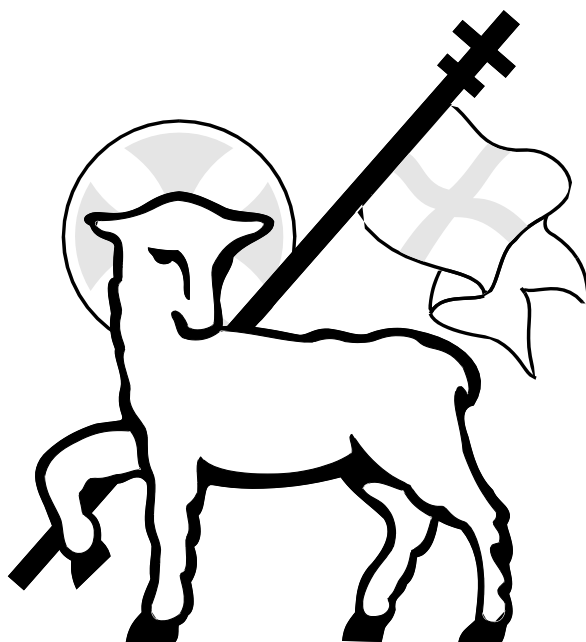


Epistle to the HEBREWS



**An exegetical theological and
practical commentary**

by

Roland Kleger

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. General remarks

The Bible teaches us that Jesus Christ holds a threefold office:

- 5 • He is king: Joh 18:37
- He is prophet: Luk 24:19; Joh 1:45; Act 3:21-23
- He is High Priest: Heb 4:14-16

10 His high priestly office or ministry is known to us primarily through the letter to the Hebrews. It is here that we find the most complete testimony to that ministry. That is the reason why this letter is of the utmost importance for a good understanding of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. It is often spoken of as the “**fifth gospel**”; the first four gospels speaking of the work of Christ on earth, while this one speaks of his work in heaven.

B. Authorship

15 This letter has been accredited to almost all the important personalities of the apostolic age: Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Peter, Priscilla and Aquila... and others! In the letter itself, we find the following information concerning authorship:

- 20 • The author was without any doubt a Hellenistic Jew; that means someone who knew the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint¹) very well. Unless of course the author had a secretary and did not actually write the letter himself.
- He was a “*genuine Christian*” being completely free from subjection to Jewish cultural traditions and the yoke of the Mosaic Law.
- He was a theological scholar and versed in Jewish history.
- 25 • He lived in apostolic times, cf. Heb 2:1-4.
- He was a close friend of Timothy, because he intended to make a visit with him to the churches (or church) to which he had written (13:23).
- At the time of writing this letter, he was in Italy or (as is theoretically possible although not likely) among a group of Italian Christians who were living abroad (cf. 13:24).

30 These indications could point to Pauline authorship. Church tradition also gives us some information concerning the authorship of the letter to the Hebrews:

- 35 • **Pantaenus**² considered this letter to be written by Paul. The apostle did not mention his name because he, an apostle to the gentiles, was writing to Jews.

¹ Abbreviation = LXX, that is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (according to a Jewish tradition it was done by 70 Jewish scholars in the second half of the third century BC in Alexandria, Egypt).

- **Clement of Alexandria** (around 200 AD) believed Paul to be the author of this letter in Hebrew which was translated by Luke into Greek. **Eusebius** preferred the hypothesis of a translation by Clement of Rome.
- 5
- **Origen** was of the opinion that this letter was written in such good Greek that it couldn't be a translation. He suspected that one of Paul's fellow workers had written down the apostle's thoughts and suggestions. Be that as it may, he was clearly of the opinion that the letter reflected the views and thoughts of Paul. This was also the opinion of the famous philologist **Erasmus of Rotterdam** (Greek expert) about 1500.
- 10
- **Tertullian** believed that this letter was written by Barnabas.
- Towards the end of the fourth century, this letter was generally attributed to the apostle Paul and it was said: "*There are fourteen Pauline letters*", indicating that Hebrews was one of them.
- 15
- From then on it was seldom doubted that the letter to the Hebrews was written by Paul. It was only in the 16th century that the famous reformer **Luther** put forward for the first time the hypothesis that this letter could have been written by Apollos.³ **Calvin** recognised the authority of this letter but ruled out Paul's authorship because of chapter 2:3. He thought of Luke or Clement of Rom.
- 20
- During the two hundred years following Luther and Calvin the letter to the Hebrews was considered to be written by Paul. Only since the time of the well-known scholar **David Michaelis** (1788) have most scholars been of the opinion that Paul could not possibly have been the author. The hypothesis that Apollos was the author of the letter was again put forward in the 20th century by the famous scholar **Spicq**.⁴
- 25
- 30 We have to accept what **Origen** said: "*Finally only God knows who the author is!*" In my opinion the above suggestions of Clement of Alexandria and Origen are not unreasonable. I honestly have difficulties in believing that this letter wasn't (in some way) "inspired" by the thinking of the apostle Paul. I will come back to this question a number of times in the course of this commentary (e.g. in the passages 10:38; 13:23).

35 C. The recipients

Just as there is no explicit indication of the author of this letter, so there is also no clear indication of who the recipients were. We do not know who was responsible for the addition of "*to the Hebrews*". It certainly did not belong to the original text. It is well possible that it was added at the time when this letter was considered to be one of Paul's. This title is

² The famous first catechist of the Alexandrian School. Before his conversion (180), he was a Stoic, later a missionary in India and Arabia.

³ Luther disagreed with Hebrews being a Pauline letter, with reference to Heb 2:3 (second generation), probably also on dogmatic grounds. By placing this letter after the letters of John, he gave it a peripheral place in the biblical canon. He did this too with the Epistle of James, which he called an "epistle of straw" (because it, according to Luther, pricked like straw). He, like the other great reformers, emphasised grace and had difficulties with passages like James 2:14-26.

⁴ Ceslas Spicq, *L'épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Gabalda, Etudes Bibliques, 1952), I, p. 209ff, 260-261.

consistent with the impression that we have on reading the letter that is, that it was written to Christians of Jewish origin (1:1), because it presupposes that the reader had a good knowledge of the history of the people of Israel, the Law of Moses and also the order of Jewish worship with all its rites (cf. 1:1.5.7-8.10; 2:6.12 etc.).

5

They had heard the gospel through the apostles or through other eyewitnesses of Jesus (cf. 2:1-3). They were themselves eyewitnesses of miracles of the Holy Spirit (2:4). They had been believers for a long time because the author reproves them by saying that they should by this time be → *“teachers”* (5:12). He admonishes them to remember → *“the first days”* and their past leaders, who had already died (13:7). They had suffered much for their faith (10:32-34), however without having to suffer martyrdom (12:4).

10

Many commentators think that the author was writing to Jewish Christians in general, others think simply to Jewish Christians in Palestine, while others suspect that he was writing to the Jews in the church in Jerusalem (or in Rome, Ephesus or Caesarea etc.). If it were Rome, then the greetings in 13:24 would be from Italian believers (e.g. from Rome), who were living in Palestine. I believe however that the hypothesis that the letter was sent from Italy to Palestine is more likely. Be that as it will, the following is sure:

15

The recipients were in danger of backsliding into a Judaism whose rites and ceremonies (9:6-8.10-11; 13:10 etc.) were in contradiction to the simplicity of the Christian meetings, these being centred on spiritual things and often taking place in the houses of poor people. This could point to the possibility of the recipients being Jewish Christians, probably in Jerusalem or more generally Palestine. They, in particular, would be in danger of falling back into Judaism.

20

25

D. Date of writing

Since Clement of Rome often referred to the letter to the Hebrews in his writings, it must have been written before the year 90 AD. The letter contains no allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem. On the contrary, the writer speaks of the Most Holy Place in Jerusalem as being symbolic of the present time (9:9). From this, we can conclude that the letter was in fact written before 70 AD.⁵ In 13:23, the author mentions Timothy, who (according to Church tradition) suffered martyrdom in the year 81 AD under the Roman emperor Domitian. We may conclude from this that the letter was probably written between 60 and 70 AD. The author was presumably writing from Rome (cf. Rom 13:24).

30

E. The authenticity of the letter

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It seems that this letter was already known in Rome before the end of the first century. Clement of Rome refers to it a number of times in his letter to the church in Corinth (ca. 90-95 AD). After this not much was heard of the letter until Pantaenus, the Presbyter, referred to it at the end of the 2nd century, attributing it to the apostle Paul. Following the time of Clement of Alexandria (who quoted the letter to the Hebrews) it was referred to again and in the first place the question of its authorship was discussed. The authenticity of the letter has

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⁵ The year in which the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans.

never really been questioned, neither in the first century nor in recent times. Much however has been written about its authorship.

F. The purpose of the letter

A twofold purpose can be perceived:

5 1. A teaching (doctrinal) purpose

By means of logical arguments, the writer wants to prove the absolute superiority of the person and work of Jesus Christ with regard to the old covenant. It seems that the recipients of the letter had difficulty in understanding that the age of the Law of Moses was irreversibly over, and that Christ had brought about the new age of grace.

10 2. A practical purpose

The Jewish Christians, unfortunately still ‘infants in the faith’ (5:12-14), should be led to growth in faith and to the recognition of the dangers (that beset them): falling back, being lukewarm and unbelief! Their deficient knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ should be remedied. In order to reach this aim, the author explains the fulfilment of the types (symbols) and promises of the Old Testament in and through Jesus Christ. Only a deeper knowledge of the person and work of Jesus Christ could fill the gaps in their spiritual life.

Key words: “better”, “perfect”

20 **Key verses:** A number of passages could be considered as “key verse” but some of the most characteristic ones are certainly: **8:1.6; 10:19-22; 12:2.**

G. Various special features

1. 5 dangers

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|----|--|----------------|
| 25 | 1. The danger of neglecting salvation: | 2:1-4 |
| | 2. The danger of hardening of heart: | 3:7-8.15 |
| | 3. The danger of backsliding: | 5:11 and 6:1-2 |
| | 4. The danger of deliberate sin: | 10:19-29 |
| | 5. The danger of neglecting holiness: | 12:14-19 |

30 2. 7 better things

- | | | |
|--|-------------------|------|
| | 1. A better hope: | 7:19 |
|--|-------------------|------|

- | | | |
|---|--|------------------------|
| | 2. A better covenant: | 7:22; 8:6 |
| | 3. A better ministry: | 8:6 |
| | 4. A better promise: | 8:6 |
| | 5. A better sacrifice: | 9:23 |
| 5 | 6. A better inheritance and a better home: | 10:34; 11:16 and 13:14 |
| | 7. A better resurrection: | 11:35 |

3. 7 eternal things

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------|-------|
| | 1. An eternal salvation: | 5:9 |
| | 2. An eternal judgement: | 6:2 |
| 10 | 3. An eternal High Priest: | 7:21 |
| | 4. An eternal redemption: | 9:12 |
| | 5. An eternal Spirit: | 9:14 |
| | 6. An eternal inheritance: | 9:15 |
| | 7. An eternal covenant: | 13:20 |

15 4. Christ in chapter one

- | | | |
|----|--|----------|
| | 1. The heir of all things: | V. 2 |
| | 2. The Creator of all things: | V. 2 |
| | 3. The radiance of God's (the Father's) glory: | V. 3 |
| | 4. The exact representation of his (the Father's being): | V. 3 |
| 20 | 5. The one who sustains all things: | V. 3 |
| | 6. The Redeemer of our sins: | V. 3 |
| | 7. The king enthroned at the right hand of the Father: | V. 3 |
| | 8. The one begotten of the Father: | V. 5 |
| | 9. God's anointed one: | V. 9 |
| 25 | 10. The Lord of eternity: | Vv 10-12 |

5. Special features of the letter

As in many of the Apostle Paul's letters, so also this one has a teaching section (doctrine: 1:1 to 10:18) and a practical section (10:19 to 13:25). The special feature of this letter is that practical exhortations or warnings are also found in the teaching sections: see 2:1-4; 3:7 to 4:13 and 5:11 to 6:20. The warnings in the practical section are to be found in the passages 10:26-39 and 12:15-29.

H. Suggestions for a better understanding of the letter

35 The following news spread out from Jerusalem: "*The Messiah has come but not as we expected him!*" The Jews had mainly rejected him. He died, rose and returned back to heaven. Now all Jews faced the following decision: to become a Christian or remain in the Jewish faith! The author remembered the great crisis in Israel's history: many Israelites perished in the wilderness because of unbelief. The author of the letter was afraid that the same disaster

could be repeated because of unbelief towards Jesus Christ. He had no illusions: As in the time of Moses (and the people of the old covenant), so there are people who attend church services but who do not really believe. They are involved in church life but have never made a genuine decision for Jesus Christ. This is what the apostle John alludes to in 1Jo 2:19. The
5 apostle Paul confirms this for the people of Israel of the old covenant in 1Co 10:1-11. We experience this today again and again in our churches. The exhortations and warnings in this letter relate especially to these people. The writer of the letter says clearly that these people have no genuine faith... as was the case with the Israelites who died in the wilderness: see
10 3:19; 4:2; 10:38; 12:16! But at the same time it seems that the author was also convinced that many of his readers were authentic Christians (cf. E.g. 3:1;⁶ 6:9-11; 10:32ff; 11:40 etc.).

⁶ In this passage the author addresses the recipients as "*holy brothers*".

II. TEACHING SECTION: THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST: 1:1 to 10:18

A. The superiority of the Person of Jesus Christ: 1:1 to 7:28

5 1. Introduction: Christ is the fulfilment of all revelation (greater than the prophets): 1:1-3

V. 1: → **“God spoke”**: God’s mighty power can be seen in nature i.e. in his creation (Rom 1:19-21) but not his love. For this reason it was necessary for God to reveal himself to man in order to bring him back into fellowship with himself: cf. Isa 1:2.

10

→ **“Through the prophets”**: These had long foretold a saviour (cf. e.g. Gen 3:15; Isa 7:14; 52:13ff; Mic 5:1ff; Zec 12:10ff etc.), who would save us from our sins. God revealed himself to them through dreams, signs and visions etc. They on their part then passed on God’s message to their fellow men by preaching but also by signs (e. g. Eze: 4:1ff; 5:1ff) and simply through their lives (e.g. Isa 8:18; Eze 24:15; Hos 1 to 3 etc.).

15

V. 2: → **“In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”**: In Greek “ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων.” This means literally *“at the end of these days”*. Hughes⁷ observes that this expression occurs 12 times in the Septuagint and that it refers to the *“eschatological age of the Messiah”*.

20

So, here we have God’s final revelation. The preparatory ministry of the angels and prophets could satisfy neither the heart of God nor of man. The Son of God had to come into our midst as the *Word of God*, the expression of God’s thoughts towards us. The Son of God is the bearer of God’s life and love. He came into the world to bring us back into a relationship with the Father, to dwell in our hearts just as he dwells in the heart of his Father (cf. Joh 1:18; 3:16; 1Jo 4:9).

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The Word of God is perfect! Apropos Christ, the most excellent Word (*Logos*), compare the passages Psa 33:9; Joh 1:1-12 and Rom 8:32! **“In these last days”**: This means that *the Word* is the fulfilment of all the promises (of the Old Testament) and that it stands for ever because it is the final and perfect revelation of eternal salvation accomplished through the power of an incorruptible life (cf. 7:25; 9:26; 10:10.14.18; 13:8).

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⁷ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), p. 37. This is the translation of the Hebrew expression בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים (*bē’akhārīt hayyāmīm*).

At this point we have to ask ourselves the following question: “*Why didn’t God speak through his Son right at the beginning? Why were two covenants necessary?*” The answer to this is twofold:

- 5 1. Man had first to become conscious of his sinfulness and helplessness before he could, with his understanding, appropriate God’s salvation (cf. Rom 3:20; 7:7).
2. Only then could he truly become desirous for what God alone could give him (cf. Rom 7:24-25)!

10 In the one [old covenant] the words of man help us to seek God; in the other [new covenant] the Divine Word sounds in the depths of the heart and extends its power in it.⁸

However, what did God say? This question is answered by the author from verse 4 onwards, but in verse 3 he already alludes to it. Salvation has come to mankind and this salvation is a person, the perfect Christ, the Son of God.

15

Vv. 2-3: Who then is the Son of God?

- | | | | |
|----|---|---|-----------------|
| | 1. The heir of all things: v. 2b (cf. Rom 8:17): | → | in relationship |
| | 2. The maker of the universe: v. 2c (cf. Col 1:16): | → | to |
| 20 | 3. The sustainer of all things: v. 3b (cf. Col 1:17): | → | creation |

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- | | | | |
|----|--|---|-----------------|
| | 1. He is the radiance of God’s glory: v. 3a: | → | in relationship |
| | 2. And the exact representation of his being (i.e. God’s being): | → | to |
| 25 | These two things relate to the essence of God (cf. Joh 1:18; 10:30): | → | God the Father |

What has the Son of God done (accomplished)?

