

## THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

A Series of Lessons by  
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## THE BOOK OF HEBREWS LESSON 1

### JESUS: THE ULTIMATE REVELATION OF GOD Introduction to Hebrews and Hebrews 1

#### Introduction to the Book of Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews has for centuries been a bit mysterious. From very early in church history there have been questions regarding the authorship of the book, the audience for whom it was first written, and the time of writing. You can find details on these questions by reading any good Bible dictionary or commentary on the book of Hebrews. (I recommend *Hebrews*, by Donald Hagner, in the New International Biblical Commentary, published by Hendrickson, 1990). Addressing these questions here in detail is not necessary. For understanding the comments made in these lessons, however, be aware that the following views are being assumed.

Authorship: The traditional association with the Apostle Paul is not supported by anything in the text of Hebrews itself. For reasons explained in many good commentaries and New Testament Introductions, authorship by Paul is most unlikely. Almost certainly someone else is the author, but more than that cannot be said with confidence. For purposes of this series, therefore, the author is considered unknown.

Audience: Probably the first people to read and hear this book were Jewish Christians. This seems probable because that first audience was apparently being tempted to go back to Judaism to avoid further persecution for their Christian faith. Perhaps these Jewish Christians were living in Rome (see 13:24), but this is less certain. Although originally intended for Jewish Christians, the message of Hebrews is relevant and vital for all Christians of all times. In studying Hebrews (and other books of the Bible) it is usually very helpful to consider how the message fit the needs of the first people for whom it was written, but we should never stop there. If the Bible is to give us strength and guidance, we need to consider also how the message speaks to our needs, our temptations, weaknesses, or challenges.

Date: Hebrews was probably written before 70 A.D., when the Romans crushed a Jewish revolt and destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. It is difficult to believe that the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the decisive end of the sacrificial procedures would have been ignored by this writer, who wanted to make the point in the strongest possible way that the Jewish Christians should not go back to the inferior provisions of the old covenant. The events of 70 A.D. would have been too powerful an argument in his favor for the writer to have omitted.

Purpose: Although some speculation is involved in questions of authorship, audience, and date, the purpose of Hebrews is quite clear and can be summarized in one word: encouragement. Specifically the encouragement is to go on with Christ and not go back to Judaism (in the case of the first readers). This encouragement applies to every Christian, regardless of background or present circumstances. The reader who fully grasps the message of Hebrews will know good reasons to be encouraged and even to be bold in the face of difficult circumstances or opposition. Although Hebrews is theologically profound and, in some ways, one of the more difficult books in the New Testament, its purpose is simple and consistent throughout.

Strategy of Hebrews: The writer of Hebrews aims to achieve his purpose of encouraging the readers/hearers by focusing attention on three main points:

1. Who Jesus is
2. What Jesus has done
3. What our response needs to be.

Hebrews, from the very beginning, rivets our attention on the person of Christ--fully God and fully man, the perfect revelation of the will of God the Father, the perfect high priest who intercedes for us with God. The better we know who our Savior is, the greater will be our confidence in his salvation. If we know who Jesus is and what he has done, we will be encouraged and we will be able to respond as we should. [I think it would be good to remind the class of this three-point 'strategy' every Sunday.]

Who Jesus is, is truly inseparable from the message of what he has done. Hebrews places great emphasis on the finished work of the cross which secures our forgiveness and fellowship with God. The continued intercession of Christ (7:25) is also based on the previously completed work of redemption. The once-for-all nature of the cross is the foundation event of the past by which the Christian can confidently face the future--whatever it holds. The future must ultimately be good for those who trust in this one event of the past.

In response to who Jesus is and what he has done, we are called upon to continue in faithfulness to him, paying whatever price is necessary to remain faithful. If Jesus is who the book of Hebrews says he is, and if he has done what this book says he has done, surely we have the strongest reasons to be encouraged no matter what the outward circumstances. Not only should we seek to be faithful ourselves; we need to encourage others to be faithful as well. Thus the writer not only encourages his readers, he encourages us to encourage others.

Along with the positive words of encouragement, the writer of Hebrews gives some of the sternest warnings found in the New Testament. Especially he warns against complacency and compromise of our faith. Again, if Hebrews is correct in its presentation of the person and work of Jesus, it would be foolish to the ultimate degree to ignore or despise his sacrifice for us. Those who willfully ignore that sacrifice will have the strongest possible reasons to be judged. Thus it is that side by side in this great book we have the strongest possible basis for confidence but also the strongest possible warnings against compromising or being complacent.

The following is a list of some of the key items mentioned under each of the three main points of Hebrews, along with the chapter in Hebrews where the item is principally found:

<b><u>WHO JESUS IS</u></b>	<u>chapter</u>
creator and sustainer of everything	1
Son of God (able to save)	1
Son of Man (willing to save)	2
greater than angels	1
greater than Moses	3
greater than Aaron	7
great high priest	7
author and perfecter of our faith	12
same yesterday, today, and forever	13
<b><u>WHAT JESUS DID AND DOES</u></b>	
reigns at God's right hand	1
experienced human life and death	2
gives help in time of need	4
obeyed despite sufferings	5
intercedes as our priest	7
inaugurated and guarantees the new covenant	7-8
with internal effects	8-9
with eternal effects	10
made perfect atonement	9-10
made permanent provision for sanctification	10
opened the way into God's presence	10
<b><u>WHAT WE DO IN RESPONSE</u></b>	
keep our eyes on Jesus	3, 12
appropriate the provision to enter God's presence	4, 10
persist in obedience and faithfulness	10-12
pursue holiness	12
confidently endure in view of the future	12
encourage one another	10-12

### Hebrews 1

The opening paragraph of Hebrews succinctly states the supremacy of Jesus' person and the finality of his work (note "sat down at the right hand" in vs. 3). Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of God because Jesus himself is eternal deity as the Son of God. Indeed, vs. 8 addresses the Son as "God." Jesus' deity means that he is fully able to save us. The opening paragraph also mentions Jesus' final and decisive act of purifying us, something which becomes a central theme of chs. 9-10.

Immediately in ch. 1 we can notice a favorite teaching method of the writer of Hebrews: he likes to use comparisons. In fact, a theme word of Hebrews is "better." Jesus

is better than angels (ch. 1), Moses (ch. 3), the high priest of Judaism (chs. 5, 7), and the sacrifices of the OT system (chs. 8-10). The superiority of Christianity is due to the superiority of Jesus.

The first comparison to be developed is the comparison between Jesus and the angels. This is probably not where I would have started, but the writer may have been trying to correct an over-evaluation of angels in some parts of the church (see Col. 2:18). More likely he is simply trying to establish the superiority of Jesus' new covenant to the old covenant. The Jews of that time believed that angels had been instrumental in revealing the Law to Moses. Notice the reference to this belief in 2:2, also mentioned in Gal. 3:19 and Acts 7:30, 38, 53.

The superiority of the new covenant has several aspects, which will be developed more in chs. 8-10, but the key to every superior quality in the covenant is the person of Jesus himself. That is our writer's starting point--the absolute superiority and incomparable status of Jesus. The angels are mighty but Jesus is their maker; they are "ministering spirits" but he is "the Son" who reigns over them and over everything else (vss. 13-14).

Jesus is shown to be superior to angels by the witness of OT Scriptures which speak of him. The author makes extensive use of the OT throughout Hebrews, and always for the same purpose we see here: to put the focus on Jesus and to help us be faithful to him. The church has always believed that the Scriptures of both Old and New Testaments find their true unity and coherence in Jesus. This belief goes back to Jesus' own explanation of himself. See, for example, John 5:39, 46 and Luke 24:25-27. The writer of Hebrews affirms the revelation that came through the OT Scriptures (1:1) but their variety finds its focus (along with the rest of the universe, 1:2, 3) in Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God because he is God (vs. 8).

The practical exhortation based on the absolute superiority of Christ is this: Keep your focus on Jesus. He is the beginning of all things because he is the creator. He is the 'end' of all things in the sense that everything will eventually serve his will, because he is the "heir" of everything. In between the beginning and the end he sustains everything. He sustains the universe; he can sustain you. If he is God, he is perfectly able to save those who put their trust in him. If we can adequately grasp the greatness of Christ, we will know that nothing can overwhelm us. No threat or event--regardless how great--can rob us of victory, joy, and hope. The creator and sustainer of the whole universe has already revealed himself as the savior, able to save from the uttermost to the uttermost.

**NOTE TO THE TEACHER:** Each lesson has a set of questions for the passages covered in that lesson. These can be used either as "assignments" or discussion questions during the lesson. The questions are on a separate page from the one-page outline to make it easier for you to use either one without the other as a handout, should you so choose. You could, of course, use both or neither as handouts. You could take a selection of the questions and add them to the outline for use as a handout.

## LESSON 2

### JESUS AS TRUE MAN--WITH US YET OVER US

#### Hebrews 2-3

Jesus is the model for true humanity, making possible God's will for humanity as described in Psalm 8. As truly human, Jesus has identified with us for the purpose of saving us. At the same time he remained, as always, truly God. Therefore, although he was and is **one of us** as a man, he was and is **over us**, absolutely unique and superior to all other humans, even such a man as Moses. Jesus is better than Moses (ch. 3), who was the greatest prophet of the OT and the man used by God not only to deliver Israel from Egypt but to inaugurate the old covenant.

#### Hebrews 2

Notice how the warning at the beginning of ch. 2 is based on the superiority of Christ established in ch. 1 ("therefore" in 2:1 makes this connection clear). If the message given through the angels was so important that it was fatal to despise it (referring to the Law of Moses, see Gal. 3:19 and Acts 7:30, 38, 53), then the message given through Jesus is even more important, requiring even more attention and responsiveness. Carelessness and complacency are inappropriate and dangerous to the extreme.

As the chapter continues, Jesus is again compared with the angels but for a different reason. In ch. 1 he was unlike angels because he is God. Here in ch. 2 he is unlike angels because he became a man. The one who was higher than angels became "lower than angels" in order to save us. As a human, Jesus is the model for a new and true humanity, making possible God's will for humans as described in the quote (2:6-8) from Psalm 8. [Notice the verbal connection between 2:8 (which quotes Ps. 8) and 1:13 (which quotes Ps. 110). Compare the idea of 'last Adam' in Rom. 5 and 1 Cor. 15.]

The Son of God became one of us, entered into the human condition to redeem and transform the human condition (from the inside out). God's purpose for humanity had been deterred by sin and Satan, but God had not changed his purpose. Jesus became a part of the human race to enable the human race, through him, to realize God's purpose for us. Through Jesus, human beings will be elevated to the dignity described in Ps. 8. That is how Ps. 8, which originally was written to describe humanity's place in the economy of God, can be applied to Jesus here in Hebrews.

In its truest sense, Psalm 8 is fulfilled *only* in Jesus, but because it is fulfilled in him it will be fulfilled in everyone joined to him. He identified with us in order that we might identify with him. He took on mortality to give us immortality. By what he experienced as a human, even to the point of dying, he was made "perfect" or 'complete' as our Savior (vs. 10). This does not mean that he was not already perfect in the moral sense. It means that to enter perfectly into his role as Savior he had to undergo certain sufferings as a human.

Because Jesus has experienced human living and dying, we are assured of his ability to sympathize with us. He knows by experience what it is to be tempted/tested (vs. 18), and he knows how to help those who are tempted/tested. But we need more than sympathy (we could give that to one another); we need salvation. Jesus' experience assures us of his sympathy but also of his salvation. Jesus became all that we are (except for sin--

4:15) to enable us to be all we're meant to be. To be all we're meant to be requires our being delivered from sin. Jesus shared our humanity in order to transform it ("bringing many sons to glory," 2:10), to become a merciful and faithful high priest, and to make atonement for our sins (2:17). Jesus' humanity (and what he experienced as a man) proves that he is fully **willing** to save us, just as his deity means he is **able** to save us (ch. 1).

Through faith in Jesus we need not fear even death (vss. 14-15). Satan's power to separate us from God is broken. Jesus has already demonstrated beyond all dispute his willingness to face any trial, any experience whatsoever, with us and for us.

[See the appendix at the end of this lesson, for further thoughts about the saving significance of the incarnation.]

### Hebrews 3

Although Jesus has identified *with* us (ch. 2), he always remains *over* us as Son of God. He is eternal deity (ch. 1) who became humanity (ch. 2) without ceasing to be deity (compare John 1:1, 14, 18). Unlike many religions (and unlike Adam and Eve in the Garden!), this is not man reaching for God or trying to become God; this is God reaching for man, becoming the God-Man.

Jesus is compared to Moses, the OT figure with the greatest revelation of God and greatest privilege as God's instrument of deliverance. Both Moses and Jesus could be described as sent by God to mankind ("apostle") and as representing and interceding for humans before God ("high priest"). Both acted as intermediaries between God and humans. Both were faithful to their missions. Jesus, however, is incomparably greater than Moses in the same way that a builder is greater than the house he builds. The very existence of the house depends on the builder! Moses is a great part of the "house" (God's people), but Jesus is the unique Son *over* the house. (Compare "in" of vs. 5 with "over" of vs. 6.) [In response to Israel's prayers for deliverance from Egyptian bondage, Moses could be described as a "Godsend"; in response to the need for humanity's deliverance, Jesus could only be described as "God, sent," i.e., Jesus is God the Son, sent by God the Father.]

