

HEBREWS

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Lecture Notes



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THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

I. THE AUTHOR

1. Barnabas

a. For:

i. Insofar as the writer would be Jewish and conversant with the OT and priestly tradition, Barnabas would be as good a candidate as Paul. He was from the tribe of Levi.

ii. Apostolic imprimatur can be extended to Barnabas since Luke and Acts were accepted as canonical.

iii. Early Christian witness was found in Tertullian's suggestion that Hebrews could have been written by Barnabas.

b. Against:

i. No clear early documentary evidence except for Tertullian's testimony. Tertullian's suggestion that Barnabas "could have" written Hebrews is quite different from saying that "he did."

ii. It is highly unlikely that the name of Barnabas, who was such an important figure in the early Church, could have completely disappeared if he did really write Hebrews. This can be seen by the fact that an apocryphal epistle of Barnabas exists. This letter could hardly be attributed to the biblical Barnabas. The name was attached by a pseudowriter to give the letter credibility. There is no mention whatsoever that Barnabas wrote any letter.

2. Apollos

a. For:

i. As an eloquent and learned man from Alexandria (Acts 18:24), he was well-versed in the OT and LXX.

ii. He was a co-worker with Paul and was thus familiar with Pauline concepts.

b. Against:

i. There are no clear instances of early church fathers attributing the Epistle to him until the time of Martin Luther.

ii. Alexandria was a prominent and famous place of learning at that time. If Apollos had written such a great letter, the people there would have declared that it was one of their products who had written it. No such boast was ever made.

3. Paul

a. For:

i. More people in history have regarded this letter to be from Paul than any other epistle. There is nothing in the epistle that is contradictory to Paul. If the actual writing was not Paul's, at least the thoughts were. For example, the analogy between milk and meat in Heb 5:12-13 is quite similar to that found in 1 Cor 3:2 (cf 1 Pet 2:2 which uses "milk" in a different way).

ii. There is early Christian testimony to Paul's authorship of Hebrews. Clement of Alexandria (c.150-210) "says that the Epistle to the Hebrews is Paul's but that it was written for Hebrews in the Hebrew language, and that Luke, after carefully translating it, published it for the Greeks."

iii. The mention of Timothy in the concluding section of the Epistle favours Paul as the author of it (13:23).

b. Against:

i. The Epistle itself does not identify its author.

ii. Heb 2:3 describes the writer as a second generation Christian. Since Paul was a first generation saint, he could not have described himself in such a way. But this argument is weak. Paul could have described himself in such a way because he was not one of the 12 who were with Jesus in his earthly ministry. The verse does not say that he received his message second hand but merely states the fact that the apostles confirmed the Word.

4. Conclusion

a. Origen said: "But I would say, if giving my opinion, that the thoughts are those of the Apostle, but the phraseology and the composition are those of someone who recalled to mind the teachings of the Apostle and who, as it were, had made notes on what was said by the teacher. If any church, then, holds this Epistle to be Paul's let it be commended for this, for not without reason have the men of old handed it down as Paul's. Who the author of the Epistle is God truly knows...."

b. There are more reasons to believe that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews.

II. THE READERS

The earliest extant manuscripts of this Epistle has the title “To the Hebrews.” There are no manuscripts found which give a different title to the Letter. Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian refer to the Epistle by this title. The problem is that the Epistle itself does not identify exactly who the recipients are. Were they Gentiles or Jews?

1. Jews
 - a. For:
 - i. This is the traditional view. Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian accepted the Epistle as a letter to Jewish Christians (see Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6:14).
 - ii. P46 (c. 250 A.D.) which is the oldest manuscript of the Epistle has the title “To the Hebrews.”
 - iii. The Epistle is full of OT Scriptures, and Jewish liturgy.
 - b. Against:
 - i. See below, 2.a.i-iii.
2. Gentiles
 - a. For:
 - i. The OT was universally the Scriptures of the early church. The Gentile Christians were familiar with the Jewish Scriptures and would have no problem understanding the Epistle.
 - ii. Epistles like Romans and Galatians which uses the OT extensively were written mainly to Gentiles.
 - iii. The readers of the Epistle are said to be in danger of falling away “from the living God” (3:12). This would be an inappropriate description of Jews wanting to forsake Christianity in order to return to Judaism.
 - b. Against:
 - i. Points #i and #ii above are in no wise conclusive arguments in favour of a Gentile readership. “It is granted that the use of the Septuagint does not prove that the readers were Jewish Christians. But if the readers were Gentiles who were in danger of a lapse into paganism or Gnosticism, as this view would have us believe, then we would have expected quite a different form of argument than that which he follows. The very fact of the author’s use of the Old Testament in his argument proves the Jewish-Christian character of his readers. For Jews, whether Christians or not, the Old Testament was accepted as authoritative. But to a Gentile

Christian the Old Testament no authority apart from his Christianity. If there was danger of his apostasy from Christianity, of what value would be the author's arguments from a book which was losing its authority from him?" (D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 3:83). The evidences for a Gentile audience are thus purely circumstantial. An investigation of the content of the Epistle should reveal clearly that the letter was directed towards a Jewish audience.

ii. Point #iii is also inconclusive. The author could be thinking "of all forms of apostasy, whether from Jewish or Gentile Christians, as a 'falling away from the living God'" (Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, TNTC, 25).

3. Conclusion

The readers were a group of Greek-speaking Jewish Christians. "The general contents and tone of the epistle support this conclusion. The author's argument assumes an exclusively Jewish point of view. 'The entire message of the epistle, the dominant claims of Christ and the Christian faith, rests upon the supposition that the readers held Moses, Aaron, the Jewish priesthood, the Old Covenant and the Levitical ritual, in the highest esteem.' The fathers of the Hebrews are naturally regarded as their fathers (1:1; 3:9; 2:16) (Hiebert, *Introduction*, 3:82).

III. THE DATE

1. The Epistle to the Hebrews must have been written before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70. Proof of this is found in the present tenses used by the author to indicate that the temple system and the levitical priesthood were still operative. The quotations below are from the KJV except #d which is my personal translation.

a. 5:1-4. "For every high priest *taken* (*lambanomenos*, Pres M/P Ptc) from among men is *ordained* (*kathistatai*, Pres M/P Ind) ... that *he may offer* (*prosphere*, Pres Act Subj) ... *Who can have compassion* (*metriopathein*, Pres Act Inf) ... he himself also is *compassed* (*perikeitai*, Pres M/P Ind) ... *he ought* (*opheilei*, Pres Act Ind) ... for himself, *to offer* (*prospherein*, Pres Act Inf) ... no man *taketh* (*lambanei*, Pres Act Ind) ... but he that *is called* (*kaloumenos*, Pres M/P Ptc)."

b. 7:21. "And inasmuch as not without an oath *he was made priest* (*eisin hereis gegonotes*)." Periphrastic use of Present verb "to be" plus the Perfect Participle defines a state that still continues to exist.

c. 7:23. "And *they were* (*eisin gegonotes*, see #2 above) because they *were not suffered* (*koluesthai*, Pres M/P Inf) *to continue* (*paramenein*, Pres Act Inf) by reason of death."

d. 7:27. Who is *not having* (*echei*, Pres Act Ind) daily a necessity, just as the priests, in the first place for his own sins a sacrifice *to offer* (*anapherein*, Pres Act Inf), then of (the sins of) the people.

- e. 7:28. “For the law *maketh* (*kathistesin*, Pres Act Ind) men high priests *which have* Pres Act Ptc) infirmity.”
- f. 8:3. “For every high priest is *ordained* (*kathistatai*, Pres M/P Ind) *to offer* (*prosperein*, Pres Act Inf).
- g. 8:4. “there *are* (*onton*, Pres Act Ptc) priests *that offer* (*prospheronton*, Pres Act Ptc) gifts according to the law.”
- h. 8:4. “Who *serve* (*latreuousin*, Pres Act Ind) unto the example and shadow of heavenly things.”
- i. 8:13. “Now *that which decayeth* (*palaioumenon*, Pres M/P Ptc) and *waxeth old* (*geraskon*, Pres Act Ptc) is ready to vanish away.”
- j. 9:6. “the priests *went* (*eisiasin*, Pres Ind) always *into* the first tabernacle, *accomplishing* (*epitelountes*, Pres Act Ptc) the service of God.”
- k. 9:9. “in which *were offered* (*prospherontai*, Pres M/P Ind) both gifts and sacrifices that *could not make* (*dunamenai*, Pres M/P Ptc) him that did the service perfect.”
- l. 9:13. “For if the blood of bulls ... *sprinkling* (*rantizousa*, Pres Act Ptc) the unclean, *sanctifieth* (*bagiazēi*, Pres Act Ind).”
- m. 9:25. “the high priest *entereth* (*eiserchetai*, Pres M/P Ind) into the holy place.”
- n. 10:4. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats *should take away* (*anapherein*, Pres Act Inf) sins.”
- o. 10:11. “And every priest *standeth* (*besteken*, Pf Act Ind, intransitive with present meaning) daily *ministering* (*leitourgon*, Pres Act Ptc) and *offering* (*prospheron*, Pres Act Ptc) ... the same sacrifices.”
- p. 13:11. “For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is *brought into* (*eispheretai*, Pres M/P Ind) the sanctuary ... *are burned* (*katakeietai*, Pres M/P Ind) without the camp.”

2. “It is sometimes argued that the present tenses employed in the above passages are no more than literary or historical presents The fact that it is the tabernacle ritual that is described, not the Herodian temple, is urged as rendering any argument based on tenses irrelevant. Nevertheless, this argument cannot this readily be dismissed in view of the thesis of the author of Hebrews. Surely it must be understood that in Jewish worship the tabernacle and the temple were essentially one (although of course the latter was historically subsequent to the former). Furthermore, it is hardly possible that the author would have spoken as he did about sacrifices being offered, if as a matter of fact they had ceased because of the temple’s destruction. Would not this feature have affected his wording in 10:2? One of his major points was the insistence that the Mosaic economy was temporary and would be superseded. To show this, the author referred to a statement in Jeremiah which implied that

the Mosaic covenant was 'old,' and he argued that this also implied obsolescence and eventual replacement (8:13). If he could have pointed to the divine judgment upon Jerusalem which brought the sacrificial system to a decisive end and thus could have corroborated his thesis, it is virtually inconceivable that he would not have done so. In the light of these circumstances, the present tenses do make a positive contribution to the problem of date" (Homer A. Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 27).

IV. A SYNOPSIS

Read F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT, xix-xxii.

AN EXPOSITION OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

PART I: THE AUTHOR OF THE NEW COVENANT (1:1-10:18)

Eusebius, “the father of Church History,” described Jesus as “the holy High Priest of all men, the only King of all creation, and the Father’s only supreme Prophet of prophets.” It has been customary in the Christian world to refer to the office of Jesus as prophet, priest, and king. Christ is the author of the new covenant. In his *Institutes*, Calvin said, “that faith may find in Christ a solid ground of salvation, and so may rely on him, it is proper for us to establish this principle, that the office which was assigned to him by the Father consists of three parts. For he was given as a Prophet, a King, and a Priest.” The three-fold office of Jesus is attested by the very title given to him, namely, Christ. The Westminster Larger Catechism asks, “Why was our Mediator called Christ?” The answer is, “Our Mediator was called Christ, because he was anointed with the Holy Ghost above measure; and so set apart, and fully furnished with all authority and ability, to execute the offices of prophet, priest, and king of his Church, in the estate both of his humiliation and exaltation” (Q.42). The Greek *Christos* means “the Anointed one.” It is interesting to note that in the OT, there were only 3 groups of people that were anointed: (1) the prophet (Ps 105:15, 1 Kgs 19:16), (2) the priest (Exod 40:13, Lev 4:3,5,16, 6:22, Zech 4:14), and (3) the king (1 Sam 10:1, 15:1, 16:13). Jesus, as Messiah, fulfilled all three roles. What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer? The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* answers, “Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation” (Q.23). Read *Calvin’s Institutes Abridged*, by Timothy Tow, 205-8, and Robert A. Peterson, “Christ’s Threefold Office of Prophet, King, and Priest,” in *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, 27-39.

I. JESUS CHRIST AS PROPHET (1:1-4:13)

The Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms question: “How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?” The answer from the former is, “Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in his revealing to the Church, in all ages, by his Spirit and Word, in divers ways of administration, the whole will of God, in all things concerning their edification and salvation” (Q.43). The latter states, “Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation” (Q.24).

It has been suggested that “the author of Hebrews composed his introduction according to a definite literary pattern. He did this in order to adequately set forth his conception of the Son who functions as prophet, priest, and king. Such an understanding of the prologue prepares the reader to approach the epistle’s main argument with greater insight” (Daniel J. Ebert IV, “Chiasm and Christology in Hebrews 1:1-4,” STM thesis, Biblical Theological Seminary, 1986, 3-4). A chiasmic structure apparently exists in verses 1-4 (ibid, 14):

- A The Son contrasted with PROPHETS, vs. 1-2
- B The Son as MESSIANIC heir, vs. 2
 - C The Son’s creative WORK, vs. 2
 - D The Son in his threefold mediatorial relationship to God, vs. 3
 - C1 The Son’s redemptive WORK, vs. 3
- B1 The Son as MESSIANIC king, vs. 3
- A1 The Son contrasted with ANGELS, vs. 4

“In v.3, at the center of the sentence, are two participial clauses, which go closely together. They make three statements about the Son in his relationship to the Father. On both sides of this center are declarations concerning what the Son has ‘made.’ On the one hand he is the agent of creation, through whom God has himself made cleansing for sin. Continuing to move outward we find two allusions to OT messianic psalms which speak of the Son’s exalted position. Finally, at the extremes of the chiasm, we find a pair of statements which contrast the

Son with other mediators of revelation, i.e., prophets and angels. According to this proposal the introduction to Hebrews follows the chiasmic pattern: A B C D C B A” (Daniel J. Ebert IV, “The Chiasmic Structure of the Prologue to Hebrews,” *Trinity Journal* 13 [1992]: 167-8). This Pauline chiasmus perhaps indicates the purpose of the Epistle—to emphasise the threefold office of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.

