

The Book of Hebrews

A Commentary

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The Book of Hebrews

Table of Contents

Introduction	p. 2
Chapter 1: Introduction of Jesus As God's Son and As Greater Than the Angels	p. 3
Chapter 2: Do Not Neglect So Great a Salvation	p. 6
Appendix: Calvinism vs. Arminianism	p.11
Chapter 3: Jesus is Greater Than Moses	p.16
Chapter 4: Entering into God's Rest	p.21
Chapter 5: Jesus, Our High Priest of the Order of Melchizedek	p.24
Chapter 6: Believers Must Stay Strong in Their Faith	p.27
Chapter 7: Jesus Is from a Superior Order of Priesthood	p.30
Chapter 8: The Superiority of the New Covenant	p.34
Chapter 9: The New Covenant Is Superior to the Old Covenant - A Comparison	p.38
Chapter 10: Jesus Is the Perfect Sacrifice	p.44
Chapter 11: The Saints' Hall of Fame	p.50
Chapter 12: Living the Christian Life	p.58
Chapter 13: Practical Advice to the Christian	p.62
Conclusion	p.67
Bibliography	p.69

The Book of Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews

Introduction:

The book of Hebrews is an atypical epistle in that it does not reveal who authored it and it does not mention where it was written nor to whom it was written... specifically. On the other hand, a reading of the book certainly reveals that it was written to Hebrew Christians who were beginning to have some doubts about their newfound religion, i.e. Christianity. I have chosen this book to study, as I believe that it has many unique insights into *why* the decision to follow Jesus is the correct one, far better than any other choice that a person could make. This not only includes the choice of Judaism, but all other choices of religions (ex. Hinduism, Buddhism, Scientology, etc.). A discussion of the over-arching superiority of Christ is presented.

No one knows for sure who wrote the book of Hebrews. In the early Christian church, Paul was generally considered to be the author. There are several reasons that this makes sense, yet other reasons to doubt Paul as the writer. For example, 2 Peter 3:15,16 notes that Paul had written a letter to the same people that Peter was writing to... the Hebrews of the dispersion. Also, the famous verse, “the just shall live by faith” appears in this book as it does in Romans and Galatians... written by Paul. The book of Hebrews also strongly suggests that it was written in Italy, by a person that was in prison and knew Timothy well – an individual such as Paul. For these and other reasons many believe in Pauline authorship. Other theologians believe the author may be Barnabas (close associate of Paul with strong leadership capabilities – he went on the first missionary journey with Paul), or Apollos (suggested by Martin Luther as this Alexandrian was a very learned, intelligent Jewish Christian who was associated with Paul in the early years of the church), or even Luke, the physician and author of his own Gospel and Acts. Still other names that have been mentioned include Silas, Clement of Rome, Priscilla, Silvanus and Philip the Evangelist. Actually, it is not really important to know who wrote this book. All it is important to know is that it was written by a fine Christian under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Although there is uncertainty concerning the author and details of where and specifically to which group of Hebrews it was written, there is internal and external information as to why it was written. As we will soon see, each chapter goes into great detail to explain the purpose of this epistle and just what was expected of these Jewish people. From secular historical sources, we also know that by 30-40 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, there was great pressure on Christians to renounce their relatively newfound beliefs. The Hebrew community was facing increasing persecution from the Romans and continued persecution from the practicing Jews in Palestine. Many of these recent converts to the Christian faith were second generation Christians. Most had not personally witnessed the miracles of Jesus, including His resurrection. For many years, Christians had been awaiting His return... and as of that time, He had not returned. Virtually all of these Hebrews were well aware of the “comfort” that they all had come to expect in the typical sacrificial worship practices of their old religion. They had practiced these Levitical sacrifices in Jerusalem in years gone by and were beginning to wonder if they had

The Book of Hebrews

made a mistake in accepting Christ as the Messiah and their Lord. Life would not be as worrisome for them if they simply turned back to their old religion.

This is what the writer of Hebrews would be addressing. Were there good enough reasons to accept the risks of Christianity? Was it really the better religion? In fact, was it really the only appropriate religion? These topics would be discussed in the thirteen chapters of this great book.

One final point to mention... the date of this book. Once again, internal and external evidence strongly suggests that Hebrews was written sometime between 60 and 95 B.C. It was mentioned by Clement of Rome around 95 B.C.. Therefore, it had to be written prior to that time. Since the author often references the Temple sacrificial system as something that should be avoided, it is highly unlikely that it was written after the Temple had been destroyed (in 70 A.D. by General Titus Vespasian - later to be Emperor)... otherwise, why mention it as there was no place to offer sacrifices after the Temple was leveled. It was written during Timothy's lifetime. Taking all of these things into consideration, the consensus of opinion is that it was probably written between A.D. 65-69.

Chapter 1: Introduction of Jesus as God's Son and as greater than the angels

¹ In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,

In this introduction to his Hebrew readers, the author is going to immediately remind them of the *singular importance* of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Dr. Harold Wilmington notes that whereas the book of Romans points out the absolute *necessity* of Jesus, this book of Hebrews strongly shows the *superiority* of Christ. In other words, a study of Romans should lead a person with an open mind to conclude that being a Christian is necessary for eternal life... which it is, of course. Unfortunately, sometimes even the logic of those arguments is not enough to keep certain people strong in their faith. It is here where Hebrews comes in as it points out the many reasons why Christianity is superior to all other faiths... in particular, the Jewish faith in this discussion.

So, the epistle begins by reminding everyone how God the Father had communicated His truths in the past... primarily via the many prophets. This was done in many ways. He spoke to Daniel and Joseph through dreams. At times, God spoke audibly (ex. Moses). God might even write His message to His prophets (the *writing on the wall* in Babylon). God would answer some prophets via the throwing down of a fleece (ex. Gideon). Many, many ways did God, their Father, speak in the past. Most recently, however, God spoke through His Son, Jesus, the Messiah. Through the Messiah, the world was actually able to see and hear God Himself! This certainly was superior to anything that had come before.

The phrase "last days" is used as the Hebrews and the Christians believed that with the coming of the Messiah, they were living in the "last days". Jesus had given the last word to the

The Book of Hebrews

world. Since He has come, we have been living in the “last days”. Jesus is not coming again to give us another gospel, to teach us any additional information. He is finished with His earthly work until Armageddon. Then, He will set up His Kingdom on this earth. Since His resurrection, we have been living in the “last days”.

whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Continuing on, the writer points out that this Son, Jesus has been appointed as heir of all things... that is, everything! Who will inherit the earth and the heavens? Jesus! This certainly makes sense as Jesus *made the worlds...* and everything else in the universe.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. John 1:1-3

Jesus is noted to be the express image of the Father... and the brightness of His glory. Jesus reveals to us what God is like. As Jesus says, when we see Him, we see the Father. In other words, Jesus is God, God is Jesus! Finally, we are told that everything in this universe continues to exist in its current form only because Jesus controls it via the power of His Word. Scientists recognize certain forces of nature (i.e. gravity, strong and weak nuclear forces and electromagnetic force – the four forces of nature). The greatest scientific minds ever on this earth (incl. Sir Isaac Newton, a fine Christian, by the way, Albert Einstein... also a believer in God) have absolutely no idea where these forces come from nor why they work. They know they exist and some basics of how they behave. But, where are they from? God only knows... and that is exactly right... God only knows. Jesus is directly behind these forces. He generates these forces of nature to keep our universe *alive*.

After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁴ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

Jesus completed His work on earth by giving His life as a sacrifice for all of mankind. Certainly, for His time on earth, Jesus had emptied Himself of some of His characteristic traits that He had while in Heaven. He had become fully human while remaining fully God. As a human, He was subject to most of the same problems that all people have to deal with during their lifetime on this earth. This life certainly has many problems and challenges. Jesus wanted to show us that He could empathize with us (not just sympathize), and understand our problems and grief. He also wanted to demonstrate to us how we should live... by following His example and instruction. His time on earth was obviously voluntary and very temporary. His death on

The Book of Hebrews

the cross, where He shed His blood and suffered horrible pain to pay the penalty for everyone's sins, was His great gift to us all... if we only accept this gift by faith. As Luke notes in the first chapter of Acts, Jesus went on to heaven, up and through the clouds, approximately 40 days after His resurrection. Now He sits at the right hand of His Father (once again, as it had always been since eternity past, Jesus was much higher than the angels), where He acts, continuously, as an intermediary between His loved ones (Christians) and His Father. And certainly, by virtue of His "inheritance" – God is His Father, Jesus certainly lays claim to the most excellent name(s) in the universe.

Then the writer continues in his comparison between Christ and angels. Jews had great love for angels. They also had great respect for their power and goodness. Angels have always been important agents for God. They are mentioned all throughout the Old Testament and certainly play an important role in the life and death of Christ. At the time this letter was being sent to the Hebrews, there was a sect in a nearby community, Qumran, that taught that angels were superior beings. In fact, they taught that the archangel Michael rivaled, or even was superior, to Christ! This was certainly debunked in this verse. Jesus, it is noted, is much better than the angels and via His inheritance; His name is certainly unrivalled by anyone or anything... including any angel. Then, several words from God to Jesus are quoted to remind the reader of the special relationship between God and Jesus.

⁵ For to which of the angels did He ever say: *"You are My Son, Today I have begotten you"*? (Psalm 2:7) And again: *"I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son"*? (Samuel 7:14)

Here we see that Jesus was the actual Son of God. No angel could lay claim to that.

⁶ But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: *"Let all the angels of God worship Him."* (Psalms 97:7) ⁷ and of the angels He says: *"Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire."* (Psalms 104:4)

Here, it is pointed out that angels are not only made by Jesus, but are to worship Him.

⁸ But to the Son He says: *"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions."* (Psalms 45:6,7) ¹⁰ And: *"You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. ¹¹ They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; ¹² Like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail."* (Psalms 102:25-27)

This again notes the absolute omnipotence, righteousness and eternity of Jesus. Angels have not always existed, nor are they perfect and all-powerful.

The Book of Hebrews

¹³ But to which of the angels has He ever said: "*Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool*"? (*Psalms 110:1*) ¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? Heb 1:1-14

The writer concludes by noting that there never was nor will be an angel who will be given the seat next to God, the Father. Angels are wonderful, however, as they have many important purposes including helping humans as we struggle through our time here on earth.

Seven verses from the Old Testament are used to show the wavering Hebrew reader of the epistle that Jesus was far superior to any angel... even Michael and Gabriel. In fact, Jesus was in an entirely different category as angels, just as He was in a different category from humans. Jesus was God. That is that. Nothing else can compare.

Chapter 2: Do not neglect so great a salvation

¹ We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

Considering what the writer had just written, that Jesus is in a totally different category than man and angles, the reader of this epistle better be very careful not to forget those reasons that he/she first recognized that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and Lord. Sometimes, even today, people can drift away from Jesus and the Father by failing to study the Bible and failure to pray. Life should never be allowed to get so busy that we forget to remain deeply in contact with Jesus... on a daily basis. He should be our first love and we should never forget Him nor ignore Him. It is always important to cultivate important relationships in our lives... there is none so important than that we have with the Savior.

² For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

Keep in mind that the Old Testament scriptures were written by men, with the help of angels, and even the Old Covenant is unalterable. Also one must remember that every sin will be dealt with by God. God is totally just and must punish the sinner. The Law of the Old Covenant was very specific as to the necessity of punishment for sin. If one were to live by this Covenant, the Law, there never was a mechanism provided by God the Father to give eternal forgiveness for a man's sins. Sure, there was a sacrificial system that was set up to give temporary forgiveness, but any sin committed after the sacrifice was one too many. Therefore, that required another appropriate animal sacrifice. This would go on and on and on...

The Book of Hebrews

However, now Jesus had come and given Himself as a sacrifice for everyone that would accept Him as Savior. His sacrifice on the cross was a one-time event. It need not be repeated. His sacrifice was acceptable to God as payment for the penalty for all mankind's sins. It was not a temporary system as the animal sacrificial system was designed to be. It was the final necessary and sufficient answer to the salvation of man. Given this *incredible free gift from God*, we had better not neglect it. We need recognize the wonder of it and *grasp hold of it* with utmost thankfulness to God and Jesus. As the verse says, how shall we escape judgment if we ignore/neglect so great a gift from God and His Son? We will not.

Yet, why should we believe that the salvation provided by Jesus is real?

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴ God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

We should have no worry about accepting this salvation because there is ample evidence that it is true. What is the evidence? Here the Holy Spirit mentions several things:

- Jesus himself stated that all can and must be saved through Him. Recall the famous verses that follow:
 - **For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16)**
 - **I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:6)**
- Hundreds of eyewitnesses confirmed the veracity of what Jesus had said and did. These people had seen His proof of His divinity as they witnessed His miracles, moral perfection, and His death, burial and resurrection.
- God also had bestowed upon many followers of Christ special miraculous powers to confirm His Son's identity – even including the ability, on occasion, to raise the dead!
- All Christian converts were given at least one special gift of the Holy Spirit as they also were indwelt by God's Spirit after their acceptance of Jesus.
- God had at various times verbally identified Jesus as His Son (ex. when Jesus began His ministry at the Jordan River, on the Mount of Transfiguration, during the latter portion of the crucifixion, etc.). Angels were also used by God to tell the world just who Jesus was... Messiah and Lord.

⁵ It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified:

"What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (Psalms 8:4)

The Book of Hebrews

In the time of Christ, the Jews gave great credit to angels as the intermediaries between God and many of His prophets as God gave out the Law and directed the destiny of Israel and other nations. Yet, here the writer of Hebrews tells his readers that God's divine plan for the future is not to place angels in the position of authority over the world and its subjects. Instead, we are told that for some wonderful and amazing reason, God has kept man in His plan for the future. In the past, angels have had power over nations and administered punishment to the human race, at times. Yet, regardless of how badly we have performed in the past, and even today, regardless of how much we have let God and His Son down over the millennia, God still has plans for our future... during the millennial reign of Christ on earth as well as in our eternal future.

It is important to remember that God made man in His image and that He came to earth in the body of a human being... not an angel. Obviously, God has a special plan for people. One day in the future, God tells us that angels will not have authority over people any longer... that time begins at the onset of the millennium.

⁷ "Thou hast made him for a little while lower than the angels; Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and hast appointed him over the works of Thy hands; ⁸Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet." (Psalms 8:5-6)

For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

Originally, man was created to have dominion over all things on this earth. God created man to rule. He did not create angels to have dominion over anything... at least it is not mentioned in the Bible. Yet, due to sin, man has temporarily given up his opportunity for dominion. Instead, he has been temporarily made "lower than the angels" and certainly does not have much control over creation. Jesus came to rectify this situation. As we give our lives to Jesus, we literally become a new creation in Christ. As such, Christians will one day exercise dominion over those things that God had made subject to Adam and Eve at the time of creation. Now we seem to just have the urge to exercise this dominion but lack the power, ethics and morality to successfully subdue the earth and all therein.

Next the writer turns his attention to Jesus...

