

Introduction to Hebrews

- I. **Author:** Unknown
- II. **Time of Writing:** Probably between 64 AD and 70 AD
- III. **To Whom Written:** Jewish Christians in Rome (most likely)
- IV. **Purpose:** To encourage them to maintain their faith, and persevere under serious persecution (by Nero).

A. Evidence: Note the aggressive nature of the following passages:

Passage	Exhortation	End in View
2:1	<i>We must pay more careful attention... to what we have heard</i>	<i>So that we do not drift away</i>
3:1	<i>Fix your thoughts on Jesus</i>	
3:6	<i>Hold on to our courage and to the hope of which we boast</i>	
3:12	<i>See to it... that none of you has a ...heart that turns away from the living God</i>	
3:13	<i>Encourage one another daily</i>	<i>So that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness</i>
3:14	<i>...if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first</i>	<i>We have come to share in Christ...</i>
4:1	<i>Let us be careful</i>	<i>That none of you be found to have fallen short of it (rest)</i>
4:11	<i>Let us... make every effort to enter that rest</i>	<i>So that no one will fall</i>
4:14	<i>Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess</i>	
6:11	<i>Show this same diligence to the very end</i>	<i>In order to make your hope sure</i>
10:23	<i>Let us hold unswervingly to the faith we profess</i>	
10:35	<i>So do not throw away your confidence</i>	<i>It will be richly rewarded</i>
10:36	<i>You need to persevere</i>	<i>So that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised</i>
12:1	<i>Let us run with perseverance the race that is marked out for us</i>	
12:2	<i>Let us fix our eyes on Jesus</i>	
12:3	<i>Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men</i>	<i>So that you will not grow weary and lose heart</i>

B. Conclusion: Hebrews proves the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant.

V. **Form and Structure:**

- A. Hebrews has a persuasive structure and provides a call to action. The action is to encourage one and all to remain firm in their faith spite of severe persecution.
- B. This is done through the use of Old Testament quotation. If we follow the quotes, the following picture emerges:
 - 1. Remove the introduction and the conclusion to reveal the body of the Book.
 - 2. The New Covenant (Ch. 8) is crucial, and ties together the Priesthood (Ch. 5-7) and the Sacrifice (Ch. 9-10).
 - 3. This is prepared for by offers of rescue (Ch.2) and Rest (Ch. 3-4)
 - 4. What follows is the response of faith (Ch. 11) and the endurance of discipline (Ch. 12) *which are expected*.

Therefore:

- A. Jesus the Superior Priest brings a Superior Sacrifice to God. This is the core of the New Covenant.
- B. By this, Jesus can offer to us rescue from sin and rest.
- C. In return, God expects our faith and endurance.

God Has Spoken!

Today's Text: Hebrews 1:1-4

To say that these four verses are dense with meaning would be an understatement, for they may be the most meaning-filled four verses in the entire Bible. Here we find the seven attributes of Jesus, His true identity, His position in history, and a summary outline of all of redemptive history. Please note that this is the introduction to Hebrews, not its contents.

Most of the epistles of the New Testament begin with some sort of a greeting, but not Hebrews; we get right into the thick of things theologically.

Notice the contrasts that are drawn immediately between the Old and New Testaments:

"in the past..."	"in these last days"
"God spoke"	"he has spoken"
To our forefathers"	"to us"
"Through the prophets"	"by his Son"

In less than one sentence, we can see that this is no ordinary book!

1:1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, Before Jesus came, God spoke through the prophets. He did so many times and in various ways, by direct speech, dreams, and visions. His message was spoken, illustrated and legislated, it was proclaimed, decreed and provided. It came in "bits and pieces" as the Greek would indicate; never did they get the whole thing in the old days. They got pictures, types and shadows, they had dreams... but in all of this, God was communicating to His people indirectly through the prophets and yet even then the people received the message in clear human language. Notice that by saying "God spoke" the author here is telling us who it was who took the initiative in the production of Sacred Scripture: it was God Himself. The Bible is not a collection of man's musings about God, but rather God's instructive revelation to man. Keeping this fact in mind will help anyone who ever interprets the Scripture. He must ask "What is God telling us" rather than wonder what an author is saying *about God*; God is the ultimate author of every word. Finally, note that everything that came before Christ is "in the past". Christ, by contrast instructed us "in these last days". Jesus is the turning point in all history: there is the past, and then with Jesus comes "these last days".

1:2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Whereas God spoke to "our forefathers" through the prophets in former times, God has spoken to "us" by His Son In these days. Notice God spoke *through* the prophets and *by* His Son. He didn't speak through Jesus because He was Jesus. How fortunate we are that our revelation of God is direct from Jesus! In the past, they received partial revelation that came from many prophets, a little bit at a time; we have received the whole thing from Jesus directly. In the past, they received these many partial revelations that when put together would point them to Christ; we received the whole revelation in the person of Christ. The contrast is staggering to contemplate. Chapter 11 reveals to us several "forefathers" who were great in the faith even with partial revelation. How are you doing with your faith, having received complete revelation?

Notice also that God appointed Jesus "heir of all things" and then He made the universe through Jesus. One might say that God planned the universe for Jesus to ultimately rule, and then it was all accomplished when Jesus spoke the Word. (John 1:1-5; Col. 1:15-17) These are the first two attributes of Jesus that we find in this short txt.