It is significant to observe too that the Messianic prediction of a Moses-like Prophet in Deut 18:15 intimates not just the fulfilment of the prophetic office by Christ, but also the offices of Priest and King (see also Acts 7:37). In the light of both prediction and fulfilment texts, the Moses-like Prophet is a Revealer, Mediator, and Ruler: hence, a threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King. Apart from Moses, it is only the greater Moses—Jesus Christ Himself—who can be said to have fulfilled all three roles.

1. Jesus Christ the Supreme Revelation (1:1-3)
 - a. The Nature of Revelation in the Prophets (1:1)

In the OT, God revealed Himself to His people in many parts and in many ways through His prophets. Revelation was progressive and piecemeal. God revealed Himself gradually a little bit at a time. For example, right after the Fall, God promised a deliverer from the seed of a woman in the *protevangelion* (Gen 3:15). Later, he revealed that this redeemer will come from the bowels of David (2 Sam 7:12-14), that He will be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14), and that He will die for our sins (Isa 53). The OT promised a Saviour, and the NT records its fulfilment in Christ. It is when Christ came in the flesh that the full-orb picture of God’s unfolding drama of redemption is completely revealed.

God revealed to His people in various ways; through dreams, visions, and speech. Num 12:4-7 gives us a picture of how God communicates to His people: “And the Lord spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out. And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and the both came forth. And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold.”

- b. The Nature of Revelation in Christ (1:2-3)

Christ’s revelation surpasses even that of Moses. Although Moses’ face was full of light after he came down from the holy mount, Jesus is “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:9,14). Did not Jesus also say, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father... the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (John 14:9-10)?

Revelation is no longer progressing; it is final. The canon is closed. When Christ came, all that was to be revealed had been revealed. In these “last days” (cf Acts 2:16,17, Jas 5:3, 1 Pet 1:20, 2 Pet 3: 3, 1 John 2:18, Jude 18) God has spoken to us by His Son. There is a sevenfold description of the Son which is intended

to convey the fact that Christ is superior to all of God's messengers, both prophets and angels: Christ (1) is appointed heir of all things, (2) is creator of the universe, (3) is the possessor of divinity, (4) is the exact representation of the divine essence, (5) is the upholder of all things, (6) is the purger of sins, and (7) is the exalted Lord in the presence of God (v.2-3).

2. Jesus Christ the Supreme Messenger (1:4-2:18)

Christ here is compared to the angels. The word *angelos* is a person who makes an announcement, hence a messenger (Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 2:410). The angels often function as bearers or communicators of divine revelation (Luke 1:13,26, 2:9-10).

a. The Supremacy of Christ over Angels Attested by God the Father (1:4-14).

Jesus Christ occupies an infinitely "better" position than the angels. The word "better" is used 13 times in Hebrews and it clearly sets forth the theme of the supremacy of Christ over the prophets, kings, and angels as Prophet of prophets (1:2), King of kings (1:3), and Angel of angels (1:4). In the OT, we often read of "the angel of the Lord" (Gen 16:1-13, 21:17-19, 22:11-16, 31:11-13, Exod 3:2-4, Judg 2:1, 6:12-16, 13:3-22). The Angel of the Lord of the OT is really a Christophany—a preincarnate appearance of Christ (Exod 23:20-21, 32:30-34, 33:14 cf Isa 63:9).

Jesus' superiority is seen in the fact that He is called "Son" by the Father. He has received it "a more excellent name" than the angels. What is this name? It is the title "Son" (v.5). Isaiah gives us a list of Jesus' names: "Immanuel" (Isa 7:14), "Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." To this list should be added "Son of God." In support of Jesus' position as Son, the author cites a series of 7 proof texts from the OT: (1) Ps 2:7, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee (v.5a); (2) 2 Sam 7:14, "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son" (v.5b); (3) Ps 97:7, "And let all the angels of God worship him" (v.6); (4) Ps 104:4, "Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire" (v.7); (5) Ps 45:7-8, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom" (v.8); (6) Ps 102:25-27, "And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning and thy years shall not fail" (v.10-12); and (7) Ps 110:1, "Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (v.13 cf 1:3).

In drawing the reader's attention to the above OT passages, the author is attempting to point out that Christ is not like the angels. The angels were *created spirits*, but Jesus is *begotten Son*. One of the fundamental doctrinal statements of Christology is that Jesus is *begotten* not *created*. The Westminster Larger *Catechism Q.10* asks, "What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead?" The answer is, "It is proper to the Father to *beget* the Son, and to the Son to be *begotten* of the Father, and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son, from all eternity" (italics mine). The Westminster Confession of Faith has this definition of the relationship among the 3 Persons of the Godhead, "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is *eternally begotten of* the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son"

(11.3, italics mine). John 3:16 states, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his *only begotten (monogene)* Son...”

b. Warning #1: Pay Attention to the Words of Christ (2:1-4)

The author at this point homiletically applies the doctrinal discussion of Christ’s supremacy over angels. The thrust of the argument is that if the people of old who received the Law from the angels were severely punished by God when they disobeyed it, how much more will the severity of the judgment be when men now disregard the gospel that is given by God Himself in Christ? The answer is obvious and emphatic, “It will be extremely severe, and no one shall escape judgment!”

The severity is compounded by the fact that man has no excuse whatsoever to reject the Gospel of Christ because it is (1) preached by Christ Himself, (2) confirmed by the Apostles, and (3) authenticated by the Holy Spirit through signs and wonders. Thus, a rejection of the Gospel of Christ is tantamount to the unpardonable sin, which is blasphemy against the Spirit.

Many commentators use v. 3 to argue against a Pauline authorship of Hebrews. Kent contends that the argument is inconclusive, “for all will readily admit that Paul had not been an eyewitness of the miracles or of the preaching of Jesus, and thus had the confirming testimony of others for these things. The statement does not speak of initial impartation of the message but of confirmation. Thus even Paul could have said, “The Lord Jesus brought God’s final word of salvation to men, and there are many eyewitnesses still living who have amply confirmed what he said and did” (*Hebrews*, 50).

c. The Supremacy of Christ over Angels Demonstrated in His Incarnation (2:5-18)

i. His humanity (2:5-9)

The author is here anticipating a doubt that might arise in the reader’s mind: “How can Christ be superior to the angels when He became a man?” Did not Ps 8:5 say that man is made “a little lower than the angels?”

In reply to this objection, it should first of all be noted that the incarnation and exaltation of Christ should not be seen separately. The 2 events are intrinsically tied. Paul in his discussion on Christ’s humiliation often includes His subsequent glorification (Phil 2:5-11, Col 1:13-19).

Ps 8:4-6 is not intended to demean man’s position in God’s created order. Man is not made a little higher than the animals; he is made a little lower than the angels! Man is portrayed in exalted terms. Moreover, man is a little lower than the angels only *temporarily*. He will one day be crowned with glory and honour. Now, how will man be able to attain this. Not on His own, but in Christ, the representative Man, the Second Adam. What Adam originally failed to achieve, Christ did. Christ was made a little lower than the angels for a short time so that “he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” in order that He might bring “many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation” (v.9-10). As our representative, Christ saved us through His active and passive obedience. Having successfully completed His mission, Christ is

now crowned with glory and honour. It should be noted that although anthropocentrically speaking Christ was a little lower than the angels in His incarnation, He was never really inferior to the angels. This is because Christ is the Theanthropic Person—the God-Man. There is reason to believe that the term “Son of man” in 2:6 (Ps 8:4-6) could be seen in its messianic sense. That is why Jesus was able to say that He could command 12 legions of angels to come to His rescue if He wanted to in His earthly ministry (Matt 26:53). Man is presently lower than the angels, but like Christ, he will in the world to come (i.e. the millennium) occupy an exalted position above them (v.5 cf 1 Cor 6:1-3, Rev 20:6).

ii. His passion (2:10-18)

The word “passion” is another term for Christ’s “suffering.” The author here anticipates yet another objection: Even if Christ is superior to the angels in His humanity, how is He superior to them in His sufferings?

(a) He was victorious in His sufferings (2:10-13)

In order to save man from sin, it was necessary for Christ to pay the penalty of sin. God is holy and cannot allow sin to go unpunished. By sending His only begotten Son, God made provisions for man to be saved. Christ saved man through His obedience to the Law in His life, and His submission to the cross in His death. By doing so, He became the “captain” of our salvation. The word used is *archegos* which means “one who causes something to begin—‘initiator, founder, originator’” (Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 1:655). Christ is the one who instituted salvation. He is the Author of the Christian faith.

(b) He was victorious over the devil (2:14-18)

“The devil is termed the one who had the power of death. This, of course, does not mean that Satan is an independent sovereign who inflicts death upon men at his whim. Scripture does teach, however, that in opposition to the kingdom of light where God rules there is a realm of darkness in which men are enslaved to Satan, sin, and death (Eph. 6:12; 1 John 2:9-11; 3:12,14; Col. 1:13). It was Satan’s activity that introduced sin, and death followed from it as its penalty. Further, he functions as the slanderer of men, calling for their death from God (Job 1-2). Thus Satan exercises the power of death in that he promotes sin and rebellion against God, slanders God’s people, and calls their death from God. But Christ destroyed the devil at the cross. ... He did this by satisfying fully the claims of God’s outraged righteousness. By paying the penalty in full, the very grounds of death and of Satan’s accusations were removed. No more could Satan slander a believer before God and impugn God’s righteousness because the sinner had not paid with his life. The penalty was paid in full by Christ” (Kent, *Hebrews*, 59). Christ thus

fulfilled the prophecy and promise of Gen 3:15. He dealt a fatal blow on the devil's head on the cross.

Although the elect angels are morally perfect, they in no way qualify to save man. The angels are created spirit beings. Only the Creator can save His creatures. "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (v.16).

3. Jesus Christ the Greater Moses (3:1-4:13)

Excursus: An Exposition of Deut 18:15.

Moses in Deut 18:15 predicted, "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."

The verse predicts the coming of a special prophetic *individual* rather than the prophetic *institution*. A study on the text itself will bear this out. The word "prophet" here is written without the definite article. In Hebrew, the non-use of the article indicates "the class to which the referent belongs" not to "the class" *per se*. In other words, this individual to come will belong to the class of servants called prophets. If the word was intended to be seen in the collective sense, it would have been expressed with the interchanging of the singular and the plural. Throughout the passage, the noun נביא is found in the singular. It is thus preferable to understand the נביא here as referring to a particular person whose identity is hitherto unspecified.

It is also interesting to note the unusual sentence structure of the verse. The normal word order of the Hebrew language is verb-subject-object. Hence, verse 15 should read יקים יהוה נביא. But this is not the case here. The text is found in this order: object-verb-subject: נביא יקים יהוה. The object may precede the verb when the author wishes to *emphasise* it. It may be because of this reason that the KJV translators capitalised the initial letter of the word "prophet," indicating that he is one special personage. The position of the word נביא at the *beginning* of the sentence supports the argument that the referent is an individual rather than an institution. Note that no such special word order exists with reference to the institution of a king (Deut 17:14) or priest (Deut 18:1).

It is significant to note that in Deut 34:10, it is stated that "there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses whom the LORD knew face to face." The prophets that came after Moses were not of the same standing as Moses. Moses was far superior to them. In his ministry, Moses functioned as a prophet, priest, and king. It is only Jesus, the greater Moses, who can be said to have fulfilled all 3 roles (cf Acts 3:22, 7:37). For a detailed discussion, see my paper entitled "The Identification of the Prophet Like Moses," in *The Burning Bush* (July 2000): 109-49.

a. A Comparison of Jesus and Moses (3:1-6)

The following commentary on this section is taken from selected portions of Kent, *Hebrews*, 63-8.

i. Both Christ and Moses were faithful to God (3:1-2)

The readers are urged to consider Jesus as to His faithfulness as an apostle and high priest. He was faithful to God His Father, even as Moses was. The sense of *poiesanti* (KJV: "appointed") seems certainly to

refer to Christ's office as apostle and high priest. The word *poieo* usually means "to make." However to translate it as "made" and use it in the interest of Arianism as asserting that Christ was a created being is unwarranted. What is stated is that He was "made apostle and high priest." The making here has to do with Christ's appointment and not creation. Indeed Christ is the Creator Himself, and not a creature. The background of the statement may be 1 Sam 12:6, where it is stated that Jehovah "appointed [LXX, *poiesas*] Moses and Aaron," and the reference is clearly to their official appointment, not their physical creation.

Moses is also declared by the author to have been faithful to God. He is not disparaged in this statement, for this would have alienated the readers. At no point in this discussion is any suggestion made that Jesus was more faithful than Moses (although such a point might well have been established had he wished to make it, for Moses did have some lapses). The author is rather contending with those who were so enamoured of Moses that they were about to forsake the Christian society and return to Judaism. At this point in the discussion, our author is content to make the observation that Jesus is not to be disparaged, for great as Moses was, a careful consideration of Jesus will reveal no deficiencies either. In fact, he will go on to show that each was faithful, but Jesus is on an entirely different and vastly higher plane.

The attributing of faithfulness to Moses was not just a deduction by the author, but was based upon God's statement in Num 12:7, "My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house."

- ii. Christ is the builder of the house, but Moses was a part of the house (3:3-4)

The reason for the superior glory of Jesus is explained on the basis of rank, not faithfulness. The one who built (*ho kataskeuusas*) refers not only to the person who constructs, but also involves the work of planning and furnishing. One may marvel at a beautiful and well-equipped building. The author does not imply by his illustration that Moses was the house, but that Moses must be considered as part of the house or household (in conformity with the concepts expressed in verses 2 and 5 where Moses was "in" God's house). In spite of the greatness of Moses, whose responsibilities in Israel made him unquestionably the leader of God's people, he was still an integral part of those people, on the same plane with them as far as their relationship to God was concerned. Christ stands on a higher plane and deserves to be considered as the builder of the house, rather than a mere part of it.

The self-evident truth is stated in v.4 that the existence of any building testifies to the fact of a builder. This is true whether *oikos* be regarded as a "house" or a "family" (household). No matter how highly the Jews may regard Moses, all would admit that God stood above him. Thus he who built all things is God. The argument in this passage becomes clear only when it is recognised that the author is attributing deity to Jesus. God is the ultimate builder, and Christ has been stated to be the builder of the house in v.3. It should be evident that in the author's mind Jesus is God's unique Son, and thus possesses the divine nature.

iii. Christ is the Son over the house, but Moses was only a servant in the house (3:5-6)

As God's appointed messenger to His people, Moses always delivered God's word, and thus was faithful to his authorisation. Furthermore, his faithfulness was specifically stated in Numbers 12:7. However, that very passage also indicates the status of Moses as a servant and the author picks out this term for emphasis.

