

Hebrews

A study by Dr. David A. DeWitt

Hebrews is an amazing book. We don't know who wrote it. We don't know to whom it was written. We don't know from where it was written. And we don't know where it was intended to go. Yet it is one of the most dynamic books ever written. It has been quoted by believer and unbeliever alike for nearly 2000 years (beginning with I Clement in 95 A.D. right down to today). There is a lot of discussion about who wrote the book. The only thing I'm convinced of is that the Apostle Paul did not write it (see chapter two). I've translated a lot of Paul's writings and I translated a lot of Hebrews, and the style of Greek in Hebrews is very different from Paul's writings.

The Author

There has been much speculation about who wrote Hebrews. Suggestions include: Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Luke, Philip, Priscilla, Aquila, and Clement of Rome. Paul can probably be ruled out because the writer includes himself among those who had received the message of Christ from others, and those others were confirmed by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit (2:4). Paul's revelation was confirmed by those signs, so the author was probably not Paul. Besides, 2:3-4 seems to say the letter was written after the era of signs and wonders. But in the end we have to agree with Origin who, writing in the third century, said that only God knows who wrote Hebrews.

Where to?

The target audience seems to be Hebrew believers. The title "Hebrews," like all the titles of the New Testament books, was given when the books were brought together as a collection, sometime in the second century. Within the epistle there is no stated recipient. Contextually, though, there is a focus on the issues which concerned Hebrew Christians. There are repeated references to the Jewish law, their priesthood, their temple, their history, and their sacrificial system, but there are no references to Gentile or pagan practices or traditions. So it is safe to assume it was written to a Jewish Christian community.

But where? The most natural guess would be Jerusalem. And in the end, that may be the right answer. But there are several clues that suggest it was a Jewish Christian community elsewhere. One possibility would be northern Egypt, like Alexandria or Carthage. For one thing, they were apparently evangelized not by the apostles but by those who heard (2:3). Also, all the quotes (29 direct quotations from the Old Testament and 53 allusions to other passages) are from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, done in Alexandria in 250 B.C.). Then there is the fact that this community was not new, yet they were immature and in need of teaching (5:11-14). Although that is a possible need in Jerusalem, it seems less likely than in a more remote community.

Where from?

Here the biggest clue is in 13:24. It reads: *Those from Italy greet you*. Some say this means those outside Italy are greeting those in Italy. But that assumes the Jewish Christian community receiving the letter was in Italy—possible, but unlikely. Most likely, it is those in Italy, and most likely Rome, who are greeting those who are outside Italy.

Date

Here we have some more definite clues. The use of the present tense for the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system (in chapters 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 13) would suggest the those institutions are still in use. This would place the writing of the book before the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. But not much before. Timothy had been just released from prison (13:23), and the persecution was becoming severe (10:32-39; 12:4; 13:3). There is no indication of Timothy's imprisonment during the life of Paul, and he seems to be free at the end of Paul's life (2 Timothy 4:9, 21). But Paul was killed sometime in the late A.D. 60s, like 67 or 68. That would place the writing of Hebrews around A.D. 68 or 69.

Purpose

The purpose of the epistle was to orient the Hebrew Christians away from any former dependence on the earthly Mosaic Law and the Levitical Priesthood. Theirs was a better hope, a better promise, a better sacrifice, and a better age, mitigated by a better priesthood. They were to focus on a heavenly Savior, a heavenly calling, a heavenly gift. Theirs was a perfect High Priest who, through a perfect sacrifice, inaugurated a better covenant than the one given through Moses.

The Theme

The theme is, as usual, more difficult to determine than the purpose. This is because the purpose is historical for the intended audience, and the theme is applicable to all audiences. The author seems to come back to one key idea throughout the book—the assurance of the individual believer in the area of his salvation and his fellowship with God. We could say it's about **the assurance of one's position before God**. Understand that the author is not talking about the security of salvation. That is a function of God's predetermined choice (Ephesians 1:3-11; Romans 8:28-31), and therefore cannot be lost (John 5:24). But the question the author is addressing is "How does any particular person know he or she is one of God's elect?" That assurance is based on the superiority of Christ and our maturity in Christ.

Key Verses to Know or Memorize: 1:3; 1:8; 1:14; 2:3-4; 4:12; 5:14; 9:27; 10:14; 10:24; 11:1; 11:6; 13:8.

The Foundation of Assurance, the Superiority of Christ – 1:1-3:6

Chapter 1 – Jesus Christ Is Better than the Angels

Verses 1-4—God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

The book of Hebrews begins with this quite long, four-verse, sentence. In verses 1 and 2 of the NASV, the words *He/His* all refer to God the Father. In verses 3 and 4, *He* is God the Son and *His* is God the Father.

The first three words of the book are Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως. The first word can be translated: "in many ways," "in many times," or "in many portions." Since the third word can only mean "in many ways," the first word must refer to times or portions, but there is no way to know which the author had in mind. Neither word is used elsewhere in the New Testament, but it is clear that the author is beginning his writing by connecting his readers to the past. His next words are *πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις*, literally: *long ago God spoke to the fathers by (in or through) the prophets*. So he is affirming what we call the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God, as did Jesus (Matthew 5:18), Peter (2 Peter 1:21), and Paul (2 Timothy 3:16).

Nine Statements about the Son

1. In verse 2, the author is making both a comparison and a contrast, which is probably why he does not begin the phrase with any conjunction at all. He just says *ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ*, *upon (over, on, at the time of, at) the last days this One has spoken to us in (by or with) [the] Son*. The point is clearly to **equate the words of Jesus with the inspired Scripture of the Old Testament**.
2. Verse 2 also says: *ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων*, *who He appointed (aorist, active, indicative of τιθεῖν to put, place, make, or appoint) an heir of all things*. The aorist indicates the Son was **made an heir** as a timeless action. So the Son was appointed as an heir because of Who He was apart from anything He had done. **The Son did what He did because of who He was, He did not just become who He was because of what He did**.
3. Verse 2 also says: *δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας*, *through Whom also He made (aorist, active, indicative) the ages (worlds, former thing, or eternity)*. The phrase indicates it is God the Father who made all things, but He did it through the work of the Son as an agent. The aorist would indicate that God is not continuing to create. Although He will create new worlds in the future (Revelation 21), this present creation is deteriorating, not continuing, because of the curse after the sin of Adam and Eve (Romans 18:25). The last word of this phrase is interesting in that it is not the usual word for world or universe ("cosmos"), but the word for "ages" or "eternity." It is more a word for times than places. In the NASV this word (αἰῶνας) is translated *former* 49 times, *age or ages* 26 times, *worlds* 8 times, and *eternity* 3 times. This elevates the Son above the prophets, through whom God spoke in past ages. The Son was the **Creator** of those ages.
4. Verse 3 (a) says: *ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης*, *Who is existing (present participle [on-going action] of εἶμι, to be or exist) in the brightness (or radiance) of the [His] glory*. So God the Son has the same **brightness** which radiates from God the Father, (as depicted in Revelation 1:12-16, see also John 17:5). This is a clear indication of the deity of God the Son.
5. Verse 3 (b) reads: *καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ*, *and [He is] the image of His nature*. This is possibly the best statement of the deity of Christ in the Bible. The word *χαρακτήρ* transliterated is "character,"

obviously where the English word comes from. The Greek word means *exact image* or *expressed image*. The word ὑποστάσεως means: *a setting or placing under; thing put under, substructure, that which has foundation, is firm; hence, that which has actual existence; a substance, real being* (Thayer's Greek Lexicon). This is a common word in the New Testament. It is used in the sense of *confidence* or *assurance* in Hebrews 3:14, *if we hold our assurance firm to the end*. And it's in Hebrews 11:1, *faith is the assurance of things hoped for...* In all these cases, it might better be translated *foundation, substance*, or *essence*. The point here is that Jesus is the **exact image** of the substance or essence of God.

6. In verse 3 (c), we learn that Jesus is φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, *bearing (lifting up or carrying) all things by the word of His power*. The meaning here seems to be the same as Colossians 1:17, *He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together*. Jesus is seen as not just the Creator but also having the power to **hold all things together** by His ῥήματι. Although λογος (in, say John 1:1) and ρημα (here) are often used interchangeably for “word.” The use of ῥήμα often emphasizes the spoken word. This also seems to be the means of creation in Genesis 1.
7. In verse 3 (d), we are told He καθαρισμὸν τῶν αμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος, *a cleansing for sins He Himself having once for all made* (aorist, middle, participle). This simple statement summarizes the completed work of Christ on the cross. On the cross, the Son once-for-all **made a cleansing for sin**.
8. In verse 3 (e), we learn ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς. *He sat down* (aorist, middle, indicative) *at (by, with or to) the right hand of majesty on (by, with or to) high*. The aorist again denotes some accomplished timeless action. That He **sat down on the right hand of majesty** indicates this accomplishment is according to the will of God.
9. Verse 4 literally says τοσοῦτῳ κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὅσῳ διαφορώτερον παρ' αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα. *greater than, better having become, than the angels so that He a different (or superior) beside them name has inherited*. There are three different words here describing Christ's **superiority to the angels**, *great, better, and different*.

The Superiority of Jesus to the Angels

Verses 5-14—For to which of the angels did He ever say, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You”? And again, “I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me”? And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.” And of the angels He says, “Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.” But of the Son He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your companions. And, You, Lord, in the beginning said the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; and they all will become old like a garment, and like a mantle You will roll them up; like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.” But to which of the angels has He ever said, “sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for your feet”? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

This whole section is an elaboration of the phrase in verse 4 *having become as much better than the angels*. The author here lists 7 ways that Christ is better than the angels.

1. Christ is begotten of God, implying that He is of the same essence of God; the angels aren't (verses 5-6a).
2. Christ is to be worshiped by the angels (verse 6 b); the angels aren't to be worshiped by anybody (see Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9).
3. Christ is to have a throne and a kingdom; the angels aren't (verses 7-8).
4. Christ is to be anointed above the angels (verse 9); the angels were not anointed above anyone.
5. Christ is the Creator of the heavens and the earth; the angels did not create anything (verses 10-12).
6. Christ is to sit on the right hand of God; the angels have no such position (verse 13).
7. Christ accomplished our salvation; the angels are only ministering spirits to render service for believers (verse 14).

There are several other issues in this paragraph. The first is in verse 5; that the Son was begotten of God the Father. The difficult phrase is υἱος μου εἰ σύ ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε; *son of Me are You, I today have begotten* (perfect, active, indicative *become the father of, begotten, or given birth to*) *You*. What does it mean that the Father gave birth to the Son? From this passage, and many others (like John 1 and Colossians 1), the deity of Christ is assured. Here God the Father even calls the Son *God* (verse 8). But the God of the Bible has the attributes of eternality and infinity (Psalm 139). Therefore, since Jesus Christ is God, there cannot be a point in time when He came into existence. The Arian “Christians,” who began in the 300s and existed until about the 800s, believed that Jesus was a non-eternal being created

by the Father at some point in history (today's Mormons believe in a variation of that). But if there were a time in history where Jesus was created, then He would not be God in the biblical sense. Yet the author of Hebrews says He was God (1:8), and that the angels should worship Him.

One possibility is to see the above statement as metaphorical. This is certainly possible, since the Father/Son comparison is itself a metaphor of the human relationship. In conjunction with that, it is also possible to say that there was theoretically a day in which God the Father brought God the Son into being, however that day was not in history but in eternity past. So it's time was eternally long ago. Such time would never be in history as understood by humans or angels. If you go back in time, there would be an observable (historical) day when angels were created and when humans were created. But no matter how far back you went in time, the begetting of the Son would still be infinitely further back. That is to say, His existence is eternal. There is no time when He was not. There is a lot in the context to support this metaphorical use of begetting.

There is another contextual possibility for the meaning of *today I have begotten you*. The statement is a quote from Psalm 2:7 where it is used for the coronation day when the heir became the king. Clearly the ultimate meaning was that the Messiah would be king over the nations of the world. This does seem to be the meaning of Hebrews 1:8, so this is certainly possible. But the phrase does not mean that when it is quoted in Acts 13:33 (where it is applied to the resurrection of Christ). And much of the immediate context refers to God as a Father begetting a Son. So I tend to favor an understanding of the phrase as a metaphor. But one thing is clear; the Son is of the same stuff as the Father. And that stuff is deity, not angelic nor human. It is another way of declaring the deity of Christ.

Verse 9 has another interesting phrase: ἠγάπησας δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν, *You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness*. These are all common words, but the statement is unusual. It says God's anointing of the Son was, in part, because of what the Son loved, but it was also because of what the Son hated. The hatred seems to be as much of an admired characteristic as is the love. **It would seem that godly living is not just a loving thing but a hating thing.** So, for example, the popular bumper sticker "LOVE WINS" is not a godly statement. Love wins only when it is a love of righteousness.

Verses 10 -12 tell us that the creation will perish like an old garment. Paul says it will die and a new one will be created, (just as with our physical bodies, see Romans 8:18-25), Peter says creation will be burned up with intense heat (2 Peter 3:10), and John says the creation of a new heaven and a new earth are after the first ones passed away (Revelation 21:1). This is increasingly important today when there are more and more false teachers who say this world is our eternal dwelling place and it will just be fixed up, or we need to fix it up, into a place for the Kingdom of God. The world's tendency is to worship the creation rather than the Creator (Romans 1:18-32). Fact is, the world is dying. Many animal species become extinct every year, and have since the beginning of time. The earth's magnetic field is fading ("National Geographic," September 9, 2004). The second Law of Thermodynamics says the earth is deteriorating. My advice: Put your chips with the Creator, not the creation.

Verse 13 is noteworthy since it declares the enemies that will be defeated are not necessarily yours or mine but Christ's.

Verse 14 is probably the best statement in scripture for defining the ministry of angels.

Contrasting Angels and Humans

Angels

Are immortal beings, they will never die
Do not marry or have sexual relations
Don't procreate, there are no baby angels
Have no families or communities we are aware of
Were all created at one point or period in history

Good angels did not fall and do not have a sin nature.
There is no plan of redemption for fallen angels.
Faith and hope have no significance in their relating to God.
There is no evidence angels experience God's grace or mercy.
Good angels only struggle with forces outside themselves.

Humans

Are mortal being, they are condemned to die physically
Do marry and have sexual relations
Multiply themselves by having children
Develop families and other communities
Had only one couple created, the rest are procreated

All humans fell in Adam and possess a sin nature.
There is a plan of redemption for fallen humans.
Faith and hope are crucial to their relationship with God
Humans depend on God's grace and mercy.
Humans struggle with forces in and outside themselves.

Comparing Angels and Humans

Both angels and humans are created beings who have an eternal future in either heaven or hell.
Both angels and humans fell by a temptation from Satan to be independent from God.
Both angels and humans are spiritual beings, existing in a bodily form.
Both angels and humans face a future judgment for their work, whether good or evil.
Both good angels and good humans define “good” as obeying God and serving God.
Both bad angels and bad humans define “good” as independence from God.
Neither angels nor humans are omnipresent, omniscient, or omnipotent. Their capacities are limited.

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 1

1. I should not think of Jesus as just another historical figure of great influence. Jesus is of the same essence or nature as God the Father. He is the Creator and special revelation of God. His words can be added to the Old Testament as Scripture (verses 1-4).
2. I should understand angels to be a separate creation (not human and not gods), inferior to God the Son but ministering to the saints (verses 5-14).

Chapter 2 – The Effects of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ

Verse 1—For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

This is the theme of the book and the author will come back to it with increasing intensity as the book develops. Here he goes back to his beginning thoughts, continuing the idea began in 1:1-2. God has spoken in the prophets (verse 1) and in these last days through His Son (verse 2). The rest of chapter 1 elaborates on the greatness of the Son. Now he says that because we have heard all that, don’t drift away from it. **Don’t drift away from what you have heard.** In our case, that would be the New Testament.

Verses 2-3a—For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

Unfortunately, the traditional verse division breaks up this sentence, which elaborates on the theme. **Don’t drift away from what you have heard because the Word is unalterable, and God exercises justice based on His Word.** So there is no escape if you neglect the salvation God has provided through His Son. Not just “Don’t neglect getting saved,” but “Don’t neglect the salvation you have.”

The phrase *the word spoken through angels* refers to angels who were somehow involved in the revelation of Scripture (Deuteronomy 33:2; Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19).

Verses 3b-4—After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

This sentence continues the thought of 1:1-2. We should read 1:1-2 and 2:3b-4 as one statement. As such it reveals several significant things:

1. It declares the life and words of Jesus Christ as a continuation of the special revelation of God. In other words, it adds new revelation to the Old Testament. General revelation is through nature (Romans 1) and our conscience (Romans 2), but special revelation is through the Bible and Jesus Christ.
2. It says that the apostles, *those who heard*, confirmed the spoken message. This implies the inspiration of the gospel accounts (at least the synoptic Gospels, John was probably not written yet at this time).
3. It says the miracles preformed by the apostles (which were basically healing miracles) were not done to improve society. These were signs from God *testifying* (confirming) the accuracy of their revelation.
4. It seems to imply that there were certain gifts of the Holy Spirit that were temporary in nature. These gifts were given to confirm the witness of the apostles. The author speaks of them as something in the past. Actually, he seems to be explaining why they do not exist any more at the time of this writing. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that there is no mention in the New Testament of the sign gifts (1 Corinthians 13:8) after the mid-A.D. 60s.

5. It would seem to eliminate the Apostle Paul as the author of this book since he would be one of those who confirmed the message of the Gospels *by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit*.

Verses 5-9b—For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, “What is man, that you remember him? Or the son of man, that you are concerned about him? You have made him for a little while lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of Your hands; You have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

The point to this section is to declare the significance of the incarnation of Christ. The rest of chapter 2 discusses seven effects of the incarnation. The argument of verses 5-9 goes as follows. In His sovereign plan God did not subject *the world to come* (either a reference to this present age or to the Millennial Kingdom) to the angels. Even though man and his descendents were created a little lower than the angels, they, not the angels, were *appointed ... over the works of Your hands*. But because of the fall of Adam and Eve *now we do not yet see all things subjected to him* (that is, to man). Jesus called himself *the son of man* because He did not take on the form of angels but He took on the flesh of the incarnation, joining the ranks of humanity. Jesus was a God-man, not a God-angel.

Seven Effects of the Incarnation

Verse 9c—so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

For the **first effect** we must repeat the last phrase of verse 9. ὅπως χάριτι θεοῦ ὑπὲρ παντὸς γεύσεται θανάτου. *So that by the grace of God on behalf of (or instead of) everyone He might experience (or taste, aorist, middle, subjunctive) death.* The first effect of the incarnation was a **universal substitutionary atonement**. First, he says, this was an act of χάριτι (grace). So it was the unmerited favor of God for a lost world. But it was also ὑπὲρ (*instead of, in behalf of, or as a substitute for*) παντὸς (everyone). ὑπὲρ is the word used in 2 Corinthians 5: 21, *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*. So the incarnation of Christ as a son of man was necessary for the death of Christ (because angels don't die). And that death was an unmerited favor of God whereby His only begotten Son died as a substitution for (instead of) everyone. That does not mean all are saved, or elect of God, or convicted of the Holy Spirit. It only means all humanity is in a different position before God because of the death of Christ. They (we) are all save-able because we have a substitute. It also implies that there is no other way to God because there is no other substitute, and we need a substitute.