We are Christ's "house" *if* we endure. (Remember the practical purpose for the writing of Hebrews.) The start we have made is no guarantee of our finish. **Our finish** is guaranteed by **his finish** *if* we don't stop. Therefore, we trust his finish rather than our start. We trust him and what he has done rather than what we have done in the past. We can be confident (in him) but not complacent (either because of our past achievements or past experiences).

### 3:7-19

The writer of Hebrews illustrates the necessity of continuing the journey of faith by quoting from Psalm 95, which recalls the failure of a whole generation of Israelites to enter into the promised land of Canaan--the very generation which had witnessed firsthand the deliverance from Egypt! [1 Cor. 10:1-12 makes a similar point.] By their rebellious unbelief they were 'putting God to the test,' but in fact they were the ones who were failing the test! The test likewise for us is whether we will believe and obey God. If, like Israel in

the wilderness, we fail this test, we will miss the 'rest' which God has provided; we will not enter into God's best provisions.

Note the repeated emphasis on the word "today" (mentioned again in 4:7). The original passage in Ps. 95 referred to a much earlier generation's failure but was meant to apply to the people alive at the time the psalm was written. Likewise the writer of Hebrews, writing hundreds of years later, makes the same kind of application for his generation. We who now read and hear this warning must realize that it is just as applicable now as ever. This was written for us! Past blessings are wonderful but will not save us in the future if we fall into disobedience and unbelief (vss. 18-19). Many things have changed with the coming of Christ and the new covenant (as Hebrews continually stresses), but this fact has not changed: those who begin on the journey of faith need to continue the journey as long as it is called "today," i.e., every day!

Notice also the repeated references to the "heart." One's will and affections, one's desires, need to be carefully monitored and kept turned toward God. If we start to drift away from God, the drift starts in the heart. If we start acting out of unbelief, the unbelief starts in the heart and becomes outward disobedience. [Prov. 4:23 says to "guard your heart," for out of it comes the "wellspring of life." This would be true whether we are talking about positives or negatives: it "starts in the heart."] The prescription to guard against this kind of hardening of the heart is given to the whole church and not just to be applied by the individual to himself: "Encourage one another daily" (vs. 13).

(This practical emphasis is continued in the next lesson, covering chs.4-6).

Cur Deus Homo  
Why the God-Man?

God became man  
to show us God  
and man as God means man to be,  
to give us God  
to give us means  
to be the men we're meant to be.

The Incarnation reveals deity  
and heals humanity.

In Jesus we have our God revealed  
and our humanity restored.

The kind of man he became  
shows us the kind of God we have  
and changes the kind of people we are.

He came not only to have the experience  
but to change the experience of being human,  
not merely to taste life and death  
but to transform life and death  
by his life and death and life again.

Where/when God joins man it forms not a third thing  
but a healing fellowship of the two.

Where life's source joins life's shape,  
life is reshaped for eternal life.  
Life's source takes on life's shape to reshape it.  
He did this once.  
He does this always--when the shape allows it.  
What shape are you in?  
Need reshaping? in any way?

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## LESSON 3

### REST OR REJECTION? Hebrews 4:1-13; 5:11--6:20

For lessons 3 and 4 we are deviating a bit from a straightforward progress through the book of Hebrews in favor of a somewhat more topical approach. This is mostly because Hebrews starts to deal with the priesthood of Christ in 4:14 but then inserts more warnings and exhortations, beginning with 5:11, which are best studied along with the first part of chapter 4. The writer warns his Christian audience not to miss the "rest" which God has provided, for the only alternative to that "rest" ultimately is final rejection by the Lord.

I am sure that you do not need to be told that ch. 6 usually raises some difficult questions. Endless arguments have been provoked over the question of the possible loss of salvation, an issue over which Calvinists and Arminians/Wesleyans will perhaps have resolved for us in heaven! Be aware that not everyone in our congregation comes from the same theological background; however you present this material you may get a disagreement. Be prepared to state your understanding but also to admit the limits of human understanding. This is especially helpful if you encounter someone who has strong Calvinist views. It is okay not to know everything and also okay to have different opinions on some matters. It is *not* okay but mortally dangerous to refuse to take scriptural warnings seriously. The choice presented to us by Hebrews 4-6 (especially the passages chosen for the focus of this lesson) is simple but impossible to exaggerate: Either we continue to press on to God's will for us or we risk final rejection and eternal ruin.

#### 4:1-11

Entering God's "rest" (which Israel failed to do, ch. 3) is, in this life, a continual and progressive entering. Hence the need to persist in faith. In 4:3, notice carefully the tenses of the verbs: We who **have believed** *enter* the rest. To bring out the significance of the tenses we could say it this way: we who have made a start in faith **are entering** the rest now. Notice that he does not say that we "have entered" already nor does he say that we "will enter" in the future. Rather this entering is a process in which we are presently and continually engaged.

What is meant by "rest"? In ch. 3, it was the Promised Land, forfeited by an unbelieving generation, even after they had experienced God's mighty deliverance from Egypt. Even the people who did enter the Promised Land did not fully enter into God's "rest," because (as ch. 4 shows) that "rest" was not fully revealed or made available until Jesus came. The OT "rest" of entering into the promised heritage of the land has now become an analogy for a more transcendent reality--the full inheritance of God's will for all his people. In ch. 4, the "rest" which we can enter by faith (or miss by unbelief) is not just a temporary residence in a certain geographical area (a residence which would have to be temporary for the individual, since death would end it). Rather the "rest" is an eternal one, enjoyed in the eternal fellowship of God himself.

Simply put, the "rest" in ch. 4 is the experience and enjoyment of what God has promised and provided by Jesus. Most importantly this is the presence of God himself in our midst. This includes **present** Christian experience but always leads us on to the fulfillment in the **future**. God's rest is already secured for us, but it must be progressively

and continually appropriated. Because it is not automatic and never final in this life, we must continue to be diligent and "make every effort" to enter the rest (vs. 11).

[Note the intimate connection between 'Sabbath rest' and belonging to the covenant people of God. The 'Sabbath rest' honors God as the Creator (Exodus 20:11) and as the Redeemer (Deuteronomy 5:15) of his covenant people. Isaiah spoke of the Sabbath rest (chs. 56, 58) as a covenant mark which would in the future belong to Gentiles as well. The Sabbath rest is used in Isaiah and here in Hebrews as a symbol of belonging to God and enjoying his blessings. This cannot be fully appreciated if we think of the Sabbath in a legalistic way as did the critics of Jesus. Jesus' way of observing the Sabbath is consistent with viewing it as a symbol and anticipation of the full enjoyment of God's finished work. See Matthew 12:7-12; Mark 3:4; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:8-9; also Colossians 2:16-17.]

4:12-13

The penetrating power of God's word cannot be evaded. Therefore, there is no middle ground, no room to compromise and evade the consequences. There is no refuge outside the "rest" provided by God. Therefore, we **must** continue to enter the rest. If we don't go forward we will go backward. The danger of going backward is unimaginably great, as will be seen in ch. 6. [Note that "word" in vs. 12 is the Greek word *logos*, although one might have expected to find *rhema*, according to the popular but erroneous idea that *rhema* is more personal than *logos*. You cannot get any more personal than the *logos* described here!]

5:11-6:3

After starting to discuss the priesthood of Christ (4:14-5:10), the writer shifts to a practical exhortation. He rebukes the readers for not having made more progress in spiritual maturity (5:11-14), but he refuses to go back to re-teach them the basics (6:1-4). They know these things quite well, and he is not going to allow them to remain comfortable with the familiar when they need to be challenged to stretch and grow. None of us can afford to 'let up' or 'coast along' (remember 4:11). 'Coasting' is how you can start 'drifting' (2:1). If we stop entering the "rest" before we have fully arrived, we are courting disaster, as the next section vividly points out.

6:4-12

This segment contains one of the strongest (and most debated) warnings in Scripture. The most critical words are in 6:4-6. In thinking about these verses, it is helpful to remember the situation of the original audience for Hebrews, the people about whom the writer was thinking as he wrote. The temptation for that original audience was to move away from Christianity toward a safer and more comfortable identification with Judaism. (Just as in Nazi Germany it was safer to be Christian than to be Jewish, so in the Roman Empire, after 64 A.D. until 312 A.D., it was safer to be Jewish than to be Christian.) The writer warns sternly against such a deliberate step, which would mean renouncing Christ in favor of identification with those who had decisively rejected Christ.

In other words, the writer is speaking here about *apostasy*, deliberate and irretrievable renunciation of the faith which had previously been embraced. He is not talking about the occasional lapse into sin by a weak Christian. Those lapses can be

followed by repentance and should always be followed immediately by repentance. Such frequent failures as many of us experience are surely unfortunate and cost us much in terms of peace and the experience of God's joy and power. But as long as they are followed by repentance--being sorry for our failure and asking God to forgive and change us--such failures are not fatal.

Falling down is not fatal; refusing to be helped up will be. Expressed another way: Every kind of breakage can be fixed except the refusal to be fixed. Refusal to be fixed is refusal of the 'Fixer' (Healer). Ultimately we must either say a full yes or a full no to God. A partial yes will do for starting, but it cannot remain partial. Either your partial yes will become a full yes, or you will choose to say no.

If you look in numerous commentaries written on Hebrews, you will find some scholars from a Calvinist point of view explaining this passage in a way very different from the preceding paragraphs. Calvinists do not believe that a genuine Christian can ever lose his salvation. Since this passage plainly talks about repentance becoming "impossible" for some people, the Calvinists will usually say the writer is talking about people who were not really Christians to start with. It would certainly seem, however, that the positive experiences described in 6:4-5 (being enlightened, sharing in the Holy Spirit, etc.) are Christian experiences! Furthermore, if someone was never really a Christian, he certainly could not lose his salvation since he did not have it to lose!

Another Calvinist explanation of this passage is to say that the irretrievable loss of salvation is meant to be only hypothetical. That is, if it *were* possible to lose salvation it would be impossible to get it back. This viewpoint seems to assume that the biblical writer did not mean what he plainly said, not only here but in such places as Heb. 2:3. With all due respect to our Calvinist brothers and sisters (and I mean that quite sincerely), what the writer calls "impossible" is not the loss of salvation but the renewal to repentance by one who has experienced the reality of Christianity but has now decisively renounced Christ. Since the Calvinist viewpoint does not allow for the possibility of losing one's salvation, however, the words of the writer of Hebrews are made rather pointless: of course you can't get *back* what you never had to start with!

While being critical of the Calvinists' distortion of this passage (in my view), let us admit that Arminians/Wesleyans have often been guilty of distorting it in a different way. Those of an Arminian/Wesleyan view believe that it is possible for a person who has had a genuine Christian experience to drift away and at some point 'lose his salvation.' Some in the Wesleyan heritage, however, have taught that a person could thus lose his salvation but, by repentance, regain it. In other words, you could get 'saved,' lose your salvation and no longer be 'saved,' but then get 'saved' again. In practice this has led to some people getting 'saved' several times, perhaps at several different revival meetings over a period of years. I don't wish to discount either the necessity or reality of someone renewing his or her commitment to Christ, but to describe the person who is renewing a previous commitment as someone who had *lost* then *regained* 'salvation' is a bit misleading. At the very least it seems not to take seriously the word "impossible" (in Heb. 6:4-6).

The only way to take the writer of Hebrews seriously, it would seem, is to understand that he is warning *Christian believers* not to renounce their faith (i.e., commit apostasy) and not to compromise their discipleship in a way which might eventually lead them to renounce their faith. Why warn non-believers against losing something they do

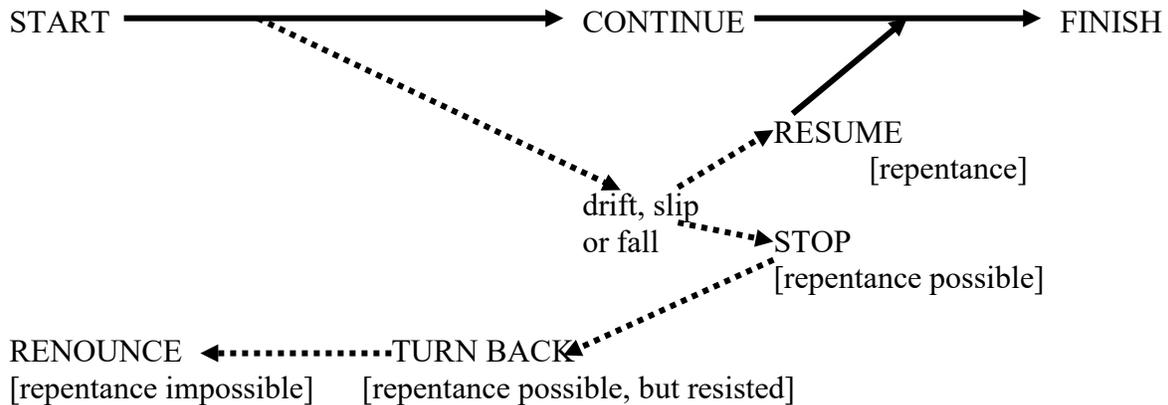
not have to lose? No, the warning is addressed to believers just as other similar warnings in the New Testament (see also 2 Peter 2:20-22).

The flaw in both the Calvinist and Wesleyan interpretations may be the same at its root: a static understanding of being **saved** (as a status or possession) rather than a dynamic understanding of **being saved** (a continuing process or journey). The book of Hebrews consistently presents a dynamic understanding of salvation as a continuing process. The results of the process are assured, but only if the process is allowed to continue. The warnings of Hebrews and of the rest of the NT make sense only if the process is something which can be halted by the indifference and rebellion of those who have entered into it.

