

# Introduction to the Book of Hebrews

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## Introductory Matters<sup>1</sup>

### Outline

- I. Doctrinal Section of the Letter to the Hebrews (1:1-10:18)
  - A. The attributes of Christ demonstrating Him to be superior to Old Covenant Judaism (1:1-3)
    1. Although God spoke in various ways during the dispensation of the Old Covenant, God has spoken through Christ in the dispensation of the New Covenant (1:1-2 a)
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      - e) Christ upholds all things (1:3)
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  - B. Christ is superior to the Angels (1:4-2:18)
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      - f) Psalm 102:25-27 (1:10-12)
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    3. Reasons for the incarnation (2:5-18)
      - a) To fulfill God's purpose for man (2:5-9a)
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      - f) To become a faithful priest (2:16-17a)
      - g) To make atonement for sins (2:17b)
      - h) To sympathize with those tested (2:18)
  - C. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)

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<sup>1</sup> The material presented throughout this entire paper was influenced by the interpretation of the Book of Hebrews as given by J. Dwight Pentecost in J. Dwight Pentecost, *Faith That Endures: A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992); idem, class notes of Andy Woods in BE450A The Book of Hebrews, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2005.

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- D. Pastoral reminders (13:1-19)
  1. Love (13:1)
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  7. Doctrinal fidelity (13:9-14)
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- E. Benediction 13:20-25

## **Date**

The Book of Hebrews must have been written before A.D. 95 since Clement of Rome quoted from it. Moreover, the book must have been written prior to A.D. 70 since it makes numerous references to the temple system as still being in operation (Heb 8:4, 13; 9:6; 10:1-2; 13:10). If the temple had not been standing at the time the letter was written, there would have been no temptation on the part of the audience to seek refuge in the temple system. Because Titus destroyed the temple in A.D. 70, Hebrews must have been written prior to that time. Another reason that Hebrews was written prior to A.D. 70 is that the writer tells his audience that they had not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood (Heb 12:4). Because much Jewish blood was shed in the events of A.D. 70, the letter must have been written prior to that time. If the approaching day mentioned in Hebrews 10:25 is a reference to the events of A.D. 70, then Hebrews must have been written just before these events transpired.

Furthermore, the book was most probably written prior to A.D. 64, which marks the beginning of the Neronian persecutions. Since there is no reference to any of these persecutions in the letter, it must have been written before they took place. However, it is inappropriate to place the date of the book earlier than A.D. 62. The recipients of the letter were second-generation believers (Heb 2:3). Thus, there must be adequate time for the apostolic generation to be replaced by the second generation. Thus, a date of A.D. 62-64 for the composition of the book would not be far from wrong.<sup>2</sup>

## **Authorship**

The Book of Hebrews is an anonymous letter. Thus, numerous suggestions have been given as to who wrote the book. Almost every character in the Book of Acts (except Dorcas) has

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<sup>2</sup> Stanley Toussaint, "The Epistle to the Hebrews" (unpublished class notes in 307B Hebrews, General Epistles, and Revelation, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2000), 2.

been suggested as a possible author. Many characters found throughout the New Testament as a whole have been suggested. One prominent suggestion is that the book was written by Apollos (Acts 18:24). It is possible to harmonize the book's detailed understanding of the Old Testament system with Apollos since he was a man "mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24b).<sup>3</sup> It is also argued that Apollos is an appropriate candidate given the fact that he was an Alexandrian Greek (Acts 18:24). It is suggested that Hebrews follows the logical style and rhetorical pattern of the Alexandrian Greeks.

Another worthy suggestion as to authorship is Barnabas. The factors favoring Barnabas include his status as a Levite (Acts 4:36), his close ties to Paul, and the fact that Barnabas and Timothy presumably knew one another. Timothy had been converted in the vicinity of the first missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3) that Barnabas had accompanied Paul on. The fact that Barnabas was a Levite may explain the Jewishness of the letter. The connection between Barnabas and Timothy would explain the writer's connection to Timothy (Heb 13:23).<sup>4</sup>

The most popular suggestion for authorship of Hebrews, however, is the apostle Paul. Clement of Alexandria first made this suggestion in A.D. 180. This suggestion has several pieces of evidence in its favor. First, just as Paul and Timothy are associated throughout the New Testament, the author of Hebrews is associated with Timothy (Heb 13:23). Second, the writer draws illustrations from Israel's past failures (Heb 4:11) just as Paul does (1 Cor 10). Third, the writer places great emphasis upon the New Covenant just as Paul does (2 Cor 3:6). Fourth, Hebrews was probably written from Rome (Heb 13:24) just as Paul's prison letters were written from Rome. Fifth, Pauline authorship of Hebrews was accepted in the Eastern Church from the

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<sup>3</sup> All Scripture quotations throughout are taken from the NASB.

<sup>4</sup> Zane Hodges, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor, 1983), 778.

end of the second century onward. Through the influence of Jerome and Augustine, Pauline authorship also became the dominant view in the Western Church.

Sixth, similarities of doctrine and style can also be detected upon comparing Hebrews to Paul's writings. For example, both exhibit a high esteem for the Old Testament in general and the Law in particular. Both Hebrews and Paul couch the relationship between the Law and New Covenant in terms of good versus better (Heb 8:6; Rom 7:12). Also, both Hebrews and Paul seem to promote faith over attempts of the flesh to keep the Law. Moreover, both Hebrews and Paul place a high priority on the person and work of Christ. Furthermore, both focus upon Christ's final propitiatory sacrifice. In addition, both make extensive use of Old Testament citations.<sup>5</sup> Also, both exhibit a pattern of basing exhortations upon previously expounded doctrinal truth (Rom 1–11; 12–16; Heb 1:1–10:18; 10:19–13:25). Finally, a similarity in phraseology is found when comparing Hebrews to Paul's letters.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the potency of the arguments favoring Pauline authorship, numerous counter arguments can be cited. However, upon closer inspection, many of these counter arguments do not seem unassailable. First, in Hebrews the name of the author is not stated. However, in Paul's other letters he attaches his name (2 Thess 3:17). However, Paul may not have given his name for good reason. The believing Jews may have already held him in high esteem. Thus it was not necessary for him to sign his name. Also, he may not have signed his name on account of the fact that the Hebrews would have overtly rejected the book without even considering its message because it came from someone who was not an original apostle or from someone who was a member of the Sanhedrin. Second, the author of Hebrews cites the Old Testament exclusively from the LXX version while Paul cites from the MT as well as the LXX in his other letters.

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<sup>5</sup> Pentecost, *Faith That Endures: A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews*, 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

Third, differences in language and style can be found upon comparing Hebrews with Paul's other writings. However, perhaps these two objections can be explained in terms of someone other than Paul writing the letter yet still writing it under his supervision. The use of an amanuensis was common in the New Testament world (1 Pet 5:12). Mark seems to have written his gospel under the supervision of Peter (1 Peter 5:13). Also, the differences of language and style are more understandable if Tertullian's suggestion is accurate that Paul wrote the letter in Hebrew and Luke translated it into Greek. Fourth, Paul could not be the writer of this letter since it was written to Jews and Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. If Paul had written to the Jews he would have stepped upon Peter's jurisdiction since Peter was the apostle to the Jews and Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7-8). However, according to Acts 9:15, part of Paul's ministry was to the Jews as well. Also, Paul touched upon Jewish issues in his other writings (Gal 3-4; Col 2:16-17).

Although Paul may have indeed been the author, it is best to not be dogmatic on the matter. No clear scholarly consensus has emerged concerning who the writer was. Perhaps the best suggestion was articulated by Origen when he wrote, "As to who actually wrote the epistle, God knows the truth of the matter." Because the writer desired anonymity, it seems best to let his wishes stand. While debates about authorship can be interesting, who wrote the book has little bearing upon interpretive issues within the book. Nor does the issue of authorship affect the book's authority, canonicity, and trustworthiness.

## **Audience**

### ***Believing Status***

A far more significant matter regarding how the book is to be interpreted is the issue of the spiritual status of those who received the letter. The believing status of the audience has a

direct bearing upon how the warning passages are to be understood. If the audience was already regenerated, then neither the Calvinist nor Arminian views of the warning passages can be sustained. If the audience was already justified, then the warning passages cannot be addressed to unbelievers or an audience comprised of believers and unbelievers. Nor can these warning passages deal with loss of salvation since too many other passages teach eternal security (John 6:39; 10:28; Rom 8:29-39; Eph 1:12-14; 4:30; Philip 1:6; 1 Pet 1:3-5). Rather, the warning passages are warning against a loss of blessings that flow from justification and have nothing to do with initial justification itself. This view allows for a theology that says while all those blessed are believers, not all believers are blessed.