1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

This verse contains five more attributes of Jesus, making a total of seven in this introduction. (Interesting, isn't it? Seven attributes, with seven being the Biblical number of completeness) First we have the Son's being the "radiance of God's glory". This indicates that we see God's glory reflected to us in Christ. If we want a sample of glory, seek Jesus. Second is an attribute that closely follows the first: Jesus is the exact representation of God's being. In other words, if you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father. If you want to know what God is all about... seek Christ. In the fifth of His attributes, we see His awesome power that is at work throughout the entire universe: "sustaining all things by his powerful word." (cf. John 1:1-4) In the Gospel accounts, we see that Jesus can interrupt the normal laws of nature through His miracles. Here, the author points out that the laws of nature themselves are created and sustained by the Word: Jesus. When we study science, we are studying Jesus! Then, with the sixth attribute, we have the most wonderful of all: Jesus has provided purification for sins! Notice that this is placed within the wide sweep of the totality of history; verse 3 is all of history in one line. Hebrews will have much to say about all of the particulars of how Jesus accomplished this. The final attribute of Jesus in this verse is that after He accomplished all of this, He sat down with God. The point here is this: Now that Jesus has accomplished His work as High Priest for the purification of our sins, He has sat down beside the Father's throne in authority, reigning as King of kings and interceding for us.

1:4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

After all of His magnificent accomplishments, Jesus sits at the very throne of God, King of kings, Lord of lords; He is so vastly superior to the angels and all other created beings! His position is superior, His being is superior and His name is superior. The balance of the chapter is the author's proof of the thesis statement made in verses 1-4, and for the benefit of the Hebrew, he uses Old Testament texts to do it.

The Supremacy of the Son

Today's Text: Hebrews 1:5-14

This second part of the first chapter contains seven Old Testament quotations that are used to prove the supremacy of Christ which was asserted within the first four verses. This is the beginning of the pattern that the author will use throughout the book of Hebrews. Remember that this book is an example of rhetorical discourse in which the author has set about to prove a case for Christ and His New Covenant to equip and encourage the believers who, undergoing severe persecution, might be liable to fall to temptation to fall away from the truth.

Central thought

God's satisfaction in Jesus' work

Hebrews passage and OT quoted

(1:5a) For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? (Ps. 2:7)

God's pledge for the Father/Son relationship

(1:5b) Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? (2 Sam 7:14)

The incarnation: angels must worship the Son

(1:6) And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." (Deut. 32:43)

The angels must serve the Son

(1:7) In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." (Ps. 104:4)

The Son's righteous rule

(1:8-9) But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." (Ps. 45:6-7)

The Son created the universe and will also end it, but He will remain the same

(1:10-12) He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end." (PS 102:25-27)

(1:13) To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? (Ps. 110:1)

Jesus reigns, and God brings His enemies into submission

In the final verse (14) the contrast suddenly changes from Jesus vs. the angels to Jesus and His redeemed vs. the angels. Here we see that the angels are not only to serve the Son, but all of those who through His grace will inherit salvation. Simply stated, that means you, me and all others who are saved by the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus, or as the Hebrews author would say, those who are saved by the superior covenant made by the superior sacrifice brought by the superior High Priest: Jesus

WARNING: Don't Ignore your Salvation!

Today's Text: Hebrews 2:1-4

Introduction

In chapter one, Jesus is portrayed as standing at the pinnacle of redemptive history, vastly superior to the angels; the creator of everything. In chapter two, He is seen joining the human race to rescue man. This is accomplished in two sections, first vv. 1-4 warn us not to neglect our salvation, and then vv. 5-18 tell us how He did it.

This first paragraph of chapter two, like the beginning of chapter one is content rich. It contrasts two divine systems, the Old Covenant and the New; the contrast looks like this:

Old Covenant

A message spoken by angels

It was binding

It contained just punishment for every infraction

New Covenant

Announced by Jesus Himself

It was confirmed by its hearers and by God Himself

It includes no escape for ignoring it or even for just drifting away

2:1 This is the thesis of the first paragraph, and by extension the rest of the chapter. Notice the use of the imperative "must". "What we have heard" is the Gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and the imperative is applied toward the assertion that we need to be paying more careful attention to it. Simply stated, this is telling all of us that we have no possible alternative to taking our relationship with Jesus Christ *very seriously*. It is not just a Sunday morning activity on the way to brunch; it is life itself! The statement here is the first of many exhortations in the book calling our attention to the fact that we absolutely must not allow anything to distract us from our relationship with Christ, for if we should let that happen, we will lose everything we have.

2:2 "For" at the beginning of verse two ties it to the statement just made in verse one: Because we might drift away... The author is going to make a case here, and this verse is the beginning of it. His case relates the two covenant systems together as noted in the introduction above. Since the message brought by angels was binding refers to the Old Covenant. It was binding means that if a person entered into the covenant relationship with God, then he was *required* to keep its 613 laws or face serious punishment: there was no way to avoid it, for you cannot fool God.