We are encouraged by Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament to be alert and diligent, not complacent or careless. It would seem that the reason for the necessity of alertness and diligence is the possibility of losing out in the end. Those sincere Christians who do not believe that it is possible to lose one's salvation will perhaps not have their minds changed by what has been said here. We do not all need to agree on that question, however, as long as we can agree on this: No one should try to prove by experience that it is possible to lose salvation, nor should anyone try to demonstrate the barest minimum effort called for in the life of a believer. No one, whether Calvinist or otherwise, can afford to be careless. What if your theology turns out to be wrong? Better to be too careful in this matter than not careful enough!

The book of Hebrews portrays the Christian life as a pilgrimage, a journey. That is why the writer repeatedly urges us to keep going--we have not arrived yet at our destination. Until we arrive, there is still a possibility of changing the destination by changing the direction of travel. This is true in both directions! If we are walking with the Lord, we have not yet arrived at the fullness of his salvation (even though it has been fully provided for); if we are straying away from the Lord or living in outright rebellion, we have not yet reached the end result of final destruction. The 'unforgivable sin' is not at the fork in the road but at its end, but the choice made at the fork puts the rebel on that road. Unless the rebel turns around (repents) and gets on the right road, there can be no other end result but final separation from God.

The writer of Hebrews, writing to Christians on the pilgrimage with Christ, is warning us not to change our direction, because that would lead to another destination. It is dangerous (although not necessarily *immediately* fatal) not to continue moving forward, because ***stopping is the first step in turning around*** and going back. If we slip and fall, we must get up and continue on with Christ. As long as we keep going in that direction, no matter how often we fall down and get up, we are assured of the destination of final salvation. The real possibility of stopping and turning back is illustrated in the following diagram:



Remember: The first step in turning back is stopping! So don't stop! If you fall, get up and keep going on with Christ!

Important further note on 6:4-6: Anyone who is *concerned* that he or she may have committed the unpardonable sin has not committed it. A person who has fallen into the horror described here is one who *cannot repent*--not because they don't have permission but because they lack the ability. (Notice that vs. 4-6 do not say that God cannot forgive them; it says they cannot repent.) Anyone who *can* repent and *does* repent has the promise of God that they are forgiven and cleansed (see 1 John 1:9).

Because we have free will, we can refuse to repent. If we refuse to repent we are refusing to be forgiven. Therefore, as long as it persists, the refusal to repent is unforgivable by its very nature. Many people have refused to repent *for a time* but later have repented and been forgiven. The grave danger of refusing to repent, however, is that *continued refusal* to repent will eventually become the *inability* to repent, if one persists in refusing long enough. Such a person will not even think any longer of repentance. Even to be able to repent is a gracious gift from God, a gift which, if spurned, need not be extended indefinitely. Indeed, God was under no obligation to extend the opportunity to begin with. His gift of the opportunity was because of his love and grace, not because he owed it to us. Certainly anyone who rejects the opportunity to repent will have no basis for charging God with injustice.

When does stubborn refusal to repent become fatal inability to repent? When does 'drifting away' (2:1) become 'falling away'(6:6)? Has that person you know who used to confess Christ but who now shows no interest in him become an apostate with no hope of ever being saved? Who can say? Some things only God knows, but we humans can know by reading the Bible that drifting is deadly dangerous, and to refuse to repent is to risk final rejection. We cannot be complacent about compromise, for we may sell our souls in the bargain.

There is a theological danger in emphasizing this danger to our souls in a one-sided manner: we can easily fall into a paranoid, legalistic frame of mind ("I've got to be perfect or God won't accept me"). To avoid that pitfall we need to remember that God has already accepted us, but not to leave us as we are. The issue at stake here is not whether we have to meet some standard of perfection before God accepts us. Rather the issue is whether we are ultimately going to accept God's will for us (which is perfection), or whether, to our

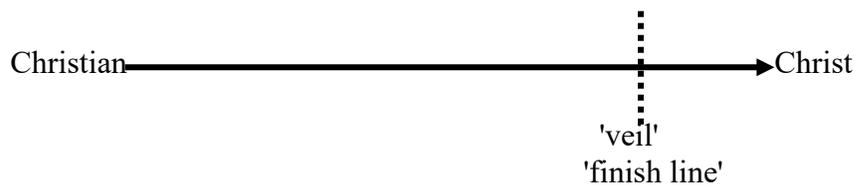
loss, we will insist on clinging to our own will. The only safe thing to do with our will is to say to God, "Thy will be done," and to keep saying it until in fact his will is done in us. God is not fickle; he is not capricious and will not suddenly give up on us in a fit of pique. But neither will he deprive us of the will with which he created us--no, not even for the purpose of redeeming us. That would be to contradict his purpose in creating us, and redemption is not the contradiction of creation but its salvation.

The danger of compromise and drifting away, on one hand, is just as great or greater than the danger of paranoia on the other hand. Both dangers can be avoided by a clear grasp of the message of the book of Hebrews as a whole. Concentration on Heb. 6:4-6 by itself--to the exclusion of the book's overall emphasis on who Jesus is and on his finished work--can create real distortion. The most important distortions to avoid are these: not taking the warning seriously; worrying that one has committed the unpardonable sin (again, anyone concerned about it has not done it); and putting confidence in one's future performance rather than in God's faithfulness and power.

Notice how Hebrews follows this harshest possible warning with warm words of encouragement and appreciation (vss. 9-12)

The last part of this chapter (vss. 16-20) puts great emphasis on the unchangeable nature of God's saving purpose. On this we can rely absolutely. God will not change his mind or *his* will to save us. That does not mean, however, that we are deprived of *our* wills, which can change. Because God's will does not change, we can proceed with confidence. Because our wills can change, we need to be watchful and diligently guard against those things which might distract us or weaken our resolve to follow Christ faithfully. Confident but not complacent--again and again the book of Hebrews keeps this balance.

The balance of confidence and diligence is seen by observing the word "hope" in vss. 11, 18, 19. By his presence in the "sanctuary" Christ provides a **secure** anchor for our hope, but we need to be diligent to make our hope **sure**. This can be simply illustrated by the following diagram, in which the line represents the hope which links us to Christ. We could call it "the hope rope." He will not let go, but we need to hold on as well.



Remember: Don't let go of the hope rope!  
To be sure, an anchor line must hold at both ends.

How can you fail to finish? Only by cutting loose from the hope which links you to him who has finished. If you cut loose from the anchor, you will drift away.  
[Another illustration: two ropes hanging above a man about to sink in quicksand; one rope is secured at the other end; the other rope is long but not tied to anything sturdy--which rope should he take hold of? What are you holding on to? What is your hope tied to?]

Our start is no guarantee of our finish, [6:4ff; 2:1-3; 3:14; 4:1, 11]  
but our finish is guaranteed by his finish, [1:3; 6:19-20; 7:22, 25-28],  
    *if* we rely on his finish [4:16; 5:8-9]  
    and *if* we don't stop,  
        which we need not do, in view of his finish.  
We rely on his finish and his finishing power,  
    not on our start or our finishing power.  
We started by trusting his finish [see 12:2]  
We continue by trusting his finish.  
We will finish by trusting his finish.  
So we may be confident, but not complacent.  
We can be sure,  
    but we can't stop.

## LESSON 4

### OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST

Hebrews 4:14-5:10; 7:1-28

#### Characteristics of Christ as High Priest

sympathetic	4:15
sinless	4:15
merciful	4:16
gracious	4:16
God-appointed	5:6
suffering	5:8
obedient	5:8
perfected	5:9

#### 4:14-16

Here begins an emphasis on Jesus as our high priest, the mediator of our relationship with God. We are encouraged to hold fast to our faith by being reminded of the character and nature of our high priest. He was tempted (or 'tested') in all the basic ways that we are, but he did not sin. Because he has experienced our problems, he is able to be a sympathetic high priest. By overcoming (not sinning) he showed that he is capable of helping us to overcome.

#### 5:1-10

The emphasis on Jesus' sympathetic identification with us continues from the end of ch. 4 (also remember ch. 2). Note that 5:2-3 speaks rather more about the Levitical high priest, who was able to sympathize since he too was a human but who, unlike Jesus, did not always resist temptation and thus needed sacrifices for his own sins. Again it is instructive to see both how Jesus is like the previous priesthood and how he is different.

Sharing our humanity is a necessary part of Jesus' qualification, but he is also qualified by divine appointment, as shown by quotations from Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 (quoted in 5:5-6). This appointment will be further explained in Heb. 7.

The final 'qualification' (beyond his humanity and his appointment) is Jesus' experience of suffering as part of his obedience to God. The experience of dying for us is in fact the most crucial 'qualification' for Jesus' entry into his priesthood for us, because his death was his priestly sacrifice. As we read 5:7-8 we naturally think of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane and his sufferings connected with the cross. No doubt those episodes were present to the mind of the writer of Hebrews as well, but we should remember that Jesus' experience of identifying with us did not begin in the Garden nor was his crucifixion the only time he paid a price for obeying God the Father. It is, of course, the ultimate example (see Phil. 2:8).

Jesus knows by experience that obedience is costly. If we have to suffer hardship at the hands of the world because of our faith and obedience, he understands exactly what we are going through. The one who asks us to obey knows what it means to obey when it is not easy. Thus Jesus is a model of obedience, but he is more. Through his obedience he became the source of salvation to all others who obey. Jesus' obedience is not just the

model for mine; his obedience enables my obedience. His obedience makes my obedience possible, because his obedience restored my relationship with God, who gives the strength to obey.

7:1-28

Before launching into the discussion of the mysterious Melchizedek, it would be wise to remember the unifying purpose of the whole book of Hebrews. The writer's very practical purpose of encouraging his readers is the motivation behind every topic which shows up in this interesting book. To provide not just a 'pep-talk' but real substantive reasons for staying encouraged, the book of Hebrews basically tries to focus our attention on three main points: (1) who Jesus is; (2) what Jesus has done; and (3) what we need to do in response to (1) and (2). The writer of Hebrews was not trying to challenge us to solve difficult puzzles about the true identity of an obscure character from thousands of years earlier (Melchizedek). There has been lots of speculation over the centuries about this person, and much of it was probably harmless. But Melchizedek is not the focus of this book, not even of this chapter. Melchizedek's role as a priest who was acknowledged and honored by Abraham is mentioned here in Hebrews to help us get a clearer focus on Jesus. The biblical writer's purpose will be missed or distorted by any unnecessary attention diverted to Melchizedek in a way which pushes Jesus out of the center of the picture. [Can you be a Christian without knowing about Melchizedek? Without knowing about Jesus? Enough said!]

In reading chapter 7 of Hebrews (also chs. 9-10), it is especially helpful to know the basics of *typology*. Typology can generally be defined as the correspondence between a person or thing in the Old Testament and a similar person or thing in the New Testament. The purpose of typologies is always to understand the New Testament person or thing more fully, but the comparison also helps us to see the consistency and unity of God's plan over the centuries. Often New Testament writers used such comparisons to show the full significance of Christ and his work of salvation. This is especially true in the book of Hebrews.

In typology, the OT person or thing is called the **type**, and the NT person or thing is called the **antitype**, meaning the one that takes the place of the 'type.' In the comparison between type and antitype there is always at least one significant point of similarity, but there is also a significant point of superiority. **The antitype is always greater than the type** and may be different from the type in many particulars, even though similar in other respects. The focus of our attention, consequently, should be on the antitype, not on the type except to help us understand the antitype. (This will be important to remember in chs. 9-10 as well.) In Hebrews 7, Melchizedek is the type and Jesus is the antitype. Jesus is the center of attention. The only reason Melchizedek is mentioned is to help us understand Jesus and his ministry better. That means we should be more interested in grasping the full meaning of Jesus' priesthood than in trying to solve the mystery of who Melchizedek is.

Melchizedek is mentioned (besides here in Hebrews) only in Genesis 14 and in Psalm 110 (which is quoted here in Hebrews). We are told very little about him. The fact that we are not told much about him is part of what makes him useful as a type of Jesus' priesthood. Unlike the Levitical priests and the high priests in the line of Aaron, who had to be born into the right family to qualify as priests, Melchizedek's priesthood did not depend on his (unknown) ancestry (or so it is assumed by the writer of Hebrews). In the

same way, Jesus' ministry is based on something besides human ancestry: it is based on God's oath (5:4-6; 7:21, 28), on Jesus' sacrifice of himself (7:27), and on his indestructible life (7:16, 25).

(In fact we know who Jesus' mother was, unlike Melchizedek's mother. We also know who served as Jesus' earthly father, without being the actual biological father. In this respect Jesus is not like Melchizedek, about whose parents we are completely ignorant (7:3). The point being made here stands: neither Jesus nor Melchizedek owed the office of priesthood to earthly ancestry. This makes their type of priesthood distinct from the Aaronic and Levitical priesthood.)

Some have suggested that Melchizedek *was* Jesus in an OT appearance (sometimes called a 'theophany'--an appearance of God; or a 'christophany'--an appearance of Christ). Nothing in the Bible, however, suggests this at all. To be quite precise, Hebrews 7:3 says he is "like" the Son of God; it does not say he was the Son. He remains as a "priest forever" only in the sense that the OT record omits any mention of his death. On the other hand, Jesus literally lives as a "priest forever." This is one of the ways in which Jesus is greater than Melchizedek: things said here about Melchizedek in a figurative, non-literal sense are literally true about Jesus. [If Melchizedek was really Christ, reigning as king over Salem (today's Jerusalem) during the lifetime of Abraham, when did he stop reigning? And why wasn't Abraham living there?]