It is clear from the book as a whole that the addressees were genuine believers.<sup>7</sup> The author routinely uses “us” when describing his audience thus equating his own spiritual status with that of his audience (Heb 1:2). He also refers to his audience as those who had their sins purged (1:3) and those who were on the verge of neglecting rather than rejecting their salvation (2:1-3). The notion of neglecting implies a prior possession. For example, the fact that Timothy was told not to neglect his ministry gift automatically implies that he presently possesses such a gift (1 Tim 4:14).<sup>8</sup> He also calls his audience holy brethren who are partakers of the heavenly calling (3:1). The term “brethren” is used ten times in Hebrews. Four of these uses do not describe the original audience. The word simply refers to either humanity in general (2:17) or is used in the Old Testament sense of Jewish brethren (2:12; 7:5; 8:11). However, the remaining six uses do describe the original audience. These uses either inarguably refer to believers or must

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<sup>7</sup> Most of these items were originally compiled in *Ibid.*, 29-31.

<sup>8</sup> Mike Duffy, “The Hermeneutical Problem of the Mixed Audience in the Book of Hebrews” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1988), 38.

refer to believers since the exhortations they are associated with would be inapplicable to unbelievers (2:11; 3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22, 23).<sup>9</sup>

In chapter four the writer expresses concern that his audience will not attain rest rather than not attain salvation (4:1). He also refers to them as fellow believers together with him (4:3). He assumes that Christ their high priest is interceding for them (4:14, cf. 7:26-8:1; 10:21), and that they already have access to the throne of grace to obtain help in time of need (4:16). He speaks of the intense persecution they have already experienced (Heb 10:32-24). Why would they experience such intense persecution on account of an empty profession? He assumes their need is patient endurance rather than salvation (10:36-39). According to 10:22-25, they have been cleansed, sprinkled from an evil conscience, made a public confession, and identified with other believers. He presupposes that they could serve the living God (9:14), have been sanctified (10:10), have received the ministry of the Holy Spirit (10:15), and that Jesus is the author and finisher of their faith (12:2). He also refers to them as sons (12:7) and as those who are inheriting a kingdom (12:28).

The believing status of the audience is also evidenced through the numerous exhortations given in the book. Pentecost identifies at least 38 exhortations that the writer gives to his readers.<sup>10</sup> Yet there is not to be found in the book a single exhortation to trust Christ for salvation. One would expect this exhortation to show up at least once if the writer was addressing unbelievers.<sup>11</sup> By way of comparison, one of the reasons we know that the Gospel of John has an evangelistic purpose is because the purpose statement of the book is an exhortation to saving faith (John 20:31). Yet no similar exhortation is found in Hebrews. In sum, it is safe to

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 32-34.

<sup>10</sup> Pentecost, *Faith That Endures: A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews*, 32-34.

<sup>11</sup> Duffy, "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Mixed Audience in the Book of Hebrews," 40.

say that the book was written to believers rather than to unbelievers or a mixed audience. Thus, the warning passages should be understood in terms of conveying a loss of blessing flowing from justification and are unrelated to justification itself.

### ***Second Generation Believers***

Although the audience was comprised of believers, they were second-generation believers. This becomes clear from Hebrews 2:3, which says, "...After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard." Thus, a chain is established from the Lord, to the apostolic generation, to the next generation that heard the gospel from the apostolic generation. The apostolic generation confirmed the message to the next generation through signs and wonders performed under the power of the Holy Spirit. The fact that the audience was a second-generation Christian audience may explain why they were more casual about the value of their initial confession.

### ***National Identity***

Some have postulated that the book was written to Gentiles. They contend that the title "Hebrews" is not found in the earliest manuscripts and the book was not so named until Clement did so in A.D. 180. This view is also buttressed by the arguments for Pauline authorship since Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles and Peter was the apostle to the Jews. However the arguments for a Gentile audience should be discarded. Why would a Gentile audience be concerned with Levitical priestly practices? The audience was obviously well acquainted with the Old Testament system and rituals. The numerous references to the Old Testament and Old Testament history argue convincingly that a Jewish audience is in view. Others have postulated a mixed audience comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. A Jewish/Gentile audience is apparent in

Paul's other letters as he deals with Jewish/Gentile conflicts (Eph 2). However, no such conflict is evident in Hebrews. Thus, a purely Jewish audience is addressed.

### ***Location***

Other New Testament letters addressed exclusively to believing Jews are addressed to those spread out in the Diaspora (1 Pet 1:1). However, the situation seems to be different in Hebrews. The audience is under duress to return to the Levitical system as represented by the functioning temple. For this temptation to be real, the audience must have been in close proximity to the temple. Thus, it is safe to conclude that the audience was located in the land of Canaan. The letter's frequent allusions to the functioning temple (Heb 8:4, 13; 9:6; 10:1-2; 13:10) as well as the audience's intimate knowledge of the details of the Levitical system seem to support this conclusion as well.

### **Occasion for Writing**

The nation of Israel had come under judgment because of its rejection of its own messiah (Dan 9:26; Matt 12:31-32; 23:36-38; 24:2; Acts 2:40). This judgment was to be meted out in the rapidly approaching events of A.D. 70. However, the Jewish believers addressed in the letter through their baptism or confession (Heb 3:1; 4:14; 10:23) had publicly severed themselves from the nation and instead had publicly identified themselves with the new order ushered in by Christ's death. In making such a public statement, they were publicly testifying to the inadequacy of the Jewish religion. Such a public statement obviously did not sit well with the Jewish leaders of the time. Thus, these leaders were placing the recipients of the letter under duress to return to the religion of Judaism.

The primary tool that the leadership was using to create this desired result was persecution. The audience had already been put out of the synagogue (John 16:2) and had experienced religious persecution at the hands of the Jews (Heb 10:32-34). Apparently the Hebrews were being worn down by this persecution over an extended period of time. Thus, they were becoming discouraged. Consequently, they were contemplating renouncing their confession and returning to Judaism. Someone may have had the idea that if they just showed up on the right feast day, then their persecutors would overlook their baptism. Perhaps they thought that their persecutors would forget their baptism completely since thousands were being baptized and the Jewish establishment had no record of who was baptized. After all, if Paul had returned to temple activity (Acts 20:16; 21), why could they not do it also? The temple already figured prominently in their thinking by virtue of the fact that the Book of Acts records numerous instances of believers fellowshipping in the temple (Acts 2:1; 3:1, 11; 5:12, 21, 42). They thought they could still be Christians and hold on to some aspects of Judaism for the purpose of appeasing their persecutors as a means of escaping persecution. Thus, their desire to return to Judaism should be categorized as regression rather than apostasy. They were not completely renouncing Christianity. Rather, they were simply syncretizing some aspects of Judaism with Christianity for the purpose of appeasing their persecutors and alleviating the persecution they were under.

The temptation to lapse back into Judaism was compounded by the fact that they were living in a transitional era in between the Day of Pentecost and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. Because the temple was still standing during this era, it was still available to seek refuge in. The temptation to lapse back into Judaism was also compounded by the fact that the addressees of the letter were second-generation believers who may not have appreciated the

significance of their baptism as much as the first generation of believers had. The temptation to lapse back into Judaism was also compounded by the fact that they had only been excommunicated from the synagogue. Unlike the temple, which was divinely ordained, the synagogue was a human institution. Thus, the argument was probably made that because they had only been removed from the human institution and not the divine institution, it was not too late for them to return to Judaism.

### **Purpose for Writing**

Because of such prolonged religious persecution at the hands of the Jews, the Hebrews were becoming discouraged (Heb 12:3). They were in desperate need for a word of encouragement. Such encouragement and exhortation was the goal of the writer of Hebrews (Heb 13:22). The writer accomplishes such exhortation in two ways. First, he shows that what the readers possess in Christ is superior to every significant vestige of Judaism. The writer takes the most significant aspects of Judaism (angels in Hebrews 1–2, Moses in Hebrews 3:1-4:13, and the Aaronic order in Hebrews 4:14-10:18) and shows how Christ is superior in comparison. Given the supremacy of Christ over Judaism, it is foolish to return to Judaism. In using this methodology, the writer in no way disparages Judaism but simply shows that what the believers currently possess is better than anything the previous dispensation had to offer. Thus, the writer's trajectory is from good to better rather than from bad to good (Heb 8:6). Hence, the adjective "better" is found thirteen times throughout the book.