Verse 10—For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

The **second effect** of the incarnation is that it served to *perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings*. This, of course, brings up the question: “How can the perfect be perfected.” Here are a few thoughts:

- The word τελειῶσαι (aorist active infinitive) means: *to bring to an end, complete, perfect, accomplish, or finish*. So the Savior was perfected in the sense of being completed or brought to an end by His suffering. But it **was not His work** that was complete (He has more work yet to do—the Second Coming, millennial reign, judging all things, etc). But the **suffering of Christ completed who He was**.
- We often think of perfection as an improvement of imperfection. But that is because we are sinners, so for us it is. But it is not necessarily so. For example, for years I was a private pilot. Then I obtained an instrument rating (through suffering, I might add). My becoming an instrument pilot did not mean I was something less than a pilot before. Through the suffering of my training, I became an instrument pilot, something more complete, more finished, more perfect, than I was before, but it had nothing to do with the quality of my private pilot flying. Christ was the infinite Son of God before He came to earth, but the suffering He accomplished here made Him something He was not before. Now the four living creatures around the throne of God can sing a *new song*, “*Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation* (Revelation 5:9).
- Suffering does not create faith. The perfection of the Son through suffering did not increase His faith. That would assume He had less than perfect faith before. What suffering did was **prove** the quality of His faith. Suffering is the great test of our faith. Suffering does not give us faith or increase our faith, or perfect our faith; it uses our faith, tests our faith, and proves the quality of our faith. All this so that we can be perfected.

Verses 11-13—For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, “I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.” And again, “I will put My trust in Him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children whom God had given Me.”

The **third effect** of the incarnation is **the proclamation of the gospel** stated in these quotes from Psalm 22 and Isaiah 8. They say it 4 ways: (a) *I [David/Christ] will proclaim Your name to my brethren*, (b) *I [David/Christ] will sing Your praise*, (c) *I [Isaiah/Christ] will put my trust in Him*—a demonstration of perfect faith, and (d) *I [Isaiah/Christ] and the children whom God had given Me*—probably a focus on discipleship.

Verse 14—Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

The **fourth effect** of the incarnation is **to render the devil powerless**. If we look at the temptations of Christ (Matthew 4, Luke 4), we get the impression that the devil wanted Jesus to go straight to the kingdom and avoid the cross (Matthew 4:8-9). It is the cross that finally defeated the devil because it paid the price for sin, allowing humans the opportunity to escape this world where the devil is god (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Verses 15-16—and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.

The **fifth effect** of the incarnation is to **free the descendents of Abraham from slavery to the fear of death**. Verse 15 says that Christ's death made it possible for people to no longer fear death. Verse 16 says Christ's death was not for angels but the descendents of Abraham. One difference between men and angels is that there is no plan of redemption for fallen angels. But is there anything that ties these two verses together? One possibility is that there was no emphasis on eternal life in the Old Testament. There was an eternal hope in the Old Testament (Job 19:25-26; Daniel 12:13; Hebrews 11:10), but the emphasis for the descendents of Abraham was this life in the land of Israel. There was no John 3:16 offer given to the Old Testament saints. The book of Ecclesiastes, for example, speaks of the vanity of this life with no consideration of an afterlife in heaven.

Another way to take the passage is to simply understand that unbelievers are slaves to the fear of death and *the descendant of Abraham* refers to believers in Christ who are, of course, free from that slavery. But is it true that all unbelievers fear death? It doesn't seem like it. Many unbelievers seem to have no fear of death at all. It could mean that they all live their lives for this life but that also does not seem to fit our observations. Strong believers in Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism do not seem to be focused on the fear of death.

So it seems best to see the fifth effect of the incarnation is giving the decedents of Abraham (the Hebrews the author is addressing) **a freedom from a “this world” perspective** (slavery to the fear of death).

Verse 17—Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

The **sixth effect** of the incarnation was to place Christ in the role of a high priest. The difference is, a priest of Israel could offer a sacrifice but it was never a propitiation satisfying God's holiness. But **the incarnation allowed Christ to sacrifice Himself as a satisfaction to God**. Christ offers mercy (an unmerited non-punishment) to the world of humans (1 John 2:2), being faithful (consistently obedient) to His calling.

Verse 18—For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

The **seventh effect** of the incarnation was the temptation that Christ suffered. Since this concept is developed in chapter 4:14-16, I shall discuss it more thoroughly there. Here we should only notice that the effect of the incarnation was Jesus being tempted as a human. He could not be tempted in the heavenlies because in His preincarnate state He was God but not man, and God cannot be tempted, by definition (James 1:13). But when God the Son took on the form of humanity, **He became the God-man and then he could be tempted**. So the incarnation allowed for the temptation, which meant the second person of the Godhead could identify, by experience, with us humans who are tempted.

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 2

1. We must not drift away from the New Testament into other sources of authority—like sacred tradition, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, ...etc. (verse 1). Many Christians believe the Bible is a good book, a necessary book, but few believe it is a sufficient book. If you don't hold to a sufficient Scriptures, you won't mature.
2. We can expect that our salvation/spiritual life will be perfected through suffering (verses 2-10).
3. Our faith should take us beyond a "this world" perspective (verses 11-19).

Chapter 3:1-6 – Jesus Christ Is Better than Moses

Verse 1—Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;

There are several interesting words in this first sentence of chapter 3. First is the identification of believers as ἀδελφοὶ ἅγιοι *brothers* [who are] *holy*. This label for believers is found only here in the New Testament. It is a reference to the position of believers due to their sanctification (see 2:11, discussed in Romans 6:3-10 and Titus 3:5). Next, believers are described as κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι, *calling heavenly partakers*. Believers are those who have a heavenly not earthly calling. So believers will not be focused on solving the earth's problems. Then the author commands his readers to κατανοήσατε *understand or consider*. The word means *according to mind*. So the command (the word is an aorist imperative) is to *understand* the nature of Jesus. As an apostle, He is a *sent one*, in this case indicating Jesus was sent from God. As a priest, He is *one who represents us to God*. But this priesthood is connected to our ὁμολογίας (*confession*). It means *the same words*. So Jesus is the apostle and high priest of those who agree with God (say the same words) about Jesus. So believers are people who have some understanding about the person of Christ.

Verses 2-6—He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all his house. For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

This paragraph gives one main way that Jesus was superior to Moses. They were both faithful (consistently obedient) to their calling. But Moses was a **servant** of God in the house which God built. Jesus **built** the house which God built. Therefore, Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses. **Glory is making value known**. Glory (δόξα, *glory, praise or honor*) does not effect value, it just makes it known. In our capitalistic western world, we can think of it as advertising.

Virtue is being faithful to calling, but glory depends on what we have received from God (1 Corinthians 11:7; 15:40-43; James 1:9).

So we again see the effects of our free will actions on the one hand, and the sovereignty of God on the other. Moses was one of the greatest servants of God, yet he could not determine his role before God. The best he could be was a faithful servant. All of us have been given a certain calling in life which we did not ask for. We are who we are (race, sex, personality, health, etc.), and we have varying gifts, certain desires, and different life situations. All that comes to us via the sovereignty of God. But our virtue is determined by our faithfulness to that calling.

Verse 6 introduces the next section. The author often ends one section by introducing the next one. Here he brings up the idea that we are the house of God *if* we hold fast our confidence and our hope. This confidence and hope will be described as **entering God's rest** in the next large section.

The Path of Assurance, Maturity in Jesus Christ – 3:7 – 12:11

Chapters 3:7-4:16 – Entering God's Rest

This brings us to a major division of the book. The first division was *The Foundation for Assurance, the Superiority of Christ 1:1-3:6*. This, the middle division of the book, I have called *The Path of Assurance, Maturity in Christ*. In this nearly two-chapter long first section of the middle division, we shall discuss the meaning of entering God's rest. It is

divided into two parts. The first part is 3:7-11, where the author lists **6 sins** the Old Testament Israelites committed to anger God. The second part is 3:12–4:16, where the author gives his readers **7 commands** to keep them from repeating the sins of their fathers so that they can, unlike their fathers, enter God’s rest.

First, I would like to discuss what it means to enter God’s rest. Rest here is not relaxation. It is not a state of letting go, being ourselves, or not worrying about what anybody thinks. The author seems to believe such a state of relaxation does not (or should not) exist for believers on earth. The *rest* described here is one of constant attention, being careful, watching ourselves, and each other, to be sure we enter into it. Our sin nature does not allow a relaxation because that would lead to personal sin. Only in heaven does such a relaxation exist because only there are we rid of our sin nature. The *rest* the author describes here includes life on earth. For instance, he uses the Sabbath or seventh day of the week as an example. And that certainly was not a time of relaxation. If they violated its specifications, they were to be put to death. It was a time of forced inactivity but not relaxation. The author links rest to the assurance of our salvation and the maturity of our fellowship with God. So I suggest:

The rest of Hebrews 3 and 4 is the assurance of both our salvation and our fellowship with God

Verses 7-11—Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “Today if you here His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, they always go astray in their heart, and they did not know my ways; as I swore in My wrath “They shall not enter my rest.”

Verse 7 confirms that the Old Testament was inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16). The author quotes from Psalms 95:8-11 and calls it what *the Holy Spirit says*. The *voice* we are to hear is the voice of the Holy Spirit as He inspired the authors of Scripture to write down His words without error (Matthew 5:18).

Verse 8a lists the **first sin** of the Israelites as σκληρύνετε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν, *hardening your heart*. The word σκληρύνετε means “to harden, **to make obstinate or stubborn**” (Thayer’s Lexicon). The word is used 4 times in this passage (Hebrews 3:8, 13, 15, and 4:7). It is also used in Romans 9:18 of God hardening whom He desires. So the word is used of both the work of God and the sin of sinners. It is one of those things (like vengeance, wrath, and pride) that are right for God to do but not for humans to do. For us, humans the hardening results in not entering into God’s rest. In that case, we would not have the assurance of our salvation or our fellowship with God.

Verse 8b gives us the **second sin** of the Israelites. God says: τῷ παραπικρασμῷ *they provoked (Me)*. Here and in verse 15 are the only uses of this word in the New Testament. It simply means to provoke to anger. In this case, they **provoked God**, trying to get Him to violate His character. Therefore, He must respond with anger or He would be inconsistent with Himself.

Verse 8c and again in verse 9a, the author gives us their **third sin** when he uses the word for temptation or testing two times. Verse 8 has the phrase πειρασμοῦ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, *in the day of temptation*, and verse 9 begins with οὗ ἐπείρασαν οἱ πατέρες *where your fathers tempted/tested (Me)*. In verse 8, he uses the noun form of *tempt/test* and in verse 9 the verb form, but the meaning is the same and it covers both testing and tempting. **God says they were testing Me** to see if I would stay consistent with My holiness or tolerate their violations of it. The phrase “the day of trial” is contextually not God testing them but the Israelites testing God (see also Psalms 95:8). God’s ultimate response was, *they saw my works for forty years*. The result of their temptation was the work of God, which killed them off as they wandered in the wilderness for those 40 years.

Verse 9 also lists the **fourth sin** of the Israelites. They tested God ἐν δοκιμασίᾳ *with a test*. But the word for *test* here is not the same as above. This is the word for “proving.” In English it transliterates *dokemasia*, from which we get the word “document.” In this case, the Israelites were **assuming God was not true (or good)**, and they were out to prove it by documenting a case against Him through their complaining and disobedience. This test was an act of disbelief which basically said to God: “Prove to us You are good because we don’t believe it.”

Verse 10 gives us their **fifth sin**. It says: ἀεὶ πλανῶνται τῇ καρδίᾳ, *always they go astray in their heart*. The key word πλανῶνται form πλαναω (planao) which means *to wander, go astray, or mislead*. It is where we get the English word “planet” because the ancient world referred to planets as wandering bodies, not stationary in the sky like the stars. So the fifth sin is that the hearts of the Israelites were **always wandering away from God**. [The word for *heart* is the

same through this passage. It is the word for the physical heart, seemingly here referring to *sincerity* or *sincere intentions*.]

Verse 10 (c) has the **sixth sin** of the Israelites. God says: αὐτοὶ δὲ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰς ὁδοὺς μου, *and they did not know my ways*. One reason the Israelites wandered away from God was they were ignorant of the ways of God. They had no basis for following God because **they didn't know what He was like**. Keeping the laws of God has never been the goal of God for His people (read Isaiah 1:10-18). The laws of God, like the sacrifices, were done so that His people could learn His ways. Obedience is not just about keeping His laws, it's about seeking out the character of God, knowing His heart, His mind, His expectations, and then longing for that in our own lives so that we may please Him. [This, by the way, is only taught today in biblical Christianity. No other world religion, and no scripture other than the Bible, focuses on knowing God. The others focus on things like laws, custom, tradition, celebrations, and disciplines but not the heart of God.]

In verse 11 He says that, because of these 6 sins, He swore in His wrath *they shall not enter My rest*.

Next, the author gives us seven commands so that we, his readers, do not make the same mistakes the Israelites made.

First, we shall consider the three commands which are in Chapter 3.

Verses 12-19—Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.” For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Verse 12 has the **first command**. The key verb is: βλέπετε. It means: *to see, look at, watch*, and metaphorically *to be careful* or *to be on guard* (Strong's). The English transliteration is *blepete*, from which we get the word “blip,” as on a radar screen. The NASV translates it *take care*, which is adequate but there is more urgency in the word than simple care. It's more like “**look out**.” Next, we need to notice that the command is to ἀδελφοί, *brothers*. So the author is clearly addressing believers. The content of the command is: μήποτε ἔσται ἐν τινὶ ὑμῶν, *lest perhaps there exist in any one of you καρδιά, a heart which is:*

πονηρὰ – a common word for *evil* or *wicked*

ἀπιστίας – the negative of the word for *faith*

ἀποστήναι – which means *to withdraw remove, depart or leave*

ἀπὸ θεοῦ ζῶντος, *from the living God*

So we must conclude that it is possible for a believer to have a heart which is evil, unfaithful, and one which can *withdraw, remove, depart or leave* the living God. And the author says watch out that does not happen, because if it does, you will not enter God's rest. Notice that he does not say that they will lose their salvation. But I am suggesting that he is saying they can lose the assurance of their salvation, and the assurance of their fellowship with God, thus taking themselves out of God's rest.

Verse 13 has the **second command**. The key verb is: παρακαλεῖτε. It is a common command *to beseech, exhort, console, urge, or comfort*. The command is a positive exhortation in contrast with the first (more negative) command. It also differs from the first command in that the first one is about what we should each do for ourselves, and this second one is what we should do for each other. It's an aspect of fellowship that we exhort our fellow believers *that they should not σκληρυνθῇ be made hard or stubborn*, by ἀπάτη τῆς ἁμαρτίας, *the deceitfulness of sin*.

Verse 14 has the **third command**. The key verb here is κατὰσχωμεν. It means *to hold fast, hold firmly, occupy, or possess*. [The word can also mean *to withhold*, but that is not the context here.] Specifically, what we are to *hold fast* is ἀρχὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως μέχρι τέλους, *the beginning of our assurance until the end*. The key word here is ὑποστάσεως which the NASV translates *assurance*. That is a good translation, but the word has a broad meaning of *support, foundation, confidence, or essence*. It is used here in Hebrews 1:3 of Jesus Christ when it says He is the *nature* or *essence* of God. So we are to hold firmly to the *nature*, or *essence*, or *foundation* of our faith. Verse 14 says we

become partakers of Christ if we do that. It does not say that if we don't hold firmly to the essence of our faith we won't become partakers of Christ, but there is no assurance of it unless we do.

There seems to be a big emphasis in the Bible on how we finish. [See also Ezekiel 18: 24, 28, and 32.] The command in verse 14 is **to finish well**, by holding firmly to the foundation of our biblically based faith. This is the basis of our assurance and our rest in God.

*Finishing well is significant because,
generally, life gets harder as we get older.*

There are at least 3 reasons for that:

- We begin reaping what we have sowed (Galatians 6:7-8). Our sins begin to catch up with us. We are always reaping what we sowed and sowing what we will reap.
- As we live in this fallen world, the sins of others increasingly effect us; people sue us, we have accidents, neighbors dislike us, close relatives mess up their lives, etc.
- Life gets harder as we get older simply because of the fact of deteriorating health in a deteriorating world. Things we have done to make life pleasant are gradually taken away by the fact of our aging.

Verses 15-19 are a parenthesis where the author reiterates the provocations of the Israelites which kept them from entering God's rest. The key word describing their sin is παραπικρασμός, *provocation*. The word occurs as a noun in verse 15 and a verb in verse 16. The NASV mistranslates them both as verbs, but in verse 15 it says: μὴ σκληρύνετε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς ἐν τῷ παραπικρασμῷ. *Do not harden your hearts as in the provocation*. The word παραπικρασμός is only used here and in verse 8 in the New Testament. It means: "to provoke in the sense of rebellion" (Thayer's Greek Lexicon). The context tells us five other things about this word *provocation*:

1. It's a sin (verse 17).
2. It's caused by people hardening their hearts against the Word of God (verse 15).
3. It results in the loss of assurance of salvation (verse 14).
4. It is a cause for not entering into God's rest (verse 18).
5. It exists because of unbelief (verse 19).

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 3

1. We can only have assurance of being in the household of God if we hold our faith in Christ firm until the end of our lives. It is important to finish well (verses 1-6).
2. The "rest" of God is not relaxation this side of heaven. It is, rather, an assurance obtained by avoiding the sins which kept the Old Testament Israelites from that rest (verses 7-11).
3. I must, therefore, watch myself and other believers so that we do not have an unbelieving heart (verses 12-19).

Chapter 4

Next we shall consider the four commands which are in chapter 4. This continues the list from 3:14.

Verse 1—Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

In 4:1 we have the **fourth command** for entering God's rest. It is discussed in 4:1-10, but verse 1 deserves special notice. The command is φοβηθῶμεν. It is a first person plural, aorist, passive, subjunctive of φοβέω. The transliteration is *phobeo*, from which English gets the word "phobia" or "fear." The aorist is a timeless action, the passive means we are being caused to do something by some other source, and the subjunctive is a mood of uncertainty (usually translated "should," "may," or "might," or in this case "let us"). So an amplified paraphrase might read: ***Let us be caused to be in the state of fear***. This fear is not simply awe or respect but the terror of not entering into God's rest.

Hear are a few general thoughts about the fear of God:

1. If I respect someone, it is on my terms, I'll decide what that looks like. If I am afraid of someone it is on his or her terms, they get to decide what that looks like.
2. My obedience will follow my fears not my respect.
3. Submission, if it is done out of love without fear, will only result in obedience in the area of agreement. Only fear yields obedience in the area of disagreement.

4. Love casts out fear (1 John 4:18), only when it is perfect and defined as keeping Christ's commandments in the context of salvation.
5. Christ's commandments to "fear not" were all in a horizontal context (to not be afraid of other people, things, or circumstances). Jesus never said we were not to be afraid of God (Luke 12:4-7).
6. *God is like a fire on a cold night; you want to get close, but the closer you get, the more there is to fear* (Walt Henrichsen).

We should also now take notice of the key word of this whole section, **rest**. The Greek word is **κατάπαυσις**, which occurs nine times in these ten verses and 12 times in this section (3:7–4:16). It is a combination word. Transliterated, it is a combination of *kata*, meaning *according to* and *pauses*, from which English gets the word "pause." The common translation is "rest," "place of rest," "day of rest," or "time of rest." Rest is defined as *a fixed and tranquil abode where there is no more toil, or trials* (Thayer's). The warning of verse 1 is that, although the rest of God is a promise, it is a conditional promise. So we can fall short of it. Therefore, the promise is not salvation or the security of salvation because that is unconditional. The promise here concerns the assurance of our salvation and our fellowship with God, which is conditioned upon the seven commands (which we are now discussing) in this section of Scripture (3:7–4:16).

Verse 2—For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Verse 2 has a couple of things we should emphasize. First is the word **ωφέλησεν**, which means *to profit, gain or benefit*. This implies a personal profit motive. In other words, the author is motivating his readers with a personal, individual profit. It is what Jesus did when He said: *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal* (Matthew 6:19-20). So an individual profit motive is encouraged in Scripture when the profit is heavenly not earthly.

*A focus on heaven will always result in a focus on the **regeneration of the individual**.
A focus on setting up a kingdom on this earth (politically, socially, or militarily) will
always deemphasize the individual in favor of the **regulation of a community**
(a nation, group, or congregation).*

Verse 2 also ends with the interesting phrase **μη συγκεκερασμένους τη πίστει τοις ακούσασιν**. It means the Israelites were also *not united together with the faith of those who heard*. The point of the warning is that the Israelites failed to enter God's rest because of their lack of faith, not just in God but their lack of faith in those who heard the word of God and revealed it to them. The application of this is that we, and the author's target audience, are to have faith in the scripture because it comes from those who have heard the word of God directly.