Speculation about the figure of Melchizedek may be fun, but as soon as we are more interested in him than in Jesus we have missed the point that Hebrews is trying to make. Melchizedek was not a christophany or a theophany; he was a *type* pointing to Christ. And with Melchizedek, just as with all types, the *antitype* (Jesus) is both similar and superior to the type.

Note one other important respect in which Jesus is unlike any priest who preceded him, either the Levites or Melchizedek: Jesus was both priest and sacrifice. Only by the power of an indestructible life (7:16) could he remain a priest after such a sacrifice! Jesus' sacrificial offering was also unlike that of the OT high priest in the fact that Jesus did not need to offer a sacrifice for himself.

The fact that Jesus lives on eternally is part of the basis for the superiority of his priesthood as compared with the Levitical high priesthood of Aaron's descendants (the other important part of the superiority is the superiority of Christ's sacrifice, dealt with in chs. 9-10). Since the new and eternal priesthood (and the connected covenant) is based not on physical descent from Aaron but on eternal life, *only* Jesus is qualified to serve. Only he has made such a sacrifice, and only he can be the perfect mediator between God and human beings. (See 1 Tim. 2:5.)

Jesus is guarantor/priest of a better covenant by which we draw near to God (7:22). His guarantee is certain but not unconditional; the condition is that we trust its certainty. He is our intercessor (see also Rom. 8:34; Isa. 53:12; John 17; 1 John 2:2), not to be pictured as perpetually **kneeling** in prayer before the Father but rather as **sitting** (Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). The intercession of Jesus is not just an activity of Jesus (among other activities). Rather his intercession means all that he represents and is in mediating the relationship between God and human beings who trust in him. The significance of Jesus as mediator is the result of who he is and what he **has done** (in his death and resurrection) as well as what he continues forever to be and do. On the throne of the universe is the God-Man, crucified for sinners and raised to new life, which he now imparts to us. His very existence and presence at God's right hand are intercession in the sense of expressing his commitment to the full accomplishment in us of God's saving will. Who Jesus is and what he has already done for us--this is the basis of our firm confidence that God will finish what he has started in us.

## LESSON 5

### COVENANT COMPARISONS: INTERNAL EFFECTS

Hebrews 8:1-9:14

From the focus on Jesus as the high priest like Melchizedek, we find here a shift of focus to the effects of Jesus' sacrifice, by which the new covenant has been established. In various ways the new covenant is shown to be superior to the old covenant, first of all because of the new covenant's greater **internal effects** (especially ch. 9) and then because of its **eternal effects** (mostly ch. 10). To introduce this rather lengthy comparison, the author of Hebrews quotes from Jeremiah 31:31-34 the promise of God to bring about the new covenant.

8:1-5

The "true tabernacle" has been the subject of many theories of interpretation over the centuries. Some commentators have said that it refers to the church as the body of Christ, but that suggestion would be more convincing if we could assume that Paul wrote Hebrews. A better understanding is that the true tabernacle refers to the 'heavenly realm,' not in the sense of a place far distant from us but in the sense of the 'spiritual realm' which is accessible to us because of Christ's role as our high priest. Whatever it is, the word "true" indicates that the present sanctuary was somehow represented by the OT tabernacle which the new sanctuary has now replaced. [Compare John 6: Jesus is the "true bread" in comparison with the manna eaten in the wilderness.]

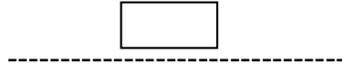
What the earthly tabernacle in the OT *symbolized*, the "true tabernacle" *is*. What is that? The very presence of God. Where is the sanctuary? It is where God and man meet. Because the writer says the true tabernacle or sanctuary is in "heaven," we may too easily think the contrast is between **below** and **above**. But the writer of Hebrews is once again developing an important typology, this time between the tabernacle and priestly service of the old covenant and the corresponding spiritual realities of the new covenant. That means the contrast is essentially a historical comparison between **then** and **now** (or, as Hagner would say, the typology is "horizontal" rather than "vertical," historical rather than ontological). This is very important for understanding the entire message of Hebrews, since the writer's whole emphasis (on who Jesus is and on what he has done) is based on the difference between **then** and **now**, between the **provisional** of the Old Testament and the **permanent** of the New Testament. [See the chart at end of Lesson 6.]

Especially if we try to imagine some structure called a 'sanctuary' far away in heaven, we will miss the real point that the writer is trying to make. The key contrast between the OT tabernacle and the sanctuary in which Jesus serves is not essentially a contrast between below and above. Rather it is the contrast between limited and relatively ineffective access to the presence of God for the people of the OT as compared with open and effective access to the presence of God through the sacrifice and ministry of Jesus. That is the reality which the writer pictures by the comparison between the two sanctuaries. Especially the heavenly sanctuary must not be thought of as *more distant* from us than the wilderness tabernacle! Rather, as a spiritual instead of an earthly reality, the true sanctuary is *near* to us. Because it is **more accessible** to us we now have a better

covenant relationship with God. When the writer speaks of the new covenant’s sanctuary, he speaks of realities which can be *present* for us here on earth, not realities which are *absent* until we go to heaven. Thus, in the two diagrams which follow, diagram # 2 pictures the contrast more effectively than # 1.

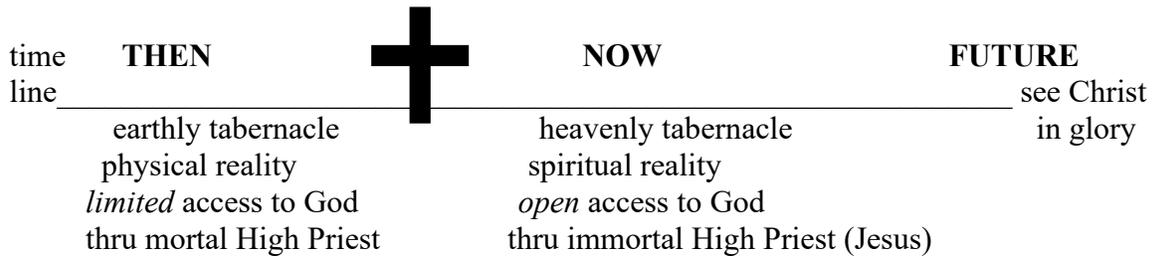
Diagram # 1, “vertical” contrast:

**THERE ABOVE: HEAVENLY TABERNACLE**



**HERE BELOW: EARTHLY TABERNACLE**

Diagram # 2, “horizontal” contrast:



past provision points to → present experience, the beginning of → eternity with God

The point in Hebrews is not that there are two tabernacles--one on earth and one in heaven--functioning at the same time. No, the point is that the ‘heavenly’ (or spiritual) realities of Jesus’ high priesthood have rendered the earthly tabernacle, its sacrificial system, and its priesthood obsolete. It was good in its time, but its time has passed. It has been forever replaced by the permanent priesthood of Jesus and by his once-for-all sacrifice.

8:6-13

Verse 6 is a concise statement of the theological viewpoint on which the writer will expand through chs. 8-10. Jesus is the better minister of a better covenant, based on better promises (enumerated in the quotation from Jeremiah which follows).

Heb. 8:8-12 quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34, which is the promise of the new covenant before it was given, while the old covenant was still in effect. Jeremiah's contemporaries could only look to this as a future reality; the readers of Hebrews (including ourselves) can rejoice in it as a present reality. Why would anyone want to go back to the inferior and leave the superior?

Note the specific ways in which the new covenant is better than the old covenant (8:10-12):

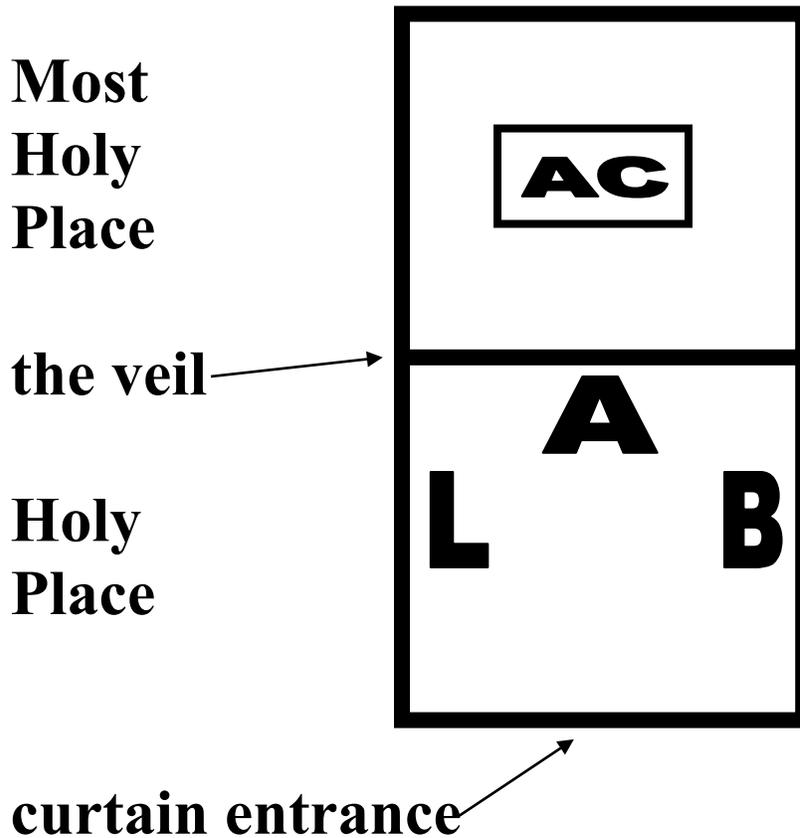
- (1) better ministry (Christ's priesthood as compared with the Levites and descendants of Aaron)
- (2) better promises:
  - (a) forgiveness of sins (permanent effect of the one sacrifice of Christ)
  - (b) internalizing of the law (motivation and enablement to obey God)
  - (c) knowledge of God (personally, intimately, for everyone)

On the new covenant, see also Luke 22:20; 2 Cor. 3; and Heb.7:23.

Heb. 9

It might be helpful here to use an overhead transparency for quick review of the arrangements in the tabernacle being referred to by Hebrews 9. But remember that this is not the writer's main point. His point is how Jesus' sacrifice makes possible for us all to enter into a greater sanctuary than the one described in the OT.

## FLOOR PLAN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT TABERNACLE



**AC = Ark of the Covenant**

**A = Altar of Incense**

**L = Lampstand**

**B = Bread of "the Presence"**

The OT tabernacle symbolized God's presence among his people, but it also symbolized the inaccessibility of his direct presence. Access to the Holy of Holies, or 'Most Holy Place,' was extremely limited even for the one individual allowed to enter, requiring sacrifices and special times. In contrast to the OT situation is the access to God's presence now opened to all believers (see also Eph. 2:18).

Special note on 9:12 "The holy place" is the presence of God, which we enter now, having had our consciences cleansed. The holy place is for us not an absent reality (out there) but a present reality--present here, present now. As stressed above in the notes on ch. 8, the contrast is essentially between then and now, not below and above. This becomes increasingly clear as the writer goes on to indicate that *we* who are still alive on earth are permitted entry into this "holy place" where Jesus has already gone (see 10:19-22). When you reflect on the emphasis of Hebrews on the fact that the new covenant realities are better and more beneficial to us than the realities of the old covenant, it strikes you as strange that anyone should ever have imagined that the sanctuary of the new covenant was further removed from us, less accessible than the sanctuary of the old covenant. The holy place in which Jesus serves as high priest is a place where we are welcome now. We don't have to die and go to heaven to enter this holy place.

Some translations of 9:12 say that Jesus entered the Holy Place "with" his blood, but more accurately translated it says that he entered the Holy Place **by** or **through** his blood, i.e., by shedding his blood. His death, in other words, was the means by which he entered the Holy Place and enabled us to enter the presence of God with him (see 10:19-20). The writer of Hebrews does not say (nor does the NT teach) that Jesus carried his shed blood anywhere. Notice further the wording in 9:12: Jesus entered the Most Holy Place "having obtained eternal redemption" (NIV). He did not enter the Most Holy Place *in order to obtain* redemption but because he had *already* obtained it! With his death on the cross, our redemption was secured (a fact which was reflected in Jesus' words "It is finished" in John 19:30, and by the powerful and consistent testimony of the entire NT; see, for example, Col. 2:13-15; Eph. 2:16). The atonement was accomplished **on** the cross, not **after** the cross.

A common mistake in studying Hebrews is to press the analogy with the OT Day of Atonement too far. In the OT the animal was sacrificed in the courtyard and its blood carried by the priest into the sanctuary. But in the OT ritual the priest was not the sacrifice! From that fact alone you can see that there must be a limit to how much Jesus' death can be compared to the ritual on the Day of Atonement. Remember that in typology the antitype is **like** the type, but it is also **greater** than the type and therefore **not like** the type in every way. Jesus' sacrifice can be compared to the ritual on the Day of Atonement, but it is not like it in every way. It is greater than what happened on the Day of Atonement, even though there are instructive similarities. While it may be true, in the OT, that the actual atonement was not completed until the ritual with the blood inside the tabernacle, hidden from public view, we should not force the analogy onto the NT atonement in any way that would distort the plain statements of the New Testament. The atonement was accomplished on the cross, by Jesus' physical death. At that very moment, the way into the spiritual Holy of Holies was being opened (see Matt. 27:50-51). Remember, too, that the Holy of Holies being discussed by the writer of Hebrews is not some place more distant from us than the earthly tabernacle was from the children of

Israel. It is nearer, not more distant! What the writer is illustrating by use of the OT analogy or type is the spiritual significance in the here and now of Jesus' once-for-all death for us. [Just as with the comparison between Jesus and Melchizedek in ch. 7, so the comparison here between Jesus' sacrifice and those of the OT should keep its focus on the NT reality. What we want to understand through the comparison is principally the significance of Jesus' death, not so much the significance of the OT sacrifices which prefigured it.]