Christ, however, occupies a vastly different position in God's house of believers. He is the Son, the heir of God, possessing an authority which is inherently superior to any mere servant. Thus He is not merely "in" the house as Moses was (although Moses did have special responsibilities in the house) but is over the house as the lord and master. Even though during Christ's earthly sojourn He appeared to be a servant (Phil. 2:7), He was actually equal to the founder, a position never enjoyed by Moses.

b. Warning #2: Do not harden your heart to the gospel of Christ (3:7-4:13)

i. The prohibition of entering God's rest (3: 7-19)

The author has just shown that Jesus is superior to Moses. This should invoke a response from the readers. To doubting believers, it should cause them to fully trust in His person and work. To unbelieving Jews, it should cause them to repent of their unbelief and turn to Jesus for their salvation. That is why the author exhorts, "To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts" (v.7-8). The basis of this injunction is Ps 95:7-11. It is significant to note that the word "today" is emphasised throughout this passage (3:13,15; 4:7[2x]). Salvation is *today!* It cannot wait.

The words "provocation" and "temptation" in verse 8 are taken from the LXX rendering of Ps 95:8. They probably allude to 2 different places and events in the wilderness experience of the Israelites. The word "provocation" alludes to *Meribah* (strife), and the word "temptation" to *Massab*. Both words are linked together in Exod 17:7: "And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?" Such unbelief on the part of the Israelites was first displayed in Rephidim at the start of the exodus (Exod 17:1-7). At Rephidim, the Israelites complained over the lack of water. The same unbelief that God would provide is again displayed in Kadesh. God gave them the water they wanted and said, "This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD" (Num 20:13). It is surely not just the fact that the Israelites complained over the lack of water that the Lord became angry with them. It was the root problem of unbelief. The 10 spies had earlier dissuaded the people from entering the promised land, to which God responded by saying that they had tempted Him ten times (Num 14:11,22,23). The phrase "the day of temptation" (v.8) should not be seen as a literal 24 hour day, but a figurative though specific period of time; in this case, the whole period of the exodus. The

whole journey from Egypt to Canaan was characterised by rebellious unbelief and a progressive hardening of the heart (Exod 17:1-7, Num 20:1-13). Heb 3:9-11 gives us a divine commentary of the whole exodus episode: “When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter in my rest.” Throughout the wilderness period “Israel saw numerous miracles and other instances of divine guidance, but still continued to resist. In spite of God’s unmistakable presence among them, they frequently acted as if they had been abandoned, and demanded continuing proofs of God’s leading. Such testing of God is a demonstration of unbelief, for it says in effect, ‘We don’t believe your promises to provide for us, and we demand new evidence.’ This went on for a period of forty years, throughout the entire wilderness experience from Rephidim onward. Such action in the face of repeated miracles was clearly inexcusable” (Kent, *Hebrews*, 71).

It is interesting to note that the author of Hebrews rearranged the phrase “forty years” when he quoted from Ps 95. The Psalmist had the phrase “forty years” at the beginning of the verse which speaks of God’s grief (Ps 95:10), but the author of Hebrews placed it at the end of the verse which speaks of Israel’s unbelief (Heb 3:9). Why was this done? Kent suggests: “One good possibility is that the writer was conscious of a parallel in years between the forty years of Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness and approximately the same period that had now elapsed since the rejection of Christ in A.D. 30. It is doubtful that we could place the writing of Hebrews beyond A.D. 70; but if it was written in the 60s, already it was the fourth decade since the crucifixion, and the parallel would provide opportunity for some sober reflection” (*Hebrews*, 71; cf Luke 9:31).

The author went on to diagnose the problem as having its source from the heart (v. 10, 12). The phrase *kardia ponera apistias* is significant. The word *ponera*, “evil,” has the idea of diseased, hence, corrupt, depraved, and wicked. The genitive *apistias*, “unbelief” describes the basic symptom of a diseased heart. A depraved heart is primarily characterised by unbelief.

Because of their unbelief, God forbade them from entering his “rest” (v.11 cf Ps 95:11, Num 14:28-30). In the OT, the promised land of Canaan was God’s rest for the people of Israel. God promised in Deut 12:9-10, “For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you. But when ye go over Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety...” (cf. Josh 21:44, 22:4, 23:1).

The author warns: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (v.12). This is a very serious warning. It is a warning against apostasy. The word “departing” here is the Greek *apostenai* where the English word “apostasy” is derived. It literally means to move away from. To reject the Lord Jesus Christ after He has revealed Himself so clearly to them (Heb 1:2) is apostasy. To depart from Christ is to depart from the living God. A rejection of Christ is a demonstration of a faithless heart. It shows that

one did not really know God in the first place. Although the author here addressed his readers as “brethren,” it does not mean that he is presuming that each and everyone of them are truly “brethren.” It is a literary or rhetorical device which is still used today when a pastor addresses his congregation as “friends” over the pulpit. It is without doubt that many of the readers were indeed Christians, but in the setting of a local church, a mixed multitude invariably exists.

The readers are exhorted not to allow the heart to “be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” and to “hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (v.13-14). The warning is issued again, “harden not your hearts” (v.15). The readers are warned not to follow after the steps of their forbears for God was thoroughly disgusted with their rebellious unbelief and destroyed them in the wilderness (Num 14:23,29,32,33).

ii. The invitation of entering God’s rest (4:1-13)

God’s promise of entering into His rest is still valid for us today. The word “rest” is used differently here. In chapter 3:11,18, the word “rest” has the idea of physical rest—God’s gift of the promised land of Canaan. Here, the word “rest” has the idea of *spiritual* rest—God’s gift of eternal life in the gospel. “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest” (v.2-3).

This is surely one proof text against the dispensational theology. The Gospel did not begin in the NT, it was already preached in the OT. Did not Jesus tell the Jews, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me” (John 5:39,46)? Jesus also said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56).

How was the gospel administered in the OT? The *Westminster Confession of Faith* under the heading “Of God’s Covenant with Man” explains: “Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.

“This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed.

“This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full

remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old Testament” (VII.3-5). Jesus gave this invitation to sinners: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I *will give you rest*” (Matt 11:28, italics mine). To enter into this salvific rest, there needs to be an application of faith (v.2b).

If God’s rest is still open and valid, why did he say, “they shall not enter into my rest” (v.3; the conditional *ei*, “if” is another way of expressing the Hebrew negative oath). Indeed, God’s warning continues to hold true. Those who do not approach God by faith will still be refused entrance into His rest. But the promise continues to be equally valid. Christians (both Jew and Gentile) are presently entering into God’s rest. The word for “enter”, *eiserchometha*, is written in the present tense indicating that the action is still going on. To prove that God’s salvific rest is still open to all who would trust in Christ, the author argues from the OT that God’s seventh day rest from His creating work is still occurring (i.e. God has rested from all His creating work since the inaugural seventh day). The idea of rest here is that “of completion and not of inactivity.... It is important to note that the ‘rest’ is not something new which has not been known in experience until Christ came. It has been available throughout the whole of man’s history. This reference back to the creation places the idea on the broadest possible basis and would seem to suggest that it was part of God’s intention for man. ‘Rest’ is a quality which has eluded man’s quest, and in fact cannot be attained except through Christ. Jesus himself invited men to come to him to find rest (Mt. 11:28-30)” (Guthrie, *Hebrews*, TNTC, 113).

The author cites another OT passage to support the fact that the promise of God’s rest is still open. Ps 95:7 tells us that God is still offering His rest to people *today*. The author was careful to point out that the invitation is still open “after so long a time” (v.7). It has been more than 400 years since God made the promise of a rest, but the failure of the Exodus generation did not mean that the promise was cancelled. The reference to “Jesus” in v.8 needs clarification. In Greek the names of Jesus and Joshua are spelt the same way, *Iesous*. It is clear in this context that there is *paronomasia*, a play on words. Joshua typified what Christ would do when He came. Jesus Christ is the true *Saviour*, not Joshua, the son of Nun. “The author’s contention is that Joshua did not provide Israel with rest in the fullest sense of Psalm 95:11, even though he did lead the people into the promised land. In fact, the Old Testament asserts that he did lead them into rest of a limited sort (Josh. 21:44; 22:4; 23:1). However, the rest in Canaan was only one very limited aspect of that blessed rest which God had planned for His people; and the far more important spiritual rest in salvation which is the possession as well as prospect of believers was beyond Joshua’s capability to bestow. The proof is the fact that long after the days of Joshua, God would not have spoken in Psalm 95 about a need today to enter into rest if it had been previously accomplished” (Kent, *Hebrews*, 84). Greek students would do well to note the *ei ... an* construct indicates that this is a *contrary to fact* condition: “For if Joshua had given them (salvific) rest (which he did not), then would he (Jesus) not afterward have spoken of another day (which He did in Ps 95).”

The author concludes, “There *remaineth* therefore a (sabbath) rest to the people of God” (v.9, italics and parenthesis mine). The word *sabbatismos* is not the usual word for “rest” used in the previous verses which is *katapausis*. The former occurs only here in the NT. Why is there such a switch? Kent answers, “The change to sabbath rest was doubtless made because the author wants his readers to think in terms of God’s own rest, which was just explained in its connection with creation (v.4). The rest in Canaan is not what remains to be entered, but the sharing of God’s presence and the blessedness which that affords” (*Hebrews*, 86). The Sabbath rest here according to Calvin is “that perpetual Sabbath in which there is the highest felicity, when there will be a likeness between men and God, to whom they will be united The chief food of man is nothing else but union with God; this is attained when we are formed according to him as our exemplar” (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. John Owen, 98).

In summary, the idea of rest in Heb 3-4 contains 4 aspects: (1) God’s rest or creation rest (4:4), (2) Canaan rest (3:7-19), (3) Salvation rest (4:1,3a,8,9), and (4) Heaven rest (4:10,11). “Basic to the entire discussion is God’s rest, begun at the conclusion of creation. It is this present blissful condition of God which He longs to share with men. From this beginning the author develops the theme from one step to another. The physical rest in Canaan was merely one limited aspect, and is used as a type or picture of a deeper spiritual concept. That spiritual reality is the spiritual rest which the true believer may have even in this life, but it does not bring the fullest satisfaction until the future day when believers actually enter God’s presence in heaven and ‘rest from their labors.’ God’s salvation for man thus is covered in broad strokes, and is shown to involve physical as well as spiritual blessings, both in time and in eternity” (Kent, *Hebrews*, 88).

II. JESUS CHRIST AS PRIEST (4:14-6:20)

The *Westminster Larger Catechism* asks, “How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?” The answer is, “Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering of himself a sacrifice without spot to God, to be a reconciliation for the sins of his people; and in making continual intercession for them” (Q.44).

To the same question, the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* replies, “Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us” (Q.25).

1. Jesus Christ the Supreme High Priest (4:14-6:20)

a. The Ability of Jesus as High Priest (4:14-16)

These verses contain words of encouragement to those who might have become discouraged over the hopeless situation they are in after having been shown the sinfulness of their depraved heart and that nothing escapes the all-seeing eye of God.

The author tells the readers to focus their eyes on Jesus, their *great high priest* (v.14). In the OT, there are priests, and high priests, but no one has been called *great high priest*. Only Jesus deserves that great title. Jesus, as great high

priest, is able to (1) intercede for sinners in heaven, and (2) feel with sinners on earth. The Jewish high priest had to go through the Holy of holies, or the most holy place in the earthly temple once every year, but Christ passed through the heavens into the very presence of God Himself once and for all (v.16). Moreover, Jesus in His humanity can empathise with us in our weaknesses for he “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (v.15). The qualification “yet without sin” is important. “We are often tempted because we have already been involved in sin, or compromised with sin, and are tempted to go into deeper sin. Jesus was never tempted in any such way, for in Him there was no sin. When trials or even temptations in our modern sense of the word, came to Him, He had taken no previous steps toward the sin and there was no sinful response in His nature” (J.O. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2:58-9). See also 2 Cor 5:21, 1 John 3:5.

All (both believers and unbelievers alike) are exhorted to approach the throne of grace boldly to obtain mercy and grace in time of need. Note that it is the *throne of grace*, not the *throne of judgment*. In this period of grace, the Lord bestows mercy and unmerited favour to all who would put their trust in Him. Christians can find help to overcome sin without fear of rejection because Christ our Priest is sitting at the right hand of God interceding for us.

b. The Supremacy of Christ over the Aaronic Priesthood (5:1-10)

i. The inferiority of the Aaronic priesthood (5:1-4)

The Aaronic priesthood is an inferior priesthood because its priest is plagued by weaknesses himself. The OT priest is just as sinful and frail as any other human being whom he is representing before God. He himself needed to make atonement for his own sins. The priest himself needed a priest. In Lev 16, we read that the high priest had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins first during the Day of Atonement before he could do so for the rest of the people (v.2-3).

Since it is necessary for man to have a mediator to represent him before God, it is crucial that an acceptable representative be appointed. Since no human being is sinless, no suitable representative can be found. Man is thus fully dependent upon God for mercy and grace. God will have to decide who is “acceptable” before Him as priest. It is thus a gracious act on the part of God to even allow a sinner to function as priest (v.4 cf Exod 28, Lev 8, Num 16:40, 18:1-7).

ii. The superiority of the priesthood of Christ (5:5-10)

Jesus’ priesthood came also by divine appointment. The Lord descended from Judah and not from Levi and Aaron the priestly line. It would therefore be wrong for Him to assume the role of priest. The author at this point attempts to prove that the priesthood of Christ was given to Him by God, and was a totally different kind of priesthood, one which did not belong to the Aaronic but to Melchizedek.

The author first points out Christ’s status before God. The priests of Israel were all *servants*, but Jesus is Son (v.5 cf Ps 2:7). No where in Scripture did God address Aaron as “my Son”.