The second strategy that the writer uses to exhort his audience is through the warning passages. Here, the writer warns his audience of the consequences they will face if they syncretize Judaism with Christianity. Thus, the writer warns the believers of the consequences of drifting away from the truth (Heb 2:1-4), disobeying the truth (Heb 3:7-4:13), immaturity

(Heb 5:10-6:20), despising the truth (Heb 10:26-39), and denying the truth (Heb 12:25-29). Because the addressees were already believers, the warnings need to be understood from the perspective of a loss of blessing that flows from justification rather than issues related to justification itself.

### **Argument**

In Hebrews 1:1-2a, the writer opens the letter by explaining that Christ is superior to any previous divine revelation. In previous dispensations God gave extended revelation through many means over a long period of time. However, such revelation was indirect, incomplete, and temporary. By contrast, Christ's incarnation introduced a new method of revelation. God spoke directly "in Son." In other words, the incarnation was a direct, complete, and permanent revelation of the Father (John 14:9). The fact that this revelation came about in the "last days" indicates that the time period of waiting for this complete revelation is over as Christ has now been made manifest (John 1:14). Since the time for a superior revelation has arrived and the period of an inferior revelation has passed, how foolish it is for the Hebrews to move from Christianity back to Judaism. Such a move represents a transition from a complete revelation back to an inferior revelation.

In Hebrews 1: 2b-3, the writer lists seven of Christ's attributes. Each of these attributes is so awesome and spectacular that the major features of the Old Covenant pale by comparison. Because what the Hebrews have in Christ is superior to every aspect of the Old Covenant, it is foolish for the readers to leave Christ and return to the Old Covenant. First, Christ is the heir of all things. One day He will exercise complete authority. Second, He is the maker of all things. He is the one who ordered the ages. Third, He is the brightness of the Father's glory. Not only does this concept express Christ's eternal nature, but it also expresses His oneness with the

Father. Fourth, He is the express image of the Father. In biblical times, because the image of the emperor had been impressed upon a coin by a die, when one looked at a coin he was looking at an exact representation of the emperor. Similarly, when one sees Christ, he sees the Father (John 14:9).

Fifth, He upholds all things. Christ not only created all things but He is also the sustainer of all things (Col 1:17). He is the one who will carry the ages along to their designated end. Sixth, Christ made a complete purification for sins. The notion of a once for all purification stands in sharp contradistinction to the Levitical system whose repetitious sacrifice testified to the fact that it was incapable of a complete purification. This contrast will be developed at length throughout the book. Seventh, when Christ finished His work of purification he sat down at the right hand of God. Thus, His work of purification was complete unlike the Levitical system whose purification was never complete. Hence, a chair was not an item of furniture in the Tabernacle. The Levitical priest never sat down because His work was never complete. By contrast, Christ sat down at the right hand of God because His work of purification was complete.

In Hebrews 1:4-2:18, the writer argues that Christ is superior to the angels. The writer makes this argument because angels occupied a prominent position in the Old Covenant system. God used them throughout the previous dispensations to convey revelation (Gen 16; 22:11-18; 31:11-13; Exod 3:1-2; Num 22; Judg 6; 13; 1 Kgs 17:2-4; Dan 10:11-12; Zech 1:9; 4:1-6; Luke 1:11-17, 28-32). The angels were also instrumental in the giving of the Law (Gal 3:19). Thus, if the writer can show Christ's supremacy with respect to the angels, he will be able to show how Christ is superior to a major facet of Judaism. He will also be able to show that revelation offered by Christ is superior to the revelation given under the Old Covenant.

In Hebrews 1:4-14, the writer strings together a series of seven Old Testament citations to demonstrate Christ's superiority to the angels. He introduces this section by proclaiming that Christ has a more excellent name than the angels (1:14). The name represents the totality of a person's being. Thus, Christ is superior to the angels in every way. First, the writer uses Psalm 2:7 to show that at the resurrection, the father appointed the son to rule (Acts 13:33). This is the meaning behind the word "begat." This word does not convey "beginning" as taught by the Arian heresy. In contrast to this authority vested in Christ, an angel was never vested with such authority. Second, the writer uses 2 Samuel 7:14 to show a continuing relationship between the Father and the Son. He also uses this verse to show that Christ is the unique Davidic descendant. Through Him would come the future form of the earthly, Davidic, theocratic administration. No similar honor has been bestowed upon a mere angel. Third, the author uses Deuteronomy 32:43 to show the worship that the angels will give to Christ in the millennium. Certainly the one who is worshipped is superior to the one worshipping.

Fourth, Psalm 104:4 is used to demonstrate that angels are unseen, temporal or created, and servants. Christ shares none of these attributes. He is the opposite. He is visible, eternal or uncreated, and ruler. Fifth, Psalm 45:4-7 is used to show Christ's eternity and anointing for His future earthly administration. Again, such authority was never vested in a mere angel. Sixth, he uses Psalm 102:25-27 to show that Christ is the creator and eternal. He is superior to His creation because He will remain while the whole creation disappears. Such a description is inapplicable to angels since they are mere created beings. Seventh, the writer uses Psalm 110:1 to show Christ's present position of honor and authority at the Father's right hand (John 17:5). Angels do not occupy such a prominent position. The writer concludes by noting that angels, unlike Christ, are mere servants. In sum, because Jesus is superior to the angels, He is superior to a major

ingredient of Judaism. Furthermore, His revelation is superior to that which was mediated by angels under the Old Covenant. Thus, it is foolish for the Hebrews to put themselves back under the Levitical system.

In Hebrews 2:1-4 the author interrupts his train of thought by inserting the first warning passage. This passage represents a parenthesis in the author's treatment of the subject of angels. Here, the readers are warned against drifting away from the superior revelation found in Christ. The word "we" makes it clear that the recipients were believers as the author identifies his own spiritual status with that of his audience. The word "neglect" also makes it clear that the readers were believers who were in danger of leaving what they presently possessed. Such neglect would lead to a forfeiture of blessing flowing from justification. The writer's argument represents an "a fortiori" argument proceeding from the "lesser to the greater." If drifting away from Old Covenant Judaism was punishable, how much more will drifting away from the full revelation of the Son be a punishable offense? This is especially true since the full Revelation of Christ was confirmed to the recipients of the letter through apostolic signs and wonders.

In Hebrews 2:5-18 the author resumes his argument with respect to the angels. In other words, the reference to the angels found in Hebrews 2:5 connects this verse to the reference to the angels found in Hebrews 1:13. Unlike the angels, Christ became incarnate. His incarnation was strategic in that it accomplished eight sweeping objectives. Observing these eight objectives flowing from Christ's incarnation shows Christ's superiority to the angels because angels never became incarnate and never accomplished any of these objectives.

The author lists eight reasons why Christ became a man. First, Christ became a man in order to restore God's original purpose for mankind (Heb 2:5-9a). According to Psalm 8:4-6, God originally created man for the purpose of being a theocratic administrator who would rule

creation on God's behalf (Gen 1:26-28). Because of the serpent's lie that man could rule creation on his own without being subservient to God (Gen 3:5), man lost his position as theocratic administrator. Consequently, Satan became the ruler of this age (2 Cor 4:4). Thus, Christ entered the world to restore man's position as theocratic administrator. However, Christ could only accomplish this purpose by becoming man Himself. In other words, the loss of man's position as theocratic administrator through the disobedience of the first Adam will be restored through the obedience of the last Adam. This explains why Christ frequently referred to Himself as the "Son of Man" as recorded in the gospels. Thus, His incarnation was necessary for this objective to succeed. Although the accomplishment of this objective is not a present reality, it will be realized in the future millennial reign. Christ's death laid the foundation for this goal to be realized.

Second, Christ became a man in order to taste death for everyone (Heb 2:9b). The penalty for sin is death (Gen 2:17). However, Christ came into the world to taste death on our behalf. He offered Himself as an acceptable sacrifice on man's behalf. Third, Christ became a man in order to bring others to glory (Heb 2:10-13). Through His suffering He identified Himself with sinners (Isa 8:17-18) thus making it possible for them to be saved. Fourth, He became a man in order to break Satan's rule over humanity (Heb 2:14). As previously explained Satan is now the ruler of this world. However, Christ's death partially defeated Satan (John 12:31) and laid the foundation for Satan's ultimate defeat (Rev 20:3, 10). Fifth, Christ became a man in order to remove the fear of death (Heb 2:15). The penalty for sin is death (Gen 2:18). However, because Christ tasted death on man's behalf, the sting of death has been removed for those who trust in Christ (1 Cor 15:55-56).