⁹ But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰ In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author (captain) of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Jesus also was made lower than the angels (as He was made a man... the Holy Trinity saw fit to allow His incarnation for the sake of all mankind)... but, just for a little while (approx. 33 years). This had to be done, as Jesus had to accomplish

The Book of Hebrews

several things during His first advent requiring His humanity. First of all, he came to earth as a baby, grew into a man and experienced all of the typical experiences of life that other people have to deal with – including suffering. He was therefore able to demonstrate to the human race, His brothers, how we should live... how we should respond to life's problems. That is, He is the ultimate role model.

Next, when one considers His years here on earth, and His many difficulties, it is easy for all people to recognize that Jesus is able to empathize (not just sympathize) with us as we struggle through the difficult times in our lives. Finally, Jesus had to live a perfect life as a human being in order to qualify as the only adequate sacrifice for humanity's sins. And then Jesus had to be crucified and suffer terribly as He paid the penalty for our sins. For all of these reasons, Jesus was and is the perfect Savior of mankind. The Bible notes that He is the *author* or *captain*, that is, the leader... the originator... the source of our salvation. And, because of these incredibly selfless deeds, Jesus is given all glory and honor in Heaven.

Verse 10 also points out that Jesus not only created all things, but certainly can lay claim to all things as well. Because of His death, He is able to bring many other brothers to salvation. That was the reason for His sacrifice and it certainly was not in vain. Every person has the opportunity for eternal life in Heaven because of this great gift from Jesus.

¹¹ Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. ¹² He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." (Psalm 22:22)

Jesus is the one who sanctifies us (leads us into holiness). Of course, it is our duty to become sanctified throughout our lives here on earth. All of us, mankind and Jesus, are all brothers under our Father, God.

So Jesus has no hesitation to refer to His Christian brothers as brethren... Jesus taught that anyone who does the will of God is His brother. **For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.** Matt 12:50

It is interesting to note that Jesus waited until after His resurrection before He referred to His disciples as His brethren. **"Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."** Matt 28:10

Jesus is from the same stock as we are. He is human, so are we! His use of the term *brethren* for Christians shows that He fully identifies with mankind... we are His brothers and sisters. As a little sidebar, although we certainly NEVER will be any form of a god, we someday will be given a glorified body that we will use for eternity. This body will be like that seen by the three disciples as they watched Jesus, Elijah and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration.

The Book of Hebrews

¹³ And again,

"I will put my trust in him." (Isaiah 8:17)

And again he says,

"Here am I, and the children God has given me." (Isaiah 8:18)

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Hebrews 2:1-18

This last portion of chapter 2 notes that Jesus came as God incarnate... God in the flesh (and blood) because this was necessary for Him to be our Savior. Because of leading His life as a perfect, sinless man He qualified to be the propitiation for our sins. The devil was not able to defeat Jesus. Just the contrary. Jesus defeated Satan. Men and women have had to live in fear of death... not any longer. With the wonderful sacrifice provided by Jesus, death has been defeated. No one ever has to taste of death ever again. We now only pass from a life of struggle on this earth to a life of peace and joy in Heaven when we "pass over" some day from life unto life. Jesus did this for humanity alone. He did not come to earth, suffer and die on the cross for anyone other than people... not for angels or anything else. The fallen angels have no propitiation for their sins. They are still lost... and someday will follow Satan into the Lake of Fire. Jesus is our propitiation, He is our Mercy Seat; He is our mighty counselor, sitting at the right hand of the Father, interceding regularly for us. He is our mighty "Perry Mason" up there in Heaven. He will never lose a case... we are safe in His hands.

The chapter ends by pointing out that Jesus was subject to testing ("temptation") just as we are today. Not only was He blitzed with temptations by Satan at the onset of His ministry... during the weakness He was under from a 40 day fast, but He had tremendous testing throughout His ministry. He never succumbed even once. If He had done so, He would not have qualified to be our sacrificial Lamb. Perfection was required. But, Jesus did not fail us!!!

The Book of Hebrews

Time for a theological discussion: Calvinism vs. Arminianism

There are several verses in the book of Hebrews that talk about Christians being in danger of losing *something very significant* because of unbelief. These verses begin in chapter 3. They also appear in chapter 4 and, especially, chapter 6. Therefore, I will take this time to discuss two differing theological views that relate to this **loss**.

The difficult question that arises is what is it that they are in danger of losing? These verses may be talking about losing one's *salvation*... or, they may be talking about losing the *peace and joy that accompanies the gift of salvation* in those people who earnestly obey Jesus Christ and turn the control of their lives over to the Holy Spirit. I can honestly say I am not 100% sure of the answer myself, but I certainly want to discuss the two differing points of view. Simply put, this discussion relates to the topic of whether once a person is initially saved, are they saved forever? There are two major points of view as follows:

OSAS (once saved, always saved): This belief is one of the tenants of Calvinism. The Calvinists believe that God pre-destines individuals for salvation and that once these people are *irresistibly called* by God to salvation, they will remain saved forever. Jesus never allows anyone, nor anything, to take away one of His children. Even the individual in question will be unable to give up their salvation. That is, once they are saved, they simply cannot be lost again. Period.

Conditional Perseverance: There is another large group of Christians who look at many other Bible verses and come to the conclusion that a Christian can fall away from the faith and lose their salvation. This is one of the tenants of Arminian theology. They do agree that nothing can wrestle a Christian out of the loving hands of the Savior just as the OSAS believers, but they suggest that there is one way in which a person may fall from grace. The saved person *himself/herself* can choose to turn away from Christ, using his/her free will, and fall from grace due to this *newfound* unbelief – i.e. rejection of Christ.

By the way, each side of this discussion has many excellent Bible verses to back up why they believe what they do. It is not blatantly obvious which side is correct. Keep in mind that there are millions of intelligent, faithful, students of the Bible on opposite sides of this issue. Given that I am sure that at least tens of thousands of these people have prayed to the Holy Spirit to lead them to the correct understanding on this and other topics in the Bible, there must be an intriguing reason why they have come to two different conclusions. God only knows what that reason is. It will be interesting to find out some day when we get to Heaven. Let me mention just a few verses that each group uses to back their line of reasoning:

The Book of Hebrews

OSAS:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 [if a Christian loses his salvation, that certainly would not be working out for his ultimate good]

And this is the will of him who sent me, that **I shall lose none of all that he has given me**, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:38-40)

"You are not your own," we're told. "You were bought with a price." (1 Cor. 6:19-20)
[once a person becomes a Christian, their eternal life is in Jesus' hands, not the individual's]

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, **you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption** of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:13-14

Now it is **God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come** 2 Cor 1:21-22

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. **28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.**
John 10:27-29

Looks pretty convincing, but...

Conditional Perseverance:

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. ⁵ Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. **If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.** ⁶ But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. Rev 2:4-7

19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.
Rev 22:19

The Book of Hebrews

⁵ **He who overcomes** will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. Rev 3:4-5
[if a person does not overcome life's difficulties and pressures, might his name will be blotted out from the book of life?]

"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹² Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the **devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.** ¹³ **Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.** Luke 8:11-13

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ **If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned** John 15:5-6

²² All men will hate you because of me, but **he who stands firm to the end will be saved.**
Matt 10:22

"Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? ⁴³ It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. ⁴⁴ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁵ But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. ⁴⁶ The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. **He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.** Luke 12:42-46

²¹ They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. Acts 14:21-22 [apparently these disciples had to go through a lot of trials... if they were unable to do so, the suggestion is that they would not enter into the kingdom of God]

¹ For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. ⁶ Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷ Do

The Book of Hebrews

not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." ⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. ⁹ We should not test the Lord, as some of them did--and were killed by snakes. ¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel. ¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. ¹² So, **if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!** 1 Cor 10:1-12 [Paul is comparing these Corinthians with their Old Testament forefathers, many of whom died and were scattered in the desert. Paul suggests that they be careful or they could suffer a similar fate]

There are many other verses that are used to back up both sides of the argument. Oddly, some use the same verse to support their opposite views! The bottom line of all of these verses can be stated as follows. The folks who believe that a person cannot lose their salvation (OSAS) interpret all of the verses in the Bible that talk about a person who backslides and loses faith as being a person that **will lose their peace and joy** that they could have had if they had obeyed Christ and continued to work toward their sanctification with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The folks who state that a person can turn away from Christ and lose their salvation, obviously believe that many of those same verses refer to the previously saved person **losing their salvation** due to their apostasy... their unbelief that came after they had previously accepted Jesus as Savior. They simply changed their mind and rejected the Savior.

In other words, every verse listed above, and many, many more, can and has been interpreted in opposite ways. I am not saying which way is the correct way as I am not privy to God's answer to this question. One thing is for sure, it would be extremely foolish for anyone to fall from full faith and trust in Jesus. Every Christian should always attempt to follow their Savior to the absolute best of their ability... with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Let us take a look at an example to see how these two Christian camps might explain the same person's walk with Christ. Is the woman mentioned below saved or not?

A: A young woman gives her heart to Christ while in High School. She goes to a Christian Bible College and then spends two years as a missionary in Japan. All this time she confidently and humbly serves the Lord. Several years later, she is found working as a call girl in Las Vegas. When asked, she says she no longer believes in Jesus but has turned to Scientology.

How might this turn of events be interpreted?

Conditional Perseverance: This is simple. She was once saved, but then turned her back on Jesus and now is lost.

The Book of Hebrews

OSAS:

- This young woman is still saved, but has lost the peace that she could have enjoyed if she had continued on her path toward sanctification. Someday she will return to the Lord, even if it is only seconds before her death.
- She is still saved by God no matter how bad she treats Him once she is saved. It matters not one bit, as far as salvation is concerned, how she treats God. God and Jesus still love her and will not turn her away from eternal life in Heaven upon her death... even if she never turns back to Jesus while on this earth. Let me give an everyday example of this: Consider a loving couple that adopts an abandoned little girl to love and to rear as their own. When this girl reaches the age of 17, she rebels from these parents and runs away from home and begins a life of sin to support herself. Years later, she returns home infected with the AIDS virus, still angry at the world, and destitute. The question is what will the parents do? It would not be a major surprise if they took her back into their house and treated her with kindness and love. After all, she is their child. Of course, she suffered terribly because she rejected them. Yet, she was at all times their child... they never disowned her. God still looks at that girl as His child even though she rejects Him during the latter half of her life. He will still be waiting for her in Heaven when she dies. In fact, she may even commit the “sin unto death” and God may take her to Heaven earlier than had she not committed apostasy.
- A third way to look at this example is to say that this young girl really wasn't a Christian at any time. For reasons that we do not know, the whole time she was professing Jesus, she had ulterior motives, which we may never know. So, she really did not turn away from Jesus...she never “knew” Him in the first place.

So now I will return to the main commentary on Hebrews. When I discuss the verses that relate to the above topic, I will point out the two ways that they could be interpreted. I certainly lean to the belief that a person cannot lose their salvation. For that reason, I will generally use that logic when interpreting those verses. But remember, millions of other Christians believe that the loss that is being written about concerns the gift of salvation... not the peace and joy that should accompany this salvation. The bottom line should be, all Christians should NEVER live their lives in such a way that they can be in danger of losing anything from God! Never lose faith in Jesus. Who in their right mind would want to gamble on this subject?

The Book of Hebrews

Chapter 3: Jesus is greater than Moses

In this chapter, a comparison is made between Moses and Jesus. Of course, Jesus is shown to be more worthy of honor than even Moses. Then, the chapter continues as the writer exhorts the Hebrew readers to stay strong in the Lord... not to ever even consider turning away from the Living God.

¹ Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess.

This chapter opens with the writer calling the readers of his letter, holy brothers and partakers of the heavenly calling. Obviously, he is talking to Christians. They were all brothers, one with each other and all with Christ. They would all live in Heaven some day. He asks for their attention because he wants these Hebrew Christians to *seriously consider* an important point he is about to make. Consider Jesus Christ, sent from God (an Apostle = “a sent one”) to be our High Priest. Jesus was sent to us to show us God... and to bring us the free gift of salvation, of course. But now, Jesus represents His children to His Father God as our High Priest. Then a comparison is made between Jesus and Moses because Moses was well known to all Hebrew people. Moses was a champion of their faith.

² He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.

Both Jesus and Moses were faithful to God in all that they were sent to accomplish. Both are worthy of the Hebrew's praise. Yet, Jesus was tasked with a far more important mission than the prophet Moses. He also was certainly able to accomplish this task, as He was God Incarnate.

³ Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. ⁵ Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. ⁶ But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

The writer now asks for these folks to think very carefully about the two prophets of God. Moses was incredible as he performed very admirably in his time on earth serving the Lord God. He was a critical cog in the house of faith that God had created beginning with Abraham. He was the recipient of the plans for the Tabernacle of God (God's House here on earth) and primarily responsible for its building. Moses was a wonderful servant of God – he served as Judge of the Israelites and received the Law from God. He was their leader throughout all those years in the wilderness. He interceded for his beloved people to assuage God's anger towards them, as they so frequently were guilty of rebellion against their Lord God. He was worthy of praise and to be remembered forever.

The Book of Hebrews

But now these Hebrew Christians were asked to consider Jesus as well. Moses was responsible for the tabernacle and the current place that the Jews had in the world ... freed out of their bondage to Egypt. Jesus was responsible for creating the world and freeing mankind from their bondage to sin! Of course this makes Jesus more worthy of praise and glory than even Moses. Not to say that Moses was and is not a great man but Jesus was the creator behind *everything* ever created! Also, it is critically important to remember that He who creates the universe is God. Jesus is God. God the Son created the universe! Jesus not only created the universe that all people live in, but He is the chief cornerstone of another great building project... the Church. All Christians are part of this “house” and everyone in this “house” has a great hope for the future... a *blessed hope*. An exhortation is then given to all these Hebrew Christians to *hold on to the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end of their lives*... this is important in order to remain a member of His “house”. True Christianity will be demonstrated by a person’s endurance. Here are the ways two well known commentators explain this verse.

- John McArthur states, “Perseverance in faith is proof of real faith. The person who returns to the rituals of the Levitical system to contribute to his own salvation proves he was never part of God’s household.” Therefore, McArthur would say that all of these Hebrew Christians could not help but remain firm to the end (otherwise, they would not have been Christians in the first place).
- The Zondervan Bible Commentary, edited by F.F. Bruce sees it another way, “This warning is directed to those who have confessed themselves true Christians. It is intended to show that true Christianity is proved by endurance, by continued confidence in and loyalty to Christ, who is our hope. He does not belong to God’s house who merely professes to do so.” Bruce suggests that this is not just a hypothetical warning (in that these Hebrew Christians are bound to remain faithful), but a very real one.

Soon, the writer of Hebrews will give more warnings concerning the tendency that some were showing to drift from their original resolve. He is about to use the familiar story of their ancestors being brought out of Egypt to make his point.