Secondly, the author points out that the priesthood of Christ is not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek (v.6 cf Ps 110:4). Melchizedek appeared in the OT in Gen 14:18-20. Christ's priesthood clearly transcends that of the Aaronic or Levitical because it follows after a superior one, namely, that of Melchizedek whose priesthood combined both royal and mediatorial functions. Melchizedek was a priest of the most high God. The Levitical priesthood was never given such a title. Jesus Christ was not only *Priest-Son*, but also *Priest-King*.

Heb 5:7 is an interesting passage: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." This clearly alludes to the Lord's Gethsemane experience. These prayers of Christ were directed to the one who was able to save him out of death. For what did Jesus pray in Gethsemane? To answer this, one must consider also the difficult passage in the Gospels, "Let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39 et al.). It can hardly be that Jesus was praying that He might not die on the cross, for this prayer was hearkened to and yet He did die. (To suggest that the prayer was heard, but the answer was no, hardly satisfies the language here.) ...

"If it is understood that the cup from which Jesus drank was the 'cup' of suffering the wrath of God as the bearer of man's guilt, then to some extent it may be appreciated why He who had never known forsakenness by the Father dreaded the prospect. Yet His will was so completely submissive to the Father that He asked, 'Thy will be done' (Matt. 26:42). Out of death (*ek thanaton*) may well suggest that the resurrection is in view. Thus Christ is understood to pray that the separation from God involved in His approaching death for sinners (Matt. 27:46) would not be the end of the experience, but that death might issue in resurrection life. (To object that Christ knew He would rise, and had even predicted it, and thus would not have prayed for it is invalid, for the same objection might be raised to all of Christ's prayers. Prayer does not always involve asking about uncertainties, but may include statements of acquiescence to God's revealed will.) It should also be observed that the text does not actually say that Christ prayed to be saved out of death, but to the One able to save him out of death. Can this not suggest the reposing of perfect trust in the Father, and the acceptance of His will regardless of the cost and without trying to alter it?

"Christ's prayer in Gethsemane was heard .. because of His godly fear. This is apparently a reference to Christ's perfect submission to God's will as He prayed 'Thy will be done.' This display of absolute reverence for the Father resulted in the granting of the request As a perfect man His prayer was in full harmony with God's will and thus was certain of being answered. How encouraging to have such a priest representing us before the Father" (Kent, *Hebrews*, 99-100).

Buswell has this to say concerning the "cup": "I am personally convinced that the 'cup' from which Jesus asked to be delivered in Gethsemane was physical collapse and death in the garden before He reached the cross (Matthew 26:38-46; Mark 14:34-42; Luke 22:41-46). Luke describes His physical condition, 'An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him; [for] as He prayed He was in extreme agony, and His sweat was like great drops of blood falling down upon the

ground' (Luke 22:43,44). Matthew and Mark do not describe these particular symptoms, but they record the fact that He said, 'My soul is in great pain,' to the point of death' (Matthew 26:38; Mark 13:34). In this saying the word translated 'in great pain,' or 'exceeding sorrowful,' is the word in the LXX which translated 'cast down' in the repeated refrain in Psalm 42, 'Why art thou cast down, Oh my soul?' As Jesus used these words in speaking to His disciples, they would undoubtedly recognize that He was referring to this particular refrain in the Psalm. But He added, 'To the point of death,' indicating that He thought Himself to be in a state of physical collapse.

"Extreme profuse perspiration such as Luke described is characteristic of a state of physical shock in which the sufferer is in imminent danger of collapse and even death. My suggestion is that our Lord Jesus Christ, finding Himself in this physical state of extreme shock, prayed for deliverance from the death in the garden, in order that He might accomplish His purpose on the cross.

"This interpretation would harmonize with Hebrews 5:7, and it seems to me the only interpretation which will thus harmonize. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews literally says that He prayed 'to Him who was able to save Him from death,' and 'He was heard from the fear.' In the Scripture to say that a prayer is 'heard' almost always implies that the petition is granted. I cannot see any other possibility but that we must translate these words, 'He was heard [and delivered] from that which He feared'" (*Theology*, 2:62-3).

By submitting to His Father's will, Christ displayed active and passive obedience. He obeyed His Father's will (*active obedience*) by going to His death on the cross (*passive obedience*) in order to redeem man from sin. See George Skariah, "The Soteriological Significance of the Active Obedience of Christ," *The Burning Bush* (July 2000): 254-301.

c. Warning #3: Do not be spiritually retarded in your Christian faith (5:11-6:20)

i. Spiritual infancy rebuked (5:11-14)

"Of whom" here refers to the antecedent "Melchizedek" (v. 10). The author has a lot more to say concerning the relation between Melchizedek and Christ, but the readers apparent lack of knowledge with reference to the basics of the Christian faith made it difficult for the author to proceed with the discussion of such a difficult subject. The author accuses the readers of being "dull of hearing" (v.11). The word "dull" comes from one word *nothroi* which has the idea of laziness. It is used also in Heb 6:11-12. *Nothros* is an adjective "pertaining to being sluggish or slow to become involved in some activity—"lazy" (Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 88:249). When used as an idiom, *nothros tais akoais*, as it is here, it means "slow to understand, with an implication of laziness" (ibid., 32:47). For this reason, the author chided the readers, "For when for a time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (v.12). What are these "first principles"? They are listed in 6:1, namely, the doctrine of Christ,

repentance from dead works, faith toward God, doctrine of baptisms, laying of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. These are *fundamentals* of the faith; foundational material for new converts. The readers were still infants (v.13). They were still not capable of receiving the meat of God's Word. They have not gone past "Theology 101." Like babies, they were still unable to discern right from wrong, true from false (v.14).

ii. Spiritual maturity encouraged (6:1-3)

The author exhorts the readers to "go on unto perfection." "Let us move along (*pberometha*) implies that, ... 'The thought is not primarily of personal effort ... but of personal surrender to an active influence.' The concept is consistent with 1:3 where the same verb is used of Christ who 'carries' (*pberon*) all things forward to their proper end. The believer's responsibility is to stop putting hindrances in the way. By allowing Christ's priesthood to do its work in our lives, we may arrive at that spiritual maturity (*teleiotesa*) that is expected of each believer within a reasonable time" (Kent, *Hebrews*, 105).

iii. Danger of apostasy (6:4-8)

This passage should be read in the light of Heb 4:7-19. The Israelites displayed classic symptoms of an apostate heart in the Exodus. After having seen how the Lord had miraculously delivered them from the tyrannical hand of Pharaoh in Egypt, the opening of the Red Sea, the provision of manna and water from the rock, they still did not trust Jehovah to give them victory against the Canaanites in the promised land. Bruce likewise commented, "From this description of the experiences of those who may nevertheless fall away, it would certainly be difficult to distinguish them at the outset from those who are going to stay the course. For they have (a) been enlightened, (b) tasted of the heavenly gift, (c) partaken of the Holy Spirit, (d) experienced the goodness of the word of God and the mighty works of the age to come. Just as the Hebrew spies who returned from their expedition carrying visible tokens of the good land of Canaan nevertheless failed to enter the land because of their unbelief, so those who had come to know the blessings of the new covenant might nevertheless in a spiritual sense turn back in heart to Egypt and so forfeit the saints' everlasting rest" (Bruce, *Hebrews*, 145).

Since the Epistle is addressed to Jewish Christians, does this mean that a believer can lose his salvation? The hitch to this question is: How do we know that all the readers were Christians? The obvious answer is: We do not know. Instead of assuming that all the readers were born-again believers, it is better to say that the author was addressing a *mixed multitude*. Some were perhaps *professing* faith but were never really converted. To argue that a Christian can lose his salvation from this passage clearly militates against other scriptural passages like John 10:27-29, *Rom* 5:10, 8:35-39, Phil 1:6, and 1 Pet 1:4-5. This passage is specifically directed to people like Judas Iscariot who outwardly appear Christian but really never was one. Read Kent, *Hebrews*, 111-4 for a summary of the main views which are: (1) Saved persons who are

subsequently lost, (2) professed believers who have never really been saved, (3) saved persons who backslide, and (4) a hypothetical case to illustrate the folly of apostasy.

I hold to view #2. Calvin's remarks on this passage seem to support this position: "How can it be said that he who has once made such a progress should afterwards fall away? For God, it may be said, calls none effectually but the elect, and Paul testifies that they are really his sons who are led by his Spirit (Rom. *viii.14*;) and he teaches us, that it is a sure pledge of adoption when Christ makes us partakers of his Spirit. The elect are also beyond the danger of finally falling away; for the Father who gave them to be preserved by Christ his Son is greater than all, and Christ promises to watch over them all so that none may perish. To all this I answer, That God indeed favours none but the elect alone with the Spirit of regeneration, and that by this they are distinguished from the reprobate; for they are renewed after his image and receive the earnest of the Spirit in hope of the future inheritance, and by the same Spirit the Gospel is sealed in their hearts. But I cannot admit that all this is any reason why he should not grant the reprobate also some taste of his grace, why he should not irradiate their minds with some sparks of his light, why he should not give them some perception of his goodness, and in some sort engrave his word on their hearts. Otherwise where would be the temporary faith mentioned by Mark *iv.17*? There is therefore some knowledge even in the reprobate, which afterwards vanishes away, either because it did not strike roots sufficiently deep, or because it withers, being choked up.

"And by the bridle the Lord keeps us in fear and humility; and we certainly see how prone human nature is otherwise to security and foolish confidence" (*Hebrews*, 137-8).

Apostasy is an unpardonable sin (v.6). If a man hardens his heart against God, there will come a time when the Lord Himself will do the hardening. This is judicial hardening or blinding (Matt 13:14-15). The warning of 3:7-8 may be echoed here, "To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts."

iv. Certainty of God's Promises (6:9-12)

Salvation is of the Lord. And because it is thus, our salvation is secured. God cannot and will not break His promises. The author is convinced that the community of saints to which he addresses will inherit the promises of God (v.12). They have demonstrated their faith by their works (v.9-10). The word "full assurance" in v.11 is *plerophorian* which means "complete certainty." In other words, there is no doubt whatsoever that our hope in Christ will ever fail because the object of our hope—Christ—never fails.

The author exhorts the Christians to be "followers" of those who are walking faithfully in the Lord (cf Heb 11). The word used here is the Greek *mimetai* from which the English "mimic" is derived. It is good to "mimic" believers who have displayed exemplary Christian character in their lives. Paul in 1 Cor 11:1 commanded his readers, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

d. The Priesthood of Christ likened to that of Melchizedek (6:13-20)

This section is actually a continuation of the author's discussion on the certainty of God's promises. God's covenant with Abraham was used as an example to illustrate the certainty of God's promises. God condescended to guarantee with an oath the promise he made to Abraham. "In oaths it is customary to swear by a higher power, and the greater the being sworn by, the surer the promise. The Jews of Jesus' day swore by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, and their own heads (Matt. 5:34-36) The bare Word of God is itself utterly certain. However, to give men (in this instance, Abraham) more confidence, God condescended to human custom and employed an oath. There was no higher power that God could invoke to guarantee the veracity and to inflict a penalty if He spoke falsely. Therefore, he swore by himself, placing behind His promise the very integrity of God. Nothing could be surer than this. Hence Abraham was again informed that God would bless him with a greatly multiplied seed. The King James Version rendering, "blessing I will bless thee," reflects a literal translation of the Greek participle which in turn was the Septuagint method of treating the Hebrew infinitive absolute construction of Genesis 22:17. The sense to be conveyed is that of emphasis; thus, I will surely bless you....

"The two unchangeable things are the promise and the oath. The Scriptural principle of two witnesses for establishing legality underlies this argument. Since God Himself made the promise, and there was no other person to whom appeal might be made for confirmation, He added His own oath. Now either of these two things was fully trustworthy, for they both came from God, and thus both ... are completely without falsehood for God is incapable of lying. By granting both the promise and oath, neither of which can be altered to our hurt, we have the strongest assurance imaginable for trusting God's promises" (Kent, *Hebrews*, 119,121).

All the promises of God are sure and steadfast because they are anchored in the *Jesus*. Note that only the earthly name of the Messiah is used indicating that the emphasis is placed on the work of our Lord while He was in the flesh. "The ground of this confidence is the great truth that Jesus has, by way of Bethlehem and Calvary, *become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek*; and this is the theme—central to the doctrine of this epistle—of the unique and all—sufficient high priesthood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (Hughes, *Hebrews*, 236). For a history of views on the identity of Melchizedek, see Shin Yeong Gil, "The Identification of Melchizedek," MDiv thesis, Far Eastern Bible College, 1994.

III. JESUS CHRIST AS KING (7:1-10:18)

The *Westminster Larger Catechism* asks, "How doth Christ execute the office of a king?" The answer is, "Christ executeth the office of a king, in calling out of the world a people to himself; and giving them officers, laws, and censures, by which he visibly governs them; in bestowing saving grace upon his elect, rewarding their obedience, and correcting them for their sins, preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings, restraining and overcoming all their enemies, and powerfully ordering all things for his own glory, and their good; and also in taking vengeance on the rest, who know not God and obey not the gospel" (Q.45).

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* summarises it this way: "Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies" (Q.26).

1. Jesus Christ as the Supreme Priest-King (7:1-28)
 - a. The Supremacy of Christ as the Priest-King (7:1-10)
 - i. The superiority of Melchizedek as priest-king (7:1-10)

The passage here alludes to the incident between Abraham and Melchizedek recorded in Gen 14:18-20. It is written that when Abraham returned victorious from his campaign against the 5 kings who conquered the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, so as to rescue his nephew Lot, he gave a tenth (equivalent to the Mosaic tithe; Lev 27:32) of the spoils to Melchizedek.

Who is Melchizedek? The Bible tells us he is “king of Salem, priest of the most high God.” Salem could well be the ancient name for Jerusalem. In Ps 76:2, Jerusalem is called “Salem.” “Salem” in Hebrew means peace. The name “Melchizedek” is a combination of 2 Hebrew words *melek*, “king” and *tsedek*, “righteous” which literally translated means “My King is righteous” or “King of righteousness.” So Melchizedek is both *king of righteousness*, and *king of peace*. Both are descriptive of the person and work of Christ. The righteousness of Christ has obtained peace for man. Kent writes, “Righteousness is basic to the priesthood, and peace comes from it. Melchizedek was king whose name and realm connoted these concepts, at least etymologically. He provided a type of Christ, whose person and work accomplishes true righteousness and peace. It was Christ who was ‘the Holy and Righteous One’ (Acts 3:14); and by satisfying the righteousness of God as our substitute, He provides peace with God for all believers (Rom. 5:1; Col. 2:20; Eph. 2:14)” (*Hebrews*, 124).