Verse 3—For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Verse 3 is one of those passages that contains both the free will of man and the sovereignty of God. The quote is from Psalm 95:11, **ως ὥμοσα ἐν τῇ ὀργῇ μου εἰ εἰσελεύσονται εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν μου**, *as I swore in my wrath, if they will enter into my rest*. So entering into God's rest is a conditional thing depending on the faith mentioned in the first part of the verse (and the obedience mentioned earlier). It is up to them, and us, as to whether we enter that rest. But then he says, **καίτοι τῶν ἔργων ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου γενηθέντων**, *Yet the work from the foundation (building or structure) of the world (the kosmos) has been done (created, finished, or born)*. So on the one hand God's rest is **conditioned** upon our (and the Israelites') obedience. On the other hand, the security of our salvation is **predetermined** by God.

Still developing the fourth command to fear God, the author continues with:

Verses 4-10—For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works," and again in this passage, "They shall not enter My rest." Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

Verses 4-10 use the Sabbath rest on the seventh day of the creation week (our Saturday) as an example, or type, of the rest we are to enter into. This is the cessation of work described in verse 10 as **rest from work in the sense of having completed that work**. If I may summarize the verses in between: the author says that Moses offered rest to the people of God (verse 6), but since David reiterated that (verse 7), then it must be they didn't get that rest when they entered the land with Joshua (verse 8). Therefore, there still remains a call for a people of God (now the church age rather than Israel, but nonetheless a people of God) to enter that rest. The call remains because no people of God have yet entered into that rest (verse 9).

Verse 11—Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

Verse 11 gives us the **fifth command** for entering into God's rest, **to be diligent**. The key verb is σπουδάζωμεν. It can mean *to be diligent* (NASV), *to labor* (KJV), *to do one's best*, or *hasten* (Strong's). The Louw and Nida Lexicon defines it as: *to be eager to do something, with the implication of readiness to expend energy and effort*. It is clear that this rest is only entered into with a lot of effort. So this rest is not a result of accepting our fate (whatever will be, will be), or being relaxed (being yourself). The reason for all that effort is because it is possible to fall from that rest.

Verse 12—For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Verse 12 is one of the greatest verses for describing the impact of the Bible. The Word of God is described five ways:

1. The Word of God is *Zōn (zon) living or alive*. In English we get the word "zoo" and "zoology" from this word. It describes that which is living. **The Bible is the book that lives**, not the physical pages, of course, but the Word of God written on those pages. For example, most books can only be read with interest once (if that) and a few several times. But the Word of God can be read continually, and it is never stale or boring to a believer illuminated by the Holy Spirit.
2. Also, the Word of God is *ἐνεργῆς*. The transliteration is *energes*, from which we get the English word "energy." It is translated *active, effective, and at work*. Louw and Nida Lexicon defines it as *pertaining to being effective in causing something to happen*. **The word of God is not only alive but it is impacting**. It causes something to happen to those who meditate on it.
3. The Word of God is *sharper than any two-edged sword*. The key word is *τομώτερος* from *τομός* *having the capacity to cut effectively* (Louw and Nida Lexicon). Therefore, the Word of God, like God Himself, is not safe. It will cut you. **It will cut into your worldview**, your moral values, your religious views, and everything you think is valuable.
4. And the sharpness of the Word of God pierces us *as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow*. The reference to cutting our joints and marrow is, of course, a continuation of the sword metaphor. But the significant phrase here is *διεικνούμενος ἄχρι μερισμοῦ ψυχῆς καὶ πνεύματος*, *piercing (passing through or penetrating) as far as (or until) the division (or distribution) of soul and spirit*. The word for *soul* transliterates as *psuches*, from which English get the words "psyche" or "psychology," the study of the personality: intellect, emotion, and will. Humans have this in common with the animals. The other word transliterates *pneumatōs*, from which English gets the word "pneumatic." But the Greek word refers to that spiritual part of man that distinguishes him from animals. Human spirit is reflected in our thinking about morality, purpose, destiny, and our ability to function creatively. Each of these, **both the soul and spirit, are pierced by the truth of the Word of God**.
5. The last thing mentioned here is that the Bible is able to *κριτικὸς ἐνθυμήσεων καὶ ἐννοιῶν καρδίας*, *judge (or discern) the thoughts (deliberations or ponderings) and intentions (thoughtfulness, understandings, or purposes) of the heart*. The use of the word *heart* (again) is a metaphor because it is the common word for a physical heart. The use of the heart metaphor is usually more than just a reference to our emotions (the word "belly" is more common for that). The heart is used more often to represent the intentions and purposes which come from the core of our being. So the fifth thing **the word of God** does is that it **acts as a judge, which measures our ponderings and understandings and core purposes against those of God**.

The Bible, using the character and values of God, judges us as we read it. That may be why the world continually tries to discredit it. For example, a man I disciple recently asked a supposed Christian friend of his if he was still reading the Bible. The friend said: "No." When asked "Why?" his friend answered: "Because it's too depressing. Every time I read it I feel terrible. I couldn't take it any more, so I just stopped reading it." Apparently, he did not enter into God's rest.

Verse 13—And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Verse 13 is an elaboration on the last phrase of verse 12, that the Word of God is a judge of our deepest thoughts and intentions. Verse 13 adds the fact that no creature is hidden from God's sight. All are γυμνά καὶ τετραχλισμένα *open (naked, without clothing) and laid bare (easily known, or exposed)*, the ancient use was laying bare the neck of a victim). This verse expresses the omnipresence of God (as in Psalm 139) in a context of judgment. We cannot hide from the judgment of the Word of God (verse 12), and we cannot escape from the judgment of the God who wrote the Word.

Verse 14—Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession,

Verse 14 gives us the **sixth command** for entering God's rest, **to hold fast our confession**. The key verb here is κρατῶμεν. It is a present active subjunctive of κρατέω, meaning *to grasp, hold fast, lay hold of, seize, or take hold of* (Strong's). The object of the grasping is τῆς ὁμολογίας, *the confession*. It is the same word used for confessing our sins in 1 John 1:9, and it literally means *the same words*. Here the idea is not about confessing sins but about holding fast or grasping on to the same words (the confession) of faith which we made when we became believers. The verse says that the reason to do that is because we have a great high priest, namely Jesus, who has *passed through* (that is *entered into*) *the heavens*.

Verse 15—For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Verse 15 continues the high priest subject of verse 14 and introduces the seventh command. First, however, the author gives us one of the most significant statements about the incarnation of the God-man. He says: πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς αμαρτίας. *But He was being tempted (made to prove, tested, or tried), according to all things according to (the word is intentionally repeated) the same things (the same likeness, or the same manner) without sin.* It is true that the word *all* does not necessarily mean "exhaustively all" but can mean "categorically all" (as in *all* of Judea coming out to be baptized by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:5). Nonetheless, the word (πάντα) for *all* is clearly in our text. So we must conclude that the temptations of Christ went beyond those of the devil in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 to include those we all have every day, or at least the same categories of temptations we all have.

The question is: "How can the One who is deity, and therefore cannot sin (by definition) really be tempted to sin?" The answer is the **temptation to sin is not necessarily connected to one's ability to succumb to it**. For example, when we were kids, a neighbor friend and I used to climb my dad's pine trees and pretend we were monkeys. We were tempted to swing from tree-to-tree with our tails. But we were unable to succumb to the temptation because we had no tails. But the lack of tails did not make the temptation less real. Of course, all illustrations break down because we do not have a perfect understanding of the God-man. But this does illustrate the fact that Jesus could be tempted. However, because He had a perfect nature (as we had enough common sense to know we couldn't swing by tails we didn't have) and no sin nature (as we had no tails), He could not give in to anything which would cause Him to sin. There are many ways to illustrate this. For example, if a torturer placed a plate of food out of reach of a hungry prisoner, he would be tempted to eat the food but unable to succumb to the temptation. Anyway, temptation can be separated from one's ability to succumb to it. The author's point to all of this is that we have a sympathetic high priest.

Verse 16—Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Verse 16 gives us the **seventh command** for entering into God's rest. The key verb is προσερχόμεθα. It is a second person, plural, present middle subjunctive of προσερχομαι. This is a combination of two very common words προς meaning *to, toward, or with* and ερχομαι the regular word for *come*. So the command is *to come to*. The parsing demands that we translate it as: *we ourselves* (middle voice) *should* (subjunctive mood) *keep on* (present tense) *coming to*. Then the author throws in the words μετὰ παρρησίας *with confidence* (or *boldness*). Next, the place of that coming is given as θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος, *the throne of grace*. The reason we are to come to the throne of grace with confidence is not to receive justice, neither blessings nor rewards, but grace (unmerited favor) and mercy (unmerited non-punishment). These common words for grace and mercy are to be received εἰς εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν. The phrase means: *in* (or *for*) *times* (better translated *appropriate times*, or *suitable times*) *of need* (or *help*). So the seventh, and last command for entering God's rest is **a confident prayer for grace and mercy**.

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 4

1. I need to fear God, not just love God, or my obedience will be restricted to where and when I agree with God. Love without fear defines obedience as agreement (verses 1-11).
2. I need to understand that whatever other good books I study, only the Bible will tell me the truth about myself and judge the thoughts and intentions of my heart (verse 12).
3. As a Christian, I have a unique leader. Unlike Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna, etc., I have in Jesus One who was tempted in all the ways I am, yet without sin (verses 13-16).

Chapters 5 and 6 – Maturity and Assurance

In many ways, this section is the heart of the book. The author has first presented Jesus Christ as superior to the prophets (1:1-4), superior to the angels (1:5-2:18), and superior to Moses (3:1-6). Then he introduced us to the subject of entering into God's rest and gave us seven commands or principles for doing that. Now he begins a new section which describes that rest as the maturity which leads to the assurance of our salvation and fellowship with God.

In this section, we see that God's rest includes the assurance of our salvation, but we learn that the assurance of our salvation should be inseparably connected to our maturity.

Chapter 5

In 5:1-10 we learn **eight characteristics of Christ as a high priest**. [The reason he begins this section with Christ's priesthood is given in verse 11, but we shall deal with that when we get there.] The first three of these characteristics are in verse 1.

Verse 1—For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;

The **first characteristic of a high priest** is that he is ἐξ ἀνθρώπων λαμβανόμενος, *from men (mankind) taken (received or chosen)*. Here the author points out that the high priest **must be human**, which was obvious until we began talking about Christ as our high priest. The point here emphasizes Christ's incarnation.

The definition of the incarnation is that perfect humanity was added to undiminished deity.

This destroys the Gnostic and the pantheistic ideas, which say that Jesus was not fully flesh-and-blood humanity.

The **second characteristic of a high priest** is that he is ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων καθίσταται τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. It literally reads: *for (on behalf of, instead of, or a substitute for) men (mankind) appointed (brought to, put in charge of, or made) to (toward, or with) God*. So the high priest is an **appointed intermediary between humans and God**.

The **third characteristic of a high priest** is that he is chosen as a substitute ἵνα προσφέρῃ δῶρά τε καὶ θυσίας ὑπὲρ αμαρτιῶν, *in order that (a purpose word) he might bring (or offer) both gifts and sacrifices for sin*. The purpose of a high priest is **to make a sacrificial gift for the sins of the people**.

Verses 2-3—he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.

Verses 2 and 3 are not the characteristics of a high priest but the weaknesses of a high priest. The author offers these verses to elaborate on the humanity of the priest. They are a parenthesis to the section, but essential to the author's point. A regular human high priest deals with people not just as a fellow human but also as a fellow sinner. He does not just relate as one who is tempted in all ways such as they are, but as one who is a weak, ignorant, misguided sinner. So he must offer a sacrifice for himself as well. This is what separates Christ from all the other high priests. The author mentions it here to elaborate on the humanity of the usual high priest.

Verses 4-6—And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "You are My Son, today I have

begotten You,” just as He says also in another passage, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

The **fourth characteristic of a high priest** is that he is **called by God**, like Aaron was. A high priest is not nominated or elected by the people. He is not chosen because of his accomplishments. Nor is he someone who desired the job and worked to obtain it. A high priest is **born into the position**. The author elaborates on that in two ways concerning Christ:

1. He was begotten of God, and
2. He was of the order of Melchizedek, not Levi/Aaron.

Verse 7—In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.

Verse 7 is another parenthesis to the author’s main point in this section. The confusing issue is whether he is speaking of Christ or Melchizedek. Most likely, it is a reference to Christ. God very specifically, fortunately for all of us, did not save Christ from death. The reference here could be talking about Christ’s resurrection from the dead. More likely, though, it is referring to the fact that God **heard** his prayers, not that God **answered** them. He prayed to be saved from death and His prayers were *heard because of His piety* but they were not answered because the answer, though it may be according to God’s will, was not according to God’s plan. The same may be true of our prayers. Good prayers of good believers are **heard** by God, but that does not mean they are **answered** by God.

Verse 8—Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

The first four characteristics given here are common to all high priests, the last four focus only on Jesus Christ.

The **fifth characteristic of our high priest** is that he **learns through suffering**. The question is: “How could Christ, being perfect, all knowing, all powerful, and all the other characteristics of deity, learn anything?”

Here are 3 things to consider:

- (1) God does not learn in the sense of acquiring new information, but He learns in the sense of experiencing the unfolding of actual, historical events. New things don’t surprise Him (since He predestined them) but they do either please or anger Him. Therefore, He experiences them (see Genesis 6:5-7). That experience is a form of learning, even though the information itself is not an enlightenment. For example, in Genesis 18: 20-21 we read: *And the LORD said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.”* The Lord was not going to Sodom and Gomorrah to collect information. He already knew *their sin is exceedingly grave*. He was going there to experience the situation. But that experience was a form of learning.
- (2) Learning is not necessarily a move from imperfection to perfection. For us it is, of course, because our imperfections are bathed in ignorance and sin. But that is not the essence of learning through suffering. Learning can move us to a higher state without assuming imperfections in our lower state. For example, allow me to return to the airplane pilot illustration I gave with chapter 2 verse 10. As I said, I am a pilot. I have been flying light airplanes since I was 15. A few years ago I decided I wanted to become an instrument pilot. That meant I had to study to pass a written exam, an oral exam, and a flight test on instruments. The suffering I went through made me into an instrument pilot. But that did not mean there were any imperfections in my flying before (and of course there weren’t – just kidding). Adding an instrument rating did not assume my private pilot’s license was imperfect, it just made me something better through suffering – an instrument pilot. In a similar way (not exactly, of course) Christ became something better by the sufferings of His incarnation and death. He was eternally the Son of God. But because of His suffering the incarnation He is now the God-man. He is the worthy to open the book because He is the Lamb that was slain (Revelation 5:6-10).
- (3) What Jesus learned was *obedience*. First, this does not mean previous to His incarnation He was disobedient. To return to my flying example; I learned obedience to IFR (instrument flight rules). It is not that I was disobedient to those rules before, it’s that I was not flying in conditions where those rules applied. But by becoming an instrument pilot I learned obedience to another set of rules. Second, Christ learned obedience in that He submitted Himself to God the Father. Submission is obedience in the areas of self-denial and self-sacrifice. Obedience in the area of agreement is not submission. Submission involves self-sacrifice (which is usually in the area of disagreement for us sinners). Taking upon flesh, living among us sinners, being rejected, and dying on a Roman cross was not something Christ desired. It was done out of self-sacrifice, from which He learned (through experience) the obedience of that sacrifice.

Verse 9—And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

The **sixth characteristic of our high priest** is in verse 5a. He is himself **made perfect**. The statement is from just one Greek word *τελειωθεῖς* (aorist, passive, participle of *τελεωω*) *having been made complete (perfect, fulfilled, or accomplished)*. This is a very common Greek word with a wide range of usage. It basically means *to come to an end* in the sense of reaching a goal or completing something. This is in addition to the obedience of verse 8. Here we learn that the high priesthood of Christ completed Him. The explanation of that is in the rest of the verse.

The **seventh characteristic of our high priest** is in verse 9b. Because of Christ's completion as the God-man He was a **source of eternal salvation**. He was more complete than when He left the heavenlies. He had become a propitiation for sin, which satisfied the righteousness of God (1 John 2:2). This meant He Himself became the one and only source of eternal salvation. But Jesus was not just a propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation, for the world. He also offers justification (Romans 3:23-25) for a certain kind of people, *those who obey Him*. Obedience is given here, not as a means of justification but as evidence for it. Obedience is the means of assurance.

Verse 10—being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The **eighth characteristic of our high priest is that He is of the order of Melchizedek**. We shall discuss this thoroughly in chapter 7. Here the author only mentions it to distinguish Jesus over all other high priests.

Next, the author states the real problem: they are not pressing on to maturity – 5:11 – 6:3

Verses 11-12—Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Verses 11 and 12 are about the readers of this letter. First the author says he has more to say about Christ as the high priest, but he is going to put that aside for the moment because he is concerned that his readers might not understand. He then gives 4 reasons why they will not understand.

One, from verse 11, is that they have become dull of hearing. The descriptive word is *νωθοὶ*. It metaphorically describes their hearing as *lazy, sluggish* or *dull* (Strong's). The point is they have gotten themselves into a mental state where they are not able to hear with any understanding the things pertaining to maturity.

Two, from verse 12, is that they ought to be teachers. Interestingly, he says they are *ὀφείλοντες εἶναι διδάσκαλοι*, *obligated to be teachers*. The reason he gives is *διὰ τὸν χρόνον*, *because of the time* they have been believers. This is significant because it implies that all believers irrespective of their calling (their gifts, talents, personality, desires, or life situation) should, after a certain amount of time as a believer, be a teacher in some way. Obviously, he is not speaking necessarily of classroom or formal teaching but actively involved in communicating the truth of the Word of God.

Three, is that they need to be taught *στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν λόγων τοῦ θεοῦ*, *the elements of the beginning of the Word of God*. Everyone I meet with for the first time, whether they are new or old Christians, I teach them our course on "The Overview of the Bible" because most people in Christianity today need the elements of the beginning of the Word of God. And, by the way, if I am doing a Bible study with a new group, I always start with the book of Genesis.

Four, is that they need *milk and not solid food*. They were actually not capable of digesting the theological food the author had for them. Instead they needed to be fed milk because that is all they could mentally or spiritually digest.

Verse 13—For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

Verse 13 is an explanation of the *milk* metaphor. The one who sees Christianity as a simple basic faith of, say, rituals or liturgy, or Sunday attendance at church, or the simple gospel message, may be sincere or right, but an infant. The problem with such a person is that they are *ἄπειρος λόγου δικαιοσύνης*, *unskilled, (inexperienced, or unaccustomed) to the word of righteousness*. And the author finds this lack of skill unacceptable.

Verse 14—But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Here the author gives perhaps the best definition of maturity in the Bible.

A mature person is one whose senses are trained by practice to discern good and evil.

There are a couple of words to take note of here. One is αἰσθητήρια, *senses* (used only here in the New Testament). Thayer defines this word as the *faculty of the mind for perceiving, understanding, or judging*. Since the context is one of moral/theological perception, this would be a function of the human spiritual sensitivity or possibly conscience (although *conscience* is not the word used here). Another key word here is διακρίσιν, *to discern*. Unlike the word for *senses* this is a very common word. It is a combination of δια (through) and κρίσιν (judgment). What a mature person does is train his or her senses by judging good and evil. A mature person is then a judgmental person in the sense of regularly evaluating: (1) the conditions in the world around them, (2) their own actions, and (3) those of their fellow believers, according to the Word of God.

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 5

1. Since I have a superior High Priest in Christ, I should never see any human spiritual leader as a priest *For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (verses 1-10, quote from 1 Timothy 2:5).
2. No matter what my gifts are, I should become a teacher of the Word of God (verses 11-12).
3. I should, through practice, have myself trained to discern good and evil (verses 13-14).

