Ark of the Covenant, for as the priest placed the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat (the lid of the ark), the incense from the altar would carry the aroma of the blood up to Yahweh in order to atone for Israel's sins (Lev. 16:12-13). So, theologically, the altar of incense should be in the Holy of Holies, but because the incense had to be replenished each day (Ex. 30:7) and the high priest was only allowed in the Holy of Holies once a year, it was more practical to place it in the Holy Place as close to the Holy of Holies as possible.

9:6-7 The author then explains the ritual of the Day of Atonement on the first of the new year, described in Leviticus 16. The high priest was required to first purify himself with the blood of a bull before he could go into the Holy of Holies. He was then to take the blood of a goat into the Holy of Holies and pour it onto the mercy seat, which was the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. This yearly sacrifice atoned for the sins of ignorance committed by Israel over the past year.

The discussion here of the tabernacle and the rituals serves to illustrate that access to Yahweh was extremely limited, and even that access required a lot of effort and ritual, which will be emphasized in the following verses (Heb. 9:8-10).

9:8 The tabernacle was a beautiful and highly symbolic picture that demonstrated, first, the restricted nature of the holiness and glory of Yahweh yet, at the same time, the access to Him that was possible. Second, it symbolized what Jesus would look like theologically when He came. The Holy Spirit was also using the tabernacle to show that there was something more, because a tent, with all of its rituals, was so lacking compared to the true heavenly sanctuary. Likewise, the restricted access to the Holy of Holies, where the glory of Yahweh dwelt, kept the people of Israel from seeing (let alone accessing) Yahweh, which would create a desire for something more. In this way, it pointed to the need for a better high priest who could come and open up to Israel a greater access to Yahweh. The author makes the point that as long as the

tabernacle stood, it restricted access to Yahweh. Therefore, it had to be removed so that the greater tabernacle, to which it was pointing, could finally come.

9:9-10 The final point is that, ultimately, the sacrificial system and tabernacle could not internally cleanse the consciences of the people because it was all merely external articles and rituals meant to point to something greater. How could anyone think that a blood ritual in a tent could truly cleanse you fully of your vile sin and gain you access to the full glory of Yahweh?

9:11-12 The contrast to the restricted and temporary tabernacle is that now Christ, who is the Son of God and the unique and greater high priest, has come, and His sacrifice has gained for humanity a greater access to Yahweh by entering the heavenly sanctuary. This is the first reason that Christ's sacrifice is greater than the Levitical sacrificial system. This sanctuary is greater and more perfect because it was not made by sinful humanity, as the tabernacle of the First Testament had been. And it is not a part of creation, which has a beginning and is inferior to God. Rather, this sanctuary is a part of God in an intimate, relational dwelling with Him in heaven (Rev. 21).

The second reason that Christ's sacrifice is greater than the Levitical sacrificial system is that, unlike the Day of Atonement, which happened every year, Christ entered into the heavenly sanctuary one time with one sacrifice.

The third reason that Christ's sacrifice is greater than the Levitical sacrificial system is that Christ did not enter into the heavenly sanctuary with the blood of animals (Lev. 16:3, 5-11, 15-16), which is temporal, but with His own perfect and eternal blood. The author has already made the point that one can only enter the sanctuary with a gift (Heb. 5:1; 8:3), so Christ entered with His own life and blood as the gift (Heb. 7:27). Therefore, He secures an eternal redemption for humanity, since He Himself is the eternal Son of God.

9:13-14 The reason this is significant is that if the blood of animals could ritually purify Israel to live in the Promised Land, then how much more would the blood of the eternal God-man who is king and priest atone for the sins of the people? Christ did this not through the works of sinful men but through the work of the Holy Spirit. And since He was perfect, He is able to cleanse our conscience perfectly from our works of trying to save ourselves that just keep producing death.

The blood of bulls was used to sprinkle and ceremonially cleanse the high priest on the Day of Atonement. The blood of the goat was used to sprinkle the Ark of the Covenant in order to ceremonially cleanse Israel on the Day of Atonement. The ashes of the red heifer mixed with water were used to sprinkle and purify those who had touched a dead body (Num. 19:9); a dead body is a result of death, which is a result of sin. These ashes were not used on the Day of Atonement but rather throughout the year. The point is that all the sacrifices meant for cleansing, from the most important high festival day to the most common of the days, were not able to cleanse completely the people of Israel.

9:15 Because Christ serves as a priest of a different order (Heb. 7:11-28) and in a different sanctuary (Heb. 9:11-14), He is the mediator of a different covenant. After Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt, He brought them to Mount Sinai in order to enter into a covenant with them (Ex. 24). Ratifying this covenant required the death of an animal and the sprinkling of its blood on the altar of Yahweh and on the people. Israel swore that they would love Yahweh and others and keep His commandments. He then promised to dwell with them and make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 29:3-6). However, they broke the covenant with their worship of

the golden calf (Ex. 32), which brought death under the Law of the covenant into which they had just willingly entered with Yahweh. Even so, Yahweh forgave Israel of their sin and let them live. This means that their sin was not punished according to the Law due to the mercy of Yahweh (Ro. 3:25). The Day of Atonement did not pay for the debt of Israel; it only put it off until a better sacrifice could come along. Not only does Christ mediate a different covenant, He also died for all the sins committed under the Mosaic Covenant, since it could not atone completely for sins (Rom. 3:25). Therefore, we can actually receive the eternal rest in heaven with God that was promised (Heb. 4:1-13) because we have been saved completely.

9:16-17 In order to enact a permanent covenant in the ancient world, the blood of a sacrifice was required (Gen. 15:9-21). This is why the Mosaic Covenant required the death of an animal—in order to enact the covenant (Ex. 24) and to cover the yearly violations of the covenant (Lev. 16). The First Testament and the Mosaic Covenant promised eternal rest, blessings, and redemption that it could not fulfill, because the death of a finite animal could not enact those eternal promises. As with a will, the people of Israel could not receive the benefits of the covenant unless the one who made the covenant died. The problem is that Yahweh cannot die, and when the people die for their own sins, it is not enough to grant them life and the eternal blessings of the covenant.

But Christ is human in that He can die as a representative for the human race. Yet He is also God in that He can defeat the curse of death. And being God, the maker of the covenant has died, enacting the eternal blessings and redemption of humanity that the First Testament had promised. And because He has been resurrected and has ascended to the right hand of God in the true heavenly sanctuary, He is able to defeat the curse of death (1 Cor. 15:55-57) and usher us into eternal life, which the Mosaic Covenant could not do. The point of this is that the old covenant is now abolished, because the one who made it died, and we now reap the benefits and are no longer under it.