2:3 Our salvation is greater than we can hope to comprehend. We must not ignore this great salvation! This is quite interesting because it is what most of us do on a regular basis. When we are fighting with our wives, we are ignoring our salvation. When we are going through our days just like everyone else being irritated, selfish and prideful, thinking about how little people appreciate us and all of the rest of that kind of stuff, we are ignoring our salvation. When we don't get around to spending time in prayer or in the Word, we are ignoring our salvation...

Wait! Escape what? Verse two made reference to the just punishments that the Old Covenant has for breaking any of the laws; what punishment does the New Covenant have...? The New Covenant is full of grace and forgiveness, this is true; but it also has a punishment: Eternal Damnation. So here's the proposition that our author seems to be making: "Do you feel lucky Punk; well do ya?"

This Gospel was not announced by mere angels, it was given to us personally by Jesus Himself who is at the very top of the organizational chart. It was confirmed by those who heard His words personally: the message is true.

2:4 Verse four reinforces the message in verse three by demonstrating the fact that the veracity of the message we have received from Jesus Himself is altogether true and correct; it must be taken seriously. It has been further confirmed by God Himself by miracles, wonders and signs... For Heaven's sake take it seriously!

Jesus is Superior to Moses

Today's Text: Hebrews 3

Introduction

This chapter begins with the word "therefore". As you know, this word tells us that what has preceded it is being summed up or built upon. In this particular case, we note that the preceding verses contain the description of Christ's rescue of mankind, and then ends with the encouraging note that since Jesus shared personally in our temptations He is more than qualified to assist us in resisting sin: THEREFORE...

Points of Interest

3:1 ...fix your thoughts on Jesus. Jesus, the one who is superior to the angels, the one who created the universe, the one who became a man to rescue all of us from sin, who is superior to the prophets and who can help those who are being tempted: Fix your thoughts on Him, and not on the things of this world.

3:2-3 Moses and Jesus were both faithful. Jesus was faithful to the one who appointed Him; Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus' faithfulness was directly to God, who declared Himself "well pleased" with Him (Matt. 3:17) Jesus received greater honor than Moses, partly because Jesus rescued Moses from his sin, just as He rescues the rest of us from ours. When Moses left this world, he was not invited to sit at the right hand of the Father in heaven: Jesus was, and He remains there to this day.

3:4 This is an interesting verse. Following on the thought of verse 3 relating the relative honor of the house itself versus it's builder. Moses served in the house, and you might even say that he made up the house (by extension to the Nation of Israel) but Jesus designed and built the house. Note the second part of this verse: "God is the builder of everything". In the Greek, there is no definite article preceding "God". Thus, this is not to name God, but rather to carry His essence. This thought will be elaborated on further in verse 5.

3:5-6 Moses was a servant in God's house, in fact he was the greatest of the servants of God. Jesus is *over* God's house. Moses, therefore was a servant of Jesus. We are His house. "We" can refer either to Israel or to the redeemed. Some commentators will choose to assert that the author refers only to Israel here. While that is dubious at best, it is an assertion that could be made if the book ended here... but it doesn't. In fact, the book of Hebrews in toto blows such an assertion out of the water, but we'll leave that for later episodes... Finally, note the conditionality of this verse. "We are His house, *if* we hold on..." We must remain in Christ with courage in tough times; we cannot abandon Him when the going is tough and claim to be His house.

3:7-11 These verse quote Psalm 95:7-11, and are used to amplify the warning of verse 6. You will note that there are 2 parts of Psalm 95. The first is an invitation to worship (1-7a) and the second is a warning against disobedience (7b-11). Here we have a minor part of the invitation, and the entire warning. This passage reminds us of the disobedience of the children of Israel in the Wilderness when in spite of their deliverance from Egypt almost immediately began to grumble and complain. The result of course was that God led them through the Wilderness for 40 years until all but two (who remained faithful) had died off before being allowed to enter God's rest: the land of Canaan. In this passage, a parallel has been drawn between "rest" "Canaan" and remaining true to Christ.

3:12-15 The warning is expanded upon in this section. "See to it" is a command that is indicative of our personal responsibility to remain faithful to our Lord. We are simply not to allow ourselves to be led

astray: at our peril. We are further instructed to encourage one another daily; compare this to sharing in Christ. The message is that being a Christian is not a solitary thing; it involves being in relationship and accountability with other Christians. In former times, it was common for the church to intervene in the lives of its members to lead them away from sin and unbelief. Of course in our highly sophisticated age, we all mind our own business and hold our tongues when we see our brothers and sisters entering into error. I can assure you from personal experience that if we “butt in” and attempt to encourage others to turn away from their sins, you will be dropped from their Christmas card list... but if we do not, then we have sinned. We must encourage one another daily because the stakes are too high, and the enemy too cunning.

3:16-19 This final paragraph is the conclusion of this warning, and highlights the conditional nature of Biblical covenant. Israel was led out of Egypt, and God promised to them the land of Canaan. While God kept His promise regarding the land, those individuals who had sinned and turned away from God were lost in the desert because God swore that they should not enter His rest. The same is true today: God has promised that those who are in Christ shall inherit eternal life through Christ. However, if we individually turn away we will die in the spiritual desert.