As I have previously mentioned, there will be occasional, but very important, references in the chapters to follow of the real possibility of the Hebrew recipients of this letter **losing something very, very important**. What that loss represents is a matter of differing opinion. As I have stated, many theologians who believe in the possibility of losing one’s salvation believe that is what this loss indicates... that is, the loss of salvation (i.e. one’s eternal life with Jesus in Heaven). Of course, this is not what those with the OSAS philosophy think is meant when the warning of this potential loss is given. They state that the believer is in danger of losing the very valuable peace and joy that comes with continued growth in faith and continued sanctification while here on earth plus potential loss of rewards in Heaven. Both sides deal with real and significant losses, but one, of course, much more significant than the other. Here is what the

The Book of Hebrews

famous New Schofield Reference Bible says concerning the several possibilities that a warning about this **loss** *may* be implying:

- The warning is directed to some of the Jewish people who professed to be believers in Christ but stopped short of true faith in Him after advancing to the threshold of salvation
- The warning is directed to believers who have fallen into sin to such an extent that they have crucified themselves to the Son of God afresh and are therefore disapproved and will lose their reward (that is, the reward that comes in addition to salvation... they do not lose their salvation)
- The warning is to those who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and are in danger of falling away, through unbelief or sin, and losing their salvation
- This warning presents only a hypothetical case since if one could “fall away” it would be impossible to renew him again to repentance; for, in such an instance, it would be necessary for Christ to be crucified a second time. Obviously, this will not occur; thus to actually “fall away” is impossible

Let us take a moment to consider these above four possible meanings for the *loss* that we will soon see is being warned of in the epistle to the Hebrews. Since the people being addressed are known to be Hebrew Christians we can *rule out the first possibility above*. Also, *the last case...* the “hypothetical case” argument *does not seem reasonable* as Christ died once and for all for all sins; those of yesterday, today and tomorrow. Therefore, Christ would not have to be crucified for a second time as this suggests. The two real possibilities are that the Hebrew Christian could lose their salvation *or* their rewards... just as was discussed in detail a little earlier. With that as a basis for understanding some of the more difficult verses in this book, let us continue...

Verses 7-11 give an introduction to a warning that immediately follows. This introduction retells a little of the story of when the Jews wandered in the wilderness.

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: *"Today, if you will hear His voice, ⁸ Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, ⁹ Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. ¹⁰ Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.' ¹¹ So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' "* (Psalms 95:7-11 & Hebrews 3:7-11)

A quote from a Psalm of David urges the reader to not be like their fathers who lacked faith to enter into Canaan (*their rest*) when God told them to do so. Therefore, they were made to wander in the wilderness for thirty-nine additional years! Other than Joshua and Caleb, all of the men over the age of 20, at the time when that faithless decision was made, were never permitted to enter into their rest... that is, enter into the “Promised Land”. On the other hand,

The Book of Hebrews

God never allowed any of the Israelites to return to Egypt either. They, at least, had been removed from their position in bondage.

It is appropriate to state what the “Promised Land” represents to the two different groups mentioned above. Since the Israelites wanderings in the wilderness are used here by God as an analogy to potential loss for Christians, it is not surprising that the OSAS group has a different interpretation for Canaan than does the “Conditional Perseverance” group.

- **OSAS – Canaan = the life of peace and joy** that a committed, faithful Christian can enter into through a life of sanctification ----- a Christian that loses enough faith may wander in the wilderness and have a backslidden life without peace and joy, losing their rewards in this life and the next and possibly even “sinning unto death” (yet, still is a Christian)
- **Conditional Perseverance – Canaan = Heaven** ----- a Christian that does not make it into Canaan represents to this group backsliding into the wilderness of the *non-Christian* life

The Israelites, while slaves in Egypt, represent slavery to sin. God saves them from this bondage when He brings them out of Egypt. The OSAS folks consider the Israelite wanderings in the desert due to their lack of faith at Kadesh-barnea as representing the lack of peace and joy that would normally accompany the faithful child of God as they work out their sanctification... which is what crossing into Canaan by Caleb and Joshua will represent.

The *Conditional Perseverance* folks, on the other hand, consider that God brought them out of Egypt, gave them the faith to get started on their path toward salvation, yet their subsequent lack of faith at Kadesh-barnea doomed them to the loss of their salvation and those that demonstrated this fall from grace (i.e. the men over 20 except Moses, Joshua and Caleb) wandered in the desert and died in their sins without ever entering Canaan (representing Heaven to this group). Let me quote from *The Life Application New Testament Commentary* (p. 1020), “The nation had been rescued from Egypt, had seen God’s salvation, and had been given the hope of a new land. Yet they had disobeyed. Christians have been rescued from sin, have seen God’s salvation, and have been given the hope of eternal life. For those who reject Christ, the penalty is greater than it was for the Israelites. The penalty is God’s rejection. Just as Christ is greater than Moses, those rejecting Christ will receive greater punishment than those who rejected Moses.”

Keep in mind these two different interpretations as we go on now...

[12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.](#)

After the writer of Hebrews has set the scene by reminding them of the error of their fathers, he warns them not to make an even worse mistake. Exhort one another daily. They

The Book of Hebrews

were living in very difficult days and places as the Romans persecuted Christians. Not only that, but Hebrew Christians were certainly looked upon disdainfully, at best, by most Jews. This persecution was getting worse over time. So now was the time to encourage one another... not lose faith and turn back to the old system of worship... the Law. Jesus had come to set them free. They must stay firm in their new faith.

For those Jews who had yet to give their lives to Christ, they were encouraged to do so that very day (as most have heard before, "**Today** is the day of salvation")... as at some point their heart may harden keeping them from ever again having the opportunity to give their allegiance to Jesus.

As one would expect, those theologians who believe in OSAS, state that the author of Hebrews is telling his Christian Hebrew readers to *beware* drifting into unbelief in the gospel of Jesus as this could lead to a loss of the peace and joy of their salvation and even the loss of some eternal rewards in Heaven. Others (those who believe in Conditional Perseverance) suggest that the exhortation is for them not to place their very salvation at risk due to unbelief. As always will be the case in these instances of warning, the loss threatened for sin and unbelief of the Christian is very serious. It *should be* a moot point whether the loss is salvation or the loss of the wonderful peace, joy and rewards that can be forfeited due to a lack of commitment and continuing faith (including being disciplined by God, at times, even unto death). Why? The loss of faith and commitment to Jesus would be a disaster in either case!

14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

15 As has just been said:

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

(Psalms 95:7-8)

Now the Hebrew Christians are reminded that they have become partakers of Christ. In verse 6, they were exhorted to keep the faith to *the end* to continue *steadfast* in the house of Christ. All Christians are *in* Christ. But what about life for the Christian while on earth? Will they have God's peace and joy down here? The Psalmist says we better not rebel or that will have some serious consequences. As we have discussed at length, those consequences may be a loss of salvation, or the loss of the peace, joy and other rewards potentially available to a faithful disciple of Christ (again, depending on what a person believes concerning the possibility of voluntarily giving up one's salvation by turning away from Christ).

16 Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?

17 And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Heb 3:16-19

The Book of Hebrews

As noted earlier, all but a couple of the adult men rebelled through a lack of faith when God wanted them to walk on into the Promised Land and possess it. They were afraid to do so. They did not trust that God would help them defeat the current inhabitants of Canaan. For this unbelief, God did not allow them to enter into the *rest* that He had available to them. Most expositors do believe that this rest is a not a *type* of Heaven. Instead, the rest of Canaan is believed to be analogous to a Christian having the opportunity to have peaceful *rest* while living the Christian life here on earth. Certainly, most Christians, it would seem, have great difficulties obtaining peace. If they had enough faith, God promised them a “peace that is beyond human understanding”. For lack of belief, many of the Israelites were denied the peace of their Promised Land. For lack of belief, Christians may well be denied peace during their sojourn here on earth. **What keeps people from entering into God’s peace? Their unbelief!**

To be sure, as discussed thoroughly in this section, there certainly are those students of the Bible who believe that the analogy of the lack of being able to enter Canaan is a symbol for not being able to enter Heaven.

Chapter 4: Entering into God’s Rest

¹ Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ² For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. ³ Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest.'" (Psalms 95:11) And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world.

This chapter begins with another warning to his readers to make sure that they have exercised their faith in the Messiah and believed in His work on the cross and have truly asked Him into their hearts. He is asking them to take some time to examine themselves and make sure that they have put their faith and trust in Jesus... not in anything or anyone else. He notes that the gospel message has been preached to many people, including his readers, of course. The problem is that many did not accept the gospel and act on it by making Jesus the Lord of their life. This time there is not quite the difficulty in interpreting the verses (as in chapter 3) as the author of the epistle is stating that those that have heard the gospel but did not put their faith in Jesus are those that will not enter Heaven... in other words, they were never Christians in the first place. Those that believed entered into rest; those that did not combine knowledge with faith did not.

⁴ For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work."

The Book of Hebrews

Here the author uses another example of *rest*, that is, God resting on the seventh day after creation. Of course, God still works today, but He has *rested* from the type of work that He was engaged in during those first six days of creation, The first three verses of this chapter alluded to the rest that was denied to so many of the Israelites for their lack of faith... they died before entering the Promised Land of Canaan.

⁵ And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." ⁶ It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.

The writer here refers back to verse 3 and reminds us that many people did not enter into God's rest in the days of Moses. As it turns out, many people did not enter in among the Jews of the times when this epistle was written, and many people will not enter into God's rest in our day. But... it still is true, that in any given time period some will have the faith to receive the rest that God promises.

⁷ Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it **Today**, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before:

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (Psalms 95:7,8)

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.

Just as Moses was unable to bring all of Israel into a saving faith in God, there were many Israelite men and women that were still out of the will of our Lord long after the time of Joshua. And this, of course, was long after they had crossed over the Jordan into the *promised land*. Many years later, King David, in one of his psalms, tells all men and women to listen to the voice of the Lord, do not harden your heart... instead, give your heart to Jesus, *today*. As is true today, it was true thousands of years ago; **Today** is the day of salvation. There is no better time than right now to give one's life to God through faith in His Son. There is a very special day of rest for those people who trust in Jesus for their salvation. This is referred to in the next verse as the *Sabbath-rest*.

⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

Just as God rested on the 7th day, those people who give their lives to Christ and keep strong in their faith will also have an analogous Sabbath-rest. Once a person is saved by faith in Jesus, they need to immediately give up the losing battle of attempting to be saved by works. When this is truly done, that person can rest in the finished work of Christ for their salvation.

The Book of Hebrews

After our salvation, we *obey* Jesus because we love Him and want to make Him proud... we should never again *work* for our salvation... never.

12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. **13** Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

The Holy Bible is the living Word of God. Every word within this book comes from the Holy Spirit. In the original Greek and Hebrew there were no errors. Today's translations, such as the NIV and NAS are essentially perfect in their interpretation of the original languages. When people read the Word, God speaks to them, typically in His "still, small voice" – at times, even more blatantly. It is through the reading of the Word that we learn most of what we need to know to live for Christ. God surely can see what is the intent of our heart and soul as we carry on with our lives. Very importantly, we need to read and study His Word so He can speak to us, piercing our spirit and mind... our conscience, so that we know how to live each day of our lives.

In addition to the knowledge that we gain concerning how to live our lives, we also know that "faith comes through hearing and hearing through the Word of God". We will not be able to grow in faith, as we should, unless we study God's Word.

To any faithful student of the Bible, it goes without saying that God always is aware of our motives and our actions. We cannot hide anything from God. This fact is stated in this chapter to remind any of the Hebrews (and any of us) that needed reminding. It certainly is a fact that many Christians *act* as if they could hide things from their Lord. It cannot be done.

14 Therefore, since we have a great High Priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. **16** Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Heb 4:1-16

All Christians have a powerful High Priest sitting right now at the right hand of God, the Father. He is continually intervening for all of His children, all those who have put their faith in Him for their salvation and sanctification. He will not fail to represent us adequately to His Father. Jesus is not only our Savior, but He is our intermediary to God. We cannot lose as long as we place our trust in Him.

Jesus can not only sympathize with our problems in life, but He can empathize. He lived life as a human for some 33 years. His human body and mind was subject to the same limitations as our bodies. He experienced physical and mental pain and anguish. He was tested by Satan who attempted to make Him sin. Yet, Jesus was able to live His entire life without committing even one sin. Of course, that is the reason His sacrifice was sufficient to pay the

The Book of Hebrews

penalty for the sins of humanity – for that portion of humanity that believes in Him and accepts this wonderful gift from the Savior. We are told to come boldly to His throne, not only for the gift of salvation, but for help in those many times we struggle in life. He wants to lessen our load. He knows that life is not easy.

Chapter 5: Jesus, our High Priest of the order of Melchizedek

This chapter continues on with the theme of showing why Christ is superior to the Levitical priests.

¹ Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. ³ This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. ⁴ No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,

First, a description of the attributes of the earthly Levitical High Priest is given. He is appointed to this position. His job entails offering gifts and sacrifices for himself and the people to God. He should have compassion for the people for their problems for he can empathize with them... after all, he is human too. Not just anyone can have the honor and duty of this position, only God can call a man to this office, just as Aaron was called by God so many centuries ago.

⁵ So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a High Priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have begotten You." (Psalms 2:7)

In the same way as the Levitical priests were appointed by the Father, Jesus was appointed as High Priest by His Father. God sent His only begotten son to do what was necessary to save mankind.

He certainly did not come to earth to glorify Himself. In the first incarnation, if anything, it was quite the opposite. He came to us as a baby, grew up as a young carpenter, then spent 3-4 years ministering as a servant of the people. Then, this culminated in His suffering on the cross for our sins. No, Jesus certainly did not come to glorify Himself.

⁶ As He also says in another place: "*You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*"; (Psalms 110:4)

Here a distinction is made between two different orders of priesthood, the Levitical order and the order of Melchizedek. With the exception of Melchizedek himself, who appeared to Abraham in the Old Testament (Gen chap. 14), Jesus is the only other priest mentioned in the

The Book of Hebrews

Bible that was in this order. Melchizedek appeared in Genesis only briefly, then disappeared except to be mentioned later by David, briefly in Matthew, and many times in Hebrews. David not only predicted that the Messiah would come from this order, but also be an everlasting priest. So what differentiated these two orders? What made Melchizedek special? He certainly was a very interesting and mysterious character. Abraham met him after that patriarch had defeated the kings of the east. These eastern kings had taken his nephew Lot captive in an earlier war between Sodom, Gomorrah and their allies against many eastern nations. Abraham brought back not only Lot but also the king of Sodom and many other men and women who had also just been taken captive. Abraham was offered a great reward by the king of Sodom, but refused to benefit from this heathen king. That is when King Melchizedek makes his entrance into the Bible.

[18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, 19 and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. 20 And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."](#) Gen 14:18-20

As we see in these few verses, Melchizedek engaged Abram in a supper of bread and wine (quite reminiscent of another famous supper to come). He also **blessed Abram** and offered up blessings to God. The first mention of the concept of tithing is mentioned as **Abram tithes to this King**. In chapter 7, much more detail will be given relating to this mysterious king. Salem means "**peace**". Melchizedek means King of **Righteousness**. As can be seen, it is fairly obvious that this king is a *type* of Jesus. Just take a look at all of the points just mentioned and it becomes rather obvious. He was the priest of the most High God in this Old Testament time. Jesus, of course, is our High Priest to God. Jesus is also the King of Righteousness and certainly brings peace to all His children... and eventually to the world. Abram entered into a supper of bread and wine with this king. We are to enter into the Lord's Supper, of bread and wine with our King. Abram tithed to this king. We are to tithe to our King. Melchizedek was a **king/priest**. Jesus is a King/Priest/Prophet. Levitical priests certainly were not kings. Jesus has existed from eternity past and will exist forever. He was not created nor will He ever cease to exist. Melchizedek **comes out of nowhere on to the pages of the Bible. He vanishes from the pages of the Bible without mention of his demise**. There are so many reasons that we can see how Jesus fits into this order of Melchizedek.

