

Introduction to Hebrews

Circumstances of Writing

The text of Hebrews does not identify its author. What we do know is that the author was a second-generation Christian, for he said he received the confirmed message of Christ from “those who heard” Jesus himself (2:3). Because Paul claimed his gospel was revealed directly by the Lord (1Co 15:8; Gl 1:12), it is doubtful that he was the author of Hebrews. The author was familiar with Timothy, but he referred to him as “our brother” (13:23), rather than as “my true son in the faith,” as did Paul (1Tm 1:2).

Scholars have also proposed the following people as authors: Luke, Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Apollos, Timothy, Philip, Peter, Silas, Jude, and Aristion. Ultimately it does not matter that the identity of the author is now lost. We should be satisfied with the fact that early Christians received the letter as inspired and authoritative Scripture and that its value for Christian discipleship is unquestioned.

The author of Hebrews knew his recipients well, calling them “brothers and sisters” (3:12; 7:5; 10:19; 13:22) and “dearly loved friends” (6:9). Like the writer, they were converts who had heard the gospel through the earliest followers of Christ (2:3). Scholars have speculated that those to whom the book was written were a breakaway group, such as a house church that had separated from the main church. Another theory holds that the recipients were former Jewish priests who had converted to Christianity and were considering

a return to Judaism (at least in conformity to certain practices) to avoid persecution from fellow Jews. Another theory holds that the group was not necessarily Jewish since Gentile Christians also revered the Old Testament as Scripture.

Regarding when the book was written, it is clear that the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70) had not yet occurred. The destruction of the temple would have been mentioned if it had already occurred, for it would have strengthened the letter’s argument about Christ’s sacrifice spelling the end of the temple sacrificial system. The public persecution mentioned in 10:32–34 implies one of two possibilities for dating the book. We know that Roman Emperors Nero and Domitian (in AD 64–68 and 81–82 respectively) persecuted Christians. Most likely, Hebrews was written during the persecution under Nero, perhaps just before the destruction of the temple.

Contribution to the Bible

No other book in the New Testament ties together Old Testament history and practices with the life of Jesus Christ as thoroughly as the book of Hebrews. Just as Jesus Christ taught that the Old Testament was fulfilled in himself (Mt 5:17–18; Lk 24:27), so the author of Hebrews taught that the old covenant was brought to completion in the new covenant (7:20–8:13). Hebrews also shows that because the old covenant has been fulfilled in the new covenant,

prehistory–1900 BC

Abel offers a better sacrifice than Cain.
Abraham moves from Haran to Canaan. **2091**
Sarah conceives at age ninety. **2066**
Abraham offers up Isaac in obedience to God’s command. **2046?**
Isaac blesses Jacob and Esau. **1930?**

1900–1445 BC

Jacob blesses Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. **1859**
Birth of Moses **1526**
Exodus from Egypt and defeat of Pharaoh at the Red Sea **1446**
God’s awesome manifestation and covenant with Israel at Sinai **1446**
Tabernacle is built and dedicated **1445**

the new covenant is “better” (7:22). The new covenant was made superior by the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Structure

In concluding the book of Hebrews, the author wrote, “I urge you to receive this message of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly” (13:22). If the literary style of Hebrews indicates anything, it is that it is a written theological sermon. It is not so much a letter—although it certainly ends like one—because it has no opening subscription, as was the norm with

ancient letters. Hebrews instead begins with an introductory essay about the superiority of Jesus Christ (1:1–4). However, its capacity to encounter the reader’s soul indicates it is more than just a literary essay. Indeed, it has a definite sermonic character since it expounds the Scriptures at length in order to challenge the reader to faith and faithfulness. The sustained development of a complex, holistic theology of covenant indicates that Hebrews is a written theological sermon that discloses the broad sweep of God’s grand redemptive plan for humanity.

Outline

- I. The Superiority of the Son of God (1:1–2:18)
- II. The Superiority of the Son’s Faithfulness (3:1–4:16)
- III. The Superiority of the Son’s Work (5:1–6:20)
- IV. The Superiority of the Son’s Priesthood (7:1–10:39)
- V. The Superiority of the Christian Faith (11:1–12:2)
- VI. The Superiority of the Father’s Way (12:3–29)
- VII. The Superiority of the Christian Life in the Church (13:1–25)

1445–1125 BC

Israel wanders in the wilderness. **1445–1407**
Rahab supports the conquest of Jericho. **1406**
Deborah and Barak defeat the Canaanites. **1320?**
GIDEON 1250–1175?
JEPHTHAH 1200–1150?

1125 BC–AD 95

SAMSON 1120–1060 BC?
SAMUEL 1105–1025 BC?
DAVID 1050–970 BC
Jesus’s death, resurrection, and ascension **AD 33**
Hebrews is first quoted by Clement of Rome
in his letter to the Corinthians. **AD 96**

The Nature of the Son

1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. ²In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe^a through him. ³The Son is the radiance^b of God's glory and the exact expression^c of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins,^d he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.^e ⁴So he became superior to the angels, just as the name he inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The Son Superior to Angels

⁵For to which of the angels did he ever say, **You are my Son; today I have become your Father,**^{f,g} or again,

I will be his Father, and he will be my Son?^h

⁶Again, when he brings his firstborn into the world, he says,

And let all God's angels worship him.^j

⁷And about the angels he says:

He makes his angels winds,^k and his servants^l a fiery flame,^m

⁸but toⁿ the Son:

Your throne, God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of justice.

⁹**You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; this is why God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy beyond your companions.**^{o,p}

¹⁰And:

In the beginning, Lord, you established the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands;

¹¹**they will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like clothing;**

¹²**you will roll them up like a cloak,^q and they will be changed like clothing.**

But you are the same, and your years will never end.^r

¹³Now to which of the angels has he ever said: **Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool?**^s

¹⁴Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve those who are going to inherit salvation?

Warning against Neglect

2 For this reason, we must pay attention all the more to what we have heard, so that we will not drift away. ²For if the message spoken through angels was legally binding^t and every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment,³ how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? This salvation had its beginning when it was spoken of by the Lord, and it was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴At the same time, God also testified by signs and wonders, various miracles, and distributions of gifts from the Holy Spirit according to his will.

Jesus and Humanity

⁵For he has not subjected to angels the world to come that we are talking about. ⁶But someone somewhere has testified:

What is man that you remember him, or the son of man that you care for him?

⁷**You made him lower than the angels for a short time; you crowned him with glory and honor^v**

⁸**and subjected everything under his feet.^w**

^a1:2 Lit *ages* ^b1:3 Or *reflection* ^c1:3 Or *representation, or copy, or reproduction* ^d1:3 Other mss read *for our sins by himself* ^e1:3 Or *he sat down on high at the right hand of the Majesty* ^f1:5 Or *have begotten you* ^g1:5 Ps 2:7 ^h1:5 2Sm 7:14; 1Ch 17:13 ⁱ1:6 Or *When he again* ^j1:6 Dt 32:43 LXX; Ps 97:7 ^k1:7 Or *spirits* ^l1:7 Or *ministers* ^m1:7 Ps 104:4 ⁿ1:8 Or *about* ^o1:9 Or *associates* ^p1:8–9 Ps 45:6–7 ^q1:12 Other mss omit *like a cloak* ^r1:10–12 Ps 102:25–27 ^s1:13 Ps 110:1 ^t2:2 Or *valid, or reliable* ^v2:7 Other mss add *and set him over the works of your hands* ^w2:6–8 Ps 8:4–6 LXX

1:1–2a These verses relate the revelation of Jesus Christ to God's previous revelation to the OT prophets.