#### Internal effects of Jesus' sacrifice

The greatest inability of the OT sacrifices was the inability to cleanse the conscience of those who offered the sacrifices. In contrast, internal cleansing is provided by the one sacrifice of the new covenant. In distinction from the many ritual cleansings of the OT system, that which is cleansed by the blood of the new covenant was not a tabernacle "out there somewhere" but rather the conscience of each one who puts his or her trust in Christ. A guilty conscience is the real barrier to fellowship with God (see Gen. 3; Isa. 59:1-2; 1 John 1:6-7). Because our consciences have been cleansed by Jesus' blood, we are free to enter the Holy of Holies now, into the very presence of God. [The veil in the old tabernacle symbolized that barrier. See 2 Cor. 3:12-18; 4:3-6.]

In the presence of God we are now able to "serve" the living God. The word that is used for "serve" in vs. 14 has connotations of the kind of service a priest offers to God. It could even be understood as "worship" in a context such as this (just as we use the term 'service' in referring to a time of worship). Because of Jesus' successful service as our high priest, we are enabled to enter into the Holy of Holies with him and likewise to "serve" God in ways far better than even the high priest himself was able to do in the OT. (The superiority of our privilege and the kind of offerings we can make are suggested in 13:10, 15-16).

## LESSON 6

### COVENANT COMPARISONS: ETERNAL EFFECTS

Hebrews 9:15-10:22

The new covenant is not provisional (like the old) but is permanent and impossible to be superseded. Nothing greater than God giving himself is even conceivable. Or we could say that in the new covenant (or 'contract') Jesus--who is both God and man--is 'the party of the first part' and 'the party of the second part.' How could the covenant/contract be made more sure?

Heb. 9:15-28

The new covenant is put into effect by Jesus' death, the once-for-all shedding of his blood (compare Luke 22:20). Compare the repeated sacrifices of the old covenant. A merely human act may need repeating; an act of God does not.

The writer takes advantage of the fact that one Greek word (*diatheke*) can mean either 'covenant' or 'will' (as in "last will and testament"). Christ is presented as both the 'testator' whose death brings the 'will' into effect, and as the 'executor' of the 'will,' the one who guarantees that the will's provisions will be carried out. Only a resurrected man could be both testator and executor of his will! Again you can see that an earthly analogy can only go so far in explaining spiritual realities.

With regard to 9:23 and the cleansing of the "heavenly things," you will find it helpful to keep the following in mind: What needed to be cleansed was not some place or thing in heaven in the sense of where God is already gloriously present. Rather, what needed cleansing was a place where God wanted to make his presence known: our consciences, which had been defiled by sin (9:14). *We* needed cleansing, and the OT sacrifices could not accomplish it (9:11). By the cleansing of our consciences, we can now have unhindered fellowship with God. It is helpful again to remember that "heaven" and "heavenly" can have more than one meaning in the NT. Here in Hebrews 9, as in Eph. 6:12, the reference to heavenly realities is best understood as 'spiritual realities.' Indeed, the 'heavenly sanctuary' is none other than the people of God, cleansed by Jesus' blood in order to be a fit habitation of a holy God (see Heb. 3:6; John 14:23; 1 Cor. 3:16).

[What needed to be cleansed was not some place where we wanted to go when we die, but a place where God wanted to be while we are alive! That place is us!]

Hebrews 10:1-4

Christ's all-sufficient, once-for-all sacrifice allows entry into God's presence. The constant repetition of sacrifices in the old covenant shows their inadequacy to do what was really needed. To Christ's sacrifice nothing can be added nor needs to be added--ever. By one sacrifice which *he* provided, God has shown once and for all time his disposition toward us, his view of sin, and his will to save us from sin's power and sin's consequences. In contrast, if forgiveness depends on *our* sacrifices, they must be made over and over again. Our forgiveness depends not on our sacrifices but on the sacrifice of the Holy One who needed no sacrifice for himself.

Compare the constant **reminder** of sins (10:3) with the **forgetting** of sins (8:12). If God provides forgiveness/forgetting, who are we to remember sins or hold them against ourselves or against others who have repented? Note that God's 'forgetting' is not a mental blank but a willing choice not to hold our sins against us. God does not literally forget why we needed salvation, and neither should we (2 Pet. 1:9). (That this is true is shown by the fact that forgiveness can be revoked! See Matt. 18:23-35.) Likewise, when we need to forgive someone, we need to 'forget' it in the sense of not holding it against them, not letting our relationship be determined by that which has now been forgiven. It does not mean that you no longer can have a memory of the thing forgiven. This biblical 'forgetting' is not *erasing* the memory but *releasing* the offender and the offense. It means that you let God's grace be greater than the offense--in God's forgiveness toward you and in your forgiveness toward another person. Grace and forgiveness shape the relationship, not past offenses. [In a similar way, the OT frequently speaks of God 'remembering' his covenant or promises. This does not mean that God had a sudden mental recall of something he had been forgetting. Rather it means that God has acted *in accordance with* his promise or covenant. On the other hand, when God 'forgets' our sins, he does not treat us *according to* them.]

10:5-10

It is noteworthy that here the focus is on the sacrifice of Jesus' **body**, whereas before the emphasis was on his **blood**. This is really only another way of speaking of the *one sacrifice*--Jesus himself, dying physically for us. That Jesus died for us was God's will. That was why he needed a body--so that he could do God's will in this way.

Christ came to do God's will. God's will was (and still is) for us to be cleansed (sanctified) by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ (vs. 10). Thus, your perfect salvation and sanctification have already been secured by God's provision. God himself has provided for his will for us (our sanctification). Our continuing responsibility is to let him apply this to our lives.

Any religiously serious person is concerned for doing God's will, but the Christian gospel is good news about *God doing his will so that we can do his will*. After all, God's will is what *God* does. If we would do his will, we must let him do his will in us. It is not God's will for you to do his will without him, but it is his will for you to do his will, with him.

10:11-12

Note the contrast between the old priests' "standing" and Christ's "sitting." Their work was never done; his work is done forever.

Special note on 10:14: This is a key verse for understanding God's provision for our sanctification. The words "has made perfect" are in the perfect tense in Greek, which indicates **a continuing result from an action in the past**. Jesus' death was at a given point in time, long ago, and will never happen again. But it has a permanent significance and makes a complete difference in us in the present time. In other words, Jesus' once-for-all death is the permanent provision for all the sanctification we will ever need! Notice, however, that the verse describes this sanctification as being applied to those "who are

**being made holy.**" (The NIV translation is excellent in bringing out the present tense of this expression, indicating that it is a continuing process of growth in holiness.)

If we compare verses 10 and 14, we will see the complementary aspects of sanctification: "we have been made holy" (vs. 10) speaks of the completely adequate effect of Christ's death; "being made holy" (vs. 14) speaks of the progressive application of this sanctification to our lives. Thus we have a **permanent and perfect provision for an ongoing process** of being made holy, of being sanctified. We don't have to *produce* holiness, but we do have to *receive* it by faith and then continue to *grow* in it. Because it has already been provided, we *can* receive it and continue to receive it more and more. Holiness is God's *will* for us. Holiness is God's rightful *demand*. But to have any genuine hope for holiness, you must realize also that holiness is God's *provision* for you in Christ. There is all the difference in the world between trying to produce what you think is demanded and trying to appropriate what has been provided! Holiness is God's will, but that is precisely the "will" that Jesus came to do (10:7, 9, 10), once for all. You **can do** God's will because Jesus has **already done** God's will. That does not relieve you of the responsibility of obeying. Quite the contrary, it means that your responsibility to obey is now genuinely possible to fulfill. You will have no excuse for not fulfilling your responsibility to obey, because the provision is there. But since the provision is there, you will not *need* an excuse, if only you let God do his will in your life.

The early Methodists used to ask one another the question, "Are you going on to perfection?" On the basis of this tenth chapter of Hebrews, the answer would have to be, "Yes, if I am going on at all." The Christian's destiny has already been revealed: sanctification in every aspect of one's being. Holiness is in your future or you have none (worth having). Holiness is in your future because of his act of sanctification in the past (on the cross) and his activity in the present (by the Holy Spirit). The present process requires your willing response of growth in obedience and love, but the ultimate success of the process depends on the perfect and permanent provision (the cross) and not on your perfect performance. Your sanctification is God's irrevocable will for you as a Christian. The only way to avoid this destiny is to stop being a Christian.

10:18

Since Christ's sacrifice, no other sacrifice for sins is necessary or possible. God's promise, based on that one sacrifice, is this: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more" (vs. 17). Unlike the former sacrifices, which made it impossible to forget the sins (10:3), this sacrifice--by its permanent validity--makes it possible to forget sins and to declare that any future sacrifices for sins lack all validity. (Sacrifices of time, money, etc. to further the work of God's kingdom in some way are *not* sacrifices for sin.)

10:19-22

By that one permanently valid sacrifice of Christ, we are given the privilege of access to God's presence. Jesus' body (or "flesh") is said to be the "curtain" or "veil" through which we enter into that holy place, once again drawing on the comparison with the OT tabernacle. In the OT tabernacle, the sanctuary was divided into two parts--the holy place and the most holy--by the curtain. The curtain served as a barrier but also as the

doorway into the most holy place. That is the function of the curtain which the writer has in mind here: Jesus' body is our 'doorway' into the holy place. [See also Mark 15:38.]

Such language obviously has to be understood figuratively, but it represents a very literal truth. Quite literally it is because of Jesus' flesh-and-blood death on the cross that we can enter into the presence of God with cleansed consciences. We can say that we enter by the blood of Christ (vs. 19) or by the body of Christ (vs. 20). It is interesting how flexible the language can be: Christ is the priest, the sacrifice, the curtain. The very flexibility of the comparisons demonstrates again that the 'heavenly sanctuary' is not some physical structure, some counterpart in heaven to the former sanctuary on earth. Rather Jesus himself is the antitype of the OT sanctuary, replacing by his own person and work all that was represented by the OT sanctuary, priesthood, and sacrifices.

The confidence with which we enter into the sanctuary and enjoy God's presence is not flippant but reverent. It is an appropriate boldness based on God's generous provision (at great cost), not a brash presumption which fails to appreciate the price for this access. We have this privilege not because we are great but because he is good.

The following chart summarizes the more important comparisons between the old and new covenants as taught in Hebrews 7-10:

### OLD COVENANT

then  
 weak, flawed  
 law on stone  
 remembrance of sins  
external cleansing  
 (ceremonial)  
 limited access to God  
 for very few  
 weak, mortal high priests  
 'earthly' sanctuary  
provisional, temporary effects  
 prophetic, promise, 'type'

### NEW COVENANT

now  
 powerful, perfect  
 law in heart  
 'forgetting' of sins  
internal cleansing  
 (conscience)  
 free, open access to God  
 for everyone  
 powerful, immortal high priest  
 'heavenly' sanctuary  
eternal effects  
 fulfillment, 'antitype'

## LESSON 7

### PERSEVERING FAITH

Hebrews 10:23-12:3

This lesson emphasizes the vital need for the kind of faith that can endure, the kind of faith which can be called "faithfulness." First we are exhorted concerning the need for this persevering faith (10:23-39). Then we are encouraged by a stirring tribute to past heroes of such persevering faith (11:1-40). Jesus is the supreme example of this faithfulness and our leader (12:1-3).

10:23-35

Having seen all that Christ has provided (as described especially in chs. 9-10), let us hold fast through enduring, persevering faith. Note individual responsibility but also responsibility to encourage one another. [Compare Gal. 6:1-2]

Most of the time we tend to think of our attendance at church as meant for our benefit or perhaps the benefit of our family. While that is true, this verse reflects another benefit that results from our being in church and involved in other overtly Christian activities: we can thus encourage others who are there. Even if we do not say a word, just our presence says "Yes, it is true. God does make a difference in my life." That testimony by our presence--as well as the hymns we sing together, the prayers we pray together, etc.--is a way of encouraging others. And everyone needs encouragement.

"The Day" referred to in vs. 25 is probably the day of final judgment, the certainty of which should always inform our daily living.

Special note on 10:26: This verse has often been a problem for people who felt that they had gone too far or had committed some sin too awful to be forgiven. At times in past church history, some people believed that this verse taught that any sins committed after their conversion or their baptism could not be forgiven (as though Jesus' sacrifice was only for sins you had committed before you believed in him). To avoid these tragic misunderstandings, you need to see the verse in its context, especially in relation to verse 18. What the writer means in verse 26 is that if we willfully reject Christ's sacrifice we can not find *another*. "No sacrifice for sins is left" because the last one needed has been made in the sacrifice of Jesus (vs. 18).