[7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered](#)

Here mention is made of the prayers and supplications that Jesus made to God while in His human incarnation. During these 33-34 years, Jesus experienced those physical and emotional things that all humans experience... with the exception of having sinful thoughts or engaging in sinful deeds, of course. It is intriguing to contemplate the method of communication

The Book of Hebrews

that Jesus primarily used to interact with His Father... prayer and supplication (fervent, humble prayer). Although there were times of audible communication, these were fairly rare. Jesus used the same exact method to give and receive information and comfort from God as we are asked to use. The fact that this is true is really kind of amazing. Prayer is really the key to our relationship with Jesus and God... and a prayerful reading and studying of His Living Word, the Bible. God will listen to us, and then He will communicate to us. Let us not forget one other important means of communication and worship used effectively by Jesus... fasting. That excellent method has really gone by the wayside in the world today... but it should not be overlooked.

Returning now to the verses 7-8, we see that Jesus in His humanity was not beyond agonizing while in the Garden of Gethsemane. If He had been, that would have been a little weird to say the least. He was about to go to the cross, suffer enormously even before He was nailed to the cross, and then die a horrible death. Worse than that by far, He was going to suffer the penalty for all of the sins of mankind. Just think about it. All humanity would have had to spend an eternity in Hell, suffering forever in ways one does not even want to contemplate. Jesus, in our stead, would have to take this suffering onto Himself as He was substituting Himself for us. Jesus was truly God the Son. But, Jesus was also human. In His humanity, He showed His emotions. At the funeral of His friend Lazarus, He cried. He later cried over His beloved Jerusalem. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He cried out to God and asked, “**let this cup pass from Me.**” Of course, he quickly followed by telling His Father that he wanted to do His (God’s) will. Then it was quickly confirmed to Jesus that He was to die that next day on the cross.

Let there be no misunderstanding, Jesus experienced physical and emotional pain. That was the plan. He was to experience what we experience. He handled this entire experience with a “godly fear” as we all should. As verse 8 tells us, even as the Son of the most High God, Jesus learned obedience through His sufferings. These sufferings had to be genuine, and they absolutely were, or the whole concept of Jesus paying the penalty for our sins would have been a sham.

⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

So Jesus then did go to Calvary and died on the cross. He lived and died without sin. He was perfect in life, and perfect in His sacrificial death. Therefore, His offering of Himself as a sacrificial Lamb of God was acceptable to His Father and this resulted in Jesus being the author of eternal salvation for all who trust Him and believe. How do we show our love for Him? By obeying Him.

¹⁰ called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," ¹¹ of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the

The Book of Hebrews

oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Heb 5:1-14

Once again, the writer mentions that Jesus is our High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek”. He shows a little disdain for some of his intended readers as he suggests that they have become a little dull when it came time to listen and learn these Biblical truths. Many of them were obviously not studying the scriptures and learning more and more about their Savior. He says that they had even begun to forget some of the first principles of Christianity. This, in fact, was the purpose of this letter... to get them back on track so they would not fall for false doctrine that was becoming prevalent in that day. We have that problem in a very big way today as well. Far too many people are not grounded in even basic biblical principles.

I often have asked older people in my position as a doctor (and it is easy to steer the conversation to this question), if they think they are going to Heaven when they die. If they said, ‘yes’, I asked why they thought God would let them in. I used to be amazed at the answer because it almost always was a variation on the theme of “I have been a pretty good person.” When I asked these same people if they knew what the Bible said about this topic, most had no idea. The amazing thing was that most of these people claimed that they were Christians and many said that they had attended church for many decades! My word! They had even forgotten their “milk”!

Not only were these Hebrew Christians guilty of not going on to the solid food of the scriptures, most of America today is guilty as well. At this very moment, as we study the epistle to the Hebrews, we all are “eating solid food”. If we continue, we will learn more and more how to grow closer to Jesus and how to become more like Him. That should be our goal in life.

Chapter 6: Believers must stay strong in their faith

¹ Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ² instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And God permitting, we will do so.

This chapter begins with the author saying that he is about to go on to a subject with more depth than some of his audience may have been used to hearing about. Now, he felt, it was time to take a step forward and learn more than just about how to be saved, baptism, etc. (all those items mentioned in verse 2 above). So, God willing, he was about to dig in with his lesson...

The Book of Hebrews

⁴ It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, ⁶ if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

The above three verses are three of the more controversial verses in the book of Hebrews. Depending on the belief of the commentator, there are two basic interpretations as follows:

- John McArthur, who believes OSAS, states that these verses are referring to those Hebrews in the reading audience who knew quite a bit about Jesus and were certainly strongly considering giving their lives over to Him. They were *enlightened* (i.e. had knowledge) about the gospel; they had momentarily *tasted the goodness* of God and what His Son had accomplished with His sacrificial death. McArthur feels that the reference to the Holy Spirit may relate to “their participation in the miraculous ministry of Jesus who was empowered by the Spirit” while on earth. However, he believes that the people mentioned as possibly “falling away” are not Christians. If they do turn away from Christ, they will not be brought back to salvation... they will have lost their chance... their hearts will have been hardened.
- F.F.Bruce looks at these verses differently. He says, “the things listed here by the writer to describe the “fallen” are most certainly things that characterize all true Christians.” He states that the phrases “once been enlightened”, “tasted the heavenly gift”, “shared in the Holy Spirit” and “tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age” all are attributes only of Christians. Therefore, he believes that the writer of Hebrews is concerned that some of his Hebrew friends are in danger of losing their salvation.

Of course, one of these two interpretations is right... the other wrong. As I have labored to point out, regardless of who is right, it is critical to keep our faith in Jesus Christ once we have turned to Him. If we do, the question of who is right becomes a moot point!

⁷ Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. ⁸ But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

An illustration is given to demonstrate what was meant by the aforementioned warning. Good land will receive, keep and use the rain that falls upon it in order to produce a good crop. That same rain also falls on other land that cannot absorb it properly or use it properly (maybe it is too hard and the rain runs off, or maybe it evaporates dry from the scorching sun). Unfortunately, only thorns and thistles will grow on this worthless land... and it is in danger of being cursed. If it is unable to correct the problem, it will be burned in the end.

The Book of Hebrews

⁹ Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case-- things that accompany salvation. ¹⁰ God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

Although a very important warning has just been given, the writer to the Hebrews is confident that those reading his words will be faithful to their Lord and Savior all the way through to the end of their lives. God will reward them for this faithfulness and for all the work that they have done and will do as they spread and teach the gospel to others.

¹¹ We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. ¹² We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

So keep on with the faithful work currently undertaken. It is not always easy to continue to work for the Lord, Jesus all through the years. Some folks start out like gangbusters, but in a few months, let alone a few years, they have cooled off, sometimes completely. For some of these saints, it would be difficult to know that they are Christians by their works. Although no one is saved because of their work for God, all Christians should be *recognized as such by their works*. Therefore, all should be hard working, faithful Christians until that moment that we step into Heaven and meet Jesus face to face.

¹³ When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by Himself, ¹⁴ saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." (Genesis 22:16-17) ¹⁵ And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. ¹⁶ Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷ Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath

This is rather an interesting note. Sometimes people make a promise and add emphasis to show that they are really telling the truth and mean what they say. This is accomplished often by "swearing to God". Now, Jesus tells us in the gospels not to do this ourselves, but to just let our 'yes be yes' and our 'no be no'. On the other hand, in Old Testament times, God did use this technique to add emphasis to His Covenant promise to Abraham. Intriguingly, since He is the ultimate power, He had to, of course, swear by Himself. That fact does bring a little smile to my face, frankly. I just think that this is intriguing.

So what was God swearing to Himself? God was going to bless the *chosen people* down through the ages (¹⁷ "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.") Gen 22:17-18 God did bless this nation and will bless them in the future.

The Book of Hebrews

Through their “seed”, Jesus Christ, they have also brought salvation to the Gentiles. Their Messiah is our Messiah. He came out of the Jewish nation and came to the Jewish nation. They rejected Him in His first incarnation... He, of course, also came for all other people who would accept His free gift of salvation. Now we live in the Church Age, which is dominated by Gentiles. One day in the future, the Jews will see their Messiah coming again... right to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. They will finally recognize Him for who He is... God the Son.

¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. Heb 6:1-20

God wants us to know that His pledge is sure. How? There are two reasons, each one that would be totally sufficient on their own. First, God simply cannot lie and He had given His promise to Abraham and his descendants. Second, to really make this point iron clad... God swears it to us, which He rarely does... only to prove to the recipient of the promise that the promise has absolutely no chance of ever being rescinded!

The phrase “we who have fled” references the Old Testament times when a person would flee to a “city of refuge” (a safe haven) if they accidentally were responsible for another person’s death. They would be in mortal danger of the punishment of death if caught. Yet, once they made it to one of these refuge cities, they were safe... analogous to the safety we have and should feel, in the arms of our Savior, Jesus.

We now should trust in this promise completely and depend on it to anchor our lives. No doubt, there are many difficult situations in life. Use this promise from God, provided by Jesus’ sacrifice, to help us through those tough times.

The disciples watched as Jesus ascended up into Heaven. He entered into the Heavenly Sanctuary... figuratively, behind the curtain. Recall that the Tabernacle and Temple had a veil/curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. Now Jesus sits in the Heavenly “Holy of Holies” interceding, as the Christian’s High Priest, for those He has saved via His blood sacrifice.

Chapter 7: Jesus is from a superior order of priesthood

The next section of this book to the Hebrews is concerned with showing the Hebrew Christians just why they should know that this new High Priesthood was superior to the Levitical system. The reason is because the High Priest of this New Covenant was infinitely more qualified than any of the Levitical priests. Chapter 7 develops the notion that Jesus was in a better *order of priesthood*. Chapter 8 talks of His better *Covenant*. Chapter 9 points to His

The Book of Hebrews

superior *sanctuary*. Finally, this section concludes with the convincing argument of Jesus' better *sacrifice*.

King Melchizedek was introduced in the book of Genesis. He has also already been introduced to the readers of this book back in chapter 5. Recall that this king met Abraham as the patriarch returned in triumph, defeating several eastern kings that had taken his nephew, Lot, captive. No doubt, he is a mysterious figure in the Bible. He is a *type* of Christ, as is discussed in some detail in the early verses in this chapter. The point is going to be driven home to the Hebrew readers of several parallels between Melchizedek and their High Priest, Jesus. Even more details are given to prove that Christ is far more excellent than any Levitical High Priest could ever be.

¹ This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, ² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." ³ Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. ⁴ Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!

Everything mentioned in the above verses has been discussed in the commentary of chapter 5. Maybe the only additional point to emphasize here is the sentence “**Just think how great he was.**” This comment follows immediately after noting how this king never had his genealogy mentioned in the Bible. The suggestion is made that this makes him an everlasting priest... like Jesus. Obviously, we are led to believe that King Melchizedek was a man, but a *type* of Christ, God used him to pre-figure Jesus. Why would God do this? Generally, all Old Testament *types* seemingly are used by God to demonstrate His foreknowledge of coming events. He demonstrates His omniscience and omnipotence as He shows us His uncanny ability to know all future events. *Types* are an interesting form of prophesy.

⁵ Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people--that is, their brothers--even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. ⁶ This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater.

The earliest mentioning of tithing is from Abraham to Melchizedek. Although Abraham was the special Old Testament saint, who arguably was the most important person of all of the *chosen people* of God, he still was the one receiving the blessing – not the one giving it! The custom was, as noted, the lesser person is blessed by the greater. Just who was this king anyway? We are never told... only intriguing hints are given.

The Book of Hebrews

⁸ In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. ⁹ One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, ¹⁰ because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

Admittedly, verses 8-10 are a little difficult to understand. Here is what they are saying. The Levitical priests were all descendents of Abraham. Of course, all these priests, who collected tithes as part of their jobs, would all die, many of these deaths being recorded in the Old Testament. On the other hand, Jesus is eternal. Melchizedek, because he is a *type* of Jesus, has no scriptural mention of his birth or death. He is declared, one might say, “to be living”. Now, the confusing part. Since Abraham is the Patriarch of the Levite family (i.e. Levi was “[in the body of his ancestor](#)” Abraham) and Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek, one might say that the Levites paid a tithe to this mysterious king (in a sense). At least their great-great-great...great grandpa did. This again, suggests that Melchizedek is greater than the Levitical priests.

Next a comparison is laid out between Jesus and Melchizedek.

¹¹ If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come--one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.

If salvation could have been attained via the Levitical system of priests, there would be no need for any other *order* of priesthood. The problem was that after over a millennium of the current Levitical system of worship and sacrifice, it had become patently obvious that there was not going to be a mechanism whereby mankind was going to be able to save himself via the Law and animal sacrifice. In fact, truth be told, there never was any chance of that happening. But God wanted to demonstrate to man that it could not be done. One might ask, did God really need to do that? Wasn't it always obvious that man would never develop adequate morals and ethics to reach the point that he could keep the Law? Apparently not. Not even today. Just think of the New Age movement... they still teach that man will someday usher in an age of human perfection. Some people will never learn. Also, the whole idea behind re-incarnation is that at some point a man or woman will reach moral perfection at which time they will enter into Nirvana (or the *clear*, etc.). Just how many Hindus or Buddhists do you know that are perfect people? Given the fact that this system was not going to lead to *perfection*, a new system was imperative. Jesus ushered in that New Covenant.

¹³ He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. ¹⁵ And what we have said is even more clear if

The Book of Hebrews

another priest like Melchizedek appears, ¹⁶ one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is declared:

"You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." (Psalms 110:4)

Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. No one from that tribe ever served as a priest under Moses or anytime thereafter. This job, under the Law, was set aside for the Levites. Moses himself said nothing about any earthly priest coming from Judah. If a High Priest came out of this tribe, this Priest certainly would not be under the Levitical Order... and He wasn't. All of the Levite priests, from Aaron on down through the ages, were born into their position by the Law and the edicts of God. Their ancestry determined their position in life.

Now someone new had come along who was not born into the Levitical tribe. Obviously, Jesus would not be able to serve as a Levite priest. Yet, the Triune God did send Jesus to earth with the complete intention of having Him become the High Priest of a better order... the order of Melchizedek. Through the power of living a perfect life as a human being, Jesus would sacrifice Himself for mankind to save those who trust in Him from their sins. Very soon after accomplishing His mission on earth two thousand years ago, He went to Heaven to carry out the calling of High Priest. He will remain our High Priest forever.

¹⁸ The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

The Levitical system needed to be set aside as it was not able to justify anyone. Not only that, but given the action shown by the Israelites from the time that the Law was given to Moses, all the way to the time of Christ, this system was unable to help the people, in any consequential way, to lead a good life, let alone produce righteousness in them leading to salvation.