1:2b–4 Seven praises start the letter's argument that Jesus Christ and everything connected with him is superior to all that had come before and all that will come after him. (1) Jesus Christ is the **heir** of creation for whom all things have been made. (2) He is the Creator through whom all things have come into existence. (3) He is the **radiance** of the divine glory toward which all of creation looks for fulfillment. (4) He is the **exact expression** of the *nature* of God the Father. (5) He is the "Word" of God, the only prophet of God who is also God himself. (6) He is the priest of God who has provided the perfect sacrifice for all human sins. (7) He is the King

who sits on the throne at the **right hand** of the Father.

1:5–14 Drawing on a series of OT quotations attributed to God, the author demonstrated how God the Father had addressed his Son as divine. God the Father addressed him uniquely as **my Son** (2Sm 7:14; 1Ch 17:13; Ps 2:7), **God** (Ps 45:6–7), and **Lord** (Ps 102:22). Moreover, God the Father attributed divine activities to his Son. He is the **firstborn** and "begotten" Son who was brought into the world so that all the angels must **worship him** (Dt 32:43; Ps 97:7). He is the Son who made the angels **his angels** and **his servants** (Ps 104:4). He is the Son who sits on the divine **throne** and rules with the divine attribute of **righteousness** (Ps 45:6–7). He is the Son who created heaven and earth in the

beginning, and who will remain the same when creation is consummated, because he shares in the divine attribute of the eternal (Ps 102:25–27).

2:1–18 In this chapter the author turned to consider Jesus as a human being. The author uses the fact that the law was **binding** to introduce the first of several strong exhortations in the book (3:7–19; 5:11–6:3; 10:26–31; 12:1–2:14–29). The gospel was verified to its first hearers by **signs and wonders, various miracles, and distributions of gifts from the Holy Spirit** as the church was in its foundational stages.

2:5–9 The author demonstrated that the eternal Son entered creation to become a man and thereby temporarily became **lower than the angels**. Psalm 8, on one level taken

▼ A Biblical View of Angels

by Bruce A. Ware

Angels are created spirit beings. Some of them are holy and some are evil. Both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, the terms translated *angel* refer to one sent with a message or one acting as a messenger. The terms are used of human messengers in some instances (e.g., 1Sm 23:27; 1Kg 19:2; Lk 7:24; 9:52) and often in the Old Testament apply particularly to the angel of the Lord (e.g., Gn 16:7–14; Jdg 6:11–14; 2Sm 24:16; Zch 1:12–13). Most often, however, the terms are used for created spiritual beings (e.g., Ex 23:20; Mt 1:20; 4:11; 25:31,41).

The Origin of Angels

Because all that God creates and does is wholly good (Gn 1:31; Jms 1:17), we must understand angels, in their entire class, as created by God as good. Psalm 148:1–6 expresses praise to God for his creation of all things, and among those things specified are “all his angels” and “all his heavenly armies” (Ps 148:2). Furthermore, Colossians 1:16 makes clear that by Christ all things were created, including things “in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible” (cp. Rm 8:38–39). Also relevant is God’s statement to Job (Jb 38:4–7) indicating that angels (“sons of God”) were present and shouted for joy at the creation of the heavens and earth.

A difficult question concerns how some of the good angels God created have become evil. First, we must understand all fallen angels, in their originally created form, to have been wholly good. This was a goodness they forfeited, presumably, because of their rebellion against God. Two passages in particular lead us to think this is the case. Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4 both speak of angels who departed from God’s purposes and hence received God’s judgment and condemnation. When one adds to this the clear implication from Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 12:9 that demons are the followers of Satan, it seems obvious that these evil spirits, though created good, became evil as they followed their leader’s enticement to sin against their Creator.

The Character of Holy Angels

Less is said in the Bible about the character of unfallen angels than about their activities,

but some aspects of their character are evident.

1. They are personal beings with intelligence, emotions, and volition. We receive insights about their intelligence in 1 Peter 1:12, where they long to know more of God’s salvation plan; in Revelation 17:1–18, where they know and communicate God’s plans; and in Matthew 24:36, where they know much but not everything. Witness to their emotions is seen in Job 38:7, where they rejoice over God’s creation; in Isaiah 6:1–4, where with awe and wonder they cry out “Holy, holy, holy” before God; in Luke 15:10, where they rejoice when sinners repent; and in Revelation 5:11–14, where they worship the Lamb who was slain. The idea that they have their own will is tied to passages such as Hebrews 1:6, where God appeals to their will to worship the Son, and 2 Peter 2:4, with its implication of some angels sinning in their choice to rebel against God.
2. They are spirit beings. Hebrews 1:14 calls angels “ministering spirits.” In Luke 8:2 and 11:24 we see that demons are sometimes referred to as “evil spirits” or “unclean spirits,” so presumably they are spirits by virtue of their being angels. But they can, for specific purposes, take on human form. We see this in Genesis 19:1, when the angels visit Sodom, and in Hebrews 13:2, which notes that one might unknowingly entertain angels.
3. They apparently are not sexual in that they do not marry and hence do not procreate. According to Matthew 22:30, in heaven people, like angels, will not marry or be given in marriage.
4. They exist forever. Luke 20:36 states that angels cannot die.
5. They are powerful (2Th 1:7). In 2 Kings 19:35 one angel sent by God destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, and in Daniel 6:22 an angel shut the lions’ mouths.
6. They are holy. Angels are called “holy ones” and “holy angels” (Jb 5:1; Ps 89:7; Mk 8:38).
7. Although wondrous beings, they are not to be worshiped. In Colossians 2:18 the “worship of angels” is rejected. In

Revelation 19:10 and 22:8–9, John fell down to worship the angel, but the angel said to worship God.

The Functions and Ministry of Holy Angels

Angels are servants of God who surround his presence (Dn 7:9–10; Rv 5:11–14) and carry out his will in various ways on earth (e.g., Gn 32:1; 2Sm 24:16–17). Hebrews 1:14 calls them “ministering spirits.” Specific functions of angels are spoken of throughout the Scriptures.

1. They worship God (e.g., Is 6:1–3; Lk 2:13–14; Rv 5:11–14).
2. They ministered with regard to Jesus during his earthly life. This is seen in Luke 1:11–20, where an angel appeared to Zacharias predicting John’s birth; in Luke 2:26–38, where Gabriel appeared to Mary; in Matthew 1:20, where an angel appeared to Joseph; in Luke 2:8–15, where an angel appeared to the shepherds; in Matthew 2:13,19, where an angel told Joseph to go to Egypt and then back to Israel; in Matthew 4:11, where angels ministered to Jesus at his temptation; in Luke 22:43, where an angel strengthened Jesus in the garden; in Matthew 28:2–8, where an angel rolled away the stone and proclaimed Jesus’s resurrection; and in Acts 1:10–11, where two angels foretold of Jesus’s return.
3. They proclaim God’s word and ordain the law. Evidence of their proclamation is in Luke 1:26–38 and Acts 27:23–24. Their work of ordaining appears in Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19; and Hebrews 2:2.
4. They protect and deliver God’s people as he directs. In Exodus 23:20–23 an angel protected Israel on entering the land. In 2 Kings 19:35 an angel killed 185,000 Assyrians. In Daniel 3:28 an angel delivered

the three Hebrews in the furnace. In Daniel 6:22 an angel closed the lions’ mouths. In Psalm 34:7 the angel of the Lord is said to encamp around those who fear him. In Acts 5:19 and 12:7 an angel delivered the apostles from prison.