God's Rest

Today's Text Hebrews 4:1-13

Introduction:

Picking up where we left off last week, the author continues his discussion of that rest which the people of Israel largely did not enter because of their disbelief. In this section, our author expands this thought by explaining that receiving good news is simply not enough; we must combine it with enough faith to live out what we have received. Not to do so will result in our deaths in the desert.

4:1-2 Verse 1 introduces a new thought to the discourse from the previous chapter by bringing to our attention that the eternal rest lost to all but two of the Israelites who were saved out of Egypt is still available to us. This thought will be more fully developed beginning in verse three. The second part of this verse contains an interesting turn of phrase that continues the warning found in the previous chapter. The word that the NIV renders "be careful" is *phobeo* from which our English word "phobia" comes. As you know a person having a "phobia" is someone who holds something in great fear, and the Greek word means "to fear". It is odd that the NIV here translates it as "be careful" for the one and only time. Thus, we can conclude that the author is telling us that we should *fear* falling short of the rest! Verse two goes on to reveal that we as well as the Israelites have received the "gospel"... interesting. The Greek word translated here is not the usual word for Gospel, but rather it is literally good news; in this case the good news of God's rest. They had the news, in fact it derives from God's promise to Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed, and since the people in the desert were aware of this, they had the good news... as do we. The difference (hopefully) is that they had received the news but had not accompanied it with the requisite faith to faithfully follow God.

4:3 We, like the Israelites are in the process of entering into God's rest. Also like the Israelites, we are expected to remain faithful to God until the very end; then rest. You may recall from our study of the second that our entrance into that rest is completed by the process of death, burial and resurrection, just like that of Christ. Consequently, we must not fall away.

4:5-7 It really starts to get interesting here. The author continues to discuss the illustration from Psalm 95, going all the way back to Genesis to show where this rest began: God completed all of His work and then rested... this is the rest we are to enter. Please take notice that when God rested on the seventh day, He was not doing so because of any law, but rather it was because His work was finished. This is to say that He had completed His purpose of creating Man in His image... and entering into fellowship (relationship + purpose) with him. God's eternal rest is the culmination of fellowship with Man. Israel fell short, will we? Verse seven nails this point down. Quoting again from Psalm 95, the author points out that centuries after the episode in the desert, through David, God made quite clear that the offer of rest was still open

4:8-11 Verse 8 documents that entering the Land was not the rest! Entering the Land was a mere shadow of the full reality which came through Jesus Christ; it is clearly not the Land Promise. We then go on to repeat that there is still a Sabbath rest for the people of God, but it is clearly not the shadow of the Old Testament Sabbath, but rather it is the reality of the grace of Christ and our hope for eternal life.

4:12-13 Verse 12 should be committed to memory. These verses reinforce the idea that we need to be fearful of missing out on God's rest. You cannot fool God! You may convince me that you are a great, devoted and selfless Christian... but God knows your heart and sees you in secret: there is no fooling Him. We must devote ourselves to be His fervent and sincere disciples, willing to give everything in His service, and serving in a manner pleasing to Him. Unbelief and rebellion is out of the question

The Great High Priest

Today's Text: Hebrews 4:14-5:10

Introduction

Continuing on from vv. 12-13, we are arriving at the very heart of the book of Hebrews. In this overall context, three powerful forces are revealed: The power of the Word in 12-13, the power of the Lord in 14-15, and the power of prayer in v. 16.

Points of Interest

4:14-15: On these verses, we see Jesus as our "great high priest" a turn of phrase that is not common in Scripture. By adding the word "great" to "high priest" we can see that Jesus is superior to all who have come before. We also see several things that distinguish His priesthood from all others, beginning with His having 'gone through the heavens'. The OT priests entered the Holy of holies through the veil once per year with a sin offering. Jesus did not enter through any earthly veil into God's presence on earth. Instead, He went through the very heavens into the actual and literal presence of God, and this entry into the real presence of God as contrasted with the man made representation of the earthly Temple is the point. What the OT priests did in symbol, Jesus did in "spirit and in truth." Next, it was Jesus who did this. Jesus is the name given to the God-man here on earth, and it was the "man" part that makes His role in rescuing us from sin and death possible. Third, Jesus was the Son of God; He is qualified to rule over God's house, and He is qualified to intervene in history to rescue Mankind. Fourth, He is perfect, having been tempted in every way that you and I have been, only Jesus has endured without succumbing to sin. Next, He is able to sympathize with all of us who have been tempted. He is not a great high priest who has no conception of what our lot is like; He is quite familiar with our struggles, and yet He demonstrated His faithfulness by holding firm and not sinning.

4:16: Because of the foregoing, we may approach the throne of grace with confidence. For us who are in Christ to approach the throne of grace is not like it may have been in our younger days going to the principal's office. Rather than being afraid of the one in such lofty authority as the principal, we approach the throne of grace where the great high priest sits, a high priest who has sympathy for us, not condemnation. We may go there in prayer to ask for mercy and help in all that we face full in the knowledge that He is there waiting to minister to us. Why do fear paying Him a visit?