- 30 1. He provided purification for sins: v. 3c (cf. Joh 1:29; 19:30).
2. He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven: v. 3d (cf. Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; 1Pe 3:22).

These first three verses are like a summary of the whole:

35

1. Jesus is the final Word of God (cf. Joh 14:6; Act 4:12).
2. The Son is the Creator, sustainer and heir of all things: vv 2-3.
3. He accomplished salvation for all mankind: v. 3 (cf. Mar 10:45; Eph 1:7).
4. After he had accomplished all things, he sat down at the right hand of the Father: v. 3.

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This letter informs us about what the Son, at the Father’s right hand, does: He is the High Priest who represents us: Heb 4:14-16 (cf. Rom 8:34; 1Jo 2:1-2).

45 Now the author shows and explains the superiority of Christ over all things and that we do well to put our whole trust in him and him alone (cf. e.g. 10:19ff, 12:2; 13:8-14)!

⁸ Andrew Murray, *Le Voile Déchiré*, 4th ed., translated from English into French (Mennetier-Mornex, France: M. Weber [Éditions Emmanuel], n. d. [2nd ed., 1953]), pp. 25-26. Since not all readers know French, we translate the quotation from French into English.

2. Christ is superior to the angels: 1:4 to 2:18

a.) The Son of God is superior to the angels: 1:4-14

Angels play a very important part in Jewish thinking, for instance as transmitters of God's revelation to his people (cf. Act 7:38-39; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). And so the author of the letter shows the superiority of Christ over the angels in order to underline the excellence of his message. The incomparable greatness of the name of Christ (v. 4b) and his deity are underlined by **seven quotations from the Old Testament**: the names which he has received: cf. Phi 2:9.

(1) The Son in his person is superior: vv. 4-9

- 10 1. **V. 5a**: Quotation from **Psa 2:7**: → *"You are my Son; today I have begotten you..."*: This sentence is often wrongly understood. If Jesus was begotten, does it not mean that he is a created being like angels and men? This is exactly what Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims maintain, in short, all Unitarians! But the author does not mean to say that the Son was created by the Father. In context he is referring to the enthronement of the Son at the right hand of the Father (cf. v. 3). The author is thinking of the title *"Son"*, in the sense of „inheritance of David“. In Psalm 2 it is said that the Son will attain lordship over the whole earth (Psa 2:8). In this sense the title appertains only to the Son of God, not to the angels.⁹ This is supported by the statements in Act 13:33-34: Here it is clearly said (Paul) that the statement → *"today I have become your Father"* applies to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and not to an act of creation (cf. Luk 3:22; Heb 5:5). Through his resurrection Jesus became → *"the firstborn among many brothers"* (Rom 8:29).
- 15
- 20 2. **V. 5b**: A quotation from 2Sa 7:14 (cf. also 1Ch 17:13 and 22:10): God's promise to David referring to the dominion of his descendant. It is known that this promise was not entirely fulfilled through Solomon, but rather in and through Christ, who lives forever (cf. Heb 13:8), while Salomon is long dead.
- 25 3. **V. 6**: → *"the firstborn"*: Stibbs says in reference to this:

30 He is 'the first-born in a double sense (cf. Col 1:15, 18), first as the only-begotten of the Father, existing before the created universe and Lord over it (see Ps. 89:27), and now as the firstborn from the dead, who has, as the great path-maker of salvation, opened the way for the many to enter as sons into glory (2:10).¹⁰

35 The words → *"...let all God's angels worship him"* are without any doubt quoted from Psa 97. In the Hebrew text it says: → *"all the gods [Elohim] shall worship him"*. But the Septuagint translates the word "Elohim" with "angel". We must not forget that in the Old Testament angels were often called "Sons of God" (e.g. in Job 1:6; 38:7). It is obvious that the one who is worshipped is higher than those who worship him.

4. **V. 7**: A quotation from Psa 104:4: It is of course true that the angels are God's mighty creations but...

⁹ Compare Zane C. Hodges, 'Hebrews' in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, New Testament, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck ([Wheaton, Ill.]: Victor Books, 1983), pp. 783-784.

¹⁰ A. M. Stibbs, 'Hebrews', in *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 1196.

5. **Vv. 8-9:** A quotation from Psa 45:7-8: Christ is the Son of God; his throne will last forever. He carries the sceptre (i.e. he is king) and even more: He himself is God, anointed by the Father. This is the most important fact, that he is God. If he wasn't, then he could not have redeemed us. The indispensable importance of his deity can be seen in 1Jo 2:22-23; 5:1.5.10-13.20. → **"...therefore God, your God, has anointed you..."** This expression points to the deity of Christ: see also Heb 13:8; Joh 1:1; 20:17.28-29. The anointed one is the Messiah (in Greek: Χριστός = *Christ*). He is our King, High Priest and Prophet. → **"Your companions":** Believers (who are brothers: cf. Heb 2:10-13) or the angels? Those indicated here *"companions"* or *"participants"* are probably the brothers of Christ. When Christ finished his earthly ministry and ascended into heaven, there to offer his blood to the Father, he was the first to receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Then he could send the Holy Spirit to those who believed in him, that is his brothers. This began at Pentecost: cf. Act 2:33. Those who receive the Holy Spirit are also in fact anointed ones (cf. 2Co 1:21-22; 1Jo 2:20.27). This was already prophesied in Old Testament times: cf. Isa 59:21; 61:1-3; Eze 36:26-27! In our hearts we should constantly remind ourselves: God is my Redeemer! **Practical application:** → **"You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness":** As those who are his own, those who should follow him, we are called upon to practice righteousness just as he did!

(2) The Son is superior in relationship to his work: vv. 10-14

6. **Vv. 10-12:** A quotation from Psa 102:26-28: Through this quotation we learn that Christ is exalted higher than the angels, because he himself is the Creator of all things (cf. Joh 1:1ff; Col 1:16), and that he remains forever the same (cf. 13:8). See also Isa 40:28 and Mal 3:6. In other words: Our Redeemer is also our Creator!
7. **Vv. 13-14:** A quotation from Psa 110:1: Jesus himself quoted this verse before the Jewish religious leaders in order to prove his deity: Mat 22:41ff (cf. Mat 26:64 and Mar 16:19; Act 2:35; 1Co 15:25; Eph 1:20-22). Indeed, no angel sits at God the Father's side; only the Son of God! This quotation shows us that Christ is more exalted than the angels, because he is the Redeemer of the world. This verse should make us realise that we have a wonderful High Priest and Redeemer: Yes, he is even higher than the angels and even more, he is the Son of God and is himself God. Because of this, we need nothing else. In HIM we have everything.

Having shown the greatness of Christ, i.e. having shown that he is superior to all the prophets and even the angels, the author intersperses with a first warning.

b.) First warning: 2:1-4

- V. 1:** Warning: → **"Therefore":** That means because of the superiority or exaltedness of Christ! → **"What we have heard":** These are the things that Christ said; see the gospels and Act 1 as well as all the things that the apostles reported about him. The readers are in danger of turning away from what they have heard about Christ and going back to legalism (i.e. the Mosaic Law and the Jewish traditions).

Vv. 2-4: The reason for the warning:

- V. 2:** → **"The message spoken by angels":** This means the Mosaic Law: cf. Exo 23:20-23; Act 7:38.53; Gal 3:19. Under the law, of course every sin of commission, omission or disobedience (based on failure to listen to God's Law) received its just retribution.

V. 3: Logically, if transgression against the Mosaic Law, which was only spoken by angels, was punished, how much more will this be the case for neglecting or despising the great salvation (in Christ) preached through Christ himself, the Son of God. In addition to that, this salvation was attested to them through those who had themselves seen or heard Christ that is eyewitnesses of Christ, in other words the apostles. **So obviously the readers to whom this warning is directed are second generation Christians.**

V. 4: Those who preached salvation in Christ experienced the help of the Holy Spirit who gave them the authority to perform signs and wonders, just as Jesus had promised his disciples in advance (cf. Mar 16:17-18; 1Co 12). Jesus himself had pointed out that the more a person knew of the truth, the greater his responsibility would be before God (cf. Mat 11:21-24; Luk 12:48).

c.) The Son of Man being higher than the angels and the reason for his being humiliated: 2:5-18

(1) The Son of Man being higher than the angels: vv. 5-9

The problem is obvious: In Jewish thinking, the angels were far superior to man. That is of course true. A Jewish Christian could therefore ask himself the following question: Christ was a man; and he died... therefore is he not a lesser being than the angels? The author of the letter answers these questions:

V. 5: True, the implementation of this reign has not yet taken place. Verse 5 confirms that this will only become reality in the world to come!

Vv. 6-9: According to **Gen 1:26.28**, man was destined to rule over all created things. Sadly, he lost this privilege because of Adam's sin (i.e. the **first Adam**: cf. Gen 3 and Rom 5:12-21). The statements from **Psa 8**, which are quoted in verses 6-8, were only fulfilled through and with Jesus Christ, the **Second Adam** (cf. 1Co 15:47). This was possible, because Christ was and is without sin (4:14; cf. 2Co 5:21). In fact, Christ was → "*made a little lower than the angels...*", by which we understand that Christ, in becoming man, freely subjected himself to human weakness (e.g. hunger, thirst, tiredness, but without ever committing sin: Heb 4:15; cf. 2Co 5:21). Incidentally, in view of the fact that at the end of time believers will (help to) judge angels (cf. 1Co 6:3),¹¹ man will at least in a certain way be higher than the angels. This dominion of Christ will reach its consummation in the Messianic kingdom (millennium), when all the promises pertaining to this earth will be finally fulfilled. And so Christ as Son of Man is superior to the angels, because at his return the whole world will be subject to him. By the way, Heb 2:8 is proof that Christ's kingdom is still a future one.¹² And since we, the believers, will rule with him, so we shall, in this respect, be above the angels (cf. Rev 5:10; 20:6; 1Co 6:3).

Application: Christ became Lord of all things only after he willingly humbled and lowered himself in becoming man and giving his life for us (cf. Phi 2:5-10). For this reason, Paul, in

¹¹ This refers though without any doubt only to fallen angels.

¹² This verse is just one of many, which show clearly that the amillennial view (whereby the kingdom of Christ on earth began with the Church of Jesus or that the spirits of the saints who have died and are with the Lord already rule with him) is untenable.

Phi 2:10, deliberately uses the name “*Jesus*” (in Greek: Ἰησοῦς¹³). Only after being humbled, was he crowned with glory (in heaven). We believers are also called to humble ourselves and to renounce “worldly lusts”, i.e. the works of darkness. If we do this, it will also be granted to us, on the day, when we are united with the Lord, to rule with him. In the coming age, God will make all things subject to the one who submits to him during this life. God should be our one and only in this life, and then we will be prepared for life in heaven, where God will be all in all. Live a life of self-humiliation here and in heaven a life of glory.

(2) The purpose of his becoming lower than the angels: 2:10-18

1. **V. 10:** Christ had to suffer and die → “*In order to bring many¹⁴ sons to glory.*” He had to suffer death in order to become our Redeemer.
2. **Vv. 11-13:** He humbled himself in order to become the Prince of our salvation, the Head of a group of redeemed people, the fellowship of those he has purchased (cf. Joh 17:2.6.26). In order to prove this, the writer quotes two passages from the Old Testament: in **v. 12:** Psa 22:23 (cf. Joh 17:6). Psalm 22 is a so-called Messianic psalm. In **v. 13:** Isa 8:17-18. In fact, Christ could only purchase “*his brothers*” (the church, i.e. the “*ekklesia*”) through his substitutionary death (cf. v. 10)!
3. **Vv. 14-15: v. 14:** → “*To free us from him who holds the power of death*”, that is Satan (cf. Joh 8:44). Since the fall (of Adam), all are (judicially) children of the devil: cf. Eph 2:1-3; Col 2:14-15. **V. 15:** → “*To free us from the fear of death*”: Here we have to think of those who do not know Christ and who are constantly in fear of fetishes, witchcraft, evil spirits and so on.
4. **Vv. 16-18:** → “*In order that he might become (our) high priest*”: Compare 4:14-16; 5:2-3; 7:25-28; 10:21. **V. 16:** Salvation in Christ is for man, not for angels (cf. possibly 1Pe 1:12). **V. 17:** He had to take on “*flesh and blood*” like us (cf. also v. 14). **V. 18:** What you don’t experience yourself you cannot really know and understand. The gospels show us that Jesus wept, that he suffered hunger and thirst, and that he was deeply moved... and that he also suffered temptation etc. For this reason he can help us, because he knows us and our problems, situations, weaknesses and trials (cf. Heb 4:15).

¹³ This is his “human name”, whereas “Christ” is his godly title.

¹⁴ → “*Many*”: In order to justify their teaching of “*expiatio definita*” (= Christ only died for the elect, not for all mankind. We call this teaching “*limited atonement*”), the Calvinists use this verse among others to say Christ died for “*many*”, but not for all. They also use such verses as Isa 53:12; Mat 26:28; Mar 10:45; Joh 17:9. On the other hand, we must point to other verses, which obviously show that Christ truly died **for all mankind**: 1Ti 2:3-4; Rom 3:23-24; 5:12.18-19; Col 1:19-20; 2Pe 3:9; Joh 1:29. 1Jo 2:1-2 is particularly explicit. 2Pe 2:1 is without doubt the passage, which Calvinists find the most difficult to explain, because it says clearly that Jesus had even paid the price for the salvation of false teachers. But of course the ransom is not efficacious for these, because they deny/reject the one who has paid the price for them. Christ of course paid the price for the salvation of all mankind, but it is only efficacious for those who accept redemption in Christ. The grace of God will not be forced on people, and it is also not impossible to resist it. On the contrary, people can reject it (cf. Mat 23:37; Luk 7:30). In my opinion, passages like Isa 55:1-6 or Mat 11:28-30 are to be understood in this way. God invites us, but people must answer his call (cf. Mat 22:1-10). Those who advocate the Calvinistic “*expiatio definita*” base it usually on Joh 6:44 and maintain that God would exclusively draw the elect to him, those for whom Christ died. The questionability of this teaching is particularly clear, when we consider the words of Jesus in Joh 12:32. Jesus said there that he would draw all men to him. The context shows clearly that it means all mankind, because verse 31 speaks of the “*world*”.

3. Christ is greater than Moses: 3:1-19

a.) Christ and Moses: vv. 1-6

Moses was the human mediator of the old covenant; he was the only one who was called “God’s servant” (cf. Num 12:5-8). Stibbs says that the Israelites associated their conscious status and calling as God’s chosen people with Moses.¹⁵ The Jews felt themselves to be so allied with Moses because he was the mediator of “their” law. In order that the Jewish Christian recipients of this letter, who were in danger of falling back into Judaism, would understand the greatness and total superiority of Christ, the Son of God, the author of faith, he sets out to show them that he is also greater than Moses. This follows on from him showing them that Christ is greater than the angels.

V. 1: For the first time in this letter the recipients are called “*holy brothers*” and are addressed as those who “*share in the heavenly calling*”. This fact will subsequently have to be repeated again and again. Christians should look to Jesus who is their Apostle and High Priest. As the Son of God, he is the “sent one”, that is the Apostle, as the Son of God he has become the High Priest, in order to reconcile men with God the Father and to mediate on their behalf.

V. 2: What Jesus and Moses had in common: both were faithful in their service for God: **Moses**, see Num 12:5-8; **Jesus** see for example Mat 26:42 and Joh 17:4!

Vv. 3-6: The difference between Jesus and Moses, that is, everything which shows that Jesus is greater than Moses:

1. **Vv. 3-4:** Moses was only a member of God’s house in which he served (as one of the people of God), but Christ, the Son of God, is himself the builder of the house of God (the Church i.e. the people of the new covenant). By the way, the building of a house for God’s name was the work of the (by God) anointed King (cf. 2Sa 7:13). According to verse 3a, we, the Church, are this new “house of God” (cf. 1Co 3:9; Eph 2:19-22). Christ is the builder and head of the house of God, which is his body.

2. **Vv. 5-6:** Moses was simply faithful as God’s appointed servant, Christ though as the Son of God! In this respect, Moses’ service was only a type and prophetic reference to Christ with the truths and blessings which would find their fulfilment in and through him (cf. Deu 18:15-19). Christ is the fulfilment of everything that Moses foretold (cf. Mat 5:17).

Christ is therefore not only a servant of God (as in Moses’ case); he is much more; he is the Son of God. Christ is not just a member of God’s house, which will be built, on the contrary, he himself was (and still is) the builder!