5. They bear witness to and long to know more of God’s salvific purposes (1Co 4:9; Eph 3:10; 1Pt 1:12; possibly also 1Co 11:10).
6. They will bear witness when Christ will confess or deny people “before the angels of God” (Lk 12:8–9).
7. Even before the final judgment, they play a role in God’s reward of the righteous and punishment of the wicked. In Luke 16:22 angels take the poor man to Abraham’s bosom. In Acts 12:23 an angel struck Herod dead for not giving glory to God.
8. They will come with Christ at his return to carry out his will—gathering his people and dispensing judgment on the wicked (Mt 13:39–42,49–50; 16:27; 24:30–31; 25:31; 2Th 1:7).
9. They are used by God to defeat evil powers and nations. This is evidenced in Daniel 10 (the intervention of the angel Michael to defeat ungodly forces). It also appears in Daniel 12:1 (Michael will rescue God’s people from great distress) and in Revelation 12:7–9 (Michael and his angels defeat the dragon and his angels).
10. An angel binds Satan during the millennium (Rv 20:1–3).
11. They are stationed at the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem (Rv 21:12). In light of their continuous biblical role of ascribing praise to God, it stands to reason that angels will be among the great heavenly choir singing praises to God forevermore.

For in **subjecting everything** to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. As it is, we do not yet see **everything subjected** to him. ⁹ But we do see Jesus — **made lower than the angels for a short time** so that by God's grace he might taste death for everyone — **crowned with glory and honor** because he suffered death.

¹⁰ For in bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was entirely appropriate that God — for whom and through whom all things exist — should make the pioneer^a of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. ⁸ That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹² saying:

I will proclaim your name
to my brothers and sisters;
I will sing hymns to you
in the congregation.^c

¹³ Again, I will trust in him.^d And again, Here I am with the children God gave me.^e

¹⁴ Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death — that is, the devil — ¹⁵ and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death.

¹⁶ For it is clear that he does not reach out to help angels, but to help Abraham's offspring. ¹⁷ Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters^f pertaining to God, to make atonement^g for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

Our Apostle and High Priest

3 Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. ² He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was in all God's household. ³ For

Jesus is considered worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder has more honor than the house. ⁴ Now every house is built by someone, but the one who built everything is God. ⁵ Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's household, as a testimony to what would be said in the future. ⁶ But Christ was faithful as a Son over his household. And we are that household if we hold on to our confidence and the hope in which we boast.^h

Warning against Unbelief

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

Today, if you hear his voice,

⁸ do not harden your hearts

as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing
in the wilderness,

⁹ where your ancestors tested me,
tried me,

and saw my works¹⁰ for forty years.

Therefore I was provoked to anger
with that generation

and said, "They always go astray
in their hearts,

and they have not known my ways."ⁱ

¹¹ So I swore in my anger,

"They will not enter my rest."^j

¹² Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

¹³ But encourage each other daily, while it is still called **today**, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception. ¹⁴ For we have become participants in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the reality^k that we had at the start.

¹⁵ As it is said:

Today, if you hear his voice,

do not harden your hearts

as in the rebellion.^k

¹⁶ For who heard and rebelled? Wasn't it all who came out of Egypt under Moses? ¹⁷ With whom was God angry for forty years? Wasn't it with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the

^a2:10 Or *source*, or *leader* ^b2:11 Or *father*, or *origin*; lit *all are of one* ^c2:12 Ps 22:22 ^d2:13 2Sm 22:3 LXX; Is 8:17 LXX; 12:2 LXX ^e2:13 Is 8:18 LXX ^f2:17 Lit *things* ^g2:17 Or *propitiation* ^h3:6 Other mss add *firm to the end* ⁱ3:7–11 Ps 95:7–11 ^j3:14 Or *confidence* ^k3:15 Ps 95:7–8

to be a reference to humankind and the dominion conferred on man by God, also applies to the **son of man** as Jesus Christ. Jesus was **crowned with glory and honor** by God because he suffered death for **everyone**.

2:10–18 In these verses the author showed why it was necessary that the eternal Son became a man. First, it was **appropriate** that the Son should have a ministry completed in suffering, which all humans experience, so that he might identify with us and bring **many sons and daughters** into the presence of God. The author quoted three OT verses to show that the Son is present in the gathered church (Ps 22:22), that the Son trusts the Father (Is 8:17), and that the church can come before the Father because it is united with Christ (Is 8:18). Second, the Son

became a man and suffered death so that he could **destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil**. By virtue of Christ's death on our behalf we are freed from the fear of death. Third, the Son became a man and suffered death so that he could serve as a **faithful high priest** in service to God. The only person who can serve as a mediator between God and man is the one who is both God and man.

3:1–4:16 In these chapters the author turned from demonstrating the Son's superiority over the angels to demonstrating that the Son is superior to Moses, the mediator of the law, and Joshua, the conqueror of the promised land.

3:1–6 God had identified Moses as the one who was uniquely **faithful . . . in all God's**

household (see Nm 12:7). His faithfulness was for the sake of showing the superiority of the faithfulness of Christ, since Christ was faithful as a **son over his household**. Jesus was faithful "over" the "household" of which Moses was a part. Jesus, who was faithful in his role of bringing the gospel to those under the condemnation of the law, is therefore **worthy of more glory**.

3:7–19 Having established the superiority of the gospel of Christ to the law of Moses, the author proceeded to explain the meaning of Ps 95. His purpose was to warn his readers that if the punishment for disobedience of the law was severe, then punishment for faithlessness to the gospel would be far worse. The result of such unbelief is divine judgment. They would **not enter** God's **rest**.

wilderness?¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who disobeyed?¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

The Promised Rest

4 Therefore, since the promise to enter his rest remains, let us beware^a that none of you be found to have fallen short.^b ²For we also have received the good news just as they did. But the message they heard did not benefit them, since they were not united with those who heard it in faith.^c ³For we who have believed enter the rest, in keeping with what^d he has said, **So I swore in my anger,**

“They will not enter my rest,”^e

even though his works have been finished since the foundation of the world. ⁴For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in this way: **And on the seventh day God rested from all his works.^f** ⁵Again, in that passage he says, **They will never enter my rest.^g** ⁶Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news did not enter because of disobedience, ⁷he again specifies a certain day — **today.** He specified this speaking through David after such a long time:

**Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.^h**

⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹Therefore, a Sabbath rest remains for God’s people. ¹⁰For the person who has entered his rest has rested from his own works, just as God did from his. ¹¹Let us, then, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall into the same pattern of disobedience.