9:18-22 The author continues to demonstrate the severity of the threat of the curse by the fact that the ratifying of the Mosaic Covenant required such bloody, violent, and messy rituals in order to purify the tabernacle and its people. The author quotes Ex. 24:8, where even Moses himself connected blood to the heart of the covenant. The sin of the people and the threat of the curse were so great that everything needed to be cleansed with blood. Only with the shedding of blood (death) can sins be forgiven.

9:23 Just as the sketches of the heavenly sanctuary (the Levitical tabernacle) needed to be purified, so too the heavenly things need to be purified. It is not entirely clear what the “heavenly things” are and why things in heaven need to be purified. The best understanding seems to be the consciences of God’s people (Heb. 9:14), for this is the cleansing in which the author is really interested. Humans were created to dwell with God in heaven, which happened in the garden before the fall. As eternal creatures and believers who belong with God, we can only enter heaven, as heavenly things, if our conscience is cleansed. This was the point of the tabernacle—to point the way to how we could enter heaven, since we were promised to be heavenly beings.

9:24-26 Unlike the Levitical priests, Christ did not enter a manmade sanctuary on one day a year (Heb. 8:2; 9:11); rather, He entered the true heavenly sanctuary and sat down forever. He did this for us so that we would have access to God. Likewise, He did not have to enter *being* a sacrifice over and over again because His eternal death was sufficient to atone for sins permanently and defeat the curse of death (1 Cor. 15:55-57). He had to enter into heaven only one time, for His

perfect sacrifice is sufficient to complete the redemption of God and consummate the new age of blessings that were promised in the First Testament; the maker of the covenant died, but now He lives.

9:27-28 Just as it is impossible for a person to die more than once—because they immediately face the judgment after death—it is impossible for Christ to die repeatedly, since He was a human. But because He is God, He is able to bear the sins of many in His one death; there is thus no need for continual deaths. Unlike the high priest, who returned to the Holy of Holies with another sacrifice, Christ will return to us, not to be sacrificed again but to usher us into the heavenly sanctuary with Him. The high priest was never able to take Israel into the sanctuary with him, yet Christ is able.

C. Jesus Christ, the Consummate Sacrifice (10:1-18)

The contrast between the continual Levitical sacrifices and the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ in Heb. 9 is intensified in this section. The sacrifices made under the Law served as a reminder of sins; Jesus' sacrifice, in contrast, consummated the New Covenant, under which God promised to remember their sins no more (Heb. 10:15-18).

10:1 After making the point, that the tabernacle is a shadow of the true heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:5), the author now makes the same point about the Law (Col. 2:17). If Yahweh put the Law into effect, then the Law is good. Yet, if the Law, with its continual need for sacrifices, could not perfect the people of Israel, then its intended purpose was not to redeem the people of Israel. Thus, the author makes the point that the Law existed to point to the good things of Christ who was to come in the future.

10:2-3 The Jew would argue that the sacrifices of the Law could remove sin. The author presents the question, if the sacrifices could remove sin, then would they not have stopped? If the sacrifices had perfected Israel, then why did God demand that they keep sacrificing animals? Why did He not stop the waste of life if sacrifices were not needed anymore? Therefore, since He did not stop them, they had not removed sin, and a better sacrifice was still needed.

The sacrifices were, first, a reminder of how horrific Israel's sin was and how it separated them from Yahweh. Yahweh designed the tabernacle to restrict Israel from coming to His presence in the Holy of Holies. Around the tabernacle was a fence with only one gate, and fewer people were allowed into each section as you got closer to the Holy of Holies. Then there were the required sacrifices, which cost the person making the sacrifice and were a bloody and messy ordeal. This would be a vivid image of how sin kept them from Yahweh.

Second, the sacrifices showed that there was a way back to Yahweh, pointing to the greater high priest and sacrifice that were to come. This was the *whole point* of the tabernacle. Despite the restriction, Yahweh did put a gate on the tabernacle and allowed the high priest to come to Him. And the fact that He allowed for an animal sacrifice to cover sins for a while showed that there was a path to Yahweh. The restriction along with the access showed that Yahweh was pointing Israel to something better yet to come.

10:4 The point here is that it is impossible for the blood of animals to completely pay the price of sin committed by humans. The word "take away" (*aphaireo*) is used of a literal taking off, as in Peter cutting off the ear of the high priest's slave (Lk. 22:50), or metaphorically, as of the removal of sin (Lk. 1:25). It carries the idea of the complete removal of sin so that it no longer exists.⁵⁰ The issue that the author is presenting is not whether the Day of Atonement sacrifices had the power to cleanse sin (Lev. 16:3, 6, 11, 14-16, 18-19) but whether they could bring about a decisive and complete forgiveness.

10:5-7 The author then quotes Ps. 40:6-8 to make this point. David is seen as the author of the psalm, yet it is taken as Christ speaking and offering Himself in service to Yahweh before His incarnation. The psalmist uses four terms to describe the sacrificial system in order to cover the entire sacrificial system as a whole.

Ps. 40:8 reads "ears you have dug out for me," yet the author of Hebrews quotes the LXX version, which reads "a body you prepared for me." The author has paraphrased the meaning,

⁵⁰ See Leon Morris. "Hebrews." In *Hebrews-Revelation*. Vol. 12 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 96.

where he understands the part (ear) to be symbolic for the whole (body). The point is that God is opening up the ears of David so that he can listen to God and respond with his entire body, heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:4-5).

10:8-10 The author unpacks the meaning of the quotation, stating that Yahweh's ultimate desire was not the death of animals; therefore, their sacrifice could not ultimately satisfy Him. Animal sacrifice was what the Law required in order to cover sins, not what Yahweh ultimately desired in order to do away with sin. Thus enters Christ, who offers up *willingly* His unblemished and eternal body as a sacrifice for sin, which does do away with sin. As a result, Christ's sacrifice does away with the Law and the sacrificial system—they are not needed anymore since sin has been dealt with. If the humanity is no longer separated from Yahweh, if their sins have been forgiven, and if the greater high priest has come, why would one need the Law anymore?

10:11-14 Once again, the author points out that the priests continually offered sacrifices and never sat down, which means that their work was never finished. In contrast, Christ made one sacrifice that lasts forever, and He sat down at the right hand of God, which means His work is finished. He now actively waits for the time when all His enemies will be brought under His conquering dominion. Even though this has not happened yet, we can be confident that He has perfected all believers for all time.

10:15-17 The author quotes Jer. 31:33-34 again and emphasizes the fact that both Yahweh and the Holy Spirit have declared that the New Covenant will first engrave the active and living Word of God on the hearts of the people through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This does away with the need for the Mosaic Covenant. Second, the sins of those who are part of the covenant will be forgiven forever. This does away with the need for the sacrificial system.

