

Preachers' Gathering 2018

Preaching Hebrews

Booklet 2
Sermon Material and Notes

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Preaching Hebrews, Booklet 2

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(See 'Preaching Hebrews - Booklet 1 – Introduction' for
Summaries of each chapter, Overview, Context, Authorship,
Background, Structure and Argument, Ways of dividing the text,
Dealing with Challenges, Application, Bibliography)

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Sermon 1 1:1 – 2:4 God has spoken. Therefore, listen

(See also Booklet One, page 1)

1:1-4 The Word of God reveals, redeems and gives new life. This is a key theme throughout the letter, as the Word came to the fathers, through the prophets, but finally in *His Son*. Revelation came through progression until its final fulfillment in Christ. Throughout history, God's servants have been His spokesmen but now God has opted to choose His own Son to deliver His final revelation to humanity!

The writer of the letter reveals just why the Son is qualified to deliver supreme revelation – God has appointed Him 'heir of all things' (Ps 2:8 and Heb 1:5); through Christ, God created the entire cosmos of space and time (Col 1:16) – Christ was God's agent in this task; He is the radiance of God's glory and as such the light of God shines in and through the Christ into human lives and situations; Christ is the image of God's being and nature, such that seeing Christ is seeing what God the Father is; Christ upholds all things by 'the word of His power', thus being the Creator and ongoing sustainer and controller of this vast universe; Christ provided purification for our sins by His work as our great High Priest – He works globally and personally in a way that no one else in this universe could; Christ then sat down at God's right hand, showing us how this Christ applied Psalm 110:1 to Himself and indicating the sheer exaltation and supremacy of Christ to His current position as perfect mediator between God and humanity in His role as Prophet, Priest and King.

Christ is thus marked out as superior to the angels, through His exaltation to the highest place and through the title 'Son' that He had always possessed. All this was eternally appointed by the Father, for the Person and Work of His own Son. Indeed, the adjective 'better' is used 13 times in Hebrews to compare and contrast Christ and His new order with all that went before Him, including the angelic roles of law-giving (2:2f) and the administration of nations (2:5)!

1:5-14 Lest there be any doubt whatsoever that Christ is indeed better than the angels, our writer now amasses a mountain of OT evidence that argues his case! Indeed, five of his selected quotes are from the Psalms, one is from 2 Samuel 7:14/1 Chron. 17:13 and one comes from Deut. 32:43. The writer of Hebrews builds his case text by text, as he further puts the spotlight on Christ's supremacy over the angels:

Ps 2:7 – ‘You are my Son, today I have become your Father’. God never said this to any angel! These words were most fully realized and fulfilled in the Messiah of David’s line whom God would raise up. Christ had always been eternal Son but had entered the full exercise of that office following the suffering and exaltation that actually proved His total obedience to His Father’s Will.

2 Sam 7:14 – ‘I will be His Father and He will be my Son’. The prophet Nathan gives God’s response to David’s wish to build a house for the ark of God, namely that God is not wanting a house of wood but rather to confirm that He will establish the house of David for ever! This greater Son of David was no less than the expected and promised Christ celebrated in Luke 1:32f; 1:68f – the Davidic Messiah Himself.

Deut. 32:43 - ‘Let all God’s angels worship Him’. The focus here in verse 6 is not on the first or second coming of Christ but on the reality of this Christ being worshipped by angels! ‘Firstborn’ – see Ps 89:27 and Ps 97:7 - because He exists before creation and He has inherited all creation as His – it belongs to Him. Some say that this refers to the Father’s purpose to commit judgment to the Son, so that all may honour the Son (John 5:23). The timing is most probably at Christ’s exaltation and enthronement as sovereign over the universe.

Ps 104:4 – The angels in verse 7 may be carrying out God’s commands with speed (winds) and strength (fire) but ultimately angels operate in ways that are fading/ephemeral, whereas Christ works eternally and permanently!

Ps 45:6f – Here in verses 8-9 the Psalmist celebrates a royal wedding. This Messiah can be addressed not only as God’s Son but actually as ‘God’, for He is the Davidic Messiah and the radiance of God’s glory. He is perfect justice and righteousness. The ‘companions’ are those who belong to Him for they share in His joy and glory.

Ps 102:25-27 – In vv 10-12, the key point is that even though earth and heaven might pass away, God Himself is eternal and unchanging. The words are applied here by the Psalmist to the Son because it was through the Son’s agency that Creation took place – the angels were there as watching worshippers. Indeed, God here addresses this Creator as ‘Lord’!

Ps 110 – Finally, this reference is to the Son’s enthronement and the promise of victory for Christ over all his enemies! This is the right of the Messianic King and Great High Priest who died, rose and is now exalted! No angels ever got an invitation to sit before God, let alone at

His right hand. Verse 14 confirms that ultimately angels served God and those who would inherit salvation in Him. The nature of this salvation is *not* explained. What the readers *do* need to know is the terrible danger that faces anyone who treats this salvation *lightly*! The readers had embraced the authority of this gospel and this authority was that of Christ. God has *no* message or mediator higher than Christ's gospel.

2:1-4 *Therefore*, all this huge focus on Christ's superiority to the angels can now be understood. The Law was mediated by angelic intermediaries. God's final Word is *in his son* – the truths and teachings of the gospel are of paramount importance and are a matter of life and death. Believers *must not drift away* from them, and risk loss of their hope and security! (2:1). Even the Law, mediated by angels (Deut. 33:2; Gal 3:19; Acts 7:53), carried very severe penalties for its infringement (2:2). The great salvation came to this earth by *Christ, The Son Of God*. This gospel must therefore not be treated lightly! The writer of Hebrews thus feared that Christian believers risked sinking under pressure to the extent that they would retreat from public profession of gospel and faith. Then the gospel would cease to have any real influence on their lives! Here then is the first of a number of severe warnings from the writer (2:3). The gospel had come with and in Christ (Mark 1:14f; Luke 4:18ff) but the author of Hebrews and the letter's readers had heard this gospel testimony from reliable witnesses (Luke 1:2). In this respect, the author did not claim special personal revelation of the gospel in the way Paul did. As such, he puts himself on the same level as the readers of his letter! 2:4 stresses, though, that God Himself added abundant evidence of His own supernatural confirmation of this unique gospel. God showed His agreement with the utter superiority of Christ through many signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit – see Acts 2:2,43; Gal 3:5; 1 Peter 1:12. The distribution of gifts of the Spirit signed and sealed the truth, reality and power of Christ's gospel! The writer to the Hebrews would not have mentioned these manifestations had there been any chance that they would have pleaded ignorance of such events. They were well known and widespread and the writer now reminds his readers of their validating power in order to re-kindle their dwindling faith in the sheer majesty of Christ's Person and Work.

Sermon 2 2:5 – 3:6 Just who is this Incredible Christ?

2:5-9a The Humbling Of Christ – we have OT evidence that the governance and administration of this world has been allocated to angelic powers, some of which are evil and hostile eg the angelic 'prince of

Persia' and 'prince of Greece' (Dan 10:20-21; 12:1). However, in Hebrews the age and world to come has not been entrusted to angels but rather to the Son of God, whom His Father has 'appointed heir of all things' (1:2). That new world-order inaugurated by Christ has not yet fully appeared and for a while the hallmarks of the Christ had to be weakness and pain, rather than strength and glory. The writer to the Hebrews quotes Ps 8:4-6 in Heb 2:6 but applies this great privilege not to humanity but instead to Christ, the head of the new creation and ruler of the world to come! Yes, the Christ was like a human being (Dan 7:13) but vastly more besides! Christ is the last Adam and ultimately the entire creation will be brought into subjection to this Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ has been appointed as Sovereign but in order to deal with His people's mega-problem of sin, He must realize His sovereignty through the twin pathways of deep suffering and painful death. This is why the Christ had to 'be made a little lower than the angels' (2:9) in His person and function as High Priest in the presence of God Himself. 2:8 indicates that the surrender of creation for human oversight is not yet fully realized and not all creation yet gives allegiance to Christ, but the sovereignty extended to humanity, which has not been adequately exercised, has already been handed over to Christ, so that He will continue and complete His work for this cosmos. In verse 9 we see that by Christ's death and resurrection, He has been exalted to the highest possible place where he reigns until all opposition to His sovereignty is eliminated and it will finally be seen that 'all things are subjected to Him'. Because of His humiliation, suffering and death, Christ has been granted heavenly glory. The crowning followed the suffering. Christ died for us and by taking on Himself what was due to us, He redeemed us from the curse of death. This is *The Grace Of God*.

2:9b-18 The Suffering Of Christ – What God supremely did, according to 2:10, was to make Christ, through His *suffering*, perfectly qualified to be the Saviour of His people. The heart of the Godhead is revealed in his ultimate work, namely that He was 'in Christ reconciling the world to Himself' (2 Cor 5:19). As our 'representative' and 'forerunner', Christ entered into the presence of God to secure *our* entry there. This perfect Son of God has become His people's perfect Saviour in order to open up the way to God Himself and to achieve this, He *must* experience and endure suffering and death. We had to tread a pathway of perfection that Christ himself had trod in order to count as our representative and High Priest. Christ Himself opened up this way.

- a) He had to sympathize with us and He could only do that by experiencing and sharing our own pains and struggles.
- b) At the same time, Christ had to live in perfect *obedience* to God to be a qualified High Priest, fully acceptable to God.
- c) He had to present an *atonement* for humankind to God. He suffered *with us and for us!* His suffering was *voluntary* and *vicarious!* This is how, incredibly, Christ ‘brought many sons and daughters to glory’ (2:10). He, the Saviour, has saved those He is happy to call His brothers and sisters (2:11).

In verses 12-13 this remarkable solidarity with His people is confirmed by the writer’s use of three OT quotes: Ps 22:22 – we are the members of His Church under the New Creation; Isa 8:17b – as Isaiah and the remnant of Israel stayed faithful to God when so many rejected the prophet, so Christ endured rejection yet refused to give up; Isa 8:18a – Isaiah’s two sons, Shearjashub (‘Remnant will return) and Mahershalalhashbaz (Hasten booty, speed spoil) bore names that reminded Israel of God’s saving plans for Israel, as did his own name ‘Yahweh is salvation’.

Similarly, Christ’s own ‘sons’ and ‘children’ – see Isaiah 53:10 and John 17:6 – were a constant reminder that *the Word of God would ultimately be fulfilled* in spite of all the opposition it faced! Verse 14 underlines the fact that Christ had to be truly human. He had to be born into this world and experience death in this world, like every other human being does. Jesus had died in apparent weakness, failure and disgrace. Death and evil *seemed* to have been victorious, but the reality was the very reverse – Jesus had been raised from death and had given His followers the power of His risen life!

The prince or angel of death is identified here with the devil or Satan, but Christ has disarmed him. The all-pervading human fear of death has been dealt with and for believers in Christ, death brings freedom, not bondage. The devil can no longer scare us with death (2:15). The sense of 2:16 is that Christ ‘took hold’ of us, providing help and deliverance. Who are the ‘us’? None other than the many sons of Abraham whom the Son of God is bringing to glory! The reality of solidarity with humanity crops up yet again in the words of the writer. Any priest must be one with those He represents before God and Christ had to be like His brethren as High Priest, except for sin (2:17). He suffered with them and for them and was made perfect through that suffering. He is both sympathetic *and* faithful. The perfect High Priest! Our confidence to approach God is possible, *only if our sin has been dealt with!* Because Jesus was sinless, He was entitled to enter God’s presence but because He has also dealt with our sins, He

has a double entitlement to enter God's presence. As High Priest He has *actually* removed the sin barrier between ourselves and our Holy God. An additional blessing comes to us in verse 18, for Jesus Himself had been frequently tempted, not only as a human being gets tempted, but also tempted to seek a less costly way to fulfill His life and ministry. The readers of Hebrews were being tempted to retreat from God and throw in the towel called 'discipleship'! In Christ they had a Victor and an Intercessor who had proved that it WAS possible to endure, persevere right to the end and still be standing firm!

3:1-6 The Faithfulness Of Christ – Therefore, brothers and sisters, in light of the totally stunning role of Christ in salvation just presented by the writer, *focus on Jesus*, having been *set apart by God for himself*, having been *made a family member* and having been *called into his eternal rest!* (3:1). God has revealed Himself totally and finally in Christ. He is God's representative among humans AND humanity's representative in the presence of God – the ideal and perfect High Priest. In all these regards, Christ has shown Himself to be completely faithful (John 17:4). 3:2 records that Moses had been Israel's true advocate with God (Ex 32:11ff,31f; Num. 12:7f;14:13ff). Yet, Moses' status was actually inferior to Christ's (3:3-4). Moses was a faithful administrator under God but Christ the Son of God, was infinitely greater and higher in power. The universe was made through Him; it was given to Christ by his Father as His heritage; thus, Christ is founder and inheritor of the household of God. Moses was a servant of the divine household, but Christ is Son and heir! In the OT God had issued a warning against those who might 'speak against my servant Moses' (Num12:8). The far greater warning, implicit here, is not to challenge the claims of Christ and His gospel! In other words, *continuance in the Christian life is the acid test of reality*. The true saints of God are those who *persevere to the end*. This is why the writer to the Hebrews is desperate for believers to endure, to keep fearless confession, to foster hope, to be joyful and to uphold and build their faith, no matter what their circumstances!