¹²For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

Our Great High Priest

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens — Jesus the Son of God — let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

Christ, a High Priest

5 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed in matters pertaining to God for the people, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he is also clothed with weakness. ³Because of this, he must make an offering for his own sins as well as for the people. ⁴No one takes this honor on himself; instead, a person is called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵In the same way, Christ did not exalt himself to become a high priest, but God who said to him,

You are my Son;

today I have become your Father,^{i,j}

⁶also says in another place, **You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.^j**

⁷During his earthly life,^k he offered prayers and appeals with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. ⁹After he was perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰and he was declared by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The Problem of Immaturity

¹¹We have a great deal to say about this, and it is difficult to explain, since you have become

^a4:1 Lit fear ^a4:1 Or that any of you might seem to have missed it ^c4:2 Other mss read since it was not united by faith in those who heard ^a4:3 Or rest, just as ^e4:3,5 Ps 95:11 ^f4:4 Gn 2:2 ^g4:5 Ps 95:7–8 ^h5:5 Lit I have begotten you ⁱ5:5 Ps 2:7 ^j5:6 Gn 14:18–20; Ps 110:4 ^k5:7 Lit In the days of his flesh

4:1–16 If the result of unbelief and disobedience to God is exclusion from divine rest, then the result of true faith and faithfulness to God is entrance into everlasting divine rest. Such a rest was not available through the ministry of Joshua in the OT since it was reserved for the ministry of the NT “Joshua,” Jesus. The ministry of Joshua did not bring people Sabbath rest. Only through the superior ministry of Jesus the Son of God may a person enter divine rest. Only through the **great high priest**, who has come from heaven and identified with human beings in their weakness, may we approach the **throne of grace with boldness**.

5:1–6:20 In these chapters the author established the superiority of Jesus as priest over Aaron as priest.

5:1–10 Aaron was the high priest of Israel who had been **called by God**, thus establishing his authority. His purpose as a priest was to offer to God **sacrifices for sins** on behalf of the people, and to **deal gently** with the ignorance and waywardness of the people on behalf of God. The problem with Aaron’s priesthood was Aaron himself; since he was a sinner, he had to **make an offering for his own sins as well as for the people**.

Like Aaron, Jesus was called by God, but according to Ps 110:4, God gave him a unique

calling as **a high priest . . . according to the order of Melchizedek**. Christ’s priesthood was on an entirely different level than that of Aaron. Unlike Aaron, the salvation that Christ brought was eternal.

The author speaks of Jesus as being **perfected** (v. 9; 2:10; 7:28). This is not a reference to *moral* perfection; the author has made clear that Jesus was “without sin” (4:15). Rather, Jesus was perfected in the sense of being qualified for his role as our great high priest.

5:11–6:3 In this section the author paused to consider the theological and moral state of his readers. He expressed concern that they

too lazy to understand.¹² Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. You need milk, not solid food.¹³ Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant.¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature — for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil.

Warning against Falling Away

6 Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God,² teaching about ritual washings,⁴ laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.³ And we will do this if God permits.

⁴ For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age, ⁶ and who have fallen away. This is because, ⁸ to their own harm, they are recrucifying the Son of God and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For the ground that drinks the rain that often falls on it and that produces vegetation useful to those for whom it is cultivated receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and about to be cursed, and at the end will be burned.

⁹ Even though we are speaking this way, dearly loved friends, in your case we are confident of things that are better and that pertain to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love^c you demonstrated for his name by serving the saints

— and by continuing to serve them.¹¹ Now we desire each of you to demonstrate the same diligence for the full assurance of your hope until the end,¹² so that you won't become lazy but will be imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and perseverance.

Inheriting the Promise

¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself: **¹⁴ I will indeed bless you, and I will greatly multiply you.**¹⁵ And so, after waiting patiently, Abraham obtained the promise. ¹⁶ For people swear by something greater than themselves, and for them a confirming oath ends every dispute. ¹⁷ Because God wanted to show his unchangeable purpose even more clearly to the heirs of the promise, he guaranteed it with an oath,¹⁸ so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain. ²⁰ Jesus has entered there on our behalf as a forerunner, because he has become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The Greatness of Melchizedek

7 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, met Abraham and blessed him as he returned from defeating the kings,² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means king of righteousness, then also, king of Salem, meaning king of peace.³ Without father, mother, or

^a6:2 Or about baptisms ^b6:6 Or while ^c6:10 Other mss read labor of love ^d6:14 Gn 22:17

might not understand the **difficult** doctrines he was explaining (5:11). Because of their immaturity, they needed to be warned about failure and encouraged toward maturity. The author listed six basic principles of the elementary message about Christ that serve as the foundation of the Christian faith and life. These principles may be divided into three groups of two each. (1) **Repentance** from sinful actions and **faith** toward God (6:1) are the two sides of conversion that begin the Christian life. (2) The baptism of new believers who have received the gospel and **laying on of hands** for Christian leaders (6:2) to proclaim the gospel are fundamental components of church life. (3) The good news of the **resurrection** and the prospect of **eternal judgment** (6:2) are essential components in the gospel that the church preaches.

6:4–20 Verses 6–9 have been the subject of much debate. There are several possible interpretations regarding the author's intentions and the identity of those **who have fallen away**. First, some say those who had "fallen away" were genuine Christians who had forsaken Jesus and reverted to Judaism. A second view says they were hearers who

had understood the gospel but had not become true believers. A third interpretation identifies the **things that are better and that pertain to salvation** as sanctification rather than justification. A fourth interpretation holds that the writer is speaking about apostasy as an unfulfilled possibility rather than a concrete reality.

The fourth interpretation seems most acceptable. The author was not detailing a doctrine of apostasy; he was calling his readers to progress toward maturity. Like Abraham, who obtained the promise of God **after waiting patiently**, the readers should **seize the hope** before them because God has **guaranteed** his promise with an **oath**. And because Jesus has entered the **inner sanctuary** of God's presence, the Christian has a sure and firm **anchor for the soul**.

7:1–10:39 These chapters are an extended discourse on the superiority of the priesthood of Christ as demonstrated by the superiority of his order, his covenant, his ministry, and his sacrifice.

7:1–19 The Levitical priesthood of the Jews was grounded in the **order of Aaron**, but the priesthood of Jesus Christ is grounded in the **order of Melchizedek**. The mysterious

Melchizedek appeared in Gn 14:18–20 and was not mentioned again until the messianic promise was made in Ps 110. The author of Hebrews drew from the OT witness to show that the order of Melchizedek was eternal in origin and scope. Melchizedek was a type of Christ reflecting the divine attributes of eternity, righteousness, peace, and sovereignty. His eternity is evident in that he was a **priest forever**—without record of beginning or end. His righteousness is evident in his name since Melchizedek is Hebrew for **king of righteousness**. His peace is evident in the fact that he was also declared to be the **king of Salem**, which means **king of peace**.

Finally, Melchizedek's sovereignty was recognized by **Abraham**, who paid this priest-king a tithe of all he had when he returned victorious from war. The Levitical priesthood was inferior to that of Melchizedek because **the inferior is blessed by the superior**. The sovereignty of Melchizedek is reflected in the sovereignty of the Son of God, because while the Levitical priesthood was authorized by a **legal regulation**, the priesthood of Christ was authorized by **the power of an indestructible life**.

▼ Christ as Priest

A Priest: Appointed by God to offer gifts and sacrifices to God on behalf of his people for their sins and out of gratitude for God's provision and grace; a mediator between God and his people (*Ex 28–29; Lv 9:7; Heb 5:1*).