10:18 The author concludes by stating that now, through Christ our high priest, these two promises have been accomplished, so neither sacrifices nor the old Mosaic covenant are needed anymore, period.

V. A Call to Faith and Perseverance (10:19-13:25)

Now that the author has clearly laid out the person and work of Jesus Christ, he then exhorts the believers to place their faith in Jesus Christ, who is the unique king and high priest over creation. In this final division, the author will make two primary points about faith. First, the only worthy object of one's faith is Jesus Christ, for He is the only one who can make you righteous and thus usher you into life in the heavenly realm. Second, true faith is demonstrated by perseverance in one's confession and by endurance in the trials of life knowing that the promises of God far outshine the temporary trials of life. The author will do this by introducing "faith" and "endurance" in Heb. 10:39, and then he will develop these concepts further in inverted order. He unpacks the character of faith in Hebrews 11 and then exhorts the readers to endurance in Heb. 12:1-13.

A. Drawing Near to God in Enduring Faith (10:19-39)

The author begins this new division with a summary of who Christ is and what He has accomplished and then a warning to not walk away from the great work that Christ has accomplished for them. He ends with an encouragement to persevere in the faith, which serves as a transition into Hebrews 11.

10:19-21 The author starts by giving two reasons we are able to draw near to God as believers, each beginning with the word *since*. The first reason is that we have confidence to enter the sanctuary of heaven because the righteous blood of Jesus has purified us, making us right before God so that we do not have to fear condemnation anymore (Heb. 3:6). The sacrifice is further emphasized with a comparison of the flesh (death) of Jesus with the curtain that was a barrier to the Holy of Holies. Just as the curtain was split, so Jesus' body was broken for us, to give us access into God's presence (Matt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38; Lk. 23:45). The second reason is that we have a great high priest who is perfect, lives forever, and is ready to deal with us with compassion as we come to God (Heb. 4:16).

"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."⁵¹

10:22 Because of these two truths, we are encouraged to do three things. The first is to draw near to God with a sincere heart with assurance that we will be received. Our assurance is not in our own works but in our faith in the finished work of Jesus. The reason we are able to have faith is that our hearts have been made pure with the sprinkling of Jesus' blood that cleanses us. This "sprinkling" goes back to the inauguration of the Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 24:3-8), which pointed to the blood of Jesus inaugurating the New Covenant. The cleansing of our hearts is a fulfillment of Jer. 31:33 and Ezk. 36:26-27, which promised the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This cleansing of our heart is contrasted with the evil heart that humans have before regeneration.

10:23 The second thing we are encouraged to do is to hold unwaveringly to the hope we confess. As mentioned earlier, our confession is the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done for us

⁵¹ William L. Lane. *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 281.

(Heb. 1:1-4). This solid, foundational truth is where we place our hope—the trustworthiness of an unchanging and faithful God who swore that Jesus’ work would be finished in us.

10:24-25 The third thing we are encouraged to do is to keep encouraging other believers to love and do good works now that we have been cleansed through the blood of Jesus. The author commands believers to not stop gathering together in studying God’s Word and discipling each other, as others have done. This is a reference to those who have failed to heed the warning passages and have walked away from the faith and community of believers, as did the wilderness generation of Numbers 14. In Heb. 10:19-25, the author has summarized the implications of Jesus Christ as king and high priest.

10:26-27 The author now comes to the fourth warning passage of the book of Hebrews, which focuses on the rejecting of God’s truth and the consequences of that rejection. The word “deliberately,” knowingly,” “willfully,” or “willingly” points to a conscious and intentional rejection of God that moves beyond the drifting and forsaking in the previous warning passages. There is no sacrifice for someone who receives the knowledge of the gospel and chooses to reject it, for the sacrifice of Jesus does not atone for the willful rejection of His sacrifice. This language reinforces the point made in the previous warning passage (Heb. 6:4-6). The absence of a sacrifice for deliberate sin is contrasted with the certain judgment of God’s wrath for those who reject such a great high priest.

The author quotes Isa. 26:11, which is describing the pagan enemies of God’s people, whom God will destroy because they have rejected Him. Nowhere does God call believers His enemies, and the fury of God’s fire that will consume His enemies could hardly refer to the refiner’s fire for believers. Except for a few cases, and never in this language, fire refers to the judgment of unbelievers. 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).

10:28-29 If the judgment for rejecting the Law of Moses, which was weak and useless for saving people, resulted in death, then how much greater will the punishment be for the one who rejects the blood of Jesus Christ, which inaugurated a covenant that can save and perfect humans completely and for all eternity? Notice that God makes it clear that there is no mercy for those who commit this sin. Here the author draws on the language of Deut. 17:2-7, where the word “rejected” does not refer simply to the infringement of a specific law like murder (Num. 35:30) or false prophecy (Deut. 18:20), but rather to the rejection of the Law as a whole for the pursuit of false gods.⁵² To be called an enemy of God and to receive no mercy does not refer to a believer, who has Jesus as their brother (Heb. 2:11-13) and as their merciful and faithful high priest (Heb. 2:17; 8:12).

The nature of the apostasy under the New Covenant is elaborated with three clauses that define what it means to keep on sinning deliberately. First, the apostate has trampled or has had contempt for the blood of Christ. Second, the apostate has profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified. The sanctifying blood goes back to the argument of Heb. 8:1-10:18, which focused on the superiority of the new covenant (Heb. 8:1-13) and the new covenant offering (Heb. 9:1-10:18). Specifically, the phrase “the blood of the covenant” goes back to the

⁵² Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 376.

statement in Heb. 9:20, which quoted Ex. 24:8 and applies it to the new covenant inaugurated by the blood of Christ.⁵³ And third, the apostate has insulted the Spirit of grace.

We must understand that this is not talking about ordinary humans who have not accepted Christ but about the one who has a full knowledge of Christ (Heb. 10:26), for one cannot profane or insult what they do not know. Since Christ is the Son of God who created, sustains, and atoned for all things and uniquely did what no other could do, then it truly is a great sin and deserves a great punishment for the one who knows this and rejects it.

10:30-31 The author continues to clarify these apostate sinners as those who are outside the community of faith and God and are thus His enemies by quoting Deut. 32:35-36, where Moses is condemning the rebellion of the Israelites and their chasing after the other gods. Much of the context of Deuteronomy 32 is an indictment of Israel's unfaithfulness and a warning of God's coming judgment on Israel (Deut. 32:1-25). And second, God's action of judgment against Israel's enemies always follows with the fact that He will carry out His judgment on Israel if they do likewise (Amos 3:2; 21 Pet. 4:17).