Chapter 6

Verses 1-3—Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits.

Verse 1 is a bit rough to translate but the meaning is clear. It's a call to leave the basic teaching about Christ to press on to τελειότητα *maturity or completeness*. It's from the root word, which we have seen, and will see, repeatedly in Hebrews, τελεωω or τελεωδς, which means *end, goal, complete, perfect, or mature*. That is followed by five examples of basic things, things which the author wants his readers to move beyond. These are not bad things that should be avoided. Quite the opposite they are basic things every believer should know. But they are *milk* things and we cannot be mature if we continue only in those things. The five are as follows:

1. μὴ πάλιν θεμέλιον καταβαλλόμενοι μετανοίας ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων καὶ πίστεως ἐπὶ θεόν, *not again a foundation throwing down of repentance from dead works and faith in God*. In other words, don't just keep spelling out the gospel over and over again in church or every time you meet.
2. βαπτισμῶν διδασχῆς, *baptism teachings*. In other words, don't just keep on talking about baptisms.
3. ἐπιθέσεώς τε χειρῶν, *and laying on of hands*. Early on some people received the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the apostles hands (Acts 8:18), Paul seems to have given Timothy some gifts by laying hands on him (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). The prophets and teachers in Antioch laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas when they left on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:3). It is not certain what usage the author has in mind here, but he is telling them to get beyond it. Likely, he is referring to labeling people as "spiritually mature" or not, depending on whether they had a proper "laying on of hands." The author is saying to get beyond that for identifying true maturity.
4. ἀναστάσεώς τε νεκρῶν *and [the] resurrection from [the] dead*. This is another important subject all Christians should be informed about. But again, if that is all you talk about, then you need to move on.
5. καὶ κρίματος αἰωνίου, *and of eternal judgment*. Everyone needs to know that there is an eternal judgment for both unbelievers (Revelation 20:11-15) and for believers (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). But then we need to move on to greater maturity.

Those of us doing discipleship continually teach these 5 and other similar subjects. What is really sad today is many of our churches don't even want to teach these things because they are controversial and therefore contrary to the popular doctrine of tolerance. Remember, the author is not saying we should not teach about these things but that we should move beyond them to maturity. And the maturity we are to move on to is where we are among those *who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil* (5:14). *And this we will do, if God permits.*

Perhaps the most controversial passage in Hebrews is those who have fallen away – 6:4-8

Verses 4-8—For in the case of those who [1] have once been enlightened and [2] have tasted of the heavenly gift and [3] have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and [4] have tasted the good word of God and [5] the powers of the

age to come, **and then have fallen away**, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For **ground** that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

I have taken the liberty of numbering the 5 characteristics of verses 4 and 5, making bold the key issue, underlining the consequence and making bold the *ground* illustration. This way it will be easier to refer back to them as we progress. I will next consider 4 proposed interpretations of this passage. I have placed them in the order I feel to be from least likely to most likely.

Interpretation #1 – It’s about losing our salvation.

1. The 5 characteristics of 6:4-5 describe true believers.
2. *Fallen away* means those who lose their salvation through unbelief.
3. *Impossible to renew...* means they cannot be saved again as long as they are in unbelief.
4. The *ground* illustration is a contrast between those who are still saved and those who have lost their salvation.

There are two basic problems with this interpretation. First, it violates the sovereignty of God. It is a logical contradiction to say someone who has been predestined to be saved from eternity past is now not predestined to be saved from eternity past. How could someone God predestined to be saved from eternity past become lost (Ephesians 1: 3-11; Romans 8:28-30)? Second, those who have *fallen away* could never be saved again. To limit the impossibility of their renewal to “as long as they are in unbelief” is contrary to the idea of repentance. Repentance assumes the possibility of belief, which would be impossible for those who have fallen away.

Interpretation # 2 – It’s about unbelievers who were never saved.

1. The 5 characteristics of 6:4-5 describe the experiences of unbelievers living in community with believers.
2. *Fallen away* refers to unbelievers acting like the sinners they really are.
3. *Impossible to renew...* is because they can’t renew what they never had.
4. The *ground* illustration is those who were never saved being burned up.

The biggest problem with this interpretation is that 6:4-5 goes beyond any description of an unbeliever. Unbelievers cannot obtain those things by living in community with believers. And if they were never saved, what would be the point in saying that it is impossible to renew those who have fallen away? What did they fall away from? What would they be renewed to?

Interpretation # 3 – It’s a warning for believers to not become useless.

1. The 5 characteristics of 6:4-5 describe true believers.
2. *Fallen away* refers to the sins of believers which do not allow them to enter God’s rest.
3. *Impossible to renew...* means it is impossible to turn back the clock and deal with the problem by getting saved all over again.
4. The *ground* illustration refers to the usefulness of faithful believers vs. the uselessness of sinning believers.

This view seems credible. The biggest problem is that *fallen away* seems to refer more to the consequences of sin than the sin itself. Sin causes falling away, but this view doesn’t tell us what it means to have fallen away.

Interpretation # 4 – It’s a warning for believers to not lose the assurance of their salvation.

1. The 5 characteristics of 6:4-5 describe true believers.
2. *Fallen away* is the loss of assurance of salvation (they don’t know if they are saved), after sinning, resulting in believers not entering God’s rest.
3. *Impossible to renew...* means it is impossible to turn back the clock and deal with the problem by getting saved all over again.
4. The *ground* illustration refers to the contrast between those who are assured of their salvation and enter God’s rest and those who lose the assurance of their salvation and do not enter God’s rest. It’s not that the ground is burned but that everything on the ground is burned up (similar to 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

This seems to be the best view because it fits the context of the book and best explains the 4 issues emphasized here.

The consequences of having assurance – 6: 9-12

Verse 9—But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

Verse 9 is a parenthetical statement where the author stated his confidence that his primary readers are among those who have the assurance of their salvation. The NASV words *things that accompany* are not in the text. It simply reads καὶ ἐχόμενα σωτηρίας, *and [those] having salvation*.

Verse 10—For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

Verse 10 gives two attributes of God: (1) He is not unjust and (2) He does not forget. Remember that God is not necessarily fair. Fairness is treating everyone the same. God does not do that. **Justice is treating everyone from the same standard.** This is the basis of all of God's judgment. He has only one standard and it is applied to everyone. Everyone will be judged by how they measure up to the life of Jesus Christ.

And God does not forget. The point here is that God does not forget our good works, which are the basis of our judgment. **Remember: salvation is always based on faith and judgment is always based on works.** In the sense of God's omniscience, He does not forget our sins. But He also does not forget that Jesus paid for those sins (2 Corinthians 5:19-21), and He does not forget if we receive Christ as our payment for those sins (John 5:24). So the net effect for judgment is that God *will remember our sins no more* (Hebrews 8:12).

But here the author says God does not forget: ἔργου ὑμῶν καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης ἧς ἐνεδείξασθε εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, *your work and the love which you have demonstrated unto His name*. The “and” connecting the *work* and the *love* is καὶ which is the soft “and” usually better translated “that is” or “and as a part of.” So the love for the name of Christ is probably meant as a description of their work. This, in turn, is described as διακονήσαντες τοῖς ἀγίοις καὶ διακονοῦντες, *having ministered to the saints and ministering*. Notice the similarity of the first and last words of this phrase. They are the word for *service* or *ministry* (from the root word *slave* or *deacon*). The only difference is the first word is an aorist (indicating completed action), *having ministered*, and the second one is a present (indicating continuing, ongoing action) *keeping on ministering*. They served and continue to serve, thus giving evidence of there having the assurance of salvation, which allows a believer to enter God's rest.

Verses 11-12—And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

This sentence is the point to this whole discussion. The desire of the author is that ἕκαστον ὑμῶν *each one of you* show this same diligence. The point to be noted here is that the author emphasizes **this assurance is not a community thing but an individual thing**, which each one of them must realize by themselves.

Next is the main phrase of the sentence: ἐνδείκνυσθαι σπουδὴν πρὸς τὴν πληροφορίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἄχρι τέλους, *showing zeal (haste, speed, or pursuit) to the assurance of hope until the end*. The key word is *assurance* or better, *full assurance*. It is used with faith in Hebrews 10:22 (see also Colossians 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:5). Here it is used of their hope. **Notice again that it matters how we finish.** Assurance of salvation is to be pursued until the end. Eternal hope is another focus of Hebrews. We will deal with it more extensively in chapter 11. Here we shall simply define it as “an expectation and desire for a heavenly future with God.” Hope is also an understanding that the expectation has not yet been realized.

Verse 12 could serve as an introduction to chapter 11 where the author gives an extensive list of those who *through faith and patience inherit the promises*. The word here translated *sluggish* is the word νωθροὶ which we ran into back in 5:11 where it was translated *slow* in the metaphor *slow of hearing*. You recall the word literally means *lazy*, which would be a better translation here. The author is exhorting his readers to not be lazy. Once again we see that the *rest* or *assurance*, which the author is writing of is not a relaxation but a continual effort to the end of this life.

Next, the author reminds us that whatever God promises He will fulfill – 6:13-20.

Verses 13-15—For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, “I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you. And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.

Here the word ἐπαγγειλάμενος, *promise*, is equated with, or at least identified with, the word ὁμόσαι, to swear an oath. God’s promise was to swear an oath to Abraham. The significance of God swearing according to Himself is that the promise was as good as God. The specific promise was an earthly blessing of multiplying Abraham’s descendents on the earth. And sure enough we still have Abraham’s descendents, the Jewish people, multiplying on the earth. Remember, no such blessing was promised for the church age. Our blessings are heavenly, not earthly, or genealogical.

Verses 16-18—For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

Verse 16 gives us the well-known principle: **disputes are solved by appealing to a higher authority**. That’s why we quote scholars, experts, analysts, the law or our research data as an authority to prove our case. Proof is in the higher authority.

Verse 17 says that God does the same thing, except He is the highest authority. So He swore an oath based on Himself. The way we see the authority of God is dependent on the way we see the character of God. And the way we see His character defines who we are. A.W. Tozer wrote: “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us” (“The Knowledge of the Holy,” p. 9).

Verse 18 tells us there are two things God swore an oath about. In the context, that would be: (1) the promise He made to Abraham (verse 13) and (2) the oath *to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose*. Then the author surrounds these with two other attributes of God. One is ἀμεταθέτων, **immutability** – the fact that God does not change. The other is **truth**. The author says it in the negative: ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι [τὸν] θεόν, *in which God [is] unable to lie*. This way of saying it is interesting because it presents **lying**, not as something God chooses to not do, but as something **God is not able to do**. Therefore not lying (that is truth telling) is an attribute of God, not just a work of God.

God is not limited, but He is restricted. The omnipotence of God does not say God can do anything. For example, God cannot sin, be inconsistent, do absurd things, be unjust, or lie. Those are indeed restrictions, but they are not limitations. To be restricted to righteousness, consistency, honesty, holiness, and justice is not a limitation. So the author concludes the verse by saying our hope is based in the promise of a God who is unable to change and unable to lie.

Verses 19-20—This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Verse 19 tells us that the immutability and truth of God who will *promise to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose* is a hope which is as an anchor to the soul. Our hope, a future expectation which we do not yet have, is anchored in the attributes of God. This hope is a hope for entering into the very presence of God, as a high priest would do entering within the veil of the temple or the tabernacle where the ark of the covenant was from the time of Moses until the Babylonian captivity (~1500-500 B.C.).

Verse 20 continues this idea of our being able to enter into the Holy of Holies. It was something only a Levitical high priest could do and only on the Day of Atonement. But we enter, not as a Levite, but as saints, following Jesus who enters not as a Levitical priest but from a higher order of priesthood – the order of Melchizedek.

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 6

1. I should not think of Christianity as just a few basic subjects (like the Gospel and baptism). I should not neglect the basics, but I need to press on to things which increasingly help me discern good and evil (verses 1-3).
2. If I fall away from obedience to God, I cannot have assurance of my salvation (verses 4-12).
3. I can have confidence in God’s promises to us because He kept His promise to Abraham. The existence of Jewish people in the land of Israel is a reason for confidence in God (13-20).

Chapters 7 and 8 – The Priesthood of Melchizedek

In Chapters 1:1-3:8, we read about the superiority of Christ. He is the heir of all things, creator of all things, better than the angels, and better than Moses. Next, in the rest of chapter 3 and chapter 4, the author told us about God's rest (the assurance of our salvation and fellowship with God) and warned us about the possibility of not entering into it. In Chapters 5 and 6, we are told that maturity is the key to entering into God's rest. Chapter 6 specifically warned us about falling away from that rest. Next, the author goes back to the subject of the superiority of Christ (not that he ever really left it) to focus in on one significant aspect of the priesthood of Christ, namely, that He is a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

Chapters 7 and 8 are about the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood. First (in 7:1-10), the author talks about the incident recorded in Genesis where Abraham met Melchizedek. Then (in 7:11-8:5), he gives us 10 ways Christ's Melchizedek priesthood is superior. Finally (in 8:6-13), he proves the old Mosaic covenant was never meant to be permanent because the coming of a new covenant is an Old Testament idea.

Chapter 7

Verses 1-3—For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.

Genesis 14:18-20 reads: *And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand. He gave him a tenth of all.*

Both Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7 say Melchizedek was (1) king of Salem, (2) priest of the Most High God, (3) the one who blessed Abraham, and (4) given a tenth of all the spoil of battle. [Genesis adds that Melchizedek also blessed God.] Then Hebrews adds 6 other facts about Melchizedek not given in Genesis. (5) he is the king of righteousness, (6) he is the king of peace, (7) he is without father, without mother, i.e. he has no genealogy, (8) he has neither beginning of days nor end of life, (9) he is made like the Son of God, and (10) he remains a priest perpetually.

So, who was this person that met Abraham? From Genesis 14, he sounds like a man living in Salem. [This is probably the place later called יְרוּשָׁלַם (Jerusalem). Salem, שָׁלֵם, comes from שָׁלַם the basic word for *peace*, from which also comes שָׁלוֹם the standard Jewish greeting "Shalom." Jerusalem is the place of peace (which it has certainly not been over the years).] If we focus on Hebrews 7, Melchizedek sounds like a preincarnate theophany of Christ. But verse 15 adds to this discussion. Here the author refers to Jesus as *another priest* who *arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek*. From this, it seems that the author of Hebrews is presenting the Genesis' Melchizedek as a person who comes from heaven and is placed on earth as a priest of God for this encounter with Abraham. Many say it is the priesthood of Melchizedek, not the man himself, which has the criteria of numbers 7-10 in Hebrews 7:3. Possibly, but it sounds like the author is describing a person who represents that priesthood. So our options are:

1. Melchizedek was a heavenly being who represented this heavenly eternal priesthood. This is favored by Hebrews 7:15.
2. Melchizedek was an earthly man designated to meet Abraham, but the priesthood he represented was eternal. This is favored by Genesis 14:18-20 and the requirement for a priest to be a human in Hebrews 5:1.
3. Melchizedek was a preincarnate appearance of Christ, and the *other priest* of Hebrews 7:15 is postincarnate resurrected Christ. This is favored by the fact that there are other preincarnate appearances of Christ.

Frankly, I don't see that we have enough evidence to dogmatically choose one of these options over the other.

In verses 4-10 the author focuses on the implications of Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek.

Verses 4-5—Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham.

The paying of a tithe to Melchizedek is mentioned both in Hebrews and Genesis. This is then compared and contrasted with the tithe collected by the Levite priests at the time of Moses, about 500 years later. First, understand that “tithe” means 10%. With this in mind, we can make some observations about Abraham’s tithe to Melchizedek.

1. Tithing existed before the Mosaic Law – at least 500 years before.
2. The Levitical tithe was a taxation. Abraham’s tithe was a free-will gift.
3. The Levitical tithe was a tax for the redistribution of wealth to the Levites, the poor, widows, and orphans. Abraham’s tithe was a gift to God via His priest Melchizedek, not a gift to the poor or widows or orphans.
4. Abraham’s tithe was not a regular gift from his income; it was a special gift from the spoils of the campaign to rescue Lot. Abraham kept none of these goods; he returned what was left to the king of Sodom.

Application: If you wish to use tithing (10%) as a basis for giving, it does have a biblical basis outside the Mosaic Law, but the example is one of a special gift to God, not a regular tithe of your income or a redistribution of your wealth to the poor.

Verses 6-10—But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Verse 6 gives us two ways Abraham demonstrated his submission to Melchizedek: (1) Melchizedek was the one who collected the tithe and (2) Melchizedek was the one who blessed Abraham.

Verse 7 reminds us of the general principle that the lesser (Abraham) is blessed by the greater (Melchizedek).

In verse 8 the *mortal men* who *receive tithes* are the Levite priests, and the one who *lives on* is Melchizedek.

Verses 9 and 10 then make the point the author has been leading up to. Since Levi came from the loins of Abraham and Abraham was inferior to Melchizedek, the Levitical priesthood is inferior to the Melchizedek priesthood.

Another significant observation must be made before we leave these verses. The verses answer the question:

Where do we come from?

Specifically, the issue is, “Where does our spiritual essence come from? When do we actually get started as human beings?” Obviously, our physical bodies come from our parents. But what about our soul/spirit, that eternal part of us, which is the **real us**, living in this physical body which will leave it and move on when we die physically (Genesis 35:18)? There are two common answers:

One answer is that we are all individually created by God at some point in the conception-to-birth process. These are divided up into those who think God created us: (a) at conception, (b) when the blood is formed, (c) when brain waves are established, (d) when we are able to breathe on our own, and (e) when we are born.

A second answer, which seems more likely from this passage, says that our spiritual nature is formed with our physical bodies. The fact that Levi was in the loins of his great-grandfather Abraham in a way that made him spiritually part of the submission of Abraham to Melchizedek, suggests that the spiritual elements that came together to form him as a spiritual person came from his parents. If so, then he became a spiritual person at the same time he became a physical person—when he was conceived. It seems likely, therefore, the answer to the question about where we came from spiritually is from our parents. When the sperm and egg combine, they carry not just the physical elements but also the spiritual elements that make us an eternal person.

Next, the author gives us ten ways Christ’s priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to Aaron’s priesthood of Levi.

Verse 11—Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?

1. The first superiority is that the Levitical priesthood was not **perfect**. The author’s reasoning is simply that if it was perfect, there would not be a need for another priesthood.

Verse 12—For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.

2. The next superiority is in the fact that the Law has changed, but the priesthood and the Law must change together. Since the Law and its priesthood changed, it was never what the Melchizedek priesthood is—an **eternal** priesthood.

Melchizedek Priesthood The Promise to Abraham	Levitical Priesthood The Law of Moses	Christ's Priesthood The Age of Grace
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Verses 13-14—For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.

Verses 13 and 14 are a parenthesis to the list. The point is, Jesus could not be a Levite priest because He was from the tribe of Judah (which, of course He had to be, to be a king and fulfill the Davidic Covenant – 2 Samuel 7).

Verses 15-17—And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of Him, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

3. Verses 15-17 give us the next superiority of Christ's Melchizedek priesthood. It is not based on a destructible physical life, *but according to the power of an indestructible life*. This may be a reference to the resurrection of Christ or it may be the nature of the Melchizedek priesthood. Either way, it is superior to the priesthood of Levi.

Verses 18-19—For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

4. Verses 18-19 give us the fourth reason the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior: it brings in a **better hope**. These verses give us a very good synopsis of the position of the New Testament church leaders concerning the end of the age of the Law and the beginning of a new era. The author says the Law has had a ἀθέτησις, *nullification or removal*. The explanation is διὰ τὸ αὐτῆς ἀσθενὲς καὶ ἀνωφελές — οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐτελείωσεν ὁ νόμος, *because it [was] weak and unprofitable – for the law makes perfect no one*. The word ἐτελείωσεν is from the root word we see all over the place in the book of Hebrews τελέω *to make complete, perfect, or, mature*. This is the author's theme idea: **maturity leads to assurance**. But he says this maturity was never obtainable by following the Law. The present hope (of the Age of Grace) is better because it is that δι' ἧς ἐγγίζομεν τῷ θεῷ, *by (or through) which we draw near to God*. This perspective slammed the door shut on Judaism and any inclusion of the Law as part of this Age of Grace. [Notice that the inclusion of the Law as a path to godliness is still prominent in many Christian denominations, especially those following an amillennial or covenant form of theology.]