Sermon 3 3:7 – 3:18

Warnings About Unbelief

3:7-11 OT Warning Against Unbelief – Early Christian tradition of Christ's work of redemption viewed the death of Christ as a 'New Exodus' – the sacrificial lamb without blemish who is the true Passover. Like Israel in early days, these believers are 'the church in the wilderness', baptized into Christ (antitype of Israel's passage through the Red Sea),

sacramentally feeding on Him by faith (antitype of Israel's feeding with manna and water). Christ the living Rock leads them through the wilderness; the heavenly rest before them is the heavenly counterpart to the Israelites goal of earthly Canaan (1 Cor 10:6ff; Jude 5). The writer warns his readers *not to abandon their faith and hope.*

Psalm 95:7b-11 cannot be separated from Psalm 95:1-7a in this Psalm that was sung in the Temple on the Sabbath. The key point was to remind believing people that it was and is vital to worship God, but deeds and words of worship are valid and acceptable only if they spring from genuinely obedient minds, hearts and wills. Massah = 'tempting' and Meribah = 'striving' (Ex 7:2,7). Israel's complaint to Moses about lack of water at Rephidim was just one of a whole string of occasions of moaning and grumbling that stretched over 40 years of wandering. They wanted to see just how long God's patience would last, faced with their unrelenting stubbornness of mind, heart and will!

Another example of unbelief in Israel was the Num. 14:20ff and Deut. 2:14 incident when most of the spies sent into Kadesh-Barnea brought back an unfavourable report about the land of Canaan. The Israelites revolted against Moses and Aaron and only by Moses' intercession did God spare the whole people. The entry of the Israelites was delayed by continued wandering for a further 38 years. Only Caleb and Joshua entered the promised rest of God in Canaan at this time. Failure to listen to, and respond in obedience to, the voice of God is taken very seriously by God. Now generations later, the writer to the Hebrews warns his readers that 'Today' is the time to listen to and obey God.

3:12-18 Shun The Sin Of Unbelief – Our writer explains strongly in 3:12 along these lines - the Israelites who rejected Moses in the wilderness wanderings era were judged by God in their failure to enter their earthly Canaan. How much greater will be the loss of the new age blessings of heaven for those who fail to enter because of unbelief that involved disloyalty as well as passive failure to believe. The Israelites of old had rejected the authority of Moses. If Christians reject the Christ who is Son of God and who is appointed by God as Apostle and High Priest, then this amounts to rebellion against the living God! This would be apostasy, a complete break with God. To turn back from gospel illumination and reject it in favour of the old order already superceded, amounts to sin against the light.

The call of the writer is therefore for the believers to maintain *the faith* and *their faith* to the end, by hearing the voice of God and living in obedience.

Mutual encouragement was the order of the day – and every day/’Today’ – for there is always strength in numbers. Isolated Christians are always vulnerable. Struggling with temptations to compromise will always press in on Christians and worldly wisdom will be a threat – and ‘the deceitfulness of sin’ - that will push believers towards a watered-down conscience that will all the more easily lead them into doubt and disobedience. United encouragement reduces this. Verse 14 stresses again that the true people and partners of Christ are those who remain firm right to the very end. Perseverance is our greatest challenge. The ancient people of God worshipped God after their deliverance from the Red Sea but soon flagged and drifted. Starting the journey of faith is vital but is not enough. The final prize goes to those who continue and complete the course!

Verses 15-18 underline the worrying truth that the people of Israel at the Red Sea had seen just what power God had wielded on their behalf and yet had rebelled against Him. God passed sentence, as recorded in Num. 14:27ff and Deut. 32:20. How true of all of us as believers in Christ. We experience His power *and yet* we so quickly start to doubt and drift all over again as we struggle to trust our God! Finally, the writer summarizes the truth that because of unbelief – faithlessness – those wandering people failed to enter God’s rest in the promised land. The message to the first Century AD Hebrews must have been plain indeed. They had experienced the redeeming power of God in the gospel of Christ and had received the promise of an eternal rest and inheritance. The writer pleads with his readers not to risk losing these glorious promises.....*by unbelief*.

Sermon 4 4:1 – 13 Hearing, faith and God’s judgment

4:1-2 Hearing And Faith – The Marriage Made For Heaven! The writer has dealt with entry to the ‘rest’, in the form of the earthly Canaan. He now turns again to the spiritual counterpart of the earthly Canaan.

‘*Therefore*’, writes the author, persevere and attain this goal of entering eternal rest in this new order! The followers of Jesus need to fear the possibility of missing this goal! The earlier Israelites got no value from hearing the good news because they failed to appropriate it by faith. The demands on those people were to obey God’s voice and to keep God’s covenant but they chose instead to disobey His voice and to disregard His covenant. Hearing the gospel by itself does not bring final salvation; it requires to be appropriated *by faith - a genuine faith and a persistent faith*.

4:3-11 Rest For The Faithful – The reference to ‘my rest’ (Ps 95:11; Gen 2:2) relates to a sharing in the rest that God Himself enjoys after His active work of creation. The ‘rest’ of God had been available ever since the end

of creation (4:3) but can be forfeited by disobedience, as the writer repeatedly injects through his quoting of Psalm 95. That ‘rest’ is ongoing and may be shared by all who respond to the gospel with faith and obedience. The divine Sabbath thus started at the point of creation’s completion and continues even now (John 5:17). This is the writer’s focus in 4:3-5. In the following two verses, he underscores his belief, based on this Psalm 95, that entry into the ‘rest’ of God is still available ‘so long a time’ after the Exodus and wilderness wanderings era. The voice of God in the Psalm and Letter is the paramount factor of gracious promise, whether in the days of Moses, David, Christ or the 21st Century AD. However, this ‘rest’ can also be forfeited by shallow response to grace, presuming on His patience, tempting the Lord or treating faith and obedience with lightness, hypocrisy or rejection.

Verse 8 summarizes the argument and sets a context to it. The ‘rest’ in Psalm 95:11 is not the earthly Canaan for that land of rest was lived in by the Israelites who entered it under Joshua’s lead. The people addressed in Ps 95 had already been living a long time in Canaan. The ‘rest’ was also different from the rest they had from all their enemies, given by God in Joshua’s day (Josh 23:1 cf 21:44). To the Greek readers, the names ‘Joshua’ and ‘Jesus’ are not two names *but one!* The former led God’s people into the earthly Canaan, but the latter led His people as heirs of the new covenant into their heavenly inheritance. The former was a temporal ‘rest’; the latter was a true ‘rest’, still prepared and reserved for disciples of Christ in the new order, new creation and new eternal life with God. According to 4:9-10, the ‘Sabbath rest’ involves our participation in God’s own rest. As God rested after His work of creation, so believers rest after their service on earth. It means the eternal homeland that is the heritage of believers – a better ‘home’ or ‘city’ (11:10,16). People of faith are already citizens of this city of God, though not yet experiencing their full privileges as citizens of it.

Just when we enter this city is not completely clear in the Hebrews letter – it *may* be that the writer to the Hebrews believes that OT believers entered the rest on completion of Christ’s redemptive work, whilst NT people of faith enter the rest on death. It is to this eternal fellowship with God that the readers of the letter are urged to persevere, regardless of the difficulties and pain of this present evil age. Our writer reaches yet another climax to his arguments in verse 11 with another highly significant ‘*therefore*’. In view of all the prospect of glory by persevering in their faith and in view of the catastrophic results of unbelief, the believers are urged to strive with every drop of energy and endurance in order to enter their promised ‘rest’

in their eternal home. The Word of God *must* be taken seriously, *must* be accepted in faith and *must* be put into daily practice.

4:12-13 Judgment By God And His Word - This focus on ‘warning’ in verse 11 is then continued and intensified through verses 12-13. The warning about falling by disobedience is timely and there is a reason for it – *because*, unlike human words, this Word of God is living, powerful and discerning of the true condition of the human heart. The Word is ‘active’ in achieving that purpose for which the Word was given (1 Pet 1:23; Isa 55:11). It reaches all the recesses of our spiritual being and exposes our innermost motives, thoughts and driving forces (1 Cor 4:5). The Spirit and Word work together to take a human being apart. The result will be that whilst we can deceive ourselves and certainly we can deceive others about our true nature, yet nothing escapes God’s awareness and knowledge of us! (4:13). We are exposed and stripped naked in the presence of the all-knowing God. We cannot conceal *anything* from Him. Ultimately, we don’t have to satisfy other people or our own conscience, but we will stand before God Himself and ‘we must give account’.

Sermon 5 4:14 – 5:10 Jesus, our Great High Priest

4:14 – 16 Our Faith And Our Confidence

Two more ‘*therefore*’s’ confront us within the space of just three verses! Following the strong words of warning and admonition in 4:12-13, there follow words of comfort and encouragement. Real notes of positivity pile in, one after the other. In Christ, we are promised all the strength we need to hold onto the faith and resist an array of temptations to compromise and crumble. Jesus is no ‘armchair theologian’ – He has undergone human trouble and temptation but come through and remained firm and faithful. He now reigns in glory and this is a massive incentive for us to persevere in faith and obedience. He has been exalted high above the heavens as our great High Priest cf earthly high priests who at most passed once a year through the inner veil into the holy of holies in a physical but temporary sanctuary, appearing for just a few moments before God on behalf of their people. *What a vast difference, when it comes to the might and majesty of the Christ in his great high priesthood.*

Verse 15 indicates that alongside this magnificent transcendence, Christ’s humanity remains absolutely valid as a foundation for His sympathy, understanding and compassion *for us* here and now! He went through huge human temptation and trial but came through with His faith and obedience intact. He is supremely qualified to understand and help US in our

weaknesses. Christ had been 40 days in the wilderness and only He – the sinless one – can fully appreciate the sheer power of the temptation to sin! The confidence of the writer in believing the readers *can* ‘hold firmly to the faith they profess’ is firmly rooted (‘for’) in his knowledge that this High Priest has indeed *struggled personally with various trials and temptations* and is therefore equipped to help struggling believers with their own sufferings in this life.

‘Therefore’ (4:16), God has given ample reason to come to the throne of God with confidence, for it is at that throne that Christ Jesus sits in exaltation as our High Priest. The earthly mercy-seat was the place where propitiation took place on the day of atonement and God offered grace to the people. That was a transaction in token, whereas Christ’s presence on the heavenly throne confirmed a propitiation in actual fact and reality. It also indicates the perpetual availability of God’s grace and help in all of our needs – on a 24/7 basis of access!

5:1 – 10 Qualifications For High Priesthood – The key issues here are
a) a high priest must be sympathetic to those he represents, and,
b) he must be appointed to this office.

5:1-4 General Qualifications – Aaron and all his successors represented Israel in the presence of God and had to be Israelites themselves, familiar with their needs and struggles. These high priests had to present the people’s gifts and sin-offerings to God annually on the day of atonement (5:1). The high priest needed to be knowledgeable with Temple ritual *but also needed* to show tenderness and consideration to those struggling and drifting, remembering that he himself is subject to weakness (5:2). Those dealing with the sins of the people needed to be very conscious of their own weakness and thus gentle with others. Indeed verse 3 shows us that the high priest had to make a sin-offering for himself, as well as for the people cf Jesus had no need to offer such a preliminary sacrifice for Himself. Jesus had endured His people’s weaknesses and temptations during His own journey on this earth, but then supremely had borne His people’s sins in His own body on the tree, in His capacity as the ultimate and unique High Priest of God. This leads the writer of ‘Hebrews’ to point out in 4:4 that no man could take the initiative to appoint himself as high priest. There must be evidence of a divine call in every case (Lev 8:1ff; Num 20:23ff, 25:10ff).

5:5-10 Christ’s Qualifications For High Priest – The author of the letter here presents Christ’s qualifications to be high priest – His divine appointment and His sympathy with His people. Christ did not take the

initiative in this appointment. God called Him, using the words of Ps 2:7; Heb 1:5 – ‘You are my Son: today I have become your Father’ – most likely at the point after which Jesus had been crucified, raised and exalted. This is followed in 5:6 by the quoting of Ps 110:4 – ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek’. It was a double appointment by God Himself in the same person – as Davidic Messiah (Ps 2:7) and as high priest (Ps 110:4).

Melchizedek appears in Gen 14:18 as king of Salem, probably Jerusalem, and priest of God Most High. Centuries later, Jerusalem fell into David’s hands and became his capital city (2 Sam 5:6ff). After that, David and his heirs became successors to Melchizedek’s kingship and probably also to the priesthood of God Most High. However, in the Hebrew monarchy the ‘divine kingship’ of the fertile crescent – which united religious and civil leadership – was abandoned. The chief priesthood in the Jerusalem temple was practised in the period of the monarchy by the family of Zadok – a family different from the Davidic line and with no claimed links to the order of Melchizedek. Under the Hasmonaeans chief priesthood and chief civil power in Israel were combined in one person but had nothing to do with Melchizedek. A number of religiously pious groups in Israel were not happy with this Hasmonaean way of combining roles and they wanted to separate kingly and priestly functions. As far as we know, the writer to the Hebrews was the first to combine these two eschatological roles in one person, namely in the Christ who has become our High Priest and King in the order of Melchizedek.