The author states that to fall into the wrathful hands of the living God without the blood of Jesus is a terrifying thing. To fall into the hands of God means judgment (Deut. 32:39; Acts 13:11). This is not the comfort that the author provides for the believers in Heb. 4:14-16, 7:24-27, and 10:19-23. In Heb. 12:25-26, the author also refers to a greater judgment for those today because the warning comes from Christ Himself rather than from a written law. It is clear that these judgments also point to the fact that salvation is in view because they use language that is not used of those who are found in Christ, rather of nonbelievers who belong to the world.

10:32-34 As in the previous warning passage, the author now moves on in order to encourage those who are not deliberately sinning against the blood of Jesus. He reminds them of the times that they have endured harsh suffering because of their faith in the knowledge of God. To *endure* means to stand one's ground or to remain in the field of battle instead of fleeing. They were able to endure persecution and love others in need because they knew that what they had gained in heaven through the blood of Jesus Christ was far superior to anything they could lose on earth or any pain that could be inflicted upon them. The eternal inheritance reserved in heaven for them (1 Pet. 1:4) was so real in their eyes that they could easily say goodbye to material possessions, which were short-lived in any case. This mindset and attitude are precisely what the author means with "by faith" in Hebrews 11.⁵⁴

10:35-36 Therefore, do not forget how great Christ is and what He has to offer and just throw it away because the suffering is still going on and the promises of God are beginning to fade in your mind. The reward for enduring is greater than for giving in to the false promises of the world. Once again, the author reminds them that the true believer endures and perseveres in the confession that they have made, which is based on the truth of God's character and promises.

10:37-39 To make this point, the author quotes Isa. 26:20 and Hab. 2:3b-4. Both make the point that Christ is coming back soon and to not give up and to await His coming. The context of Habakkuk is the wrath of God that will come upon Israel and the Babylonians for their sin. Habakkuk is having trouble seeing and trusting in the coming kingdom of God in the light of all the injustice in the nation. Even so, Habakkuk ends his book by stating that even when there is

⁵³ Peter T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 378.

⁵⁴ F. F. Bruce. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 270.

no life in Israel and everything is lost, he will still trust in God for His deliverance and salvation. This is the picture of perseverance that the author of Hebrews encourages the readers to have.

The only way that one can have life is if they are righteous, and the only way one can be declared righteous is by their faith in the promises of God and in the blood of Jesus Christ. Do not forsake the promises of God for the life the world has offered, for faith in God is the only way one can be saved.

B. The Work of Faith (11:1-40)

The author transitions from the previous exhortation to faith and endurance and now gives examples of those who have endured in the midst of suffering. Heb. 10:32-39 and Heb. 12:1-11 both have the common theme of endurance in the midst of suffering, and Hebrews 11 is in the middle of these two sections. Almost all the figures are commended for their faith because they persevered. Paul contrasts faith with works. Here faith is rooted in the work of Christ and so perseveres. He has already given a negative example of unbelief in the wilderness generation, so here he gives a positive example of faith. The author continues the discussion of imitating (Heb. 6:12) the faith of those who have gone before us and the faith of Abraham (Heb. 6:13-15).

Notice that the list in Hebrews 11 not only gives attention to the faith of the First Testament examples but also to the great salvation historical events of the First Testament. They are sequenced in order to provide an outline for the redemptive purposes of God moving from the age of promise until its fulfillment found in Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of the salvation of humanity.

It is important to understand that the primary idea of Hebrews 11 is not that these people were great heroes of faith but examples of what faith can do. The emphasis is not on the people but on the repetition of the phrase “by faith,” which appears 21 times in this chapter. The author did not spend ten chapters demonstrating the superiority of Jesus to the people and covenant of the First Testament to then turn around and demonstrate the superiority of the faith of those in the First Testament. Though they do serve as an example to imitate, they are not to be the object of our focus. They serve as great examples precisely because they made God, not themselves, the object of their faith.

The main idea the author makes is that it is impossible to please God without faith (Heb. 11:6). This point finds its foundation in the previous chapters, where the author has shown Jesus and His sacrifice and covenant to be superior to the Levitical sacrificial system and the Mosaic Covenant. If obedience to the Mosaic Covenant could not perfect the believer, then only faith in the finished work of Christ can perfect the believer. Thus, the author gives many examples from the First Testament to make this point—that salvation has always been based on faith, not on the Law (Hab. 2:3-4; Heb. 10:38).

11:1-2 The author does not really define faith; rather, he describes it. Nor does the author describe faith as being blind. To place blind faith in something is stupid, for there would then be no reason to choose Christ over any other option (Lk. 14:25-33). And the author did not spend ten chapters giving evidence for the superiority of Christ to all other options to then describe faith as being blind.

The author makes two points about faith. First, faith is being certain about what we hope for, based on reason and evidence demonstrated in the person and work of Jesus Christ (the evidence that was given in Heb. 1-10). Second, faith involves what is unseen (Heb. 11:1, 3, 7, 10; 2 Cor. 5:7). The things that are unseen are the promises of God and our entrance into the heavenly sanctuary. However, our faith in these promises is not blind or wishful thinking but is based on the reputation of God, who has consistently and repeatedly honored His promises throughout history. This is why the ancients were able to have faith, received their reward, and were commended. The main theme of Hebrews 11 is that the people received approval from God because of their faith in God, not because of their character, morality, or works. In fact, the only assured result of faith is approval from God. But this is all a child of God would want.

11:3 The focus of Heb. 11:3-7 is that one believes in and receives the unseen because of their faith. The faith here is not that the universe (the worlds) exist but rather that it came into existence by the Word of God. The author does not say that the material realm is a copy of the spiritual realm but rather that the material finds its origin in the spiritual realm, which we cannot see. The point is that everything we see had its origin in God's intentional design and command. Likewise, we can see His fingerprint on the material realm, which we can see, and we can be sure that the spiritual realm, which we cannot see, does exist.

“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 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.”⁵⁵

11:4 Abel and Cain both offered sacrifices to God, but only Abel found approval with God (Gen. 4:3-5). They both made an offer of obedience, but the difference is that Abel had faith and Cain did not. The point is that it was not the sacrifice that was pleasing to God but the heart it came from. This is the author's point in Heb. 11:6. Therefore, because Abel had faith, he was declared righteous by God (Hab. 2:3-4; Heb. 10:38), even though Genesis does not explicitly state this. Thus, Abel's life of faith and his receiving God's approval speak to us still today even though he is dead. Because of his faith, death was not able to end his testimony. This statement does not allude to the blood of Abel in Gen. 4:10, for the focus here is on his life of faith and on God's approval, not on his death and blood.