Verses 20-21—And inasmuch as it was not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever.’”

5. Verses 20-21 tell us that a significant part of the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood is that it was **given with an oath from God**. The Levitical priesthood was a genealogical assignment through the tribe of Levi for the sons of Aaron. But the Levites became priests without any oath from God. In other words, there was no promise from God that their priesthood would last forever. Even when Aaron was originally designated as a priest, there was no promise that his priesthood would last. So, the author of Hebrews reasons, we should not be surprised that God has replaced it with a better one.

Verse 22—so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

6. The sixth advantage of the Melchizedek priesthood is that it is in the context of a **better covenant**. This will be the focus of 8:6-13, so we will leave the discussion of it for there.

Verses 23-24—The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.

Verses 23 and 24 develop the idea of #3, the indestructible life of the resurrected Christ. The reasoning is: greater numbers of priests who die are not more valuable than one resurrected priest who *continues forever*.

Verse 25—Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

7. Verse 25 tells us an eternal priest has the advantage of being able to **save forever** people who come to God through Him because, unlike the Levitical priesthood, He *always lives to make intercession for them*.

Verse 26—For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens

8. Verse 26 lists the eighth reason for the superiority of Christ's Melchizedek priesthood: it is **holy**. The holiness is then described as *innocent* (of evil), *undefiled* (with anything impure), and *separated from sinners* (separation from sin being the basic definition of holiness), and because of all that, this priesthood is *exalted above the heavens*.

Verses 27-28—who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

9. The ninth superiority of Christ's priesthood of Melchizedek is that, as priest, He **does not need to offer daily sacrifices** for His own sins. Actually He was the sacrifice for sins, which was made once for all. (Verse 28 then reiterates several of the previous points.)

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 7

1. Tithing (giving 10% of my income) was part of the Mosaic Law. It is not a directive for me today. But this is a biblical example, apart from the Law, to give 10% of special or unusual income (verse 1-6).
2. Abortion is wrong at any stage of pregnancy because a real spiritual human being exists as soon as the physical being comes together in the womb (verses 7-10).
3. I should not think of myself as a Christian Jew, even if I am genealogically Jewish. We are connected to God through Christ's priesthood of Melchizedek not Rabbinical Judaism or the priesthood of Levi (verses 11-38).

Chapter 8

Verses 1-5—Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown to you on the mountain."

10. The last point made here is that Christ's Melchizedek priesthood is superior because it is part of, and emanates **from the tabernacle in heaven**, not any temple on earth. The author says this is *Κεφάλαιον* *the main point, summary*, or *capital* point of the subject. The priesthood of Christ is different in that it has a heavenly focus, seated on the right hand of God in heaven, in a tabernacle which exists in heaven.

Three Applications of the Ten Superiorities of Christ's Melchizedek Priesthood

The First significant application is in how we view Christian leadership. Our leaders should never be seen as (or call themselves, or consider themselves) priests. Priests are an intermediary between God and man. That was only historically assigned to the Levites, and that age is over. *For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (1 Timothy 2:5). No human should ever consider himself a priest in the church. Our leadership is pragmatic, according to gifts. Leaders are to be followed if they teach the truth (Hebrews 13:7), not because they have a sacred office from God. There is a sense in which we are all priests (Revelation 1:6), but that refers to our representing God to others as examples, not as a separate class of Christians who represent others to God.

A Second application is a focus on heaven. The author of Hebrews defines Christianity as a heaven-focused belief. There is a billboard on the highway near my office that is nearly blank. But in the middle it has two boxes, implying we should check one or the other. Next to the first box it says: DO NOTHING. And next to the second box it says: SEE HOW YOU CAN HELP, GO TO GLOBALWARMING.COM. I always want to climb up on the billboard and check the box in front of DO NOTHING since that is the only other option given. Of course we should do what we can to preserve and protect the environment. But it's all about your focus. Not what is important but what is most important. Life is full of

important things which must be ignored because they crowd out the most important things. The “good” is always the biggest enemy of the “best.” Do you want to fix the earth, control the masses, and establish a religion? Well, if you do, then you will want to get involved in things like ecology, passing the right laws, electing the right politicians, and establishing a religious priesthood to minister to the masses. But if you are interested in the Christianity the author of Hebrews is talking about, then you will be trying to get people saved off from this planet, prepare those people for heaven, and focus on getting individuals to serve the God of heaven, through the high priesthood of Jesus Christ.

A **third** application comes from the author’s repeated declaration that the age of the Law, along with its priesthood, is over. So don’t try to force fit into the church what God did with Israel, or attempt to mix Law and grace. Of course, God is the same and does not change, so we can learn about God from the laws and the priesthood He gave to Israel. But the church is not Israel. Although God does not change, what He does changes. The church is not a nation. It is not a specific race. It does not have an earthly priesthood. It does not perform the Mosaic Law. The church is a spiritual brotherhood/sisterhood of those who are regenerated through the blood of Christ: in different nations all over the world, living under all sorts governments, made up of all sorts of races, with no earthly priests. It consists of individuals who each relate to God individually. On earth, they gather locally and form networks of relationships, and they link together to spread the Gospel and help one another mature until Christ returns. The Age of the Law, with its priests has been set aside and replaced by the Age of Grace, not mingled together with it (Romans 11:18-28).

Verses 6-7—But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.

In the remainder of chapter 8, the author talks about the new covenant with the church. First, in verses 6 and 7 he reiterates the fact that it is a better covenant, because of Christ’s more excellent ministry and because of God’s better promises. Then he spends the rest of the chapter proving that the existence of a new covenant is not a unique idea. As a matter of fact, God said in the Old Testament that there would be a new covenant. He writes the following:

Verses 8-13—For finding fault with them, He says, “Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and I did not care for them, says the Lord. “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people, and they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘know the Lord,’ for all will know me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

The point to verses 8-13 is in verse 13. God told Israel that there would be a new covenant in the future. That meant the old covenant (the Mosaic Law) ... *growing old, is ready to disappear*. The author was not quoting this passage to say that the new covenant with the church was that covenant mentioned in the Old Testament. Paul clearly taught that the church age was not revealed to the Old Testament writers (Ephesians 3:3-9). **The author’s point was not this is that, but this is like that.** The new covenant which the author refers to here is that taught in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Jeremiah covenant is most probably a reference to the new covenant God will make with Israel during the future Millennial Kingdom (Isaiah 11:1-10; Revelation 20:1-10). It has some significant similarities and differences with this age.

Similarities between the new covenant with the church and the millennial covenant of Jeremiah 31:

- Both are a new covenant, indicating that the old Mosaic covenant was temporary (verses 8 and 10).
- Both are written on the minds and hearts of believers (verse 10).
- Both are those of whom God will say: *I will be their God, and they shall be My people* (verse 10).
- Of both, God says: *I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more* (verse 12).

Differences between the new covenant with the Church and the millennial covenant of Jeremiah 31:

- The Jeremiah covenant is *with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah* (verses 8 and 10). But the covenant with the Church is with believers of all nations, including Gentiles (Ephesians 3:6).
- The Jeremiah covenant is compared, via contrast, with *the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt* (verse 9). The fathers of the church are the apostles, elders, prophets and teachers (some of whom were not even Jews), not those who came out of Egypt.
- The Jeremiah covenant says: *they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘know the Lord,’ for all will know me, from the least to the greatest of them*. This is certainly not true of the

church. The whole point of Hebrews 5 is that the church is in danger of not entering into God's rest (of chapters 3 and 4) because they do not know the Lord and are in need of someone to teach them.

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 8

1. I must focus on a heavenly priest, Christ Jesus. Biblical Christianity is defined by a heavenly focus (verses 1-5).
2. The new covenant of the New Testament is better. Therefore, I should not limit my understanding of God to the Old Testament (verses 6-13).

Chapters 9 and 10 – The Priesthood of Jesus Christ

In the first two chapters, plus the first six verses of chapter three, the author established the superiority of Jesus Christ as the foundation of assurance. Then, beginning with chapter three verse seven, and continuing up through chapter eleven, he discussed the maturity in Jesus Christ as the pathway of assurance. Here in chapters nine and ten he makes the point that the only perfect provision ever made for the assurance of our position before God is the priesthood of Jesus Christ. This is a foundational issue for the author. He gives us 67 verses in this (two-chapter long) section to discuss that subject.

Chapter 9

Verses 1-5—Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Verse 1 is a bit hard to translate, so perhaps we should look at the original. It reads: Εἶχε μὲν οὖν [καὶ] ἡ πρώτη δικαιοσύνη λατρείας τό τε ἅγιον κοσμικόν. The literal word order translation is: *It had indeed (also) the first [one or covenant] a righteous liturgy which and holy (place) earthly.* We would translate that as: *Indeed the first had a righteous liturgy and an earthly holy place.* So in this section the author is going to tell us about the earthly holy place. This is to be in contrast to the rest of the section, which is a heavenly holy place.

Verse 2 begins describing the σκηνή, which is the *tabernacle*, not the temple. The tabernacle was constructed by Moses, as specified by God. It was a model on earth of the real tabernacle/temple in heaven (Revelation 15:5-7). The original temple on earth was David's idea, which God allowed Solomon to build. The second temple was commanded by God (Haggai 1:1-4), apparently for the Messiah to enter. But it is not the model of the heavenly tabernacle because the ark of the covenant was not in it. So the author goes back to the tabernacle, not the temple, for his comparisons.

We also learn that the author is here discussing only the sanctuary itself since the brazen altar, which was in the tabernacle courtyard but outside the tent, is not mentioned. Here he tells us that the outer room of the tent was called the Holy Place and it contained the lamp stand and the sacred bread.

Verses 3-4 reminds us that there is a second veil, which created an inner room called the Holy of Holies. He says it contained the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant. Actually, the altar of incense sat just outside the Holy of Holies. But its use was connected with the use of the Holy of Holies especially on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:12-13). And that is the point the author is dwelling on in this section. There were three items in the ark of the covenant: (1) a golden jar of manna, (2) Aaron's rod, and (3) the two tablets with the Ten Commandments.

Verse 5 gives us a fourth feature of the ark of the covenant, namely, that it was covered by a golden lid called the mercy seat. It had two cherubim on top of it with their wings spread over it. This was the place where the high priest, once a year on the Day of Atonement, sprinkled blood to atone for the sins of the people.

Verses 6-7—Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.

Verses 6 and 7 describe two things. First is the difference between the regular priests and the high priest. Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies. Second, the author tells us that the high priest must enter the Holy of Holies with blood which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people. The interesting thing to note here is that the sins covered by the blood were the sins committed in ignorance. Sins committed intentionally, or known sins, were not covered by the

blood of the Day of Atonement. Those sins were punished by specifications given in the law. For example: *If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep* (Exodus 22:1). Or *if there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them* (Leviticus 20:13). So the sins of stealing sheep, or committing an act of homosexuality, was punished by the Law. The blood of the atonement was not for that. It was only for sins committed in ignorance. This is why David said there was no sacrifice for his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah (Psalms 51). Those sins were to be punished by the Law, not atoned for by the high priest on the Day of Atonement.

Verse 7 makes the first of many references to the blood sacrifice. Christ's blood will be compared and contrasted to that of the Old Testament sacrifices. We should note, however, that it is not just the fact that Christ shed His blood but also that He died shedding His blood that makes the sacrifice sufficient. The blood had saving value only because it brought about His death.

Verses 8-10—The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

In verse 8, the author says that the Holy Spirit is showing us how inaccessible God is. The individual Israelites, who were not priests, could not even enter the Holy Place. The Levitical system did not allow the people access to God.

Verse 9 says the Old Testament tabernacle is a παραβολή transliterated *parabole*. Which is clearly where we get the English word *parable*. The tabernacle is a parable or symbol of the present age, that is this age of grace or the church age. Some claim *for the present time* represents the Old Testament time, but that is unlikely since that age ended when Jesus died on the cross (Romans 10:4, Galatians 3:23-4:11). The present time for the author and his readers is the same age of grace we live in. And in this age, as in the tabernacle, the *gifts and sacrifices* we make, just like those of the Levite priests, cannot take away sins. So they cannot provide the worshiper with a perfect conscience.

Verse 10 tells us that the physical regulations of the Law were only δικαιώματα σαρκὸς μέχρι καιροῦ διορθώσεως ἐπικείμενα, literally: *righteousnesses of the flesh until the time of (the) reformation*. The Louw and Nida Lexicon defines this last word as *to establish a new order, forming a new order, or reformation*. So the *present time* of verse 9 is not the *reformation* or *new order* of verse 10.

Verses 11-14—But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

In verse 11 *good things to come* is probably a reference to the *eternal redemption* in verse 12. The great accomplishment of Christ in this passage is that He entered into a greater and more perfect tabernacle.

Verses 11-14 give us seven ways which separate Christ from the Levitical priesthood:

CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD	THE LEVITE PRIESTHOOD
He entered a tabernacle not made with hands.	They entered a tabernacle which humans built.
He offered His own blood.	They offered the blood of goats and calves.
His offering was once for all.	Their offering needed to be repeated.
His offering obtained eternal redemption.	Their offering didn't redeem anyone.
His offering could cleanse the conscience.	Their offering could only cleanse the flesh.
His offering was through the eternal Spirit.	Their offering was through a physical priest.
He offered Himself, being aware of what He was doing.	They offered animals, unaware of what they were doing.

Verse 13 also mentions *the ashes of a heifer*. John McArthur writes: *It is said that, in the history of Israel, only 6 red heifers were killed and their ashes used. One heifer's ashes would suffice for centuries since only a minute amount of the*

ash was required. (“McArthur Study Bible,” see also Numbers 19). Some also say Jews today are breeding animals looking for a red heifer needed to reinstate the Levitical priesthood in a reconstructed Temple.

Verse 15—For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Verse 15 is very significant because it says the death of Christ retroactively covered the sins of the Old Testament saints. The text reads: ἀπολύτρωσιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ πρώτῃ διαθήκῃ παραβάσεων, *the redemption at the time of the first covenant transgressions*. So their faith was, as in the case of Abraham *reckoned to him as righteousness* (Genesis 15:6). But their actual holiness, which gave them the ability to stand before a holy God, was accomplished when, and only when, Jesus died on the cross. Abraham, Moses, and David were redeemed the same time you and I were—when Jesus died on the cross.

Question: *Were the Old Testament believers forgiven of their sins when they became believers?*

Answer: Their sins were not paid for until Jesus died on the cross. Therefore, they were not technically forgiven of their sins. God does not forgive sins in the sense of overlooking them, so they must be paid for in order for the justice of God to be satisfied. Their faith was taken as a commitment to God, which would become effective when Jesus died on the cross, but the actual payment which satisfied God, had to wait for the death of Christ. This may be why they went to Sheol (or Hades – Luke 16) instead of the presence of God (2 Corinthians 5:8). It also may be why the grace of God is never offered to the individual in the Old Testament.

Verses 16-22—For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you”. And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Verses 16-17 use the word *covenant* in the sense of *testament* as in “last will and testament” (διαθήκη can mean either *covenant* or *testament*). The author uses the word to say a testament can only go into effect when the one who made it dies. So covenants require death to bring them into being. The Mosaic Law had to die to bring in the Age of Grace. Jesus promised the Age of Grace to the apostles (Matthew 16:16-18). But He lived in the age of the Law. When He died, the promise went into effect (Romans 10:4). Death activates the promises, that is, makes them a reality.

Verses 18-21 refer to the ceremony of Exodus 24:1-10 where Moses inaugurated the covenant of the Law given at Sinai by the death of animals. These animals were only symbolic, of course, because the animals did not promise anything themselves. But that is indeed the author’s point. They were only a symbol of the death of Christ. Animal blood could not pay for the sins of the people, so it could not activate the covenant with God. But their blood was a symbol of a very important principle, which he mentions next.

In Verse 22, the author says *almost* all things are cleansed with blood. The text reads: καὶ σχεδὸν ἐν αἵματι πάντα καθαρίζεται κατὰ τὸν νόμον, *and almost in blood all things are cleansed according to the law*. The word *σχεδὸν*, *almost*, could mean that most things are cleansed by blood but some are not. For example, water, incense, and fire were used to purify in Exodus 19:10; Leviticus 15:5; Numbers 16:46, 47; and 31:21-24. The problem with this view is that none of these things, nor the blood of animals, could really cleanse anyone. More likely the word *almost* means that under the Law all things were almost cleansed, but none of them were actually cleansed because the blood of animals can’t do that. **Their blood can only remind us that it needs to be done.**

What the animal blood sacrifice does is announce the principle of the last part of the verse: καὶ χωρὶς αἱματεκχυσίας οὐ γίνεται ἄφεσις, *and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*. It reminds us of Jesus’ statement: ... *for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins* (Matthew 26:28). This is not a logical deduction the author is making. This is simply the way it is because God says so. God does not forgive in a vacuum. The forgiveness of God does not take place in just any context. It is only going to happen when there is the shedding of blood. This idea introduces the next set of verses.

Verses 23-26—Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a

mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Verse 23 says that it was necessary for the copies of the things in heaven, which are on earth (the tabernacle and its furniture) to be cleansed with these material things. But the heavenly things themselves also need to be cleansed with better sacrifices than the earthly blood of bulls and goats. The question this raises is, “Why did heavenly things need καθαρίζεσθαι, *to be cleansed*? Well, it is not that they were dirty. The cleansing is because of the principle of the last verse: **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness**. The heavenly sanctuary was, up to this point, a place for God and angels who needed no forgiveness. Now it would also be a place for those who were forgiven. And the forgiven can only be forgiven by cleansing through the shedding of blood.

Verses 24-26 explain that Christ, having shed His atoning blood, entered into the heavenly Holy Place as the worthy Lamb who was slain once-for-all, who suffered once-for-all, and for all time.

Verse 26 says His suffering was νυνὶ δὲ ἅπαξ ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων, *now but once upon the consummation of the ages*. The word συντελεία can mean *consummation, completion, perfection* or *end*. The last word here, αἰώνων, can mean *age* or *eternity*. The author could be speaking of the end of an age, in which case he is probably referring to the end of the age of the Law, and the completion of all the ages, which led up to this point. However, he could also be saying *but now (Christ has made) a completion (of sacrificial suffering) once for eternity*. This second interpretation seems more consistent with the context.

Verse 27—And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment

Verse 27 is one of the most significant verses about the future of all humans. The text reads: καὶ καθ’ ὅσον ἀπόκειται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαξ ἀποθανεῖν, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο κρίσις, *and according to as much as (it was) appointed to man once to die, after (or with) that comes judgment*. The word ἀπόκειται is a combination of απο meaning *from, against, or because of* and κείται, meaning *appointed, or destined*. *Appointed* is a good translation. It indicates man is destined to die, or has an appointment with death, and right after that, or with that, comes judgment. Whether you are a believer or not, the certainty of your appearing before God in judgment is as certain as death.

It might be said that there are exceptions to this: Enoch (Genesis 5:24), Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), and those Raptured at the end of the church age (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). Because of this passage, many believe the two witnesses of Revelation 11 are Enoch and Elijah. That’s possible, but these are presented as exceptions to this general rule. And the whole point of those Raptured in 1 Thessalonians 4 is that they are an exception. There also seems to be some who will die twice – those who were miraculously risen from the dead in Bible times, such as the dead son in Luke 7:12. They will have to die again. But verse 27 here is meant to be a general statement about life and death. Unless we are Raptured, you and I will not be an exception – count on it!