Sixth, Christ became a man in order to become a faithful and sympathetic high priest (Heb 2:16-17a). Because the function of a priest is to represent man on behalf of God, it was

necessary for Christ to become a man in order to identify with and understand those whom He was representing. Seventh, Christ became a man in order to die on the cross thus making a complete propitiation for sin (Heb 2:17b). Such complete propitiation stands in sharp contrast to the Levitical system's Day of Atonement (Lev 16), which simply postponed sin's indebtedness for another year. Eighth, Christ became a man so He could sympathize with those tested (Heb 2:18). Because Christ in His incarnation was tested in every way (Luke 4:1-13; Heb 4:15), He knows how to sympathize with, identify with, and minister to those experiencing similar tests. In sum, Christ through His incarnation accomplished sweeping objectives that no angel could ever accomplish. Because Christ is superior to the angels, He is superior to a major facet of Judaism. Thus, revelation through Him is to take supremacy over revelation given through angels.

At this point the typical Jew would be thinking that while it may be true that Christ's revelation may be superior to the angels, what revelation could possibly be superior to that given by Moses at Mount Sinai? After all Moses gave the Law, which told redeemed Israel how to live. The Mosaic Law was all-pervasive in that it showed Israel how to worship, how to relate to one another, and how to be restored to fellowship with God when they sinned. Thus, the Jewish people held Moses in the highest esteem. For the writer to be able to show Christ's supremacy with respect to Moses would not only show that Christ is superior to a major vestige of Judaism but also that Christ's revelation is superior to that of Moses. Thus in Hebrews 3:1-4:13, the writer establishes that Christ is superior to Moses just as he previously showed that Christ is superior to the angels.

The writer first accomplishes this goal by drawing some parallels between Jesus and Moses (Heb 3:1-2). Both were apostles or men sent by God. Moreover, both were faithful in the execution of their divinely ordained tasks. However, despite these similarities, numerous

contrasts exist between the two (Heb 3:4-6). First, while Moses was the house or foundation of Israel, Christ was the architect of the house (Heb 3:3-4). The builder of the house is deserving of more honor than the house itself. Here a distinction is being drawn between Jesus as creator and Moses as a mere creation. Second, while Moses was in the house, Jesus was over the house (Heb 3:5-6). Third, while Moses was a servant Jesus was a son (Heb 3:5-6). The term “son” connotes authority. In other words, Jesus possessed an authority not enjoyed by Moses who was a mere servant. Fourth, Moses’ revelation was only temporary as it anticipated better things to come (Heb 3:5). The New Testament informs us that this better thing was Christ (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39, 45). Thus, Moses merely testified to the coming reality of Christ.

In Hebrews 3:6, the author says that his readers will remain in Christ’s house rather than Moses’ house if they hold on to what they have been taught. He assumes that they will. However, this expression introduces the possibility that they will not. Such a possibility leads the writer to interject his second warning passage. Here, he warns his readers of the consequences they will experience if they disobey God by lapsing back into Judaism (Heb 3:7–4:13). To illustrate his point, the writer quotes from Psalm 95:7-11, which alludes back to the Kadesh Barnea incident that is recorded in Numbers 13–14. Here, redeemed and regenerated Israel (Exodus 14:30-31) failed to believe God’s promise that they could overcome the giants and take Canaan. Thus, that generation irrevocably forfeited the blessings of Canaan rest. The writer fears that his audience is on the verge of committing the same type of sin and thus he uses the Kadesh Barnea incident to warn them. Just as the regenerated and redeemed nation irretrievably forfeited blessings, the Hebrews were on the verge of doing the same thing if they failed to believe God by lapsing back into Judaism. Although their redeemed status would not be affected, the blessings flowing from that redeemed status would be impacted. Although it was too late for the

Exodus generation, it was not yet too late for the Hebrews, as they had not yet crossed the point of no return. The writer's fear that they would cross this point brings to mind the Kadesh-Barnea incident as a basis for warning his audience.

The writer proceeds to detail the consequences of unbelief that the nation would experience if they imitated the pattern of the Exodus generation (Heb 3:12-19). These consequences include an experiential departure from God (3:12), the development of a hardened and insensitive heart (3:13-16), participation in an overt act of rebellion (3:17), and loss of blessings flowing from their justification (3:18-19). This need not be the destiny of the Hebrews. God has provided a rest for them that will enable them to remain strong in the midst of Jewish persecution so they will not fall into unbelief and lapse back into Judaism. The rest available to the Hebrews is explained in Hebrews 4:1-13.

First, the writer draws attention to the possibility of rest for the Hebrews (Heb 4:1-2). Debate persists concerning what this rest actually is. Some believe that this rest is salvation. However, this view is unlikely because the readers were already believers. Others believe that this rest is the millennial kingdom. However, this view is also unlikely because the offer of the kingdom had already been rejected by the nation (Matt 12; 21:43; 23:36-38). The kingdom will not be re-offered to the nation again until the tribulation (Matt 24:14). In the interim, the theocratic kingdom has been postponed. Thus, the imminent appearing of the millennium was not possible at the time the Book of Hebrews was written. The best view is to see the rest spoken of in Hebrews 4 as pertaining to God's sustenance in the midst of trials that God provides to the believer when he trusts God.

Second, the writer explains the pattern of rest (Heb 4:3-5). Just as God worked six days in creation and rested on the seventh day (Gen 2:2), God's people are to follow this pattern and

enter into rest themselves. Third, the writer explains the perpetuity of the rest (Heb 4:6-10). Some may have concluded that the Exodus generation's disobedience at Kadesh-Barnea may have permanently withdrawn the opportunity for rest due to that generation's disobedience (Heb 4:6). However, such a conclusion is faulty because that rest was announced during David's day (Ps 95:11) centuries after Kadesh-Barnea (Heb 4:7-8). Thus, the promise of rest remains for God's people (Heb 4:9) although the promise is by faith and not works (Heb 4:10).

Fourth, the author exhorts his readers to enter the rest (Heb 4:11-13). The readers are not to follow the example of the Exodus generation and instead to enter the rest by faith (Heb 4:11). The writer brings up God's Word at this point to show that believers will be judged by the revelation they currently possess (Heb 4:12-13). Five characteristics of God's word are highlighted in these verses. God's Word is living and active, powerful, penetrating, and a discerner of inward motives. If believers fail to enter into rest because of unbelief, then such a motive will be judged according to the standard of God's word. In sum, the writer has shown that the revelation of Jesus is superior to that given by the angels (Heb 1:4-2:18) and Moses (Heb 3:1-4:13). Interspersed within the writer's message are two warnings against drifting away from the truth (Heb 2:1-4) and disobeying God by lapsing back into Judaism (Heb 3:7-4:13). The point of these warnings is that the believing Hebrews would experience a forfeiture of blessings flowing from their justification if they lapsed back into Judaism.

Having shown Christ's superiority to the angels and Moses, he now moves on to showing Christ's supremacy with respect to the entire Levitical, Aaronic priestly system (Heb 4:14-10:18). This will complete the author's argument that Christ is superior to all vestiges of Judaism and thus the Hebrews should not forsake Christ for the purpose of returning to Judaism. In Hebrews 4:14-16, the writer returns to the theme of Christ as the great high priest. This theme

was introduced earlier (Heb 2:17; 3:1) and now the author develops it in more detail. Here, the writer gives two reasons as to why the priesthood of Christ is superior to that of Aaron. First, Christ occupies a superior position of ministry than Aaron because Christ is in heaven and Aaron is a mere terrestrial priest. Second, Christ is better able to sympathize with our weaknesses since He became a man and was tested to the farthest degree possible (Heb 4:15; Luke 4:1-13). Thus, He is qualified to sympathize with us in our weaknesses having been tested to a much greater degree than an Aaronic priest has ever been tested. Consequently, the Hebrews are admonished to draw near to the throne room of their heavenly and sympathetic high priest to receive help in the midst of persecution. Such priestly and spiritual assistance will enable them to hold fast to their confession and not lapse back into Judaism.