11:5 By Enoch's faith he was not overcome by death, but rather God took him away so that he could not be seen anymore (Gen. 5:21-24). In the persistent repetition in Genesis 5 of everyone dying, Enoch's walking with God and escaping death break the pattern. Nowhere does it mention his obedience or works of the Law, but that he walked with God, which is a faith that leads to a relationship with God. It is his faith that received God's approval.

11:6 The author then makes the point that one cannot please God without faith. If no one can meet the requirements of the Law and earn God's approval through obedience, then all we have is a life that trusts in and depends on the character of God, desires and pursues a relationship with Him, and expects and looks forward to the promises of God.

This negative statement is repeated with a positive statement in the second half of the verse. The one who wants to approach God must believe (have faith) in two things. First, you must believe that God exists. The faith is not in the *fact* that God exists. And not simply any god but rather the God who revealed His character and will through the prophets and who in the last days has spoken in His Son (Heb. 1:1-2). This belief is rooted in His sovereignty as God as well as in His relational involvement in creation as Redeemer, seen in its fullest sense in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Second, you must believe that God rewards those who seek Him. You must believe that the promises of God will come to those who have faith in Him because He has proven Himself trustworthy through history. Once again, the condition is placed not on one's obedience to the Law but on faith and on seeking to know God in a relational way.

11:7 Noah is the first person mentioned here whose faith was based on taking God at His word. God spoke to him of a judgment and of things never seen, and Noah believed in Him (Gen. 6:8-

⁵⁵ Leon Morris. *Hebrews*, p. 114.

22). His actions based on His faith led to the judgment of the world and to his righteous approval before God. Most likely, the author is not referring to the preaching of Noah to the people of his day (2 Pet. 2:5) but to the fact that his response to God in faith with action condemned even more the people of the earth who did not respond to the judgment of God. Noah escaped death because of his faith, not his obedience.

11:8-10 Now the author comes to the heart of his “by faith” argument with Abraham, who is the greatest example of faith. The focus of Heb. 11:8-22 is that the patriarchs had to have faith in God and resist the disappointment of not receiving the inheritance in their lifetime. Thus, they demonstrated their perseverance by blessing their children with the promise of God and looking forward to the day their descendants would inherit the land. Abraham only had the word and promise of God that a better land awaited him if he trusted in God. And despite the setbacks and trials, he kept persevering in the confident hope that he would receive from God what he could not see. After many years of not receiving the promises of God, Abraham could have believed that he was not going to get the land that God had promised him, yet he kept persevering in faith. The author makes the point that Abraham was looking to something greater than just land. First, he saw himself receiving the land through his descendants, Isaac, Jacob, etc., which required faith since he would not still be alive to see it happen. And second, he realized that there was greater land, a city of God that was not built by man but by God. This has been realized through Christ entering the heavenly sanctuary.

11:11-12 By faith Abraham trusted God that he would have a child even though he physically could see that his wife Sarah was barren and, eventually, too old to have a child. Yet God brought life from death because Abraham had faith in the trustworthiness of God and His promises. Thus, from him came not one child but an uncountable number of children. The dust of the earth refers to the physical, ethnic descendants of Abraham, and the stars of the sky refer to the spiritual descendants through adoption through Jesus Christ.

11:13-16 The author makes the point that the patriarchs all died before they could see the promises of God fulfilled. But they did not turn back to the physical land and make it their home. They could see the promises way out in the future because they had faith in God; He promised it, so it would happen. For if they had not seen the promises to come, then they would have turned away from God and declared their residency to the land that they lived in or gone back home to Mesopotamia. Therefore, because they looked forward to the heavenly city where God is, God was pleased with their faith and welcomes them gladly into His presence. The faith-not-works obedience is important to understand because Abraham was not always obedient to God. In fact, his disobedience threatened the promises of God on many occasions, with a pharaoh taking Sarah, then it happening again, and Abraham begetting Ishmael through Hagar. But despite his lack of obedience at times, his faith is what pleased God and gained him righteousness and entrance into the heavenly sanctuary.

11:17-19 God had made a promise to Abraham that it would be through Isaac that He would make Abraham into a great nation (Gen. 21:12), still Abraham was willing to trust God in the sacrificing of this son. Abraham had seen and learned throughout his life that God could do anything and always was faithful to honor His promises. Therefore, Abraham reasoned that God would bring Isaac back to life since He had made a promise (Gen. 22). The author then states that figuratively God did bring Isaac from the dead. This is seen in the fact that God stopped Abraham and that it is a typology of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

11:20-21 By faith Isaac and Jacob believed God when they blessed their children to continue on the line of the Abrahamic Covenant. Once again, the author does not point out the fact that Isaac disobeyed God by trying to give Esau the firstborn blessing because the point is that in the end he placed his faith in God when he blessed Jacob.

11:22 Joseph believed in the promise that God would bring Israel out of slavery in Egypt and bring them to the Promised Land (Gen. 15:13-14). He told his descendants that they were to take his bones to the Promised Land when that day came (Gen. 50:24-25).

11:23 The focus of Heb. 11:23-31 is that the generation of Moses experienced the promises of God through their exodus from Egypt and entrance into the Promised Land because of their faith. Moses' parents saw something in Moses and the promises of God that allowed them to throw off the fear of Pharaoh's command. The word "beautiful" carries more of the idea of approval. Something about the face of Moses must have convinced them that God's approval was on him.

11:24-26 When Moses had grown up, he decided to reject the life of sinful pleasure that brought wealth and power but brought it only for a short time. Instead he chose the life of slavery and rejection and of being part of a people who were insignificant, in order to gain the eternal rewards of the promises of God. This is a typology of the choice that Christ made by refusing Satan's offers in the wilderness to worship him and, later, to come off the cross, in order to instead redeem humanity into the heavenly sanctuary.

11:27-29 With this forward-looking faith, Moses ignored the power and threat of Pharaoh and left Egypt. He then demonstrated his faith in God through the Passover lamb, which would free Israel from the slavery of Egypt and the judgment of God, in order to gain the blessings of God, which he could not yet see. Unlike the Egyptians, who had no faith, Moses was able to cross through the Red Sea.

11:30 The author skips over the faithless wilderness generation and moves to the generation of Joshua, who entered the Promised Land. By faith Joshua and the second generation of Israelites believed they could conquer and live in the Promised Land because God was with them (Josh. 5:14; 6:1-21). They entered the promised rest of God because of their faith.