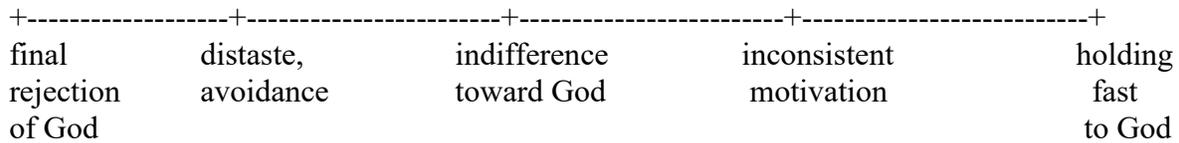
For the first readers especially this would mean that the sacrifices of the old covenant, which once had a provisional effectiveness, were no longer effective. If they leave Christ's sacrifice, they need not think that they can go back to the OT sacrifices and resume them. God has made those sacrifices obsolete. The deliberate sinning mentioned here is probably, then, a reference to apostasy, much like the danger discussed in chapter six. The blatant nature of the sin he is talking about is shown by the strong language of verse 29.

For us who are not tempted to go back to Judaism (as the first readers were), what does this verse mean? We also have nowhere else to go if we abandon our only hope--the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Nothing else can conceivably be offered if we reject or scorn the sacrifice which God himself has already provided. If we fail and fall into sin, we have to appeal once more to the one and only effective sacrifice for sins--Jesus' death. God

will apply the benefits of that sacrifice as often as we truly repent and ask his cleansing (1 John 1:9). There are sacrifices required of us in the new covenant (as for example the sacrifices of praise and good works in 13:15-16), but there are no more sacrifices *for sin* which can be made or need to be made.

Just as he did in ch. 6, the writer of Hebrews follows his harshest warning with words of appreciation and positive encouragement (vss. 32-35). They have already invested a lot, and they can be encouraged by remembering that God will be faithful to reward them (vs. 35).

Toward the end of this chapter the writer once again urges us to continue on in faith. Dedicated, disciplined persistence is the only safe course for us because of the natural human tendencies illustrated by the following diagram:



The human tendency apart from God and apart from Christian fellowship is to drift toward the left hand side of this scale. Most of us struggle with trying to 'hold fast'; we sometimes find our motives, our zeal for God, not as strong as at other times. Struggling with our inconsistencies is part of Christian growth. The real danger arises when we grow tired of the struggle and become complacent about our inconsistencies. When we compromise and become comfortable with our weak and wavering discipleship, we drift into indifference toward God and his will for us. Then the desires and motivations of the world begin to regain control of us, just as they control people who do not know God. As the business and cares of this world take over our lives, indifference can even become distaste for God's will, because we fear it will interfere with our self-centered plans.

Indifference toward God or avoidance of God will be rebuked by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, as God will try to get our attention to warn us of the danger we are courting. Even then, God is acting with grace, wanting to save us from ourselves, but we can rebel and spurn his grace. If we do, and if we persist in doing so, the end result can only be destruction. All of this can be avoided by holding fast as the writer of Hebrews urges us to do.

On the spectrum of attitudes in the diagram above, where would be the point of no return? We can speculate and hold different theological opinions (see discussion of ch. 6), but we dare not experiment. Too much--everything--is at stake. Wherever the point of no return might be, we want to stay as far away as possible from it. Where would be the safest place to stay? Clearly we should use every means available (including Christian fellowship, vs. 25) to help us keep holding fast. Salvation is assured for those who hold fast. [A good discussion question would be "What kind of things might influence you toward one end or the other of this spectrum?"]

Hebrews is characterized by a certain tension throughout the book. On the one hand, the person and work of Christ are put forward as the absolute guarantee of our salvation. No room is left for doubt or uncertainty concerning either God's will or God's provision for our complete redemption. On the other hand, the possibility that we might not benefit from God's provision is treated as a very real danger. How can salvation be guaranteed but uncertain? The apparent contradiction of this is not resolved by choosing to deny that one can lose his or her salvation (see discussion on ch. 6). The answer, rather, lies in the fact that a guarantee (such as we have in Christ) must be trusted in order to benefit us. Our salvation is guaranteed in Jesus (7:22), but we must trust the guarantee. If we should miss out on God's salvation, it will not be because it was inadequately provided; it will be because it was inadequately wanted or inadequately trusted. Remember that the Israelites in the wilderness, who had God's promise and power to assure them of the inheritance, failed to benefit from the provision because of their unbelief (4:2).

What God has promised is guaranteed but not unconditional. The condition is that you trust the guarantee: Christ (7:22). Our faith must have a starting point but also a continuation, a perseverance. God will help us to persevere, but we must want to continue and allow him to continue his work in us.

#### 11:1-40

This famous chapter contains many examples of the kind of faith that we are told we need at the end of ch. 10. This faith is more than mere intellectual belief, more than agreeing to a set of doctrines. This faith does involve believing certain facts (for example, belief in creation as the work of God, vs. 3), but it also involves endurance or perseverance in believing and obeying. While the faith discussed here is the faith to believe for a miracle, it is also the faithfulness to go on obeying and trusting God while waiting for the miracle. [Note that one Greek word, *pistis*, can be translated as either 'faith' or 'faithfulness.']

The word "faith" occurs some 24 times in the chapter, and the phrase "by faith" is especially emphasized by being used to begin 18 sentences (starting with vs. 3). Clearly faith is the emphasis. Ironically the kind of faith emphasized here is not necessarily the kind of 'faith' that gets preached a lot these days. Hebrews 11 emphasizes the kind of faith which can enable you to be patient, to persevere. We often hear faith preached today as though it is something which makes patience unnecessary, as though adequate faith makes perseverance obsolete. Quite the contrary, as this chapter shows, adequate faith makes perseverance possible.

As you read this chapter carefully, you will note that not everyone who had this faith experienced success by the world's standards, but they all pleased God by their faithfulness. Even those who died without having yet received the fulfillment of the promises (vs. 13) were pleasing in God's eyes because they remained faithful (see vs. 39). Like these OT heroes of faith, we who live under the new covenant will die before we see *all* the promises fulfilled, unless we survive until the return of Christ. We will taste some success but also some frustrations, some lack of fullness, some pain--Jesus promised it! (See John 16:33.) Sooner or later, we will all need faithful endurance, perseverance (10:36).

Along with the frequent repetition of the words "by faith" note also the many references to "things not seen" or "invisible." (See vss. 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, 26, 27.)

Things not seen are vital to the meaning of faith in this chapter. To live in the present in the way that pleases God (and "without faith it is impossible to please God," vs. 6) requires a certain discernment of invisible present realities and invisible future realities.

By its very nature, faith involves trusting God for things which cannot be seen now. Certainly in this life, even though we may experience many blessings and see many miracles in answer to prayer, we will not be able to receive all that God has provided for our eternal joy (for example, the immortal body; see Rom. 8:18, 23; 2 Cor. 5:2). We do not have to wait for the next life to experience God's saving power, but we will have to wait to experience the totality of its effects (note 6:5; we have already tasted of the powers of the age to come). That means that in this life we cannot have the total fulfillment of all that God has in store for us, all that we were made and redeemed for, all that we long for (for example, reunion with Christians who have already died, 1 Thess. 4:13-14). We need enduring faith--faithfulness--because we do not and cannot have total fulfillment now. If we could have all the fulfillment now, we would not need Jesus to return or to go to be with him; we would not need to continue in faithfulness. The time of waiting for fulfillment is precisely the time for living faithfully. Enduring faithfulness will no longer be necessary when the fulfillment is experienced (see Rom. 8:24-25).

This was an important word for the first readers of Hebrews, tempted as they were to avoid the hardships of the moment by returning to a more comfortable and safer Judaism. This is an important word for us as well, because we live in a society saturated with the belief that personal fulfillment *right now* is so important that other things can be sacrificed to obtain it. How often do we sacrifice faithfulness (to one another and to God) for the sake of seeking personal fulfillment? How often do we sacrifice principles for the sake of pleasure? honesty for the sake of profits? People even sacrifice marriage vows and marriage partners for the sake of more 'fulfilling' relationships.

The lesson of Hebrews (and of the whole Bible) is that the only route to real fulfillment is faithfulness to Christ and to the guidance of the Word of God. If we sacrifice faithfulness for the sake of (temporal) fulfillment, we will end up with neither fulfillment nor faithfulness. If we remain faithful, God will be faithful and will assure our eternal fulfillment. It does take faith to believe that and to live by that--faith in things we do not 'see' (in the sense of experiencing them) but which we do 'see' by faith, as though "from a distance" (vs. 13). The present moment, "today" (chs. 3-4), is the time to be faithful; we have eternity to be fulfilled. Fulfillment may have to be postponed (not a welcome thought in our world of 'instant gratification'); faithfulness cannot be put off. You cannot be faithful yesterday or tomorrow, although you can wish you had been or can plan to be. But to **be** faithful, you must believe and obey now. To remain faithful, you will need to continue believing and obeying in each new 'today.' [Note: This has nothing to do with the word "Now" at the beginning of vs. 1. In that particular occurrence, "now" does not mean "in the present time." It is really only a loose connective word which could have been translated as "but", "and", "so", or even "then." It is true that faith and faithfulness have to be 'in the now,' but that is based on the nature of faith rather than on the occurrence of "now" in vs. 1.]

11:1 Not so much a definition of faith as a description of its effect. The word 'faith' in this chapter could well be translated 'faithfulness,' for that is its true sense in many verses. One could say that true faith will show itself in faithfulness.

11:3 Since no human was there to witness firsthand the world's creation, we'll have to take it by faith that God created this world. Some have misunderstood and misquoted this verse, taking it to mean that the world was created by God's use of faith. Careful attention to the word order in the sentence, however, will show clearly that this is not a statement about the universe being *created* by faith but rather about how we can *understand* by faith that it was created by God's command. God's word was not effective because he had faith, but because he is God!

11:6 The only way to gain God's approval. The "reward" for those who seek God would have to be a relationship with God, wouldn't it?

11:13 "Living by faith when they died" in this text means 'dying without the fulfillment.' Somehow that sounds very unlike the way we sometimes hear people talk about faith these days. Someone who died without having received the fulfillment of the promise might be suspected of having too little faith. But perhaps such a person is demonstrating great faithfulness rather than too little faith!

Our definitions of faith and faithfulness must include the perspective of God giving the reward in eternity if necessary. At the very least we need to appreciate the truth that what God is doing is never confined to one generation. If our understanding of what God is doing can be contained in one person's life, then we simply have too small an understanding. The heroes of faith in this chapter--people like Abraham, Joseph, and Moses--perceived that they were privileged to be part of something much bigger than themselves or even their entire generation (see vs. 22). We are likewise privileged, but often our horizons are limited by our focus on immediate personal or family needs. God wants to meet those needs, but he also wants you and me to see the bigger picture of what he is doing, to see ourselves in the bigger picture.

Without the long-term perspective we may actually be placing a higher value on fulfillment than on faithfulness. The verse previously mentioned (vs. 6) did not say that "without fulfillment it is impossible to please God," but it did assure us that it is important to believe that God will reward faithfulness. These who died without having received the fulfillment (yet) were trusting God, that he would take care of fulfillment, even if not in their earthly lifetimes. Ultimately, this lifetime cannot contain all the fulfillment God has planned and provided for you.

11:17-18

How to fulfill the promise (and when) is God's problem (if it is proper to speak of God having problems!). Abraham's responsibility was to obey a command which seemed to contradict a promise he had received earlier. Indeed, by telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, God was telling him to sacrifice the fulfillment of a divine promise--a fulfillment Abraham had waited on for years. Isaac was the fulfillment of a previous promise and was himself the promise of more fulfillment. How could God's promise to give Abraham countless offspring (Gen. 15:5) be reconciled with this command to give up the child of promise? Abraham's choice was this: Do I hold on to the fulfillment I already have and insist that God keep his promises to me, or do I make faithfulness my priority and trust God to remain faithful? It would be difficult to imagine a greater test of faithfulness than

this. This example suggests that, at least sometimes, faith should be focused more on enabling our response to God than on obtaining a response from God.

Another point to make from this passage is that it might take a resurrection to fulfill some promises. In the meantime it may take more faith to be crucified than to be raised from the dead!

11:25-28

Moses, by faith, chose a risky future with God's people over riches and pleasures available apart from God's people. In other words, he chose faithfulness over fulfillment.

11:32-40

**Some won** earthly victories by faith. **Others endured** earthly defeats, but by faith they did endure. Notice that the writer says that **all** of these--the 'winners' and the 'losers' (in the eyes of mankind)--died before fulfillment of **all** that was promised (vs. 39). He also says that **all** of them--no matter what the world thought--had gained God's approval. What is required is faithfulness, not 'success' as defined by the world. (On God's approval or 'commendation' see also vss. 2, 4, 5. The expression in each case can also be translated "obtained a testimony.") [Compare 1 Cor. 4:2.]

Like them, we too will die before we see **all** the promises fulfilled, unless we survive until the second coming of Christ. Like they were, we too are part of something bigger, more comprehensive, than one lifetime can contain. (Compare Eph. 4:13.)

12:1-3

The writer pictures us as runners in a race, surrounded by the faithful heroes of the past (ch. 11). We could call it "the faith race," not in the sense of trying to outrun anyone else but in the sense of enduring the course, of making it successfully across the finish line.

The term "witnesses" can be taken in two different ways. They could be thought of as 'witnesses' in the sense of **watching** us as we run. They can also be thought of as 'witnesses' in the sense of what they are **speaking** to us. The 'witness' of the faithful in this sense was important in ch. 11 (e.g., vss. 4, 13, 20, 21, 22). The 'witnesses' could be thought of like the crowd cheering on the team on the field, with the important qualification that each one in the 'cheering section' knows by experience what it means to be in the thick of the competition. Perhaps a better analogy is the way members of a relay race team will encourage the rest of the team after their own segments of the race have been completed. These 'spectators' are not disinterested bystanders merely being entertained! (Look again at 11:39-40.)