Verse 28—so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

Verse 28 has several issues requiring comment. The first is that he repeats the word ἅπαξ *once*, emphasizing not only the necessity but the sufficiency of Christ’s death for sin.

The next interesting word is πολλῶν, *many*. Five-point Calvinists point out that Christ died for *many* not *all*. Thus verifying the L of TULIP, representing limited atonement, the doctrine that Christ died for only the elect, not the whole world. But this view is on shaky ground. The Bible declares a universal propitiation (1 John 2:2), a universal redemption (2 Peter 2:1), and gives a universal appeal for the Gospel (John 3:16-17). There are also passages like Romans 5:15 which use the word *many* as a synonym for all. It reads: *But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many*. The *many* who died in Adam are clearly all of the human race, and these are the same ones Christ died for.

Verse 28 also says Christ will appear δευτέρου χωρὶς αμαρτίας *a second (or second time) without sin (or a sin offering)*. The author is making the point that not only was Christ’s death sufficient, but when He comes a second time,

at the Second Coming (of Matthew 24 and Revelation 19), there will be no sin offering. It will be a time of judgment for sin, not offering a sacrifice for sin.

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 9

1. I need to realize my sins, as well as the sins of everyone (including the Old Testament saints), were paid for when Christ died on the cross. No sin is paid for by a person becoming a believer (verses 1-15).
2. I should never think God forgives sin in the sense of overlooking it. Sin must be paid for by the shedding of blood, i.e., death (verses 6-22).
3. I should live every day in light of two great truths: (1) death is certain and (2) judgment after death is just as certain (verse 23-28).

Chapter 10

Verses 1-3—For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year.

These first 3 verses of Chapter 10 give us the best answer to the question: “Why were there animal sacrifices in the Old Testament Mosaic Law?” The answer was, not to cleanse the worshiper from sin or they would not have to be repeated. Rather, they were *a reminder of sins*. The animal sacrifices were to remind the Israelites how much their sin offended the character of a holy God.

Verses 4-10—For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, “Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, “Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of me) to do your will, O God. After saying above, “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have not desired, nor have you taken pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Verse 4 and verse 10 bracket this section with the problem (verse 4) and the solution (verse 10). In between, the author uses the words of Psalm 40:6-8 to say it from Christ’s perspective. I will restate the use of the Psalm in verses 5-7 as an expanded/amplified text. *Therefore, [because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins] when He [Christ, the Messiah] comes into the world [at His incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth], He [in essence] says, [Levitical] sacrifices and offerings You [God the Father] have not desired, but a [physical, able to be sacrificed] body You [Father] have prepared for Me in whole burnt offerings [of the Mosaic Law] and [and Levitical/animal] sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure. Then I [Jesus] said, “Behold, I [being born as a baby in Bethlehem] have come, as prophesied in the Old Testament to do your will, O God.*

Verse 8 re-quotes parts of the passage to emphasize one particular point—the pleasure of God. The animal sacrifices were removed because God took no pleasure in them. They were never for the pleasure of God but as a **reminder** of the seriousness of the Israelites’ sin. The basis of **maturity is to realize all things are done for the pleasure of God**. People often become angry with God because of their suffering or suffering in the world. But that anger is based on an assumption that God somehow owes us a certain pleasure base. This perspective is common in our so-called postmodern world where we all tend to think of ourselves as co-gods worthy of some pleasure which God owes us.

Question: Does the creator have an obligation to His creation?

Answer: No.

Verse 9 shows us once again why we cannot mix together the laws of one age with another. For reasons He has not told us, God *takes away the first in order to establish the second*. In this case, He takes away the Levitical sacrifices in order to establish an age based on the sacrifice of Christ.

So we come to verse 10, the answer to verse 4. We believers ἡγιασμένοι *have been sanctified*. The word is a perfect, passive, participle of the word for *sanctified* or *holy* or *set apart*. The perfect indicates past action with future consequences. We have been made holy with future consequences.

Verses 11-14—Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from

that time onward until his enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Verses 11-12 give 4 contrasts between the Levitical priests with Christ.

THE LEVITICAL PRIESTS	CHRIST
Stand	Sat down
Offered time after time	Offered once for all time
Were many with many sacrifices	Was one with one sacrifice
Offered sacrifices which can never take away sin	Offered a sacrifice took away all the sin of the sanctified

Verse 13 speaks of Christ's present state between His first and Second Coming. Christ is pictured as not causing His enemies to be made His footstool but waiting for God the Father to do it. So this Church/Grace Age is not a time when Christ is at war with His enemies in some conquering way (as was the mistake of the Crusades) but where He is building His Church (Matthew 16:18), while waiting for the Father to bring about His earthly dominion.

Verse 14 is one of the greatest statements in the Bible for the eternal security of the true believer. It makes it virtually impossible for one who is saved to lose their salvation because they are sanctified for all time. To take a closer look at the text, it says: *by one offering τετελείωκεν εἰς τὸ διηνεκὲς τοὺς τετελείωκεν He perfected unto continually the ones who have been sanctified.* The word τετελείωκεν, *He has perfected* is a perfect tense indicating past action with future consequences. The word αἱγιαζομένους is a continuative, present tense having the idea of *keep on being sanctified.*

Verses 15-18—And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them,” He then says, “And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Verse 15 once again confirms the author's commitment to the inspiration of the Old Testament by the Holy Spirit. What Jeremiah wrote is what the Holy Spirit said. This quote from Jeremiah 31:33-34 was quoted earlier in 8:10-12. The author refers to the New Covenant of the Millennial Kingdom. This is given to stress the last phrase *their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.* In the Millennium, there will be forgiveness of the sins of the nation Israel so there is no longer any existence of such a thing as an offering for sin. [There will be animal sacrifices in the Millennium (Ezekiel 40-48), but they will not be to pay for sins. They will probably be the same as in the Mosaic Law, as a reminder of sin.]

Verse 18 gives us the general, and logical, principle: where there is forgiveness of sin, there is no longer any offering for sin. This implies that everything done, after the death of Christ, as a sacrifice for sin, is inappropriate. The Jewish sacrifices going on at the time of the writing of this book were inappropriate. Any pagan ritual done to pay for sins is inappropriate. Working, or suffering, to pay for our own sins, is inappropriate. Any attempt to pay for our sins is a refusal to accept the sufficiency of the death of Christ on the cross as a payment for sin, and a basis for forgiveness.

Verses 19-25—Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

In verses 19 and 20, we should notice that the veil keeping people from the presence of God has not disappeared. It has, so to speak, been replaced by *the veil, that is, His flesh.*

Verses 19-25 give us three exhortations based on two conditions. The two conditions are the accomplishments of the blood of Christ and the high priesthood of Christ. The three exhortations are: **let us draw near with a pure heart**, **let us hold fast the confession of our hope**, and **let us stimulate one another to love and good deeds.**

Concerning verses 22 and 23 there are three suggestions for how to understand the phrase *let us draw near with a pure heart*.

- John McArthur suggests this is “the heart of the invitation to those in the assembly who had not come to Christ.” This is consistent with his “Lordship Salvation,” but seems unlikely here. These people are already *brethren, who have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus*.
- A second suggestion is that this is an exhortation to prayer. The command to draw near to God is not uncommon in the Bible (Psalm 73:28; Jeremiah 30:18-29; James 4:8). That is possible, but it would be “out of the blue” contextually.
- Third, the idea here is to get to know God Himself and His ways, fear Him, love Him, and grow to a mature relationship with Him. This seems most likely here. This is what allows us to enter His rest and, therefore, have the assurance of our salvation and fellowship with God. I suspect the exhortation to *hold fast... without wavering* has the same assurance idea.

Verse 24 is a very practical exhortation. It reads: καὶ κατανοῶμεν ἀλλήλους εἰς παροξυσμὸν ἀγάπης καὶ καλῶν ἔργων, *and let us understand (or consider) one another unto encouragement of love and good works*. The idea is to understand one another in such a way that we can encourage one another to do good deeds.

Verse 25 is a continuation of the exhortation in verse 24. The reason for the assembling together is *unto encouragement of love and good works*. In this much discussed phrase the Greek says: μὴ ἐγκαταλείποντες τὴν ἐπισυναγωγὴν ἑαυτῶν, καθὼς ἔθος τισίν, *do not forsaking (leaving behind or deserting) the assembling (or gathering) of yourselves just as (is) the custom (habit, or manner) of certain ones*. Let’s make a few observations here:

1. This is not a command to gather together, it is an exhortation (a present, active, participle) to not be in the habit of not assembling together. So it is not a command to gather but a command **to not forsake** gathering.
2. There is no recommendation as to how often we are to gather together.
3. There is no recommendation as to when we are to gather together.
4. There is no suggestion of what is to go on during that gathering – except to stimulate one another to love and good works. (We can, however, safely assume that the author had in mind the activities of Acts 2:42.)
5. The assembly was an activity, which they were to do. It was not a definition of who they were. The word here ἐπισυναγωγὴν is a combination of ἐπι generally meaning *upon* and συναγωγὴν transliterated *sunagogen*, which is the word for *synagogue*. This is not the word for *church*. That is the word ἐκκλησία, meaning *called out ones*. So the gathering (synagogue-ing) is what we are to do, not who we are.
6. The ones not doing this have a habit of not doing it. It is their ἔθος (*ethos*). Most likely, they were people gathering together with the Jews in synagogues but not synagogue-ing with fellow Christians. The emphasis is made with the word ἑαυτῶν, *yourselves*. The problem was not gathering **yourselves** together.
7. The point of the verse is to tell us that some sort of regular gathering together of believers, to exhort one another to love and good deeds, is not to be forsaken.

Next we have one of the most severe warnings in the Bible. First we will look closely at the text, then I will give several traditional interpretations including the one I prefer.

Verses 26-31—For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge His people. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Let’s look closely at the first two verses (10:26-27a). The crucial passage reads: Εκουσίως γὰρ αμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας, οὐκέτι περὶ αμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία, φοβερὰ δέ τις ἐκδοχὴ κρίσεως. Translating the words in order: *willingly – for – keeping on sinning* (it’s a present, active, participle) *we – after – (the) – having received* (it’s an aorist, active, infinitive) *– the – knowledge* (or better *full knowledge*) *– of the – truth, – no longer – concerning – sin – does their remain* (it’s a present passive indicative) *a sacrifice, fear but a certain expectation of judgment* (I have separated the words of verse 26).

Here are some of the traditional and possible interpretations of the passage.

The “you can lose your salvation” view

This view says:

- *go on sinning willfully* means serious significant sin, like denying faith in Christ
- *receiving the knowledge of the truth* is salvation
- *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins* means they lose their salvation
- *a terrifying expectation of judgment* is the Great White Throne Judgment

This view would be easy to accept here if this was the only passage we had on the subject. The biggest problem with it is that the Bible is full of passages that say salvation is eternally predestined by God from the foundation of the world and the sins of the saints are always paid for. One key verse is in this chapter (verse 14; see also Ephesians 1:3-11; Romans 8:31-34; and John 5:24).

The “apostate – false believer” view

This view says:

- *go on sinning willfully* is the sin of apostasy, the deliberate intentional sin of unbelievers who claimed to be believers
- *receiving the knowledge of the truth* is understanding some of the truth by being in fellowship with Christians
- *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins* means Christ’s death never covered their sins, because they were never saved
- *a terrifying expectation of judgment* is the Great White Throne Judgment

The biggest problem with this view is these people have received the full knowledge of the truth. This does not sound like unbelievers. These sound like real believers. Also, the phrase *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins* does not say Christ’s death doesn’t cover their sins but that it no longer remains as a sacrifice for sins. They must take a very metaphorical view of the last statement.

The “loss of assurance” view

This view says:

- *go on sinning willfully* is willful deliberate sin after repentance (hence the present participle – *go on sinning*)
- *receiving the knowledge of the truth* is the assumption of salvation, and the possibility of salvation, but
- *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins* means there is no evidence they were ever saved, therefore there no longer remains a sacrifice for their sins. It doesn’t remain because the evidence of their salvation doesn’t remain
- *a terrifying expectation of judgment* is the Great White Throne Judgment, which is all they can expect since they can have no assurance of their salvation

This view best fits the theme of the book of Hebrews. But the phrase *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins* does not sound like there no longer remains an application of the sacrifice to cover their specific sins. It sounds like the sacrifice itself no longer remains. If this phrase is a metaphor of the application of the death of Christ, then this is the best view. But that is not what the phrase literally says.

The “no animal sacrifice” view

This view says:

- *go on sinning willfully* is willful deliberate sin after repentance (hence the present participle – *go on sinning*)
- *receiving the knowledge of the truth* is salvation. But those who *go on sinning willfully* should not expect to receive the benefits of salvation because
- *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*. This means there no longer remains an animal sacrifice, or any other Levitical sacrifice of the Mosaic Law, for sin. You cannot just go on sinning and expect to cover it with an animal sacrifice at the temple because that whole order *no longer remains* for Christians, and
- *a terrifying expectation of judgment* is all that remains because these willful sinners are depending on a Levitical/animal sacrifice which not only never paid for sins, but it *no longer remains*.

This view has the advantage of being consistent with the author’s constant warnings about staying with the Mosaic Law or mixing it with Christianity. It also allows a literal interpretation of *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*. It also seems to fit well with the context following verses 26 and 27 (see comment below). The biggest weakness to this view is that the *terrifying expectation of judgment* sounds real for the sinners in question, and this view would say it is only hypothetical in that they are actually saved. It would say this is a hyperbola, a statement which overstates the case to make a point. Willful sin can expect a terrible judgment, so don’t go there.

In verses 28-29 the author warns against making too little of the sacrificial death of Christ. He says this tramples underfoot the Son of God and insults the Spirit of grace. What is interesting here is that the sinner here is one who *has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified*. So it seems that these sinners are indeed sanctified saints who are dishonoring Christ and insulting the Holy Spirit. Since they are sanctified, they either must be able to be unsanctified (the first view above), which is biblically unsound, or the judgment is a hyperbolic warning against the idea of going back to an animal sacrifice to cover your sin. This is what disgraces Christ and insults the Holy Spirit.

Verses 29-31 discuss the nature of the Judgment of God. We learn:

1. There are varying degrees of punishment for different sins. Some will receive *much severer punishment*.
2. Justice is for the next life, not for this life. *"Vengeance is mine, I will repay."*
3. Believers will be judged by God. *"The Lord will judge His people."*
4. Fear of God is a basic element in being a believer. *It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Verses 32-39—But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay, But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

In Verse 32 the author speaks to the same people he has been addressing as those *being enlightened*. So it seems clear they were real believers.

Verses 32-34 list six specific ways they suffered, although verse 34 is probably description of verses 32-33. The six are: (1) *by being made a public spectacle*, (2) *through reproaches and*, (3) *tribulations*, (4) *and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated*. (5) *For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and* (6) *accepted joyfully the seizure of your property*.

Verse 35 is an exhortation to *Μὴ ἀποβάλητε οὖν τὴν παρρησίαν ὑμῶν* *not throw away* (it's an aorist, active, subjunctive – *that you might not throw away*) *therefore your confidence* (or *boldness*). This is basically the theme of the book: **Maturity Brings Assurance**. Then he adds, *ἥτις ἔχει μεγάλην μισθοποδοσίαν*. *Which is to have a great* (or literally *mega*) *reward*. So once again we see the heavenly profit motive encouraged.

Verses 36-37 emphasizes this and extends it to the immanent return of Christ for the church, so it is a reference to the Rapture (of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; John 14:6; 1 Corinthians 15:50ff).

Verses 38-39 introduce the next chapter and the author's major section on faith. The point of these verses, it seems, is not just to say that his readers will always be saved, but that they shall live in such a way that they will please God. The point is not that the just shall get saved or stay saved by faith but that they will live a life of faith on earth.

Verses 32-39 speak of the suffering of these new believers. Here are some general thoughts on suffering/happiness of a believer in Christ during this life on earth.

- (1) The normal product of salvation and doing good is suffering.
- (2) The joy or happiness of believers on earth is always psychological not physical (as in Philippians 4:6-7).
- (3) Physical/material blessings are only in heaven.
- (4) Earthly, material joy/happiness can be pursued but not obtained (by either believers or unbelievers).
- (5) The believer's ability to endure suffering is directly related to his or her heavenly focus (verse 34).
- (6) Endurance of suffering comes through a focus on heavenly profit (verse 36-37).
- (7) Endurance of suffering depends upon the believer's faith (verses 38-39).

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 10

1. The insurmountable problem everyone in every religion everywhere faces is, nothing they can do takes away their sin. Only Christ can do that (verses 1-14).

2. The only thing I can do about my past sin is to obtain forgiveness for myself by receiving Christ's payment for my sin. Any other offering I might make to God to obtain that forgiveness (like animal sacrifice, doing penance, giving to the poor or doing other virtuous acts to offset my sin) is inappropriate and insulting to Christ (verses 15-18).
3. I should not avoid assembling together with other believers as a means of encouraging them to love and good deeds (verses 19-25).
4. If I go on willfully sinning, I should not assume that I am saved (verses 26-39).

Chapter 11 – Faith

The chapter begins with a definition of faith, which governs everything the author says in the rest of the chapter.

Verse 1—Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

In Greek it reads: Εστιν δὲ πίστις ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων.

The word order has to be changed for it to be translated accurately into English. A literal translation would be: *But (or and) faith is the essence (or confidence) of the things having been hoped for, the conviction (or proof) of the things having not been seen.* Faith is being defined here with two parallel statements like we often see in Psalms and Proverbs. [Such as: *A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish man despises his mother* – Proverbs 15:20.]

In the **first** statement, faith (πίστις) is the:

- ὑπόστασις. This word can be translated *assurance, essence, confidence, nature, or foundation*. It has been used already in Hebrews 1:3 (*He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His **nature***), and Hebrews 3:4 (*For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our **assurance** firm until the end*). [The bold are the translations of this word.] But in this context, it is probably best translated *confidence*. And faith is the essence or confidence of ...
- ἐλπιζομένων. This is a present, passive, participle of the common verb for *hope*. The present tense indicates continual action, the passive voice indicates past action with future consequences, and a participle is a state of doing or being. So the reference is to things which have been hoped for in the past but continue being hoped for.

In the **second** statement faith is: the evidence (or proof) of things not seen.

- ἔλεγχος. Louw and Nida define this word as *the evidence, normally based on argument or discussion, as to the truth or reality of something* — ‘proof, verification, evidence for’. And the faith is the evidence for things which are.
- οὐ βλεπομένων. The first word is *not* and the next word is another present, passive, participle of the common verb *to see* or *to notice* (transliteration *blepo*, from which English get the word *blip*), *having been seen*.

The first statement ties faith to hope. **Hope is a desire for a destiny not yet seen.** It looks to a desired destiny. We risk in the direction of our hopes. A man with no hope is a man with no faith. A man with true hope is a man with true faith. But a man with false hope is a man with false faith. If our hope is in our health, education, business success, or personal accomplishments, then that is where we will tend to place our confidence (i.e., our faith) and take our risks. The more confident I am in something, the more faith I have in those things. But the author adds the idea that my faith/confidence is linked to my hope. Therefore **the nature of faith is to have confidence in a certain desired future destiny.**

The second statement links faith to the evidence or proof of things not seen. So the author parallels the *hope* of his first statement with *things not seen* in his second statement. But then he says that faith is the *evidence for* or *proof* of those unseen things. So I must be very careful to be sure about the truth of the object of my faith because I will tend to prove the unseen things I hope for, whether they are true or not. **The nature of faith is to prove my unseen hopes.**

So, in verse one, the author is defining “faith” with two parallel statements. But the definition is not unique to biblical or godly faith. It is true of any faith and probably *the best definition of faith ever given in all of literature*. But notice that **faith does not necessarily lead to truth. It leads to hope but not necessarily to truth.** So if our faith is in a false hope, then our confidence and its verification (evidence or proof) will be false.