11:31 By faith even Rahab, the sinful Gentile who was not a part of the Abrahamic Covenant of God, was able to enter the covenant, promises, and rest of God because of her faith, not her obedience. She had heard of what God had done, and she believed (Josh. 2:1-15). Faith is the only thing that allows one to escape the destruction of the disobedient.

11:32 The focus of Heb. 11:32-40 is that the generations after Moses experienced conflict with unbelievers because of the promises of God and had to persevere in their faith knowing that God had provided for their ancestors before them. The author lists key figures from the conquest through the monarchy. The choices of Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah are odd, for none of these men were great men of faith compared to Abraham and Moses. Gideon constantly tested God and then turned on his people, but he did demonstrate faith when he led a reduced army into battle against the Midianites (Judg. 7:1-25; Isa. 9:4; 10:26; Ps. 83:9). Barak put conditions on God and hesitated at His command, but when it was time to act, he stepped out in faith (Judg. 4-5). Samson was childish and given over to Philistine women, but in the end he surrendered to God in faith (Judg. 13-16). Jephthah burned his daughter as a sacrifice to God, but he did acknowledge that his victory over the enemy came from God (Judg. 11). Though David struggled with pride and women, he frequently demonstrated a desire for and trust in God

throughout his life. Samuel and the prophets were great examples of faith and of suffering rejection and persecution at the hands of their own people, yet they brought revival at times and judgment at others because they looked forward to the restoration of their people promised by God.

11:33-38 The author lists many impossible things that people throughout the Bible have accomplished and, likewise, the many persecutions that they have endured. They were able to accomplish amazing feats because of their belief that nothing is impossible with God. And they were able to endure because of their faith in a God whom they believed had better things for them than what they were losing. It was because of their faith in God and not their life of works that the unbelieving world was not worthy of them.

11:39-40 They all trusted in something future and unseen, thus their faith found favor with God. Yet they did not receive the full promises of God. This was not because their faith had failed but because God was planning something better that would one day be revealed. God was not just interested in giving them a good life and land, but He wanted to give them access to a full eternal life within the heavenly sanctuary. Now through Jesus Christ as the only true perfecter of humanity can they and we, if we follow them in faith, experience the full promises of God.

“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’...”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Leon Morris. *Hebrews*, p. 132.

C. Endure Discipline as God's Children (12:1-13)

The author transitions from the First Testament examples of faith to an exhortation to emulate their examples. Just as they endured hardship for the promises of God, so must we endure hardships, knowing that God is using trials in our lives to make us godlier so that we can experience the joy set before us, just as Christ did.

12:1 In Hebrews 11, the author gave many examples of what an enduring life of faith looks like. Therefore, in light of all those examples, we are to live lives of faith like theirs. Their lives serve as a witness to us of what we must emulate. Since Christ is truly better than all things, anything that would keep us from pursuing him should be forcibly removed from our lives, especially the sin that clings to us and hinders us from moving forward. The ultimate goal is to persevere and finish the race and not drift away from God.

12:2 The only way that we can endure in a world of distractions is by keeping our focus on Jesus who has already blazed a trail to heaven on our behalf and has perfected our faith. The idea of Christ as our pioneer and perfecter is continued from Heb. 2:10. Jesus is the greatest example we have, for He was willing to endure rejection, shame, a gruesome death, and separation from God in order to obtain the joy of salvation that was set before Him. As a result, God vindicated Him by seating Him at His right hand.

12:3-4 The author encourages you to think of all the things that Jesus went through for you and how He did not give up when He was tempted in the midst His struggles and continued to persevere so that you could be perfected in your salvation. His sacrificial love should inspire us to not become weary and give up. We should also remember that we have not endured hardship to the point of death as He did; He was tempted along all points of the scale and yet was without sin.

12:5-6 The author quotes Prov. 3:11-12 in order to remind us that the reason we endure suffering is because we are God's children. We are not to be discouraged by discipline and give up. Instead, our discipline should be a reminder to us that we have a loving Father who wants to shape us into selfless and godly beings. This proverb reminds us that this has always been the way that God deals with His children.

12:7-8 Every loving father disciplines his children. Good fathers do not want their children to grow up to be selfish, entitled jerks who always demand to get what they want and use people for their purposes. This is why fathers discipline their children, so that they will consider and serve others and benefit the community they live in. God uses the trials in our life in order to strip from us the desire to fulfill our own pleasures and pursue the pleasures of the world. This suffering makes us more dependent on Him, and it is then that we realize that what we find in Him is far better than what we find in the world. If we do not experience discipline, then we do not have a father who cares for us.

12:9-11 This idea of discipline is something that we should understand, for when our fathers disciplined us, we respected them for it because deep down inside we knew that it was for our own good. If we respected earthly fathers who were doing the best they knew how, then how much more should we trust and embrace the discipline of our perfect heavenly Father who knows all things in His perfect will? All this is done so that we may share in the holy righteousness of God and dwell with Him in heaven. Even though right now God's discipline is

painful and not fun, we know that it is refining us into righteous children of God, and this brings us peace and joy, which sustains us in the midst of suffering.

“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.”⁵⁷

12:12-13 The author quotes Isa. 35:3-4 and Prov. 4:26 to encourage us to press on. If we press onward despite feeling tired and we trust in God, then we know that He is a God who gives the weak strength and heals the wounded, just as He did for His own Son when He raised Him from the dead.

⁵⁷ Leon Morris. *Hebrews*, p. 136.

D. The Warning Against Rejecting God (12:14-29)

After building and laying out the nature of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross, which provided a better redemption and access to God than the Mosaic Covenant, the author now gives one last warning passage of the danger of ignoring such a great high priest. However, the author focuses more on the danger of rejecting God who sent His Son than on Jesus, as the previous warning passages did. Here, there is no question of the severity and finality of the judgment for those who reject God.

12:14 In the midst of trials and suffering at the hands of others, one might be tempted to lash out in anger or retaliation. The author commands the believers to pursue peace with everyone and holiness. Jesus died in order to bring peace between God and humanity; therefore, we are to seek the same thing as we strive to emulate the example set before us in Jesus Christ. Likewise, we are to be holy like our Father who is holy, in that through our righteous conduct we demonstrate lives that look different from the world around us. These are only obtainable in that they are gifts from God. Therefore, we are to make every effort to receive them and make them a part of our lives. The only way that we can see God is if we have a pure heart (Matt. 5:8), and the only way we can become holy is by faith.

12:15 The author then gives three warnings. The first is to not fall short of the grace of God. The wilderness generation experienced the grace of God but failed to combine it with belief and perseverance and therefore missed out on God's rest. We should make every effort to continually respond to the grace of God that is always available to us.