²⁰ And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, ²¹ but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him:

"The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" (Psalms 110:4)

Next on God's agenda was to send a High Priest that had the power to save the people. Jesus was that Priest... a priest, as we have seen, of the order of Melchizedek. God sent His only begotten Son to give His life as a ransom for many... for all those who would accept Him as their Savior. God has sworn an oath that Jesus would be the High Priest forever.

²² Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. ²³ Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. ²⁶ Such a

The Book of Hebrews

high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

All of the Levitical priests had limitations. Their power was certainly limited. Their righteousness was only that of a man... certainly they all were with sin. Regardless of their excellence, and some were fine men and priests, they all eventually died. None of them could save anything for eternity, especially a man or woman.

Jesus lives forever and now is seated at God's right hand. He intercedes for His children now and forever. He has total power to carry out His purpose. He will bring all those who trust in Him to Heaven some day. He will not lose one soul.

²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. Hebrews 7:1-28

The Levite high priests were required to offer continual sacrifices, including offering sacrifices for their own sins. Once another sin was committed, and the people always were sure to continue in sin, additional sacrifices were required. Jesus also had to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Because of His perfection, His offer was acceptable to God as the payment for all mankind's sins, past, present and future. That offer was His life on the cross PLUS taking the penalty on His person for all of mankind's sins. What a wonderful Savior we have.

Chapter 8: The superiority of the New Covenant

¹ The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a High Priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

Following the last few verses of the previous chapter, the writer states that he is about to make his "main point". So this chapter is concerned with pointing out the superiority of the priestly ministry of Jesus and the superiority of the New Covenant. Certainly, there had been a priestly ministry assigned and run by the Levites since the time of Moses on earth. This, of course, took place in a tabernacle at first, and then a beautiful Temple designed by David (under the direction of God) and built by Solomon, followed by the second Temple. All of these kings, priests and sanctuaries were, of course, earth bound. Now, however, we have a High Priest, Jesus, that is literally in Heaven, sitting at the right hand of the omnipotent Father, God! Jesus is now a living resident in the actual Heavenly home of God! This is the true Tabernacle of the

The Book of Hebrews

Lord... He Himself designed and built it! Next, is a discussion concerning His current work while in His Heavenly Tabernacle...

³ Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this One also to have something to offer.

Priests have always offered gifts and sacrifices to God. The gifts are to honor Him for all that He has given and done for mankind. The sacrifices are given as some form of an appeasement for man's sins. When man sins, they lose their relationship with God... they also cannot enter into salvation when they have unrepentant sins and have not paid the penalty for those sins. With temple sacrifices and ceremony, a temporary system was instituted by God to pay the penalty for those sins in Old Testament times. It was not meant to be adequate, but was a forerunner of the things to come. The job of offering the sacrifices was not a simple one. It was a lot of work. Massive numbers of animals were offered each year. The duties of each priest kept them very busy, especially when it came time to perform the sacrifices.

Now, however, the Messiah had just recently come and, once and for all, sacrificed Himself to pay the entire penalty for all of mankind's sins. Jesus was now in Heaven, as we just noted, but He was not walking to and fro busying Himself with multiple and continuing sacrifices as the earthly priests had always done. Jesus offered Himself up once and for all as the perfect sacrifice for all mankind and all time. He now sits in Heaven as a Living Sacrifice for all people if only they will turn to Him as the author and finisher of their salvation.

The earthly author of Hebrews then will note that Jesus would not even qualify as a priest on earth under Mosaic Law...

⁴ If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵ They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." (Exodus 25:40)

First it is pointed out that if Jesus were still abiding only on earth, He would not be a priest as the Law called for earthly priests to come out of the Levite tribe. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. He also briefly alludes to the fact that the gifts and sacrifices that these Levite priests offer are but a shadow of the Heavenly things that are going on, in that day and today and in the future. As an interesting side point, the fact that priests here are noted to offer the "gifts according to the Law" at that time on earth, it must still have been possible to offer these sacrificial gifts to God. That strongly suggests that this letter was written before the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70.

Moses was given detailed instructions on building the Tabernacle when he made his trips up onto Mount Sinai. J.Vernon McGee paints a beautiful picture of how this "tent" was a *type* of the coming Messiah, Jesus. The first compartment to the Tabernacle was called the Holy Place.

The Book of Hebrews

This had three articles of furniture, the golden lampstand, the golden table of showbread, and the golden altar. These three items pre-figured Christ as the light of the world, the bread of life and Christ as our High Priest and intercessor to God. On the great Day of Atonement, the high priest passed through the veil into the Holy of Holies. There were housed the Ark of the Covenant covered by the mercy seat. Around the Tabernacle was a court with two more pieces of furniture, the brazen altar and a laver for washing. The brazen altar was where the sacrifices were done. The laver was where the priest could wash, signifying the washing from sin. The priests worked and worshipped in the Holy Place. Once a year, only the High Priest would enter into the Holy of Holies and into the presence of God. When Jesus completed His incredible work of sacrificing Himself for our sins, the veil between the world and the Holy of Holies was rent from top to bottom... signifying that we all now have direct access to God. The Holy of Holies is now in Heaven as that is where God the Father and His Son, Jesus reside. During all of those years in the wilderness, there was constant activity when the Tabernacle was up. It was surrounded by the twelve tribes of Israel. The priests were feverishly working at their jobs. They literally did not have any seats on which to sit. There was a pillar of fire over the tent at night and a cloud above it during the day.

All of this was a shadow of things to come... now, the entire process of the priestly intercession is taking place in Heaven, with Jesus at the helm. Ever since Jesus rose from the dead, we have had our Great Intercessor in Heaven. As His job on earth is finished, he is now sitting at the right hand of His Father in Heaven. Not only is He sitting, but He sits on a throne! We no longer need a priest on earth in order to come to God. We can boldly approach God directly now as Jesus has given us access.

⁶ But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. ⁷ For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said:

"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

¹³ By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. Heb 8:1-13

The Book of Hebrews

Christ is no longer down here on earth. That is certainly to our great advantage. Now that Jesus is back up in Heaven, He is continuously interceding on His children's behalf with His Father. We need it! There is a New Covenant, also known as the New Testament. The Old Law and Covenant had been given to Moses. This was made soon after God, using Moses, led the Israelites out of Egypt. That covenant was conditional on the *chosen people* following, obeying and worshipping God. If and when they stopped following and obeying God, He would no longer honor the terms of the Old Covenant. That was the deal. The Israelites certainly did not live up to their side of the Covenant and therefore God actually provided for their capture and eventual dispersion throughout the world. Obviously, this Old Covenant was not "faultless" so a new one was needed. This chapter ends with the notation that the Old Covenant is about to vanish away. It probably was only a few years later that the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans thus making Temple sacrifice impossible. Interesting "coincidence"? Old Covenant worship was not possible after A.D. 70.

The Old Covenant was never meant to be permanent anyway. It was used as a means to show the world that keeping the Law was not possible for humans to do in our present "fallen" condition. The system that God set up in the time of Moses always was meant to teach the Jew (and the Gentile) that a perfect sacrifice was going to be needed at some point. The temporary system of animal sacrifice was not going to suffice to truly pay the penalty for the world's sins. That perfect sacrifice would have to be provided by God the Son, Jesus. That is what the Messiah would do on His first trip to the world, His incarnation. Later, He would come again to reign as King, but only after He had secured salvation for His people through His sacrificial death, burial and resurrection. He had to pay for our sins first.

The New Covenant is certainly a better covenant. First laid out in Jeremiah, it has many attributes that place it above the Old Covenant:

- It does not put the Law on stone as did the Old Covenant. Instead, after we turn to Jesus, repent of our sins, believe that He died for our sins and rose from the dead, and ask Him into our heart, we are given a Law that is written in our hearts, mind and conscience. With the daily help of the Holy Spirit, *it is possible* for us to obey and follow God. This covenant is for all people, Jew and Gentile, weak and strong, rich and poor.
- Jesus, the Son of God, is the High Priest of this Covenant
- Certainly, it is ministered from a better sanctuary, Heaven instead of earth
- It has a better sacrifice than bulls, doves and lambs, etc., in fact, a perfect sacrifice... Jesus Himself. This New Covenant could and did provide total forgiveness for all sins. The Old Covenant could not do this.

This New Covenant is the only covenant at this time. The Old Mosaic Covenant is not in operation any longer. No one should try to follow it.

Note that the writer tells the Hebrew Christians that there will come a day when all twelve tribes will unite under this New Covenant. The house of Israel and Judah will once again come together as they accept their Messiah, Jesus... the very one that they rejected two thousand

The Book of Hebrews

years ago. This is beginning to happen today. The twelve tribes are certainly uniting back in their Promised Land. That was the first step. Now, slowly but surely, there are more and more Messianic Jews... believers in Christ. One day in the future, in the end times, there will be a mass revival of Jews turning back to God through the Messiah, Jesus. This time is likely close at hand. Verse 11 will come true at some point in the future. In the Millennial Kingdom, everyone will know Jesus and what He has done. You will not be able to find a person on earth who is not aware of this fact during His reign then of 1,000 years... nor after that time.

One more point of explanation concerning this New Covenant. The author of this epistle was, of course, writing this to Hebrew Christians. When he tells them of the New Covenant, it really is pointing to the Millennial Kingdom when the House of Israel will once again unite and follow the Messiah. Yet, the New Covenant became a reality for the Gentiles (and a remnant of Jews such as Peter, Paul and John, etc.) immediately after Pentecost. After the Great Tribulation, Jew and Gentile will all be united under Christ's New Covenant with Jesus continuing, of course, as the High Priest.

Chapter 9: The New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant – a comparison

This chapter gives a wonderful comparison between the Old Covenant with its Tabernacle and the New Covenant with Jesus at the helm. It shows how the New is infinitely better than the Old. In Old Testament days, the Israelite people worshipped God in the Tabernacle, then later the Temple. God even had a special area reserved for Himself within these structures of worship... in the Holy of Holies. Yet, only the High Priest was able to enter into the Holy of Holies, and that was only one time per year... the Day of Atonement. He was the only person who had any direct access to God.

Now, with the New Covenant, the sanctuary is in Heaven. This is where God and His Son Jesus, our High Priest, reside. As you may recall, when Jesus "finished" His job on the cross, which was to complete His sacrificial death for mankind, He called out "**It is finished**". Right at that time, an earthquake of some sort resulted in the renting of the veil (from top to bottom) which had separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. This was God signifying to the people that from that point on there would be direct access to Jesus and the Father... there would no longer be a veil of separation. Heaven is where we need to direct our worship today. Jesus and His Father await our prayers.

The writer of Hebrews begins this chapter with a discussion of the contents of the earthly Tabernacle. This was briefly mentioned a few pages back as well.

¹ Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. ² A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place.

The Book of Hebrews

In one area of the tabernacle (the Holy Place) two items representing aspects of Christ stood:

- The lampstand – represents Jesus, the light of the world
- The showbread (12 loaves of bread replaced each Sabbath (the old bread was then eaten) – represents Jesus, the bread of life

³ Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies), ⁴ which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered Ark of the Covenant. This Ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant.

⁵ Above the Ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the mercy seat. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

The golden altar actually was placed immediately outside the Holy of Holies. There are a few different possibilities mentioned as to why the author chose to say that the “Most Holy Place” “had” the golden altar when, in fact, the altar was located just outside the veil to this area. In any case, the actual usage of the altar’s contents took place in the Holy of Holies. Incense and coals from the altar were brought into this “room” on the Day of Atonement. Certainly, the ministry of the altar was within the Holy of Holies.

The actual contents of this section are:

- Mercy Seat – where the blood of the animal sacrifice was sprinkled to “cover” man temporarily from the penalty for his sins – the same Hebrew word is also translated as “propitiation” which is what Jesus was for us. He was the “propitiation/Mercy Seat” for our sins
- The Ark of the Covenant with:
 - Manna – representing the bread of life – Jesus gave us the Living Word to feed on every day
 - Aaron’s rod that budded – representing the death (rod) and resurrection (budding) of Christ
 - The tablets of the Law – Jesus fulfilled the Law
 - Cherubim (angels) watched over the entire process from above

⁶ When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. ⁷ But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and **never without blood**, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

The priests were continually working at their jobs every day of the year. Sacrifices were performed with regularity in the Holy Place (the first part of the Tabernacle). On Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement, the High Priest was called on to enter into the Holy of Holies (second part of the Tabernacle) to offer up the major sacrifice for the sins of the people, including his

The Book of Hebrews

own. Not all sins were covered however... only those referred to as ‘sins of ignorance’. High handed, open defiance of God's law was not atoned for.

It was extremely important that he do this ceremony correctly. If he did not, he would be struck down dead. It is said that he had a chain around his foot to allow the other priests to drag him out if that occurred... as they would not have been able to go after him. This, as can be seen, was very serious business. Note what word was used (in verse 7) when telling what he brought into the Holy of Holies... blood. Blood was the necessary sacrificial material to cover the people's sins. In this case, it was the blood of a spotless animal – representing the future sacrificial blood of the sinless Jesus Christ. Always remember, “[without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.](#)” (Hebrews 9:22)

[⁸ The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. ⁹ This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. ¹⁰ They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings-- external regulations applying until the time of the new order.](#)

The Hebrews were then told that this Tabernacle (and later, Temple) worship service could not make the man who brings the sacrifice “perfect”. Yes, it all was required by God and it certainly was a good and proper ceremony to carry out. In fact, it was necessary to perform these sacrifices to be right with God. Yet, they certainly had their limitations. They could not save anyone from their sins... they did not even *cover* all *potential* sins. The ceremonies then listed concerning food, drinks, washings, etc. were appropriate to do only until the reformation - i.e. the New Covenant - i.e. until Jesus came. And Jesus had already come!

[¹¹ When Christ came as High Priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.](#)

Yes, Jesus had come, lived, died for our sins, and now was interceding for His children while sitting at the right hand of God. He was in the Tabernacle in Heaven, an everlasting Tabernacle not made with human hands, not subject to destruction or imperfection.

[¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!](#)

The Book of Hebrews

Jesus entered into the Heavenly Tabernacle just after He died on the cross. His shed blood was accepted by God as the agent capable of cleansing the Christian from their sins. Remember, the Bible clearly states that without blood there is no remission of sins. The rhetorical question is posed as to how much more efficacious the blood of the perfect Savior would be as a sacrifice to cleanse man from his sins. Just a bit later, he tells us exactly what Jesus' sacrifice will be able to accomplish...

15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

What will Jesus' sacrifice accomplish? Here is the answer. Those who are called and accept that call and receive Jesus as their Savior will receive the promise of eternal life!!! Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant. He came to give everyone this New Covenant... a promise of eternal life through Him. Placing our faith in Jesus and His shed blood gives us forgiveness of all our sins... not just the sins of ignorance. Any sin committed under the Law of Moses is forgiven by the Mediator of this New Covenant.

16 In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, **17** because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living.