V. 6b: → “*...if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast*”: As in Heb 2:1-4, so here the writer also intersperses a warning after having shown the superiority of Christ (over Moses): “*if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.*”

¹⁵ A. M. Stibbs, op. cit., p. 1197.

The following question arises: “**Does this mean that it is possible to lose the salvation that we have received if we fall by the wayside?**” Here are a few thoughts on this question. A fuller discussion is found in reference to verses 6:4-6 and 10:26-31:

5 Were those, to whom this subliminal warning “*if*” was directed to in these verses, truly born-again believers, or were they rather sympathisers who had no roots in real authentic faith? This is the big question here! It is correct that the writer of this passage is addressing (in verse 1) “*the holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling*”. In my opinion, this question cannot be answered without taking into consideration the context of the letter and of the whole New

10 Testament. Isn’t it true that those who preach the Word of God are aware that in every church there are believers who only pay lip service but whose hearts are not moved? Jesus himself indicated this in his parable of the sower in Luk 8:4-15 (cf. Mat 13:1-23 and Mar 4:1-20). The question is then, does the seed that fell on rocky places or among thorns and sprang up, withered or scorched truly represent a sowing in the sense of a real (born again) Christian? In

15 Mar 4:16-19, Jesus himself says that these are not really children of God. Especially **Luk 8:15** emphasises this clearly: Only those who receive the Word of God with a noble and good heart are truly children of God. True believers are those who persevere to the end. This is what Jesus says in Mar 4:20. The warning in Heb 3:6 is in my opinion directed to all who are outwardly (to all appearances) believers, but who aren’t really in their innermost hearts. A

20 true believer is one who remains faithful when trials or even persecution comes (cf. 1Jo 2:19; Jud 5.19). The truth can often only be seen after a number of years. In the final analysis only God knows who the true born-again Christians are (that is those who have received the Holy Spirit) and those who are only sympathisers, who draw back as soon as opposition or temptation comes. In order to understand the letter to the Hebrews, we must take note of the

25 fact that these warnings are directed at people who have been challenged to examine themselves: Am I really a believer with roots who is bearing fruit, or am I like the seed that springs up but is dried up or suffocated by the cares and temptations of this world or this life.¹⁶ When we preach in our churches and fellowships, we must remember this and point out the danger of it. Baptism and lip service to the name of Jesus are no guarantee of eternal life.

30 A life in union with Christ, including all the consequences, is indispensable for the attainment of salvation! By the way, the following section confirms that this warning is for those who are not truly Christians, because there the author shows that those who fell by the wayside were not true believers. When they were tested in the wilderness, they rebelled against God. Therefore the conclusion of the author: They were unbelievers (cf. 3:19 and 4:2). With

35 reference to this, see Jam 2:14-26: Faith without works is dead. James uses the expression “works”, while Jesus speaks of “fruit”. It means the same. On the contrary to what certain commentators maintain, I believe there is no contradiction between the teaching of the author of the letter to the Hebrews and that of Jesus, Paul or James. I shall come back to this question in my commentary on Heb 6:4-6.

40 **b.) Second warning: vv. 7-19**

Following the comparison of Moses and Jesus (Vv. 1-6), there is a comparison of the people of the Old covenant and the New covenant. All the people of Israel celebrated the Passover in Egypt, partook of the Passover lamb and then were saved by passing through the Red Sea. And later most of the people of Israel died in the wilderness. The reason for this was their

45 **unbelief:** see vv. 10.19 (cf. Exo 17:1-7 and Num 20:1-13). The author fears that the Hebrews

¹⁶ The author of the letter seems to be thinking of the words of Jesus, because he used illustrations of earth or ground to show the danger of faith that is not genuine: cf. Heb 6:8-9 (I will come back to this in my commentary on chapter 6).

to whom he is writing this letter could become guilty of the same sin as the people of Israel in the wilderness, i.e. the hardening of their hearts through unbelief. Hence the warning.

(1) Warning against hardening of heart: vv. 7-11

This warning is a quotation from Psa 95:7-11:

5

V. 7: → “*So, as the Holy Spirit says*”: here we find a wonderful example of the inspiration of the Word of God: cf. Heb 4:12; 2Pe 1:21 and 2Ti 3:16!

V. 8: → “*during the time of testing in the desert*”: Compare this with Exo 17:1-7 and Num 20:1-13. The people demanded water and rebelled against God. As soon as times of testing come, it becomes clear who really believes. In **Deu 8:2** it says explicitly that God led Israel through the desert for this very reason, namely, to test the intentions of the heart of each individual! Most of the people of Israel did not believe and so they died in the desert. And what is the state of the hearts of the readers of this letter?

15

The Israelites ate the Passover lamb and passed unharmed through the Red Sea. Although they were witnesses of so many signs and miracles, many of them remained unbelieving and rebelled against God! And how is it with us in New Covenant times? Baptised, helping in a Sunday service, professing Christian, etc.? But how will it be with us when we face real trials? Will we remain faithful to the Lord whatever the cost? Or will we then turn away from him... just as many of the Israelites did at that time?

20

V. 11: → “*...they shall never enter my rest!*” That means they couldn’t go into the promised land of Canaan.

(2) Danger for us: to have a root of unbelief: vv. 12-15

25

After the writer reminded his readers of Israel’s catastrophe in the wilderness, he continues by warning them not to have an unbelieving heart.

V. 14: → “*...if we...*”: Compare this with 3:6! Verse 19 explains the author’s questioning: All those who believe and persevere in spite of testing and temptation are real “*companions of Christ*”.

30

(3) The example of Israel in the wilderness: vv.16-19

This example shows that we can be “*unbelieving confessors (of the faith)*”! Neither baptism nor participation in Holy Communion is a guarantee of salvation! Salvation always depends upon: **obedience**: vv. 18-19. The author repeats this truth again in 5:9. We read also in Joh 3:36 and Act 5:32 that a purely intellectual faith without obedience is of no benefit.

35

The following table represents these warning texts:

Israel in slavery Exo 3:7	We were slaves of sin: Rom 6:17.20 7:14 and Joh 8:32-36
All Israel ate the Passover and left Egypt: Exo 12:47-51; 13:9; cf. Heb 3:16.	Christ, our Pascal Lamb (1Co 5:7), has died for all (Joh 1:29), and God wants all men to

At the Red Sea, the unbelief of the people already began to show itself, although they had witnessed the miraculous deliverance out of Egypt: Exo 14:11. And yet, God had led them all through the Red Sea (1Co 10:1-3). They all experienced Yahweh as liberator from slavery.	come to a saving knowledge of him: 1Ti 2:3-4; 2Pe 3:9! Christ did all for us: Joh 19:30. Many receive him as Saviour, just as much seed is scattered: cf. Mar 4:3-20 (see all of verse 16; cf. Luk 8:15).
In the wilderness God wanted to test what was in the hearts of the people of Israel (cf. Deu 8:2). In times of testing, the true state of the heart of the individual is revealed. The number of those that fell away from God through disobedience was enormous (cf. Heb 3:8-11. 17-19; Jud 5; Num 14:22-23).	Many receive Christ joyfully as Saviour but not as Lord. As long as all goes well, one is a Christian. As soon as difficulties (persecution etc.) arise, they turn away from Christ and reveal through this that they were never really born-again Christians (cf. Mar 4:15-19; 2Pe 2:20-22; Jude 5.19; Heb 2:1-4; 6:4-9; 10:26-31, etc.).
The true believers in Israel were allowed to enter the promised land, those who remained faithful during the time of testing: e.g. Joshua and Caleb: cf. Num 14:6.24.30. They represent the true believers.	Those who receive Christ as Saviour and Lord are the true believers: who believe (Joh 1:12; 3:16; 1Jo 5:12-13), who obey him (Act 5:32; Rev 2:26), who receive him with a good heart (Luk 8:15)!

4. Christ is greater than Joshua: 4:1-13

a.) God's true rest: vv. 1-11

V. 1: The call to enter into rest is for everyone (compare 1Ti 2:3-4).

5 **V. 2:** Here the reason why Israel (the majority) did not enter into rest is repeated, namely because of their unbelief: compare Heb 3:19; Jud 5.

10 **V. 3a:** There is a rest. The author underlines this by quoting Psa 95:11. He quotes a sentence with a negative verb ("*...they shall never enter my rest...*"), because he probably didn't know any other word (in the affirmative) in the Old Testament which he could quote in this context.

15 **V. 3b-4:** God's rest, the 7th day of creation (cf. Gen 1:31 to 2:3; compare Exo 31:17), is actually a type of the rest that has been prepared for us. Adam could not enter into this original rest, because he had fallen into sin. What is then *our* rest?

20 **Vv. 5-8:** Joshua could not really lead Israel into this rest. Otherwise David would not have spoken 400 years later of "*another rest*" (cf. verses 5 and 7). We can gather this from the book of Joshua: Israel was constantly involved in wars and battles; we can hardly maintain that they had entered into rest.

25 **Vv. 9-10:** The author now defines what **God's true rest is for us!** It is not only our eternal state after death and resurrection. No, the true rest in God is faith. True faith rests from its' own works (cf. Rom 8:22-25). We are not saved by our own works but through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-10). Christ has accomplished everything (the work is done: cf. Joh 19:30; Heb 10:10.14)! Jesus himself said that we can find true rest only in him: Mat 11:28-30. Watch out though, I repeat: that does not mean that we, as believers, don't need to

care about doing good works. The true believer will automatically do good works; he will bear fruit (Jam 2:14ff). The difference simply is that true faith does not trust in its own works,¹⁷ in order to be saved. He knows that faith alone can save him and that the works of God can only be done by grace and through faith (cf. Eph 2:8-10). God's true rest is that we finally cease to do everything in our own strength: cf. Rom 6:11; Gal 2:20.

V. 11: And, because this is the only true rest, we are called to enter into it in faith by receiving Christ. What a paradox: Christ has accomplished everything... and yet the writer admonishes: → ***“Let us, therefore, make every effort...”***: The explanation for this is that we have died with Christ (Rom 6:11) and yet we are admonished, *“to put to death the works of the flesh...”* (cf. Rom 6:12ff; Phi 2:13-14; Col 3:5). We could summarize it like this: Just as God rested after completing creation (cf. Gen 2:3), so we too can find our Sabbath, that is our rest, in that we rest in Christ, who accomplished everything for us (on the cross). In this sense, Christ is greater than Joshua, because the latter could not really lead Israel into rest!

15 **b.) The Word of God: the means by which we enter into rest: vv. 12-13**

These two verses are quite amazing following on from the preceding 11 verses. What in fact links vv. 12-13 on the one hand and vv. 1-11 on the other? This is actually easy to understand, when we see that the Word of God is powerful and that it can help us to enter into God's rest, because it shows us our true state before him. The Word of God is active: cf. Isa 55:11; Psa 119:105; 1Co 2:10-14 etc.

The word is:

- 25 1. God's Word
2. living
3. effective
4. sharp
5. penetrating
- 30 6. judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart
7. inescapable (nothing is hidden from it)

V. 12: This verse and 1Th 5:23 are usually asserted by adherents of a teaching called “trichotomy”. Trichotomy teaches that man has three parts: (1) body (2) soul (3) spirit, while dichotomy teaches that man has two parts: (1) body = the visible or material part (2) soul and spirit = the invisible or immaterial part. For more about these teachings, see my commentary under the title “the Nature of Man” in my brochure “Biblical Anthropology”.

V. 13: God's omniscience and omnipresence: Compare the well-known Psalm 139:1-16 and 1Co 4:5. With regard to Jesus Christ, see also Joh 2:24-25 and Rev 5:6 (the 7 horns and 7 eyes are symbolic for omnipotence and omniscience; cf. my commentary on ‘The Revelation of John’).

¹⁷ A tragic error which Jews fall into when they reject Christ as Redeemer: Compare e.g. Rom 9:30-32; 11:20-24.

5. Christ is greater than Aaron: 4:14 to 7:28

a.) Christ is our High Priest: 4:14-16

1. **His greatness v. 14:** He has gone through the heavens, not just the earthly tabernacle (tent) like Aaron and his descendants (cf. Heb 6:20; 8:1; 9:11).
5
2. **His ability to sympathise v. 15:** He can sympathise because he was a person just like each one of us (cf. Phi 2:5-10): He was also tempted and tested but (unlike us) without ever falling into sin (cf. Joh 8:46 and 2Co 5:21). This was the only way he could bring about atonement for our sin. If he had sinned himself, then he would have had to die for his own sins. Because he committed no sin, his righteousness is credited to all who believe on him and receive him (cf. Rom 5:18-19; 1Co 1:30). Since he himself went through many times of trial and temptation, he can understand us better than anyone else!
10
3. **His grace is very tangible v. 16:** Because God the Father has accepted the sacrificial blood, we can approach the throne of grace to attain forgiveness (cf. 1Jo 1:9; 2:1-2; Rom 5:2; 8:34; Heb 10:19-22).
15

b.) Christ meets all the qualifications to be a High Priest: 5:1-10

(1) The qualifications of a High Priest: vv. 1-4

1. Selected from among men (and not from among angels!): v. 1a.
20
2. Appointed to represent men in matters relating to God: v. 1b.
3. He must offer gifts and sacrifices for the sins of the people: vv. 1c and 3b. He must also offer sacrifices for himself (because he is also a sinner): v. 3a (cf. Lev 16:11).
4. Since he is selected from among men and is himself subject to weakness, he can understand the problems of others: v. 2.
- 25 5. He must be called by God himself: v. 4 (cf. Exo 28:1; Num 16:40).

(2) How Christ fulfilled these requirements: vv. 5-7

1. He was called by God: vv. 5-6 (well founded in the following quotation: in v. 5: Psa 2:7 and in v. 6: Psa 110:4).
2. He humbled himself, became man and suffered: v. 7 (cf. Phi 2:5-8).
- 30 3. He endured the worst possible battles and sufferings. But in this way, he learned obedience: v. 7-8.

(3) How Christ exceeded these qualifications: vv. 6.8-10

1. He learnt full obedience (obedience unto death): vv. 8-9a (cf. Phi 2:8).
2. Through this, he obtained salvation for all who obey him: v. 9b (What the Aaronic priests certainly had not attained).
- 35 3. He is a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek: vv. 6.10. (See chapter 7: This is an eternal ministry while the Aaronic ministry was confined to a certain time limit).

Christ is therefore a greater High Priest than Aaron. After the author had shown this, he intersperses a further warning.

c.) The third warning: 5:11 to 6:20

(1) The danger of stagnation in the life of faith: 5:11-14

5 The first warning (2:1-4) is against indifference and apathy, the second (3:7-19) against unbelief and disobedience while this third one is against spiritual laziness, against the sin of stagnation. This is the biggest enemy of spiritual growth. Until now the author has quite simply presented the deity and humanity of the Redeemer, our great High Priest. Now he moves on to explain the heavenly priestly ministry of Christ. This theme is rather more
10 complex. And because many of the recipients are stunted in their spiritual growth, there is a danger that the difficult theme that the author deals with from 7:1 will not be understood. For this reason, the author admonishes and warns them.

15 **V. 11:** Only spiritually minded people can understand spiritual things (cf. 1Co 2:14). The recipients of the letter seem to be happy with the crucified Christ (who has paid the price for their sins), while at least some of them seem to show no interest in his heavenly ministry and sovereign authority.

20 **V. 12:** They had remained infants in faith. This is illustrated by the picture of an infant, who still needs milk (cf. 1Co 3). Isn't it often like this in our fellowships and churches? The sermon centres on "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!*" and that is it. No solid food is offered; the church members are still (only) drinking milk; that is they are not being led on in the faith.

25 **Vv. 13-14:** The infant is contrasted with a mature person. A person does not become mature because of age but because of a righteous heart that is surrendered to God (cf. Rom 12:1-2).

(2) We must desire perfection: 6:1-3

Three foundations of Christian faith are enumerated in three pairs (a total of 6):

- 30 1. (1) Leaving dead works, which simply means *repentance*. And (2) *faith*: that of course means faith in Jesus Christ.
- 35 2. (1) The teaching about *washings* (i.e. baptism) and (2) *the laying on of hands*. It seems that in apostolic times these two things went hand in hand. Because the word "baptism" is in the plural here, it is assumed that it means Jewish ceremonial washings, because we speak simply of *one baptism*: compare Eph 4:4-6 with this. Or was the author thinking of both at the same time? The laying on of hands is linked with the thought of identification and the passing on of something (cf. Lev 16:21).
- 40 3. (1) *The resurrection* (cf. Luk 24:39-43; 1Co 15:20-22 etc.) of the dead and (2) *eternal judgement* (cf. Mat 25:41 and Rev 14:9-11; 20:11-15). These last two events relate to the future of man.