In Hebrews 5–7, the writer goes on to show that not only does Christ meet the essential elements of the Aaronic priesthood, He also far transcends them by ushering in a far superior priesthood of the Melchizedekian order. In Hebrews 5:1-9, the writer shows how Christ meets the basic requirements of the Aaronic priesthood. The two prerequisites are given in Hebrews 5:1-4. First, the priest had to be a man (Heb 5:1-3). The priest's manhood enabled him to sympathize with those beset by similar human weaknesses. Second the priest had to be called by God (Heb 5:4). The author then takes these prerequisites in reverse order and shows how Christ fulfilled them (Heb 5:5-9). Christ was certainly called by God (Heb 5:5-6). He was appointed to the role of a priest after the Resurrection (Ps 2:7) and began his present session as priest after the Ascension (Ps 110:4). Christ also became a man through His incarnation (Heb 5:7-9). His manhood can be seen in the emotional distress that He experienced in Gethsemane. The emotional distress that He experienced at the prospect of having to die in order to pay the penalty of sin which is death (Gen 2:17) prompted Him to pray for restoration to fellowship with the

Father after the ordeal of the cross (John 17:5). Christ's prayer was heard on account of His piety. His manhood can also be seen on account of the fact that He had to learn while He was on the earth. He had to mature socially, physically, and spiritually just like everyone else (Luke 2:52). He matured through suffering. In his humanity He also had to be "made perfect" or complete the task that the Father had given Him. Thus, Christ, meets the core requirements of the Aaronic order because He was a man and called by God.

Despite meeting these prerequisites, Christ was far more than a mere Aaronic priest. Christ ushered in a new Melchizedekian priesthood that transcends the Aaronic order. It is to this new Melchizedekian order that the writer now desires to focus his readers' attention upon (Heb 5:10). However, two reasons make conveying the Melchizedekian priesthood difficult. The first reason is that the explanation will require the use of Old Testament typology (Gen 14:18-20). The second reason entails a paucity of evidence found elsewhere in the Bible regarding the figure known as Melchizedek. He is only mentioned in two other places (Gen 14:18-20; Ps 110:4). Thus, conveying the difficult truth of the Melchizedekian priesthood will require a mature audience. The author is not quite sure that his audience is up to the task. This realization prompts him to interject his third warning on the dangers of immaturity (5:11-6:20). If the audience remains in an immature state they will forfeit spiritual blessings flowing from their salvation. The author will resume his discussion of Melchizedek at a later point after he completes the warning (Heb 6:20; 7:1 ff).

The warning contains six elements. First, the fact of the immaturity of the audience is stated (Heb 5:11-14). Here, the author acknowledges the immaturity of his audience. They needed milk rather than solid food. This is why the writer believes they will have a difficult time digesting the truths associated with the Melchizedekian priesthood. By this time they should be

teachers but need someone to teach them the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. “By this time” implies that the audience was in a state of regression that had not previously characterized them. They will have matured once they are able to use the word of God in daily life. Second, the writer enumerates the items that his audience must leave behind if it is to mature. The idea here is not to abandon these things but rather to progress beyond them. Although many associate these items with pharisaic Judaism, not all agree on this point. Some believe that they have to do with the essential elements of their Christian experience.<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 6:3 implies that the audience was capable of maturing and their immaturity was not yet an irreversible state.

Third, the actual warning is given in Hebrews 6:4-6. The author issues this warning with the events of Kadesh-Barnea in the back of his mind (Heb 3:7-11). While the Exodus generation was redeemed, their unbelief resulted in a forfeiture of Canaan blessings. Based on the way the Hebrews are described in verses 4-6, there is little doubt that they were also redeemed and regenerated. Similarly, the Hebrews were on the verge of forfeiting the blessings of maturing in Christ (Heb 5:11-14). If they went back to Judaism, they would be permanently trapped in a system that would keep them in a perpetual state of immaturity (Gal 3-4). The decision would be irrevocable in that the encouragement of fellow Christians (Heb 3:13; 10:25) would not be able to stimulate them out of their immature state. They would have “fallen away” from the goal of maturing in Christ. They would be re-crucifying Christ anew by publicly identifying with the nation that crucified Christ.

Fourth, an illustration of the warning is given in Hebrews 6:7-8. The illustration involves a field yielding both a good and a bad crop. This illustration amply describes the Hebrews who

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<sup>12</sup> R.C. Sauer, “A Critical and Exegetical Examination of Hebrews 5:11-6:8” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manchester, 1981), 176ff..

were yielding both a good and a bad harvest (Heb 5:11-14; 6:9-12). In biblical times when a field yielded a bad crop it was burned so that the field could be used to produce a better crop. Because of the existence of this bad crop in the lives of the Hebrews, they were similarly destined for refining fire. This refining fire has nothing to do with hell but rather has to do with divine discipline (Heb 12:5-11) and loss of rewards at the Bema Seat (1 Cor 3:11-15). While there was still hope for this generation, discipline and loss of rewards would be their fate if they imitated the unbelief of the Exodus generation. Fifth, the writer expresses confidence that they would not follow in the unbelieving pattern of the Exodus generation (Heb 6:9-12). They have already exhibited some evidence of maturing in Christ.

Sixth, the writer gives the reason why his readers can trust God's promises of rest and high priestly help in the midst of persecution (Hebrews 6:13-20). This reason has to do with the certainty of God's promise. As an example, the writer draws from the life of Abraham. God made specific promises to Abraham regarding the birth of Isaac (Heb 6:13-14). Although this promise was delayed it was not denied. Abraham ultimately attained what God had promised him (Heb 6:15). The reason Abraham attained the promise has to do with its certainty. First, the promise (Gen 12:1-3) was based upon the character of God. Because it is impossible for God to lie, it was just a matter of time before that promise would be fulfilled. Second, God confirmed the promise through an unconditional covenant (Gen 15). Thus, Abraham could persevere in faith despite delays in the promise knowing that the promise ultimately would be fulfilled because of its certainty. The promises of rest and priestly assistance that God made to the Hebrews were equally certain. The Hebrews could count on these promises because they were as solid "as an anchor of the soul." Just as Abraham persevered in faith despite seeming delays

because of the certainty of the promises, the Hebrews could rely on God's promises of rest and priestly help in the midst of adversity because they are just as certain.

As the writer discusses the certainty of Christ's promise to furnish priestly assistance, he returns to the subject of Christ's priesthood being patterned after the priesthood of Melchizedek (Heb 6:20). This brings the writer full circle to the subject he initially wanted to discuss prior to issuing the warning against immaturity (Heb 5:10). Despite the fact that Christ meets the initial prerequisites of the Aaronic order (Heb 5:1-9), He was far more than a mere Aaronic priest. He ushered in a new Melchizedekian priesthood that transcends the Aaronic order. The writer's goal is to show that Christ's priesthood is superior to the Aaronic priesthood. Thus, Christ is superior to another major vestige of Judaism.

In Hebrews 7:1-4, the writer equates Melchizedek (Gen 14:18-20; Ps 110:4) and Christ. First, Melchizedek is called the king of Salem. Salem is a reference to Jerusalem. This allows for a parallel with Christ since He will one day rule the world from Jerusalem (Isa 2:2-3; Zech 14:17; Rev 20:9). Second, Salem also means "peace." Melchizedek is also called the king of righteousness. Putting these ideas together, we learn that Melchizedek's reign was characterized by both peace and righteousness. This combination is again reminiscent of Christ whose reign is described in the same way (Isa 9:6-7). Third, Melchizedek is also called a king and a priest. Such a combination of offices was non-existent with mere human rulers of Israel. When any king tried to usurp priestly prerogatives, he was severely disciplined. King Saul lost his kingdom and King Uzziah became a leper upon attempting to usurp priestly functions (1 Sam 14; 2 Chr 26). Thus, this combination of offices could only prefigure Christ who will also be both priest and king.

Fourth, Melchizedek also had no known genealogical record. Thus, he is described as without mother or father and without beginning or end. This again represents a parallel with

Christ who was also without beginning or ending. This cannot be a parallel with Aaron because his death and ending is well documented (Num 20:22-29). Fifth, the bread and the wine that Melchizedek brought to Abram (Gen 14:18) also represent a parallel with Christ. As a priest Melchizedek ministered to Abram's spiritual needs. By bringing him bread and wine, he ministered to his physical needs as well. Such a portrait appropriately depicts Christ who ministers to the spiritual (Heb 7:25) and physical needs of man (Philip 4:19). Sixth, Melchizedek is called priest of the most high. Thus, he is not just a priest to Israel as the Aaronic order demands. Rather, he is priest to the world. This is an appropriate description of Christ who ministers to everyone (Heb 2:9). Thus, the writer uses Melchizedek as a typological representation of Christ.