WHO WAS AN OLD TESTAMENT PRIEST?

REQUIREMENTS

- A Levite, a descendant of Levi
- Specifically, a descendant of Aaron
- Holy to the Lord
 - Physically without blemish
 - Ceremonially clean
 - Morally clean by virtue of prescribed sacrifices

DUTIES

- Offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people
- Bless the people on behalf of God
- Teach the people the law of God

WHO WAS AN OLD TESTAMENT HIGH PRIEST?

- A specific descendant of Aaron
- Appointed by God
- Had the responsibility of entering the most holy place once a year to make atonement for the people's sins on the Day of Atonement

WHO WERE SOME OF THE HIGH PRIESTS?

- **Aaron** (*Ex 28:1; Heb 5:1–4*)
- **Eleazar** (*Nm 20:25–28*)
- **Phinehas** (*Jdg 20:27–28*)
- **Eli** (*1Sm 1:9*)
- **Ahimelech** (*1Sm 21:1*)
- **Abiathar** (*1Sm 23:9; Mk 2:26*)
- **Zadok** (*1Kg 2:35*)
- **Jehoiada** (*2Kg 12:2*)
- **Hilkiah** (*2Kg 22:8*)
- **Joshua** (*Hg 1:1; Zch 3:1*)
- **Eliashib** (*Neh 3:1*)

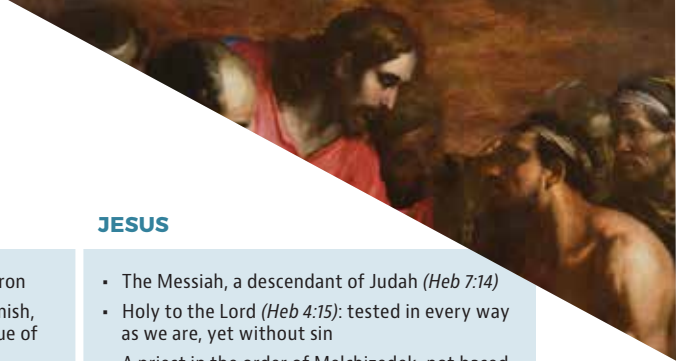


AARON

Aaron, along with his descendants after him, was appointed by God for the priestly ministry of offering sacrifices to God on behalf of the people and for blessing the people in the name of the Lord.

PHINEHAS

Phinehas was zealous with the Lord's zeal among the Israelites when he put a man and woman to death for blatant disobedience against God (*Nm 25:1–13*).



REQUIREMENTS

- A Levite, specifically, a descendant of Aaron
- Holy to the Lord: physically without blemish, ceremonially clean, morally clean by virtue of prescribed sacrifices

JESUS

- The Messiah, a descendant of Judah (*Heb 7:14*)
- Holy to the Lord (*Heb 4:15*): tested in every way as we are, yet without sin
- A priest in the order of Melchizedek, not based on physical genealogy but on the power of his indestructible, resurrection life (*Heb 7:15–17*)

WHO WAS MELCHIZEDEK?

- Genesis 14:17–20; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7
- Name means “king of righteousness”; king of Salem means “king of peace”
- A priest of God Most High
- Blessed Abraham and received a tenth of Abraham’s possessions

- Appears in Genesis (a book of beginnings, genealogies, births, and deaths) without father, mother, or genealogy, without a beginning of days nor end of life
- A king-priest who remains a priest forever, foreshadowing the Son of God

HOW WAS JESUS THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST?

THE LEVITICAL HIGH PRIEST

Mediator of the old covenant (*Heb 9:1–10*)

Offered a sacrifice first for his own sin (*Heb 5:3*)

Appointed by God according to physical descent from Aaron (*Heb 5:4*)

Remained a priest until death (*Heb 7:23*)

Offered sacrifices daily for the sins of the people and himself (*Heb 7:27*)

Entered the most holy place only once a year with the blood of an animal to make atonement for himself and the people, but this sacrifice could never perfect the worshiper’s conscience (*Heb 9:7,9*)

Offered the same yearly sacrifices that could never perfect the worshiper (*Heb 10:1*)

Stood day after day offering the same ineffectual sacrifices (*Heb 10:11*)

JESUS THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Mediator of a new, better covenant (*Heb 9:11–28*)

Tempted in every way, yet without sin (*Heb 4:15*)

Appointed by God not according to physical descent but in the order of Melchizedek (*Heb 5:5–6*)

Remains a priest forever (*Heb 7:24*)

Offered himself once for all for the sins of the people (*Heb 7:27*)

Entered the most holy place in heaven once for all with his own blood to make eternal atonement for the people and to cleanse their consciences from dead works to serve the living God (*Heb 9:14*)

Offered himself once for all to sanctify the worshiper (*Heb 10:10*)

Offered himself as the one effectual sacrifice for sins and sat down at the right hand of God (*Heb 10:12*)

The old-covenant priests were appointed by God according to lineage, being descendants of Aaron. They were to be holy and set apart to the Lord. The priesthood of Aaron served its purpose for a time but could never accomplish the ultimate goal of sanctification for the worshiper because of sin in both the priest and the people. Therefore, we need a priest who is holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens: **Jesus** (*Heb 7:26*). This sinless Son of God is a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek (*Heb 7:17*). He is the unblemished Lamb of God (*Jn 1:29,36*) who offers himself once for all as the atoning sacrifice for the worshiper (*Heb 10:10*). He has sat down at the right hand of the Father in heaven, having completed his sacrificial work (*Heb 10:12*). As our great high priest, Jesus reconciles us to God. His perfect righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification. He intercedes for us before the Father (*Heb 7:25; 9:24*) and prays for us (*Lk 22:31–32; Jn 17*). In him we have forgiveness for sin and peace with God.

genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

⁴ Now consider how great this man was: even Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the plunder to him. ⁵ The sons of Levi who receive the priestly office have a command according to the law to collect a tenth from the people — that is, from their brothers and sisters — though they have also descended from Abraham. ⁶ But one without this^a lineage collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. ⁷ Without a doubt, the inferior is blessed by the superior. ⁸ In the one case, men who will die receive a tenth, but in the other case, Scripture testifies that he lives. ⁹ And in a sense Levi himself, who receives a tenth, has paid a tenth through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still within his ancestor⁸ when Melchizedek met him.

A Superior Priesthood

¹¹ Now if perfection came through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the law), what further need was there for another priest to appear, said to be according to the order of Melchizedek and not according to the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must be a change of law as well. ¹³ For the one these things are spoken about belonged to a different tribe. No one from it has served at the altar. ¹⁴ Now it is evident that our Lord came from Judah, and Moses said nothing about that tribe concerning priests.

¹⁵ And this becomes clearer if another priest like Melchizedek appears, ¹⁶ who did not become a priest based on a legal regulation about physical^c descent but based on the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it has been testified:

**You are a priest forever
according to the order
of Melchizedek.**^d

¹⁸ So the previous command is annulled because it was weak and unprofitable ¹⁹ (for the law perfected nothing), but a better hope is

introduced, through which we draw near to God.

²⁰ None of this happened without an oath. For others became priests without an oath, ²¹ but he became a priest with an oath made by the one who said to him:

**The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever.”^d**

²² Because of this oath, Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant.