It is encouraging to be aware of these others who have 'run the race' before us, but our focus needs to be on Jesus. He is the "author" (or "pioneer") and the "finisher" (or "perfecter") of this 'faith race' in which we are running. He is the supreme leader, the 'goal line,' and the greatest possible example of the kind of enduring faithfulness we need. The race is not over yet. For each of us it is still possible to win or lose, **but the only way to lose is to quit**. Therefore we should discard anything that might influence us to quit, or anything that might cause us to lose interest in the race, since that could lead to quitting. [The imagery of a race is employed in Phil. 3:12-14 also.]

## LESSON 8

### OUR PROPER RESPONSE TO THE PRIVILEGES OF THE NEW COVENANT Hebrews 12:4-13:25

This concluding lesson is concerned principally with practical exhortations about behavior and attitude. Of course these exhortations are based on the theological/spiritual perspective which has characterized the entire book. It is because we know who Jesus is and the decisive nature of what he has done that we can be courageous and persistent in our Christian pilgrimage.

12:4-13

Difficulties in this life can be endured as discipline, i.e., they will have good results eventually even if they are unpleasant at the time. Although God may not **cause** the trials initiated by a hostile world or by Satan, God can **use** every situation or problem which we submit to him to produce his will for us. And his will is good. What the world intends for evil, God will turn for good (Rom. 8:28-29; Gen. 50:20). Put another way, the world or Satan may be trying to 'tear us down,' but God uses every adversity as well as other experiences to 'build us up.' (Compare the concept of 'pruning' and 'bearing much fruit' in John 15.) [Stan Cosby: God can either alleviate suffering or appropriate suffering. Either way his purpose and glory are served.]

God's intended end result is that we share in his holiness (vs. 10; compare 10:10, 14). Focusing on that intended result as a positive goal will strengthen us in the midst of the conflict. Strengthening does not often appear *immediately* as the result of difficulties and conflicts. Rather those are the times when our weaknesses become most glaringly obvious. But the revealing of our weaknesses becomes the opportunity for the healing of those weaknesses and wounds. Instead of being disheartened by awareness of the weakness, we can take courage in the certainty of God's purpose: healing, wholeness, holiness.

Sometimes we need to hear that encouraging word from another believer. That means that sometimes we need to be that believer who speaks that encouraging, healing word to a disheartened fellow pilgrim. [Gal. 6:1-2] To be prepared to share that encouraging word, we have to be willing and alert to see the "feeble arms and weak knees," whether that failing strength is ours or another's. And we have to desire genuinely what God desires: healing, not further wounding or weakening. God wants the "lame" to be healed, not further "disabled." God is for healing; God's people will be for healing if they follow his example. To be for healing does not mean ignoring problems; neither does it mean giving up on 'problem people.' As God's people, assured of the ultimate good result for each faithful pilgrim, we can make it our aim to relieve pain, restore and increase strength, and encourage one another--not with false or superficial optimism but with genuine care for the long-term welfare of each other.

12:14

This verse says that we are responsible to pursue holiness or sanctification. Remember that this is something we **can** pursue with positive expectation of growth and progress because it has been already provided by Christ (10:10-14). The obverse is also true: Although it has been provided, we must still pursue it.

The holiness which God provides and which we pursue is the ultimate healing of our entire being. Holiness in the truest sense of the word is wholeness. This, and nothing less than this, is the healing which God has as his ultimate goal for us. Our concern for healing is usually focused on physical realities or social circumstances which cause us pain, discomfort, or which threaten our survival. God cares about those things, but he also wants to heal us in those areas of our lives where we ourselves might choose to be left alone, those aspects of our lives where we might wish to maintain the status quo because it suits us.

God knows what things we need to be healed of, even if we regard those things differently. Unfortunately 'holiness' sounds like deprivation to many people, so there is a tendency to think negatively about it. In fact, holiness heals. Holiness does not tear you down; it builds you up. But some things may have to be torn down in order to build you up in a way that will last. That is why we need to let God define for us--through his Word, the example of Jesus, and the conviction of the Holy Spirit--the meaning of holiness in our lives. We need to let him prescribe for us the disciplines we need, rather than choosing only what we want of God's ways and keeping what we like of our ways (as the current fashion is in religion and other forms of 'self-help'). "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" means that no half measures or compromises can ultimately be successful. Nothing less than the holiness God provides (10:10, 14) is sufficient for the holiness God requires and the wholeness we need. Half holy is not whole or holy! [That sounds like a pun, but it makes a point.]

You may think "I'm not strong enough to be holy." In one sense that is true, since you are not strong enough to be holy by your own efforts. In another sense it is false, because you are also not strong enough not to be holy! Holiness--God's holiness--will eventually save you or destroy you. You are not strong enough to resist it. As the writer says a bit later (12:29, citing Deut. 4:24), "God is a consuming fire." The power of holiness is nothing less than the most powerful force in the universe, the power of God himself.

Holiness is stronger than sin, for in the end holiness wins. So often I think of holiness as something shattered by the tiniest of moral lapses. When I do, I am thinking of *my* holiness, as produced by my diligent efforts. But the holiness of God himself, which is the holiness effected by his presence, will destroy all affection for sin and will at last destroy sin itself. That holy presence, when endured rather than evaded, will (progressively) destroy sin in us and even its effects in the world eventually. Holiness heals what sin has broken, but only when it is God's holiness. In view of the healing nature of God's holiness, why am I so reluctant to pursue it? Perhaps because there are some things in and about me which my own "holiness" has not healed but which I fear, and maybe even know, that his **holiness will heal**.

There is often a contradiction in our thinking (and feelings) about the attributes of God. We think warm, comforting thoughts about his love; but his holiness may seem cold, austere, and threatening. But to accept God's love is to accept his holiness, because we

cannot accept one characteristic of God and refuse to accept another. (He will not be God according to our prescription!) Remember that the greatest demonstration of his love was also the greatest demonstration of his holiness--the cross. And remember that Jesus died to save us *from* our sins--that which is opposed to his holiness. To deliver us **from sins** would be to deliver us **into his holiness**, which is precisely what Heb. 10 was saying to us earlier. Saying yes to his love may be our perception of our first conscious response to his saving will, but at some point we must understand that it is only by saying yes to his holiness that we continue to say yes to his saving will. To let God love you, you must let God change you. To let God love you, you must let him make you holy, you must let him heal you in all the ways you need to be healed.

It may be that it is more inviting to think of Jesus as the healer rather than as the one who makes holy. If, however, we understand in a positive, life-building way the biblical truth about holiness, the difference between these two aspects of Jesus' effect on us will fade away. Jesus the healer is also the one who makes holy. For those with a strong concept of God's holiness but a weak concept of God's love, the truth may need to be stated this way: The holy one is the one who heals. The one who wants me to be holy is the one who heals so that I can be holy.

12:16-17

Esau was the exact opposite of the heroes in ch. 11. He lacked the discernment of those faithful people because all he could see was the immediate. Therefore, he traded his birthright for what he wanted in the moment, thus sacrificing the eternal (his part in the heritage of God's chosen people) for the sake of the temporal (see Gen. 25:33ff). He despised what he could not see (compare 11:1) and traded it away. By despising the blessing and choosing against it, he forfeited it forever (Gen. 27:30-40). Let that be a warning to us. The opportunity to choose the blessing which God wants to give us is not an endless opportunity. It is possible to make an irreversible choice (recall the discussion in lesson 3).

12:18-29

This section contains another typological interpretation. In this case the 'type' is the experience of the awesomeness of God at Mt. Sinai. The 'antitype' is the present experience of Christians of the presence of God and those who dwell in his presence (metaphorically called "Mt. Zion" in vs. 22). The writer says that our experience is **not like** that of those at Sinai (vs. 18), with its terrifying external manifestations. But the seriousness with which the voice of God should be regarded is, if anything, greater. Then, at Sinai, God was speaking from an earthly mountain; now he speaks from the more exalted throne of heaven (vs. 25). Now, just as much as then, "our 'God is a consuming fire'" (vs. 29). Not one to be trifled with!

It is important to notice that the writer is describing present Christian experience in vss. 22 and 23. There is indeed a sense in which we have not yet arrived in a final way at our ultimate destination, but the point here concerns the fact that we already experience to some degree the presence of God, the angels, and the many people, past and present, who belong to God. The reality of our present experience of the heavenly company is inseparable from our present experience of entry into the most holy place (recall the discussion of ch. 10).

Notice in vs. 23 that everyone in the church enjoys the privilege of the "first-born" (see Gal. 3:14, 29). Don't be like Esau and despise that privilege.

The prediction that God will shake everything which can be shaken should be thought of as both a threat and a promise (vss. 26-28). Many things on which people rely will be taken from them. But we who rely on God and his kingdom alone are already receiving an unshakable kingdom. Thus, there is nothing to fear except God, who is like a consuming fire (vs. 29) to destroy everything that is out of harmony with his character and will. When all that is out of his will is destroyed all who have made God's will their own will experience unmitigated fulfillment. We need have no fear of the shakable being shaken if we are clinging to the unshakable. With the proper fear of God we have nothing else to fear, even death (recall 2:15).

[The proper fear of God cures all other fears, but fear of others can destroy the fear of God. See John 5:44; 12:43; Prov. 1:7.]

### Hebrews 13 Various exhortations

#### 13:7-8

It is a matter of speculation to some extent, but the wording of these verses may indicate that a leader or leaders of the Christians had died (notice past tense of "spoke"). The loss of respected and trusted leaders can often dishearten those who have looked to them, especially in difficult times, for wisdom and courageous example. It is good to have models of faith, whose life of godliness we can seek to imitate. The value of such human leaders, however, cannot be absolutized. Human leaders may fail or disappoint us in various ways, and even the very best of them will have to depart eventually through death. Ultimately we must look to Jesus, who never changes. Jesus is the same always, providing a solid base for our lives, our obedience, and our faithful endurance. The best of our mortal leaders are those who can say "Follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

#### 13:9

Since Jesus does not change (vs. 8), we should be extremely cautious, even skeptical, toward any "strange teachings" (vs. 9), which often appear posing as 'new doctrine.' We need to test everything by comparing it with what has been said about Jesus from the beginning by the appointed apostolic eyewitnesses (see 1 John 1:1-4; 4:1-6).

#### 13:13-14

Compare "outside the camp" with "within the veil" (6:19; 10:19-20). What was previously "unclean" (excluded, outside the camp) is now clean because Jesus is there. The 'outsiders' are the 'insiders' in Jesus. In the eyes of the world we are outsiders, but we

know ourselves to be pilgrims on the way home. (Compare John 17:11-16, *in* but not *of* the world.) While in this world, we are content to be discontented pilgrims.

13:15-16

Although we may be outcasts from the earthly city, we have access to the heavenly sanctuary with Jesus. In the presence of God we have the holy privilege of offering the sacrifices of praise and confessing the name of God (recall 10:14, "serve the living God"). Our sacrifices are not limited to the time of worship, however. We also offer God pleasing sacrifices when we "do good" and "share with others" in the course of everyday living.

13:17

After a previous reference to the example of former (?) leaders (vs. 7), the writer of Hebrews now exhorts us to be responsive to our present leaders. Submission to authority is a good biblical principle which has suffered much in recent decades because of abuse of authority by some and a general societal trend toward individual autonomy ("Nobody tells me what to do!"). The way authority is referred to in this verse might be helpful in restoring a balanced perspective.

Notice that the rationale for respecting the authority of others is not "because they have the right to tell you what to do," but because "they keep watch over you" and because "they must give an account." In other words, respect is due to those who have responsibility for your wellbeing; respect their responsibility and their accountability to those over them (ultimately God). It is in our long-term best interest to give our willing cooperation to those assigned responsibility over us.

This principle of submitting to authority should not be applied in such a way that we abdicate all responsibility for ourselves and our decisions ("I'm just doing what I was told to do"). That is an unbiblical imbalance. God's assignment of responsibility/authority to one person does not negate the personal accountability each one of us has before God (see 2 Cor. 5:10). For example, my pastor has the authority (responsibility) to teach me the Word of God. To show proper respect for his authority, I should be in church and pay attention to what he is saying; I should pray for him regularly in reference to his responsibilities. I cannot use the fact of his authority over me as an excuse for my own failure to read and study the Bible. If I interpret the Bible differently than he does on some point, I need to be mature and responsible in how I deal with that disagreement. I do not have to assume that he is always right, but I do have to respect the greater responsibility that he has in such matters. My view can be only my own (until I teach it in a Sunday School lesson or share it in some other way); what the pastor teaches from the pulpit will influence many more people, who are looking to him for more than they are when they listen to me in a casual conversation. Both the pastor and I, along with everyone else, bear responsibility for the way our words influence others. (See James 1:19-21; 3:1-12.) He has the greater responsibility; I must respect that.

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS  
(series by Dr. Arden C. Autry)

LESSON 1

JESUS: THE ULTIMATE REVELATION OF GOD  
Introduction to Hebrews and Hebrews 1

Introduction to the Book of Hebrews

Authorship

Audience

Date

Purpose: Encouragement

Strategy: Focus on

1. who Jesus is
2. what Jesus has done
3. what our response should be

Hebrews 1

Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God

Creator and Sustainer of the universe

Incomparable superiority to angels

superior name

eternal existence

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS  
LESSON 2

JESUS AS TRUE MAN--WITH US YET OVER US  
Hebrews 2-3

Hebrews 2

Warning against drifting away

Jesus fulfills true purpose for humanity

sharing our human condition

transforming our human condition

Jesus is not only able but willing to save and help

Conquest of the fear of death

Hebrews 3

Jesus superior to Moses

“apostle” and high priest

house and house builder

Although one of us, he is also over us.