The priesthood of Jesus is unique. It is unlike that of Aaron. The Jewish priesthood required all its priests to be from the Levitical line. Every priest in Israel received his priesthood by being a descendent of Aaron. Christ received His priesthood from nobody but God (Heb 5:10). The source of Christ’s priesthood was not earthly but heavenly. It was not through natural means that Christ obtained His priesthood (v.3). Aaron died and needed to be replaced by another. But the priesthood of Christ is eternal. He remains our great high priest forever. Vos said, “Melchizedek was an historical person and not eternal, still as a Scriptural figure he was regarded as eternal, being without recorded father or mother or genealogy, and having no recorded beginning of days nor end of life. In these respects he is like unto the Son of God, that is, stripped of all earthly attachments. As such, then, he is also a type of Christ. Thus *as he appears in Scripture* he may be regarded as enveloped in an atmosphere of eternity” (cited in Wilson, *Hebrews*, 88).

Some have identified Melchizedek as a Christophany. Kent says that “there are compelling reasons for objecting such an identification. (1) Melchizedek is said to be (made like the Son of God. ‘ This is strange language if the sense is that he was actually the Son of God.... (2) The statement of Psalm 110:4 calls Messiah a priest ‘after the order of Melchizedek.’ This clearly differentiates Christ and Melchizedek, and it would hardly be a clarification if the text said he was a priest after the

order of himself. (3) The historical record indicates that Melchizedek was king of a city-state in Canaan, a situation involving a fairly permanent residence on the part of the king. This would be totally without precedent so far as the Old Testament revelation regarding theophanies is concerned. These were always temporary manifestations. (4) To argue from etymology that Melchizedek (“king of righteousness”) was a theophany has its hazards. Historical and archaeological data indicate good reason to understand compounds with *-zedek* as reflecting a dynastic title for Jebusite kings of the area. We have the Biblical example of Adonizedek, king of Jerusalem, in Joshua 10:1 ... ; yet it can hardly be suggested that this king was a theophany. The best explanation seems to be that Melchizedek was a historical human personage who typified Christ” (*Hebrews*, 127).

Melchizedek was obviously a believer. How did he become one? The Scriptures does not tell us. Kent suggests that he might be one of those rare individuals who still held to the true faith handed down from Noah (*ibid.*, 124). How did Abraham know Melchizedek and why should he make a tithe-offering to him? The Bible does not give us a whole lot of details on this. As priest, Melchizedek was able to receive tithes on behalf of the Lord. But how did Abraham know that Melchizedek was a legitimate, God-ordained priest? The Bible is silent here.

The superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek over the Aaronic is seen in the fact that Levi, as priest, paid tithes to Melchizedek. (v.4-10). Not all Levites were priests. Only those who belonged to the house of Aaron qualified to be priests (see Lev 21:16-24). One of the duties of the Aaronic priesthood was to collect tithes from the people of Israel. According to Num 18:21 the Levites were allowed to exact a tenth of the tithe from the people of Israel. The fact that the Levites had the right to exact a tithe from the people showed that they had a certain invested authority. Consider therefore the greatness of Melchizedek that even Abraham the great Hebrew patriarch had to pay tithes to him. The priestly authority Melchizedek exercised over Abraham may be easily grasped, but it is something else to say that the priesthood of Melchizedek excelled that of Aaron because Levi himself had to pay his dues to Melchizedek. In v.9-10, we find *federal theology* being taught. It is important to note that the Greek perfect tense is used in this passage twice (*dedekatoken* in v.6; and *dedekatokai* in v.9) which indicates that although the action was performed in the past, its effects remains till today. The priesthood of Melchizedek was in no way abrogated. It remains as a perpetual priesthood (cf v.24; “ an unchangeable priesthood”).

ii. The superiority of Christ as priest-king after the order of Melchizedek (7:11-28)

The following is a synopsis of the argument presented in this passage: “A comparison between the Levitical high priesthood and the unique priesthood of Christ was introduced in 5:1-10. When Aaron and Christ were brought into direct comparison, the basis of the comparison was the humility both displayed in refusing to exalt themselves to the office of high priest, which could be received only by divine appointment

(5:4-6). The validity of the OT priesthood resides in its authorization. The likeness of Jesus to Aaron, however, was shattered with the citation of Ps 110:4. The appeal to Melchizedek proved that Jesus' priesthood was different from and superior to the Levitical priesthood. The one who is summoned to be "a priest forever" enjoys a preeminence that removes him beyond the sphere of comparison with Aaron. The parallel between Aaron and Christ was infringed most dramatically when the writer described their respective priestly functions. In reference to the Levitical high priest, mention was made of the cultic ministry of sacrifice on the Day of Atonement (5:1,3) and the extension of forbearance to those who are weak (5:2). By way of contrast, Christ's high priestly offering culminated in the surrender of his life in perfect obedience to God (5:7-9). This self-sacrifice represented an incomparably more profound and more radical identification with men and women in their weakness than was ever envisioned in the case of the Levitical high priest.

"In 7:11-28 the comparison between the Levitical high priesthood and the unique priesthood of Christ is resumed. The writer turns directly to Ps 110:4 and its designation of a new eternal priest "like Melchizedek" and not "like Aaron." The interpretation of the oracle as a solemn decree of appointment spoken by God to the Son established a basis for a series of intricate comparisons between the new priesthood based on divine oath and the old Levitical priesthood based on the law. These comparisons demonstrate the superiority and finality of the Son's eternal priesthood. On the basis of the oracle in Ps 110:4, the writer deduces that the old priesthood, sacrifices, and covenant have been replaced by the new priest and the covenant he secured with his sacrifice" (William L. Lane, *Hebrews* 1-8, WBC 47, 196). For a verse by verse exposition of the intricate argumentation found here, see Kent, *Hebrews*, 132-145.

2. Jesus Christ the Mediator of the New Covenant (8:1-10:18)

The ministry of Christ in the New Testament is superior to that of the Old Testament in terms of its covenant, sanctuary, and sacrifice.

a. Christ the Mediator of the Heavenly Sanctuary (8:1-6).

The author has unquestionably established the fact that Christ's priesthood is far superior to Aaron's (Heb 5-7). Here he adds another point. Aaron ministered in an earthly tabernacle while Christ serves in a heavenly temple. Christ serves not on earth but in heaven, right before the presence of God. In heaven, he sits at the right hand of the divine Majesty. Christ is an exalted regal priest.

What is this "true tabernacle" mentioned in v.2? It is not (1) Christ's glorified body, or (2) the Church. The emphasis here is not so much the locality but the *quality* of the tabernacle. It is the "true" tabernacle. The word used is *alethines* which means *true* "as the opposite of counterfeit, unreal, or merely apparent. It does not mean 'true' as opposite from false" (Kent, *Hebrews*, 147). The OT tabernacle was certainly a "true" tabernacle since it was given by God and constructed according to divine specifications, but it was in reality a shadow of the *true tabernacle* in heaven (v.5).

This true tabernacle is said to be “in the heavens” (v.1). “The greatness of Christ’s priesthood is further revealed by the place which he occupies in the real sanctuary above [1:3]. For whereas the Levitical high priest entered the earthly ‘holy place’ but once a year, and then only to *stand* briefly before the symbol of God’s throne, Christ our Priest-King sat down on the throne of the divine Majesty in heaven itself! And the essential point which the unsettled readers must grasp is in their unseen Mediator who reigns in glory in order to minister all the riches of his grace to them [11:1].

“John Owen makes a characteristically vigorous application of this truth: ‘The church hath lost nothing by the removal of the old tabernacle and temple, all being supplied by this sanctuary, true tabernacle, and minister thereof.—The glory and worship of the temple was that which the Jews would by no means part withal ... And in later ages men ceased not, until they had brought into Christianity itself a worship vying for external order, ceremony, pomp, and painting, with whatever was in the tabernacle or temple of old; coming short of it principally in this, that *that* was of God’s institution for a time, *this* of the invention of weak, superstitious, and foolish men. Thus is it in the church of Rome. And a hard thing it is to raise the minds of men unto satisfaction in things merely spiritual and heavenly ... But ‘unto them that believe Christ is precious.’ And this ‘true tabernacle,’ with his ministration, is more unto them than all the old pompous ceremonies and services of divine institution, much more the superstitious observance of human invention” (Wilson, *Hebrews*, 103).

Heb 8:6 is significant: “But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.” Christ’s priestly ministry is superior to Aaron’s because Christ mediates a *better covenant*. Two Greek words were available to the author for the word “covenant,” *suntheke*, and *diatheke*. The latter is used here. It seeks to convey the idea of a one-sided agreement, an unconditional contract. “In rendering the OT term *brith*, the Septuagint translators employed *diatheke*, literally ‘a final will or testament,’ in place of *suntheke* ‘contract, agreement,’ since they evidently wished to emphasize the fact that the initiative for such a covenantal relationship existed with one person rather than being the result of negotiation and compromise” (Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 2:452; see also TDNT, s.v. “*diatheke*,” by Johannes Behm, 2:104-34). Moses is the mediator of the Sinaitic covenant (Gal 3:19), but Christ is the mediator of the new, or *better covenant* (cf Heb 9:15)—i.e. *better* than the Mosaic. The Mosaic covenant was a good covenant, but it was nothing compared to the new covenant. This is because the new covenant is based upon *better promises*. The Mosaic covenant was a physical covenant. A large part of it dealt with how the Israelites should behave before God and man before they can expect to receive any kind of material blessings from Him (Exod 19:5-8, 24:3-8). In other words, it was a *conditional* covenant. The new covenant, on the other hand, has to do with *spiritual* blessings. They consist of (1) renewal of the heart (v.10), (2) universal knowledge of God (v.11), and (3) complete forgiveness of sins (v.12).

Now, since the new covenant was instituted by Christ in the New Testament period, does that mean that the Old Testament people were denied those spiritual blessings? Calvin answered in the negative, “for it is certain that the fathers who lived under the Law had the same hope of eternal life set before them as we have, as they had the grace of adoption in common with us, then faith must have rested on the same promises. But the comparison made by the Apostle refers to the form rather than to the substance; for though God

promised to them the same salvation which he at this day promises to us, yet neither the manner nor the character of the revelation is the same or equal to what we enjoy. If any one wishes to know more on this subject, let him read the 4th and 5th chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians and my Institutes” (*Hebrews*, 185).

b. The Promises of the New Covenant (8:7-13)

The new covenant was promised since the time of the OT by Jeremiah: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:31-34).

In Heb 8:7, the first covenant is said to be faulty. It should be clarified that “the actual fault lay not in covenant itself but in the people who did not keep their part of the agreement. The inadequacy of the covenant was its inability to insure that the people could live up to it” (Kent, *Hebrews*, 151).

What are the characteristics of the New Covenant? It is: (1) “Better” than the Mosaic Covenant, not morally, but efficaciously (Heb 7:19, Rom 8:3-4). (2) Established on “better” (i.e. unconditional) promises. In the Mosaic Covenant God said, “If ye will” (Exod 19:5); in the New Covenant He says, “I will” (Heb 8:10,12). (3) Under the Mosaic Covenant obedience sprang from fear (Heb 2:2, 12:25-27); under the New from a willing heart and mind (v.10). (4) The New Covenant secures the personal revelation of the Lord to every believer (v.11); (5) the complete oblivion of sins (v.12; Heb 10:17; cf Heb 10:3); (6) rests upon an accomplished redemption (Matt 26:27-28, 1 Cor 11:25, Heb 9:11,12,18-23), (7) and secures the perpetuity, future conversion, and blessing of Israel (Jer 31:31-40, 2 Sam 7:8-17) (*The Scofield Reference Bible*, 1297).

Who are the beneficiaries of the New Covenant? There are 4 views (see Kent, *Hebrews*, 155-160): (1) The church has replaced Israel as the participant in the new covenant. (2) The new covenant is with the nation of Israel only. (3) There are two new covenants, one with Israel and one with the New Testament Church. And (4) There is one new covenant to be fulfilled eschatologically with Israel, but participated in soteriologically by the Church today. This writer holds to view #4. Read also Homer A Kent Jr, “The New Covenant and the Church,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 289-98.

c. A Comparison between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant (9:1-10:18)

Read “The Similarity of the Old and New Testaments,” and “The Difference of the Two Testaments,” in *Calvin’s Institutes*, abridged by Timothy Tow, 178-191.

i. The nature of the Old Covenant (9:1-10)

The description of the tabernacle of the Old Covenant is straightforward enough. The blueprint for the building of the tabernacle and its furniture is given in Exod 25-40. The whole structure was about 45 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 15 feet high. It is made up of 2 rooms, the outer room (i.e. the Holy Place) is about twice the size of the inner room (i.e. the Holy of holies). The furniture which belonged to the first room were (1) the lampstand, and (2) the table with the showbread (v.2). The items of the second room were (1) the golden censer, and (2) the ark of the covenant which contained the manna, Aaron's rod, and the tablets of the Law.