²³ Now many have become Levitical priests, since they are prevented by death from remaining in office. ²⁴ But because he remains forever, he holds his priesthood permanently. ²⁵ Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them.

²⁶ For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do — first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all time when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak, but the promise of the oath, which came after the law, appoints a Son, who has been perfected forever.

A Heavenly Priesthood

8 Now the main point of what is being said is this: We have this kind of high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ² a minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that was set up by the Lord and not man. ³ For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; therefore, it was necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. ⁴ Now if he were on earth, he wouldn't be a priest, since there are those^e offering the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵ These serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was warned when he was about to complete the tabernacle. For God said, **Be careful that you**

^a7:6 Lit *their* ^b7:10 Lit *still in his father's loins* ^c7:16 Or *fleshly* ^d7:17,21 Ps 110:4 ^e8:4 Other mss read *priests*

7:20–8:13 The author addressed next the authorizing sources of the two priesthoods. Citing Jr 31:31–34, the author noted the old covenant between God and Israel was dependent on the oath of man; unfortunately, **they did not continue** in this covenant. But the new covenant promised through Jeremiah was different, because that oath was made entirely by God. Because God swore to the new covenant, it was eternally guaranteed. Because of the divine oath, the new covenant is **a better covenant**.

The priesthood based on the old covenant was filled with priests who could not remain in office because they died, but the new covenant priest **always lives to intercede**. The old covenant priesthood was filled with priests who were **weak** (7:28), but the new

covenant priest was **perfected forever** through Jesus's obedient suffering. The old covenant priest had to **offer sacrifices every day**, but the new covenant priest offered a

sacrifice **once for all time**. The old covenant priest sacrificed for both himself and his people, but the new covenant priest, being sinless, **offered himself** on behalf of the people.

#88 99 Essential Christian Truths

GOD IS TRANSCENDENT

God's transcendence refers to the fact that he is distinct from and independent of his created world. He is transcendent over us with regard to his greatness and power as well as his goodness and purity. The implication of this doctrine is that God is inherently superior to humanity: His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Is 55:8–9). When God saves us, he restores us so that we can fulfill our human purpose. This does not mean that we become God or that distinctions between God and humanity are obliterated. Understanding God's transcendence evokes awe and wonder at his goodness and power.

make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain.^A ⁶But Jesus has now obtained a superior ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been established on better promises.

A Superior Covenant

⁷For if that first covenant had been flawless, there would have been no occasion for a second one. ⁸But finding fault with his people,^B he says:^C

See, the days are coming,
says the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah —
⁹not like the covenant
that I made with their ancestors
on the day I took them by the hand
to lead them out of the land of Egypt.
I showed no concern for them,
says the Lord,
because they did not continue
in my covenant.

¹⁰For this is the covenant
that I will make with the house
of Israel
after those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws into their minds
and write them on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

¹¹And each person will not teach
his fellow citizen,^D
and each his brother or sister, saying,
“Know the Lord,”
because they will all know me,
from the least to the greatest of them.

¹²For I will forgive their wrongdoing,
and I will never again remember
their sins.^{E,F}

¹³By saying a new covenant, he has declared that the first is obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old is about to pass away.

Old Covenant Ministry

9 Now the first covenant also had regulations for ministry and an earthly sanctuary. ²For a tabernacle was set up, and in the first room, which is called the holy place, were the lampstand, the table, and the presentation loaves. ³Behind the second curtain was a tent

called the most holy place. ⁴It had the gold altar of incense and the ark of the covenant, covered with gold on all sides, in which was a gold jar containing the manna, Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵The cherubim of glory were above the ark overshadowing the mercy seat. It is not possible to speak about these things in detail right now.

⁶With these things prepared like this, the priests enter the first room repeatedly, performing their ministry. ⁷But the high priest alone enters the second room, and he does that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. ⁸The Holy Spirit was making it clear that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed while the first tabernacle was still standing. ⁹This is a symbol for the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the worshiper's conscience. ¹⁰They are physical regulations and only deal with food, drink, and various washings imposed until the time of the new order.

New Covenant Ministry

¹¹But Christ has appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come. ⁶In the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation), ¹²he entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow, sprinkling those who are defiled, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse our^A consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God?

¹⁵Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant,¹ so that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance, because a death has taken place for redemption from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. ¹⁶Where a will exists, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷For a will is valid only when people die, since it is never in effect while the one who made it is living. ¹⁸That is why even the first covenant was inaugurated with blood. ¹⁹For when every command had been proclaimed

^A8:5 Ex 25:40 ^B8:8 Lit *with them* ^C8:8 Other mss read *finding fault, he says to them* ^D8:11 Other mss read *neighbor* ^E8:12 Other mss add *and their lawless deeds* ^F8:8–12 Jr 31:31–34 ^G9:11 Other mss read *that are to come* ^H9:14 Other mss read *your* ^I9:15 The Gk word used here can be translated covenant, will, or testament, also in vv. 16,17,18.

9:1–28 The author turned his attention to a comparison of the ministries of the old and new priesthoods. The **regulations for ministry** given through the old covenant were for an **earthly sanctuary**. The sacrificial ministry of the old priesthood was unable to **perfect the worshiper's**

conscience. The sacrificial ministry of Christ is able to **cleanse our consciences**. Christ's ministry is superior because he does not enter an earthly sanctuary, but into **heaven itself**. Unlike the high priest who entered annually into the most holy place, Christ entered into the most holy place **once for**

all time. Unlike the old priesthood that offered the blood of animals, Christ offered **his own blood**. Unlike the old priesthood that offered sacrifices continually without effect, the blood of Christ obtained eternal redemption.

by Moses to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats,^a along with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll itself and all the people,²⁰ saying, **This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.**²¹ In the same way, he sprinkled the tabernacle and all the articles of worship with blood.²² According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

²³ Therefore, it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves to be purified with better sacrifices than these.²⁴ For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model^c of the true one) but into heaven itself, so that he might now appear in the presence of God for us.²⁵ He did not do this to offer himself many times, as the high priest enters the sanctuary yearly with the blood of another.²⁶ Otherwise, he would have had to suffer many times since the foundation of the world. But now he has appeared one time, at the end of the ages, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of himself.²⁷ And just as it is appointed for people to die once — and after this, judgment —²⁸ so also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but^d to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The Perfect Sacrifice

10 Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the reality itself of those things, it can never perfect the worshipers by the same sacrifices they continually offer year after year.² Otherwise, wouldn't they have stopped being offered, since the worshipers, purified once and for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?³ But in the sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year after year.⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵ Therefore, as he was coming into the world, he said:

**You did not desire sacrifice
and offering,
but you prepared a body for me.**

^a9:19 Some mss omit *and goats* ^b9:20 Ex 24:8 ^c9:24 Or *antitype*, or *figure* ^d9:28 Lit *time, apart from sin*,
^e10:5–7 Ps 40:6–8 ^f10:9 Other mss add *God* ^g10:12 Or *offering one sacrifice for sins, sat down forever at the right hand of God* ^h10:16–17 Jr 31:33–34 ⁱ10:20 Or *opened*

**6 You did not delight
in whole burnt offerings
and sin offerings.**

**7 Then I said, "See —
it is written about me
in the scroll —
I have come to do your will, God."^e**

⁸ After he says above, **You did not desire or delight in sacrifices and offerings, whole burnt offerings and sin offerings** (which are offered according to the law),⁹ he then says, **See, I have come to do your will.**^f He takes away the first to establish the second.¹⁰ By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time.