5:1-4: Here we are looking at an earthy high priest. The high priest represents the interests of man before God; he is an intercessor much like an attorney intercedes for his client. The earthly high priest can deal with men with compassion for our weaknesses because he has the same weaknesses and can understand the struggles everyone has in life. In fact, since the high priest has the same weaknesses that the rest of us have, he must make offerings for his own sins as well as for ours. In order to hold this position, the high priest must be called by God. Here, the author uses the example of Aaron, who was called to the priesthood by God, and through whom the succeeding high priests were born into the office. (The Levitical priesthood) These are the qualifications of a high priest; what follows is the reasons why Jesus is a *great* high priest.

5:5-6: Jesus was also called to the priesthood, but there is a major difference as compared to Aaron. Jesus was first called to be God's Son; Aaron was God's humble servant. Jesus did not take up this position, but instead it was conferred upon Him by God. Quoting again from the second Psalm, used earlier in the book to demonstrate Jesus' superiority to the angels, now it is used to show the superiority of His call to the priesthood. This is paired with Psalm 110:4 wherein Jesus has been declared a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Here, this is used as further evidence of the superiority of His call to the priesthood, but in the next section the order of Melchizedek will become a major theme.

5:7-10: In these verses, the author documents how Jesus endured His earthly life with temptation, suffering and pain; making Him able to sympathize with us. He then goes on to point out that in spite of His earthly affliction, He remained faithful and obedient to God and never succumbed to sin. The result of this faithfulness was that He and He alone could rescue Man by offering His once for all sacrifice as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Moving on to Maturity

Today's Text: Hebrews 5:11-6:20

Introduction

This is a tough text for most people; read it very carefully. Some may be shocked at what it says; the author hadn't read Calvin! The rest of us should feel convicted... why are we so immature? We need to grow up and not need to keep teaching the same things over and over. The truth is that most of us don't bother to understand the elementary teachings of the faith and never even suspect the mature ones. Most of the people in this class should have been teaching long ago... and yet still say that they aren't ready: Why is that? Yep, this is a rough text!

5:11-12: This section has been written in between the author's introduction of the subject of Jesus as our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek and his explanation of what that means. By putting it here, he is telling us that we should have understood this topic long ago, but we are slow to learn. Notice in particular verse 12. Implicit here is the thought that our slowness to learn arises not because we are in any way incapable for he says we all should be teaching these things ourselves. Our slowness seems to stem from our either not taking the matter seriously enough, or for our laziness in learning.

5:13-14: By keeping ourselves as spiritual infants, we do not have the mature ability to detect good from evil. You might say that we all must be mature since we know right from wrong. You would be wrong: he said "good from evil" and that is quite a different matter! For most people, good represents things they like; evil represents things they don't like. If they are non-smokers then smoking is a great evil. If they like rock music then rock music is fine. All too often we turn our noses up at things we personally don't care for and insinuate that they are evil; what utter nonsense!

6:1-3: Our author continues here with a bit of encouragement after the rebuke of 5:11-14. Let us move on from elementary things. Then, he lists six elementary teachings that we should move on from: repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands (spiritual gifts), resurrection and eternal punishment. **Stop!! Did you notice that these are the things we *always* talk about? We, too must move on from the elementary teachings!** If we are ever to grow to discipleship in Christ, we must learn the basics completely, and then keep on growing to maturity. This requires effort on our parts.

6:4-8: Oh boy, here we go: controversy! These are verses that people have argued over for centuries, and frankly they are the main reason that many churches shy away from teaching Hebrews. Let's carefully examine what they say exactly:

1) *It is possible to fall away.* (v. 6) Put another way, it is possible for a person, once in a covenant relationship with God to remove himself by his own deliberate acts.

2) *That such people were actual Christians is stated as a fact.* This makes the Calvinist response that such a person was "never really saved" impossible; consider the evidence cited here. First, they would need to be "brought back" (v. 6) Second, they would have "been enlightened", have "tasted the heavenly gift", "shared in the Holy Spirit", "tasted the goodness of the word" and "tasted... the powers of the coming age". These are all things which occur after baptism, and unless the person who was baptized was able to trick God into giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit, they were "really saved".

3) *Those who fall away cannot be restored while they remain in a rebellious state.* The word "impossible" leaves little wiggle room; even God can't do this. V. 6 gives us a clue as to why: they are crucifying Christ all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace. This indicates a state of rebellion against God. Nobody can come to Christ in this state, he must surrender first.

4) *God's response to this rebellion is faithful.* We normally think of God's faithfulness in terms of His mercy, but the fact remains that His wrath and judgment is also faithfulness. He has made His peace terms quite clear to us: repent and live or rebel and die. If He kept the first part of the bargain but not the last He would not be faithful in the entire bargain.

6:9-12: OK, you can relax now... our author does not expect us to fall to such a state as was described above. God is just, and He is aware of your heart, so do not fear. Instead, he gives us great encouragement to press on. By pressing on, our author encourages all of us to do more, learn more, serve more and love more. We must not sit back and say we've done our part in service, but rather that we should redouble our efforts for the Gospel; not because we fear that God will reject us, but rather because we love Him and are dedicated to His service.

6:13-18: In these verses, the author is going further to reassure the people that they have nothing to fear if they will continue in Christ and not "fall away". God has confirmed His promises to us with an oath, sworn by Himself. This means that since God cannot lie, we may be encouraged to hang in there no matter what.