However, using Melchizedek as typological of Christ in no way implies that Melchizedek is a theophanic preincarnate appearance of Christ. Some have argued that Melchizedek is a theophany on the grounds that he had no beginning or ending and that he is like the Son of God (Heb 7:3). However, the text never says he had no beginning or ending. Rather, we simply possess no genealogical record of his beginning or ending. Also, the text does not call Him the Son of God but simply says he is like the Son of God for analogical purposes. Two factors argue against viewing Melchizedek as a theophany. First, a theophany typically brings a message from God to man. Yet such a message does not transpire in Genesis 14:18-20. Second, specific names and places are used to describe Melchizedek's rule. The fact that he is called the King of Salem means that he exercised geo-political jurisdiction over that city. Therefore, he was an actual human being rather than a theophany.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Pentecost, *Faith That Endures: A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews*, 118.

After establishing a typological connection between Melchizedek and Christ, the writer uses this as the basis for his argument that Christ is superior to the Aaronic order (Heb 7:4-10). The writer makes two historical notes to establish how Melchizedek was superior to Abraham. First, Abraham tithed to Melchizedek. The one who receives the tithe is greater than the one who gives the tithe. Second, Melchizedek blessed Abraham. The one who blesses is greater than the one who is blessed. Thus, on these two counts Melchizedek is greater than Abraham. The author's major premise is that Melchizedek is greater than Abraham. The author's minor premise is that Levi comes from the loins of Abraham. In other words, the Levitical system descended from Abraham. The conclusion that the author draws from these two premises is that Melchizedek, who typifies Christ, is greater than Levi. Thus, Christ is supreme over the entire Aaronic order and Levitical system.

The writer goes on to strengthen his case that Christ is supreme over the Levitical system by observing the Levitical system's inadequacies (Heb 7:11-19). Here, the writer explains why the Levitical order had to be done away with. First, it had no power to bring those under its authority to maturity. If the Levitical system had the capacity to bring men to maturity there would have been no need for it to be replaced by a new Melchizedekian priesthood (Heb 7:11). Second, the existence of the priestly ministry of Christ under the Melchizedekian priesthood mandates that eradication of the Levitical system. Christ could not be a priest under the Levitical system because its priests had to come from the tribe of Levi. Christ descended from the tribe of Judah. Therefore, because Christ did not fit the criterion of the Levitical system, it had to be eradicated for His priestly ministry to come into operation (Heb 7:12-14). Furthermore, if the Levitical system had to be done away with then the entire Mosaic Law that the Levitical system is based upon had to be done away with as well. Third, the Melchizedekian priesthood is eternal

and the Levitical priesthood is temporary. The temporary is always inferior to the eternal (Heb 7:15-17). The writer concludes by observing that the Levitical system had to be annulled because it was weak and ineffective (Heb 7:18-19).

The writer goes on to give other reasons as to why the Melchizedekian priesthood should be considered superior in comparison to the Levitical system. First, unlike the Levitical system the Melchizedekian priesthood was based upon an oath (Ps 110:4). Thus, it was based upon a better covenant (Heb 7:20-22). Second, no Levitical priest was permanent. Each faced death. By contrast, because Christ was inducted into His priestly office after His Ascension, it was impossible for Him to die in office. His priesthood never terminates. Thus, he is able to continually make intercession and continually bring to maturity those under His authority (Heb 7:23-25). Third, the Melchizedekian priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthoods because of the righteous character of Christ. Christ is sinless. By contrast, the Levitical priests were not. That is why it was necessary for them to offer up a sacrifice for their own sins as well as for the sins of the people. The character of the Levitical priest is weak while the character of Christ the Melchizedekian priest is flawless (Heb 7:26-28). Given these comparisons, how foolish it was for the Hebrews to contemplate returning to the imperfections of the Aaronic when they presently possessed the flawless Melchizedekian priesthood.

The author continues his contrast between the priesthood of Christ and the Aaronic priesthood by noting that Christ ministers from a superior position than Aaron. While Aaron ministers from an earthly tabernacle, Christ ministers from a heavenly tabernacle at the right hand of God (Heb 8:1). While Aaron ministers from a man made tabernacle, Christ ministers from a tabernacle erected by God (Heb 8:2). It was impossible for Christ to minister in the terrestrial tabernacle of the Aaronic order since Christ was not from the tribe of Levi. Thus, it

was necessary for Him to minister in a heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8:3-4). While Aaron ministers in an earthly tabernacle that was merely a shadow of the heavenly tabernacle, Christ's ministers in the heavenly tabernacle, which is the reality behind the shadow (Heb 8:5). Thus, Christ's position of ministry is superior to Aaron's.

The writer goes on to contrast the priesthood of Aaron with the priesthood of Christ by showing that the Melchizedekian priesthood was based upon a superior covenant (Heb 8:6-13). At this point the Jewish mind might be asking, "If the Mosaic Law is permanent and the Levitical system is based upon the Mosaic Law, then how could the Melchizedekian order be substituted for the Levitical order?" The writer rebuts this assertion by noting that the Melchizedekian priesthood was founded upon the oath mentioned in Psalm 110:4 (Heb 8:6; 7:21). Psalm 110:4 makes it clear that this oath is eternal. Such eternality stands in contradistinction to the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant is temporal. The author proves the temporal nature of the Mosaic Covenant by quoting the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34) in verses 8-12. The writer's point is that if the Mosaic Covenant was intended as a permanent arrangement there would have been no need for the New Covenant (Heb 8:7). However, the moment Jeremiah announced the coming inauguration of the New Covenant he served notice as to the transitory nature of the Mosaic Covenant (Heb 8:13). Thus, another area of supremacy can be seen upon comparing Christ's priesthood to that of Aaron's. While the Aaronic order was based upon a temporary covenant, Christ's priesthood is based upon an eternal covenant.

In an attempt to show his readers the inappropriateness of abandoning Christ's priesthood in favor of the Aaronic priesthood, the writer continues to show the superiority of the priesthood of Christ in comparison to that of Aaron. To this end, the writer in Hebrews 9:1-10:18 compares and contrasts the work that Aaron performed on the Day of Atonement with the work performed

by Christ on the cross. In Hebrews 9:1-11, the writer emphasizes the weaknesses of the earthly tabernacle. First, he describes the tabernacle furniture (Heb 9:1-5). He observes that in the Holy Place, or outer room, stood the lampstand and table of consecrated bread. Although at first glance the writer appears to place the altar of incense inside the Most Holy Place, or inner room, this seems unlikely. It was necessary for the high priest to minister regularly at the altar of incense (Exod 30:7). Such daily ministry would have been impossible if the altar of incense was inside the Most Holy Place because the priest was only admitted into that room once a year (Heb 9:7). Thus, it seems better to view the altar of incense in the Holy Place. Inside the Most Holy Place stood the Ark, which housed the gold jar of manna, Aaron's rod, and the tablets of the Law. The manna signified God's provision. Aaron's rod signified that the Lord had specified that it was Aaron's tribe that was to occupy the priestly office. The tablets of the Law showed how the redeemed nation was to live. Above the Ark stood the mercy seat where the propitiary sacrifice on the Day of Atonement was offered. Above the mercy seat were the engraved cherubim signifying that all of the heavenly hosts were observing the propitiary sacrifice.

Second, the writer describes the limitations of the earthly tabernacle (Heb 9:6-11). Hebrews 9:7 describes the following limitations of the Day of Atonement: only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, he could only do so once a year, he could only enter with sacrificial blood for his own sins, the sacrifice was only efficacious for one year, and the sacrifice was only applicable for sins of ignorance.<sup>14</sup> Other limitations of the earthly tabernacle include the fact that its sacrifices were not able to clear the conscience (Heb 9:9-10) and that the tabernacle was made by man rather than by God (Heb 9:11).

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<sup>14</sup> Toussaint, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," 26.