There is a problem concerning the locality of the golden censer. The author placed it in the Holy of holies. If we take the golden censer here to mean the golden altar, then its location would not square with that found in Exod 30:6 which placed it in front of the veil outside the Holy of holies. How do we explain this? "The best answer to this puzzle is to note the author's statement as being influenced by liturgical function at this point rather than by strict physical location. In so doing, he is following precisely the thinking as well as the terminology of the Old Testament which also describes the incense altar in relation to the veil and the ark, rather than in terms of the chamber in which it actually was placed" (see Exod 30:6, 40:5; Kent, *Hebrews*, 164). It may be helpful to note that "the incense-altar in Solomon's temple is described as 'the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary' (1 Kings 6:22). It smacks of special pleading to argue that our author does not say that the incense-altar was situated in the holy of holies, but only speaks of the holy of holies as 'having a golden altar of incense.' The participle 'having' should naturally mean the same thing with reference to the incense-altar with reference to the ark of the covenant. There was, however, a special connection between the incense-altar and the holy of holies, no matter on which side of the veil the altar stood. On the one day in the year when the holy of holies was entered the incense-altar played a significant part; not only was the holy of holies never entered without incense from the incense-altar (Lev. 16:12f.), but the blood of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement was sprinkled on the horns of the incense-altar as well as on the mercy-seat (Ex. 30:10; Lev. 16:15)" (Bruce, *Hebrews*, 202).

ii. The nature of the New Covenant (9:11-10:18)

(a) It is a bloody covenant (9:11-22)

Christ is performing His priestly work "by a greater and more perfect tabernacle." What is the tabernacle that is referred to here? Note that the tabernacle is described as (1) greater and more perfect, (2) not made with hands, and (3) not of this building. In the light of 8:1-2,5, and 9:24 the "tabernacle" here should be seen as the heavenly tabernacle of which the earthly was a type. It is not hand-made as the earthly tabernacle was (Exod 35:30-35; 36 :1-4 ; 38 : 22-23) . It is not part of the physical universe (*κτιστος*). Christ is our great high priest in a far

superior sanctuary which is heaven itself—in the very presence of God. There is no longer any need for an annual offering of animals to atone for sins. Christ the perfect sacrifice—the Lamb of God—has taken care of that once and for all (*ephapax*). “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in *once for all* in the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (v.12; italics mine).

The blood of Christ which secured the believer’s salvation is emphasized here. The word “blood” is used 4 times here. The blood of animals cannot save, it is only the blood of Jesus that saves: the church is being “purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28), we are “justified by his blood” (Rom 5:9), “we have redemption through his blood” (Eph 1:7), we are redeemed by “the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:19). It should be noted that the word “blood” should be read in its *literal* rather than *figurative* sense. It is not a *metonymy*, and not a substitute word for “death.” In order for the new testament to become effective, the one who made the testament needs to die (v.16). In the case of the testaments which God gave in both the OT and NT, a *bloody* death is required (v.18-21). For “without shedding of blood is no remission” (v.22). Christ died on the cross through the shedding of His blood. That death on the cross saved us. As regards the nature of Christ’s blood, read Robert Peh, “The Blood of Jesus Christ: Human or Divine?” *The Burning Bush* (July 1998): 88-94. See also Prabhudas Koshy, “The Significance of Christ’s Blood in the Atonement,” *The Burning Bush* (July 2000): 233-53.

(b) It is a better covenant (9:23-10:18)

It is a better covenant because it is based upon a better sacrifice. The blood of Christ provided this better sacrifice (v.23). “What animal sacrifices accomplished ceremonially and typically, Christ’s sacrifice achieved actually. Christ’s blood fully satisfied God’s wrath against sin, and thus His presence in heaven provided an incalculable advance over the ministrations of any earthly priest” (Kent, *Hebrews*, 179).

It be a better covenant because it is ministered in a better sanctuary (v.24). The true tabernacle is in heaven. The earthly tabernacle was merely a “copy” of the heavenly one. Christ as great high priest is our Mediator and Intercessor before the very presence of God.

It is a better covenant because the problem of sin is removed for all time (v.28). When Christ died on the cross, he bore the penalty of our sins. We are forgiven of our sins past, present and future. We will be judged one day not for our sins, but for our service.

It is a better covenant because it is a once-for-all covenant. There is no more need for repeated animal sacrifices. In any case, it is impossible for sins to be cleansed through animal blood. The blood of animals is purely symbolic of the blood of Christ. The sacrifice of animals is purely figurative of the sacrifice

of Christ. In the New Covenant, we are sanctified through the blood “the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (10:10,14,16,17). Note that not only did God forgive us of our sins, He also forgets them: “their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” Ps 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” Forgiven sin is forgotten sin. We too must live by that principle.

As regards the millennial temple and sacrifices, read Gary Cohen, “Ezekiel’s City: A Millennial Vision,” *Zion’s Fire* (July-August 1998): 18-23; Prabhudas Koshy, “The Millennial Temple,” *The Burning Bush* (January 2000): 23-31; and John C Whitcomb, “Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 201-17.

PART II: THE ADHERENTS OF THE NEW COVENANT (10:19-13:25)

I. THE ADHERENTS ARE GIVEN THE PRIVILEGE OF ENTERING THE MOST HOLY PLACE (10:19-31)

1. The Procurement of the Privilege (10:19-21)

Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice has secured our salvation (10:14). His blood, not our works, has brought us close to God—into the holiest (i.e. the most holy place, the holy of holies; in this case referring to the heavenly tabernacle; v.19 cf 9:11,24). We can now enter the presence of God without fear of being struck dead. We have “boldness” in Christ (v.19). The word *parresian*, which is used 4 times in Hebrews (3:6, 4:16, 10:19, 10:35), is significant. The word denotes “a state of boldness and confidence, sometimes implying intimidating circumstances” (Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 1:307). It speaks more of an objective rather than subjective attitude. See TDNT, s.v. “*parresia*,” by Heinrich Schlier, 5:871-86. We should no longer be afraid to approach God directly because Christ our great high priest represents us before the Father (v.21).

2. The Encouragement to Participate in the Privilege (10:22-25)

a. To draw near in faith (10:22)

The exhortation of 4:16 is repeated here. We have every confidence and reason to draw near to God. The wall of enmity between God and man has been broken down by Christ. God has reconciled man to Himself. He desires all sinners to turn to Him with a sincere heart rid of all ulterior motives, a heart filled with childlike trust. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (11.6).

b. To hold fast the hope (10:23)

The word used here is not *pistis* (faith), but *elpidos* (hope). The triad of faith, hope, and love is characteristically Pauline (cf 1 Cor 13:13, 1 Thes 1:3). True hope is hope in God and not in self. Man may fail, but God never fails. That is why the author says that God is faithful to keep His promises (cf 4:1). We are saved not only today, but forever. The 5th point of Calvinism, “Perseverance of the Saints” or “Preservation of the Saints” teaches this important truth. The Christ who has saved us, will save us to the very end (Rom 8:30).

c. To encourage one another unto love (10:24-25)

The Christian religion demands not only duty towards God, but also duty towards our fellow men especially those who are Christians. We are to provoke one another unto love and good works (v.24). The word *paroxusmos* is a marker “of a causative relation, with the implication of stimulating a change in motivation or attitude” (1:805). It has been used with reference to sharp arguments which provoke anger (Acts 15:39). It is of course used here in the positive sense. They were to encourage one another in the faith so that no one would be tempted to go back to his former religion or way of life. And all the more because “the day” is drawing near. This “day” refers to the “Day of the

Lord,” or the “Day of Christ” (1 Cor 3:13, 1 Thes 5:4). The imminence of that day when Christ returns to redeem His own should motivate Christians to remain faithful to Him and to one another.

3. Warning #4: Do not play the fool with God (10:26-31).

This is a repetition of the warning in 6:4-6. “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (v.26). In other words, when the person hears the gospel and rejects it, he is in effect rejecting the only way whereby salvation may be found (John 14.6). “As under the law there was no forgiveness of deliberate sin, sin committed ‘with a high hand’ [Num 15:30 AV margin] so under the gospel there is no provision for the reinstatement of those who wilfully fall away from their profession of faith in Christ. Both classes of sinners are worthy of the same sentence of death, for both are guilty of rejecting God’s ‘covenant’ outside of which there is no salvation [v 29]. Hence the sternness of the author’s warning matches the wickedness of the sin. He shows his readers the awful doom that awaits apostates in the day of judgment [v 27f), in order that they might realize the consequences of severing their connection with Christ by a permanent withdrawal from the Christian assembly [v 25; cf 1 John 2:19]. What we have here is a dreadful disclosure of the fate which must inevitably overtake anyone who, after having professed an interest in Christ’s salvation, then deliberately and defiantly repudiates it. This settled *state* of rebellion against the gospel is not to be confused with isolated *acts* of sin which may be committed through weakness or ignorance. The warning of 6:4-8 has the same sin in view, but there the psychological aspect is stressed: the fact that repentance and renewal is impossible. Here the emphasis is linked with God’s terms of salvation: there is no sacrifice to wipe out this sin.... It is because Christ’s sacrifice is the only sacrifice for sin, that the man who wilfully rejects that sacrifice in order to return to the dead works of lifeless service of Judaism, finds that there is no other sacrifice for sin to which he can have recourse” (Wilson, *Hebrews*, 139).

It is thus “a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (v.31). Calvin wrote, “A mortal man, however incensed he may be, cannot carry his vengeance beyond death; but God’s power is not bounded by so narrow limits; besides, we often escape from men, but we cannot escape from God’s judgment. Whosoever then considers that he has to do with God, must (except he be extremely stupid) really tremble and quake; nay, such an apprehension of God must necessarily absorb the whole man, so that no sorrows or torments can be compared with it. In short, whenever our flesh allures us or we flatter ourselves by any means in our sins, this admonition alone ought to be sufficient to arouse us, that ‘it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God;’ for his wrath is furnished with dreadful punishments which are to be for ever” (*Hebrews*, 251).

II. THE ADHERENTS ARE TO REMEMBER THE LESSONS OF PAST EXPERIENCES (10:32-39)

The Jews who had become Christians received all kinds of persecutions for their faith in those days. They were disowned by their families, and persecuted by both the Sanhedrin and Roman officials. Such trials are providentially allowed by God to mature the faith of the believers in Him (Jas 1:2-4). It is good to remember such difficult times when one had to suffer for one’s faith. For the strength that causes one to endure such affliction is the confidence and hope in knowing that we have “in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (v.34). Muster such inner strength in difficult times. The word *hupomone*, “patience,” in v.36 is significant. It is

the “capacity to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances” (Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 1:308). It is the “willingness to remain under adverse circumstances without compromise or defection” (Kent, *Hebrews*, 212).

III. THE ADHERENTS ARE TO EMULATE THE HEROES OF FAITH (11:1-40)

1. What is Faith? (11:1-3)

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (v.1). It is important to note that this text is connected to the previous discussion on “patience.” True faith is enduring faith. Calvin said that those who see this text as providing the exact definition of faith are “greatly mistaken ... for the Apostle does not speak here of the whole of what faith is, but selects that part of it which was suitable to his purpose, even that it has patience ever connected with it” (*Hebrews*, 260-1). It is solely because the objects of hope have an existence quite apart from faith that faith in them is not misplaced. It is this which distinguishes saving faith from the faith of the imagination, for only those who put their trust in the promises of God are delivered from embracing a miserable delusion ... Such faith is more than a bare assent to a set of theological propositions; it is a regulative principle of life [Gal 2:20]” (Wilson, *Hebrews*, 147-8). This is the faith of the OT saints (cf the roll-call in v.4-40), and the faith required to take God at His Word. Man was not present “in the beginning” when God created the heaven and the earth (Gen 1:1). He has to accept and believe by faith that the world came into existence by divine fiat (Ps 33:6, 148:2-5). God created the world *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing” (i.e. without any pre-existing material).

2. The Faith of the Antediluvian Saints (11:4-7)

The story of Abel is found in Gen 4:1-15. By faith Abel offered a *blood* sacrifice as opposed to a *work* sacrifice offered by Cain. Scofield’s comments on this episode are noteworthy: “Abel ... is a type of the spiritual man. His sacrifice, in which atoning blood was shed (Heb 9:22), was therefore at once his confession of sin and the expression of his faith in the interposition of a substitute (Heb. 11.4).” Cain’s offering was rejected because he gave a “bloodless offering of the fruit of his own works, and proclaims, in the very infancy of the race, the primal truth that ‘without shedding of blood is no remission’ (Heb. 9.22; 11.4)” (*The Scofield Reference Bible*, 10).

Kent agrees that the blood sacrifice view “accords well with the author’s previous statement that ‘without shedding of blood there occurs no forgiveness’ (Heb 9:22)” (*Hebrews*, 219). He, however, disagrees with that view because “the Genesis account does not specify that the offerings of Cain and Abel were intended to be sin offerings” (ibid.). I disagree with Kent. I contend that Genesis *does specify* that the offerings were meant to be sin-offerings. In Gen 4:7, God told Cain that he would do well to offer a sin offering. The KJV reads, “sin lieth at the door.” The word “sin” is actually the Hebrew מַחַתָּה which is used with reference to a sin-offering. Thus a better translation would be “a sin-offering lieth at the door.” Scofield again makes an astute observation on the word “sin” in Gen 4:7: “In Hebrew the same word is used for ‘sin,’ and ‘sin-offering,’ thus emphasising in a remarkable way the complete identification of the believer’s sin with his sin-offering (cf. John 3.14 with 2 Cor. 5.21). Here both meanings are brought together. ‘Sin lieth at the door,’ but so also ‘a sin-offering croucheth at the [tent] door.’ It is ‘where sin abounded’ that ‘grace did much more abound’ (Rom. 5.20). Abel’s offering implies a previous instruction (cf. Gen. 3.21), for it was ‘by faith’ (Heb. 11.4), and faith is taking God at His word; so that Cain’s unbloody offering was a refusal of the divine way. But Jehovah

made a last appeal to Cain (Gen. 4.7) even yet to bring the required offering” (*The Scofield Reference Bible*, 11). See Quek Suan Yew, God’s Acceptance of Abel’s Offering and Rejection of Cain’s (Gen 4:1-7),” *The Burning Bush* (July 2000): 80-108.

The story of Enoch is found in Gen 5:21-24. Gen 5:22 says that “Enoch walked with God.” Heb 11:5 renders the Hebrew idiom “he walked with God” as “he pleased God.” Enoch walked in faith for “without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (v.6). To please God, one must not only believe what God has said in His Word, one must also obey what He has spoken in His Word. As James said, “Faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:20).

The story of Noah in Gen 6:8-9:29. Noah’s faith was so well known to the Jews that it almost became proverbial (Ezek 14:14). God revealed to Noah that He was going to destroy the world by flood (v.7). Gen 2:5 tells us that there was no such thing as rain in those days. In all likelihood, Moses had never seen a boat or ship in his life. The earth had never experienced a flood until the days of Noah. Humanly speaking, it is easier to disbelieve God than to believe Him when He said that He is going to destroy the world by water—water from above and below (Gen 7:11). But Noah, out of a reverential fear for God, believed and obeyed God by building the ark. His faith which is manifested by works saved him from the flood, yes, even his own soul (cf Jas 2:22).