¹¹ Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins.¹² But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.¹³ He is now waiting until his enemies are made his footstool.¹⁴ For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified.¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. For after he says:

**16 This is the covenant I will make
with them
after those days,
the Lord says,**

**I will put my laws on their hearts
and write them on their minds,**

**17 and I will never again remember
their sins and their lawless acts.^h**

¹⁸ Now where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

Exhortations to Godliness

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus —²⁰ he has inauguratedⁱ for us a new and living way through the curtain (that is, through his flesh) —²¹ and since we have a great high priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.²³ Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful.²⁴ And let us

10:1–18 The author in these verses focused on the superiority of the sacrifice of Christ. The old sacrifices were only a **shadow** of the blessed realities that come from the personal sacrifice of Christ. Citing Ps 40:6–8, the author demonstrated that God was no longer interested in the **whole burnt offerings and sin offerings** of the old covenant. The old sacrifices had to be offered continually, and they did not accomplish anything beyond ritual purification because

they could not **take away sins**. Jesus offered **one sacrifice for sins forever** by offering himself. Afterward, he sat down at the throne of God. By his blood atonement, he has **perfected forever** those who are sanctified.

10:19–39 The author's exhortation to faithfulness contains commands, a warning, an encouraging reminder, a promise, and an expression of confidence. Due to the **boldness** that believers have to enter the divine

presence through the perfect sacrifice of Christ, the author commands his readers to: (1) **draw near** to God with assurance, (2) **hold on** to their confession without wavering, and (3) **consider one another** and not forsake the gathering of the church. The warning is a reminder that there is no effective sacrifice for sin apart from that provided by Christ. If Christians turn their backs on Jesus, they have no hope—only the expectation of terror.

▼ The New Covenant



COVENANTS OF SCRIPTURE	RECIPIENTS	COMMANDS	PROMISES/ CONDITIONS	COVENANT SIGN
Creation Covenant (Gn 1–3)	Adam and Eve	Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it; do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil	Eternal life for obedience; death for disobedience (including spiritual alienation, exile from the garden)	
Noahic Covenant (Gn 6–9)	Noah and all his descendants and every living creature	Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and rule it; do not eat meat with its lifeblood in it; do not murder	Never again shall all life be destroyed by a flood permanent covenant (Gn 9:16)	Rainbow
Abrahamic Covenant (Gn 12; 15; 17)	Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants	Keep the covenant; circumcise every male	Land (Canaan); offspring (nations and kings); blessing (a great name and blessing to others) permanent covenant (Gn 17:7)	Circumcision
Mosaic (Old) Covenant (Ex 19–24)	The people of Israel	Keep the covenant; obey the law (Ten Commandments on tablets and other laws)	Blessing for obedience; curse for disobedience (agricultural plight, military defeat, exile from the land)	The Sabbath
Davidic Covenant (2Sm 7; Ps 89)	David and his descendants	Keep the covenant; obey the law	A great name; stability for God's people; an eternal house, kingdom, and throne permanent covenant (2Sm 23:5)	
New Covenant (Jr 31:31–34; Ezk 36–37; Lk 22:14–20; Heb 8–10)	Believers in the Messiah; Gentile believers are branches grafted onto the tree of Israel	Repentance and faith	A new heart indwelt by God's Holy Spirit and having God's teaching within, written on hearts instead of tablets; cleansing and forgiveness of sin; a Davidic king forever permanent covenant (Ezk 37:26)	The cross (Lord's Supper)

consider one another in order to provoke love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Warning against Deliberate Sin

²⁶ For if we deliberately go on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire about to consume the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who disregarded the law of Moses died without mercy, based on the testimony of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment do you think one will deserve who has trampled on the Son of God, who has regarded as profane^a the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know the one who has said,

Vengeance belongs to me;
I will repay,^{b,c}

and again,

The Lord will judge his people.^d

³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

³² Remember the earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to taunts and afflictions, and at other times you were companions of those who were treated that way.³⁴ For you sympathized with the prisoners^e and accepted with joy the confiscation of your possessions, because you know that you yourselves have a better and enduring possession.^f ³⁵ So don't throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.³⁶ For you need endurance, so that after you have done God's will, you may receive what was promised.

³⁷ For yet in a very little while,
the Coming One will come
and not delay.

³⁸ But my righteous one^g will live
by faith;
and if he draws back,
I have no pleasure^h in him.ⁱ

³⁹ But we are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and are saved.

Living by Faith

11 Now faith is the reality^j of what is hoped for, the proof^k of what is not seen.² For by this our ancestors were approved.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was^l created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.^m

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken away, and so he did not experience death. **He was not to be found because God took him away.**ⁿ For before he was taken away, he was approved as one who pleased God.⁶ Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

⁷ By faith Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to deliver his family. By faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and set out for a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going.⁹ By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise.¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

¹¹ By faith even Sarah herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she^o considered that the one who had promised was faithful.¹² Therefore, from one man — in fact, from one as good as dead — came offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and as innumerable as the grains of sand along the seashore.

¹³ These all died in faith, although they had not received the things that were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth.¹⁴ Now those who say such things make it clear that

^a10:29 Or ordinary ^b10:30 Other mss add *says the Lord* ^c10:30 Dt 32:35 ^d10:30 Dt 32:36 ^e10:34 Other mss read *sympathized with my imprisonment* ^f10:34 Other mss add *in heaven* ^g10:38 Other mss read *the righteous one*

^h10:38 Lit *my soul has no pleasure* ⁱ10:37–38 Is 26:20 LXX; Hab 2:3–4 ^j11:1 Or *assurance* ^k11:1 Or *conviction* ^l11:3 Or

the worlds were, or the ages were ^m11:3 Or *so that what is seen was made out of what was not visible* ⁿ11:5 Gn 5:21–24

^o11:11 Or *By faith Abraham, even though he was past age — and Sarah herself was barren — received the ability to procreate since he*

11:1–40 This chapter compares the faith of the OT fathers with the faith exercised by Christian believers. Faith is defined as **the reality of what is hoped for and the proof of what is not seen**. Faith is not fleeting but substantial enough to generate confidence. The Greek word for “proof” indicates an inner conviction that is not based on visible

matters. **To please God** requires **faith**. One **must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him**. He is there and he responds.

Throughout the chapter, the author provided examples of people in the OT who exercised faith. He focused most heavily on **Abraham** and **Moses**. To complete the list

with a crescendo (vv. 32–40), he recounted an inspiring litany of the fruit of faith displayed in the virtuous life, faithful death, and anticipated resurrection of numerous OT heroes. Although their faith was **approved**, they did not receive what God had **promised**. The purpose of this delay was to ensure that they would not be perfected apart from Jesus Christ.

they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had an opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But they now desire a better place — a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He received the promises and yet he was offering his one and only son, ¹⁸ the one to whom it had been said, **Your offspring^a will be traced through Isaac.** ¹⁹ He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead; therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking.^c

²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and **he worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.** ²² By faith Joseph, as he was nearing the end of his life, mentioned^d the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions concerning his bones.