Virtually every adult should have a will. A will tells those folks left behind what a person wants done after his death regarding his possessions. It certainly makes things much easier for those left behind and allows a person to spell out exactly what they want to pass on and to whom. On the other hand, it does not really come into play until a person dies. Typically it just sits in a safe somewhere until that day comes. Jesus left us a will... a New Will... a New Covenant... a New Testament. It was thrust into action upon His death, as we would expect from a will. God, His Father, began carrying out His Son's will very soon after His wonderful and beloved Son's death. In fact, very soon after His death, God brought His Son home to Heaven. Right after that, God brought His Son's brothers and sisters up there to be with Jesus and with the angels and with the Father, Himself. Wow, what a will that was and is. All Christians are in that will as well! But, only Christians.

18 This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. **19** When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. **20** He said, "*This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.*" (Exodus 24:8) **21** In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything

The Book of Hebrews

used in its ceremonies. ²² In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**

Here we see a reminder of how the ceremony was carried out in the days of the Old Covenant. This system was certainly appropriate for many a century for the faithful Israelite to carry out. No more, however. In fact, after the time of Jesus, it was wrong to slip back into this system... it was a sin. This section ends with that famous Biblical truth... “**without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**”

²³ It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

Now, Jesus is up in Heaven performing the necessary intervention for His children continuously and certainly effectively. His sacrifice is the Perfect One. He is in the presence of Holy God, His Father, at this very moment. No longer is man depending on a shadow of the true Heavenly Tabernacle and using an animal copy instead of the needed sacrifice. Now, the necessary sacrificial Lamb has carried out His work on this earth successfully. He now is carrying out His work in His Heavenly Tabernacle... interceding for Christians everywhere with His Father.

²⁵ Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶ Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. Heb 9:25-28

Jesus had to die only once on the cross for mankind's sins. In the Old Covenant days, the High Priest had to enter the Holy of Holies every year on the Day of Atonement and repeat the sacrifice of an animal and the sprinkling of its blood. With our New Covenant, Jesus had to die on the cross just once for all time. His shed blood was necessary, but also sufficient for all people and all ages, past, present and future.

All men and women will die unless the rapture comes first (there may be a rare exception such as Elijah and Enoch, but they may even die someday if they come back during the tribulation). For everyone else though, it is appointed once to die (by the way, not twice or more – i.e. there is no re-incarnation). Then what? For Christians, the Bema Judgment will come and they will be given any and all rewards that they have earned for their service to Christ while on the earth.

The Book of Hebrews

For everyone else, the Great White Throne Judgment will commence. This is the time when all non-Christian mankind will answer for their sinful lives. The inescapable problem here is that these people will not have Jesus as their attorney. They certainly will not have Him as their Savior. They are out of luck.

A comparison of the attributes of the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary:

Earthly Sanctuary:

- Location is on earth where it is subject to destruction (as in A.D.70)
- It was temporary
- A thick veil separates the people from God
- The sacrifices are temporary fixes to cover sin... they cannot eliminate sins penalty
- The High Priest is human with all of humanities imperfections
- The sacrifices are animals
- It was only a “type” of the real sanctuary of God
- It was constructed by humans
- It belonged to Israel
- Blessings from worship and sacrifice were temporary
- It used animal blood to “cover” sins temporarily

Heavenly Sanctuary:

- Location is in Heaven
- It is permanent
- There is direct access for all people to God and Jesus
- The sacrifice provided by Jesus was for all time... once and for all
- The High Priest is Jesus (God the Son)
- The sacrifice was a “perfect” human (Jesus) and therefore acceptable to the Father
- It was made by God
- It belongs to the whole world
- Blessings from this Heavenly Sanctuary result in eternal salvation
- It uses the blood of Jesus to “cleanse” sins from all believers permanently

As can be seen, there are many differences in the two sanctuaries. In every instance, the heavenly sanctuary trumps the earthly sanctuary. The next chapter goes into more detail on this topic.

The Book of Hebrews

Chapter 10: Jesus is the Perfect Sacrifice

¹ The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴ because **it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**

The Old Testament Mosaic Law was a shadow of things to come. The entire system in the Old Testament was set up by God to teach His people of the absolute need for a *Perfect* sacrifice for their sins. Their futile attempts at keeping the Law (perfectly) taught them that they needed a sacrifice to gain forgiveness from their sins... they were not going to be able to lead a perfect life. God set up an animal sacrificial system to allow the faithful steward to have their sins *covered* while waiting for a permanent solution. God also provided an order of priests, the Aaronic Order, to represent the people to God with praise and worship and sacrifices. All of this was just a shadow of the reality that was to come... Jesus, the Lamb of God whose sacrifice took away the sins of the world forever. This was a one-time event; that is all that was needed. That event had come just a generation prior to the writing of this epistle and much care and effort was being given through this letter to remind these Hebrew Christians not to turn back to their old beliefs.

The old system was never able to cleanse anyone from their sins. Yes, it was a system set up by God for temporary use until the Messiah came and settled the sin question forever. The old animal sacrifices never were able to make a man righteous in front of God. They were needed to show obedience to God and as a *picture* of what was to come. The fact that they needed annual repetition was evidence that they were inadequate to take away the sins of mankind. They looked forward to a day when God Himself, in the person of the Son, would give Himself up on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.

⁵ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ⁷ Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'" (Psalms 40:6-8)

⁸ First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). ⁹ Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, **we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

At the appointed time, Jesus made His entry into the world. The Psalms are quoted to show how Jesus noted that God did not desire the animal sacrifice nor the offerings of the Old

The Book of Hebrews

Covenant for salvation. Other verses in the Old Testament demonstrate that these sacrifices are certainly not going to be sufficient...

"The multitude of your sacrifices-- what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. Isaiah 1:11

Your burnt offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me." Jer 6:20

It would require much more to settle the sin problem. Hence, the New Covenant was enacted. Then God prepared a body for His Son so that He could come onto the earth incarnate. It is interesting to note that in the verse quoted from the Psalms, the phrase "a body you prepared for me" is written "mine ears hast thou opened" (i.e. pierced with an awl). The Greek translators of that day regarded this Hebrew expression as an idiom and translated it as written here when translating the Old Testament. Remember, many people of that time used Greek for their everyday language. Many theologians believe it is significant that this specific verse is referenced when writing about the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Jesus gave Himself on the cross for all of humanity. In Old Testament times, a slave normally would be allowed to go free after six years of service. He could choose to remain in service, however, and sacrifice his freedom for the sake of his family by accepting an ear-piercing at the end of his years of servitude. In doing this, however, he was saying that he loved his family so much that he was willing to remain as a servant to his master for the rest of his life. By doing this, he would be able to take care of his beloved family. In a sense, Jesus accepted an "ear-piercing" for us – He gave His life for his beloved "bride" – the Church.

Jesus said, *Here I am... I am come to do your will, O God.*" So Jesus came ready to do whatever His Father wanted Him to do. He followed through wonderfully by living a sinless life, teaching us how we should live and showing us God. Then Jesus became the Perfect Sacrificial Lamb to *finish* the work of redemption.

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Once again, the point is made that the Aaronic order of priests daily went about their work of worship and sacrifice... but, it could not lead to salvation for anyone. Jesus, on the other hand, lay down His life **once**... this resulted in the *finished work of salvation* for all who would believe. Then, He returned to Heaven to sit at His Father's right hand where He is now interceding for His children... and will continue to do so.

¹³ Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, ¹⁴ because by one sacrifice he has *made perfect* forever those who are *being made holy*.

The Book of Hebrews

Note that this comment states that Christians are “being made holy”. The sacrifice of our Savior was the only sacrifice needed to save any and all people... once and for all. Through this sacrifice, Christians are made perfect in the eyes of God as they are imputed the righteousness of Jesus. But, the next process is called *sanctification*. Obviously, no one actually makes it to living a life of perfection in this lifetime. Yet, it should be our goal to become more like our model, Jesus, as we go through this life on earth... to become sanctified. If a Christian cannot see this happening, it is obvious that they are not living for Jesus in the way that they should.

The writer of Hebrews also notes that Jesus awaits the end-times when He will come with His saints, all those Christians that are in Heaven, to put a successful conclusion to the battle of Armageddon. At that time, He will set up his one thousand year kingdom and reign over the earth during that time. Then, Satan will rise up for a brief season, only to be cast into the lake of fire for eternity. That is what is meant by the enemies of Jesus being made His footstool.

15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

16 "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."

If we strive for sanctification, as we should, we will be having a close daily relationship with the Holy Spirit. Our goal should be to allow the Holy Spirit to run our lives as much as we possibly can. This will require much prayer and Bible study... a constant emphasis on communication with God. The Lord will sear His Laws into our conscience.

One of the benefits of our sanctification process will be an increase in faith. By walking with Jesus, obeying His commandments, we open ourselves up to His blessings and comfort in this sometimes very difficult time here on earth.

17 Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

18 And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

This is just a reminder that the gift of eternal life, the result of the sacrificial death of Jesus, results in God forgetting our sins. God says that He will remember them no more (a re-statement of chapter 8:12... taken from Jeremiah 31:34). This is certainly different than the typical manner that humans behave. A person may forgive another a particular sin, but they sure have a marked tendency to *remember* that sin... and sometimes are not bashful to let that person know about it as time goes by.

Once God forgives a person of their sins, no other offering is ever required... for any sin... past, present and future.

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, **21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in

The Book of Hebrews

full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

This is a beautiful verse. Try to picture that day long ago when our Lord gave His life for us all. He struggled in agony on that cross in severe pain awaiting that moment when His human body would finally give out. Just seconds before that happened, Jesus cried out “**It is finished**”. Then he died, His Spirit leaving his body. Recall what took place next. A terrifying darkness had already come over the place beginning three hours earlier. By this time, the whole region was enshrouded in terrifying darkness. Immediately after Jesus died, an earthquake shook the ground and caused much damage. **At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split** (Matt 27:51) The curtain tearing from top to bottom signified that no longer did it require a Levitical high priest to intercede between the people and God. Until that moment, there had been no way that any ordinary person could even dream of entering into the Holy of Holies to have an audience with God.

Now, because of Jesus and His blood sacrifice, all Christians have direct access to our Holy God... We are all now saints and can boldly come to God and Jesus with faith that our prayers, praise, worship and requests will be heard and answered. Jesus has now become our High Priest. We are invited to speak with God anytime and anywhere. Our temple is in the Heavens. The high priest of the Old Covenant used the sprinkling of the sacrificial animal’s blood as a sign of cleansing. He continually washed himself in basins of clean water. Christians are also to come to God with a clear conscience as we have been washed in the blood of the true Lamb of God. We also must remember... **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.** (1 John 1:9)

So it is certainly appropriate to ready ourselves when we come to the Lord to approach Him with all respect and with a pure conscience.

²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Here the Hebrew Christians are told to stay strong in the faith knowing the Jesus will never disappoint them. If they will exhort one another, it will be easier to keep strong and not be swayed by the significantly negative external events that were happening all around them at that time. As mentioned earlier, these second generation Hebrew Christians were being attacked from all sides... sometimes even physically. With respect to the Romans, many Christians were concerned for their lives. Many Jews were also making it very difficult for their Hebrew Christian counterparts. Life on this earth looked like it would be so much easier if the Hebrew follower of Christ would simply drift back to the old way of worship... it had been the right way to worship for so very long. Wouldn’t God honor it now? The answer then... and still the

The Book of Hebrews

answer for our Jewish friends today is... **no**. Any going back was a terrible sin as it made the work of Jesus to no avail!

The suggestion was then made to continue to meet together for worship and to encourage one another... especially as they were becoming aware of the increasing tension in the Roman Empire (Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed with many thousands of Jews killed in A.D. 70).

²⁶ If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ²⁸ Anyone who rejected the Law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

The verses above demonstrate just how bad it would be for any individual to go back to Old Testament worship and beliefs after having received the knowledge of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. There is no way to Heaven but through Jesus and His blood sacrifice on the cross. If we have the knowledge of the way to salvation and we reject this... then there is no other way, no other sacrifice remaining. Jesus is the only way to Heaven.

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 14:6

In the Old Covenant, a person was put to death without mercy when the Law of Moses was rejected and that person turned to false gods. ⁶ On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness. ⁷ The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you. Deut 17:6-7

How much worse it would be to reject Jesus!

³⁰ For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." ³¹ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

God will be the judge. God has provided His Son to give us a straightforward way to Heaven. If this gift is rejected, God will judge that person.

³² Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴ You

The Book of Hebrews

sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

Most of these Hebrew readers had suffered already for their Savior. As already mentioned, the times were getting worse in the Roman Empire for Christians. Yet, typically, when anyone comes to Christ, they initially are acutely aware of the excellent choice that they have just made and recognize how it will affect their eternal life... i.e. they will spend it in Heaven! These people, many who now were beginning to lose their way, needed to look back and recall what those reasons were that made them turn to Christ in the first place. When anyone really analyzes the plusses and minuses of being a disciple of Jesus, logic will always convince him/her that being a Christian is the only proper choice to make. No matter what the outcome of one's life on this earth, there can be no reasonable argument but that an eternal life in Heaven trumps any kind of "great" life on earth... I don't care if the person had 15 billion dollars, perfect health for 125 years, 72 beautiful virgins (for which many Muslim fundamentalists strive), fame, beautiful mansions, etc. I placed the word "great" in quotes as these things I mentioned do not really guarantee a truly great life. Even if one has to spend life paralyzed from the neck down, like Joni Erickson Tada (and she will tell you that there is no way that she would trade her eternal future in Heaven for a lifetime on earth with a perfectly functioning body), it is better to follow Jesus. Why? Well, to paraphrase the writer of Hebrews, Joni knows that she has *a better and lasting possession in Heaven!*

³⁵ So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. ³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. ³⁷ For in just a very little while,

"He who is coming will come and will not delay. ³⁸ But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."

³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. Heb 10:1-39

The concluding verses exhort the reader to stay strong in faith in Jesus Christ as the day will come where this faith will be richly rewarded. As one of my favorite poems reads, whenever the events of life get tough, no matter how difficult... just "keep a'goin', keep a'goin'."

Jesus absolutely is coming again one day... probably in the not too distant future as recent events suggest strongly. Jesus tells us to live as righteously as we possibly can. Do not give in to temptation... do not take the easy path... stay on course. Make Jesus proud so that one day you can hear the glorious words, "[Well done my good and faithful servant.](#)" (Matt 25:21)

The Book of Hebrews

Chapter 11: The Saints Hall of Fame

This chapter of the New Testament is one of the more famous chapters in the entire Bible. It is often referred to as “The Saints Hall of Fame” or “Heroes of the Faith”. Many Old Testament Hebrew Saints are mentioned to show the reader the value of faith. All of these Hebrew Christians loved the memory of their ancestors and their accomplishments. It was hoped that reminding them of the important part that faith played in the lives of these well known men and women would convince these wavering Christians to stay strong in their own faith toward Jesus.

It is worth remembering that there are but two ways to have eternal life in Heaven; a person can lead a sinless life, such as Jesus did, or a person can trust in Jesus as his/her Savior. This latter method requires faith. Let us see what the writer has to tell us about this topic.