The writer points out other ways the work of Christ was superior to the work of Aaron on the Day of Atonement. For example, while Aaron shed the blood of an unsuspecting animal, Christ spilled His own blood (Heb 9:12). Moreover, the blood shed by Aaron made the worshipper externally clean while the blood shed by Christ cleansed the worshipper's conscience (Heb 9:13-14). In addition, although Christ's priesthood is based upon the covenant of Psalm 110, His death allowed the benefits of the New Covenant to be mediated (Heb 9:15-22). Blood often mediated benefits in Old Testament times. Of the four ways covenants were entered into in Old Testament times (striking of hands, exchanging sandals, exchanging salt, blood sacrifice) the blood covenant was the most permanent. Severed animal pieces were separated into two rows. When the parties to the covenant passed through the animal pieces they invoked a similar fate upon themselves that the animals experienced if they failed to keep their obligations under the covenant. At this point the parties were considered dead men because the covenant became permanent and the parties were powerless to change its terms. Thus, the blood of the animals mediated the benefits of the covenant by making those benefits permanent. Even the Mosaic Covenant was inaugurated by blood. Because the Tabernacle was comprised of items from the cursed ground, it and everything within it had to be sanctified through the sprinkling of blood. Just as blood mediated benefits in Old Testament times, Christ's blood also mediated the benefits of the New Covenant. Although the blood shed by Aaron postponed sin's indebtedness for one year, it did not mediate the benefits of the New Covenant.

Furthermore, Christ's ministry position is superior. While Aaron shed blood in a terrestrial, man made sanctuary, Christ entered heaven itself in order to purify it with blood (Heb 9:23-24). Perhaps heaven needed cleansing because the earthly things needed cleansing. Because the earthly things are copies of the heavenly things a correspondence seems to exist between the

earthly and heavenly things. Heaven may have also needed cleansing because various passages indicate that the heavens are not clean (Job 1:6; 15:15; 25:5; Zech 3:1; Rev 12:10) probably on account of the fact that Adam's sin negatively impacted all of creation (Rom 8:19-22), including the heavenly sphere.

Also, Christ's death dealt conclusively with the sin question (Heb 9:26-28). Just as men die once and then face the judgment, Christ dealt in finality with sin. Thus, when Christ returns He will not be dealing with the sin question but rather will take those who have believed in Him to their promised inheritance. Such finality stands in sharp contrast to the Aaronic system where sacrifices only postponed sin's indebtedness for one year but never completely satisfied God's wrath against sin. Thus, animal sacrifices had to be repeatedly offered under the Aaronic system.

In Hebrews 10:1-4, the writer interjects two major inadequacies of the sacrifices of the Aaronic system. First, the Aaronic order is merely the shadow testifying to a coming reality and not a reality in and of itself. In other words, the New Testament allows us to see that the Day of Atonement as described in Leviticus 16 typifies Christ. Thus, the Day of Atonement looks forward to Christ and was never intended to be an end in itself. Second, while the Aaronic system could postpone sin's indebtedness, it could never permanently deal with the sin question. Such inconclusiveness is seen through the repetition of animal sacrifices demanded by the Aaronic system as well as the remaining guilty consciences of the worshippers.

Next the writer emphasizes the volitional aspects of Christ's sacrifice in comparison to the involuntary nature of the Aaronic sacrifices (Heb 10:5-10). The sacrificial animal under the Aaronic order had no choice as to whether it was to be sacrificed. In contrast, Christ voluntarily offered Himself as a sacrifice. To demonstrate Christ's volition the writer applies Psalm 40:6-8. This Psalm says God had no pleasure in animal sacrifices because they were involuntary.

However, God took pleasure in Christ's voluntary sacrifice. Christ voluntarily offered His body to the Lord. Interestingly, Psalm 40 uses the word "ear" rather than "body." However, the author of Hebrews is probably drawing from the imagery of Exodus 21:6 where a slave had his ear pierced when he voluntarily wanted to continue on as his master's slave. Because the ear is connected to the body, the writer probably uses "body" to represent the part for the whole.

The writer reiterates the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice in Hebrews 10:11-14. While the Aaronic priest performs his religious duties day after day, Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father awaiting His future theocratic, earthly administration. The implication is that Christ's sacrifice is final while the Aaronic sacrifices are not. From His position at the Father's right hand Christ looks both backward to His finished work on the cross and forward to His future Davidic reign. Finally, the writer reiterates that Christ mediates a superior covenant than Aaron by enumerating the specific aspects of the New Covenant that His death introduced (Heb 10:15-18).

These verses conclude the section of the epistle where Christ is shown to be superior to the Aaronic system (Heb 4:14-10:18). Because the priesthood of Christ is superior in every respect to the priesthood of Aaron, it is futile for the Hebrews to put themselves under any aspect of the Aaronic order. These verses also conclude the doctrinal section of the letter (Heb 1:1-10:18) where Christ was shown to be superior to the angels, Moses, and Aaron. Thus, Christ was shown to be superior to every significant vestige of Judaism. Because Christ is superior to every aspect of Judaism, it is futile for the Hebrews to put themselves under any aspect of the old system.

In Hebrews 10:19–13:25, the writer applies the doctrinal truth that he has previously expounded in the doctrinal section (Heb 1:1-10:18) to the lives of the Hebrews. His goal is to dissuade them from lapsing back into Judaism. The word "therefore" (Heb 10:19) connects the

application section to the previously discussed doctrinal truth. The various exhortations that follow in Hebrews 10 begin with the words “let us.” First, the writer exhorts his readers to approach God (Heb 10:19-22). Under the old system the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with great trepidation. However, under the new system all believers are priests (1 Pet 2:5; Rev 1:6). Further, the veil in the old system has been torn (Matt 27:51) and replaced with the new veil of Christ’s body. The believer’s sins have been forgiven. Consequently, believers are exhorted to approach God with boldness.

Second, the Hebrews are exhorted to hold fast to their confession (Heb 10:23). The Hebrews should not try to hide their baptism by attending the Levitical feasts in an attempt to escape persecution. Such regression can only result in a loss of blessing. Instead the Hebrews should take refuge in the rest that God provides. This rest will sustain them in the midst of persecution. Third, the Hebrews should encourage one another (Heb 10:24). Those who have opted not to regress should encourage those who are contemplating such regression.

Fourth, the Hebrews should not forsake the regular Christian assembly (Heb 10:25). Instead of leaving the Christian assembly in order to attend the feasts in an attempt to escape persecution, the Hebrews should participate in the Christian assembly. Such an admonition is all the more true with the expected A.D. 70 judgment rapidly approaching. This judgment had already been pronounced upon that generation of Israel for rejecting their messiah (Matt 12:31-32; 23:37-24:2; Luke 21:23-34; John 19:15; Acts 2:40). By the time the Book of Hebrews was written this coming judgment was expected at any moment. If the Hebrews identified themselves with the nation under judgment, they would experience this temporal judgment as well. However, if they instead identified with the body of Christ, they would escape this judgment.

Thus, the author exhorts his readers not to renounce their confession through participation in the Jewish feasts and instead to participate in the regular Christian assembly.

In Hebrews 10:26-39, the writer interjects his fourth warning passage. Here, he warns them against the dangers of despising the gospel. He warns them that if they go back to the Levitical sacrifices after having known the truth that all of their sins have been forgiven in Christ they are returning to a system that no longer has the power to forgive sins. Even though the Levitical sacrifices continued to function prior to the temple's destruction in A.D. 70, they no longer had a capacity to remove sins because Christ's death rendered them inoperative. Thus, the Hebrews would be returning to a system with no potency (Heb 10:26). Also, if the Hebrews identified themselves with the nation under judgment (Matt 21:41; Luke 20:16), they could expect to experience that temporal judgment as well (Heb 10:27, 30-31). To illustrate the severity of the sin of retrogression, the writer presents an "a fortiori" argument by arguing from the lesser to the greater. If a departure from the Law of Moses brought death upon the transgressor (Deut 17:4-7), how much more should the Hebrews expect to be swept away in the coming A.D. 70 judgment since they were departing from the complete revelation of the Son of God. Such a sin is indeed severe. It would be the equivalent of trampling the Son of God under foot, treating the covenant that sanctified them as a common thing, and insulting the spirit of grace (Heb 10:29). These harsh phrases are used to describe such retrogression because the Hebrews would be publicly identifying with the nation that crucified Christ. Certainly such a sin is even more deserving of judgment than a mere departure from the Law of Moses, which was a punishable offense under the old order. Thus, the writer argues that participation in the coming A.D. 70 judgment will be the inevitable repercussion of lapsing back into Judaism.

The writer encourages his audience by reminding them how their faith has sustained them in the midst of past persecutions (Heb 10:32-34). Therefore, their faith can sustain them now as well. If they allow God's rest to sustain them, they will experience rewards and blessings (Heb 10:35-36). They are to follow God's admonitions to the remnant in Habakkuk's day by trusting in God in the midst of difficulties (Heb 10:37-38; Hab 2:3). The writer expresses confidence that his readers will trust God, not lapse back into Judaism, and consequently be exempted from the A.D. 70 judgment (Heb 10:39).