Our writer now puts the spotlight in 5:7 on Christ’s stunning humanity. We have been told already that Jesus was faithful and merciful as our High Priest because He was made like us in every way – He sympathizes with our every weakness because He Himself was exposed to all the struggles, trials and tests that we have to face and endure. This sympathy of Christ for us here and now continues even in His present exalted and glorified state. It seems that the writer must have heard of earthly examples of Jesus ‘praying’, ‘pleading’, ‘crying out’, and ‘weeping’ – possibly additional to the obvious one of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33b-36; John 12:27f). These acts of Jesus surely have ongoing pastoral application for us today. These acts ultimately point to Jesus’ need of divine help to drink that appalling cup of suffering, yet the very cup that brought Him glory. Amazing!! Jesus’ qualifications for His high-priestly service were His agony, tears, prayers, pleading and suffering throughout His earthly life and ministry. The marvel was that His trust in God had never failed. In all this, Christ ‘was heard for His godly fear’, because He committed Himself and submitted

Himself to the will of God. He endured the pain and the cup WAS NOT removed. How could it have been?! Even Jesus went hungry in the wilderness testings and knew bitter loneliness in Gethsemane. Sometimes God does *not* intervene to deliver us from our pain.

Verse 8 insists that He – ‘Son’, rather than ‘a son’ – was not exempt from the general rule that learning comes by suffering. We have nasty consequences from our disobeying, and that teaches us next time to obey! Jesus however had set out from the start to obey God and learned by suffering step-by-step just what this obedience would cost Him on earth (Isa 50:5f). His sufferings were the required price of His obedience on earth *but at the same time* they were *a crucial part* of His obedience. Indeed, they were the very means by which He fulfilled the will of God (Matt 3:15; Mark 10:38f; Luke 12:5). Jesus was utterly at God’s disposal for God’s saving purposes, which meant the initial baptism for His identification with humanity, followed by His receiving and drinking of the cup of intense suffering publicly. The Christians reading this letter to the Hebrews knew that their present trials and suffering could be averted by renouncing their confession or at least reduced by making it less visible to the public gaze. Were they to give up their faith or press on to perfection? Jesus did indeed press on to be made ‘perfect through suffering’. The readers must do the same – strengthened by Christ’s example and by Christ’s present available power to help. No struggle of ours is beyond or outside Christ’s sympathetic help for us.

The author completes this section of his argument in verses 9-10. By suffering, Christ was made perfect. In a real sense, death for believers means perfection, but here in the letter, the writer explains that by suffering and death, Christ was made perfect and ‘became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him’. He was also named by God as ‘high priest in the order of Melchizedek’. Humiliation and suffering lead to exaltation in glory. This happens because of the nature of Christ’s eternal sacrifice, pinpointed in 9:12 (‘eternal redemption’), 9:15 (‘eternal inheritance’) and 13:20 (‘eternal covenant’). This sacrifice was attained once only, not needing repetition and valid permanently! This required Christ’s obedience and it is obedience which is stated as the condition for this eternal salvation. In other words, the readers, and indeed ourselves, *must* persevere in their loyalty to Christ, the Saviour called ‘high priest’ for ever.

Sermon 6 5:11 – 6:20 Warning, Problem and Solution

5:11- 6:3 (See also Booklet 1, p 42) The Hearers' Current Problem –

Logically, the writer should press on with further explanation of the priestly 'order of Melchizedek' but he is aware of the mental and spiritual sluggishness of some of his readers, so he breaks off to address this serious problem of immature spiritual development (5:11). The author dives straight in by claiming that the readers have been Christians for some time and ought to be teachers by this stage. The reality is that they really need to begin with the ABC of their theological thinking and spiritual understanding of the basics. They are still at the 'milk' stage, not the 'solid food' stage! (5:12-13) These readers had settled down in their Christian lives, aware that continuation would involve a deeper, and more costly, separation from their past lives and Jewish or other religious upbringing, especially perhaps the fact that the old order of priesthood and sacrifice was no longer valid. Only those who are growing in the 'word of righteousness' will gain the knowledge and understanding to make moral judgments and exercise spiritual wisdom (5:14). Some of these readers had stagnated and got stuck in the faith! It is also true of course that the teaching on the passing away of the old order might well have been unacceptable to some of these Jewish believers and that would have been another stumbling block on their road to maturity. We all face intellectual, moral and personal blockages that stop us from going forward.

Having told his readers that they are not yet ready for solid food, the author of the letter now surprises his 'audience' and ourselves by proposing to move on from the basics! Into the heavier stuff! Strange that he now says 'therefore' in 6:1, rather than 'nevertheless'! Like ourselves at times, these believers probably needed a jolt out of their complacency, by being given a fresh vision of the sheer extent of the glory of Christ. In short, they needed to be exposed to the love of Christ in His high priesthood and simply be blown away by it in their own lives!! In 6:1-3 our writer lists 3 pairs of issues that he does NOT want to re-visit at this point. He seems to start from a Jewish foundation and builds Christian Theology.

- a) *Repentance From Dead Works/Faith Towards God.* This could well include a list of all the evil ways of death featured in the *Didache* like adultery, idolatry, hypocrisy, envy and pride, to mention just a few. Repentance from these was vital (Rom 6:21; Mk 1:15) and it was tightly linked into faith, of which these believers had a substantial knowledge from their understanding of the OT (Gen 15:6; Hab 2:4; Isa 7:9).

- b) *Teaching Of Baptisms/Laying On Of Hands.* These were probably ceremonial washings carried out by groups of nonconformist Jewish groups, common in Rome and challenged here by our writer as invalid. Imposition of hands was probably understood here as imparting the Sp.
- c) *Resurrection Of The Dead/Eternal Judgment.* The Pharisees held this doctrine from OT times with regard to Israel's ancestral hope would be realized. The Jews had accepted the reality of God's judgment (Gen 18:25; Isa 33:22; Dan 7:9ff). In NT terms, Christ will be the Judge of all.

If converts from paganism gave up Christianity and returned to paganism, it would be a clearly visible break BUT if a 'Hebrew' slid away from Christianity, he or she could slowly abandon the Christian elements of their faith but still hold on to the Jewish foundations listed in 6:1-2 and deceive themselves that they were truly growing in Christ when in fact they weren't. The writer thus sees no point in repeatedly stressing the basic Jewish foundation points in 6:1-2. He therefore goes on to the serious material on high priesthood and looks for Christ to work!

6:4-8 The Danger Of Falling Away – The writer now explains why there is no point in laying the foundation all over again, namely because apostasy is incapable of remedy. It is impossible to cure or put right. Those who *persevere* prove themselves to be the true people of God. People who have shared the covenant privileges of God's people, then reject and renounce them, are the hardest people to reclaim for the faith. It is true that nothing is impossible for the Lord to accomplish by the power of His Spirit. This passage is not about nominal adherents to the Christian faith who have never known its power in their lives. This concerns those who know where the truth lies and over a period of time, they follow the faith but then for some reason renounce it. Thus, the seed that fell on rocky ground produced a believer who grew for a while but under testing, then fell away.

These are folk who have

- a) 'been enlightened' – ie the light of the gospel has impacted their lives and they may well have been baptized. To reject the gospel now would be to sin against the light of God and as such, by its very definition, there would be no way back! It would be an incurable sin.
- b) 'tasted the heavenly gift' – this could be a reference to the Lord's Supper or might be a wider compass of all the spiritual benefits and blessings signified in, and resulting from, eating the Lord's Supper.
- c) 'partaken of the Holy Spirit' – some scholars have tried to argue that the writer here means partaking of the gifts of the Spirit rather than the actual Person of the Holy Spirit, but that cannot be proved from the text. Some

claim that it is impossible for a genuine ‘partaker’ of the Spirit to subsequently commit apostasy. The writer to the Hebrews does however believe that it is possible in this way to ‘insult the spirit of grace’ (10:29) eg Simon Magus was stated by Peter as being still ‘full of bitterness and captive to sin’ (Acts 8:23), evidenced in following decades by his continuing opposition to the gospel. This *does* raise the question of ‘In what way, and to what extent, had he partaken of the Holy Spirit?’ d) ‘tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age – Simon Magus HAD realized how good the word was when spoken by Philip and saw the signs attending – see Matt 12:28 - authenticated and acknowledged by Christ Himself, but He also warned that some had claimed to prophesy and exorcise demons in His name but they never knew Him - see Matt 7:22f. Ultimately only the Lord knows who truly belongs to Him! This warning was a very real warning against a very real danger, as long as there are ‘evil hearts of unbelief’ around that can cause us to turn away from the living God (3:12). In 6:6, the writer recalls that those who crucified Christ also refused to accept Him as the Son of God, exposing Him to deep, public humiliation and crucifixion. There were and are Christians who in effect place themselves in the same position of the willful sin of *deliberate apostasy*. Their rejection of this salvation leaves possible no other salvation. Some will reach a point at which they can no longer repent, following their continual and causative crucifying of Jesus. No way back! 6: 7-8 stress that fruit will come by endurance, but some land has no yield at all.

6:9-20 The Writer’s Confidence And Hope – Such was the appearance of the fruits of righteousness in these readers’ lives in the form of acts of service for their fellow-Christians, that the writer felt sure they were not actual, or even potential, apostates (see the evidence in 10:32-34). Only here in the letter does he confidently write to them as ‘my dear friends’ (6:9). God regards such acts of kindness as having been done to God Himself (6:10). Indeed, these acts need to be continued right to the end, showing that Christian works do indeed hold a place along the road of perseverance that confirms them as heirs of salvation (6:11-12).

Our writer now presses his point (6:13-15) that the heirs of Abraham are those who have responded to the gospel, rooted in Abraham’s own experience, namely that ‘he believed the Lord and He reckoned it to him for righteousness’ (Gen 15:6, quoted in Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6). The key point is that Abraham and his spiritual descendants *persevered to the end*, thereby confirming the reality of their faith and their hope. The writer recognizes God’s faithfulness to His promise to Abraham but also to His

promise regarding the high priesthood of Melchizedek. Abraham waited patiently – so must we! Abraham believed God and eventually, against all the odds, Isaac was born with the confirmation that God’s ultimate but distant promise for all his descendants would indeed be fulfilled. This was even confirmed with an oath, sworn by God Himself, after the offering up of the life of Isaac (6:16-17).

God’s promise to Abraham by an oath helps the readers of this letter to realize the enormity of the divine oath to use the Melchizedek high priesthood to fulfill the divine purposes (Ps 110:4). Only God knows what He will do. His word alone is sufficient, but God swears an oath to give us double assurance – this is grace upon grace. This oath was fulfilled in the glorious gospel of Christ! This great and strong encouragement is intended for US (6:18-20) and because it is impossible for God to lie, we have His promise and His confirming oath. The ‘double glazing’ of complete assurance in these twin anchors of hope. Our hope is absolutely anchored to the One who is now behind that thick curtain behind which the Christ has entered as our Great High Priest to deliver for us an eternal salvation by the shedding of His own blood. He it is who will intercede for His Church for ever and His purposes can never be thwarted, even in the midst of a passing, crumbling and dying world that yields no hope of its own.

Our writer is now ready to proceed from where he left off in 5:11. He is ready to declare the utter marvel of the Melchizedek priesthood, however tough it may be for some of his readers to understand, because it is by this route that the writer will lead his people to a maturity of their Christian faith and Christian life. This author is following a very definite agenda in his letter to take the believers to that place that he knows God wants them to be, both at that point in history and by *perseverance* to the end of their journey. Such is also God’s intended purpose for us as believers living in 2018.

Sermon 7 7:1-28

The Order of Melchizedek

7:1-10 The Superiority Of Melchizedek – Our writer is gradually going to reveal the costs and demands of Christian discipleship for his believing readers, so he now deepens, expands and extends his arguments about the *Centrality and Significance of this Christ, the Son of God*. In short, Melchizedek prefigures the high priesthood of Christ. He shifts from Ps 110:4 way back to the only other reference in Scripture to this Melchizedek, namely Genesis 14. Abraham had defeated the four invading kings from the east. Abraham’s nephew, Lot, had been among the captives

taken by these four kings, so Abraham set off with help to recover these captives. A local ruler, Melchizedek, then blessed Abraham, who handed over a tenth of the plunder to this local ruler. Melchizedek's name involved two meanings – 'king of righteousness' and king of Salem = 'king of peace'. Our writer of the Letter to the Hebrews employs these two remarkable terms to build his case – peace with God is founded on the righteousness of God – the very core and heart of the Christian gospel! This Melchizedek, says verse 3, was without father, mother, genealogy, beginning and end. He did in fact have an historical line as an actual priest-king, BUT our writer simply records his brief appearance and then disappearance in Gen 14:18-20 to present him as a suitable type of Christ, with a special focus on the eternality of Christ, rather than His humanity. Melchizedek stayed a priest whilst on earth but Christ as the antitype remains for ever the high priest. Jesus is not shown after the pattern of Melchizedek but rather Melchizedek is shown as being made like/similar to the Son of God.