3. The Faith of the Patriarchs (11:8-22)

Excursus: Historical Background of Abraham

Abraham is one of the major figures of the OT. He is called the father of the chosen race. Not only is he the father of the Hebrew people, he is also called the father of all true believers.

When did Abraham live? See chronological chart below:

1450 is the date of the Exodus from Egypt
+ 430 Exod 12:40 (time Israelites spent in Egypt)
+ 130 Gen 47:9 (Jacob’s age)
+ 60 Gen 25:26 (Isaac’s age)
+ 100 Gen 21:5 (Abraham’s age)

2170 BC = Birth of Abraham (Gen 11:26)

He left Ur of the Chaldees with his father in Gen 11:29-31.

2095 Left Haran at age of 75 (Gen 12:4)
2084 Was 86 (Gen 16:16)
2071 Was 99 (Gen 18:14) Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed
2070 Was 100 (Gen 21:5)
2033 Was 137 (Gen 23:1, 17:17)
1995 Was 175 (Gen 25:9)

How did Abraham live? Well, he lived as a pastoral nomad. The people then were mainly agriculturists. The industrialists were primarily in the urban centres. Agriculturists moved around. Abraham would belong to this component of society. There was a dependency as well as friction between pastoralists and urbanites. Urbanites had to purchase meat, milk, etc, from pastoralists and pastoralists depended on urbanites

for their services. There was a symbiotic relationship (eg, Jacob at Shechem; Gen 34:21). Abraham was a wealthy man (Gen 12:16, 14:14). He had 318 trained servants.

Why was Abraham in Ur? We do not know for sure. It could be that Terah was in Ur for trade purposes only. His homeland was Haran. Ur was 220 miles south of Baghdad. It was one of the cities of Sumer. Sumer is mentioned in Gen 10:10 as Shinar (southern Babylonia or ancient Sumer). Our first writing came from Sumer. Writing originated in about 3300 BC. Egyptian writing first started in 3100 BC. Earliest writing was in the form of pictures. The alphabet was developed much later. Ur in the Bible is the Ur of the Chaldees. Ur means “city.” The Chaldees was the area of southern Mesopotamia. Some say that Ur was closer to Haran. But this was not the area of the Chaldees. Ur of Mesopotamia is the Ur of the Bible. It was situated near the Persian Gulf and was therefore a port city. There were docks, warehouses, and harbours. There was a sacred area built by Ur Nammu (c 2100 BC). It was restored in the Neo-Babylonian period during the reign of Nabonidus. This area had large enclosure walls, cultic rooms, and storage facilities. The ziggurat was the holiest area. It was a stepped tower with a temple on top (cf tower of Babel). Many of the ziggurats in ancient sites are preserved. But Ur’s is the best preserved. The inner core was made of unbaked mud bricks while the outer was made of fired bricks. The quality of the materials used is evident by the fact that it is still standing after all these years. Mortar used for bricks was bitumen (correlates with Genesis’ tower of Babel). Asphalt is a slimy substance found in that area. Three massive stairways at different sides run to the top. The temple was dedicated to the moon god—Nanna. Small temples were found around the ziggurat (eg, Nanna temple). In the SE were the royal tombs. They were built with bricks and looked like houses. The ruler was considered a god and his tomb had temple features. The floor had stairways that lead to an underground tomb where bodies were laid. Underneath these structures were other tombs. They date back to about 2300 BC. Great wealth of treasures have been recovered. Servants, warriors, musicians, chariots with drivers were buried with the dead king to serve him in the afterlife. Private houses were two storeys high. Some houses had indoor plumbing, and toilet facilities. The people were advanced in science and math. Their clay tablets had calculations of the sides of a right-angled triangle (ie, the Pythagorus theorem). (It is quite possible that the biblical patriarchs wrote their genealogies on such clay tablets.) Art was advanced too. They did metal work especially with gold. Metallurgical procedures were later lost and only discovered a few hundred years ago especially with regard to combining metals etc. Abraham was thus living in a sophisticated, advanced culture. He was not an ignorant nomad. He lived in a “high tech” city in his time.

The story of Abraham is found in Gen 12-25. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees and Haran to go to Canaan by faith (Gen 11:31, 12:1). It is important to note that Ur was not an “ulu” (i.e. backward, primitive) fishing village. Ur was one of the great centres of urban civilization in the ancient Near East during that time. It was not a situation where Abraham had nothing to lose by leaving Ur. He had everything to lose by leaving Ur. He was actually moving from riches to rags. But this is what faith is all about. Faith is taking God at His Word and obeying what He says no matter what (v.8). He left the comforts of the Fertile Crescent to live in tents in Canaan (v.9). When Abraham left for the promised land, his motivations were purely spiritual. He was looking forward to living in a city whose architect and builder is God (v.10). Inasmuch as God is the architect and builder of this city, it is clear that the earthly Jerusalem is not meant. Other references in Hebrews to this city are 11:16, where God is said to have prepared it, 12:22, where it is called the ‘city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,’ and 13:14, which refers to this city as the ‘one to come.’ Galatians 4:26 speaks of ‘Jerusalem which is above’ as the

spiritual origin and home of true believers. Revelation 21 describes the new Jerusalem, mentioning also the twelve foundations of its wall inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles (21:12). It should be clear, therefore, that Abraham's faith was centered not only on a city (as something more permanent than a tent), but on a heavenly and eternal goal. It was because his trust was placed in heavenly verities that temporal factors were of small consequence to him. This city, the heavenly Jerusalem, is regarded in Scripture as the final home of God's people" (Kent, *Hebrews*, 224).

Not only was Abraham found faithful but also Sarah (v.11). Calvin has this commentary: "That women may know that this truth belongs to them as well as to men, he adduces the example of Sarah; which he mentions in preference to that of others, because she was the mother of all the faithful.

"But it may seem strange that her faith is commended, who was openly charged with unbelief; for she laughed at the word of the angel as though it were a fable; and it was not the laugh of wonder and admiration, for otherwise she would not have been so severely reprov'd by the angel. It must indeed be confessed, that her faith was blended with unbelief; but as she cast aside her unbelief when reprov'd, her faith is acknowledged by God and commended. What then she rejected at first as being incredible, she afterwards as soon as she heard that it came from God, obediently received.

"And hence we deduce a useful doctrine,—that when our faith in some things wavers or halts, it ceases not to be approved of God, provided we indulge not the spirit of unbelief. The meaning then is, that the miracle which God performed when Isaac was born, was the fruit of the faith of Abraham, and of his wife, by which they laid hold on the power of God.

"These reasons, by which the power and character of faith are set forth, ought to be carefully noticed for he declares that Sarah's faith was this,—that she counted God to be true to his word, that is, to what he had promised.

"There are two clauses to this declaration; for we hence learn first, that there is no faith without God's word for we must ever hold that there is a mutual relation between God's word and our faith. But as faith is founded chiefly, according to what has been already said Hence Sarah is said to have counted God faithful who had promised. True faith then is that which hears God speaking and rests on his promise" (*Hebrews*, 281-2).

On v.12, Calvin commented that the author now "reminds the Jews, that it was by faith that they were the descendants of Abraham; for he was as it were half dead, and Sarah his wife, who had been barren in the flower of her age, was now sterile, being far advanced in years. Sooner then might oil be expected to flow from a stone, than a nation to proceed from them: and yet there sprang from them an innumerable multitude. If now the Jews are proud of their origin, let them consider what it was. Whatever they are, everything is doubtless to be ascribed to the faith of Abraham and Sarah. It hence follows, that they cannot retain and defend the position they have acquired in any other way than by faith" (*ibid.*, 282).

The faith of the Patriarchs are even more remarkable when we consider that they trusted in the promises of God even though they did not receive them in their lifetime (v.13-16). It is evident that they did not set their minds on earthly blessings. They realised that the better home is the heavenly (v.16). Abraham, by faith, looked forward to the day of Christ. Jesus told the Jews: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56).

The tremendous faith Abraham had in God is unquestionably displayed in the ultimate test of offering his well-loved son, Isaac, as a sacrifice (v.17-19). "Abraham was commanded to take his own son, his only begotten and beloved son, Isaac, to lead to the

place, which was afterwards to be shewn to him, and there to, sacrifice with his own hands. These tender words God seems to have designedly accumulated, that he might pierce the inmost heart of the holy man, as with so many wounds; and then that he might more severely try him, he commanded him to go a three days' journey. How sharp, we must think, was his anguish to have continually before his eyes his own son, whom he had already resolved to put to a bloody death! As they were coming to the place, Isaac pierced his breast with yet a new wound, by asking him, 'Where is the victim?' The death of a son, tunder any circumstances, must have been very grievous, a bloody death would have still caused a greater sorrow; but when he was bidden to slay his own,—that indeed must have been too dreadful for a father's heart to endure; and he must have been a thousand times disabled, had not faith raised up his heart above the world. It is not then without reason, that the Apostle records that he was then *tried*.

"All the things we have hitherto related, however deeply must have wounded the heart of Abraham, yet they were but slight wounds compared with this trial, when he was commanded, after having received the promises, to slay his son Isaac; for all the promises were founded on this declaration, 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called,' (Gen. xxi.12;) for when this foundation was taken away, no hope of blessing or of grace remained. Here nothing earthly was the matter at issue, but the eternal salvation of Abraham, yea, of the whole world. Into what straits must the holy man have been brought when it came to his mind, that the hope of eternal life was to be extinguished in the person of his son? And yet by faith he emerged above all these thoughts, so as to execute what he was commanded. Since it was a marvellous fortitude to struggle through so many and so great obstacles, justly is the highest praise awarded to faith, for it was by faith alone that Abraham continued invincible.

"But here arises no small difficulty. How is it that Abraham's faith is praised when it departs from the promise? For as obedience proceeds from faith, so faith from the promise; then when Abraham was without the promise, his faith must have necessarily fallen to the ground. But the death of Isaac, as it has been already said, must have been the death as it were of all the promises; for Isaac is not to be considered as a common man, but as one who had Christ included in him. This question, which would have been otherwise difficult to be solved, the Apostle explains by adding immediately, that Abraham ascribed this honour to God, that he was able to raise his son again from the dead. He then did not renounce the promise given to him, but extended its power and its truth beyond the life of his son; for he did not limit God's power to so narrow bounds as to tie it to Isaac when dead, or to extinguish it. Thus he retained the promise, because he bound not God's power to Isaac's life, but felt persuaded that it would be efficacious in his ashes when dead no less than in him while alive and breathing.

"As though he said, 'Nor did hope disappoint Abraham, for it was a sort of resurrection, when his son was so suddenly delivered from the midst of death.' The word -figure, which is here used, is variously explained. I take it simply as meaning likeness; for though Isaac did not really rise from the dead, yet he seemed to have in a manner risen, when he was suddenly and wonderfully rescued through the unexpected favour of God" (Calvin, *Hebrews*, 286-8).

The story of Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau is recorded in Gen 27:1-28:5. The faith of Isaac was based on the *content* of the blessing he gave to Jacob. Isaac, like his father Abraham, believed the promises God gave to him. Although Jacob obtained the blessing through deceitful means, the promises remain valid and cannot be broken because it is God who will fulfil the promises, not Jacob. Yet, it could be that Isaac finally realised that Jacob was God's choice to carry on the godly line (Gen 28:4). Rom 9:11-13 explains, "(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him

that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”

The story of Jacob blessing Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, is recorded in Gen 47:28-49:33. “It was the Apostle’s object to attribute to faith whatever was worthy of remembrance in the history of the people: as, however, it would have been tedious to recount everything, he selected a few things out of many, such as this. For the tribe of Ephraim was so superior to the rest, that they in a manner did lie down under its shade; for the Scripture often includes the ten tribes under this name. And yet Ephraim was the younger of the two sons of Joseph; and when Jacob blessed him and his brother, they were both young. What did Jacob observe in the younger, to prefer him to the first-born? Nay, when he did so, his eyes were dim with age, so that he could not see. Nor did he lay his right hand by chance on the head of Ephraim, but he crossed his hands, so that he moved his right hand to the left side. Besides, he assigned to them two portions, as though he was not the lord of that land, from which famine had driven him away. There was nothing here agreeable to reason; but faith ruled supreme. If, then, the Jews wished to be anything, they should glory in nothing else, but in faith” (Calvin, *Hebrews*, 290).

The faith demonstrated by Joseph in v.22 is found in Gen 50:22-26. Joseph was only second to Pharaoh in Egypt. He was both popular and powerful in Egypt. Joseph could have prepared for himself an illustrious tomb and monument so that he would be remembered by Egyptian posterity. But no, God’s promise to his people of a promised land was more precious to him. This is seen in his desire to be buried in Canaan with his forebears (Gen 49:29-50:13). His bones were taken out of Egypt by Moses (Exod 13:19), and was finally buried in Shechem after the conquest (Josh 24:32).

4. The Faith of Moses (11:23-29)

The historical background of this reference is found in Exod 1-2. First, you have the faith of Moses’ parents who saved the baby Moses from the murderous hands of Pharaoh. “Wherein precisely did their ‘faith’ lie? Probably the statement that Moses was a ‘goodly’ child means more than that he was a beautiful baby. We are perhaps intended to infer that there was something about the appearance of the child which indicated that he was no ordinary child, but one destined under God to accomplish great things for his people.” We are not told in Scripture whether they received a more specific revelation from God concerning His plans for the child. In any case, “some appreciation of the divine purpose to be fulfilled through Moses is implied in his ascription of faith to Amram and Jochebed” (Bruce, *Hebrews*, 309).

Second, we have the faith of Moses himself. His faith is displayed in that (1) he refused to be called an Egyptian (v.24), (2) identified himself with God’s people (v.25), (3) sought to honour Christ, than to honour self or man (v.26), (4) forsook Egypt, fearing God rather than Pharaoh (v.27), and (5) instituted the first Passover, trusting the blood of the lamb to save the firstborn from death (v.28).

Third, the faith of elect Israel in crossing the Red Sea (v.29). We know that the majority of those who crossed the Red Sea did not possess faith and was forbidden to enter the promised land. It was for the sake of the believing remnant that God saved Israel by opening up the Red Sea. The “Sea of Reeds” (Hebrew *Yam Suph* in Exod 13:18) is really the Red Sea as indicated in the NT. The Greek word here is *eruthran* which literally means “red.” The NT is the inspired commentary of the OT. The Israelites did not walk across some shallow stream in Egypt. A wonderful miracle occurred when God opened one part of the Red Sea thereby rescuing the Israelites from the Egyptian army. It was the same Sea which drowned the Egyptians.