For example, if my unseen hope is in Buddhism, then my experiences will tend to prove, or verify, my faith in Buddhism. If my faith is in evolution, it will be confirmed to me as I use it to write textbooks, date fossils, or arrange the exhibits in a museum. So my faith will also tend to confirm (prove, or verify) what is untrue. In that case, my faith becomes a great disadvantage.

But it can also be a great advantage if it is placed in a true hope. For example, when I fly my airplane on instruments, I have hope, and therefore faith/confidence, that I will get to my destination using my instruments. When I arrive safely through the fog, I tend to have more faith in my instruments because my faith was proven, or verified, by exercising it. Faith is a great advantage for the people of the God of the Bible because their hope is in the truth of the Word of God. They can step out in faith, like I do when I fly on instruments, and get places they could not otherwise go. They can; have more insight than the world (Psalm 119), become children of God (John 1:12), have a peace that surpasses understanding in the midst of turmoil (Philippians 4:6-7), and obtain heavenly rewards (2 Corinthians 5:10). Restating verse 1:

Faith is confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny, which verifies the reality of that destiny (to the believer).

Verse 2 begins an application of this definition in the area of faith in the truth of the Word of God. It simply says:

Verse 2—For by it the men of old gained approval.

The rest of the chapter is a list of illustrations of this statement. Literally this verse reads: ἐν ταύτῃ γὰρ ἐμαρτυρήθησαν οἱ πρεσβύτεροι. *For in (by or with) this the elders testified (or bore witness, it is an aorist, passive, indicative of μαρτυρεω, the common word for witness. For example, it's used as a noun in Acts 1:8. KJV says: For by it the elders obtained a good report. But it seems the main idea is that the elders of the Old Testament testified about God by their confidence in the hope given to them by God.*

Verse 3—By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Verse 3 destroys the theory of evolution. It says our faith is the sort that understands the worlds, or *ages* were created (κατηρτίσθαι) by the spoken word (ῥήματι) of God. This came about in such a way that the things which appear to us in this world (φαινόμενον, *appear* or *shine*) were not γεγονέναι (*made, generated, or made to come to be*) through anything which is seen. So the universe is not eternal, and it did not come about by the evolutionary development via natural process working in that universe we now see.

Verse 4—By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

In verse 4, Abel witnessed for God, presenting a better sacrifice by faith, that is, by his **confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny**. Apparently, Abel's sacrifice was better because it was a blood sacrifice, but there is nothing in Genesis 4 that would tell us God explained that ahead of time. It does seem that the nature of our faith governs the nature of our sacrifice. For example, the faith of a suicide bomber is reflected in his willingness to sacrifice himself to kill innocent civilians on a mission of hate. Paul says our faith should lead us to present our bodies to God as a living, holy sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2). It seem the nature of our faith will affect the nature of the sacrifices we tend to make. Anyway, after God responded to the two sacrifices in Genesis 4, Cain and Abel knew which sacrifice was better.

The statement that Abel's faith *still speaks* could mean it still speaks for him to God, as his vindication at the future coming judgment. Or, more likely, this means his faith speaks down through the centuries as an example to us. But what exactly are we to learn from his sacrifice? The only thing we can say for sure is to know God well enough to be able to present a sacrifice pleasing to Him.

Verse 5—By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

In Genesis 5:23-24 we read this about Enoch: *So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.* Enoch's father lived 962 years, and his son (the oldest recorded living person) lived 969 years. The results of Enoch being pleasing to God was he lived about 600 years less than his father or his son. So, apparently, escaping death was better than living another 600 years. He and Elijah were the only two people recorded to have been "Raptured" up without dying.

Verse 6—And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

The author of Hebrews never deals with the question : **Where does true faith in God come from?** He only discusses the use of faith, not the origin of faith or what makes it strong enough to use. I will, therefore, attempt to give some thoughts on this question. The reason I am doing so is that many misunderstand the author of Hebrews, thinking he is answering this question. So here are some thoughts on where faith comes from.

- (1) Faith itself is built into every human being. It is part of spiritual nature breathed into Adam by God in the Garden of Eden. Every human, from an atheist to Christian, has faith: **confidence in some desired, future, unseen destiny.**
- (2) Faith in God, that is, true faith or faith in the truth, is a gift of God. It comes as part of our character, predetermined by God from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-9; Roman 8:28-30). It's what allows us to respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8).
- (3) True faith in God comes as an act of free will when a person decides to accept Christ and, therefore, receives a new spiritual nature from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). This allows a person's understanding to see through the fog, as it were, to have a clearer knowledge of the way things actually are (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:14-16).
- (4) An increase in true faith in God comes from reason applied to revelation. There are two kinds of revelation: *natural revelation* and *special revelation*. *Natural revelation* creates faith when reason is applied to the natural world (Romans 1) and to our conscience (our sense of morality and justice – Romans 2). This is a deduction available to the natural man. For example, I have faith my office ceiling will not fall in on me. It is undeniable that it has not fallen in on me in the past. So, given the same conditions (no earthquakes or tornadoes, etc.) I have faith (reason applied to the real world) that it will not fall in on me in the future. In the same way, the natural man can conclude, from observing the natural world and his conscience, that there is a Creator who was active in the past and, therefore, will likely be active in the future.
- (5) True faith, or an increase in faith in God, also comes from reason applied to *special revelation*. This is the faith the Bible usually exhorts us to seek. *Special revelation* is where God specifically, verbally, supernaturally made Himself known to people (Moses at the burning bush, Joshua at Jericho, the apostles at the empty tomb, Paul on the road to Damascus). Special revelation is the Bible and the person of Jesus Christ. So meditation on the Scripture is our greatest source of faith (Romans 10:17). This is not available to the natural man, but this is the free will choice of the believer which unlocks his future spiritual maturity (1 Corinthians 2:14-16).

These are some of the sources of faith and the sources of stronger faith which are not, near as I can tell, mentioned in Hebrews. [By the way, suffering is not a source of faith nor is it something which strengthens faith. This is a common error. Suffering tests our faith, it does not create nor strengthen our faith. Strong faith come through the Word of God (Romans 10:17).]

Verse 6 has two thoughts which should be noted. First is the idea of pleasing God, which is done by faith in Him. Second is the idea of being rewarded by God, and that is done by seeking Him (Matthew 7:7).

First, notice that the faith I am to have is not faith that God exists. For one thing, if God only wanted more people to believe He existed, He would have made Himself known in some physical way, so He could be observed through the five senses. The call is to believe in His sovereignty, that is, to believe He is the God of the Old Testament. But notice another thing—faith that God exists is faith that creates the existence of God. Faith that creates truth is *faithism*. *Faithism* is a false test for truth which says *truth begins with faith*. But if truth begins with faith, then contradictory things can be true, and that's impossible. Idiotic and insane people believe in nonsense. That doesn't mean their nonsense is true. So the author is not calling his readers to believe **that** God exists. Rather, he is calling his readers to believe **in** the God who they already know exists. The command is addressed to *he who comes to God*. So the people being described here already believe in God or they would not be coming to Him. The command is for them to have **confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny**, which has been revealed to them by the Word of God.

Second, verse 6 tells us about being rewarded by God. The basis for rewards here is not keeping laws, or liturgies, or ceremonies, or special days, or events (Isaiah 1:10-18; Romans 14:1-8) but seeking God. So rewards are based on the expectations of God. This says that our judgment at the Bema Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10) will be based not just on the commands of God but on the expectations which come from the heart of God.

Verse 7—By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Verse 7 tells us several things about Noah. First, we are told that Noah acted by faith. He had **confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny**. That means (like me flying my airplane on instruments) he had an advantage over those without faith. He could do more than they could. And that is the point to all these “hall of fame” examples here in Hebrews 11. They did more than the average person because their faith gave them that confidence and direction.

Second, the specific object of Noah’s faith was the Word of God. The word is χρηματισθεῖς, *to warn, direct, or reveal*. So Noah believed in the specific verbal revelation of God (not some feeling, or set of circumstances, or coincidences) as a basis for determining the will of God.

Third, the fact that this was about things *not yet seen* means Noah had to act on faith, because rain was something μηδέπω βλεπομένων *not yet seen* (like the runway ahead of me when I make an instrument approach with my airplane through the fog).

Fourth, we learn that Noah built the ark based on two motives: (1) his reverence (εὐλαβηθεῖς, not the word for “fear,” but *caution or reverence*, literally *to be received well*), and (2) the profit motive of the salvation of his own family.

Fifth, we learn two results of obedience for Noah. (1) His obedience was an act of condemnation (κατέκρινεν, literally *according to judgment*) of the world. By way of application: we pronounce judgment on the world when we obey God in faith, thus seeing further than the world. For example, the world says divorce will make you happier. God says He hates divorce. But almost everyone who gets divorced is more miserable. So by obeying God through faith you condemn the world. (2) The second result of Noah’s obedience *according to faith* was that he became *an heir of righteousness*. Eternal rewards are the ultimate result of faithfulness. Our position as a righteous saint before God is determined by our faith (in our case, faith in Jesus Christ).

Verses 8-10—By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

The example of Abraham has the same basic lessons as the example of Noah.

- (1) He acted by faith, meaning he had **confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny**.
- (2) The specific object of that faith was the specific verbal revelation of God (not some feeling, or set of circumstances, or coincidences).
- (3) He wanted *to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going* (like the fog I am flying through when I make an instrument approach with my airplane).
- (4) He had a profit motive, *to receive an inheritance*.
- (5) He had an eternal perspective; *he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God*.

Verse 11—By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

Verse 11 is a special tribute to Sarah. With little elaboration, the author makes the basic point he makes for all the faithful. She was able to go beyond the limitations of the world by faith. It got her further than she could otherwise go (like to the runway ahead of me when I make an instrument approach with my airplane through the fog).

Verse 12—Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

Verse 12 makes a similar observation for Abraham as for Sarah. Being old, he was by faith able to have *as many descendants as the stars of heaven*.

Verses 13-16—All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

Verses 13-16 are all about the heavenly perspective of the Jewish patriarchs. The author makes the point that even though they were in the Promised Land, that earthly land was not their focus. If their focus was earthly and physical, they could have returned to their own area of Mesopotamia. But that was not possible because they had an eternal perspective. This is a revelation, which is not available in the Old Testament. That, in and of itself, is very significant. If we get our perspective for ministry from the Old Testament, blurring the church and Israel (as, for example, the covenant amillennialists do), then we will see ministry, virtue, and value in clinging to this earth. But that is clearly not the New Testament perspective. And the author of Hebrews tells us that was not the ultimate focus of the patriarchs either. If we focus on this world, like, say, to save it politically or ecologically, then we can always go back to being worldly. But if our focus is on *a better country, that is, a heavenly one* then there is no point in going back to earthly values.

Verses 17-19—By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, “in Isaac your descendants shall be called.” He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

This example of Abraham offering up Isaac as a sacrifice has been used in moral/ethical discussions all through history. The point of the author is that Abraham’s faith allowed him to go beyond sacrificing Isaac to apparently what Abraham assumed would be God raising Isaac from the dead. However God was going to do it, Abraham believed the promise of God for his future generations through Isaac. Therefore, he could go further than he could see physically (like when I make an instrument approach with my airplane through the fog) because of the advantage offered him by his faith.

Verses 20-21—By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

Both Isaac and Jacob blessed their sons by faith, that is, because they had **confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny**.

Verse 22—By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

In Genesis 50:24-25, Joseph requested that his bones be buried in the Promised Land. This to was an act of **confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny**.

Verses 23-29—By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

Verses 23-29 focus on the faith of Moses (verse 23 being the faith of his parents). In all these examples, the motive for them was **confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny**, namely, the future of the Israelites in the Promised Land. As in each of the examples here, faith allowed Moses (and his parents) to go beyond their apparent physical limitations (like when I make an instrument approach with my airplane through the fog). Notice:

- In verse 23, Moses’ parents were able to go beyond the fear of the king’s edict.
- In verse 24, Moses as a young man went beyond an identification as *the son of Pharaoh’s daughter*.
- In verses 25-26, Moses was able to see beyond the ill-treatment he received from the Israelites because he understood there were greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.
- In verse 27, Moses was able to see beyond the wrath of Pharaoh for leaving Egypt in obedience to God.
- In verse 28, Moses was able to have confidence that, because he kept the Passover, God would not destroy the firstborn of Israel.
- In verse 29, Moses was able to see beyond the barrier presented by the Red Sea.

Verse 30—By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

Verse 30 tells us that Joshua and the Israelites were able to go beyond the physical barriers of the wall of Jericho.

Verse 31—By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

Verse 31 tells us the reason Rahab did not perish with the others of Jericho is because she had a **confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny** which allowed her to see beyond the fall of Jericho.

Verses 32-38—And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

Verses 32-38 are a big **etc.** The author thinks his way through the history of the obedience of godly people and says what they had in common is that their faith, their **confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny**, allowed them to go beyond the limitations others had (like when I make an instrument approach with my airplane through the fog).

Verses 39-40—And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

Verse 39 tells us that the faith of the patriarchs and prophets, their **confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny**, was not realized during their lifetime. So even though they were able to go beyond their normal limitations, during their lifetime they did not see all the benefits of their faith. It is like when I make an instrument approach with my airplane through the fog. As I am making the approach, I have **confidence in a desired, future, unseen destiny**, but while on the instrument approach I am still in the fog. I have not yet received what my instruments have promised.

Verse 40 tells us that there is something better which we know about that they did not know about, namely, the coming of a Messiah, a Christ who would pay for our sins and provide an opportunity for eternal life for those who receive Him (John 1:12). The statement *apart from us they would not be made perfect* does not mean we personally have anything to do with their perfection. This is a figure of speech meaning apart from the truth which was revealed to us, the coming, death, and resurrection of Christ, *they would not be made perfect*. Neither would we.

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 11

1. My faith is basically a conviction. It is what I understand to be true (verses 1-5).
2. I cannot please God unless I believe (have a conviction): (a) that He is the sovereign God described in the Bible and (b) that He will reward me if I seek Him (verse 6).
3. Faith in the truth will take me further than I can go without it (verses 7-40).

Chapter 12 – Discipline

Chapter 12 is in five sections. First is a call to model Jesus (verses 1-3). Second is a description of the discipline of God (verses 4-11). Third is an exhortation to self-discipline, which actually begins the application or last division of the book (verses 12-17). Fourth is about the individuals call to approach God (verses 18-24). And fifth is about the unmovable Kingdom of God (verses 25-29).

Model Jesus – 12:1-3

Verse 1—Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Verse 1 begins with an unusual word for *therefore*. Τοιγαροῦν is a combination word translated something like *wherefore then, so therefore, or consequently*. The most common way to say *therefore* in Greek is to just use the last three letters of this word ουν. For example, when Paul begins the last major section of Romans, he uses this common word ουν for *therefore*. This is further evidence that Paul did not write Hebrews. The combination word in Hebrews is one of emphasis on results. The best translation here is probably *consequently*.

Next, the author ties this section into the last, as he commonly does throughout the book, referring to the *great cloud of witnesses* of the last chapter. The point is: they are an example of what he is about to say.

The main verb of the verse is *τρέχουμεν*, a present, active, subjunctive from *τρέχω*. This is the common word meaning *to run* (see 1 Corinthians 9:26). Its transliteration is *trecho*, from which English gets the word *track*, as in a running track. The present tense indicates ongoing action, and the subjunctive is the mood of uncertainty. So it is best translated *that we might keep on running*.

The other exhortation in the verse is a participle best translated *putting aside*. There are two things we should be putting aside. First is any *ὄγκον*, *weight, bulk, mass, or burden*. These would be things that may not be sinful in themselves, but involve us in the affairs of this world (2 Timothy 2:4). Second is *αμαρτίαν* the common word for *sin*, all of which easily distracts us from the faith of Chapter 11.

Verses 2-3—fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

In addition to the two negative exhortations of verse 1, the author gives us one major positive command, to keep focused on Jesus. The mature spiritual life cannot be lived just by avoiding sin and earthly burdens. It must also have a focus on Christlikeness. Jesus is both the author of our faith and the perfecter of it. Next, he tells us something interesting about Jesus. The reason for what He did included (among other things) a profit motive – *for the joy set before Him* (of sitting down *at the right hand of the throne of God*) *He endured the cross*. This personal, heavenly, profit motive is part of the motivation the author of Hebrews offers his readers. This is what will allow us to *not grow weary and lose heart*.

Discipline of God – 12:4-11

This running of the race, to avoid worldly burdens and sin while pursuing Christlikeness, is accomplished, in part, by discipline. In these verses, he writes about God's discipline.

Verses 4-5—You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov’d by Him.”

In verses 4 and 5, the author reminds his readers that the discipline of God is an Old Testament concept, and that discipline has not, for them, resulted in their shedding blood while *striving against sin*. The point to this general introduction of the subject is to **recognize the existence of God's discipline and to not run from it**. He says: *μη ὀλγῶρει παιδείας κυρίου μηδὲ ἐκλύου ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐλεγχόμενος*, literally, *do not think lightly (or despise) the discipline (or instruction) of [the] Lord neither loosen (or weaken or fail) when you have been reprov’d (or convicted) by (or under) it*. From the Old Testament origin of discipline, and the father/son illustration in the following verses, we can conclude that discipline seems to be a work of God the Father.

As we began looking at the subject of God's discipline, we need to notice a few things:

- (1) God's discipline is a work of God but not necessarily something we can **identify** as a work of God (Ecclesiastes 3:11). There is no way to know if difficult circumstances are the discipline of God, the work of the devil, or the result of “chance” events (Luke 10:31). So no circumstantial event should be labeled as the discipline of God.
- (2) There is no purely circumstantial way to know if the events I am experiencing are focused on me or others around me. I could be the object of the discipline of God, the temptation of the devil, or the actions of evil people. Or I could simply be collateral damage from any of those actions. Therefore, circumstantial events should never be used in decision-making as to whether they are or are not the discipline of God.
- (3) The only way to determine that an event or situation could be the discipline of God is when I am doing something (sinful) which needs to be disciplined. In that case, I should, of course, make the change, whether I am being disciplined by God or not.
- (4) The only way to make changes in response to the discipline of God is to know the heart of God as revealed in the Word of God.
- (5) The reason we are informed about the discipline of God is because the heart of God is to bring us into conformity with the image of His son Jesus Christ. That should not be regarded lightly. And that is the only thing we can know for sure He is doing in our lives (Romans 8:29).

For example, suppose I am a believer living in sin. Can I say that a specific circumstance (such as an accident, an illness, a material loss, or a broken relationship) is the discipline of God? No, I cannot. My bad circumstances may be because of any of those actions mentioned in # 2 above, or my own actions (Galatians 6:7-8). If I am a child of God, He will discipline my sin. But I do not know which events are that discipline.

Consider an example of a natural father. I grew up on an evergreen nursery. My father gave me many things to do which involved working with the trees. I know my father wished to discipline me to be a responsible hard worker. But when he sent me out in the field to hoe, I do not know if that was to help my discipline or simply to get the weeds out of the field. To value my father's discipline did not mean I could identify any particular event as that discipline. So our response to the discipline of God is not to identify a specific event as being that discipline in ourselves or the lives of others. We are, instead, to take comfort in the fact that we are being disciplined by God and be confident that we will be disciplined by God if we are indeed His children.

Verse 6—For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."

There are two descriptive words here for God's discipline: παιδεύει, and μαστιγοῖ.