In the encounter between the amazing Abraham and the mysterious Melchizedek, the latter is shown as superior to the former and so his priesthood must also be seen as greater. Why?

- a) Because Melchizedek accepted tithes from Abraham, amounting to a tenth of all the war spoils (7:5-6a). Ongoing agricultural product was tithed and allocated to the priests in Israel. By the first century AD it is likely that this administration was actually done by the priests. The key point, however, is that whereas the members of the tribe of Levi received tithes from their fellow-Israelites, who were children of Abraham like themselves, Abraham – ancestor of the Levites and of their brethren who paid them tithes – accepted the superiority of Melchizedek by paying tithes *to him!* The priesthood of Melchizedek's order was thus higher in status than the Levitical priesthood. Neither Melchizedek nor Christ have their genealogies counted among the sons of Levi. Heb 7:9-10 suggests that in a sense Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek - thus admitting the superiority of Melchizedek – in the person of his ancestor Abraham. Levi was the great-grandson of Abraham and had not been born when Abraham met Melchizedek. An ancestor, in biblical thinking, is viewed as containing within himself all of his descendants.
- b) Because Melchizedek gave his blessing to Abraham and despite Abraham having the promises of God, nevertheless Abraham realized the superiority of Melchizedek and willingly accepted his blessing (7:6b-7). Moreover, no record exists of Melchizedek losing his priestly

office by death *cf* Levite losses of priests when each one died! This, therefore, is further evidence for the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levitical priesthood. However, Melchizedek is only recorded as a living human. Far greater still is the Christ who surpasses *all* human priests and orders! (7:8).

7:11-28 The Superiority Of Jesus – The argument continues to stress that the Aaronic priesthood was *never* designed nor able to usher in the age of fulfilment – a vastly different priest and order was needed for that! (7:11). Christians from a Jewish background/context would not have even been thinking of a priesthood beyond the Levitical model. The link between Aaronic Priesthood and Mosaic Law was so intimate that a change in the priesthood required of necessity a change in the temporary law (7:12; Gal 3:24f). For Paul, the law functioned to make us aware of sin, NOT to justify us before God. Indeed, Paul and the law basically agree that the law was a temporary age, only up to the coming of Christ and the age of perfection. Melchizedek had nothing to do with Levi and Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah anyway and Judah had no links with priestly service. The new order proclaimed by the author to the Hebrews superseded the Levitical one and was not even earthly in its exercise. It came from outside the tribe of Levi and is eternal, not earthly (7:13-14).

No priest of the Aaronic line lived for ever, but the Christians' high priest is immortal. Each one died! That old order was indeed earthly and material – involving the physical descent of priests, a material shrine, and animal sacrifices. By contrast, Christ died, was raised and now operates His high priestly function in the power of a life that can never be extinguished (7:15-17). All the equipment associated with the Law and Aaronic priesthood failed to produce a peaceful conscience or direct access to God Himself (7:18-19). Some men and women of faith did undoubtedly discover this, but not via the Levitical ritual or the Aaronic priesthood. The new order opens up free access for us to draw near to the living God. The gospel has made possible perfection ie. what the law could never do.

A major theological factor at work here is the swearing of an oath to confirm the appointment of the Messiah as a permanent high priest. 'The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: You are a priest forever' (Ps 110:4). The Word of God was enough, but this is raised in strength by an oath (6:17). Aaron had been appointed by divine command (Ex 28:1) but not with an oath (7:20-21). Christ by contrast is affirmed as superior to all His predecessors (7:22). The emphatic word in verses 20-22 is the last word

‘Jesus’ who guarantees and mediates what our writer for the first time names as ‘a better covenant’.

The text gives two further reasons to complete the overwhelming case.

a) 7:23-25 Superior Because It Is Permanent – many Aaronic priests served but none enjoyed his office in perpetuity! Indeed, Josephus counted 83 high priests between Aaron and the Fall of the Second Temple in AD 70. Death stopped each one from continuing! Christ, the high priestly Son of God, by contrast, is ‘perfected for evermore’ (7:28). Permanent validity is assured! (7:24). Permanent and utterly faithful intercession by Jesus was certain! (7:25) In Christ, God draws near to humankind and in Christ humankind may draw near to God. The perfect and constant mediator, giving us 24/7 open access to the Lord of the Universe! The writer has already stressed that as high priest, this Christ made satisfaction for our sins (2:17), helps us in our temptations, sympathizes with us in our weakness and gives mercy and grace to help us in time of need. What more could we possibly or reasonably desire? He also intercedes for us (Heb 7:25; Rom 8:33f; Isa 53:12; Lk 22:32; John 17). These ministries of Christ actually never end and that’s why our salvation IS eternal.

b) 7:26-28 Superior Because Of The Character Of Christ – Finally, the new order of priesthood is infinitely better because the new priest is Jesus, the Christ. Remember it was Jesus who supremely endured temptation, prayed, suffered, obeyed, gave His life as a sin-offering for us. He shared our humanity in daily contact with a sinful and hostile world, whilst at the same time demonstrating His divinity. He is perfectly qualified to be high priest for us (7:26). Aaron needed to make sin-offerings for himself AND his people. The high priest wasn’t actually required to offer a DAILY sin-offering on his own account, but daily slip-ups were always liable to occur (Lev 4:3; 16:6) and needed to be provided for. Jesus by contrast needed to make no such offerings. He was completely and personally free from the guilt and power of sin. That was the reason for His perfect suitability to deal with our intractable sin issue (1:3; 2:17; 5:1; Isa 53:10; Mk 10:45; 14:24). *he offered up himself – a voluntary sacrifice for sin in our place.* He did it without resentment or anger against God or humankind, even as the nails were driven into His flesh! By this we have *peace with god available nowhere else and in no one else* (7:27). High priests were weak (5:2f) but the new priesthood in Melchizedek’s order was arranged to supersede the old priesthood set up by the law. This came about when Christ made the supreme and totally perfect sacrifice for our sin. Now set free from His own earthly weakness, the Christ, the eternal Son of God,

now operates perfectly in His role as Great High Priest to meet all of our needs (7:28). His work for us, in us and through us, will be done in His Power and Way.

Sermon 8 8:1-13 Covenant, tabernacle and sanctuary

8:1-2 The High Priest of a New Covenant – The Aaronic Priesthood

Superceded – Our writer now drives home the message of all his previous detail thus far recorded, and especially that packed into Chapter 7! The Aaronic priesthood gives way to the one in the order of Melchizedek; the Old Covenant gives way to the New; the earthly sanctuary gives way to the heavenly; temporary, token sacrifices give way to the one great sacrifice that is both effective and eternal (8:1-2). This is the true sanctuary at the right hand of God Himself in His glorious heaven. It operates in the realm where there is eternal rest (Chs. 3 and 4), the eternal city (11:10,16); the unshakable kingdom (12:28). It operates in the arena of divine truth and reality; it is *not* a copy, imitation, shadow or sham, in any sense of these words.

8:3-7 A More Excellent Ministry – What Does This Great High Priest

Actually Do? - The Aaronic high priests offered ‘gifts and sacrifices for sins’, which tend not to be distinguished from each other, but basically mean ‘offerings’. This is revealed in the case of Christ in His offering of HIMSELF (7:27; 9:14), an offering that is not, in any sense, repeated or continual in frequency. It was *once only!* (8:3). Jesus could never have carried out the old form of making offerings on earth, for there were others appointed to do that and they were not even from Jesus’ own family or tribe. Christ’s high priesthood was totally unique and distinct – valid in heaven, by a perfect sacrifice, offered just once for all (8:4). The earthly sanctuary was a mere ‘copy’ or ‘shadow’ or ‘replica’ of the heavenly reality, based on instructions given on Mount Sinai (Exod 25:9,40; 26:30; 27:8). In short, the Levitical order *foreshadowed* the *spiritual order* of the new age that would dawn in the work of the Christ (8:5).

By huge contrast, says our author in 8:6, Christ ministers in the heavenly dwelling-place itself and this ministry is therefore superior to any earthly ministry. It is superior also because of the superior covenant out of which the power is ministered, Christ Himself being the Mediator. Christ does indeed rescue and reclaim sinners, but by offering Himself, through death, as our substitute. God’s holiness and justice demands that a price be paid for the penalty that *we* have incurred. God’s call for justice *must* be satisfied, but Christ makes it possible by His sacrifice of Himself ‘to

demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus' (Rom 3:26). This New Covenant, foretold in Jeremiah 31:31ff and mediated by Christ, was necessary because of the inadequacy and insufficiency of the Old Covenant. Our writer to the Hebrews will now explain this to his readers.

8:8-13 A Better And Superior Covenant – These verses came through Jeremiah in 31:31-34 but our writer's main concern here is to stress that the pronouns 'I', 'me' and 'my' all refer to the Lord God Himself. *It is from him!* Heb 8:8-9 records God's covenant with Israel when He freed them from Egypt – recorded in Exod. 24:1-8; Heb 9:18-20; Jer. 7:23. *But the people rejected this covenant* and this sad and sorry state of affairs is outlined in Jer. 7:23-26. Prophets tried to call the people back to their covenant loyalty (Jer. 11:6). The promise of blessings for obedience and the warning of curse for disobedience attended these prophetic pleas.

There was an apparent revival and re-commitment to the covenant in 621 BC in Josiah's reign, rooted it seems in the 'book of the law' – probably Deuteronomy – and mentioned in 2 Kings 23:3; Deut. 29:1. The king's turning back to God and covenant seems to have been genuine enough, but the re-dedication of others much less so, as evidenced in Jer. 3:10!

Shallowness and nominalism seemed to have been the order of the days, months and years that passed. Both Israel and Judah suffered very dark times and Jeremiah prophesied a *covenant that was entirely new* (Jer. 31:31ff).

This new covenant was to have certain distinctive features that marked it out –

- a) The Setting of God's Law in their Hearts (Heb 8:10) – Deut. 6:6-9 had already laid down various ways in which God's law could be remembered/ memorized. Much more than that, however, was needed to ensure an active and living obedience to that law and Ezekiel hit the nail on the head in this regard – Ezek. 11:19f.; Rom 8:1ff. The desperate need was for a new heart, indeed a new nature, plus the knowledge and power actually *to do his will!* Many times, in Scripture comes the promise that God will be our God and we will be His people, but it is in the *New Covenant* that a new power, and therefore a new life, become a reality at last.
- b) The Knowledge of God by Personal Experience (Heb 8:11) – There was a sense in which the Israel of old knew its God, but clearly, they very readily forgot their God and wandered away so easily to other gods – see Judges 2:10; Hosea 4:1,6; 6:6; Jer 22:15f. The writer here

intends the idea of a personal knowledge of God, born of a personal and intimate relationship, through the possession of a new heart, by God's Spirit at work. This is part of our 'perfection' as we grow into Christian maturity.

c) The Forgiveness of our Sins (Heb 8:12) - Forgiveness of sin had always been a mark of the divine character in the eras of Moses (Exod. 34:6f), Micah (Mic. 7:18f), Isaiah (Isa 43:25; 44:22). This pardon is a vital part of the very idea of a personal relationship with God.

These are therefore the ‘better promises’ on which the New Covenant is built. In this Letter to the Hebrews, the New Covenant did mean the abolition of the old sacrificial order by a perfect and unrepeatable sacrifice and the ministry of a high priest rooted in, and founded on, that one great sacrifice. The promise of a transformed life under this New Covenant has been proved by many down the running centuries of time over these past two millennia – see Romans 8:3f. This is not just for the house of Israel and the house of Judah (8:8) but for all nations. Now obsolete are the old covenant of Moses, the Aaronic priesthood, the earthly sanctuary and the Levitical sacrifices (8:13) which had all been set up under that covenant. 8:13 might suggest that the Temple had not yet actually fallen and thus that the old era had not quite fully disappeared. The era of law and prophets is past; the age of the Son and the Spirit is here and will always be here in the new order inaugurated by that great High Priest, the very Christ of God Himself.

9:1-10 Tabernacle of the First Covenant - Its Function and Limitations – The word ‘*Therefore*’ on this occasion opens up a shift backwards in the author’s argument. He describes the wilderness tent/Tabernacle, referring to the Exodus text, in Heb 9:1-5 and then describes the ritual linked to that sanctuary in Heb 9:6-10. The Mosaic tabernacle was introduced just after the announcement of the covenant in Exod. 24. In 9:1-2 the writer underlines in effect that whether tabernacle or later Temple, the key feature of these sanctuaries is that they were both *temporary*. This wilderness tent-shrine was made up of the court, outer compartment and inner compartment. The *Outer Compartment* held a ‘candlestick’ or ‘lampstand’, made of gold with branches from the main stem and situated on the south side. The table, made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, plus crockery, and the

consecrated showbread consisting of 12 cakes made and then replaced every Sabbath day, were located on the north side. Only the priests could eat the cakes. The west end of this outer compartment had a linen curtain, the ‘second veil’, in contrast to the screen through which one entered the holy place from the court. The ‘second veil’ in the outer compartment was the entrance to the *Inner* compartment or ‘Holy Of Holies’ (9:3-4).