According to the author, these **six things** portray the foundation of Christian faith. With the words → "*leave the elementary teachings about Christ*" in v. 1, the author wants to say: *We know that already, now we must move on; let us aim for perfection*. He is saying that it is

not enough just to lay the foundation rather we should also build a whole house on this foundation. It is clear from verses 4-8 that they are not speaking about true Christians, because it says that they do not make any progress in faith.

5 **V. 3:** → **“And God permitting, we will do so”**: That means strive for perfection. And so the author indicates what we will find out in the following chapters, what *Christian perfection* is. These chapters offer us solid food, because they explain the essence of the heavenly priestly ministry of Christ. Christian perfection is simply the practical realization of Christian perfection in everyday life, as exemplified by Christ.

10 **(3) The danger of falling away and an excursus on the following question:**
“Can a Christian lose his salvation?” 6:4-8

Along with Heb 10:26-31, this is probably the most challenging and at the same time the “most difficult” passage in the letter to the Hebrews. In my opinion, this passage should be understood in the same way as 2Pe 2:20-22 and Mar 4:16-19. The following question is forced upon us: **Were the people who are being addressed truly born-again Christians? Had they really received the Holy Spirit? If yes, then this in fact implies that the Christian can lose his salvation, his eternal life!** But can a birth be annulled, as it were reversed? Only a painstaking and correct analysis of these verses and a comparative study of parallel passages will make it possible to find an answer to these very controversial questions (also) among evangelical Christians. Do the following expressions necessarily imply that born-again Christians are being spoken of here?

- Who → **“have once been enlightened...”**
- Who → **“have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit...”**
- 25 • Who → **“have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age.”**

Compare with 2:9: Jesus tasted death but not decay! On the cross, Jesus tried the vinegar but then did not drink it. That is to say: He who → **“tastes”** (tries) the good things of God, has not necessarily received the Holy Spirit. Before we decide for something, we normally sample it; otherwise it is not possible to decide for or against. Only after tasting can a person know the consequences of a commitment for Christ. → **“once been enlightened”** does not necessarily imply renewal or rebirth. The parallel passage 2Pe 2:20 shows that it means that a person has understanding. Once again, we have to remind ourselves that *understanding* alone is not the same as *renewal* (regeneration). First of all what is understood with the mind, must go into the heart. And concerning the heart, see the words of Jesus in Luk 8:15 and Mat 7:21-23. Here is a further argument, which could suggest that these people were not necessarily born again:

Many believe that the phrase → **“who have shared in the Holy Spirit”** in Verse 4 must mean that the people concerned were born again. That is not the case. **In Greek there is no article before → “Holy Spirit”**. It is therefore well possible that it means a *spiritual gift* or even more likely that it is speaking of the *operation of the Holy Spirit* on the people in question in the sense of Joh 16:8-10. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and he speaks into our hearts... Man can, however, resist the working of the Holy Spirit by not listening to him (cf. Heb 3:7-8)! With regard to **“Holy Spirit”** without the article, compare Luk 11:13 with the parallel passage Mat 7:11. In Luke 11:13, there is also no article before the Holy Spirit, and the parallel verse Mat 7:11 suggests that it doesn't mean that God gives a praying person the Holy Spirit but rather **“good things”**, that is, things given through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

The phrase → “*shared in*” (in Greek: μετόχους γεννηθέντας = „*those who have shared in the Holy Spirit*“) in 6:4 is not identical with the phrase in 2Pe 1:4 (*participate in the divine nature*). And that is exactly it, those mentioned in 2Pe 1:4 were not only spoken to or illuminated, no, it says that they changed their lives. Our text here in Heb 6:4-8 is without any doubt speaking of those people who Jesus compared with the seed, which fell on stony ground or between thorns and thistles. At first, you would think that they were real Christians, but as soon as their faith is tested, they draw back (cf. 1Jo 2:19). The illustration of the land in the following **Verses 7-8** confirms exactly this: There are fields that drink in the rain and produce a crop and there are fields that produce only thorns and thistles. This is a clear reminder of the parable of the sower and the seed that Jesus told in Mat 13; Mar 4 and Luk 8. I repeat again that Jesus clearly said that only those who receive the Word of God with a “noble and good heart” (so bringing forth fruit) are real Christians (see Luk 8:15). My opinion is that those spoken of in Heb 6:4-6, are identical with the seed which fell on stony ground or between thorns and thistles.¹⁸ Jesus clearly says that such people are not true believers.

V. 6: → “*...if they fall away*”: In Greek an Aorist Participle (παραπεσόντας), i.e. it remains so once and for all. There is no further possibility of being saved, because the cross is God’s final word, there is no “Supercross”! Christus ist the last Word of God (cf. Heb 1:2; 10:26). Some commentators think that this expression doesn’t mean loss of salvation but (simply) the confessing of faith. Hodges thinks this way and says:

But the writer evidently has in mind defection from the faith, that is, apostasy, withdrawal from their Christian profession (cf. Heb. 3:6, 14; 10:23-25, 35-39). . . . And he warned that those who succumb, that is, “fall away,” after all of the great spiritual privileges they had experienced, could not **be brought back to repentance**.¹⁹

For Hodges, those who “*fall away*”, are not lost. He says that when the thorns and thistles (i.e. the bad fruit) are burnt, the field remains.²⁰ He mentions the parallel verse in Heb 10:27 and says, that God’s anger over his people in the Old Testament is often compared with consuming fire (cf. e.g. Isa 9:18,19; 10:17 etc.). In Heb 12:29, it says that God is a “consuming fire”. Hodges is of the opinion that this doesn’t mean hell. He says that when a field is burned, the purpose is not to destroy it but rather to get rid of unwanted produce and possibly to afterwards replant it.²¹ This would correspond with the words of the apostle Paul in 1Co 3:12-15 (cf. 1Co 5:5). I personally, however, prefer the interpretation whereby those addressed here are not considered to be believers.

Verses 9-20 are a complete contrast to verses 4-8. Initially you might think that the two passages contradict each other: Heb 6:4-6 could indicate that it is possible to lose your salvation, while Heb 6:9-20 speaks of the certainty, even the security of salvation. I would recommend the following reading matter (which gives divergent views) for a discussion of these controversial questions:

¹⁸ For those who understand French I recommend reading the chapter « *la persévérance finale* » in *la doctrine du péché et de la rédemption* by Henri Blocher (Vaux-sur-Seine, France, 1983), III: p. 408-425. Concerning this passage in Hebrews, see especially pp. 417-420.

¹⁹ Zane C. Hodges, op. cit., p. 795.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 796. One can interpret Joh 15:6-8 in the same way.

²¹ Zane C. Hodges, op. cit., p. 796.

1. See Appendix 3 at the end of **Stibbs** commentary on the book of Hebrews in the New Bible Commentary Revised.²² Stibbs expresses himself discretely, but he inclines towards the position where a Christian can lose his salvation (the so-called *Arminian position*).²³
- 5 2. **Hodges'** commentary on the letter to the Hebrews in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*.²⁴ He is of the opinion that those addressed here were true Christians but that the judgement which threatened them was not hell but a different punishment (e. g. physical death, which he substantiates with the example of Saul, see S. 402).²⁵
- 10 3. The chapter on the believer's assurance of salvation (la persévérance finale des saints) by **Henri Blocher** in his dogmatic "*La Doctrine du Péché et de la Rédemption*".²⁶ Blocher is of the opinion that those addressed in these passages of warning were not born-again Christians.²⁷

Blocher²⁸ speaks of two different groups of text, the meaning of which seems to be fairly comprehensive²⁹ and he gives a number of examples for each group:

- 15 1. **Texts with warnings**, which could suggest that those who do not fulfil the conditions required can lose their salvation: Eze 33:18; Mat 18:23-25; Rom 11:20-22; 1Co 10:12; 2Ti 2:12; Heb 3:6.12.14; 6:11ff; 10:23.35-39; 12:3; Rev 2:4-5.16.25; 3:2-5.10-11.16-19.
- 20 2. **Texts, which make assurance of salvation dependant on the grace of God:** 2Ti 1:12; Jud 24; 1Co 1:8; 10:13; Phi 1:6; 1Th 5:23; 2Th 3:3; 2Ti 2:13; 1Pe 1:15; Mat 24:22-24; Joh 6:39; 10:28; 17:2.6.9.12; Rom 8:34-39; 11:29.

Those who believe that a Christian can lose his salvation (they are often called Arminians³⁰), emphasise mainly the first group. On the contrary, those who are of the opinion that a Christian is and remains saved forever³¹ prefer to quote the second group. At the first

²² A. M. Stibbs, op. cit., pp. 1219-1221.

²³ However, I must say that some of his remarks in his own commentary raise questions on his argument: He says concerning Heb 12:12-13: "*The lame*" were possibly those halting between Christianity and Judaism. (Ibid., p. 1214). That is exactly what I am saying: Those to whom this warning was directed are those who have been confronted with the truth, but who hesitate and have not definitely decided for the shame of Christ. Therefore these can not be born again Christians.

²⁴ Zane C. Hodges, op. cit., pp. 387-389 and 401-402 (for the passage Heb 10:26-31).

²⁵ Those who give preference to this interpretation would mainly point to passages like 1Co 3:11-15 and 5:5.

²⁶ Henri Blocher, op. cit., pp. 408-425.

²⁷ This is the position that I personally prefer.

²⁸ Henri Blocher, *La doctrine du péché et de la rédemption*, nouvelle édition révisée et augmentée (Vaux-sur-Seine, France, 1997). I recommend the reading of the whole chapter on assurance of salvation ("*la persévérance finale*", Vol. II: pp. 335-349).

²⁹ Henri Blocher, op. cit., see pp. 338ff („deux groupes de textes dont la portée paraît assez générale“).

³⁰ Arminius (his real name was Jakob Hermans, from the little Dutch town of Oudewaater) studied under Theodore Beza (Calvin's successor) in Geneva and followed at first his teaching on predestination. Arminius was a Genius. At the age of about 25, he gained the title of Doctor of Theology at the University of Basel. Following this, he became professor of theology at the University of Leyden and began to oppose the official Calvinistic teaching of predestination, in that he insisted on man's free will (*liberum arbitrium*). On the contrary to what is usually said, Arminius did not give his opinion on the question which interests us here (loss of salvation or assurance of salvation). He merely attacked the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. Those who followed after Arminius openly advocated the opinion that a Christian can lose his salvation. We call them "Arminians". So when we speak of the Arminian position, which says that a Christian can lose his salvation, then we must think of the followers of Arminius not on Arminius himself.

³¹ Calvinists (advocates of predestination) as a whole, but also a great number of Theologians who reject the Calvinistic teaching of predestination. The Calvinists treat these therefore also as Arminians. Henry C. Thiessen represents this position (i.e. assurance of salvation but not unconditional predestination). I also prefer this second position: Man is not fully pre-determined, rather he can refuse the grace of God that is offered to him (Mat 23:37; Luk 7:30). God will, however, protect and keep the salvation of those who have received Christ as Saviour and Lord and who are therefore born again. This position is probably the most widely accepted one

impression at least you get the impression that the two groups of text contradict each other. To illustrate this I quote a passage out of both groups of texts:

5 2Ti 2:12 *...if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, **he will also disown us...***

10 1Co 1:8-9 ***He will keep you strong to the end**, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

15 Paul is convinced that God will keep his children until the end. This is also clearly shown in Phi 1:6. If someone should in spite of this be lost, it would consequently mean that God was not able to keep him from falling. Arminians would say the following: It is true that no one can snatch a Christian out of the hand of the Lord (cf. Joh 10:28³²), but a Christian can lose himself from the hand of the Lord and so fall away. In the same way, they use the passages in the first group, among others, to conclude that a Christian can lose his salvation.

20 Those on the contrary, who insist on the certainty of the salvation of the saints, would answer these controversial questions in the following way: It is true that if it depended on man, then most (if not all) would be lost. There is in fact a real danger as far as man (the Christian) is concerned. But for Almighty God it is possible to keep his children from such a fall that would lead to loss of salvation. The exponents of this position do not argue that it isn't possible for a child of God to fall into sin and that God can, in an extreme case, even punish (judge) through physical death (cf. 1Co 5:5; 11:28-32). That does not mean though that he could lose his salvation. According to the words of the apostle Paul, he rather risks forfeiting his reward, not his salvation as such (cf. 1Co 3:11-15; 5:5). In 1Co 9:27, we read something similar: This verse certainly doesn't say that Paul is afraid that he could lose his salvation. It is much more a question of his ministry and reward. Blocher³³ mentions the example of a father who warns his child: "If you go too near to the edge, then you will fall down the cliff!"

30 And Blocher adds: "The vigilance of an earthly father is certainly not infallible but that of our Heavenly Father is!" I agree with this point of view. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, neither height nor depth (cf. Rom 8:34-39). An Arminian would add at this point: "except I myself!" My answer to this would be: "Am I myself outside of all that is in heaven or on earth?"

35 The following question must be asked: Doesn't the Arminian teaching of the possibility of losing one's salvation³⁴ imply that we must in fact keep our salvation through our own works?

40 Another question must be asked: If the backslider can lose his salvation, how grave must his sin be for him to be lost again? In the light of passages 1Co 3:11-15 and 5:5 the following questions must also be asked:

- What specific sin could implicitly cause a decrease of the heavenly reward?
- What sin causes a complete loss of the heavenly reward?
- And what would be the sin that leads to a complete loss of salvation?

among western evangelicals. It lies between infralapsarian Calvinism and the Arminian or Wesleyan position (John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement also believed it was possible to lose your salvation).

³² One of the "strongholds" of those who teach assurance of salvation.

³³ Henri Blocher, op. cit., II, p. 340.

³⁴ The opposite of eternal security of salvation (so-called *perseverantia sanctorum*).

Where are the limits? These subtle questions call to mind the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church which has introduced a system in which there are sins of differing degree (minor sins that are pardonable and sins unto death...)

5 Blocher summarises the two different interpretations of these Bible verses like this:³⁵

- Arminians say the believer will be saved “if he remains in the faith”.
- The others say, “God will provide the believer with what he needs to persevere to the end.”

10

One of the intentions of this warning verse could be to encourage the believer to remain watchful and to ask himself if his faith is genuine: Am I really a child of God? Does my fruit (works) point to my having an authentic faith (cf. Jam 2:14ff)?

15 The following serious questions have to be born in mind:

- Are we really saved and kept (until the end) through the grace of God (cf. 1Co 1:8; Phi 1:6)?
- Have we been granted redemption through grace for all time or must we retain it through our own efforts?

20

Various passages point out that God has the power to keep us to the end. Blocher³⁶ rightly questions as to whether God can really be omnipotent if his power ends, where the freedom of man begins.

25

It is true that we do not believe man to be a pre-determined machine. We believe rather that he has the freedom to choose. Everyday life often shows that even earnest Christians commit sin. But I believe that Holy Scripture teaches that sins committed by a Christian can bring his heavenly reward into jeopardy but not his salvation (cf. 1Co 3:14-15). Where Scripture speaks of people going into condemnation, it is referring to people who have never truly been born again (cf. Heb 3:19; 4:6; 1Jo 2:19; Jud 5.19, etc.).

30

At this point attention should be drawn to two **further groups of Bible passages**:³⁷

- 35 1. Passages that could suggest that a Christian can lose his salvation; especially Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 2Pe 2:20-22.
2. Passages which suggest that the people concerned were not born-again Christians; rather they were to outward appearance “members” of the church: 1Jo 2:19; Heb 3:19; 4:6; Jud 5.19. Some of Jesus’ words refer to such people: Mat 7:23; 15:13 also, as mentioned
- 40 above, the parable of the sower and the various seeds in Mat 13; Mar 4 and Luk 8.

40

I believe that those spoken of in the passages **Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31 and 2Pe 2:20-22** were not born-again Christians. They were people who knew the truth but in spite of this drew back (cf. 1Jo 2:19). The “apostasy” of the people mentioned in these passages is expressed well by the famous French proverb: “*Chassez le naturel; il revient au galop!*”³⁸ Blocher says very

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³⁵ Henri Blocher, op. cit., II: p. 342.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Vgl. ibid., II: p. 342-347.