The second warning is to not become a bitter root that causes trouble and others to be defiled. This is an allusion to Deut. 29:18, which warns Israel to not go after idols and turn away from God. As in the wilderness generation, the danger of a bitter root is that it produces an ungrateful and complaining heart that then spreads throughout the community, dragging others down into bitterness.

12:16-17 The third warning is to not become immoral or godless like Esau. Esau so despised his birthright that he was willing to sell God's blessings and rest for a bowl of soup (Gen. 25:29-34). The things of the world and his own gratification were more important than the things of God and so were idols to him. The author makes the point, just as in Heb. 6:4-6, that even though he tried to repent and get the blessing of God, it was too late; he had already rejected it, and there was no repentance left, no matter how much he cried out and begged. It is the same with us if we forsake the rest of God in full knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Each of these warnings are for those who are about to commit a willful rejection of God—not for those who love God and are making every effort to pursue holiness and abstain from sin, though they still struggle.

12:18-21 Heb. 12:18-24 contrast what the Law has provided with what Jesus' sacrifice has provided. The author makes the point that we do not come before a God who fills us with a deep dread, as with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. When Yahweh came down on Mount Sinai after the exodus, the mountain was covered in fire and smoke, and the sound of thunder and trumpets filled the air. Because the fire and thunder created more fear than understanding, the people were too afraid to approach God (Ex. 19:12-16; Deut. 4:11). God's holiness was emphasized in the fact that even if an animal touched the mountain, it would die. Only Moses was granted access, and even he stated that he was filled with fear. Because there was no sacrifice for sin, the people could not approach the throne of God without fear.

12:22-24 In contrast, we have not come to a mountain of fear but to Mount Zion, which is the heavenly mountain and sanctuary of God. The author lists seven ideas that are true of the believers' reality as they come to God. These seven ideas tie back into the concepts that he has already developed in the book and paint the picture that we have a greater access to God through greater means, which allows us to truly have an intimate relationship with God.

The reference to Abel's blood does not seem like it fits the context, and it is difficult to understand its meaning and how it is being used. Some translations have "the blood of Abel," yet the word "blood" is not in the Greek but is provided based on an assumption of contrast with Jesus' "sprinkled blood." Some say that the mention of Abel refers to the fact that Jesus' blood provides a greater atonement than Abel's blood did (Gen. 4:10). However, this does not fit the context of how it was used previously in Heb. 11:4, which focused on "by faith" and "speaking" and not on "blood" or "crying out." Nor does it fit this immediate context, which refers to the blessings that Christ has provided, not to the crying out of a murdered victim's blood. It is not the quality of the blood, for the author would have made that clear if it were.

Abel was the first person to be mentioned in the Bible and in Hebrews 11 as one who offered a sacrifice to God. Not only that, we are told that God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice because of his faith (Heb. 11:4) Thus, the mention of Abel may be a starting point to refer "to the spirits of the righteous, who have been made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). In this understanding, Abel represents the whole of all those who have offered sacrifices throughout history in order to gain atonement. The point is that Jesus' perfect self-sacrifice is better and thus brings a better (perfect) atonement than any other sacrifice throughout history, even the sacrifices offered by great men of faith.⁵⁸

12:25 The grave warning here is that even though the believer does not come to a mountain of fear, as did those of the First Testament, this does not mean there is no more fear for those who are not believers. Those who ignored God's "warning" during Noah's generation did not escape the flood on earth (Gen. 6-7; Heb. 11:7). The wilderness generation that ignored God's warning for "today" did not escape the desert (Num. 14; Ps. 95; Heb. 4). If these people did not escape the wrath of God when he warned them of the penalty of rejecting Him, then how much more will we not escape the wrath of God when we ignore the warning of rejecting God's very own Son, who is the greatest and final revelation of who God is (Heb. 1:4)?

11:26-27 The author quotes Haggai 2:6 in order to further emphasize the judgment of God and to keep with the theme of the shaking of Mount Sinai. The first significant shaking of the earth for Israel is when God appeared to them at Mount Sinai, and that filled them with a great fear and dread (Ex. 19:18; Heb. 12:18-24). Haggai 2:6 alludes to that event and promises a future shaking of not only earth but of the sky, the sea, and all the dry land. The sea and dry land are omitted from the LXX translation, which the author is quoting. The LXX sees the earth and sky as a merism, which means that two things are mentioned to refer to the whole part and everything in between, like "from A to Z." This was to give Zerubbabel and Joshua hope of God's future judgment and deliverance, which would be all encompassing and final.

The author of Hebrews goes on to explain that this shaking includes everything that is removable, which is all *created* things; nothing will survive, unlike at Mount Sinai, which only affected the mountain. The author is not asserting that creation is evil nor that the believers he is addressing are not a part of this creation. Rather, the fundamental difference between the two

⁵⁸ See Peter T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 490-91, and William L. Lane. *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 380-82.

realms is one's relationship with God through Jesus Christ, not their natural status as created or uncreated beings. What will be removed in this final shaking are those who are only a part of this creation, since they have not been redeemed. Those who will escape the final shaking are those who belong to this creation and the heavenly sanctuary, for they have been regenerated into a new creature in Christ through the blood of Jesus' perfect sacrifice (2 Cor. 5:17).

12:28-29 Therefore, since we are receiving this heavenly, unshakable kingdom through our high priest, this should evoke the response of thanks, worship, and deep fear and awe for our God. Thankfulness communicates an intentional heart of gratefulness to the one who redeemed us. Thanks is the only way that the gifts of God do not become ordinary and that we continue to look to God. Worship always communicates the idea of obedience and an active effort toward the expansion of the kingdom of God. And fear and awe come from remembering how powerful and mighty God is compared to how small we are, and we owe our lives and everything to Him. The author quotes Deut. 4:24 and 9:3 to remind us of the consequences for those who do not remember their place before this mighty God of the universe, who is a devouring fire.

E. Final Exhortations (13:1-25)

This final section consists of reminders of what the readers already knew and were doing and what they knew they should avoid. The chapter as a whole is an exhortation to worship God acceptably, according to the New Covenant. The point is not to command them to behave in a certain way but to remind them that righteous behavior is pleasing to God and that it reflects Jesus Christ's behavior, which they are now able to emulate because of His better sacrifice.

13:1-2 The main idea of Heb. 13:1-6 is that true service to God involves serving people. These verses follow the pattern of giving two exhortations for obedience as well as a rational reason or motive for doing so. The author states that true children of God will love their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as show servant-like love to those outside the community of believers. This is not an emotional love but a love of action and involvement in others' lives. If entering into humanity in order to love sacrificially is the primary character of Jesus Christ, then it should also be the character of the believers. And if we cannot love our fellow believers, who serve the same God we do and have so much in common with us, then how can we have love for the people of the world?