6:19-20: In concluding his appeal, the author underscores the encouragement of the previous section. Since God has sworn to fulfill His promises, and since He cannot lie, this fact serves as the anchor of our souls in the rough seas of life. Whatever may happen on this earth, however difficult things may get, we can rely on God's promises and summon the resources we need to maintain our relationship with Him. The latter part of this section refers to the service performed by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. The idea is that because Jesus has performed this act once for all as our High Priest, we have confidence in His sacrifice and God's promise relative to our salvation. He ends with the statement that Jesus is our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, which will be explained in the next chapter.

Melchizedek

Today's Text: Hebrews 7

Introduction

This wonderful chapter demonstrates the difference between the priesthood of Melchizedek and that of Aaron, and it does it in a way that also demonstrates Melchizedek's superiority. In so doing, the author ties Jesus in as being altogether superior to the Old Covenant and its priesthood, a theme to be carried on in the next chapter. He will do this in part by connecting the material introduced in chapters 5 and 6 to ultimately demonstrate that Jesus, our superior high priest has brought a superior sacrifice to establish a superior covenant with superior promises.

Points of Interest:

1-3: The Hebrews author recalls the story of Melchizedek and Abraham from Genesis 14:17-20. Notice that Melchizedek was both a king and a priest; this was not unheard of, but it doesn't follow the Jewish model: it is a combination of offices he shares with Jesus. Notice also the name, king of righteousness and king of peace: another item in common with Jesus. Finally notice that he is without genealogy having no beginning of or end of days: same with Jesus (on His Father's side). Many believe that Melchizedek is actually a pre-incarnation appearance of Jesus Christ (called a "Christiophony") Both are priests forever. Genesis 14:17-20 and Hebrews are the only places in the Bible where Melchizedek is mentioned, and whether or no you accept that he was Christ pre-incarnate, he is most definitely a "type" of Christ.

<i>Melchizedek</i>	<i>Jesus</i>
A King	A King
A High Priest	A High Priest
No beginning of days and without genealogy	No beginning of days and without genealogy (on his Father's side)
Ministered bread and wine	Ministered bread and wine
Non Levite	Non Levite
King of Salem (King of Peace)	Prince of Peace (Is 9:6)
King of Righteousness	Righteous King (Is 9:7)
Greater than Abraham	Greater than Abraham

4-10: Our author is making the case that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, since Abraham gave him a tithe, the first ever recorded. Abraham would not pay tribute to someone who was not greater, so Melchizedek was the greater. He was also superior to the Levites, because by extension they too paid tribute to him through their forefather Abraham. Can you think of anyone else who has been recorded in Scripture as being superior to Abraham?

11-19: The Old Covenant could not bring about perfection which existed prior to the fall of Adam, so a better covenant was needed in order for God to fulfill His purpose of redemption. The Levitical priesthood could make atonement for sin, setting aside the punishment for sin for a time. What God intended to do was to take sin away entirely, and for this purpose, the Levitical priesthood was entirely inadequate. In bringing about a new priesthood, the law would have to be changed, and that is what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Jesus was not a Levite, He was of the tribe of Judah, the tribe of kings not priests. Melchizedek was a king and priest; Jesus would become of the order of Melchizedek in order to take sin away. Again Psalm 110:4 is quoted, Jesus has set aside the "former regulation" which of course is the Law of Moses, because it was not intended to accomplish God's ultimate purpose for it was only there to prepare the way for Jesus. The Law was inadequate and useless in accomplishing God's ultimate end, so it was set aside to make room for the new.

20-28: The Levitical priests became priests because of their genealogy. Jesus, the new high priest became high priest because God swore an oath. There would be no more priestly genealogy because Jesus rose from the dead and serves in the office of high priest forever. As a consequence of this amazing act of God, Jesus is able to save completely those who will follow Him because He is always there to intercede for them: this was not possible under the Old Covenant. The New Covenant is the only way to salvation; the Old Covenant is over forever. Thus we say: The New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant.

New Priest = New Covenant

Today's Text: Hebrews 8

Introduction

We have reached the very heart of Hebrews. There are two main points at the core of this letter, first that Jesus is our new High Priest (chapters 5-7) and our sacrifice (chapters 9-10). These are the points that unify and comprise the New Covenant (chapter 8). The "high water mark" of the letter is Hebrews 8:6.

1-5: This section sums and links the discussion of Jesus as our High Priest with the New Covenant which is discussed in the next section. Verse one recalls the description of Melchizedek in the previous chapter when it mentions "throne" and "Majesty" by the use of these royal terms: Jesus (and Melchizedek) is both king and priest. "Majesty in heaven" is a reference to God, thus we can draw from this that the very Master of the universe is also serving as mediator for His brothers. Verses 2-5 make clear that while Jesus is doing the kinds of things that earthly priests did, He is doing so in a tabernacle that was made by God, not one made by men. All of the work that the priests did under the Law was but a shadow or a preview of what was to come. There was never an intention on God's part for the Levitical priesthood to be permanent or everlasting; it was a preview... or like a "trailer" if you will. Several months back, I saw a trailer for the movie *The King's Speech*. After having seen the trailer, I wanted to see the movie, and I still want to see it, but as of this date, I still haven't seen it. The Old Covenant; the Law, the nation of Israel... are like the trailer, but the New Covenant is the movie.