³⁸ Meaning approximately: If you try to suppress what is natural, it will surface at once.

pointedly: „Those falling away show by their apostasy that they, in their hearts, remain dogs and pigs, in spite of superficial change.”³⁹

Some pastoral and counselling suggestions:

- 5
1. Instead of threatening Christians with a possible loss of salvation, we should rather impress upon them what the characteristics of a true Christian are.
 2. We should show “Christians” (?), who are consciously living in sin, that their lives put their faith into question. According to the Word of God, a believer who brings forth bad fruit is no real Christian (cf. Mat 7:21ff; Jam 2:14-26). James says that demons also believe. Does that also mean that they too have been saved? No, they only believe with their mind, not with their hearts, because they remain firm in their rebellion towards God. They are lost. It is just the same with people who pretend to believe but whose conduct contradicts what they profess to believe.
 - 10
 3. Teach Christians to live according to the will of God, to remain in HIM out of love and gratitude for what he has done for us and not out of legalistic compulsion.
 4. Teach believers that it is true that believers will not be judged with unbelievers, who will be condemned before the great white throne and thrown into hell (cf. Joh 5:24; Rev 20:12-15), but that they must appear before the judgement seat of Christ (2Co 5:10) to receive a reward or not (loss of the reward due to living in the flesh (cf. 1Co 3:12-15). We cannot be content with living a minimal Christian life.
 - 15
 5. We should respect one another’s opinions: On both sides, there are earnest servants of God. One maintains that salvation can be lost while the other is of the opinion that a true Christian remains saved and that those who fall away were not truly renewed by the Holy Spirit. These diverging opinions do not justify division in our churches. Both positions are held by evangelical theologians who believe in the infallibility of the Holy Scripture (which is a deciding factor for evangelicals).
 - 20
 - 25

(4) A call to persevere because of God’s promise: 6:9-20

1. **Call to persevere: vv. 9-12:** In spite of the dangers mentioned, the author trusts that the recipients of the letter (or at least the majority of them) are near to salvation, **v. 9**. Their past ministry proves this to him, **v. 10**. **Vv. 11-12:** These two verses show that there are some among the recipients who, in fact, need this warning!
- 30
2. **The promises of God are an encouragement to persevere: vv. 13-20:** A summary could be made like this: The first part of this chapter (6:1-12) shows us that someone who rejects Jesus is totally lost. The second part of the chapter (6:13-20) shows us that someone who receives Jesus is totally saved!
- 35

(a) *The salvation of believers is doubly guaranteed: vv. 13-18*

Vv. 13-17: Our guarantees: God’s promise and his oath to Abraham also apply to us because according to the promise of faith we are the children of Abraham. In verse 14, the author is quoting Gen 22:16-17 in order to emphasise through the example of Abraham that true believers will surely reach their destination. This absolutely wonderful statement contrasts with the fearful warning addressed to the cowards in vv. 4-6.

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V. 18: → “...it is impossible for God to lie...” i.e. in what God has promised and confirmed by an oath. What God has said, he will also do; he keeps his Word: cf. Num 23:19; 2Ti 2:13.

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³⁹ Henri Blocher, op. cit., II: p. 342.

Our God is not arbitrary. He is faithful; we can count on him. → “...to take hold of the hope offered to us” → This is Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 5:5). The word “hope” in the New Testament (ἐλπίς [*elpís*]) has a fuller meaning than our word “hope”! This biblical hope is a firm conviction or assurance that what we hope for will surely come to pass! Now we are simply waiting for the fulfilment of what we have put our hope in. We are convinced that it is only a question of time until that which is hoped for will be fulfilled.

(b) *The illustration of the anchor: vv. 19-20*

Vv. 19-20: The author uses the picture of an **anchor** to illustrate what Jesus Christ is for us. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain (this means the curtain before the Most Holy Place). The curtain separated the holy place from the Most Holy Place (cf. Exo 26:31-33); Heb 9:3; Lev 16:15). Christ has entered the heavenly places, i.e. the true sanctuary, with his blood (cf. Heb 9:24-25; 10:19-20; 4:14; 7:26-27).⁴⁰ There he sits at the right hand of the Father and rests from his finished work. He is also our guarantee, like an anchor which insures the security of the ship.

V. 20: As precursor, Jesus has gone before us into Heaven, into the Most Holy Place. That means that we will follow him there! He is our High Priest who represents us there before the Father (cf. 4:14-16). This wonderful truth is also taught by the Apostle Paul (Rom 8:34) and the Apostle John (1Jo 2:1-2). → “...in the order of Melchizedek”: The author explains in the following chapter what is meant by “in the order of Melchizedek”: an everlasting order. Jesus is therefore the guarantee of our eternal life (cf. 7:25; 5:9). Those therefore who are truly in Christ can be assured that their salvation is certain and eternal. What a reason for joy and thankfulness to our Lord and God!

d.) Christ, High Priest in the order of Melchizedek: 7:1-28

Here the writer continues the theme that he left off in 5:10. He explains what is meant by, “*Christ, High Priest in the order of Melchizedek*”.

(1) Melchizedek greater than Abraham and the Levites: vv. 1-10

V. 1: → *Melchizedek: Melkhi* (from Hebr. מַלְכִי [*malkī*]) = *King* (or *my King*)
Zedeq (from Hebr. צַדִּיק [*tsedeq*]) = *Righteousness*

Melchizedek therefore means “*King of Righteousness*”

Salem = *Peace* (like *Jerusalem!*)

→ Priest of *God Most High* (Greek: τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου); which is the equivalent of the Hebrew *’Ēl ’Elyōn* (אֱלֹהֵי עֵלְיוֹן: cf. Gen 14:19.22).

In what way was Melchizedek greater than Aaron?

1. Melchizedek was both king and priest: vv. 1-2. Aaron was only priest.
2. Melchizedek blessed Abraham: vv. 1.6b.7. The one who blesses is greater than the one who receives the blessing.

⁴⁰ And not just a type or symbol!

3. Melchizedek received from Abraham the tenth of the plunder: vv. 2a.4-10. Melchizedek is therefore greater than Abraham and because Levi (who was still in the body of his ancestor Abraham⁴¹) was a descendant of Abraham, he also, at least indirectly, gave Melchizedek the tenth (V. 10). Therefore Levi is also subordinate to Melchizedek.
- 5 Something to think about: In Adam all have fallen, Abraham, as a descendant of Adam should also give the tenth. And Abraham bore Levi in his body.
4. Melchizedek is a type of the eternal Son of God. Aaron (and with him Levi: v. 8) had a family tree, and he and his descendants died and were replaced. However, it says here that Melchizedek was → “...*without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life...*” This means that he is eternal and therefore greater than Aaron and Levi, whose priesthood is not eternal since they were mortal. These attributes of Melchizedek are not mentioned in Gen 14. We only discover this information through the Spirit-inspired writer of the letter to the Hebrews.
- 10

15 Who was Melchizedek?

Laubach⁴² says that priests in Israel had to fulfil the following conditions:

1. To be a descendent of Aaron: cf. Exo 28:1; Num 3:10; 18:1-7.
- 20 2. His mother had to be a Jew with a good reputation: Lev 21:7; cf. Eze 44:22.
3. That means that it was imperative to be able to show descent from a priestly family to be permitted to exercise the ministry of a priest (cf. Ezr 2:61-63; Neh 7:63-65).

This was not so for Melchizedek. In this passage, the author points to **seven things** to show who Melchizedek is (was). Numerous interpretations and suggestions of identification have been put forward:

25

- One mainly Jewish interpretation is that Melchizedek was an angelic being. Supporters of this theory think for example of the archangel Michael. Also commentaries of the community in Qumran tend to favour this interpretation. But there are also Christian commentators who think he was an angelic being, e.g. Hodges.⁴³
- 30 • Hughes⁴⁴ rightly ridicules those commentators who at the time of the church fathers and in the Middle Ages maintained that the phrases “*without father or mother, without genealogy...*” point among other things to the priest remaining single and so not having any descendants. Hughes is right when he ridicules this interpretation by pointing to the universal priesthood of all believers in 1Pe 2:5-9. This “Catholic” interpretation would imply that all Christians should remain single☺!
- 35 • The phrases “*without father or mother, without genealogy*” are to be simply so understood that in the text in Gen 14 nothing is reported concerning the origin or death of Melchizedek. He suddenly appears on the scene and then disappears again... without anyone knowing where he came from or where he was going to. Stibbs tends to take this direction. He says:
- 40

⁴¹ This means that he was a descendent of Abraham. This passage serves among others as an argument for Traducianism. Traducianism teaches that man reproduces not only bodily but also in the soul. The soul is not simply created at the moment of conception (false hypothesis, called *Creatianism*, not to be confused with Creationism = creation in 7 days). This passage indicates rather that the whole personality of the descendants already exists in the loins of the ancestors.

⁴² Fritz Laubach, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* in Wuppertaler Studienbibel (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus und Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 1983), p. 139.

⁴³ Zane C. Hodges, op. cit., p. 798.

⁴⁴ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, op. cit., pp. 249-250.

He [i. e. Melchizedek] simply appears once in the record as a living figure and is left to abide alone and *for ever* in the minds of readers as Melchizedek the priest. Nor is anything said of any successor to him. In all this he is made by the very silence of scripture, to resemble *the Son of God* (note the divine title and contrast v. 22), who appeared once in history, but who *has neither beginning of days nor end of life*. Jesus is a High Priest after this order, unique and *for ever*.⁴⁵

- Melchizedek is identical with Jesus. That means that Melchizedek is simply a Christophany that is an appearance of Christ before his becoming man (incarnation).⁴⁶

This is also my opinion. The following arguments seem to me to speak clearly for this particular interpretation:

1. According to his human nature, Christ was “*without father*” and according to his deity “*without mother*”. The text says implicitly: Melchizedek himself is without beginning of days or end of life. He is eternal: see verses 8, 16 and 24. It is a fact that only the triune God is eternal. Melchizedek must therefore be one of the three persons of the Trinity. Melchizedek is identical with the person who in the Old Testament was called the *Angel of the Lord* (Yahweh).⁴⁷ The Angel of the Lord accepted sacrifice and worship and he let himself be known as Lord (Yahweh). People also recognised him as Lord (cf. e.g. Gen 16:7.13; Exo 3:2.4; Jud 6:11-24). In Jos 5:13-15, this person was also called “the commander of the army of the Lord”. It is well known that he accepted the worship of Joshua because he told him to take off his sandals (cf. as with Moses at the burning bush: Exo 3:2ff). He is the Lord (Yahweh) himself: see also Gen 18 and 19, the three men who visited Abraham. One of them was Yahweh himself (i.e. the pre-existent Christ: cf. Gen 18:22 and 19:24), the other two were angels (cf. Gen 19:1). The pre-existence of Jesus Christ (his existence before his incarnation) see for example: Joh 1:1.15; 8:58; 17:5.24; 2Co 8:9; Phi 2:5ff. By the way, an angel will not accept worship from man: cf. Rev 19:10; 22:9. On the contrary, the Son of God as *the Angel of the Lord* accepted it before his incarnation (along with the tenth given by Abraham), and as the Son of Man during his earthly life before his death (cf. e.g. Joh 9:38), and after his resurrection (cf. Luk 24:52; Joh 20:28).
2. Melchizedek offered Abraham bread and wine (Gen 14:18). Doesn’t this remind us of Holy Communion (cf. Mat 26:26ff; 1Co 11:23-26)?
3. Melchizedek was both king and priest at the same time (cf. Heb 7:1-2). No person can hold these two offices at the same time. Was not Saul judged because he presumed by offering sacrifices before Samuel arrived (1Sa 13:7-14)? Was not King Uzziah stricken with Leprosy because he committed the same sin (2Ch 26:16-21)?
4. An angel cannot be a priest: see Heb 5:1ff; cf. 2:14ff. Therefore, the Son of God became man: cf. Heb 2:14-18; 4:14-16. Melchizedek was the priest who came from eternity, from heaven before his incarnation. Jesus is the incarnate Melchizedek. He was Jesus (his human name, in Hebrew: יהושע [Y^ehōshu^a]), that means, the one who saves (through his becoming man): cf. Heb 2:14; 10:19-21; Phi 2:5-11; 1Ti 2:5 (the only mediator between God and man is the “**God-Man**” Jesus Christ).
5. Melchizedek blessed Abraham: An angel doesn’t bless people rather it is God who blesses them. An angel would say: “*the Lord bless you!*” It does not behove an angel himself to bless.

⁴⁵ A. M. Stibbs, op cit., p. 1203.

⁴⁶ So e.g. Fritz Laubach, op. cit., p. 141.

⁴⁷ Apart from Hag 1:13, the only Bible passage where this expression relates to the prophet himself.

6. It is true, an angel does not have any end, he is a spirit and spirits do not die. Angels though are not without a beginning, rather they were created by the Son of God (cf. Col 1:16). Melchizedek can therefore not be (or have been) an angel, because he is eternal. He is on the contrary the Son of God himself (cf. also Heb 13:8).

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An objection that could be raised to this is that the expression → *“made like the Son of God”* in Heb 7:3 implies that Melchizedek and the Son of God cannot be one and the same person. This objection is, however, not justified. It has to do with the Greek participle ἀφωμοιωμένος (*aphōmoiōménos*: perfect medium, masculine, nominative singular) of the verb ἀφωμοιῶ (*aphomoiōō*), which means *“be similar to, be comparable with”* or *“be conformed to”*. It is therefore quite possible to render it with *“Melchizedek is made like the Son of God”* or *“Melchizedek is made conform to the Son of God”*. May I point out a small interesting detail: The Greek text does not say that the Son of God was made similar or conform to Melchizedek, no, it is the other way around, Melchizedek was made conform to the Son. Hence we conclude that the Son of God existed before Melchizedek appeared to Abraham! The famous saying of Jesus in Joh 8:58 *“before Abraham was born, I am!”* should not surprise us! Yes, Melchizedek certainly existed before Abraham... he has always existed, from eternity... he is therefore without beginning of days or end of life. He remains for ever (cf. Heb 7:21.24.28; 13:8).

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The inspiration of the Holy Scriptures – something to provoke thought:

We find the story of Melchizedek in just four verses, i.e. in Gen 14:17-20. About 1000 years later, David, carried along by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2Pe 1:21), prophetically foretold that God had promised his Son an eternal priestly ministry in the order of Melchizedek (cf. Psalms 110:4). A good 1000 years later, this verse became, in the letter to the Hebrews, the theme of a wonderful exposé on the saving work of Jesus Christ.

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(2) Christ is also greater than Aaron and the Levites, because Melchizedek is a type of him: vv. 11-28

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1. **A new priestly order: vv. 11-14:** Which at the same time led to a change in the law, because the Old covenant (the Mosaic Law) was imperfect (because it cannot lead us to perfection, it rather condemns us: cf. Rom 3:20; Gal 3:11). The old priestly order (covenant), at the time of the Mosaic Law, was not perfect: **v. 11** (cf. Rom 10:4). **V. 12:** When the priestly order changes, then the law also changes, because the priestly ministry is the most important part of a covenant. **Vv. 13-14:** Christ is not (and was not) a Levite, he came from the tribe of Judah, from which the Kings came (Gen 49:10; cf. Rev 5:5). The priestly ministry of Christ is in reality a new priestly order. The previous (Aaronic) order, and with it the Law of Moses, have been abolished because they were not perfect. In fact, the old priestly ministry was only a type of what was to come (cf. vv. 15-19).

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2. **His priestly ministry is perfect: vv. 15-19:**

- Because he lives in the power of an indestructible life: v. 16.
- Because he is eternal: v. 17 (cf. Psalms 110:4).
- Because he brings a better hope: v. 19 (cf. Heb 6:18).

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3. **His priestly ministry is guaranteed by a godly oath: vv. 20-22:** Oath cf. 6:13-19! The Levitical priestly ministry was not guaranteed by an oath. Jesus became an eternal High Priest according to God's oath. This is shown through the quotation from Psalm 110:4 in v. 21. The result of this is that he has become the guarantee of a better covenant (v. 22; cf. chapter 8: the New Covenant).

4. **His priestly ministry is eternal: vv. 23-25: v. 23:** Because the Levitical priests were mortal men, the Levitical priesthood could neither be perfect nor eternal. **V. 24:** Christ though is eternal (cf. Heb 13:8). His priesthood can therefore not be passed on to another, that is, there will never be another after him or alongside him because Christ is eternally sufficient: cf. Heb 10:10.14. **V. 25:** For this reason, salvation is also complete in him because he remains forever and stands before the Heavenly Father for us (cf. 1Jo 2:1-2; Rom 8:34).
5. **His priestly ministry is perfect: vv. 26-28: Why?**
- **Because he himself is perfect: v. 26:** He was and is without sin (cf. Heb 4:15; 2Co 5:21; Joh 8:46).
 - **His work of salvation is perfect: v. 27:** cf. Joh 19:30; Heb 9:26-28; 10:10.14.