The motivation for this kind of action is that there may be times that angels are actually the recipients of your acts of love, and this would bring a great blessing from God. The allusion is to Gen. 18:2, 16 where Abraham fed Yahweh and two angels. The idea is that by doing this, you are doing it for God.

13:3 Believers are called to care for believers who are in prison and who are mistreated by others. It may be tempting to ignore them for fear of the same happening to you, but the motivation is to remember that it could be you and that they are your true family in need.

13:4-5 Sex and money have always been two formidable powers of attraction, control, and destruction in people's lives. The marriage covenant is the greatest earthly example of the image of God as male and female coming together in order to expand the kingdom of God. Marriage is used all throughout the Bible to symbolize His relationship with His people. To defile that covenant is to defile the image of God as a testimony to who He is. The motivation is that God will judge those who do not remain pure. The issue here is the one who is acting selfishly, pursuing self-gratification rather than seeking to become one flesh with his or her spouse for the sake of building God's kingdom. The adulterers are those who go outside of marriage in the pursuit of sexual self-gratification, and the sexually immoral are all those who pursue sex for their own self-gratification.

The one who loves and pursues money and materialism is the one who desires the things of this world, God's creation, rather than God Himself and His heavenly sanctuary. The sin is in not being content with what one has and therefore not being grateful to God for what He has given and not being aware of God's involvement in his life.

The motivation for not pursuing self-gratification and the things of the world is the promise that God will always be with you and involved in your life, taking care of your needs. The author quotes Deut. 31:6 and Ps. 118:6, 7 in order to make this point. God has made this promise to His people all throughout history, and the Bible has demonstrated it over and over again through many stories of His involvement in the lives of His children. If we are truly resting in Christ, then we have nothing to fear from the world's hatred or not having our desires fulfilled.

13:7-8 The author closes his letter with a final exhortation to the community of believers to leave the rituals and teachings of Judaism and the world behind and to draw near to the greater altar and sanctuary of Jesus Christ. The author encourages the believers to remember their leaders' teaching from the Word of God and the examples that they have set through their lives. When the community struggles, they are to look to the past examples (Heb. 11) and their current examples of people who are persevering in the faith. God and Christ have always spoken the same message of salvation and obedience through their chosen leaders all throughout history.

The author then reminds them that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Since He is the Son of God (Heb. 1:1-4), then just as God never changes, neither does Christ. This phrase is an allusion to 1 Sam. 20:27 and 2 Sam. 15:20 and picks up on the theme of speaking in the past and into the future as long as there is a "today" (Heb. 3:7, 13-14; 4:7). By stating that Jesus Christ is the same "forever," the author reminds his readers of His eternal being (Heb. 1:8), priesthood (Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21, 28), and the eternal salvation that He has accomplished (Heb. 5:9; 7:24-25; 9:12) for the believers to inherit (Heb. 9:15).⁵⁹

13:9-10 The author warns them to not be carried away by the strange teachings that the world offers as counterfeits to the truths of God revealed in His Son Jesus Christ. The contrast is that our hearts should find strength in the assurance of the finished work of Christ that has been provided to us through God's grace, not in the ceremonial, external rituals of food that could not perfect the believers. Food was often associated with religious rituals, both in the Jewish world and in the pagan world. Food here could refer to one or the other or both. We have an altar in Jesus Christ that truly perfects us for all eternity, an altar at which those who do not have faith are not allowed to eat. To eat at the altar is a figurative expression that means to participate in the sacrifice (Lev. 7:5-6; Num. 18:9-10).

13:11-12 The author is referring to the Day of Atonement, where the high priest took the blood of a goat into the Holy of Holies but discarded the body of the animal outside the camp (Lev. 16:11-28). God forbade the eating of the animal, for it was a symbol of the people's sin removed from the camp (Lev. 6:30). This was a foreshadowing of Jesus, who would be the Day of Atonement sacrifice sacrificed outside the city of Jerusalem for the sins of Israel.

13:13-14 Previously the author has encouraged us to enter into Christ's rest (Heb. 4:11) into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 6:19-20; 9:12, 24). However, here we are called to leave the city. Yet the goal is the same to go *to him* (Jesus). The author's use of *outside the camp* (Heb. 13:11, 13) may also refer to the time that God was rejected in the camp of Israel and so revealed Himself outside the camp (Ex. 33:7-10). We are called to leave the rituals of Judaism and meet Christ outside the city. Even if we have to bear disgrace as He did, it is worth it, for we have been perfected through His blood. We should desire nothing from the city of the world that is temporary but rather look forward to and expect the city of God that has been promised to us.

"The exhortation to leave the camp 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, leaving behind the security, congeniality, and respectability of the sacred enclosure, risking the reproach that

⁵⁹ See Peter T. O'Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 517.

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.”⁶⁰

13:15-16 These verses are the climax of this section of going out to Christ. Since we no longer need to make a sacrifice, the author calls us to offer praise to God as our sacrifice. The phrase “the fruit of lips that openly profess his name” comes from Hos. 14:2, which makes the point that the words, praise, and thanks of the believer are better than the sacrifices of the Law (Isa. 57:18). The second sacrifice that we are to offer is our acts of love for others. To serve Christ in word and deed is the greatest offering we have to present for the one who perfected us. Our faith in Him and our desire to imitate the words and deeds of Christ are what please God.

13:17 We are called to trust our leaders who guide us, for they, because of their love for God, were placed over us by God Himself in order to watch over us. Whatever complaints we may have against them, ultimately they will answer to God for their leadership. Our motivation is to not be a burden to them and to fill their ministry with joy.

13:18-19 The author now transitions from the leaders of the readers’ congregation to himself and asks for their prayer, which will bring him joy. The prayer is that his conscience will be clear before God as he serves Him in word and deed so that he may bring honor to God.

13:20-21 The author closes with a final benediction that brings the concepts of Jesus as our king-priest and his final exhortations (Heb. 13) together into one summary prayer. He calls to our God of peace who honored His promises in the covenant to Abraham throughout the history of humanity by resurrecting His Son from the dead, whose blood made the promises of the covenant reality for us today so that we may have peace. Jesus thus becomes the fullest revelation of God as a Shepherd as seen in the Davidic typology of the king as a shepherd. Here, the image of high priest and king are invoked once again. Since He is our God who redeemed us, then He is also able to equip us to please Him as we serve Him in word and deed. This is our sacrifice that brings glory to God.

13:22-25 The author closes with final requests that they heed his words, pray for him to be able to come to them, and pray for Timothy who has been released from prison.

⁶⁰ William L. Lane. *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 543.

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