Need to sustain the response to God

“today”

entering the “rest”

response of the heart

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS  
LESSON 3

REST OR REJECTION?  
Hebrews 4:1-13; 5:11-6:20

Hebrews 4:1-13

Entering the “rest” as an ongoing process

necessity of faith

present or future rest?

Make every effort to enter the rest

No refuge outside the rest

Hebrews 5:11-14

Importance of continuing to mature

Hebrews 6

Building on the foundation

Warning against irreversible apostasy

Can a person once “saved” be lost?

refusal to repent versus inability to repent

Finishing what we’ve started

relying on God’s power to finish

necessity of persistence along with faith

God’s unchangeable purpose

Don’t let go of the “hope rope”!

What does it take for an anchor to hold?

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS  
LESSON 4

OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST  
Hebrews 4:14-5:10; 7:1-28

Hebrews 4:14-16

The character and nature of our high priest, Jesus

sympathetic yet sinless

Hebrews 5:1-10

Appointed and perfected high priest

obedience and suffering

Jesus as model of obedience

Jesus as enabler of obedience

Hebrews 7

Jesus and Melchizedek

purpose of typology

similarity and superiority

focus on “antitype”

Melchizedek as “type”

Jesus as “antitype”

Guarantee of a better covenant

An everlasting priesthood

an ongoing intercession

superiority to Levitical priesthood

one sacrifice for all time

perfected forever

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS  
LESSON 5

COVENANT COMPARISONS: INTERNAL EFFECTS  
Hebrews 8:1-9:14

Hebrews 8

The “true tabernacle”

What the OT tabernacle symbolized, the “true tabernacle” is.

provisional versus permanent

Jesus’ better ministry

New covenant with better promises

forgiveness secured

internalizing of the law

knowledge of God

Hebrews 9:1-14

Limited access in the old sanctuary

Limited effects of the old sacrifices

Entry into the “holy place” by Jesus’ blood

Internal effects of the new covenant

cleansing of the conscience

to serve and worship the living God

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS  
LESSON 6

COVENANT COMPARISONS: ETERNAL EFFECTS  
Hebrews 9:15-10:22

Hebrews 9:15-28

A “will” put into effect by death

will/covenant (same word in this context)

Cleansing of the “heavenly things”

Once is enough.

Hebrews 10:1-22

One sacrifice effective for all time

“forgetting” versus “remembering”

Sanctification as God’s will

God’s provision for God’s will  
by the sacrifice of Jesus’ body

a permanent and perfect provision for an ongoing process.

appropriation versus production

No sacrifice remains

Access to God’s presence by Jesus’ blood

Jesus’ body as the way in

drawing near with confidence

Summary comparison between the old and new covenants from Hebrews 7-10:

**OLD COVENANT**

then  
weak, flawed  
law on stone  
remembrance of sins  
**external cleansing**  
(ceremonial)  
limited access to God  
for very few  
weak, mortal high priests  
'earthly' sanctuary  
**provisional**, temporary effects  
prophetic, promise, 'type'

**NEW COVENANT**

now  
powerful, perfect  
law in heart  
'forgetting' of sins  
**internal cleansing**  
(conscience)  
free, open access to God  
for everyone  
powerful, immortal high priest  
'heavenly' sanctuary  
**eternal** effects  
fulfillment, 'antitype'

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS  
LESSON 7

PERSEVERING FAITH  
Hebrews 10:23-12:3

Hebrews 10:23-39

Mutual encouragement

No sacrifice for sins is left

Importance of persevering faith

Hebrews 11

Faith and the unseen

The way to please God

Past examples of persevering faith/faithfulness

seeing the invisible

faithfulness and fulfillment

Hebrews 12:1-3

Running the faith race

a cloud of “witnesses”

discarding hindrances

Jesus as the pioneer and finisher of the faith race

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS  
LESSON 8

OUR PROPER RESPONSE TO THE PRIVILEGES  
OF THE NEW COVENANT  
Hebrews 12:4-13:25

Hebrews 12:4-29

Difficulties as discipline for God's heirs

God's goal for us: holiness

healing the broken

strengthening the weak

Pursuit of holiness/wholeness

holiness heals

Esau's negative example

lack of discernment

temporary satisfaction, eternal grief

Spiritual Mt. Zion

Inheriting the unshakable

Hebrews 13

Various exhortations

Reliable leadership

Reliable teaching

Outside the "camp"

Sacrifices pleasing to God

Responsiveness to those with responsibilities

Concluding prayers and greetings

## Basic References

Illustrated Bible Dictionary or other good Bible dictionary

Hebrews in the New International Biblical Commentary, Donald A. Hagner, Hendrickson, 1990.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, F.F. Bruce, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans, 1990.

## **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 1**

### From Hebrews 1

1. What does Jesus sustain? Will he have any difficulty sustaining you? How does he sustain?
2. What is the relationship between Jesus and the angels? What name(s) does he have which they do not?
3. What is the relationship between Jesus and the OT prophets?
4. What is the relationship between Jesus and the Father?

## **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 2**

### From Hebrews 2

1. What is meant by the “message spoken by angels”?
2. How did God confirm the message of Christ and the apostles?
3. What OT passage is quoted regarding the place of humanity as “a little lower than the angels”?
4. What were the purposes for the Son of God to become a human being?
5. How was the author of salvation perfected? How might this serve to encourage us?
6. What should be the Christian’s attitude toward death?
7. What kind of high priest is Jesus? How do we know he can and will help us?

### From Hebrews 3

1. What does it mean to call Jesus the “apostle” of our faith?
2. How does Jesus compare with Moses? Why would this be important for the first readers of Hebrews?
3. What does it mean to say we are God’s “house”? Are we God’s “house” regardless of how we behave in the future?
4. What is the OT source for the passage which begins “Today”? To what missed opportunity was the writer of the OT passage referring? Had those people seen the power of God to save?
5. What did “rest” mean in that OT setting? How does the writer of Hebrews apply it here? (see ch. 4 as well)
6. Where does rebellion start? (What do we need to be careful not to harden?)
7. How long is this warning/encouragement in effect?
8. How are unbelief and disobedience connected?

### **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3**

#### From Hebrews 4

1. What does the “rest” mean in this context?
2. What can keep the “gospel” or ‘good news’ from having the intended effect?
3. When do we enter the “rest”? When did God enter his “rest”?
4. Verse 12 is well known. What is its significance in this context?

#### From Hebrews 6

1. What specific teachings does the writer refer to as elementary or foundational?
2. What two things are described as “impossible” in this chapter?
3. Have the people described in vss. 4-5 had a genuine Christian experience?
4. What does “fall away” mean in this context? Is that different from sin committed out of weakness or ignorance?
5. How would this be applied in the historical situation of the original audience for this letter? How would this be applied today?
6. Does the writer think that the people he is writing to have committed this error yet? Why does he warn them so sternly?
7. How can we make our hope sure?
8. What do we need in addition to faith in order to inherit God’s promises?
9. What are the “two unchangeable things” referred to in vs. 18?
10. What or who is at the other end of our hope? Where is it anchored?

## **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 4**

### From Hebrews 4

1. How is Jesus said to be like us? How is he different? How does knowing both these things encourage us to seek his help?

### From Hebrews 5

1. What are the qualifications for any priest to be effective?
2. How was Jesus appointed to this role?
3. How did Jesus learn obedience? What is meant by this? How might this encourage our obedience?
4. How was Jesus “made perfect” if he was already sinless? How does this passage relate to 2:10?

### From Hebrews 7

1. Where in the OT is Melchizedek mentioned?
2. In what significant ways was Melchizedek like Jesus?
3. In the typology which compares Melchizedek with Jesus, which one is more important?
4. What two roles were combined in Melchizedek which were also combined in Jesus?
5. How does the writer illustrate the greatness of Melchizedek’s priesthood?
6. Melchizedek’s priesthood is superior to what other priesthood?
7. If Jesus did not enter his priesthood by birth into the right tribe, how did he enter it?
8. Why would it be important to the first readers of Hebrews to know that Jesus’ priesthood was greater than that of the Levites?
9. What is our guarantee of the better covenant?
10. What does Jesus continue to do in heaven? (See Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:2.)
11. How was the Son perfected as high priest forever? (Compare 2:10; 5:9; 7:18-19.)

## **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 5**

### From Hebrews 8

1. How did the earthly tabernacle constructed by Moses compare to the heavenly one?
2. In what specific ways is the new covenant better than the old? What specific provisions are found in the new covenant?
3. Where is the quoted prophecy found in the OT?
4. What does the inauguration of the new covenant mean for the old covenant?

### From Hebrews 9

1. How limited was the access to the Holy of Holies (another name for the Most Holy Place or sanctuary) in the old tabernacle?
2. What procedures were required for entry? What was the significance of these limitations, according to the writer of Hebrews?
3. What is meant by the “greater and more perfect tabernacle”?
4. How did Christ enter the true Holy of Holies for us (in contrast to the procedure for entering the earthly sanctuary built by Moses)?
5. What does the blood of Christ cleanse which the former sacrifices could not?
6. What does this cleansing enable us to do?

## **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 6**

### From Hebrews 9

1. Noting that “will” (in vs. 16) is the same Greek word as “covenant,” what has to happen to put the will/covenant into effect?
2. What was it that needed cleansing by the blood of Christ? Was it a place where God was present already, or a place where God wanted to be present?
3. How many deaths did Jesus have to die in order to cleanse us?

### From Hebrews 10

1. How does the repetition of the OT sacrifices show their inability to perfect us? If those worshipers had been perfected by those sacrifices what would they have been set free from?
2. Instead of enabling you to forget your previous sins, what did the repeated sacrifices do? (Compare with 8:12.)
3. In place of the repeated and ineffective sacrifices of animals, Jesus was given a body with which to do the “will” of God. What was that “will” (in this context) and what is the result of the fact that Jesus accomplished that “will”?
4. Instead of continually standing, Jesus is seated. What is the significance of this?
5. What is the relationship between the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ and the continual process of our becoming holy?
6. Why is there “no longer any sacrifice for sin” (vs. 18)?
7. When do we enter the Most Holy Place--now or in the future? What light does this shed on the meaning of the Most Holy Place in ch. 9? (Compare 12:22-24.)
8. How, or on what basis, do we enter the Most Holy Place?
9. What is for us the veil (the way in) to the Most Holy Place?
10. What has been cleansed to allow us this entry?
11. Of course we should “draw near to God” individually, since individual relationship with God is one of the key provisions of the new covenant, but in what other setting does the writer urge us to “draw near to God”? Why is this important?

## **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 7**

### From Hebrews 10

1. What kind of deliberate sin may the writer be thinking about, since he has just referred to those who have stopped meeting with other Christians?
2. Did the first audience of this epistle know what it meant to pay a price for being believers? Could they rely on past performances?
3. What do we need to do in addition to believing the truth of God's word?

### From Hebrews 11

1. The Greek word pistis can be translated either "faith" or "faithfulness."  
It is found many times in this chapter, but what kind of faith is being emphasized?
2. An emphasis of the chapter is on getting God's approval. How do we do it?
3. Another emphasis in this chapter is on "invisible" things, especially those things which are not seen because they are still in the future.  
How can we be confident of those things?
4. If the OT heroes of faith died without having received the fulfillment of the promises made to them (vs. 13), was this because they did not have enough faith? Or was it because their faith was so great that even death itself did not destroy it?
5. Isaac was the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. What did Abraham do when told to sacrifice the fulfillment? What does that show us about our responsibility to be faithful and to have faith in God for the fulfillment?
6. What price did these heroes of faith have to pay for being faithful?
7. Did all these heroes get the same results in this life? Would all have been regarded as successes by the people of their times? Were they all pleasing to God? Did any of them receive the complete fulfillment?

### From Hebrews 12

1. Are these witnesses watching or speaking?
2. Could anything besides sin hinder us from running the race?
3. Who (in comparison with the heroes of ch. 11) is the greatest example of endurance and faithfulness?

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 8

### From Hebrews 12

1. What is a benefit of hardship in this world? (Compare 5:8.)
2. How does the attitude of Esau compare with that of the heroes of ch. 11?  
How does Esau illustrate a danger for the readers of Hebrews, past and present?
3. What mountain does the writer refer to in verse 18?
4. Is the city in vs. 22 the one for which Abraham was looking (11:10, 16)?
5. Is there some sense in which we have already arrived at the city, but another sense in which we are still moving toward it? (See 13:14.)
6. How many “firstborn” are there in the church? (Compare vs. 6.)
7. What will be standing after the last shaking?
8. What will the “consuming fire” consume?

### From Hebrews 13

1. What is God’s attitude toward sexuality?
2. What examples of faith should we have in addition to the people mentioned in ch. 11?
3. What happens if our leaders fail or disappoint us or leave us through death?  
To whom do we look as a never-failing example and helper?
4. What will nourish you more surely and safely than strange new teachings?
5. Through Jesus we go **inside** the veil or curtain (ch. 10), but this means we must be willing to go **outside** the “city gate” or outside the “camp” to be with him. What would this “outside” mean to the first readers of Hebrews? What might it mean to us?
6. What “city” have we renounced? What “city” have we chosen? (See Phil. 3:20.)
7. Instead of animal sacrifices, what kind of sacrifices do we offer to God now?
8. Why should we treat with respect those who have authority over us?