The two pieces of furniture in this Holy of Holies were the *Golden Incense-Altar* and the *Ark Of The Covenant*. The latter, also known as the ‘ark of the testimony’, was a box made from acacia wood and contained the covenant-terms engraved on two stone tablets (Exod. 25:16,21,22). It also contained the gold jar of manna and Aaron’s staff that had budded. Finally, our author mentions the lid of the ark which was a golden slab called the mercy-seat or atonement cover (place of propitiation). This mercy-seat played a key part in the sacrificial ritual on the Day of Atonement. The blood of a bullock – offered to make atonement for the high priest and his family – plus the blood of a goat killed as a sin-offering for the nation, were both sprinkled on the mercy-seat and in front of it, while the God of Israel had vowed to appear in the cloud on the mercy-seat (Lev 16:2). Meanwhile the ‘cherubim of glory’ were two gold figures of composite creatures that hovered above the mercy-seat (Exod. 25:18-22; 37:7-9) and supported the invisible presence of Israel’s God. Our writer now wants to press on to discuss the significance of this sanctuary on the annual Day of Atonement (9:5).

Heb 9:6 reminds the readers of this letter that the outer court of the tabernacle – and the later temples – was constantly in use. The priests trimmed the lamps on the lampstand (Exod. 27:20f) and burnt incense on the incense-altar (Exod. 30:7f), also replacing the bread cakes weekly on the table of showbread. However, says 9:7, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies. It had to happen once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that very special day, he entered twice, wearing white vestments, once with the blood of the bullock and a second time with the blood of the goat, following which he confessed, over the head of a second goat, the nation’s sins, before driving that goat out into a solitary place. The key lesson from the Holy Spirit in 9:8 is that in the era of the old covenant, there was no direct access to God. That unrestricted route was opened up only through the sacrificial ministry of Christ, our great High Priest.

No animal, blood sacrifice or ceremonial washing could ever ‘perfect’ the worshipper by affecting the conscience. These things had been shadows and externalities, not internal ‘transformers’. It has always been the inner,

human conscience that blocks and stops free access to God Himself. When Christ came, a true ‘re-formation’ and transformation could and did begin. The outward and earthly copy gave way to the inner and heavenly reality (9:9-10).

9:11-14 Christ’s New Way by His own Blood – Christ has now appeared and the shadows have passed away. The perfect and lasting reality is now here. Christ, the Priest-King is now enthroned in, and ruling from, His heavenly sanctuary, having voluntarily given His perfect self-sacrifice. He now functions as high priest of the new and eternal order (9:11). The old way had been firstly to slay the animal and secondly to take the blood into the holy of holies – a two-fold manoeuvre. Christ by contrast achieved this in a *single* manoeuvre and had the immediate right to enter God’s Presence as His people’s representative and high priest. The redemption he had secured was both perfect in nature and eternal in validity (9:12). Under the old covenant, animal blood and ceremonial washings did achieve an outward effect of removing ceremonial pollution. The ashes of a red heifer that had been killed and burnt, were mixed with water and believed to be effective when sprinkled on a person who had been polluted by contact with a dead body. Just how it worked was never explained! (9:13).

The old sacrifices *could* restore a person to a formal level of communion with God and with fellow-worshippers but could never *cleanse the conscience or deal with the guilt of sin!* (9:14) Our writer can now reach the pinnacle of his argument in 9:14-15 as he claims that this act of redemption was achieved through the eternal Spirit. The link here may well be with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 42:1 in which the Servant yields His life to God as a guilt-offering for many, bearing their sins and achieving their justification. The Servant carries out *every* phase of His ministry in the Spirit’s power, ultimately when He is both Priest *and* Victim. Stunning sacrifice indeed! Like the sacrificial animals under the old order, the Christ was ‘unblemished’ (Isa 53:9), making Him an acceptable sacrifice and thus satisfying to God in dealing with the problem and dilemma of human sin. His work satisfied the divine will and the terrible human predicament (Heb 10:5-10 cf Ps 40:6-8). External pollution was never the issue; what was needed was a solution for inward and spiritual defilement (Mk 7:15,21,23). ‘Acts that lead to death’ in 9:14 refers to actions and attitudes that pollute people and build barriers with God. Human beings need to be set free from inner bondage to be enabled to worship God in spirit and truth.

9:15-22 Christ, the Mediator of The New Covenant, by His Unique Sacrificial Death, Contrasted with the Old Order – At great cost to Himself, God opened a way to forgive and redeem those who had broken the law. It required the marvel of the New Covenant by which God has promised ‘I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more’ (Jer 31:34). Grace and glory are God’s gifts to those who have been called to the ‘obedience that comes from faith’ (Rom 1:5). This is our heavenly calling and heritage, as sons and heirs of the living God in Christ. The necessity of Christ’s death being at the heart of this New Covenant provision is explained by our writer in 9:16-17. The Greek word *diatheke* means ‘settlement’ ie a covenant given by the grace of God to His people to bring them into a special relationship with Himself. It can also mean a last will and testament so that the owner can leave property, money and/or land to certain people after the owner’s death. The uniqueness here is that Christ provided an inheritance, died to make that inheritance valid for the inheritors to collect, but then was raised from death to live on and to administer that inheritance to those who actually did not deserve it in the first place! Christ is testator, executor, surety and mediator all at the same time! The New Covenant is indeed unilateral in orientation. It is not a worked-out agreement between people and divinity! This New Covenant is valid only because its author has died! Even the old covenant required death (9:18) by the shedding of blood, but not the death of the one who made it. To reinforce this point, our writer ‘backtracks’ once again into the Mosaic covenant (9:19-20) related in Exod. 24:3-8 where Moses sprinkles part of the animal blood on the altar (representing God as Author of the covenant) and part of the blood on the people (who are thereby brought into God’s covenant). By contrast in Hebrews 9:19-20, he sprinkles it – using hyssop or marjoram herb plants - on the *Book* (representing God, His commandments and covenant) and on the people. Even the tabernacle and vessels of divine service under the old order were sprinkled with animal blood (9:21-22) and anointed with oil. Some products could be exempt on rare occasions from sprinkling with blood e.g. flour, incense and certain gold objects taken in war, but generally, ceremonial cleansing or atonement had to be carried out by sprinkling with animal blood.

9:23-28 The Perfect Sacrifice of Christ – ‘*Therefore*’, writes our author in 9:23, reverting to his crucial point from verse 15, it was indeed necessary for the copies, the sacrificial items in and around the material sanctuary, to be cleansed by animal blood. Such ‘washing’, however, was only external and temporary. Inward and spiritual cleansing and renewal would need something much greater, something altogether different and lasting in its

effect and results. Human defilement needs *inward* cleansing so that those very humans may come to God free of defilement, and at the same time be made a suitable dwelling-place for the Holy Spirit of God (Eph 2:22; 1 Peter 1:2,19,22f; 2:5). The ‘heavenly things’ consist of the New Covenant rooted and anchored in the eternal gospel of Christ that was formulated in heaven; the true sanctuary is the heavenly Zion; the New Israel is the Church of Christ which includes also the redeemed believers now in the glory of heaven. That which binds them all together in common is the perfect sacrifice of Jesus in His death, resurrection, exaltation and glorification. This is seen in 9:24 for Christ achieved His goal of entering heaven by that very sacrifice and by entering heaven both on His own behalf AND on behalf of sinners like ourselves. That is the only way that we can ever enter God’s presence in heaven by having our High Priest representing and indwelling us for all eternity. The sacrifice of the Christ, unlike the repeated animal offerings carried into the holy of holies every year, consisted of the shedding of His own blood. This was the ultimate sacrifice and is continually valid (9:25), such that Christ does not need repeatedly to offer this sacrifice again and again. It has been presented and accepted once for all (9:26). He came once only, to deal conclusively and finally with sin. 9:27-28 then concludes that people die once by God’s appointment, with their judgment to follow. Christ also died by God’s appointment, but He bore our sins by that death, so that His death would yield all the benefits and blessings that we will enjoy in their fullness when our great High Priest returns at the end of the ages. All of this has *huge implications* for how we should live in the here and now, but our writer wants one more opportunity to underline the utter magnificence of this new order.

10:1-18 The Reality of the New Order Under Christ, our Enthroned High Priest – Both the apostle Paul and our writer view Christ and His new order as the *perfect reality* to which OT sacrifice and priesthood pointed, but could never, in and of itself, deliver true perfection into the image of the Son (10:1). Indeed, if the old sacrificial system had been able to cleanse the human conscience, then the believers would have had unbroken access to, and communion with, their God (10:2). This cleansing would be ongoing and unrepeatable – hence the Perfect Tense is used. For those still under law, the annual Day of Atonement was actually a regular reminder of the reality of sin (10:3)! Compare God’s promise of Heb 8:12 to His people that ‘their sins will I remember no more’. We need not enter the morbid territory of *excessive* recall of sins already confessed and forgiven (Rom 8:15). The writer then stresses what should be pretty

obvious, namely that inner moral defilement cannot be removed by the blood sacrifices of animals (10:4; Ps 51:10,16f).

This ongoing inability of sacrifices to solve the sin problem produces from our writer yet another '*therefore*' in 10:5! *There is a solution* to this dilemma and the writer uses Ps 40:6-8 to deliver the goods! God's desired sacrifice from His people is complete obedience to Him, modeled on that of His only Son. Our author applies these words to Jesus in 10:5-7. The mention of 'a body you prepared for me' suggests incarnation that led ultimately to death and atonement, requiring the full submission of Christ to the Father's Word and Will. 10:8-9 announce and explain the abolition of the old order of sacrifice, because Christ's perfect submission to the will of God has established the new order. The law will now be written on the hearts of God's people. That is what happened with the Christ Himself – he obeyed the Word and Will of God supremely and thereby, though His shed blood, He inaugurated and validated the New Covenant. That is how we have been washed, justified and made holy for Christ (10:10).

Yet again, our author throws the spotlight, this time using language from Ps110, on the truth that Christ's high-priestly work as sin-bearer is absolutely unrepeatable! (10:11-12). The priests under the old order never sat down after sacrifices had been presented. They had to continually repeat the procedures for no sacrifice could actually remove sin or wash clean the conscience for ever. By contrast, Christ completed His sacrifice once-for-all and sat down. His work had been completed and accepted by God. His work now is to intercede on our behalf at God's right hand. We now have access to all the grace and power of God!! It might be that 10:13 serves as a warning to the readers – see 10:26-31 - not to be counted among the enemies of Christ, but to make sure that they – and we – remain friends of Christ by enduring and persevering right to the very end. There is huge encouragement to continue in faith, for in 10:14 we are told that Christ, by His sacrifice of Himself, has eternally 'perfected' His holy people: cleansed conscience; fit to worship; related to God; new power for life (10:15-18).

Sermon 10 10:19-39 'Therefore'...A Call to faithful worship to the end

10:19-25. Practical consequences of our covenant in Christ – Our author is now ready to launch into a sustained, practical section of his homily to his readers, concerning their need to respond to the *greatness of Christ*. He starts with a preamble before getting down to the detail. Even the high

priests of old had severe limits set on their times of access to the Holy of Holies (10:19). Now, however, under the New Covenant, there is free access to God for all who have been cleansed, consecrated and perfected by Christ's sacrifice. We have the right of access to the place entered by our great High Priest – into the very presence of God via the veil now opened up – on the grounds of His shed blood. Verse 20 states that this new way is 'though the curtain/veil, that is, his body'. Some interpret this as 'through His flesh'. Some read it as 'through his own blood' (Heb 9:12). Others feel the author viewed the veil as symbolizing the Lord's human life, presented to God when He 'suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God' (1 Peter 3:18). Another strong incentive for believers to enter God's presence lies in the reality that Christ is there and is actively exercising His ministry there as the great high priest! The 'house of God' in 10:21 is the community of God's people. Here now are the writer's pleas for action from his readers, by way of response to Christ –

- a) 'Let us draw near to God' (10:22) – this must be done with 'sincerity of heart' and the 'full assurance of faith' that comes from faith in God's Word (11:6). The 'sprinkling of the heart' refers to inward and spiritual cleansing, achieved by Christ's shedding of blood. This qualifies us to be in God's presence. The reference to 'pure water' is probably to baptism, both outwardly and inwardly granting spiritual cleansing and a sense of nearness to God Himself.
- b) 'Let us hold fast to the hope we profess' (10:23) – see also 3:6,14, showing that we are indeed the house of God and that we are partakers and friends of Christ. The added incentives are that Christ is now actively our great high priest and that this comes to us with the unfailing and faithful promise of God.
- c) 'Let us encourage one another' (10:24) – their witness will be strengthened if they encourage one another. Fellowship is indeed vital. The verb 'spur on' is very strong and indicates that practical, mutual encouragement among believers can be very positive in generating an atmosphere of love and good works.
- d) 'Let us not give up meeting together.... but let us encourage one another' (10:25) – our writer knows of some who are staying away from the fellowship. Perhaps due to the false idea that Christian blessings could be got and then you can withdraw and enjoy them by yourself! Or due to short-sightedness, laziness, weariness, sense of superiority, sense of independence, fear of the authorities, continuing prioritization of the synagogue and a refusal to sever ties with the synagogue, rather than

focus on the specifically Christian assemblies that would strengthen their faith in Christ. It might also have been fear of growing hostility from the Roman Empire or the Fall of Jerusalem or the sense of delayed *parousia* that may have reduced their sense of evangelistic urgency with time running out. They have experienced something of ‘the powers of the age to come’ (6:5) and received ‘the unshakeable kingdom’ (12:27f). Let them now, therefore, prepare for the final consummation by persevering in single-minded loyalty to Christ.