¹ Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (NIV)
or, as is more familiar to many... Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (NKJ)

Certainly the opening verse of the chapter is filled with important meaning. As faith is the cornerstone of our experience toward Christ, it is of great value to see what the Holy Spirit has to say about it. So what is faith? First of all, if we can actually see, hear, touch, smell, or feel the item that we have faith in, we do not need faith to believe that it exists. Or more succinctly, if we see it, it does not require faith. But, when we are certain of something or someone that we cannot blatantly demonstrate exists, then we are demonstrating true faith. For example, none of us has seen Heaven. If we believe that Heaven exists and that we are going there someday, that obviously requires faith.

The Greek word for “*substance*” that the Holy Spirit guided the author to use is very interesting. In the Greek, the word has a few possible meanings. However, all of these meanings point to a strong certainty that what is being hoped for actually exists. Here are four translations for the word “*substance*” from Strong’s Concordance: “*that which has a firm foundation... a firm conviction that something is true... that which has real existence and... a firm confidence/trust/assurance*”. John MacArthur notes that “the word that is translated as “*substance*” here is also translated as “confidence” (in Hebrews 3:14) and “express image” (in Hebrews 1:3).” The point is that when God speaks of faith, He is talking about a belief in something that a person should have every reason to believe is true. It would not be dissimilar to a person having faith that the sun will rise in the morning. Have they actually seen that specific event occur? No, it will not happen until the next morning. Yet, they have a great confidence... faith... that it will happen. As a matter of fact, you might say that they are “certain of what they do not see” in regards to the sun rising. God says that our faith should be analogous for those things relating to God’s promises.

The Book of Hebrews

God gives us the faith to believe. I would think that every Christian desires ever greater faith as they walk through their Christian life... I know I do. Yet, faith is not something to conjure up. It simply does not work that way. So how does one grow in faith? As just mentioned, our faith is a gift from God. We can cultivate this gift, however, and God tells us how. First of all, God tells us that anything that we ask of Him that is according to His will, He will give us. So, first of all, ask God for more faith in prayer... frequently. Secondly, God actually tells us in His Word how to acquire more faith.

[Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.](#)

Romans 10:17

This classic verse tells us that if we study God's Word, we will increase our faith. The more we know and understand of the Bible, the more we will believe its message. Devoted Christians who worship and obey God with all of their heart would also tend to be the ones who would be granted their prayer requests in the affirmative. So prayer, obedience, worship and study of God's Word all contribute to the increase of faith – something that most everyone desires.

[² This is what the ancients were commended for.](#)

As I just mentioned, God gives us the faith to believe. The ancients of the Hebrew people demonstrated this faith on many occasions and those that exercised their faith by obeying God always were rewarded by God. Can we learn anything from them?

[³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. ⁴ By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.](#)

The Hall of Faith begins at creation. The Old Testament Saints believed the Genesis story of creation. God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. He spoke it into existence. We can either believe this or not. Until the early years of the twentieth century, most secular scientists had the belief that the universe had always been in existence... just as God is eternal. Albert Einstein certainly believed this. However, with the astronomical discoveries of Hubbell and the General Theory of Relativity formulated by Einstein in the early 20th century, virtually all cosmologists now agree with the biblical assessment that the universe *appeared out on nothing* in an extremely short period of time. The only difference of opinion is just how this amazing event took place. Most secular scientists do not allow reference to a Creator to account for this. Of course, they certainly do not have any other reasonable alternative... but they cannot bring themselves to say God did it. That would not be scientific as science in the world today cannot reference any supernatural events. This is literally true. Even if the most logical answer for an unusual event in the universe is that there was a supernatural intervention at a point in

The Book of Hebrews

time, this cannot be accepted. Therefore, God can never be accepted by secular science unless and until the definition of science is changed. Let me give one impressive exception to this ignorance in the scientific community... Albert Einstein, the greatest physicist of the twentieth century left his atheist belief system and became a believer in God when he recognized the significance of the discoveries I mentioned above.

The Old Testament saints readily accepted the fact that God created the universe. Cain and Abel were the first two sons of Adam and Eve. God had communicated with Adam, Eve and their boys His prescribed method of worship. Abel took God seriously. Cain did not.

³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.

⁴ But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. ⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ *If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?* But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Gen 4:3-7

As can be seen, Cain did not follow God's command... he did not do what was right. This is sin. Abel did do what God asked. Why? Abel believed by faith that to do what God requested would be the best course of action. This seems so obvious as I write it here on this paper, but just think of how few people do what God tells them to do? Well, Abel's faith was rewarded. His offering was accepted. These offerings by Adam and his family of the firstborn of their flocks was the beginning of thousands of years of offerings that were a type of that sacrifice required for mankind's redemption. That is why God required the animal blood sacrifice... recall that without blood there is no remission of sins.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

Enoch was one of two Old Testament characters that did not die. Instead, he was *translated* into Heaven while he walked with God. The expression "walked with God" suggests that Enoch followed God and lived a life of faith in God.

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

This is one of the more important verses in the entire Bible. It is of extreme import to let the words of this verse sink in. First of all, who does not want to please God? Certainly, any Christian would want to please their Lord. Even non-Christians, generally, would like to make God happy with their actions. Well, if we do not demonstrate faith, we simply cannot please

The Book of Hebrews

Him! The Bible has several stories that show how God wants us to exercise our faith, even when God could have accomplished His plans without requiring the faith of the person (or people). For example, take a moment and recall how he instructed Joshua to take the city of Jericho... and the faith that was required by Joshua to accomplish that mission. There are dozens of other examples like that one. God wants us to use and cultivate our faith.

My favorite example of turning to God in faith is found in the story of Job. Job was put through torturous events that he simply could not reconcile to his ideas of God's goodness and fairness. He had his situation even worsened by having to listen to four ignorant so-called friends tell him that he was an un-repentant sinner who deserved all of the misery that had overtaken him. God finally spoke to Job. Yet, and here is the key, God did not tell Job anything at all about why God allowed Job to endure such terrible physical and emotional pain. God could have done so and Job would have understood what was happening to him. But, then where would the faith have been? Instead, Job was reminded of God's power, His love and His perfect character. God was actually telling Job, in a somewhat subtle manner, to put his faith in his God... to exercise his faith. Job suddenly had an epiphany and did place his faith in God... totally. He recognized that if he truly believed in God and knew Him to be all-loving and all-powerful and all-knowing, there had to be a very good reason for what God was letting him experience. Therefore, Job put his faith to work and accepted his situation as God's will for him at that time. This led to an immediate resolution of Job's anger and discontentment and restored Job's proper relationship with His God. As soon as that was done (and this probably took only a few minutes of time), God rewarded Job greatly and rescued him from his afflictions. The message is clear... [without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.](#)

Sadly, I have run across many people who are not Christians in my life. I do not know any of them that have actually diligently pursued the truth concerning the Bible. I have suggested to many of those people, whom I have engaged in conversation about the veracity of the Bible, that they spend some time studying the Bible and asking God to show them whether it is true. Since their eternal life will depend on it (if the hundreds of millions of people around the world are correct) doesn't the Bible message deserve a little attention?

Several famous Christians have done this, by the way. That is, they have looked into the question of whether the Bible is true. They were atheists prior to their pursuit. Now they are strong Christians and share with others their findings and joy (ex. C.S. Lewis, Josh McDowell, Lee Stroebel, Hugh Ross and many others). They didn't know it when they started this study, but they were about to be blessed by God. In fact, many of these people went into their study with the idea of totally disproving the New Testament record. God has said, "[He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.](#)" Apparently, these individuals went in with an open mind, despite their skepticism and even unbelief. If people will only pursue God, *with an open mind*, He will reward them. Personally, I believe that an open mind has to be part of the equation as coming

The Book of Hebrews

into anything with a closed mind is the same thing as that person saying that he/she does not want to be “confused by the facts”.

⁷ By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

In the days of Noah, there had never been anything even resembling a little flood, let alone a dangerous one. However, by faith, Noah believed that God was going to cause a flood of massive proportions and proceeded to build a giant ark, fill it with the requisite animals and ready his own family for the onslaught of water. He became the laughing stock of all those around him. The other people were certainly looking at things logically, no doubt about it. It made perfectly good sense that Noah was crazy to do what he was doing and say what he was saying. Yet, Noah was the one who was right! Why did Noah do all those things? Faith.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. Noah did everything God commanded him. Gen 6:9,22

Noah was a great man of God. God rewarded him by saving Noah and his family and re-starting the human race through these eight people after the flood.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

The next man to be brought into the discussion of the men and women of faith in the Old Testament was the father of the *chosen people*, Abraham. He was the original patriarch. God came to a man named Abram who lived with his father and the rest of his family in a place called Ur of the Chaldees, which today would be in southern Iraq. God told him to pack up and take his wife, Sarai, and head west into a land that He had chosen for him and his heirs. He did not give Abram many details except to say that He, God, was going to make a nation out of Abram that would number as the stars of the heavens and the sand of the sea. So what did Abram do? He gathered up his wife, and a few family members who wanted to tag along, and took off. Although he tarried in Haran for a little while as most of his relatives wanted to settle there, Abram and Sarai soon made it to the land that God had promised. Why did he go there? Because he had faith that God would lead him throughout his lifetime in the direction that he should go.

The Book of Hebrews

With many a test, Abram lived and followed His God for all of his life. When Abram lived in this land of promise, he was a stranger in the land as there were many different nation groups of people. Yet, his family was the beginning of what would someday become a vast and powerful kingdom. Demonstrating his faith to go wherever God led, Abram looked forward to the day that his heirs would not have to live like nomads in tents surrounded by enemies, but instead live in a city built by God, Himself. His faith made this prospect real to him. He never realized that future reality, but he was convinced that it would happen someday. Remember, “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”.

¹¹ By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

As God dealt with Abram over the years, there came a time when He changed his name to Abraham (father of many nations) and Sarai to Sarah (princess). God gave Abraham many opportunities to demonstrate his faith throughout his lifetime. One example was when Abraham gave Lot the first choice of the new lands they had come to live in. Lot chose what looked to be the choicest property. Abram believed that God would provide the land that He wanted Abraham to possess... and that is what God did. Many other examples could be listed of this great man’s faith in God. God gave Abraham and Sarah a boy child in their old age (Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90 years old) because of their faith. Because of this faith, God was passing down His promise from Abraham to Isaac and then to Jacob that these three patriarchs would father a people as numerous as the stars in the skies.

¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons... all of these people and more never did see all of the promises of God come through in their lifetimes – although they certainly did see some come true. However, when they died the mighty nation that Israel would become was hundreds of years away... and the really mighty nation of Israel that will be seen in the Millennial Kingdom was thousands of years away. Yet, these patriarchs “saw” this future as fact because of their faith. Even more importantly, they saw themselves as strangers on this earth as they knew that their ultimate home was to be Heaven. All of this was “seen” and realized by their strong faith.

The Book of Hebrews

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

There really is not much that need be said about the faith that is demonstrated when a loving father is about to sacrifice his son because God told him to do so. This amount of faith is truly remarkable. Regardless of the thought process that Abraham reasoned as noted in the verses above, until God stopped his hand from killing Isaac, Abraham could not be absolutely sure that Isaac would be spared... yet, He was willing to kill his son because of his great faith in God. Wow, what a model of faith that is to us.

²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. ²² By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.

Isaac passed down blessings to Esau and Jacob. Jacob passed on blessings to each of his twelve sons and a special blessing as well to Joseph's two sons, given what Joseph had done for the family. Joseph led a life so filled with faith that it was a *type* of the life of Christ in many ways. As his life was drawing to a close, he made sure that someday his body would be carried back to the Promised Land to be buried with his fathers. He knew, by faith, that someday the Israelites would all be returning to that Land.

²³ By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. ²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. ²⁹ By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

Moses is next mentioned as a man of great faith. His parents had faith enough to allow him to float down a river into the life of a princess of the enemy, Egypt. He could have been killed instantly. But, they had faith that God would not allow that to happen. Moses led a life of faith once he found out that he was a son of Israel. He chose to leave his life of leisure for the life of an Israelite. All the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt in those days. He had to escape

The Book of Hebrews

to the Sinai or be executed for defending a fellow Hebrew in trouble. Moses killed an Egyptian man in that incident. Although he had found himself a peaceful existence, years later he listened to God and came back to Egypt to free his fellow Hebrew slaves. His faith was tested as he carried out all of the commands of God. This was especially tested during that first Passover. What a difficult night that had to be as Moses saw to it that his fellow Hebrews performed the sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood correctly.

Throughout the journey out of Egypt and through the Sinai and into the wilderness, Moses was a stalwart of faith. His life ended as he looked over at the Promised Land from Mt. Nebo. He looked at that land due west knowing it would someday be possessed by his fellow Hebrews.

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.

³¹ By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

Imagine the faith that it took for Joshua to trust that God's plan of subduing Jericho would work. No weapons would be used to level the thick, tall city walls. How would that work? By trusting God and marching around those walls according to a plan given him by God. After doing this for seven days, in the prescribed manner, then blowing trumpets as directed, the walls came crashing down! There is no doubt that this decision on how to strike and defeat Jericho took great faith... absolutely no doubt!

Rahab, a former prostitute, showed faith in God by helping the Hebrew spies. Because of her faith in the God of Israel, her life was spared and God made her a great-great grandmother of David! She also now lives in Heaven because of her faith.

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷ They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

In the words above, we see the writer of this epistle telling his readers that because of this wonderful thing called *faith*, men and women over the centuries had performed amazing feats for God. They had been willing to suffer loss and pain for the Lord. All of these things had been

The Book of Hebrews

done because of their *faith*. To obey and follow God is the only way to truly be happy and by placing their *faith in Him*, they would someday “gain a better resurrection.”

³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

⁴⁰ God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Heb 11:1-40

God certainly commended all of these saints for their faith... yet, the Old Testament saints had to await the coming of the Messiah before they gained entrance into their ultimate reward. Now that Jesus had come and sacrificed Himself for the world's sins, God's plan for all mankind had been set into motion. While Jesus was the first fruits of salvation, those saints had followed Him into Heaven just a few dozen years before this epistle was written. The Hebrew Christians, and all other Christians, would follow a little later as all have been made perfect through Christ.

Chapter 12: Living the Christian Life

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

After reminding his readers (i.e. Hebrew Christians) of the many wonderful examples of faith that their ancestors had demonstrated, he strongly suggests that they follow in their footsteps in their Christian walk. Of course they need to be careful not to slip into a life of sin... that life can be so alluring at times, but always ends in loss... always. Instead, keep looking toward Jesus. Keep trying to emulate Him. Jesus was fully aware of what awaited Him after enduring the cross, his seat next to His Father. Christians should also look forward to their ultimate reward when they are going through difficult situations in their lives. The ultimate reward is absolutely worth any trials that may be faced while in the “testing ground” here on earth.

³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Now the example of Jesus Christ is put before these Christians as the best reason to continue strong in their faith to the end of their lives. Any Christian should seriously consider

The Book of Hebrews

the life of Jesus whenever there is the tendency to grow weary in the faith. Very few Christians have to shed their blood because of their faith in Jesus. Yet, Jesus gave His life for us.

Jesus' incarnation served for more than to allow for His sacrificial death. For another thing, He came to show us God. He also came to set for us the perfect example of how we should live our lives. Remember the pain and agony that He had to endure so that we would have the opportunity to have an eternal life in Heaven. When any Christian is suffering, and all do at various times during their Christian walk, it is important to keep the *finish line* of this *walk* in sight.