- The first word is the one we have been translating *discipline*. It is the word for teaching children. It has the basic idea of *training*. This word is used in Acts 7:22 where it says *Moses was trained/disciplined in the ways (skill or wisdom) of the Egyptians* ... So discipline is a form of training in skill or wisdom.
- The second word means *to whip* or *beat with a whip*. It is used of Christ's scourging in Mark 15:15, and by Paul in Acts 22:25. The point seems to be that the discipline of God is significant in the sense that it will keep us on the path of conformity to the image of Christ. It may mean that if we are true believers and continue to resist, continue to insist on sinning, the action of God will be severe, possibly leading to the death of the believer (I Corinthians 5: 5; 11:30; 1 John 5:16). At any rate, **it means to be a Christian is to be scourged.**

Verses 7-11—It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

This, the body of the passage on discipline, gives us at least 6 reasons why Christians are disciplined:

- (1) In verse 7, it's so that we may ὑπομένετε, *endure, remain, or be preserved*.
- (2) In verses 7-8, it's to demonstrate that we are legitimate children of God.
- (3) In verse 9, it's for us to be ὑποταγησόμεθα, *subjected* (future, passive, indicative, *that they might be subjected or placed under submission*) to God the Father.
- (4) In verse 9, it's that we will ζήσομεν, *live* (future, active, indicative).
- (5) In verse 10, it's *so that we may share His holiness*.
- (6) In verse 11, it's that we *who have been trained by it will yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness*.

The Practice of Assurance – 12:12 – 13:19

This begins the final major division in the book. This last division is an application of the assurance the author has focused on throughout the book.

Exhortation to self-Discipline – 12:12-17

Verses 12-17—Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

There are three commands for self-discipline in this paragraph:

- (1) In verses 12-13, **strengthen yourselves**. The verb is ἀνορθώσατε, is an aorist, active, imperative, meaning *to raise lift up, restore, or make straight*. The object of the strengthening is given in the form of the illustrations of hands, knees, and feet. It is not clear whether the author means this as a personal strengthening or strengthening of one another, but both are clearly needed.
- (2) In verse 14, **pursue peace in the context of holiness**. Peace and holiness are connected here by the common conjunction καί (which is *and as a part of*, not *and in addition to*). For example, it is commonly used of “the Levites *and* the priests.” So it’s peace with all, as long as that peace is connected to holiness. The word for *men* is not in the Greek text. It just says *peace with all*. It may mean all believers.
- (3) In verses 15-17, **see to it that there be no immoral person**. The first word of verse 15 is ἐπισκοποῦντες, a present, active, participle of the common word *to oversee or watch over*. The noun form is the word for *bishop or overseer* used in 1 Timothy 3. The overseeing includes: (a) that no one come short of the grace of God, (b) no root of bitterness spring up, and (c) that there be no immoral or profane person like Easu. The descriptive words here are πόρνος ἢ βέβηλος. The first word is usually used for sexual immorality and the second is for a *vile or worldly* person. Verse 17 tells us that there was a time after which repentance was no longer helpful for Easu. It is not clear if Easu wanted to repent, but clearly he wanted the inheritance he once despised. The author’s point is, there is a time after which repentance is no longer possible. This would be at death (Luke 16:31), but due to the hardening of the heart, it could also come as a result of commitment to immorality and worldliness.

Call to Approach God – 12:18-24

Verses 18-21—For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. For they could not bear the command, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.” And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, “I am full of fear and trembling.”

These verses describe the situation for Moses and the Israelites. The access to God is illustrated by Mount Sinai, *a mountain that can[not] be touched*.

Verses 22-24—But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

The difference between the church and Israel is given by way of emphasis in seven examples. In this age (or dispensation), we focus on:

- (1) A new Jerusalem which is a heavenly city
- (2) Myriads of angels
- (3) The heavenly church (there is **no** word in the Greek text here for *general assembly*)
- (4) God, as the judge of all (in this life and the next)
- (5) The heavenly saints (*the spirits of the righteous made perfect*)
- (6) Jesus, *the mediator of a new covenant*
- (7) The blood of Christ which was the fulfillment of the better sacrifice, typified by the sacrifice of Abel

The point to all of this is to say that today, unlike the dispensation of the Mosaic Law, God is now approachable by the individual. With Moses, God instituted the priesthood of Aaron. Individual Israelites could only come to God through a Levitical priest of the family of Aaron. Actually, **the grace of God was never offered to the individual in the Old Testament**. Certainly we see the grace of God in the Old Testament. But it was never offered to the individual. Now it is the primary message of this age. God is offering the individual His grace (favor they do not merit) to approach Him.

The Unmovable Kingdom of God – 12:25-29

Verse 25—See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.

Verse 25 is another of the many warnings in the book of Hebrews. Once again, the point is: if you refuse to obey the Word of God, you have no assurance of your salvation. The author says, actually, the stakes are higher for us because we have a heavenly warning. The Old Testament hope was primarily (though not exclusively) earthly. Ours is exclusively heavenly. Greater revelation includes greater responsibility.

Verses 26-27—And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.” This expression, “Yet once more,” denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Verses 26-27 refers to the destruction of this present earth. *Heaven* here seems to refer not to the heaven of verse 25 (same Greek word), which cannot be shaken, but to the atmosphere surrounding the earth and the solar system of the physical universe. [Here is another example where the immediate context determines the meaning of the word.] This is the heavens in our three-dimensional universe of which Peter tells us *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up* (2 Peter 3:10). This is also the heaven about which the Apostle John says, *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away* (Revelation 21:1).

Verses 28-29—Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

Verse 28 is poorly translated by the NASV. The point is not to show gratitude but to respond to the grace we have received. The Greek text is: Διὸ βασιλείαν ἀσάλευτον παραλαμβάνοντες ἔχωμεν χάριν, δι’ ἧς λατρεύομεν εὐαρέστως τῷ θεῷ μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ δέους. Literally, translated it reads: *Therefore having received an unmovable kingdom, let us have grace through which we worship (or serve) God acceptably with reverence (piety or caution) and fear (or awe).* The words ἔχωμεν χάριν, *let us have grace*, obviously do not mean we should show unmerited favor toward God, which is why the NASV translates it *show gratitude*. But the intent here seems to be more like: *let us live with a focus on the grace we have*. The result of that is to worship God (this same word is used for *worship* in Acts 7:7 and Hebrews 9:1). [*Service* is not an acceptable translation here.] The worship of God is to be done in fear. The two words *reverence* and *awe* clearly mean *fear*, especially in view of verse 29.

Verse 29 describes God as a *consuming fire*. The idea of fire is usually one of purification through judgment. This is certainly the context of verses 25-27. As Walt Henrichsen has illustrated: **God is like a fire on a cold night. You want to get close, but the closer you get, the more dangerous it is.**

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 12

1. I should realize that I am being disciplined by God but also that I am not able to identify any single circumstance in my life as that discipline. Therefore, I can only use my obedience/disobedience to the Word of God, not my life circumstances, in decision-making (verses 1-11).
2. I should discipline myself and help other believers to discipline themselves (verses 12-17).
3. Because of Christ, I can now approach an otherwise unapproachable God, but I must never forget that He is a *consuming fire* (verses 18-29).

Exhortations – Chapter 13

Chapter 13 contains twelve exhortations (verses 1-19), a benediction (verses 20-22), and a postscript (verses 22-25).

Exhortation #1

Verse 1—Let love of the brethren continue.

The Greek text for verse 1 is just three words: Ἡ φιλαδελφία μενέτω. The verb μενέτω is a present, active, imperative from μένω, *to remain, stay, or abide*. The imperative is, of course, a command, and the present tense has the sense of an on-going command, *keep on remaining*. The article Ἡ gives emphasis to the subject φιλαδελφία, transliterated *philadelphia*. Like the American city by that name, it means *brotherly love* or *affection*.

Exhortation #2

Verse 2—Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

The command here is: τῆς φιλοξενίας μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθε, *do not forget the love of strangers*. The verb is a present middle imperative having the sense of *you take it upon yourself to keep on not forgetting*. The noun is a genitive of the combination word φιλοξενίας. The love is the same root word as the love in verse 1 (φίλος). It is not the common *agape* love but more like *friendship*. The second part is the word ξενος for *strangers*. So this is the same command as verse 1 only it is applied to strangers.

Then the author gives a motivation, which adds to our understanding of angels. He says we, by our hospitality, may be *entertaining as guests hidden angels*. Why angels would come and hide themselves, as strangers in need of hospitality, is not stated. One possibility is to give us an opportunity to serve them, thus gaining heavenly rewards. But this is only a speculation. What it does tell us, however, is that angels might take the form of human bodies (not possess the bodies of others – that is an angelic sin, which only demons do). These angels might then dwell among us without our knowing it (see also Genesis 18:1-8). It is possible that the author is referring to human messengers (the word for *angels* is used that way in James 2:25), but this seems unlikely here given the author's previous emphasis on angels (the word occurs 13 times in chapters 1, 2, 12, and 13).

Exhortation #3

Verse 3—Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

The command here is to *μυμνήσκεσθε τῶν δεσμίων ὡς συνδεδεμένοι*, *remember the prisoners as fellow prisoners*. The author begins with the verb *μυμνήσκεσθε* (a present, passive, imperative) *keep on being reminded*. The object of their reminder is a genitive plural of *δεσμιος*, (*desmois*) *prisoners*. Then he simply adds the prefix *συν*, for *together* or *together with*, to the first noun. *Keep on being reminded of the desmios as fellow desmios*. There is no conjunction connecting this to the next phrase *τῶν κακουχουμένων* *those who are mistreated*. So the two are probably meant to be seen as one group. Then he reminds them they are still in the body. This is obvious, of course, but the point seems to be one of being able to empathize with them.

Exhortation #4

Verse 4—Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

These are all common Greek words, but the emphasis is on the last phrase, *πόρνους γὰρ καὶ μοιχοὺς κρινεῖ ὁ θεός*, *For fornicators and adulterers God will judge*. The author reminds believers that God will judge any sin which takes sex outside of marriage (see also 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). One interesting thing here is that both fornication and adultery are listed with different words and in contrast with each other. *πόρνους* is *fornication*, sexual intercourse before marriage. *μοιχοὺς* is *adultery* sexual intercourse after marriage, with someone other than your husband or wife.

The basic teaching behind “the exception clause” of Matthew 19:9 (*And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery*) is that adultery is an exception to the “no divorce” statements in the Bible (Malachi 2:15-16; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7: 2-3). This is based on the idea that the word for *fornication* (*πόρνους*, translated *fornicators* here in Hebrews 13: 4, and *immorality* in Matthew 19:9) includes adultery. So this teaching says that they are not distinctly different words. But here in Hebrews 13:4, the words are clearly separated as two distinct sins, each of which will be judged. In that case, the *immorality* of Matthew 19 would most likely be sex during the betrothal period before marriage. **This would mean adultery is not an exception to the no divorce/remarriage statements of the Bible.**

Exhortation #5

Verse 5—Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.”

The NASV translation to be *free from the love of money* is very inaccurate. This is a good application of this verse but not a good translation. The text says, *Αφιλάργυρος ὁ τρόπος, ἀρκούμενοι τοῖς παροῦσιν*, *Let [your] way, or place, be without covetousness, be content with what is present*. That certainly would include money, and that is a prominent theme in the New Testament (Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Timothy 3:3). However, the warning here involves a broader range of coveting than just money.

The second part of the verse is a quote from Deuteronomy 31:6, and reminds the reader of the command for Christians not to be anxious for earthly things because God will provide all our needs (Matthew 6:25-34).

Exhortation #6

Verse 6—so that we confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?”

The quote here is from Psalms 118:6, and it adds one idea to verse 5, namely, that we should not fear people.

Exhortation #7

Verse 7—Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

We are here told to remember our ἡγουμένων. This is the general word for *leaders*, used regularly of secular leaders. The question here is, Why did the author not use any of the common biblical words for leader? Why did he not tell his readers to follow their elders, or deacons, or bishops/overseers (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5)? Why did he not mention apostles, or prophets, or evangelists, or pastors, or teachers (Ephesians 4:11-12; Acts 13:1)?

For one thing, this is another evidence Paul did not write Hebrews. But more significantly, it seems there was no need to specify a name or title for the leaders. Remember, Jesus said, *But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers* (Matthew 23:8). Actually, Paul is the only New Testament author who mentions bishops/overseers and deacons. Most seem to use the term *elder*, like the Old Testament did for a mature male leader of God's people in a city. Apparently, the specific title of the leader is unimportant, except that it should not become an official designation of authority.

The definition of a biblical or church leader is, however, very significant. It is οἵτινες ἐλάλησαν ὑμῖν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, *whoever speaks to you the Word of God*. So a leader is not someone appointed or elected to a position in one of our organizations but someone (and the word literally means *whoever*) speaks the Word of God to you.

Once we have located those who can teach the Word of God to us, then we should be ὧν ἀναθεωροῦντες τὴν ἑκβασιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς μιμεῖσθε τὴν πίστιν, (translating the words in order) *of whom observing the result (or end or escape) of their lifestyle (or way of life), imitate their faith*. So we should first identify leaders as those who speak the Word of God, then look at their lifestyle, observing how they escape the entrapments of sin and the result of their actions (say, on their spouses, families, extended families, and those who work with them). Those are the leaders whose faith should be imitated.

A Parenthesis

Verse 8—Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Sometimes the author of Hebrews does this. He just throws in a parenthetical phrase, which does not seem to relate to his context but is extremely significant theologically. This is one of his best short statements. It declares, or confirms, the deity of Christ. It attributes to the Son the attribute of God known as immutability. It says God does not change. And only God, among all living spiritual beings, does not change. His creation, His spiritual creatures (humans and angels) change continually (hopefully). We learn, develop, grow, establish, innovate, and adapt. God does none of that. What God says may change (like what a thermometer says changes without any change in the thermometer itself). God's laws may change (like mine do for my children as they grow up). But God, and Jesus Christ being God, does not change. The same God with the same character flooded the earth, wiped out the Canaanites, died for the sins of the world, and will judge the world.

Exhortation #8

Verse 9—Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.

Most of the Greek words here are straightforward and accurately translated by the NASV. The word *strengthened* can also mean *confirmed*, and the word *occupied* literally means *to walk around*. There is a warning against false teachers in every book of the New Testament except Philemon. This is a major issue with Christ and the apostles. The application is to be discerning about the teachings of so-called Christians in our communities who are not teaching the Word of God. The specific example he gives is about food. This could refer to the Corinthian problem of eating meat offered to idols, but more likely it refers to Judaizers who are claiming Christians should follow the dietary commands of the Law of Moses.

A Parenthesis

Verses 10-14—We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.

Here we have the second parenthesis of the chapter. The point is to emphasize our separation from the Mosaic Law, our focus on the blood of Christ, and our heavenly future.

In verse 10 the author declares that *we* true believers have Christ as our altar, and those Jews, or Jewish Christians, have no right to Christ because they are going to the altar at the temple (here called the tabernacle) for their access to God.

Verse 11 refers to the carcasses of the sacrificed animals which were burned up *outside the camp* (Leviticus 4:21; 16:27).

Verse 12 compares Jesus to the animal sacrifices, in that He was crucified outside the gate of the temple and the city.

Verse 13 gives us an exhortation (which could be numbered among the others in the chapter) to go outside the camp of Israel. In other words, we are to not seek Jesus through the Mosaic Law but outside of that Law. We are no longer under the Mosaic Law in any way (Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:27–4:11; Romans 8:18-28).

Verse 14 stresses the major difference between Israel and the church. To Israel, God focused on the physical land of Canaan, which they were to occupy. To the church, God focuses on a heavenly *city which is to come*.

Exhortation #9

Verse 15—Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

The NASV translation is good here, except the word ὁμολογούντων should be translated *confession* rather than *give thanks*. The command is to continually praise God with our lips, and that is called a sacrifice – like the Old Testament sacrifices. The point here is not so much sharing something in a service, or some particular prayer or song, as it is to have our whole conversation be a praise to God. That does not mean we are to go around talking in some strange sanctified way, sounding like a religious idiot. The point is that the substance of our conversation should praise God.

Exhortation # 10

Verse 16—And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

The first part of this verse needs a more literal translation. It reads: τῆς δὲ εὐποιΐας καὶ κοινωνίας μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθε. To take the words in order, it says: *the and (in addition) well doing and (as a part of that) fellowship do not forget*. There are two different words for *and* as indicated in my translation. The second one indicates that the well- doing and the fellowship are connected. So it is actually just one command. Also, notice that this well-doing fellowship is considered a sacrifice. Fellowship should be such that it costs us something in *doing good* for others.

Exhortation # 11

Verse 17—Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

The first part of the verse (which is all one sentence in the Greek text) is actually an extension of Exhortation #7 in verse 7. In addition to **remembering** our leaders, we are here exhorted to: Πείθεσθε τοῖς ἡγουμένοις ὑμῶν καὶ ὑπέικετε, αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἀγρυπνοῦσιν ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν. *Believe (trust or put confidence in) your leaders (same word for leaders as in verse 7) and submit to them*. So trust and submission are added to remembering our leaders in verse 7. But do not forget the definition of a leader from verse 7. It is not someone in a position we have created in our organizations. It is someone who *spoke the Word of God to you*.

The rest of this verse is actually the 11th Exhortation. It is an exhortation to the leaders. The command is: ὡς λόγον ἀποδώσοντες, ἵνα μετὰ χαρᾶς τοῦτο ποιῶσιν καὶ μὴ στενάζοντες, *as they give back word, that with grace this do and not groaning*. The idea is that leaders will have to give back a word to God as to how they were leading (speaking the Word of God), and they are therefore to lead with grace (showing unmerited favor to those they lead), not with groaning, grumbling, or grief (as in 1 Peter 5:1-5). So their attitude as leaders determines their heavenly rewards – because if they lead without grace but with groaning, it will not be profitable for the believers.

Exhortation #12

Verses 18-19—Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.

This is basically a prayer request. The author here assumes they know who he is (even though we don't) and in that context gives two reasons for them to pray for him. The first is that he, and those working with him, are convinced that they have a καλήν συνείδησιν, *good conscience*. Of course, anyone can have a good conscience, even those who are sinning. But their good conscience is in the context of ἐν πᾶσιν καλῶς θέλοντες ἀναστρέφεσθαι, *in all good will to live (strive or conduct oneself)*. The author, therefore, connects his good conscience to a good conduct (and assumes a godly definition of good).

The second reason he asked them to pray is so that he may return to see them. Once again, notice that there is no concept of indigenous missions in the New Testament. Discipleship was seen as a life-long relationship, where the missionaries were constantly looking to come back and visit them, write them letters like this one, and send people like Timothy (verse 23).

A Benediction – 13:20-21

Verses 20-21—Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

We might notice a few things included in this benediction:

- (1) God the Father is described as a God of peace. One might think that He doesn't seem like that. He seems more like a God of war all through history. But I think the author's point is that He is at peace within Himself, with the other persons of the Godhead and with His saints. He is pursuing that same peace on earth but only as it is in harmony with His character. It is a peace of righteousness, not a peace of tolerance.
- (2) The author tells us it is God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead.
- (3) Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep because of the blood of the cross.
- (4) The prayer is that God the Father equip us to do His own good will, and work in us to do what is pleasing in His own sight.
- (5) The work of the Father in us is through Jesus who will be glorified forever, not Mohammed, not Buddha, not Joseph Smith, etc.

P.S. A Postscript – 13:22-25

Verses 22-25—But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all.

In verse 22, the word of *exhortation* is probably a reference to the whole book not just the last chapter because he calls his writing ἐπέστειλα, *I have written you* (transliterated *epesteila* – *I have epistled you*). It is interesting that he considers it βραχέων *brief* or *short*.

In verse 23, the mention of Timothy being released (from prison, apparently) is another sign the book is probably written after the death of Paul, since there is no mention of Timothy being in prison during Paul's ministry. But, more importantly, notice the significance of the network of Christian relationships which existed across the empire.

Verse 24 has the same word for leader used in verses 7 and 17, further indicating that this is not written by Paul and, more importantly, that the specific titles and positions for leaders are unimportant. The important thing is that they *speak the Word of God to you*.

Verse 25 ends the book with χάρις, *unmerited favor be with all of you*.

Some Possible Applications from Chapter 13

1. I must not let the immorality, or the teaching, or the culture of this world keep me from the basic moral principles of the New Testament, such as loving the brethren, showing hospitality, avoiding fornication and adultery, staying away from false teaching, ... etc. (verses 1-19).
2. I should obey the Christian leaders who teach the Word of God to me (verses 7, 17, 24).
3. I should remember that the church is a global network (verses 20-25).