10:26-31 Don't Reject God's Way, God's Truth or God's Son – Our writer feels the strong urge to issue a further warning about the seriousness of sin. The setting here seems to one of a *deliberate* turning away from truth. Something that is intentional and sustained, rather than a sudden trip or slip on an otherwise upward spiritual trajectory. Those who have known the way of truth but then purposefully rejected their dependence on Christ’s high priestly sacrifice. Sheer and unapologetic apostasy seems to be suggested here by verse 29. To reject the uniquely shed blood of the New Covenant – our only divinely-appointed means of forgiveness – leaves no alternative route to pardon. To insult the Spirit of grace (10:29) closes the very means of God’s reaching out to us in forgiving grace. Severe death penalties faced the OT people of God for apostasy. How much greater the prospect of spiritual death under the new order. The real issue is that our author wanted believers to examine themselves continuously, to walk in the Spirit and to come to God continuously with a dependence on Christ’s high priestly function of intercession for His repentant and sorrowful people.

The Song of Moses in Deut. 32:35 and 36 is quoted in Heb 10:30 – ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay’ and ‘The Lord will judge his people’. That Song had a strong focus on Jewish unbelief and these quotes indicate the divine readiness to bring judgment on those who forsake the covenant. Great privilege brings great responsibility, both then and now! We must never grow complacent about the grace and mercy of God that we have known and experienced, for 10:31 reminds that it is indeed ‘a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God’. Our priority must be to remain, by perseverance, on a continuous pathway of knowing God, obeying God and serving God. Whenever we then slip or fall, we can be assured that our living God will be active in mercy as we seek His pardon.

10:32-39 A Call to Persevere in the Midst of Persecution – God is so incredibly gracious in the wisdom of His Word, for here we see parallels with Heb 6:4-8. After the severe warnings from the writer, we receive

comfort and encouragement to persevere. Indeed their severe, early struggles in their Christian lives had proved to be an opportunity to demonstrate their resilience in the faith in the midst of hostile opposition (10:32-34). The word ‘enlightenment’ appears in 6:4 and 10:32! We do know that none of this community, immediately addressed by this letter, had undergone martyrdom (12:4), though some did die under Nero in AD 64. If the writer is referring to pre-64 persecution, then it might be a reference to the limits set on Jews in Rome by Emperor Claudius after AD 41, or even with regard to his expulsion of Jews from the capital around AD 49. The believers, notes our writer, either suffered insult and pain themselves or supported others so persecuted (10:33), while others upheld those in prison and even joyfully accepted the forced removal of their own property (10:34), knowing that they had an eternal inheritance (Luke 6:22f).

The writer is saying that he is confident of the ongoing practical faith of these believers because they showed it under testing times soon after coming to faith and will surely continue to show such resilience and boldness (3:6; 4:16;10:19) in the testing days ahead (10:35). They were holding fast to the divine promises! Their great need – and ours today – was for *patience*, whilst continuing to do God’s will (10:7,9f). This plea for patience is backed up by Habakkuk’s own experience and testimony of the need for patient waiting on the Lord in the 7th Century BC setting. In the midst of this, *trusting faith* was vital and here our writer begins to prepare the way for his mammoth Hebrews 11 on that very subject of *faith*. The reference here is to the Coming One – the second coming of Christ – and the call in Heb 10:37 is to Christians who wonder whether Christ ever will actually return! The call is to a faith that will prove the believer to have endured in faith, but the opposite would be to fall back from faith into an earlier lifestyle. Our challenge in 10:37-38 is to be ready to live out a life of suffering and faith, built on the pattern of Christ Himself. Thereby will we receive the divine promise. Indeed, our writer is supremely confident that these Christians will not fade away and be eclipsed but will indeed endure in *faith and salvation* (10:39). We need never to forget that *faith is central* because

- a) it enables us to make real in ourselves the righteousness freely offered to us in Christ’s grace, *and*
- b) it sustains and gives substance to hope and shows the reality of what is basically invisible to human eyes here in this world.

Defined, Demonstrated and Delivered in Human Lives

This chapter 11 runs in one overwhelming direction – To Challenge its readers to engage in Bold Living for God. Ultimately God is pleased and glorified when we Live Out The Life of Faith. Our writer opens this lengthy portion of Scripture with a definition of ‘faith’ in 11:1-2 ‘Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see’. The promises of God related to a state of affairs belonging to the future but believers in Christ acted as if that state of affairs were already present – that’s how convinced they were that God could and would fulfill what He had promised. Indeed, so precious were these promises that they organized the whole of their lives in their light. They took God at His word and directed their lives in line with that decision. Things still in the future were present to faith, according to their experience. Things outwardly unseen were visible to their inward eye. *Hypostasis* means a ‘firm, solid confidence’ ie a calm courage in God’s promises, even though the believers had not yet received the fulfillment of those promises (11:39). The word *elenchus* means a conviction that is active in its certainty which propels us forward to lay hold of the realities on which our hope is fixed and which, although unseen, are already ours in Christ. This involves bold confidence in God’s great realities. These OT saints bore witness to God and He bore witness to them, affirming their bold faith. 11:3 states how God made this visible, created order into being by His word, out of nothing. Faith views this creation and is confident that this bears witness to God. What therefore are the essentials of faith?

- a) It means coming to God and seeking Him seriously and intentionally. Our writer has already pleaded for this act of approaching and drawing near to God (4:16; 10:22). We must be open to God and in conversation with Him.
- b) It means believing that God exists, so that we have the inclination to come to Him in prayer. This then stimulates further steps towards Him, seeking help.
- c) It means having confidence that God will reward the exercise of such faith. God will not miss seeing such steps and He will act in response to them.

Hebrew 11, however, is not a merely theoretical approach to faith. It is saturated in the practical details of the OT heroes of the faith. We are given insights into the circumstances that triggered a demand for faith in the lives of a number of these folk, followed by the positive outcome(s) of

those faith responses. The key issue is that these ‘heroes’ of faith are actually *normal* people, *not* extraordinary people, moving forward in a *trust relationship* with their Lord, rather than based on faith as a mere creed, a blind jump, a string of felt blessings or an accumulation of God’s goodness experienced in their lives.

Faith in Hebrews 11 is thus dynamic and challenging –

- 1** Faith Means Bold Action – in this chapter, most of the case studies show a person acting boldly in line with, or in response to, a word(s) from God. So, for example, we see action in the lives of Abel (11:4), Noah (11:7) and various others (11:32-34). The action, however, needs to run in sync with our quality of spiritual life and this is seen in the life of Enoch (11:5-6) for he pleased God and left this world without passing through death (Gen 5:24). We ought to remember that faith needs to be accompanied by acts, actions and works that validate and confirm that faith, and our writer will illustrate this, especially in the closing chapters of this letter. Prior to that though, he uses two examples where faith and works are operating together. Thus, in James 2:25 and Heb 11:31, Rahab the harlot welcomed the spies, protected them and was spared when Jericho fell. Abraham’s offering up of Isaac is another example of faith and works (Heb 11:17).
- 2** Faith Means Response to the Unseen God and His Promises – this is not passive belief only, but rather response to God’s truth. *Obedience is the outward evidence of our inward faith.* They move forward in faith and God moves with them. Abraham in 11:8-12, 17-19; Gen.12:1-9 is a great example of this and yet he and others did not actually receive or see the things divinely promised! (11:13-16) Abraham did not receive the promise of the inheritance at the time of his first call. The promise of the inheritance was not given until he had returned from Egypt and Lot had chosen favourable Jordan to settle in (Gen 13:14ff). It was reaffirmed to him along with the promise of an heir (Gen 15:18ff) and again after the giving of the covenant of circumcision (Gen 17:8). A very important lesson for us in our call to live in obedient trust. In Heb 11:11 we learn that ‘Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness’ (Gen 15:6). Heb 11:12 records the fruit of this trust for a descendant, namely multiple descendants far too numerous to count! Abraham had faced a massive challenge in Heb 11:17-19 (Gen 22:1-8) in his calling to sacrifice his only son Isaac through whom the promises of God were going to be fulfilled and the bizarre command to

kill that very child whose birth had only been possible through the intervention of God Himself!

- 3 Faith Means God Doing Miracles in Ordinary People's Lives – a careful reading of Hebrews 11 makes us aware that some of those 'heroes' listed actually had real flaws and slips in their lives! Noah got drunk and lay naked in his tent (Gen 9:20-29); Abraham lied about Sarah (Gen 20). Other examples could be brought in to help us realize that the so-called 'heroes' were still on a journey and far from 'perfection'. An Indonesian expression goes like this – '*Kita masih ada di dunia ini*' ('We are still in this world'). Often wrongly used to justify sinful attitudes and actions in this life, nevertheless it shows us that God still has a work in progress for folk like us as well! God did still use flawed people like Moses, who committed murder; David, an adulterer; Gideon, a doubter; Jacob, a deceiver; Isaac, a liar in regard to Rebekah; the people of God down the ages who so often resisted God, rebelled against Him and wandered from Him. Yet He worked on them and used them to fulfill His purposes. God also used weakness to grant His people unexpected power, strength and victory, such as David in facing Goliath.
- 4 Faith Means God At Work In Diverse Settings – a boat was built, a family moved, a child was conceived, obedience in a willingness to offer that child back to God, the suffering of persecution, the winning of wars. The NT has many examples of healings by faith, but interestingly, none are recorded in Hebrews 11! Our writer shows a real diversity of 'faith contexts' from the life of Moses. Faith was exercised by Moses' parents in hiding this remarkable child for three months after his birth. They had spiritual insight to want to protect this significant baby from Pharaoh's hostile threats on his life. They refused to drown the baby in the Nile (Exod 1:22). Moses himself is then praised for his faith – he identified with God's people rather than with the godless (Heb 11:24-26), thus giving the readers of 'Hebrews' a challenging model of maintaining a Christian profession and witness, even when that might mean accepting loss, discomfort and imprisonment (11:26); he left Egypt and persevered in his God-given mission, though His God was unseen (11:27); he led the Israelites to observe the Passover ordinance (11:28), linked to the smearing of blood on the Israelites' door posts to avoid the death angel's work. This was by faith, because the event itself was not yet seen. The lesson of the writer to the Hebrews seems to be that Moses had maintained a lifelong vision of God and this was the big

clue and secret to his faith and perseverance. A huge lesson for all Christian people today.

- 5 Faith Means God Sometimes Brings Different Results – this is a very sobering thought indeed. Sometimes, results of the exercise of faith are rapid – the people of Israel passed through the sea; the walls of Jericho fell; widows received their dead back by resurrection (Heb 11:32-35a). Sometimes, however, the fruits of faith are delayed in their appearing or the outcomes are negative. Yes, Daniel was lifted out of the lion’s den because of his trust (Dan 6:23) but we also need to look at those who really struggled in this life – tortured, humiliated, beaten, stoned, imprisoned, mistreated (Heb 11:35b-38). By faith, one believer lived, and by faith the other believer died. The reality was, and still is, that faith in God carries with it no guarantee of comfort in this world. The reward comes in the only world that actually does matter.
- 6 Faith Means Looking Forwards To God’s Ultimate Reward – Christian pilgrims must have a long-term vision for the outcome of their journeying. We have God’s commendation (Heb 11:2,39) – His ‘WELL DONE’ – meaning that God Himself had borne witness to their faithfulness.! George Guthrie puts it like this in a nutshell – “Faith is confidence that results in action carried out in a variety of situations by ordinary people in response to the unseen God and his promises, with various earthly outcomes but always the ultimate outcome of God’s commendation and reward.” We are called to orient our lives towards God and His Way, Word and Will, rather than towards the so-called reality of the visible world. We are not to fear, but rather to live in bold confidence and trust in the unseen God, Father, Great High Priest and transforming Spirit. Unlike the OT patriarchs, we now have the fullness of the revelation of the eternal inheritance known through the new Covenant established by Christ. Along with us, these OT people of faith now know the perfecting power of Christ’s sacrifice and the eternal inheritance of the saints. They had been looking throughout their lives for the heavenly city, the city of God, their eternal rest. They and we have found it in the Lord Jesus Christ.

A final thought - this is perhaps supremely seen in Heb 11:13-16 with reference to Abraham’s descendants – all the ‘aliens and strangers’ in the land. The patriarchs lived for God and not for the obtaining of an earthly security. Likewise, the readers of the Hebrews letter must consider the examples of these patriarchs’ lives and choose the path of faith or the alternative, the path of faithlessness. They died trusting God, but not hav-

ing seen their descendants' reception of the land. Christ has now gained perfection for them – and for us. They and we now enjoy access to God through Christ, as fellow-citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. Better hope, better promises, better covenant, better sacrifices, better possession and better resurrection. Their *greatest desire was for God himself and for God's city*. The result was that 'God is not ashamed to be called their God'. This was a word of enormous challenge for readers of Hebrews and for ourselves in the 21st Century!