The writer wanted his readers to trust God in the midst of their difficulties and not lapse back into Judaism. In order to do this, his audience would have to allow their faith to produce obedience and endurance in the midst of their adverse circumstances (Heb 11:1). To encourage his readers to do this, the writer provides numerous examples of individuals from their own Jewish history whose faith created obedience and endurance in spite of tremendous obstacles (Heb 11:2). The author first begins with examples from primeval history (Heb 11:3-7). Because God was the only witness to creation, we exhibit obedience and endurance when we trust His version of how creation happened rather than following popular pagan cosmologies (Heb 11:3; Job 38:4). Although Cain's sacrifice was obligatory, Abel was obedient in offering the right kind of sacrifice because he approached God by faith (Heb 11:4). Enoch lived a life pleasing to God because he walked by faith (Heb 11:5-6). Noah built the ark because he trusted in God's promise of a coming judgment and God's instructions regarding how to escape such judgment (Heb 11:7).

In Hebrews 11:8-22, the writer discusses examples of patient endurance through faith from the patriarchal era. Abram's obedience is seen in moving from where he was dwelling because He trusted in God's promises of land and an eternal city (Heb 11:8-10). Abram and

Sarai exhibited at least partial obedience in attempting to procure a son (Gen 16) because they believed God's promise that He would provide them an heir (Heb 11:11-16). Abraham also exhibited obedience by lifting the knife to kill Isaac because he trusted in God's promise of innumerable descendants and thus concluded that God would raise Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:18-19). Both Isaac and Jacob exhibited obedience in blessing their descendants because they believed God's promise of innumerable descendants (Heb 11:20-21). Joseph demonstrated obedience by requesting that his bones be buried in Canaan because he trusted in God's promise that the nation would return to Canaan (Heb 11:22).

Next the writer discusses examples of patient endurance through faith from the Mosaic era (Heb 11:23-29). Moses' parents demonstrated obedience by risking their own lives in disobeying the pharaoh's edict because they believed in God's purposes for Moses as Israel's deliverer (Heb 11:23). Moses' obedience is seen through his willingness to forsake the splendor of the king's court, his fleeing from Egypt, and his keeping of the Passover. Moses obeyed in these matters because he trusted in God's promises and purposes (Heb 11:24-28). The nation obeyed by crossing through the Red Sea because they trusted in God's provision (Heb 11:29).

Next the writer discusses examples of endurance through faith from the conquest era (Heb 11:23-29). The nation exhibited faith by marching seven times around the city of Jericho because they trusted in God's method of providing victory (Heb 11:30). Rahab exhibited obedience by housing the spies because she trusted in their status as ambassadors from God's special nation. The writer goes on to mention examples of people from the Judges era, the Davidic era, and the era of the prophets who exhibited obedience and endurance in the most dire of circumstances because of their trust in God (Heb 11:32-38). The writer's point in rehearsing all of this history is to show examples of faith producing obedience and endurance. The writer

hopes that his audience will similarly allow their faith in God to create endurance and obedience so that they do not retrogress into Judaism in the midst of persecution (Heb 11:39-40).

The writer goes on to encourage patient endurance on the part of his readers in Hebrews 12. The exhortation is given in Hebrews 12:1. It is based upon the information preceding it. The “cloud of witnesses” refers to those who endured and obeyed by faith in the previous chapter. The writer wants his readers to lay aside the sin of unbelief and instead to run their race with endurance. If the audience does these things it will not retrogress back into Judaism. The writer uses Christ as an example of patient endurance (Heb 12:2-4). Christ endured the cross and the hostility of sinners. Yet He was eventually rewarded by being seated at the right hand of the Father. Similarly, if the Hebrews endure persecution and do not lapse back into Judaism, they will receive rewards and blessings from the Father. The writer continues the theme of patient endurance by exhorting his audience to patiently endure the Lord’s discipline. Such discipline probably refers to the adversity that the audience was presently experiencing. In other words, this discipline may refer to persecution at the hands of the Jews that the Lord was allowing into his readers’ lives. The reason that the Hebrews are to endure such discipline is because God is using it to bring them to maturity (Heb 12:5-13; 5:11-14).

In addition to enduring discipline, the writer next includes some practical ways that the audience is to practice patient endurance (Heb 12:14-17). Such ways include pursuing peace and holiness, not allowing their present adversity to embitter them, and not living for momentary physical benefits but rather for long-term spiritual gains. Because Esau lived for fleshly appetites, he forfeited the spiritual benefit of the birthright. Similarly, although retrogression into Judaism would immediately alleviate the persecution they were under, the Hebrews would sacrifice long-term blessings and rewards. In a further attempt to prevent his readers from

lapsing back into Judaism, he compares the frightening aspects of the Old Covenant with the heavenly mount Zion (Heb 12:18-24). Keeping in mind the supremacy of the new order in comparison to the inadequacies of the Mosaic system will create a further incentive to patiently endure and avoid retrogression.

In Hebrews 12:25-29 the writer inserts his fifth and final warning passage. He warns the Hebrews in two ways. First he uses an “a fortiori” argument as he argues from the greater to the lesser. If those who rejected the Mosaic earthly voice did not escape judgment, how much more will judgment be inescapable for those who reject the heavenly voice? Second, he reminds them that the very thing they are tempted to seek refuge in will soon be swept away. He applies Haggai 2:6, which describes God’s future shaking of the world, to the coming events of A.D. 70. He uses Deuteronomy 4:24 to describe the coming terror of A.D. 70. By contrast, the kingdom that the Hebrews will receive is unshakeable. Thus, the Hebrews should seek refuge in Christ rather than temple activity, especially since the temple’s destruction is imminent.

Because of the writer’s emphasis upon patient endurance, he concludes by discussing some practical ways such endurance can be pursued. Many of these exhortations relate to coping with the persecution that the Hebrews were experiencing. Regarding the victims of Jewish persecution, the writer exhorts his audience to love them, show them hospitality, and visit them in prison (Heb 13:1-3). For those who had lost their worldly possessions as a result of persecution, the writer encourages them to find their security in the eternal God who will never forsake them (Heb 13:5-6, 8). Instead of retrogression, the Hebrews should obey and imitate the pattern of endurance found in their leaders (Heb 13:7, 17). As the writer has been arguing throughout the letter, the reader should avoid the teaching of those who advocate a return to the Mosaic system. The readers are instead to imitate Christ, who was sacrificed outside the camp of

Judaism, and also leave the camp of Judaism. The readers should not retrogress because they have a better altar and a better hope (Heb 13:9-14). If the Hebrews are interested in offering sacrifices, they should offer sacrifices of praise and generosity rather than returning to the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant (Heb 13:15-16). The writer exhorts his audience to perseverance through other miscellaneous avenues such as sexual fidelity (Heb 13:4) and prayer (Heb 13:18-19).

The benediction is given in Hebrews 13:20-25. By describing Christ as the one resurrected from the dead, the great shepherd of the sheep, the mediator of the eternal covenant, the one who completes believers, and the one who deserves eternal glory (Heb 13:20-21), the author reminds his readers that everything they need they presently possess in Christ. Thus, there is no need for them to leave Christ and pursue the inferior Mosaic Covenant. The writer reminds his readers to carefully consider and adhere to the word of exhortation found in the letter (Heb 13:22). Such an exhortation refers to the admonition not to lapse back into Judaism. Because this is the dominant message of the letter, it would be completely fitting and appropriate for the author to bring this reminder to the minds of the readers one last time. After providing some personal and biographical information (Heb 13:23-24), the writer closes the letter by reminding the Hebrews that they are under grace. This is the final reminder that the new order enjoyed by the Hebrews is a complete expression of grace. Therefore it would be a mistake for the Hebrews to abandon the majesty of Christ's priesthood in order to pursue the incomplete spiritual privileges of the Mosaic system.

In conclusion, the writer has repeatedly warned his readers of the consequences of lapsing back into Judaism (Heb 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:10; 10:26-31; 12:25-29). He has also shown how Christ is superior to every major vestige of Judaism. Christ is superior to the angels

(Heb 1:4-2:18), Moses (Heb 3:1-4:13), and Aaron (Heb 4:14-10:39). Therefore, the revelation offered by Christ is superior to the revelation offered by Judaism. Thus, the author has presented a compelling case against retrogression back into Judaism. While such retrogression will not alter the audience's justified status, it will result in a loss of blessing flowing from justification.

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