V. 28: Summary and conclusion: The last verse of this chapter summarises well the superiority of the high priestly ministry of Christ. He is not weak like the priests were who were appointed under the (Mosaic) Law: he is also eternal and appointed according to the oath of God. It is as if the writer would say to his readers: Since Christ remains forever, how could you dear Hebrews fall back into Judaism with all the old customs and rituals... and how can it be that you want to be subject again to the Mosaic Law? Added to this, the Levites Moses and Aaron are long dead, but Christ remains forever. There is only one way to approach God and that is Jesus Christ. So hold on to him alone forever.

Up to this point, the writer has explained and proven that Jesus Christ in his person is superior to all others. Now he sets out to show that consequently his work and ministry are also greater!

B. The superiority of the work of Jesus Christ: 8:1 to 10:18

1. Christ is the mediator of a new covenant: 8:1-13

a.) Christ is the heavenly High Priest: vv. 1-5

- 30 **V. 1:** This is basically a résumé of everything mentioned before: We have a High Priest who is seated at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. All authority is given to him (cf. Mat 28:18). What the author describes now (namely his perfect work), explains how it is possible that he has become our heavenly High Priest.
- 35 **Vv. 2.5:** Jesus serves in the sanctuary, i.e. in the **true** tabernacle. The earthly tabernacle was in truth only a shadow of the true heavenly tabernacle. If we look carefully at how God commissioned Moses to build the earthly tabernacle in the wilderness, then we will realise the truth of this.
- 40 **V. 3:** The characteristic of a priest is that he offers sacrifices (V. 3a). Jesus, our High Priest, also had to offer a sacrifice in order to be a priest. The difference here was that because he was without sin it was not necessary for him to offer sacrifice for his own sins as was the case

for the Aaronic priests. On the contrary, he presented himself as a sacrifice for us (cf. 5:1.3; 7:27; 9:25-28; 10:10.14). And his sacrifice is perfect; therefore, it does not have to be constantly repeated as was the case with the Aaronic sacrifices (which had to be offered for the priest himself and for the people). Added to this, the Aaronic high priest only came to the symbol of God's throne once a year⁴⁸ while Jesus, our High Priest, is seated forever on the actual throne of God (cf. Psa 110:1).

Vv. 4-5: Christ is the heavenly High Priest. He is not an earthly one, because the Levites are here on earth. In addition to this, Jesus, according to the flesh, does not come from the tribe of Levi but from that of Judah. Christ serves in the real heavenly holy place made by God; the Levites serve in a transitory tabernacle which is only a shadow of the real heavenly tabernacle. Not only this, the earthly tabernacle was made by man and not by God himself: vv. 2-5.

b.) Christ serves a new and better covenant: vv. 6-13

(1) The limitations of the old covenant: vv. 6-9

V. 6: The old covenant was dependent on certain conditions (cf. Exo 19:5-8), but Jesus Christ is the mediator and guarantor of the new covenant which he consummated on behalf of those who believe on him and receive him.

V. 7: Now, if the first (old) covenant had been perfect, then it wouldn't have been necessary to replace it with another one. In principle, it is the same as with parts of a car: We only change a part when it is faulty or damaged.

Vv. 8-9: This is part of a quotation from Jer 31:31-34 which concerns the old covenant. Verses 10-12 refer to the new covenant which is perfect. This is the meaning: The fact that God himself predicted the inauguration of a new covenant one day (the Israelites, as we know, couldn't keep the old covenant), which shows that the first covenant was limited and temporary. In verse 9, the author says clearly why the old covenant was limited:

1. Israel did not keep the covenant.
2. Therefore God turned away from them.

(2) The perfection of the new covenant: vv. 10-13

It is based on better promises:

1. God himself would write the Law in the *hearts* of men. This means that God would give people the power to keep the covenant: v. 10a (cf. Deu 30:6ff; Eze 36:26ff).
2. Very close and direct fellowship with God: vv. 6.10b-11.
3. Their sins were to be forgiven: v. 12.

This promise of Jeremiah has (or will have) a double fulfilment:

⁴⁸ Namely on the great Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*): cf. Lev 16: in the earthly sanctuary. Jesus in contrast in the heavenly sanctuary: cf. Heb 9:24.

1. Since Pentecost, everyone who receives Christ comes under this new covenant, whether Jew or Greek, i.e. of gentile background (cf. Rom 1:16 and 10:13).
2. For Israel as a nation, this will only be fulfilled at the return of Christ, because Israel as a nation has until this day rejected Christ, the mediator of the new covenant (cf. Rom 11:25-27; Zec 12:10; Rev 1:7).

V. 13: This verse confirms that even before the coming of Jesus it was established that the old covenant would one day disappear and be replaced by a perfect and eternal covenant: Perfect and eternal because its mediator, Christ the Son of God, is eternal (7:24-25).

10 **2. The imperfection of the old covenant: 9:1-10**

In this chapter, we discover further why the old covenant was imperfect (9:1-10), whereas the new covenant is perfect (9:11-28).

a.) The order of things inside the Mosaic tabernacle: vv. 1-5

V. 1: The old covenant was based on an earthly sanctuary:

V. 2: The things that were in the sanctuary.

Vv. 3-5: The things found in the most holy place. **Verse 4 presents us with a little problem: *the golden altar of incense*:** according to Exo 30:6 and 40:26, it was in the holy place, not in the Most Holy Place! In Exo 40:5, it actually says that the altar of incense should stand in front of the Ark of the Testimony. Hughes⁴⁹ says that Luk 1:5ff also indicates that the altar of incense was to be found in the Holy Place and not in the Most Holy Place (cf. Exo 30:7ff). In fact, if the altar of incense was to be found in the Most Holy Place then Zacharias wouldn't have been able to burn incense because he was only a priest. As we know, only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and this only once a year on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev 16). Hughes⁵⁰ (in the same way as Spicq, Keil and Delitzsch) makes a suggestion that seems good to me: According to liturgical tradition, the altar of incense was closely related to the Most Holy Place. Therefore the high priest only went into the most Holy Place with the incense. This statement of the author in verse 4 should therefore be theologically understood. By the way, we can see too from Rev 8:3ff that incense is closely connected with the Most Holy Place. Stibbs suggests this interpretation. He says:

Having the golden altar of incense. The wording here (cf. 1 Ki. 6:22) probably means not that it was itself kept in the inner shrine, but rather that it was specially connected with the ministry carried out there on the Day of Atonement. See Ex. 30:1-10; Lv. 16:12, 13, 18-20!⁵¹

b.) The imperfection of the ministry in the tabernacle: vv. 6-10

Vv. 6-7: The imperfection of the Aaronic priestly ministry can be seen in the fact that the priests could only go into the Holy Place. The high priest alone was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place and that but once a year when he presented blood as an offering for himself and

⁴⁹ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, op. cit., p. 310.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 312-313.

⁵¹ A. M. Stibbs, op. cit., p. 1205.

for the people. Through Christ though, all who belong to him can always enter the Most Holy Place because of the unique sacrifice of Christ which never needs to be repeated. Hallelujah!

5 **V. 8:** Thus (as is stated in vv. 6-7), the Holy Spirit (who inspired Holy Scripture) tells us that in fact during the time of the old covenant there was no free access into the presence of God.

10 **Vv. 9-10:** All these things were only symbolic, pointing to another “tabernacle” which was yet to come. This is also proven by the fact that these sacrifices (which were presented in the earthly tabernacle) did not really blot out sin. They merely covered sins. Sins were finally truly expiated through the blood of Jesus Christ (cf. Heb 9:15; 10:4 and Rom 3:25-26).

We could summarise it like this:

15 **9:1-10** = **the shadow**
9:11-28 = **the (eternal) reality**

3. The perfection of Christ’s sacrifice: 9:11 to 10:18

a.) Christ’s sacrifice is “genuine” (true): 9:11-15

1. He is the true High Priest: v. 11a (of the coming and not of the transitory things).
- 20 2. He performs his ministry in the true Most Holy Place that is in heaven (not just in the earthly tabernacle): vv. 11b (cf. 8:2; 9:24).
3. He is the true sacrifice (namely through his own blood, not the blood of animals which was only pointing typologically to Christ): vv. 12-14. His blood brings about redemption (cf. Eph 1:7).
- 25 4. He brought true salvation: vv. 12b-15: (a) v. 12b: An eternal redemption (b) v. 14a: The cleansing of our consciences from evil works (c) v. 14b: This salvation makes it possible for us to serve the living God (d) v. 15: We have received an eternal inheritance.

30 **V. 15:** This verse along with Heb 10:4 and Rom 3:25 show clearly that the sacrifices offered under the old covenant (that is the blood of animals) did not really procure salvation. They simply covered sins. The true cleansing from sins only came through the sacrifice of the blood of Jesus Christ. Also all the Old Testament believers (Abraham, David, etc.) are only saved thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, because they believed in the coming of the Messiah who would bring salvation.

35 **b.) The unique sacrifice of Christ is absolutely indispensable: 9:16-28**

(cf. Heb 8:3).

(1) The death of Christ was indispensable for a new covenant to come into force on the basis of a will: vv. 16-17

40 Explanation: In the Old Testament, the word for *covenant* and *will* is the same, namely „*b^erīt*“ (בְּרִית)!

V. 16: This verse can therefore be interpreted in the following way: If through the death of the testator (the one who made the will) the inheritor takes full possession of the inheritance then the death of the mediator secures the perfect ransom for all trespasses. The writer uses the word testator to express more clearly that the death of Christ was indispensable for the introduction of a new covenant. The writer speaks here of the death of Christ as the sacrifice which ratifies the new covenant.

The testator is dead. So the covenant (will) is in force, the redemption guaranteed, the new covenant established. And because Christ was the first who rose from the dead, he has become heir of all things. We who believe in him inherit with him.

Let us bear in mind the following: Because of the death of Christ the first (old) covenant has been abolished while the new covenant has been sealed through his blood.

(2) The shedding of blood was indispensable under the first covenant: vv. 18-23a

The author shows through the quotation from Exo 24:8 that the shedding of blood was indispensable in the old covenant. The reason for this is that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (see v. 22)! This also emphasises the seriousness of sin. All this was symbolic (a type) to make clear the necessity of the death of a mediator in the new covenant.

(3) The shedding of the blood of Christ was indispensable for bringing about salvation: vv. 23b-28

In order to open up heaven for us to give us access to the heavenly gifts and to the Heavenly Father, a better sacrifice was necessary: namely Christ himself. The purifying of the heavenly things must be understood in this way: All sins which separate us (human beings) from the Heavenly Father (cf. Isa 59:2) are blotted out. The greatness of this act of God is underlined by the following observations.

1. Christ, with his blood, has entered heaven itself not just a man made imitation (i.e. the tabernacle): **v. 24.**
2. Because of the one sacrifice which is sufficient for eternity **v. 25** (cf. 10:10.14) he does not need to offer sacrifices again and again (as was the case under the old covenant).
3. On top of this he offered his own blood (v. 26) and not someone else's (as the Levites did who offered the blood of animals): **v. 25.**

Vv. 27-28:

1. Man only dies once which also means that he lives only once on this earth: v. 27.⁵²
2. After his death, man will be judged: v. 27 (cf. 2Co 5:10 [the judgement of believers] and Rev 20:11-15 [the judgement of unbelievers]).⁵³
3. Once again: Christ had to suffer but once to procure eternal salvation for us: v. 28a.
4. ➔ ***“To take away the sins of many people”***: See above (commentary on 2:10). The ➔ ***“many”*** refers to those who receive him, who believe on him. I have mentioned above

⁵² There is no reincarnation as is claimed by some religions or sects: e.g. by Hinduism, New Age and other esoteric movements.

⁵³ For more information concerning the judgement of believers and unbelievers, see the chapter on judgement in my brochure “Biblical Eschatology”.

that Jesus did not only die for the so-called elect but for all mankind. John writes in 1Jo 2:1-2 that the atonement which he accomplished is not limited but is universal: for us believers and for the whole world. The term “*many*” excludes at the same time another false teaching, namely that of “*universalism*” (also called *classic* universalism) which postulates that all mankind will finally be saved. In this teaching, not only those who believe and personally receive salvation will be saved but rather all mankind. There are even those who believe that finally even the devil and his angels will be saved.

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5. When Christ comes to take up his church, then he will not come because of our sins (because he blotted these out at the time of his first coming) but rather for our salvation which will be consummated through our glorification (cf. 1Co 15:51-57; 1Jo 3:1-2): v. 28b.
- 10

c.) Christ’s sacrifice is fully efficacious: 10:1-18

(1) The previous sacrifices were not perfect: vv. 1-4

15 **V. 1:** The previous sacrifices (required by the Mosaic Law) could not make the person concerned (i.e. the sinner who offered the sacrifice) perfect because in fact the Law was only a shadow (symbol) of what was to come (i.e. the true Most Holy Place which is Christ himself: cf. Heb 9:11).

20 **V. 2:** If the previous sacrifices had really led the worshippers to perfection, then it would not have been necessary to keep repeating them. But as we know, those who offered such sacrifices remained conscious of their sinfulness.

25 **V. 3:** The annual repetition of sin offerings also renewed on each occasion the consciousness of the presence of sin.

V. 4: These sacrifices could not blot out a person’s knowledge of his sinfulness because the blood of an animal simply cannot take away sin. What must we do for sin to be taken away? Christ is the sole answer and the solution!

(2) God’s will concerning the sacrifice was fulfilled in Christ: vv. 5-10

30 **Vv. 5-7:** By quoting Psa 40:7-9, the writer shows that even David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had understood that the blood of animals cannot really take away sin. David had also understood that God himself had a sacrifice ready, a perfect sacrifice, namely the body of his own Son.

35 **Problem:** Heb 10:5 = quotation from Psa 40:7 according to the Septuagint: “*Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.*”

40 The Hebrew text of Psa 40:7 however says: “*My ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.*”

Heb 10:5: “*a body you prepared for me*” (Septuagint)

Psa 40:7: “*My ears you have pierced*”.

Laubach thinks that the text could point to a Jewish custom by which the ear of a servant, who of his own free will declared himself ready to continue to serve his master, would be pierced with an awl to show his affiliation (cf. Exo 21:5-6; Deu 15:16-17). That meant that the servant dedicated his whole life (his body) to his master. Laubach⁵⁴ concludes from this that the translator of LXX saw here an indication that the coming Messiah would dedicate his body and his whole life to God. Laubach quotes F. Zissler, who says with reference to this:

The Holy Spirit applies this to the Saviour who, like that servant, dedicated himself willingly to the service of God, taking on a body of flesh and humbling himself, taking the very nature of a servant to obey the Father even to death on the cross (Phil 2, 7).⁵⁵

Hodges explains this quotation from Psa 40:7 as follows:

The Greek translator whose version the author of Hebrews used (obviously translating with the help of the Holy Spirit), construed the Hebrew text as a kind of figure of speech (technically called synecdoche) in which a part is put for the whole. If God is to "dig out ears" He must "prepare a body."⁵⁶

Vv. 8-9: In speaking in this way (i.e. the Spirit of Christ through the mouth of David, cf. 2Pe 1:21), God made his will known thereby rescinding the first or old covenant, i.e. the Law of Moses. Compare Mat 5:17: Jesus said he had come to fulfil the law! Therefore he could replace the old covenant with a new and superior covenant.

V. 10: This statement makes clear that it was the will of God that Jesus Christ, his own Son, should be the true sacrifice through which we would be made holy once and for all. Whoever is in him has been sanctified forever.

(3) Christ's sacrifice leads believers to perfection: vv. 11-18

(a) *Once and for all and forever: vv. 11-14:*

While the priests (of the Old covenant) constantly presented the same sacrifices, which could not even blot out sin once (10:4), Christ gave himself for all time, and that was sufficient (and is still sufficient) to lead those who are his to perfection.

His sacrifice is fully effective. Nothing is missing. No further sacrifice is necessary following this one (cf. 10:26).

Parenthesis: Teaching about perfection:

i.) The meaning of the adjective "perfect" (Greek: τέλειος [*téleios*]) is in the New Testament the following: *What is complete or the one who lacks nothing; on the contrary to that which is incomplete, insufficient, provisional, unstable or immature.*

ii.) Christ is perfect, also as the one who learnt full obedience: cf. Heb 2:10ff; 5:7-10; 7:28. See also the phrase "**he is/was without sin**" in 2Co 5:21; Joh 8:46; 1Pe 2:22.

⁵⁴ Fritz Laubach, op. cit., p. 197.

⁵⁵ Ibid., quoted from Ferdinand Zissler, *Das Hohepriestertum Christi*, S. 79.