⁵ And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

(Proverbs 3:11-12) ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is

not disciplined by his father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline),

then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father

of our spirits and live! ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but

God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems

pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and

peace for those who have been trained by it.

This next section points out that Christians are actually considered sons and daughters of the Holy God. That is a wonderful truth... a wonderful picture. God truly is our Father in Heaven just as He is the Father of Jesus. We can and should address Him as Father. Keep in mind, however, that as a good Father (in fact, the perfect Father) He will do what is necessary to help mold us into the person that He wants us to be. We have our own part to play in this process as we use our free will and make decisions during our lifetime. God also has His role in this process as He directs events of this world that have an impact on all of His children. This is known as God's 'providential care'... at least, that is what I refer to it as. Sometimes this Godly care results in discipline of the Christian. Certainly, discipline is typically necessary to raise the best child possible... in fact, this is invariably needed.

The writer tells his readers to recognize this fact, that God will discipline Christians as needed. We should take this as a sign that He cares about us just as we discipline our sons and daughters when we need to teach them some life lesson. It surely is a sign of poor parenting when a child is left to do whatever he pleases... any time or any place. If God did not discipline His children, He would not be the perfect Father that He actually is.

As we continue on throughout this life on earth, it should be our goal to grow closer and closer to Jesus as we grow more and more like Him. God will help us in this holy pursuit by correcting us along the way. As is true with discipline from an earthly father, it is not pleasant when we receive it. Yet, as we learn from this proper correction, we will eventually receive a

The Book of Hebrews

harvest of righteousness, joy and peace. Yes, that will be the ultimate reward for continuing in the *race* of our lives until we cross the finish line... completely trusting in Jesus.

¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³ "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

A final warning is given to those who are balking at finishing the *race* of life. Here attention is drawn to the individual's responsibility to continuously strengthen his own moral and ethical resolve using the metaphor of the physical body. It is true that God will correct us when He deems appropriate, but that does not relieve us of our own responsibility to follow the Lord Jesus.

¹⁴ Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

The exhortation continues and tells the Christian to live at peace with all men, friends and strangers, good and bad. Christians are asked to remember to witness to others so that no one misses the gospel message. Eternal life through Jesus is certainly open and free to all who repent and turn their lives to Him.

¹⁶ See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. ¹⁷ Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

Still another warning to resist sin is given here, in particular sexual sin. Then, the example of Esau's sin is given as he is an early example of an individual who had so much to gain but threw it all away for the short term satisfaction of a bowl of pottage. People quite commonly are all too enamored by the pleasures of the world of sin and are not willing to repent and turn toward Jesus. Frankly, this pleasure for a moment... or year... or even an earthly lifetime, is nothing when compared to the offer of an eternity with God in Heaven. Also, what is not understood by individuals such as Cain, Esau, some of those Hebrew people being addressed in this epistle and modern man is that following Jesus closely also gives the wonderful short term satisfaction of peace and joy as well as the long term glory awaiting each Christian. No one can *safely* ignore the spiritual side of life.

There will come a time, after repeated rejection of Jesus, that the sinner's heart will harden and the opportunity to turn to Jesus will be gone.

The Book of Hebrews

¹⁸ You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹ to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, ²⁰ because they could not bear what was commanded: "*If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.*" (Exodus 19:12-13)
²¹ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "*I am trembling with fear.*" (Deut. 9:19)

Verse 18 references the time when the people of Israel were at the base of Mt. Sinai and the Law was being given to Moses. Moses told the people that God was coming to meet with them. The sounds and the fire put fear into many of the Hebrews and they were fearful of what God planned to do and say. ¹⁸ When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." Ex 20:18-19 Even Moses was fearful during this period, at various times, as he received the Law from God. Christians, as noted in Hebrews 12:18, do not have to come to this mountain. So where do they need to go?

²² But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Christians, on the other hand, did not have this fearful situation any longer. They did not have to come to the base of Mt. Sinai. Instead they had the opportunity to come and meet with the Living God in the Heavenly Jerusalem. This is the place where we meet with our Lord through prayer and praise. It is not seen by our eyes (at this time, but one day we will see it), but it is totally real. This place is occupied by God, Jesus and multitudes of angels. It is also the home of multitudes of saints that have already made it to their glory.

Now all Christians are invited to come to God. He awaits our coming... now through our prayers and song and worship... someday, we will actually be there in spirit... and someday we will be there in our glorified body. How do we have this incredible opportunity? Jesus... He did it all with His sacrificial death.

Cain killed Abel. Abel's blood was shed as he was the victim of the first murder ever committed. Cain was guilty of that heinous sin... as he spilled the blood of his brother. Abel's blood cried out for *justice*. The blood of Jesus is what allows Christians *mercy*.

²⁵ See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." (Haggai 2:6)

The Book of Hebrews

God has spoken down through the ages. He spoke primarily through His prophets in Old Testament times. When the people followed Him, they were very successful. When they turned their backs on God, calamity followed. Now Jesus, our Lord and Savior, is in Heaven. He has given us much direction in the New Covenant... especially as it relates to salvation, but also details on how we should live our lives. He showed us how to live our lives! We will be in serious trouble if we do not obey Him.

God shook the earth when He brought the Law at Mt. Sinai. God shook the earth when Jesus died on the cross. God will shake the earth once more and the heavens when Jesus comes again to put a stop to the battle of Armageddon.

²⁷ The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our "God is a consuming fire." Heb 12:1-29

The earth, of course, is subject to earthquakes. In fact, there are a lot of things that can be shaken in life. God tells us here that we better make sure that we build our lives on something that is absolutely Rock solid... Jesus, the Rock of Ages! The kingdom that Jesus offers to us cannot be shaken. Let us always remember this and act like we do with proper worship and actions throughout our life. Never forget, God is love and God offers joy and peace..... But He is just and will not suffer sin to enter into His Holy Heaven – those who do not enter will experience the fact that God is also a “consuming fire”.

Chapter 13: Practical Advice to the Christian

The concluding chapter speaks of practical ways we must live by faith. In chapter 11, many examples of people living by great faith were given. Chapter 12 exhorts all Christians to follow their example.

This chapter begins with a recommendation to be kind to others, friends and strangers like...

¹ Keep on loving each other as brothers. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

The Holy Spirit reminds us to love one another. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves... and remember that our neighbors include all people! On the other hand, there should be a special consideration for our Christian brothers and sisters. They are family,

The Book of Hebrews

literally. They will be living with us and sharing with us for eternity. Let us treat all other Christians as family.

Verse 2 is certainly intriguing. We are told to offer hospitality to everyone... even strangers. The Bible has many examples of this. Jesus was entertained by different people during His ministry. I wonder how many of today's Christians would have offered a snack and a cool drink to someone walking on by their front yard, accompanied by a dozen or so other men. Many people had this opportunity during those years when Jesus ministered on the earth with His disciples. Some came through with the offer and were subsequently blessed. Others let the opportunity pass them by.

Genesis 18 is another example of angels being entertained through a kind act of hospitality on a hot day by Abraham. Although Abraham did not realize, at least at first, who He was dealing with, he offered them drink, shelter and the opportunity to wash themselves. One never knows, maybe someday you will have the opportunity to *entertain* an angel. Actually, although this is not likely to occur, anytime we help another person, Jesus says it is just as if we are helping Him!

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?' ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Matt 25:35-40

As this section in Matthew also affirms, it is a very good idea to visit, teach and comfort those in prisons as well.

⁴ Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

This meaning of this verse is quite obvious. Unfortunately, in the United States today, there are far too many people, including those attending local churches that do not seem to recognize this fact. God means what He says and this is not a confusing statement.

⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Deut. 31:6)

⁶ So we say with confidence,

The Book of Hebrews

"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psalms 118:6)

Here God gives us a command to be content with what we have. This, of course, is just a reminder of the tenth commandment. So many times God tells us and shows us that Christians are not to seek for material goods. The entire book of Ecclesiastes deals with a king, Solomon, who had everything a man could want... seemingly. He had intelligence, wisdom, hundreds of beautiful women, massive amounts of property, untold riches, art, music, a palace to live in, etc., etc. However, he was miserable! Finally, he figured out the problem. Even the wisest man in the world fell under the influence of the sin of greed and covetousness. The answer? Be satisfied with what material goods one has and cultivate your relationship with Jesus. Obey Him and follow Him... as He says "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

⁷ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Christians should respect those elders of the church, the ministers and others who preach and teach the Living Word to the members. We are also told to consider their conduct. In the days that this was written, the leaders of the Church were stalwarts of the faith... people such as Paul, James, Peter, John, Barnabas and Timothy. Their conduct was worthy of emulation. They all suffered greatly for their faith... unto death for most just mentioned. These are the type of people we need to look up to and follow. Of course, we also need to be wary of those leaders whose example is not up to the standards set by Christ for Church leaders.

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

This is certainly a famous verse. One we should all remember. Jesus is God. If we know Jesus, we know God and vice versa. Therefore, God the Father is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are never going to change. They certainly may change when and how they do things. They will never change in their character and attributes. Just as even a human may change the way they teach the same subject material when they are teaching 3rd graders instead of 12th graders (at least a good teacher certainly would), God deals with people and teaches people somewhat differently in the Old Testament compared to how He does it in the New Testament. God may deal with the modern world a little differently as well. However, Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit will always *be* the same.

⁹ Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.

Many cults were already springing up all around the area where the Christian message of the gospel was being spread. This was very similar to what we have going on today. These

The Book of Hebrews

cultic leaders (Gnosticism was the word used to describe the major cults of those times) sprinkled a bit of the truth into their lies, the typical method used by Satan, but the result was a religion that would doom a follower to hell. That is why it was so very important then and is so very important now, to know the truth... remember, “**the truth shall set you free!**” (John 8:32)

Now Christians are saved by the Grace of God through Jesus, not by dietary laws or any other Laws. This was part of the Old Covenant which was unable to save anyone. Now, everyone must remember this and not turn back to the old system.

10 We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. 11 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. 12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. 14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

The bodies of animals offered up as sacrifices in Temple and Tabernacle worship were burned outside the camp. Jesus was crucified outside the Temple as well. What are we to do after recognizing this truth? The answer was to go to Jesus who was outside the Temple, outside the gate... in fact, Jesus is in Heaven! That is where those Hebrew Christians and that is where we are being told to go to find our salvation. No more is anyone to look toward Temple worship or rituals. These are no longer valid since Jesus has given us His sacrifice... Himself!

15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Let all good and faithful Christians give back to Jesus our own sacrifice. What can we give Him who has everything? Praise for all He has given to us. Praise and worship Him, pray to Him with not just wants and needs but with thanksgiving and praise. Sing to Him... even if you sing like me. Obey Him, follow Him, be as faithful as you can be. Tell others how great He is! That is what He would love to see out of His children... that is what He deserves at the very least, indeed.

17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Do your best to help your local church run smoothly. Help those leaders in the church. They are responsible to do their very best to lead the entire church body in the way of the Lord. They will answer to God for their work in the church. Do not cause any strife in the local

The Book of Hebrews

church. If it is not the place for you to worship, try another church...do not cause animosity in the first one.

¹⁸ Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. ¹⁹ I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

Apparently, the writer of this letter was well known to the readership. He tells them that he is trying his best to set a good example for the Church. He also asks for their prayers, especially as he is eager to join them soon.

²⁰ May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. ²² Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.

Here the benediction is written. As often was the case, it is a re-statement of the gospel message... a perfectly logical way to end a letter of instruction and encouragement to a church.

²³ I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you. ²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings. ²⁵ Grace be with you all.

Heb 13:1-25

Timothy had recently been set free from prison. The writer (maybe Paul) hoped to see him shortly and the two of them would pay these Hebrew brothers and sisters a visit. He also tells them that the Italian Christians greet them. There was an ever growing number of Christians in and around Rome thanks to the missionary zeal of that day. Then, he wraps the letter up with the beautiful words of...

Grace be with you all, Amen.

The Book of Hebrews

Conclusion:

The Epistle to the Hebrews was originally written to Hebrew Christians to remind them of the utmost superiority of Jesus Christ... and His gospel. No one knows for sure who wrote this letter, other than the fact that he was inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit. However, there are many good reasons to believe that Paul was the human author. It was probably written around A.D. 65 – give or take a few years.

Unfortunately, as the Roman Empire entered the sixth and seventh decades of the first century, the nascent Christian Church began to experience a great deal of persecution – even more than in its earlier years. Nero began rounding up Christians by the thousands. He then sentenced them to a variety of tortuous deaths. Their churches were infiltrated by false teachers who attempted to pervert the pure gospel message. It was not easy to be a Christian. In fact, it was dangerous. Some people were beginning to re-think their original commitment to Christ. Others were afraid to take the small step of faith required to become a Christian... a believer in Christ as Lord and Savior.

Due to the vacillation that the writer noted in some of the Hebrew converts, he wrote them this letter to exhort them on in the Christian walk. He was well aware of the importance of staying true to Jesus always... no matter the difficulties encountered along life's pathways. A return to their old belief system would have terrible consequences.

In order to convince the people of their need to continue on in their walk with Jesus, the writer of Hebrews began his letter by showing the superiority of Jesus to anyone and everyone in the universe. Jesus is compared to angels and to Moses. In a detailed discussion, Jesus was noted to be far superior. Then Jesus was noted to be a priest of the highest order, the order of Melchizedek. Not only that, but Jesus was shown to be the only Perfect Sacrifice... the only adequate and sufficient sacrifice required for the salvation of mankind.

The "Temple of God" in the Heavenly Sanctuary, where Jesus now resides as He intercedes for His children, was also shown to be infinitely better than the Holy of Holies of the Jewish Temple. Every aspect of the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant. Our High Priest, His sacrifice - the blood of the New Covenant, Jesus' ability to intercede on our behalf, our future rewards and position... all of these things are infinitely better if one accepts and stays true to the New Covenant of Jesus.

However, far too many of the Hebrew converts were beginning to have doubts – hence, this epistle was written. Excellent reasons for staying strong in the Christian faith were given... regardless of the earthly cost. The latter portion of the letter presented a great "Hall of Fame" of Old Testament saints and showed how they were all justified by God due to their faith... not through their works of the Law. Now God asks everyone to put their faith in His Son to save them from their sins. The writer of Hebrews concluded that section with the following:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...

(Hebrews 12:1-2)

The Book of Hebrews

The last two chapters of Hebrews give practical advice on how to live the Christian life as it should be lived. Even though it will be hard at times, at times even terribly difficult, there is no other reasonable choice but to stay strong and “sold out” to Jesus. To follow any other path will only end in tragedy. All Christians must remember that life is to be looked at as a marathon... and it is a marathon that must be completed successfully. It is incredibly worth it! Regardless of the fatigue, regardless of the pain, one must do as Paul noted as his life neared its end... *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day... and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.* 2 Tim 4:7-8 (NIV)

One day, let all who read this treatise be able to say and mean those words written by Paul almost two thousand years ago. Let us always stay true to our Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Book of Hebrews

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The Book of Hebrews