5. The Faith of Post-Mosaic Saints (11:30-40)

The faith of Joshua and the Israelites is seen in the destruction of the walls of Jericho (Josh 6). That the massive stone walls of Jericho would collapse after a march around them for 7 days is humanly impossible and inconceivable. One can imagine the things that could have gone through the minds of the Israelites at this point in time. But no, their faith in God stood firm even though the strategy defied human logic. Sure enough, the walls fell flat on the seventh day and Israel took the city.

The faith of Rahab is recorded in Josh 2:1-24, 6:22-25. “No doubt the surprising inclusion of Rahab in the roll of those whose faith is specially praised is an implied rebuke to the readers [Josh 2]. For if an Amorite harlot believed the reports she had heard of the God of Israel so that she ‘perished not with them that were disobedient’, then how can the children of the covenant renounce their interest in the promised Messiah? Calvin says that she is only described as ‘the harlot’ in order to magnify the grace of God in reclaiming her from such a disgraceful past, for it is certain that ‘her faith is the evidence of her repentance’. [Josh 6:25; James 2:25] Indeed she later married a prince of Judah, and shares with ‘Ruth the Moabitess’ an honoured place in the genealogy of the Saviour himself [Matt 1:5]” (Wilson, *Hebrews*, 165).

The examples of faith are so plentiful that the author must now content himself from just mentioning a few more names and brief accounts of other courageous demonstrations of faith by OT saints (v.32-40). The whole passage is self-explanatory. The OT saints all died without completely receiving the promises given to them (v.39). This is because God’s soteriological agenda was not fully accomplished yet. It was necessary for Christ to come in the flesh, and for Gentiles to be brought into the community of saints. OT believers together with NT saints will experience complete fulfilment of their salvation in the day of consummation when Christ returns (v.40).

IV. THE ADHERENTS ARE TO ENDURE DIVINE DISCIPLINE (12:1-29)

1. Jesus Our Supreme Example of Endurance (12:1-3)

The remarkable list of heroes of faith above leads to an equally grand exhortation: “Wherefore seeing we (Christians) also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses (OT saints who have gone before), let us lay aside every weight, and (or “even”) the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience (*hupomones*; “enduring patience”) the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (v.1-2; parenthesis mine).

The word “author” is the Greek *archegon* which occurred already in 2:10 means “originator,” “leader,” or “pioneer.” The word “finisher” is the Greek *teleiotes* which means “completer,” or “perfector.” When used together, both words convey the idea of beginning and ending in chronological and ontological terms. It teaches that Jesus who has saved us in the past, is saving us in the present, and will save us in the future; “he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). Jesus is “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending ... which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1:8).

2. The Purpose of Divine Discipline (12:4-11)

The author now exhorts the readers to endure the chastening of the Lord. The recipients of the letter have not yet “resisted unto blood” (i.e. martyrdom). The author tells them that the sufferings they are going through are part of God’s dealings with them as sons. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (v.6). The Lord’s disciplinary measures are not vindictive or judgmental, but instructive and correctional. The word used for “chastening” here is *paideia* which means “to provide instruction, with the intent of forming proper habits of behaviour” (Lowe and Nida, *Lexicon*, 1:414), or “to punish for the purpose of improved behaviour” (ibid., 1:490). God disciplines us for our profit so that we might be increasingly Christlike in our lives (v.10). Surely, “no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (v.11).

3. The Response to Divine Discipline (12:12-29)

The author issues 3 exhortations in verses 12-17: For (1) perseverance (v.12-13), (2) persistence (v.14), and (3) pursuance (v.15). Spiritual tenacity is called for in the midst of trials and persecution. They should not return to Judaism but continue in the straight path which they have walked and in the faith which they have received.

A negative example in Esau is given to discourage a return to the old system. It is not worth giving up one’s Christian heritage for one miserable morsel of bread as Esau did (v.16-17). For those who have wilfully rejected the Gospel, it is impossible “to renew them again unto repentance” (6:6).

4. Warning #5: Pay careful attention to the revealed Word of God (12:18-29)

“The theme is now resumed of the definitive contrast between the old and the new which permeates this epistle—the contrast between the imperfect with the perfect, the temporary and the permanent, the law and the gospel (cf. 2:1-3; 3:5f.; 7:11ff.; 8:1ff.; 9:11ff., 11ff.). Throughout, also, our author emphasizes that the greater the privilege the greater too is the responsibility. Those, who, since the advent of Christ, are blessed with the clear light of God’s day of grace are for that very reason all the more solemnly accountable for their use or neglect of this blessing. If disobedience to the message communicated through angels at Sinai received just punishment, much less shall we escape if we ignore the salvation communicated through him who is the Son (1:1-3; 2:2f.), The bodies of that disobedient generation which fell in the wilderness are a warning to us that through unfaithfulness we may fail to enter into a rest far more splendid than that of the land of Canaan (3:16-4:1,11). Death was the penalty for the violation of the law of Moses: a much worse punishment awaits whoever tramples under foot the blood of the eternal covenant and treats with contempt the grace of God in Christ Jesus (10:28f.; 13:20)” (Hughes, *Hebrews*, 542). The warning is very clear: “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:25,29).

V. THE ADHERENTS ARE TO OBSERVE CERTAIN CHRISTIAN DUTIES (13:1-17)

1. Duties Toward Man (13:1-6)

a. Duty towards fellow believers (13:1)

The Christians are to display *philadelphia* or “brotherly kindness” (v.1). Such display of kindness, sympathy, and helpfulness is required of all believers (Rom 12:10, 1 Thess 4:9, 1 Pet 1:22, 2 Pet 1:7). “In the NT the terms *philadelphia* and *philadelphos* have acquired highly specialized meanings which restrict the range of reference to fellow believers. In non-biblical contexts these terms would refer to affection or love for persons belonging to a so-called ‘in-group,’ but in the NT this in-group is defined in terms of Christian faith” (Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 1:293).

b. Duty towards travelling believers (13:2)

They were also reminded to extend hospitality to Christians from other parts of the empire. The Roman Empire had a good road system and travelling was not uncommon. Itinerant preachers of the Church would certainly wish to stay in a Christian home than put up in expensive public inns where revellings and fightings were frequent. In extending hospitality to travelling brethren, some “have entertained angels unawares” (v.2). There could be a play of words here since the word *angelos* can mean literally “an angel” (i.e. a heavenly creature), or “a messenger” (i.e. a preacher).

c. Duty towards incarcerated believers (13:3)

The NT period was a time of severe persecution. Many Christians were no doubt imprisoned (v.3). They should extend whatever help they can to those in prison. A good example was Philippian church who ministered to the needs of Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome. The Philippians sent Epaphroditus to visit Paul and to present him a gift on their behalf (Phil 4:18).

d. Duty towards spouse (13:4)

Immorality and adultery were not absent in those days and the author exhorts the readers to keep the marriage bond sacred for God will judge fornicators and adulterers (v.4). Husbands and wives were to remain faithful to each other.

e. Duty toward self (13:5)

The believers were also told not to be greedy for the physical things of the world (v.5). The word “covetousness” here literally means “love of money.” Paul said, “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim 6:6). Jesus taught, “And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Luke 12:29-31).

2. Duties Toward God (13:7-17)

a. Doctrinal duty (13:7-9)

“What follows refers not so much to morals as to doctrine. He first sets before the Jews the example of those by whom they had been taught; and he

seems especially to speak of those who had sealed the doctrine delivered by them by their own blood; for he points out something memorable when he says, *considering the end of their conversation*; though still there is no reason why we should not understand this generally of those who had persevered in the true faith to the end, and had rendered a faithful testimony to sound doctrine through their whole life as well as in death. But it was a matter of no small importance, that he set before them their teachers for imitation; for they who have begotten us in Christ ought to be to us in the place as it were of fathers. Since then they had seen them continuing firm and unmoved in the midst of much persecutions and of various other conflicts, they ought in all reason to have been deeply moved and affected.

“The only way by which we can persevere in the right faith is to hold to the foundation, and not in the smallest degree to depart from it; for he who holds not to Christ knows nothing but mere vanity, though he may comprehend heaven and earth; for in Christ are included all the treasures of celestial wisdom. This then is a remarkable passage, from which we learn that there is no other way of being truly wise than by fixing all our thoughts on Christ alone.”

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. “It ... appears that the Apostle is not speaking of the eternal existence of Christ, but of that knowledge of him which was possessed by the godly in all ages, and was the perpetual foundation of the Church... .

“He concludes that we ought not to fluctuate, since the truth of Christ, in which we ought to stand firm, remains fixed and unchangeable” (Calvin, *Hebrews*, 344-6).

b. Liturgical duty (13:10-16)

“Although Christians do not have a visible altar on which many kinds of sacrifices are offered, this does not mean that they are without an altar of their own. This ‘altar’ is Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice which fulfilled what was foreshadowed on the Day of Atonement. On that occasion no part of the offering was reserved for the priests, for after the high priest had presented the blood within the sanctuary, the bodies of the beasts were burned outside the camp [Lev 16:27]. Accordingly those who continue to ‘serve the tabernacle’ thereby debar themselves from any part in the offering of Christ. The benefits which Christ purchased for his people by his death cannot be enjoyed by those who remain inside the camp which crucified the Lord of glory!” (Wilson, *Hebrews*, 193).

The old sacrifices were no longer effective. They have been abrogated for Christ the true Sacrifice has sanctified His people by His own blood once for all. Atonement is thus no longer to be sought within the tabernacle or the temple, but in Christ. The sacrifices offered to God in the New Testament are not animal sacrifices but sacrifices of praise—a righteous life—for God finds pleasure in such sacrifices (v.15-16).

c. Ecclesial duty (13:17)

It is imperative that Christians obey and submit to their leaders, namely, the pastors, elders, and deacons. “**Be obedient** denotes assenting to another’s direction. Submit involves yielding one’s contrary opinions in favor of someone else’s” (Kent, *Hebrews*, 288). MacArthur says, “In many churches today, the congregation rules the leaders. This sort of government is foreign to the New

Testament. Church leaders are not to be tyrants, because they do not rule for themselves but for God. But the command is unqualified: Obey your leaders, and submit to them. It is the right of such men, under God and in meekness and humility, to determine the direction of the church, to preside over it, to teach the word in it, to reprove, rebuke, and exhort (Titus 2:15). They are to ‘shepherd the flock of God ... exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; not yet as lording it over those allotted to [their] charge, but proving to be examples to the flock’ (1 Pet. 5:2-3). Pastors and elders are undershepherds, who serve under the ‘Chief Shepherd’ (v.4).

“Just as church leaders are to rule in love and humility, those under their leadership are to submit in love and humility. ‘But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work’ (1 Thess. 5:12-13)” (John MacArthur, Jr., *Hebrews*, [Chicago: Moody Press, 1983], 445. MacArthur though not a Presbyterian promotes the Presbyterian form of church government).

VI. PARTING REMARKS (13:18-25)

1. A Prayer Request (13:18-19)

The author requests prayer for “us.” It is a true plural here and not an editorial “we.” He is thus requesting prayer for both himself and his partners in the ministry. The author makes no mention of his name nor the names of his associates. Apparently the readers know who he and his company were. He requests prayer that he and his partners might maintain a bright testimony for the Lord, and that he himself would be restored to their presence soon.

2. An Apostolic Benediction (13:20-21)

It is interesting to note that the phrase “the God of peace” is used only 6 other times in the NT and only by Paul (Rom 15:33, 16:20, 1 Cor 14:33, 2 Cor 13:11, Phil 4:9, 1 Thess 5:23). Was Paul the author of this letter? Although the evidence for it is purely circumstantial, the possibility that the author was Paul should not be ruled out. The benediction expresses the theme of Hebrews, namely, that Jesus Christ is Messiah (3:1-6 cf Ps 23, Isa 40:11, Ezek 34:23, John 10:11, 1 Pet 2:25, 5:4), supreme in every way, the centre of God’s eternal covenant, effected through His blood (8:6-13, 9:15-10:18).

3. Exhortation to Heed the Epistle (13:22)

Although the content of the Epistle may be hard to accept for the Jewish audience, yet he wants them to bear with his treatise, and to consider it carefully.

4. Information on Timothy’s Release (13:23)

Timothy has already been released from prison, and the author hopes that both of them can visit the readers soon.

5. Final Greetings (13:24-25)

The letter would probably be handed to one of the leaders of the church, and the author requests that the one who has received the letter would send his well-wishes to the other leaders and members of the church.

The author closes by pronouncing a blessing “Grace be with you all.” *Charis* is used distinctively in Christian letters replacing the secular *charein*. The word is written with the article indicating that the grace the author is speaking of is the grace which is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Supplementary Articles

1. F F Bruce, “Argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Book of Hebrews*, rev ed, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), xix-xxii.
2. Timothy Tow, ed, “The Consideration of Christ’s Three Offices ...” in *Calvin’s Institutes Abridged*, 205-8.
3. Robert A Peterson, “Christ’s Threefold Office of Prophet, King, and Priest,” in *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, 27-39.
4. Daniel J Ebert IV, “The Chiastic Structure of the Prologue to Hebrews,” *Trinity Journal* 12 (1992): 167-8.
5. Homer A Kent Jr, “Summary of Views on 6:4-6,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Winona Lake: BMH, 1972), 111-5.
6. Homer A Kent Jr, “The Church and the New Covenant,” in *Hebrews*, 155-60.
7. Homer A Kent Jr, “The New Covenant and the Church,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 289-98.
8. Timothy Tow, ed, “The Similarity of the Old and New Testaments,” in *Calvin’s Institutes Abridged*, 178-91.
9. Robert Peh, “The Blood of Jesus Christ: Human or Divine?” *The Burning Bush* 4 (1998): 88-93.
10. Gary G Cohen, “Ezekiel’s City: A Millennial Vision,” *Zion’s Fire*, July-August 1998, 18-23.
11. Prabhudas Koshy, “The Millennial Temple,” *The Burning Bush* 6 (2000): 23-30.
12. John C Whitcomb, “Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 201-17.