6: This is the very core of the letter; it is also the very core of the Christian faith. This is a verse you should commit to memory! In the first part, Jesus' ministry is compared to that of the Levitical priests; it is **superior** to their ministry. This is because Jesus is doing the **real mediation** that is to say that Jesus, unlike the old priests takes sin away instead of merely putting off the payment for sins. Then, the covenants are compared. Just as Jesus' ministry is superior to that of the Levites, so also is His Covenant superior to theirs. There is simply no comparison between the two that makes the Old Covenant look like something to hold on to when it is compared to the New! The New Covenant accomplishes God's eternal purpose, the Old does not. Finally, the New Covenant is based on better promises

7-12: Verses 7 and 8 bring the matter to a head by pointing out that God found fault with the people under the Old Covenant... and that is what was wrong with it. The Old Covenant contained outward regulations that were put in place to demonstrate the need for an eternal solution to the fundamental issue of rebellion. The Old Covenant provided something like a truce in the conflict between God and Man, but as is the case in an earthly war a final peace treaty was needed to bring an end to hostilities: the New Covenant. Verses 9-12 are from Jeremiah 31:31-34, and they demonstrate to anyone who cares to notice that God had informed His people centuries before that the Old Covenant would be replaced by the New. In this New Covenant, God would not send the people a written tablet of laws, but He would instead write His laws in their minds and on their hearts. By doing this, God will finally be able to restore fellowship with His people. With fellowship restored, people will not simply "learn about" God, but they will have God within them. This does not mean that there will be no teaching within the community of believers, but that the people will be having a relationship with God on a personal level: fellowship! There will be no spiritual elite, for all believers who have been regenerated (born again) spiritually will be "brothers".

13: Here our author indicates that the coming of the New Covenant has rendered the Old Covenant obsolete, meaning that it has become useless. He also points out that the Old Covenant will "soon disappear." It is quite interesting to note that since it was written in the time of Nero's persecution (64-69 AD) the practice of the Old Covenant ceased a very short time after the writing of this letter in 70 AD. When the temple was destroyed and the Jewish people dispersed at that time, the operation of the

Old Covenant terminated entirely, and has not been resumed to this day 1,941 years later... and it never will be resumed, for that is not within God's will or purpose.

Superior Sacrifice, part 1

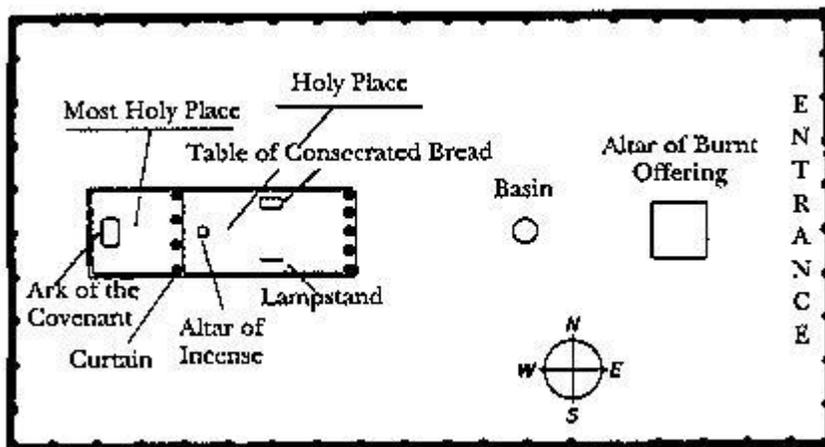
Today's Text: Hebrews 9

Introduction

The New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant according to the book of Hebrews. It has two elements that make it superior; a superior High Priest (5-7) and a superior sacrifice (9-10). We have already studied the High Priest and the Covenant itself. Here we turn to the sacrifice. Hebrews discusses the superior sacrifice in three parts: First the Old Testament tabernacle is described and used to explain what Jesus has done in the New Covenant (9:1-10), then the effectiveness of Christ's blood for forgiveness is described in 9:11-28, and finally, the effect of the sacrifice as being once for all is explained in chapter 10.

Points of Interest

9:1-5: We begin this discussion with a brief description of the contents of the Holy of Holies in the temple. This is not an authoritative description of everything recorded in Exodus 25-40. For reference, the tabernacle would have looked something like the drawing below:



The chart below compares the items found in the Old Covenant Tabernacle with its New Covenant counterpart:

OT Tabernacle

Altar of burnt offering
Basin
Holy Place
Lamp
Table
Bread
Altar of incense
Veil
Ark
Manna
Staff
Tablets
Cherubim
Atonement cover

New Covenant counterpart

The cross and death of Jesus
Baptism
The church
The Word and the Holy Spirit
Fellowship between God and Man
Lord's Supper
Prayer
Body of Christ
Presence of God
God's provision
Leaders of God's choice
God's law
Ministering angels of God
Reconciliation to God

9:6-14: After a brief description of the earthly place of worship from the Old Covenant, we now go on to a brief description of the activities on the Day of Atonement. The author uses this discussion to express that the regulations of the Old Covenant were merely an illustration of what was to come in Christ; that which we now have as a present reality. For detailed information on these activities in the Old Covenant, see Leviticus 16.