Sermon 12 12:1-11 Persevering in Christ through God's discipline

Christ, The Pinnacle Of God's Revelation

Christ, The Pinnacle Of God's Revelation

12:1 – ‘Therefore’, Reject Sin And Pursue Holiness – God Himself bore witness to the faith of these OT people of God. Those people of old had lived out the life of faith even before the incarnation of the Christ. The letter to the Hebrews marked the period when the word ‘witness’ – *martus* – was gaining its more specialized meaning of dying for the faith. Such faith ought to encourage us to follow their example of sacrificial endurance by faith. Even though Christ has been on earth, we still await with patience His second coming. He is still in a real sense invisible to us and we must endure warfare and suffering before the End. As in an athletic contest, the spectators are watching the Church to see just how it performs and how we live out our lives. We must cast aside all hindrances in the walk of faith and especially the weight of sin that will damage our running. Sin here refers especially to the constrictions of our environment – *euperistatos* - that pull us down as Christians. In other words, not just besetting sins but things of whatever sort that distract us from our single-mindedness in running the race.

12:2-4 – Our incentive and encouragement in obeying that calling comes by Looking to Jesus, our Example, who suffered to grant us Sanctification – In order to achieve single-mindedness, we must *Continually Keep Our Focus on Jesus*. Christ is not just an example of faith along the lines of the OT saints in Heb 11, but He is the *Pioneer and Perfecter of our Faith*. The definite article in Greek appears here in front of the word ‘faith’. We now have the faith of Jesus as an *Example, Incentive, Triumph and Pioneer* in the sense that Christ has been at work invisibly delivering Israel by faith from Egypt (see Jude) and sustaining Israel in the wilderness (see Paul). He has *Always* been at work in keeping our faith. He could only be the *Perfecter* of our faith through His appalling pain and suffering on earth

and especially on the cross of Calvary! He can now sustain our faith in a different sort of way than in OT times.

Roman crucifixion was not carried out on Roman citizens for it was reserved for the lowest of the lows, sub-humans, slaves, criminals. Cicero wrote in *Pro Rabirio* 5 ‘Let the very mention of the cross be far removed not only from a Roman citizen’s body, but from his mind, his eyes, his ears’. Jesus went through this out of His sheer determination to do God’s Will. He brought faith to perfection by His endurance through suffering and has won the place of highest honour and exaltation. Christ, the pioneer of salvation, has been made perfect through suffering and has taken His seat ‘at the right hand of the throne of God’ (Heb 1:3;8:1;10:12 – in 12:2 it is Perfect Tense – ongoing ministry on our behalf). This exaltation is the ‘joy that was set before him’ but in order to go through this, He had to endure *shame and death*. This is a message for the Hebrews and for us today – there is a cost. This joy is not only for Himself but for all for whom He died. He has gone to the throne as our forerunner, but we will follow Him there if we persevere in faith. The *pioneer* has got there first but we will share that throne and glory with Him.

In 12:3, Christ is shown as our *supreme* example that inspires faith. When they – and we today – plumb the depths of testings and trials of our faith, they and we *must consider Jesus*. He suffered innocently at the hands of evil and brutal men and plumbmed greater depths than the Hebrews had yet experienced. Christ, and many of His disciples down the ages, had died for their faith but this had not yet been inflicted by evil opponents on these Hebrews (12:4). These sufferings were actually evidence of the Father’s love for them because He was training them through pain to be more faithful and obedient ‘sons of God’.

12:5-6 – God Disciplines Us As His Sons, Out Of His Love And Desire For Our Sanctification - If we reflect on the truth of Proverbs 3:11-12, we will be more able to see our own troubles in proper perspective. God uses pain and suffering to train and discipline us and to show us that we truly are His beloved sons and daughters.

12:7-11 – The Divine Father Disciplines His Sons And Daughters, Based On His Relationship With Them – Within these verses, words related to ‘discipline’ occur 8 times, words related to ‘son’ occur 3 times and words related to ‘father’ occur 4 times.

a) 12:7 God disciplines us as his own children – Beloved sons and daughters are intimately loved by their Father. So, it is with us as God’s very own children.

- b) 12:8-9 God calls us to submit to hardship as discipline – ALL children need to be disciplined and even Jesus ‘learned obedience by the things which He suffered’ (Heb 5:8). We will respect that loving discipline. Sometimes an earthly father or mother may get things wrong in the type or level of discipline administered but our Father in heaven does not make any errors for He is perfect love and wisdom and deals with us on that very basis. The phrase ‘the Father of spirits’ is unique and speaks of our spiritual heavenly Father, as opposed to our physical, earthly fathers (12:9).
- c) 12:10 God calls us to holiness through discipline – God’s ultimate objective in His exercise of discipline is that we might share in His holiness. Our writer to the Hebrews in the early part of his letter seemed to speak about the cleansing of conscience that equipped them to approach God in worship, whilst here he is writing about God’s overall goal for His people, namely their total consummation of their sanctification which opens the way for their appearing with Christ in glory. This was a long-term process – see Acts 14:22 ‘through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God’.
- d) 12:11 God calls us to yield a harvest of righteousness through our submission to discipline – Discipline may well feel intensely painful at the time, but it does eventually bear much fruit, as witnessed by the Psalmist in Ps 119:67,71; Matt 5:10-12; 2 Thess. 1:4ff. Once we accept discipline from God as something well-intentioned, we will stop feeling resentful and rebellious. His soul is now peaceable and ready to function as a fertile soil that will produce a righteous life that responds to the will of God.

Sermon 13 12:12-29

Respond to God’s grace

by living a new life, continually listening to God’s voice

Express your faith by obeying the Lord with gratitude and worship

12:12-17 Perseverance In The Spiritual Life Of Believers

1. 12:12-13 We Must Deal With Discouragement – ‘*Therefore*’, act in light of the positivity of the peace and righteousness that can be ours if we accept God’s training of us in 12:11. These thoughts in 12:12-13 are rooted in Isaiah 35:3f - and are reflected also in Heb 10:37 - when the exiled Jews felt that the promised deliverance would never come, and the thoughts are found also in Proverbs 4:26, suggesting the need for the weak and struggling to be helped to continue, so that the whole

community would not be held back as they endure towards the goal. We need to think communally in the Church as well as individually.

2. 12:14a We Must Uphold Harmony – We are taught here to seek peace with all people as far as that is possible and interestingly, this ties in with Jesus' words about peacemakers in Matt 5:9 – 'for they shall be called sons of God'. Harmony is of paramount importance within the Church.
3. 12:14b We Must Strive For Holiness – This refers to the embracing of positive, practical holiness of life, not merely the avoidance of forbidden things in the verses that follow. Those who practice unholy living will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9f). We must be holy if we expect to share in God's holiness. ('You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy' – Lev 11:45 cf 1 Peter 1:15f.). Our ultimate goal is to see God, but holiness of heart and life is the absolute prerequisite for that experience!
4. 12:15a We Must Look For Grace – The readers – and ourselves today – must ensure that no one fails to experience that grace of God which puts a person on the road called 'faith' and equips that person to continue and complete that journey. Our goal of seeing God is possible *only by grace* and that grace is always and continually available to us throughout life.
5. 12:15b-17 We Must Stop All Defilement – If sin emerges in the community, it must be dealt with immediately and nipped in the bud, lest the community as a whole become infected by it and with it. This sin can become the 'root of bitterness' and this term is taken from Deut. 29:18 in the context of the sin of Israel mixing with Canaanite religious practices. The writer also links this with the risk of falling away in Heb 3:12. Verse 16 presents a warning against sexual immorality. Esau in the OT is not actually charged with fornication, though he was married to two daughters of Heth, and a Palestinian Targum on Gen 25:29 does accuse Esau of adultery with a betrothed maiden on the day that Esau sold his birthright to Jacob.

Our writer to the Hebrews does warn against sexual immorality, both here and in Heb 13:4. Esau is presented as a man with no real sense of spiritual values who became very angry when Jacob by deceit received the blessing intended for Esau. Jacob appears weaker but did show interest in the inheritance promised by God to his family, whereas Esau had sold his birthright for the 'price' of a meal when he was very hungry (Gen 25:34)! Verse 17 records the regret of Esau in surrendering his birthright and his tears of

sadness at his failure to reverse his loss of that birthright! The writer to the Hebrews is trying to reinforce his point that after apostasy, there is no second repentance possible! These verses warn us severely to take a serious attitude against defilement. We can be badly hindered by the poor example, low standards and corrupt teaching of others. More than that, though, is our need to protect, build up and encourage others within the Christian Community.

12:18-29 Our Identity And Belonging As Disciples Of Christ

1. 12:18-22a We Belong To A Spiritual Kingdom – Here our author goes back once more to the difference between the glory of the giving of the Law, but the even greater glory of the gift/privileges of the gospel which simply must not be refused. Those who fully embrace this gospel have nothing to fear BUT those who start out on this new road, but then fall away, are in HUGE DANGER. 12:18-19 warn that Sinai was so charged with God's holiness (Ex 19:16-19; 20:18-21; Deut. 4:11f) that certain death would strike down any human or animal that touched it! The people of Israel pleaded with Moses to speak to them, rather than having God speak to them with the danger of death (Exod. 20:18f). Even an animal wandering on the Mount would be so charged that it would be lethal to touch that animal. Therefore, the beast must be killed from a distance by stoning. Moses himself was petrified after the Golden Calf incident (Deut. 9:19). *But, and this is so vital, you have come to Zion!!*
2. 12:22-24 We Belong To An Eternal Kingdom – Within this particular context, this 'coming to Zion' may well be a reference to the readers' conversion, as they have come – Perfect Tense and therefore ongoing – into the spiritual realm of Christ's Kingdom. King David had located the ark of God in Jerusalem, followed by Solomon, as God's earthly dwelling-place. The temple and city of Jerusalem were physical, material copies of the heavenly, eternal Jerusalem. Our writer to the Hebrews believes that his readers even now have access to the spiritual realm of the new Jerusalem, even though that new Jerusalem has not yet come down to humankind. This city comprises the whole family of faith. The readers, and ourselves, already have access to this 'city' but not yet fully (12:22a). This is not all, though! The believers have also come to multitudes of angels who are joyfully gathered together, and it is these angels who minister to the heirs of this great salvation (Heb 1:14). A stunning thought and even more so when we recall that Christ passed by the angels in order to be incarnate on earth with humankind

(Heb 2:16). The readers, along with ourselves, are not to worship angels, but rather to glorify the God who is served by those very angels (Heb 12:22b). BUT, there is still more in verse 23!

This is probably referring to the whole communion of saints whose names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20) or, to put it slightly differently, whose names are written in ‘the Lamb’s book of life’ (Rev 21:27). They have become members of heaven and all Christ’s people are the ‘firstborn’ children of God, by their union with *the Firstborn* and having a guaranteed inheritance. These believers have also come to ‘God the Judge of all’, underlining the enormous seriousness of Christian accountability (Heb 4:13; 10:30f). The ‘spirits of just men made perfect’ must surely mean believers of pre-Christian days who have now been fully perfected in Christ (Heb 10:14,38; 11:6,35,40). Those believers’ souls don’t need to wait until the resurrection to be perfected. They are perfected already in the sense that they are with God in His heavenly Jerusalem.

The believers have also come to Jesus, the ‘mediator of a new covenant’, and this is the new way of approach to the Godhead, made possible solely by that great sacrifice of the great high priest Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 7:25;12:24). We can now ‘enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus’ (Heb 10:19) with which we are sprinkled. This is the covenant-blood of Christ, the antitype of the blood sprinkled at the start of the old covenant. This new covenant blood is utterly different from Abel’s blood following his murder! Christ’s blood has the power to cleanse the evil conscience (10:22), forgive the sinner and bring peace with God, for all who cast themselves on Christ, putting faith in Him.

3. 12:25-29 We Belong To An Unshakeable Kingdom – These believers faced huge challenges, but our writer has offered massive comfort and encouragement to persevere. BUT great certainty brings great responsibility and indebtedness to the great High Priest, Christ –
 - a) 12:25 We Must Live Obediently – Israel of old in the wilderness consistently failed to obey God’s commands and suffered by their stubborn disobedience (Heb 3:7ff). At that time, God spoke from an earthly mountain. NOW, He speaks the gospel from His heavenly Zion! To disobey the gospel offer is far more serious than to disobey the OT Law (2:2f; 10:29).
 - b) 12:26-27 We Must Have Confidence – The coming Day of the Lord is expected to be heralded by earthquake AND shaking of the

heavens (Ps 68:7f; Isa 2:19,21; 13:13; Hag 2:6f). This indicates God rising up to put down Gentile dominion, to raise up David's throne and to put Jerusalem and its temple as the centre for all nations' loyalty and worship! The present world order will disappear – see Rev 20:11; 21:1. In fact the material universe will be shaken into pieces, records verse 27, leaving only the unshakeable order, namely the Kingdom of Christ in which believers share with their great high priest, the royal priest. All created things are only temporary and passing (Ps 102:25ff). Here is the massive contrast – the new order of Christ is an *Eternal Unshakeable Kingdom* into which the Son of God has brought His very own people by His High-Priestly work!

c) 12:28-29 We Must Be Humble And Worshipful – ‘*therefore*’, *because of this amazing assurance, respond rightly* – Be grateful for this kingdom and worship God appropriately in word and deed. Worship in reverence and awe. *Why?* Because our God is a *consum-ing fire!* (12:29) In the white heat of God’s holiness, all that is un-righteous, unholly and unworthy of God will be destroyed by Him. By all means, express thankful love and trust because of His grace and mercy, *but* at the same time serious reverence and awe must be present too.