⁵⁶ Zane C. Hodges, op. cit., S. 399.

iii.) Christ makes perfect: The foundation of our perfection is the cross. These are the various aspects of our perfection:

- 5 • An already attained perfection: 10:14 (that which is imputed to us by grace through Jesus Christ: cf. 1Co 1:30; 2Co 5:21).
- A perfection which is in a process of growth: 6:1; 11:40 (our spiritual growth in our everyday lives as Christians).
- 10 • The perfection in the life to come: cf. 12:23 (which we will only experience when we see him face to face: cf. 1Jo 3:1-3; Rev 21:1-4; 22:3-5).

Perfect: Compare Rom 12:2; 1Co 2:6; 13:8-10; 14:20; Eph 4:13; Phi 3:5; Heb 5:13-14; 6:1; Jam 1:17 etc.

15 We are not in ourselves or through ourselves perfect. We are only perfect because God sees us through his Son who has accomplished it through his work on the cross. This perfection must be worked out in practical everyday life. Here we must look at the apparent contradiction between Heb 10:10 and Heb 12:14. In him (Christ) we are perfect, but this perfection has, as I said, to be worked out in everyday life. For this we are personally responsible.

20 (b) *The testimony of the Holy Spirit: 10:15-18:*

Vv. 15-17: Through the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah the Holy Spirit foretold (cf. 2Pe 1:21) that God would make a new covenant through which sins would be blotted out forever: see Jer 31:34; cf. Heb 8:12.

25 **V. 18: This verse is the conclusion of the dogmatic section of the letter:**

30 The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Golgotha was perfect. The sins of those who believe on him were blotted out forever. The logical result of this is that no further sacrifice is necessary. Christ's sacrifice was God's final word in terms of the salvation of mankind! The writer explains to his Jewish readers one last time that the Jewish (Mosaic) sacrifices are no longer necessary – yes, and more than that: renewed offering of sacrifices would be an expression of despising Christ's final and supreme sacrifice.

III. PRACTICAL SECTION: EXORTATION TO PUT FAITH INTO PRACTICE: 10:19 to 13:17

A. The access into the Most Holy Place is open: 10:19-25

5 1. A call to enter into the new Most Holy Place: vv. 19-22

Everything that the author has explained up to this point, namely the superiority of the person and work of Jesus Christ, is the basis for this encouragement and challenge. We may draw near to God for the following reasons:

- 10 1. The blood of Jesus Christ has made us acceptable in the sight of God once and for all: v. 19.
- 15 2. Christ has opened up a new way for us: v. 20: in Greek *ὁδὸν πρόσφατον* (*hódon prósphaton* = a new way or a [recently] opened way). This is the only place where this adjective (*prósphatos*) is found in the New Testament. Jesus Christ has opened up the way to the Father for all those who believe on him. In reading this verse, we cannot avoid thinking of the famous words of Jesus in Joh 14:6: “*I am the way and the truth and the life!*” Peter and John expressed this truth in the presence of the Jewish leadership (see Act 4:12). The preacher (Solomon) says (Ecc 1:9): “*There is nothing new under the son!*” But here is something “new”, what a joy! ☺
- 20 3. We have therefore a High Priest who is superior to all others because he is a priest in the true Most Holy Place, namely that in heaven: v. 21 (cf. 9:11-12.23-24).

All these privileges make it possible for the believer to draw near to God: v. 22:

- 25 1. With a sincere heart (you cannot draw near to God when you at the same time tolerate sin in your life).
2. In fullness of faith: cf. Heb 11:6.
3. The heart cleansed from a guilty conscience.
4. And the body washed with pure water.

30 2. Admonitions resulting from this: vv. 23-25

1. To hold unswervingly to our hope in God: v. 23 (cf. 1Pe 1:3-5). The fact that we have a living hope distinguishes us in a special way from non-believers because they live in this world without any true hope. Paul points explicitly to this in Eph 2:12.
- 35 2. To maintain our bond of fellowship by admonishing and encouraging one another: v. 24-25. → “*Let us not give up meeting together*”: The Greek word *ἐπισυναγωγή*

(*episynagogē*) could be translated as “*fellowship meeting*”. → “...and all the more as you see the day approaching”: The fact that Christ returns should continually be before our spiritual eyes and motivate us to live a consistent Christian life.

B. Let us therefore not reject Christ: 10:26-31

5 This is the forth main warning; along with 6:4-8 it is the most solemn one. It is the second passage in this letter on which those who say we can lose our salvation base their assumptions. As in 6:4-6, the question must be raised: Are those addressed here (people who deliberately keep on sinning) really born again or are they people who have merely taken ‘an initial step of faith’?

10

Commentators propose at least three interpretations:

1. They are born again Christians who, because they willingly sin, fall away from Christ and so lose their salvation. At first glance verse 29 seems to support this interpretation: “*the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified...*”
- 15 2. They are born again Christians who have fallen back into sin. However, their judgement will not cause them to lose their salvation. In the sense of 1Co 3:13-15 and 5:5, their works will be burnt by fire, that is they will lose their reward but not their salvation.
- 20 3. They are those who at first receive the gospel with joy but as soon as the first opposition, tests or temptations come they turn away from the faith. To return to my commentary on 6:4-6 concerning this question: The expression → “*by which he was sanctified*”, does not have to mean that the person concerned was born again. 1Co 7:14 speaks of an unbelieving marriage partner who is sanctified by God because of his or her believing partner. I would like to point out too that 2Pe 2:1 clearly says that Christ has paid the price
- 25 for all mankind. But it will not be credited to someone who consciously rejects Christ; rather he will be condemned. In a wider sense all mankind is sanctified by the blood of Christ (cf. Rom 5:18; Col 1:20) but it is only efficacious for those who receive the Word and God’s offer of grace with a good and noble heart (Luk 8:15).

30 **V. 26:** In fact, there remains no other sacrifice because Christ was and is the final and fully sufficient sacrifice. When this sacrifice is rejected, there is no further hope.

V. 27: There only remains the expectation of (eternal) judgement.

35 **V. 28:** Regarding judgement on sin committed under the old covenant, see Num 15:27-28.30-31; Deu 17:2-6.

V. 29: Because Christ is superior to Moses, it is logical that the one who rejects him merits a more severe punishment than the one who violated the Law of Moses.

40

V. 30: The author quotes Deu 32:35-36 to underline the gravity of rejecting Christ.

V. 31: Cf. Heb 12:29.

C. We want to persevere in the faith: 10:32-39

Vv. 32-34: A call to persevere in that faith which was theirs at the beginning of their life of faith. What these Christians have already endured in the name of Christ is remarkable:

- 5 • In the face of suffering they have stood their ground.
- They were often publicly exposed to insult and persecution.
- They have helped others who were persecuted.
- They have sympathised with those in prison.
- 10 • They have even joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property.

They could accept all this because they knew that they had better and lasting possessions. Compare the following passages with this: Heb 11:10,13-16; 13:14.

15 **Vv. 35-37:** Perseverance in the faith will one day be richly rewarded. This refers to the heavenly reward which Christ will give his own at the “judgement seat of Christ”: cf. 2Co 5:10; 1Co 3:14; Heb 6:10.

20 **V. 38:** This encouragement to persevere in the faith is reinforced by a quotation from Hab 2:4. This well known Old Testament quotation is also used by Paul in Rom 1:17 and Gal 3:11. As I said in the introduction, much has been written concerning the authorship of this letter to the Hebrews. The quotation from Hab 2:4 in this letter is in my opinion a strong argument for the hypothesis according to which at least the message of this letter is Pauline. This would mean that it would have been written by one of Paul’s secretaries. As I said above, Hab 2:4 is only quoted by Paul in the New Testament.

25 **V. 39:** This last verse in the chapter shows that the author was confident that his readers would not shrink back but would rather persevere in the faith.

30 **Conclusion:** The text of this passage 10:19-39 is constructed in the same way as that of 5:11 to 6:10:

Critique:	5:11ff	(cf. 10:24ff)
Warning:	6:4ff	(cf. 10:26ff)
Encouragement:	6:10,12ff	(cf. 10:36ff)

35 It is interesting to see that the warning is to be found sandwiched between two sentences which speak of Christ’s return (10:25 and 10:37). This shows that the writer did not wish to discourage his readers; he wanted to encourage them with the vision of the great future event of the return of Christ.

40 D. Good examples of faith in previous generations: 11:1-40

How should we understand this chapter? After explaining what God has done for us, the writer continues to show us that we can only benefit from this if we believe with all our

hearts. We are shown that this is the key to a life which is similar to that of the heroes of faith. If we live in fullness of faith, then all that God has done for us is actually available to us.

1. What is “faith”? Vv. 1-3

5 **V. 1:** This is a **definition** of what **faith** is: Faith is the means which enables man to perceive the invisible or to appropriate spiritual realities. Just as our natural senses enable us to have contact with the visible, physical world, so faith enables us to come into contact with the invisible spiritual world. Faith is being absolutely certain of something which we cannot (yet) see or touch (cf. 2Co 5:7).

10 **V. 2:** It is on account of their faith that the believers under the old covenant were commended by God.

V. 3: Only through this faith in the “Invisible” can we truly take hold of and understand that the universe was created solely by the Word of God (cf. Psa 33:6.9; Rom 1:20; Gen 1).

15 2. Examples of this faith in the O.T.: vv. 4-40

a.) Abel and Enoch: vv. 4-6

20 **V. 4: Abel:** Some think that Abel’s sacrifice was pleasing to God because he (unlike Cain) offered an animal sacrifice (blood). Others think that Abel’s sacrifice was acceptable to God because he offered it in an attitude of heart that was pleasing to God, while he disapproved of Cain’s sacrifice because of his evil attitude of heart. I tend towards the second interpretation (cf. Gen 4:7; 1Jo 3:11-12; Jud 11). It is true that when someone offered a sacrifice for sin, it had to be (according to the Law of Moses) an animal sacrifice. But a thank offering could be something other than a blood sacrifice. It was quite normal to bring God an offering from the harvest or from what a person earned (N.T. cf. the principle of Paul in 2Co 9:5-11).

25 **Vv. 5-6: Enoch:** Cf. Gen 5:23-24; Jud 14-15. Enoch’s life serves as an illustration that man without faith cannot be pleasing to God. Enoch, like Noah later on, lived at a very difficult time.

b.) Noah: v. 7

30 Noah’s faith manifested itself in the building of a ship in spite of the fact that the rain had not come. The result of his faith:

1. His whole family escaped judgement.
2. His testimony over 120 years condemned the whole of mankind because of their unbelief.
- 35 In 2Pe 2:5, Noah is called → **“the preacher of righteousness”**. It seems that Noah, during all the years of building the ark, had warned the people of the coming judgement of the flood.
3. Thus he became an heir of righteousness.

c.) Abraham and Sara: vv. 8-19

(1) By faith Abraham left his homeland to go to an unknown country: vv. 8-10

Abraham's faith manifested itself in his leaving his homeland to go to a completely unknown place (cf. Jos 24:2-3). At that time, from a human point of view, this was a very risky undertaking. But he went because he trusted God entirely.

(2) By faith Sarah received a son in spite of her old age: vv. 11-12

God accepted even Sarah's "little faith", although at first, she had expressed her doubt by laughing, cf. Gen 17:19; 18:11-14; 21:1-2.

(3) They knew that they were strangers on this earth: vv. 13-16

The heart of the true believer doesn't cling to earthly possession, rather to future things, that is, to "heavenly possessions": cf. Heb 13:14. Here also the preoccupation of the author of the epistle to the Hebrews reminds us of Paul's thoughts in his epistles: e.g. 2Co 5:1-10; Phi 1:21-23; 3:10-14; Col 3:1-4.

(4) By faith Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice: vv. 17-19

In being willing to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham showed that he believed that God can raise someone from the dead. This passage reminds us too of Paul in Rom 4:17. These verses are also of great importance for the doctrine of resurrection. Many liberal theologians maintain that Israel's belief in a bodily resurrection came from Iran (Persian Zoroastrianism). However, these New Testament passages show that Abraham, approx. 2000 BC, had already believed that God could raise the dead.

d.) The faith of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph: vv. 20-22

For Jacob, see for example Gen 28:10-19; 31:3-13 etc. The whole life story of Joseph is a wonderful example of a man who, in spite of everything, believed. He revered God in spite of his own brothers selling him into slavery. He refused to sleep with Potiphar's attractive wife, choosing to be unjustly imprisoned, knowing that God would one day rehabilitate and reward him.

e.) The faith of Moses: vv. 23-29

V. 23: The faith of Moses' parents!

Vv. 24-26: By faith, Moses chose Israel rather than the riches of the royal household of Egypt. Like Abraham before him he looked ahead to his heavenly reward. This text is extremely suitable for a sermon.

V. 27: The exodus out of Egypt (Exo 5-15).

V. 28: The Passover Lamb (Exo 12).

V. 29: The crossing of the Red Sea (Exo 13–15).

f.) Joshua and Rahab: vv. 30-31

V. 30: By faith, Joshua took the fortified city of Jericho (cf. Jos 5:10 to 6:27).

5

V. 31: By faith, Rahab was not killed with the other inhabitants of Jericho. Rahab is a wonderful example of divine grace: a converted prostitute becomes an ancestor of Jesus (Mat 1:5)!

g.) The judges, Samuel, David and the prophets: vv. 32-38

10 (1) Other heroes of faith: v. 32

The author gives a summary of other heroes of faith: Gideon (Jud 6 to 8), Barak (Jud 4 to 5), Samson (Jud 13 to 16), Jephthah (Jud 11 to 12), David (1Sa 16 to 1Ki 2) and Samuel (1Sa 1 to 16).

(2) Their acts of faith: vv. 33-34.35a

15 Holy Scripture says the following about these heroes of faith:

1. They conquered kingdoms (e.g. David: cf. 2Sa 8).
2. They administered justice (e.g. Samuel: 1Sa 12:3-23; 15:33).
3. They gained what was promised (given by God; cf. Jos 21:45; 1Ki 8:56).
- 20 4. They shut the mouth of lions (e.g. Samson: Judges 14:5-6, David: 1Sa 17:34-37, Benaiah: 2Sa 23:20, and Daniel: Dan 6:23).
5. They quenched the fury of the flames (e.g. Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace: Dan 3:25).
- 25 6. They escaped the edge of the sword (e.g. Jephthah: Jud 12:3, David: 1Sa 18:11; 19:10, Elijah: 1Ki 19:1-3, Elisha: 2Ki 6:14-17).
7. Their weakness was turned to strength (e.g. Samson: Jud 16:28-30).
8. They became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies (e.g. Barak: Jud 4:14-15).
9. Women received their dead, raised to life again (e.g. the widow of Zarephath: 1Ki 17:17-24, the Shunammite: 2Ki 4:17-35).

30 (3) Their sufferings: vv. 35b-37

Many of these heroes of faith had to suffer greatly (cf. Joh 15:20; 2Ti 3:12):

1. Others suffered torture (e.g. Eliezer: 2Ma 6:18).
- 35 2. They faced jeers and flogging; they were chained and put in prison (e.g. Hanani: 2Ch 16:7-10).
3. They were stoned (e.g. Zechariah: 2Ch 24:20-22; cf. Mat 23:35).
4. They were sawn in two (according to Jewish tradition, Isaiah was sawn in two on the orders of Manasseh, when he hid in a tree trunk).

5. They were tortured, put to death by the sword, wandered from one place to another, clothed in sheepskins or goat skins (e.g. Elijah), they were robbed of their possessions, persecuted, mistreated...

(4) They were commended by God: v. 38

5 The world was not worthy of them (it is not worthy of them today either)!

h.) Conclusion: vv. 39-40

10 These verses tell us that believers under the old and new covenants will be perfected together (cf. Heb 12:22-24). This will become reality at the return of Jesus Christ, when he takes up his reign on earth. The passage 1Th 4:13-18 can be compared with these two verses. The dead in Christ will be perfected along with the Christians who are alive at the time of Christ's return.

E. A call to personally fight the fight of faith: 12:1-29

1. Jesus is our example of faith: vv. 1-3

15 **V. 1:** → *“let us also”*: Just as the heroes of faith under the old covenant fought a good fight of faith and finished the race, so we also should run with perseverance the race that is set before us. This passage could also mean that these heroes of faith (whose spirits are already in the presence of the Lord, cf. Heb 12:23, Rev 6:9-11) are also spectators of our battle of faith. Just as an athlete puts aside all that could hinder him in running fast in the race (for example unnecessary clothes), so we should lay aside all sin because it would slow us down in the
20 fight of faith. Sin impedes and hinders growth in faith.

V. 2: Just as the eyes of athletes are constantly fixed on the winning post so we also should fix our eyes again and again on Jesus, our example. Why? Because he is (cf. 1Pe 2:21):

- 25
1. The author of our faith.
 2. The “perfecter” of our faith.
 3. The one who endured the cross and death (for us).
 4. The one who sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

30 **V. 3:** If we follow his example, we will be able to persevere because we will certainly never have to bear more than he did.