²³ By faith Moses, after he was born, was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they didn't fear the king's edict. ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter ²⁵ and chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. ²⁶ For he considered reproach for the sake of Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since he was looking ahead to the reward.

²⁷ By faith he left Egypt behind, not being afraid of the king's anger, for Moses persevered as one who sees him who is invisible.

²⁸ By faith he instituted the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch the Israelites. ²⁹ By faith they crossed the Red Sea as though they were on dry land. When the Egyptians attempted to do this, they were drowned.

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after being marched around by the Israelites for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies in peace and didn't perish with those who disobeyed.

³² And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, ³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms,

administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their dead, raised to life again. Other people were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned,^e they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. ³⁸ The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us.

The Call to Endurance

12 Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, ² keeping our eyes on Jesus,⁶ the pioneer and perfecter^d of our faith. For the joy that lay before him,¹ he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Fatherly Discipline

³ For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up. ⁴ In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons:

My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly or lose heart when you are reproved by him,

⁶ for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and punishes every son he receives.¹

⁷ Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline?⁸ But if you are without discipline — which all receive^c — then you

^a11:18 Lit seed ^b11:18 Gn 21:12 ^c11:19 Or back, as a foreshadowing, or as a type ^d11:21 Gn 47:31 ^e11:22 Or remembered ^f11:37 Other mss add they were tempted, ^g12:2 Or us, looking to Jesus ^h12:2 Or the founder and completer, or the source and perfecter ⁱ12:2 Or who instead of the joy lying before him ^j12:6 Pr 3:11–12 ^k12:8 Lit discipline, of which all have become participants

12:1–2 Because Jesus Christ is the **pioneer and perfecter** of the Christian faith, the author called on Christians to keep their eyes on Jesus. The Christian who has faith will **lay aside** every sinful weight and **run** toward Christ. Just as Jesus **endured the cross, despising the shame**, in order to attain the joy of rejoining the Father on his

throne, so should Christians run their race with **endurance**.

12:3–13 The Son became a human being in order to unite himself with his believing brothers and sisters. The Son can then bring believers into the presence of the Father, who will discipline them as **sons**. Citing Pr 3:11–12, the author argued that

just as the readers have accepted discipline from their **human fathers**, so too should they receive discipline from the **Father of spirits**. God does not discipline his sons to harm them, but to bless them. The benefit of the Father's discipline is fellowship in his **holiness** and bearing the **peaceful fruit of righteousness**.

are illegitimate children and not sons.⁹ Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live?

¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees,¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated^A but healed instead.

Warning against Rejecting God's Grace

¹⁴ Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness — without it no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and defiling many. ¹⁶ And make sure that there isn't any immoral^B or irreverent person like Esau, who sold his birthright in exchange for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that later, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, even though he sought it with tears, because he didn't find any opportunity for repentance.

¹⁸ For you have not come to what could be touched, to a blazing fire, to darkness, gloom, and storm,¹⁹ to the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of words. Those who heard it begged that not another word be spoken to them,²⁰ for they could not bear what was commanded: **If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.**^{C21} The appearance was so terrifying that Moses said, **I am trembling with fear.**^D ²² Instead, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels, a festive

gathering,²³ to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written^E in heaven, to a Judge, who is God of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect,²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel.

²⁵ See to it that you do not reject the one who speaks. For if they did not escape when they rejected him who warned them on earth, even less will we if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven. ²⁶ His voice shook the earth at that time, but now he has promised, **Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.**^F ²⁷ This expression, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what can be shaken — that is, created things — so that what is not shaken might remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe,²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

Final Exhortations

13 Let brotherly love continue.² Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it.³ Remember those in prison, as though you were in prison with them, and the mistreated,⁶ as though you yourselves were suffering bodily.⁴ Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.⁵ Keep your life free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for he himself has said, **I will never leave you or abandon you.**⁶ Therefore, we may boldly say,

**The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?'**

^A12:13 Or so that the lame will not be turned aside ^B12:16 Or sexually immoral ^C12:20 Ex 19:12 ^D12:21 Dt 9:19 ^E12:23 Or registered ^F12:26 Hg 2:6 ^G13:3 Or tortured ^H13:3 Or mistreated, since you are also in a body ^I13:5 Dt 31:6 ^J13:6 Ps 118:6

12:14–29 The church does not exist on Mount Sinai, **terrifying** to the Israelites in both what they heard and saw. Rather, the church is moving toward **Mount Zion** where it should dwell in the presence of God, Jesus, angels, and the righteous people who have been perfected by the **sprinkled blood** of Christ. The author urges the readers to persevere in faith. Though God will shake heaven and earth, believers can trust they are **receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken**.

13:1–25 In the final chapter of the book, the author addressed the benefits and responsibilities of life lived in the church.

13:1–6 Under the general theme of allowing **brotherly love** to reign within the church, the author addressed five specific activities in which Christians should engage: (1) **show hospitality** toward strangers, (2) visit **those in prison**, (3) minister to the mistreated, (4) honor **marriage**, and (5) **free** themselves from the love of money.

13:7–19 The author addressed seven specific ways in which Christians should revere church leaders. (1) Christians should **observe** the lives of their leaders and imitate their faith. (2) Christians should remember that Christ is always the same and judge every teaching according to the gospel. (3) Christians should recognize their church may not be appreciated by the world because the Christian community is gathered to worship their Lord, whom the world despises. (4) Christians should continually offer their own **sacrifice of praise** in appreciation for the sacrifice of Christ by confessing his name. (5) The church should be active in doing good works and sharing with one another. (6) Christians should **obey** their leaders and **submit** to them, because they are accountable to God for caring for Christian souls. (7) Christians should **pray** for their leaders to have clear consciences, conducting themselves with honor in everything.

#89 99 Essential Christian Truths

RESURRECTION

Both the Old and New Testaments teach that one day believers will experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Is 26:19; Ezk 37:12–14; Jn 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. Because Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Rm 8:22–23; Php 3:20–21). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

⁷ Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. ⁹ Don't be led astray by various kinds of strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be established by grace and not by food regulations, since those who observe them have not benefited. ¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who worship at the tabernacle do not have a right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the most holy place by the high priest as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. ¹² Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate, so that he might sanctify^a the people by his own blood. ¹³ Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing his disgrace. ¹⁴ For we do not have an enduring city here; instead, we seek the one to come. ¹⁵ Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ Don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices. ¹⁷ Obey your leaders^b and submit to them, since they keep watch over

your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. ¹⁸ Pray for us, for we are convinced that we have a clear conscience, wanting to conduct ourselves honorably in everything. ¹⁹ And I urge you all the more to pray^c that I may be restored to you very soon.

Benediction and Farewell

²⁰ Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus — the great Shepherd of the sheep — through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ equip^d you with everything good to do his will, working in us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.^e Amen.

²² Brothers and sisters, I urge you to receive this message of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. ²³ Be aware that our brother Timothy has been released. If he comes soon enough, he will be with me when I see you. ²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who are from Italy send you greetings. ²⁵ Grace be with you all.

^a13:12 Or *set apart, or consecrate* ^b13:17 Or *rulers* ^c13:19 Lit *to do this* ^d13:21 Or *perfect* ^e13:21 Other mss omit *and ever*

13:20–25 Recounting the sacrificial work of Christ, the author prayed that God would **equip** them to do his will. He ended his message with a blessing: **Grace be with you all.**