13:1-16 Powerful Pastoral And Practical Pleas

All the earlier teaching of the letter about the Person and Work of Christ, our great High Priest, has *massive and vital implications for living* –

13:1-3 Our Calling To Love –

- a) Love Must Be *Continual* – Brotherly love is demanding and costly and is repeatedly emphasized throughout the NT and has a foundation in the OT as well – Ps 133:1; 1 Thess 4:9f; 1 John 3:16. Given the multiple challenges and pressures facing these readers in the first century AD, the love urged in verse 1 was especially important within this Christian Community.
- b) Love Must Be *Relational* – Verse 2 refers to giving hospitality to Christian strangers. Greeks believed that Zeus, in his role as Zeus Xenios, worked as protector of strangers. Zeus sometimes disguised himself as a traveller and blessed those who gave him hospitality, unaware of just who they were sheltering. Ancient inns in the Roman

Empire were often unsafe places so hospitality to Christian strangers would be very welcome. The point is that angels can be messengers who will actually bring a certain blessing/message from God Himself to those giving hospitality (Gen 18:1ff; Gen 19:1ff).

c) Love Must Be *Sacrificial* – Verse 3 is indeed costly. Involvement in seeking release for Christian prisoners who were being punished for their faith, as well as even getting food into prisons, were both fraught with danger. This deep and practical concern for prisoners should be extended to all who are ill-treated. We need that capacity to put ourselves into others' shoes and feel for them and with them in ways that lead to action.

13:4 Our Calling To Be Pure –

Honouring and protecting the marriage bed is actually part of the expression of brotherly concern and love. The root reason for this is that the marriage union is ordained by God Himself. 'Adultery' means unfaithfulness by either party to the marriage vow, whereas 'fornication' covers a wide range of sexual irregularities. Our writer warns of God's judgment in this.

13:5-6 Our Calling To Be Satisfied –

actually includes coveting another man's wife by sexual desire and the love of money. Both are rooted in the longings of the human ego. Jesus warned of the impossibility of serving God and Mammon (Luke 12:15). A person's true value is not measured by their wealth. Christian leaders are particularly warned to be extremely careful in these areas (1 Tim 3:3; 6:6-8,10). Greedy people will always be anxious and unhappy, whilst the opposite of covetousness will be contentment. Our calling is to trust God's provision, accept His promises (Matt 6:31-33) and turn away from fear (Ps 118:6).

13:7-12 Our Calling To Be Loyal, Especially To Leaders –

Leaders are mentioned three times in Heb13:7,17,24. It seems to be their former leaders in 13:7 and the readers are urged to follow and imitate their example in life and lip. They were models of genuine faith yet again! They died in faith and in the faith! They had planted this community of believers (2:3) and watered it with the Word of God (Heb 13:7). Though they had now died and were not available to help, nevertheless Jesus Christ is *always available* (Heb 1:12;13:8; Ps 102:27). Isaiah 48:12 'I am the first, I also am the last' transfers from Father to Son. *Yesterday*, Jesus cried for divine help (5:7); *today*, He can sympathize with us as High Priest for He has been tempted as we are but without sin (4:15); *for ever*

He lives to make intercession for us (7:24-25). *Help, grace, power, guidance are always available to us* (Heb 13:8). Next, in verse 9, comes a warning against deviating into strange teachings of whatever sort. If Jesus is *always the same* (13:8), why would they want to leave the Christ-centred faith in any way whatsoever. It is the very grace of God that must be the source of all our spiritual strength, not the foods, rules or deviant teachings of the Colossian sort that would diminish the place of Christ and which have been made null and void by Christ.

Our writer still has the issue of food in mind when he notes in verse 10 that the sacrifice of Christ was the antitype of the sacrifice offered on the day of atonement and the animal flesh killed on that day was not eaten. Their bodies were taken ‘without the camp’ and totally burned there (Lev 16:27). Other sin-offerings could be different in that the blood was not presented to God in the holy of holies, the flesh was eaten by the priests in the sanctuary. Since the offerings of animal blood on the OT Day of Atonement, their bodies were burned. Those serving the tabernacle, have no permission to eat from the altar that typically foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ. The crux is that the sacrifice of Christ is a *better sacrifice* because the spiritual antitype is superior to the material type AND because those who enter the heavenly sanctuary by Jesus’ blood (10:19) know conclusively that Christ, the great High Priest, is always available as the source of their spiritual feeding on Him by faith. An altar in verse 10 means a sacrifice. Thus, the writer is not talking about a physical, material altar, but is saying ‘we have such a great high priest’. The Christian ‘altar’ was the sacrifice of Christ that opened the way for direct access to the Godhead. Christ is our sacrifice and sustenance to be fed upon by faith. As the OT atonement red heifers’ bodies were burned outside the camp, so was Jesus crucified outside a city gate in Jerusalem in order to ‘sanctify the people’, bringing them to God, purified in conscience by the shedding of His blood as His own voluntary sacrifice of Himself. This great truth of verse 12 has massive consequences for our understanding and practice of the following verse 13f.

13:13-14 Our Calling To Be Bold And Courageous –

Our author piles in his argument with yet another ‘*therefore*’ in verse 13! ‘Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the *stigma* that he bore’. Jesus was led out of the city for crucifixion, having had his Messiah-ship trashed and his Mission rubbed out. A double stigma against His Person and Work! Yet this very stigma ought to be viewed as great wealth, honour and privilege. Far better than gaining any earthly city because ‘we

are looking for the city that is to come'. We must yield completely to Him. Yet again this touches the heart of the message to the Hebrews. This may well be rooted in Moses' experience after the Golden Calf incident of setting up his 'Tent of Testimony' outside the camp and far from it, so that anyone seriously seeking the Lord *must go outside the camp to find him*.

Likewise, any one, under the new order, seeking God, must seek Him outside the camp by approaching Jesus outside the 'camp' of Judaism. How hard this would be for them, because formerly they had thought of everything outside Judaism as unclean! But the calling now is to 'go to Him', regardless of the shame and stigma that would mean. They would feel the sting of Jewish criticism and Imperial insult but that very journey would lead them to eternal glory! The world *outside* Judaism with all its traditions and institutions felt insecure and dangerous, but *Jesus was there, calling them to ultimate security, and Jesus was actually in control of the outside!* The Gentile Mission beckoned and not to move forward would mean falling behind Jesus Himself. The old order of Jerusalem, and all the baggage that went with it, was ready to collapse. (Heb 11:10; 12:27) The city of God was their inheritance to come.

13:15-16 Our Calling To Worship –

'Therefore', pleads the writer, although animal sacrifices were no longer needed, OUR response must be to offer continual sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise *through* JESUS! This derives from Hosea 14:2 and for the writer, the key is that now, sacrificial ritual is obsolete, because of the finality and eternal efficacy of Christ's own sacrifice. Another crucial sacrifice lies in verse 16 and that is 'to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased'. See also James 1:27; 1 Peter 2:5; Rom 12: 1. *Our Christian faith is sacrificial, based on the one self-offering of Christ.* Christ welcomes our sacrificial living that helps others.

13:17-21 Respect Your Christian Leaders

These leaders are probably the successors of the leaders mentioned in 13:7. It might be that the readers of the Hebrews letter were tempted to withdraw from the authority and fellowship of a city-wide leadership. The leaders were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the flock under their care. The Greek word *agrupnew* means 'losing sleep' because of the leaders' general watching of their sheep but perhaps also because of their anxiety that some members of that community were in danger of straying. Our writer wants the believers to cooperate with, and obey, their leaders so that the latter can exercise a joyful ministry among them. See similarly Phil 2:16. Disobedience and non-cooperation would actually damage both

those leading and those led! Sometimes, visiting teachers might seem very attractive and unusual but it was the regular, local leaders who ultimately cared for the local Christian community. A warning!

It *may* be that our writer did/does have some role of spiritual authority/influence over these readers, for he asks prayer for himself in 13:18. He believes sincerely that he has done his duty, whatever that was, responsibly, comparably with Paul in 2 Cor 2:12; 6:3. Our writer asks prayer that he will eventually be enabled to re-unite with this community (13:19). It would be tempting to read between the lines a little here to ask whether the writer is trying to justify himself in some way or to apologize that he has been absent from them for a lengthy time. Such a temptation would be conjecture however! The mention of Timothy's release in verse 23 suggests that the writer himself is free at that point.

The writer's mention of 'the God of peace' in 13:20 *might* hint at possible disunity/conflict within this Christian community and the need for healing if the readers were to be effective servants of God in a hostile Roman Empire. There is a further reference to the resurrection of Christ by the blood of the eternal *covenant*. Very interesting to read of Christ as 'that great Shepherd of the sheep'! Yes, He is our great High Priest *but he is also our Shepherd* and here is the first reference in the letter to the word 'Shepherd'! The root of this is Moses and Aaron leading the people out of Egypt (Ps 77:20; Isa 63:11). Jesus is intended as the second Moses who came up, not out of the sea, but out of the realm of the dead. The stress in this letter is not on Christ's resurrection but on His exaltation to high priesthood at God's right hand. There is only this *one* reference to the Lord's resurrection in the entire Hebrews letter! The resurrection of Christ confirmed the eternal validity of His own sacrifice and thereby confirms the superiority of the new, over the old, covenant (cf 9:20). This is all part of a *prayer that the readers will be equipped by the powerful Christ for every form of good work in doing God's will. The result will be that glory is given to God through Christ* 13:21.

13:22-25 A Final Farewell

The whole letter is a 'word of exhortation' ie a homily or sermon! The writer is probably writing outside Italy, having Italians with him, to a church *in* Italy.

Overview – The Bible Project

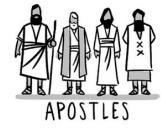
An Overview of Hebrews is available on-line from The Bible Project,
as an 8 minute-movie, which builds up to an A4 printable page:

There is an approximate copy overleaf

<https://thebibleproject.com>
RS63_Hebrews.mp4

AUTHOR: ?

- PAUL ?
- BARNABAS ?
- APOLLO ?



AUDIENCE: ?



- SEE 10:32-34
- PERSECUTION & IMPRISONMENT

THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE
OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT
SCRIPTURE



THE LE
HEB
JESUS IS THE U



2 MAIN GOALS

"THE [Radiance] OF
GOD'S GLORY"

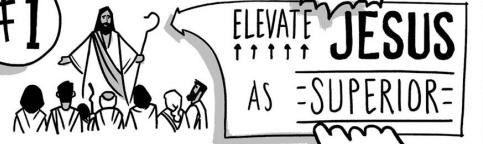
"THE EXACT [IMPRINT] OF
GOD'S NATURE"

THESE METAPHORS
MAKE THE CLOSEST POSSIBLE
IDENTIFICATION BETWEEN
JESUS AND GOD

1:1

AN

#1



#2

CHALLENGE
THE READER TO
REMAIN FAITHFUL
TO JESUS DESPITE PERSECUTION

1-2



JESUS
EQUALS...

GOD'S WORD

FOLLOW
GREAT MODELS
OF
FAITH



ABEL

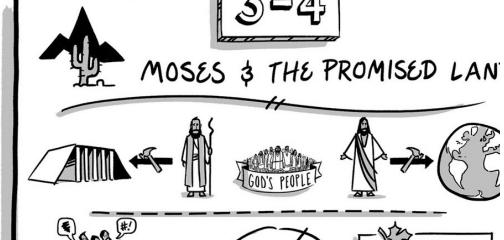
ENOCH

NOAH

ABRAHAM

SARAH

3-4



WARNING
ISRAEL
VS
GOD'S GLORY
SEE DEUTERONOMY 33:2

WARNING
US
VS
GOD'S HUMILITY

HOPE FOR
NEW CREATION



IN THE PAST **GOD** SPOKE TO OUR
STORERS IN MANY **DIFFERENT WAYS**, BUT IN THESE
ST DAYS HE HAS SPOKEN TO **US** IN **HIS SON**

Extra tips

#1

LOOK UP OLD TESTAMENT
QUOTATIONS
(THERE ARE A LOT)

#2

THE POINT IS
TO FEEL A BIT
UNCOMFORTABLE,
BUT NOT
FEAR

5-7 PRIESTS & MELCHIZEDEK

8-10 SACRIFICE & COVENANT

WARNING REJECTING JESUS = REJECTING RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

13 ETERNAL PRIEST

DESPITE HARDSHIP & PERSECUTION GOD WILL NOT ABANDON HIS PEOPLE

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the Bible Project