These three verses are also very suitable for a sermon.

2. Discipline (testing) is necessary for growth in faith: vv. 4-11

V. 4: The readers needed to understand that they had not yet suffered excessively (for instance in comparison to Jesus Christ). So far none of them had died as a martyr!

5

Vv. 5-6: The author reminds his readers by using a quotation from Pro 3:11-12 that God disciplines and (when necessary) reproves his children. The afflictions, which they experience in various ways, can serve as discipline:

- 10
- Sickness
 - Injustice caused by others
 - Persecution, etc.

15 Vv. 7-8: If God does not discipline us, then we are not truly his children. These verses are a clear statement against so-called “anti-authoritarian education” of our children! Children who are not well disciplined often become little anarchists and tyrants.

20 Vv. 9-10: A logical observation: If we have respected the discipline of our natural father or parents, it is much more likely that we will also accept the discipline of our Heavenly Father. **“Father of our spirits”** → Stibbs sees this as a reference to **“God as the Creator of the human spirit”** (cf. Num 16:22; 27:16; Rev 22:6); → **“and live”**, meaning that his discipline directs our lives in the right direction. → **“God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness”**: cf. 1Co 1:30 and 2Pe 1:4. See also my brochure on **“Biblical Anthropology”** and my commentary on sanctification through the Holy Spirit in my pamphlet **“Pneumatology”**: tests and afflictions help us to grow in sanctification.

25

V. 11: Everyone agrees with this verse. When we are doing well, it is no problem to say this but at times of testing it is a battle of faith.

3. Warning against neglecting sanctification: vv. 12-17

30 Vv. 12-13: The readers should not let themselves be discouraged by suffering. In v. 12, the writer alludes to Isa 35:3. Stibbs says: **“The lame were possibly those halting between Christianity and Judaism”**⁵⁷

35 V. 14: The readers are called to live in peace with all men and to seek to live a sanctified life: → **“...without which no one will see the Lord”**: This word is one among many which clearly show that we cannot only have Christ as our Saviour he must also be our Lord. This will manifest itself in a sanctified life, i.e., in a life of obedience to God’s Word (cf. 1Th 4:3).

40 Vv. 15-17: → **“See to it that no one misses the grace of God”**: compare Gal 5:4 which speaks of those who **“are trying to be justified by the law”**. A person’s bitterness can have an effect on the whole church: cf. 1Co 5:6! There are other dangers too that need to be avoided. Sexual immorality and adultery are among the sins most often named in the Holy Scripture. → **“...godless like Esau”**: Esau was obviously an unbeliever who only thought about the

⁵⁷ A. M. Stibbs, op. cit., p. 1214.

material advantage of the moment, not having any sense of eternal (heavenly) things. For this reason, God also rejected him (cf. Gen 27:30-40; Mat 16:26).⁵⁸

4. The superiority of the new covenant obliges us to sanctify ourselves: vv. 18-29

5 a.) Comparison between the old and new covenants: vv. 18-24

(1) The old covenant: vv. 18-21

Under the old covenant, the people were involved in visible, terrifying and fearful things but under the new covenant we experience superior things; things invisible, heavenly and glorious.

10

In Sinai, the Israelites stood before an actual real mountain: **vv. 18-19** (cf. Exo 20:18-19). **V. 20** cf. Exo 19:12-13.

15

That these experiences were really terrifying can be seen in the fact that even Moses, the mediator of the old covenant, was afraid.

(2) The new covenant: vv. 22-24

However, we, as new covenant believers, being under the grace of Christ, have approached a spiritual mountain, Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Rev 21), the city of the living God. There we find:

20

1. Myriads of angels: v. 22.

2. The church of the first born (i.e. the ekklesia): v. 23. It is the church of Christ. → “...*the first born*”: cf. Exo 12:12-13; 13:2.15; Rom 8:29; Col 1:15-16. It is the body of Christ whose members are citizens of heaven: Eph 2:19; Phi 3:20.

25

3. Also the Judge (v. 23) who is God of all: cf. Act 17:31. We can approach God in spite of his being the Judge because Christ has saved us from judgement through his own blood (cf. Joh 5:24; 2Co 5:21).

30

4. The spirits of righteous men made perfect: v. 23. These are the spirits who have gone before us into the heavenly home. According to 1Jo 3:2, they in actual fact reach perfection there. Other commentators believe that this refers to the believers of the old

⁵⁸ These passages help us to a better understanding of the difficult passage of Rom 9:10-13 which is often misunderstood by readers of the Bible. Rom 9 is, by the way, the bastion of those who adhere to predestination (Calvinists). Others also derive from Rom 9 that God is an arbitrary despot who simply plays with his poor creatures. However, it is clear that God who knows everything in advance also knew what Esau's attitude of heart would be. This does not mean that God himself pushed Esau to make a false decision. God's foreknowledge must not be confused with predestination. God knew in advance that Esau would be profane; therefore he could also say he had preferred Jacob before both of them were born. Foreknowledge (Greek: πρόγνωσις [*prōgnōsis*]) comes first: cf. Rom 8:29-30 and Psa 139:12-16. All those who are rejected are rejected because of their lack of faith and rebellion against God. Paul confirms this also at the end of Rom 9. Rom 9:11 and following should not be considered separately from Rom 9:30-33!

covenant (cf. Heb 11:39-40). This is well possible because it would be quite a surprise if these were not found in this enumeration.

5. Jesus who is the mediator of the new covenant: v. 24. Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant (cf. Heb 8:6-13).

6. The sprinkled blood (of Jesus) which speaks a better word than that of Abel: v. 24. The blood of Jesus testifies constantly in our favour with God the Father. The blood of Abel called for vengeance (cf. Isa 26:21; Rev 6:10; Mat 23:35) but the blood of Jesus Christ for expiation and eternal redemption. The blood of Christ guarantees us the eternal love of God.

10 **b.) If under the old covenant transgression was condemned, how much more will he who transgresses against the new covenant be guilty: vv. 25-29**

V. 25: Because we can approach the mountain of Zion, we cannot refuse to listen to the One who speaks (namely God) without suffering the terrible consequences of judgement. He who speaks is, according to Heb 1:1-2, God. He has spoken by his Son Jesus Christ.

V. 26: This is a quotation of Hag 2:6. Concerning this event, see also 2Pe 3:7. Jesus said: *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away”* (cf. Mat 24:35; Mar 13:31 and Luk 21:33).

Vv. 27-28: He who refuses the grace of God offered in Jesus Christ will not attain the unshakeable glory. The believer should constantly fix his eyes on this wonderful goal (cf. 2Co 4:18). The fact that we will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken should motivate us time and time again to:

1. Give thanks (cf. 1Th 5:18)
2. and press on in sanctification (2Pe 3:10-13 and 1Jo 3:3).

V. 29: The last verse of this section is once again a solemn warning: our God is a consuming fire (cf. Deu 4:24). Fire is a symbol of judgement.

F. Faith must be practiced (lived out): 13:1-17

As introduction to this passage Stibbs writes:

The writer now adds (quite in the manner of Paul, cf. Rom. 12:4–13) a variety of brief statements containing pointed practical exhortations to worthy Christian living.⁵⁹

Evidently, since we can approach God through our Great High Priest, it becomes us to walk worthily of our great God.

1. In our personal lives: vv. 1-6

True faith manifests itself through:

⁵⁹ A. M. Stibbs, op. cit., p. 1215.

1. Brotherly love: vv. 1.3.
2. Hospitality: v. 2 (In this area, western believers can learn a lot from African and Asian brothers and sisters).
- 5 3. Purity in marriage: v. 4. Both sexual sins are mentioned here: (a) fornication (in Greek: πορνεία [*porneía*]: sexual relationship between singles), (b) adultery (in Greek: μοιχεία [*moikheía*]): sexual relationship between a married person and someone with whom he or she is not married).
- 10 4. Contentment, freedom from greed and covetousness: vv. 5-6. To underline this exhortation, the author quotes in verse 6 Psa 118:6 (cf. 1Ti 6:6-10.17).

2. In church life: vv. 7-17

a.) Respect of church leaders and obedience: vv. 7.17

Democracy is good but when there is no respect or obedience towards those who are responsible in the church then there is a danger of disorder, chaos. However, the Word of God also speaks of the opposite danger, i.e., that of church leaders conducting themselves like little dictators: See, for example, the Apostle Peter's exhortation in 1Pe 5:1-4.

b.) Call to persevere in the grace of Christ and not to return to the Jewish laws: vv. 8-14

V. 8: Christ is and remains eternal, he is forever sufficient! This verse testifies to the fact that Jesus Christ never changes.

V. 9: The author exhorts his readers not to be led (again) astray through legalistic teachings which forbid the eating of certain foods. Without any doubt, he is thinking of Jewish food regulations. This thought is found in many Pauline epistles, see for example Rom 14:1ff; 1Co 9:19-23; Col 2:16ff; 1Ti 4:1-5. Once again, we find a parallel between Hebrews and the Pauline epistles.

V. 10: Our altar is Jesus Christ who shed his blood for us. The Levitical priests have no right to serve at this altar just as we have no right to take part in the Old Testament sacrifices.

Vv. 11-12: Just as the bodies of the animal sacrifices were burnt outside the camp (of the children of Israel in the wilderness: cf. Lev 16:27; 24:14; Num 15:35), so also Christ had to suffer outside the city gate, that is outside Jerusalem: cf. Joh 19:17.

V. 13-14: We are called upon to follow the example of Christ, that means to leave the camp, which is the world, and to carry our cross with him (cf. Rom 8:17-18; Col 3:1-4). It is an exhortation against any kind of conformity (cf. Rom 12:2). God certainly does not expect us to live in isolation, as has been practiced since the beginning of Christianity (a live of isolation in a monastery or as a hermit) as a reaction to worldliness (also in the official church). God wants his children to live sanctified lives (cf. Heb 12:14; 1Pe 1:15-16), not taking part in the sinful activities of the world (cf. Eph 4:17 to 5:18; 2Ti 3:1ff; Jam 4:4-6; 1Pe 4:1-4; 2Pe 3:14; 1Jo 2:15-16; Jud 20-23). We should make friends with "outsiders", but if we find ourselves in danger of being drawn into sin or compromise, then we should separate from them: cf. the well-known passage in 2Co 6:14-18.

c.) A call to praise: v. 15

God rejoices when his children worship and praise him. Compare the calls to worship in the Psalms (especially Psa 146 to 150).

d.) A call to generosity and charity: v. 16

5 Parallels to this verse are found in: Heb 6:10; Rom 12:13; 1Ti 6:17-18; 1Pe 4:9 etc.

IV. EPILOGUE: 13:18-25

A. An appeal for intercession for the author and his companions: vv. 18-19

The great apostles knew too that they needed the prayers of their fellow Christians.

5 B. The author's prayer for the recipients: vv. 20-21

Intercession must always be mutual.

10 **V. 20:** In this verse, the Lord is called → *“the great Shepherd of the sheep”* (or *Archshepherd*). This expression reminds us of the words of Jesus in Joh 10:11. In offering himself as a sacrifice he was like a sheep (slaughtered: cf. Joh 1:29; Isa 53:7). After giving his life as a sacrifice and ascending to heaven he became our great Shepherd (v. 21; cf. Phi 2:13-14; 1Pe 5:4). Let us not forget that exaltation is preceded by (self) humiliation. The great Shepherd Jesus Christ wants all mankind to become his sheep and it causes him pain that so many reject him: cf. Mat 23:37.

15 C. Request to accept these words of exhortation: v. 22

It seems that the writer sensed that it was necessary to explicitly say this which is understandable when we realise that the recipients were Hebrews.

D. Information, greetings, blessing: vv. 23-25

20 1. Information: v. 23

25 Timothy had been released. The mention of this once more speaks for a Pauline authorship. The fact that many commentators suggest Luke, Barnabas or Apollos as the writer of the letter is closely connected with the mentioning of Timothy in this verse. Luke, Barnabas and Apollos were as we know Paul's fellow workers and also knew Timothy; certainly Apollos and Luke did (during Paul's second missionary journey). The fact that it is mentioned here

that Timothy had been released could also indicate that this letter was written in Rome. Paul was held in custody there by Roman soldiers (cf. Act 28:11-31; Phi 3:19-24; 2Ti 4:6-18).

2. Greetings: v. 24

Stibbs comments in relationship to these greetings:

- 5 His special greetings to their *leaders* and to the whole Christian community suggests that the letter was actually sent to a limited group of ordinary Christians.⁶⁰

10 I am not convinced of this. I would say it is possible but in no way certain. → ***“Those from Italy send you their greetings”***: This sentence favours the hypothesis that the letter was written from Rome. But it is also possible that he was simply staying in a place where a group of people from Italy were living. This was the case for instance with Pricilla and Aquila who had to flee from Rome and lived in Corinth and Ephesus (cf. Act 18:1-3.24-26).

3. Blessing: v. 25

15 The greeting is short, but grace is enough because it is what we need so much. The grace of God is of more value than all earthly treasures. This mention of grace also reminds us again of Paul. All the letters of the apostle Paul end with this blessing, beginning with Romans through to the letter to Philemon.

20 May God help us to grow in the knowledge of his Son, our great Shepherd, who gave himself for us so that we will better understand how privileged we are in this lost world and that we will in this way receive a deep longing to win others for him (cf. Jud 22-23).

⁶⁰ A. M. Stibbs, op. cit., p. 1217.

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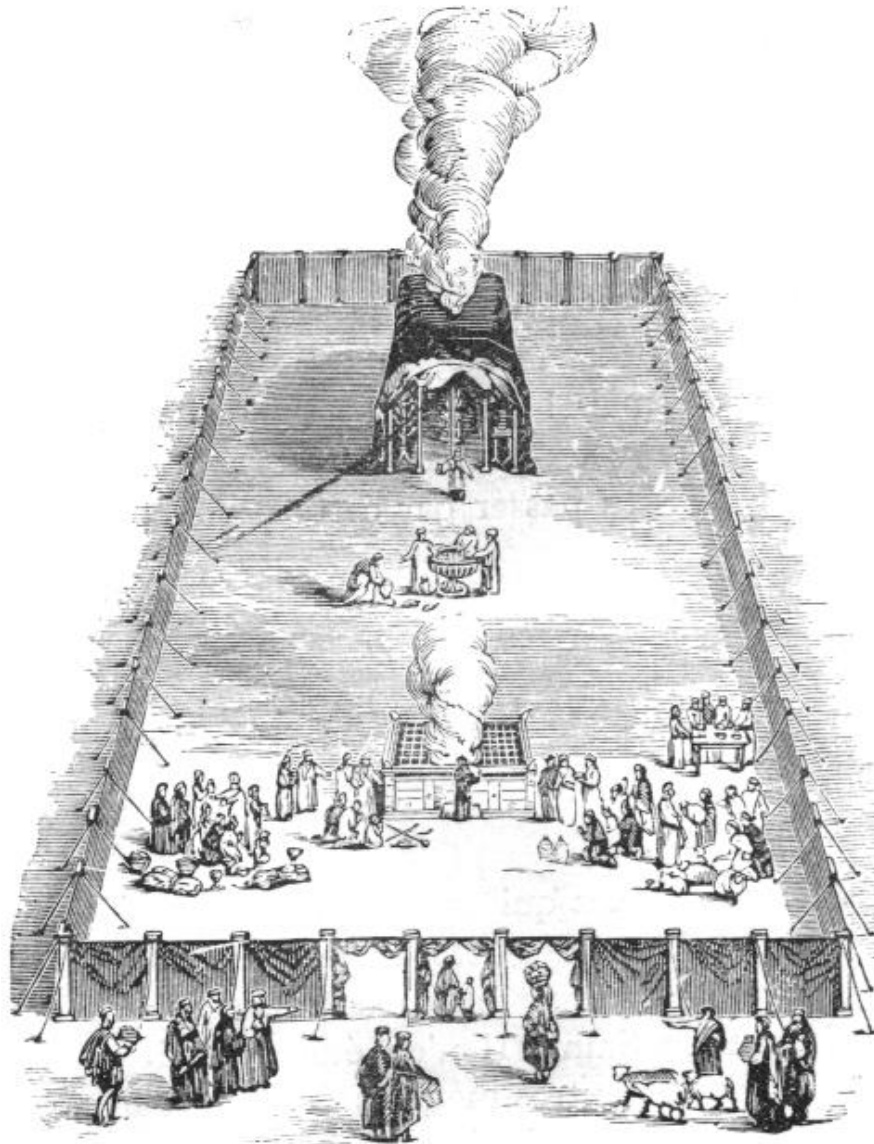
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“And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new a living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God...” (Heb 10:18-21)

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