The author's application begins with verse 8: The Holy Spirit has constructed the tabernacle, and later temple, worship with a purpose. That purpose was to show us what was to come. As long as the earthly practices remained, the way to the Most Holy Place was not disclosed; there was always a veil there that separated mankind from God's presence. That veil could not be removed during the Old Covenant. Verse 9 tells us that the old illustration was for the "present time" to show Christians (and Jews) that the gifts and sacrifices of the Old Covenant could not provide a clear conscience for the sinner. Put another way, these sacrifices could not take away the guilt of sin. This condition would continue until the day of a new order being established; a reference to the sacrifice of Christ which did take away the guilt of sin. (9:10). This is exactly the point that is made and supported in verses 11-14.

9:15-22: In this section we see another accomplishment of the sacrifice of Christ's blood; the establishment of a new covenant. "For this reason" refers back to the previous verses dealing with the fact that Jesus' sacrifice takes away the guilt of sin leaving the redeemed sinner with a "clear conscience". Because of this sacrifice... Christ is the mediator of a new covenant. In 16-17 the author uses the idea of a will and an inheritance to illustrate why Jesus had to shed His blood and die, and then this is compared to the shedding of blood in the establishment of the Old Covenant. Note the comparison of Christ shedding His own blood versus the shedding of an animal's blood.

9:23-28: This final section of chapter 9 makes the clear case that Christ's sacrifice was once for all, and that it put an end to the earthly and outward practice of the Old Covenant. Christ was the reality that the Law only gave us a preview of, and His sacrifice was the one that ended the sin problem. The Law had recurring sacrifices for as long as it existed, but when Jesus shed His blood and entered not the Most Holy Place in the temple, but into the very center of Heaven itself, the Law was over. Instead of having the continual temple practices to illustrate what would some day come, Jesus entered the throne of God because God's redemption had come and would be maintained forever.

Superior Sacrifice, part 2

Today's Text: Hebrews 10

Introduction

Chapter 10 is a continuation of the discussion of the Superior Sacrifice brought by Jesus Christ that was the subject of chapter 9. This continuation is made clear in verse 1 with the connective "For this reason..." The author will expand on the greatness of Christ's sacrifice by highlighting the once for all nature of Jesus' sacrifice as opposed to the incompleteness of the sacrifices under the Law. The chapter will move on to an exhortation to persevere beginning with verse 19, thus introducing the last great theme of Hebrews; perseverance through persecution and trial.

Points of Interest

1-10: In this piece of text, we see an introduction in 1-4 that sets out the outline of the argument that the Law was imperfect, namely that it was not possible for the sacrifices of the Law to remove the guilt of sins. By removing the guilt of sins, we see a duality of meaning. First, there is the guilt one feels for having sinned, i.e. having a guilty conscience. Second and more importantly there is guilt in the legal sense; the person has committed a crime against God and will be punished. Neither of these is dealt with by the Old Covenant Law. As a result, the sacrifices were performed over and over, for if they had taken away guilt, they would have been discontinued: therefore the Law was inadequate.

Moving on into 5-10, the author quotes from Psalm 40:6-8 to demonstrate that Jesus Christ had to come to earth to solve the problem that the Law could not solve; the logic here is that since the Law could not remove guilt, and since the Christ had to come to accomplish this, therefore the Law was not pleasing to God and a mere shadow of the reality to come (Christ Himself). The end result was a new and superior sacrifice made by Jesus Christ Himself; one sacrifice for all time.

11-14: This is an interesting bit of text because it sets up an image seldom seen in Scripture; one that if grasped, explains the current operation of the Universe. Jesus (our great High Priest and King) came to earth and sacrificed Himself once for all time for the forgiveness of sins. Consequently, there is no more sacrificing for Him to do. Since this priestly work resulted in His having entered the very holiest of all holy places, heaven itself, He sat down on God's throne, and has taken up His kingly role. He will remain there until the final victory over His foes (Satan and the forces of rebellion). To top it off, His sacrificial work has made the final outcome a certainty.

15-18: Finally, this selection of text adds the Holy Spirit as a witness to testify, that is to "back up" the evidence our author has already provided. Quoting once again from Jeremiah 31 (see Hebrews 8) we see that this time the Hebrews author quotes rather selectively. He will quote fragments of Jer. 31:33-34 in verses 16 and 17 so as to use those fragments as the Spirit's testimony regarding the sufficiency and superiority of Christ's sacrifice. Verse 18 contains the final summation of chapters 9 and 10: There is now no more sacrifice for sins: period.

19-39: This section is an exhortation to perseverance which is a major theme of Hebrews, and will be discussed throughout the remainder of the book. We will discuss this text in class, and leave further written observations for the next three lessons.

By Faith

Today's Text: Hebrews 11

Introduction

This is the famous chapter on faith. It follows from the introduction to the subject in 10:35-39, and falls within a context in Hebrews to bolster the theme of perseverance through trials and persecution. It contains 17 examples of faith from the Old Testament and one that is associated with "we" for a total of 18. It begins with a general definition of faith in verse one, transition in verse two and then the "by faith" statements filling out the remainder of the chapter.

Points of Interest

11:1-2: Verse one is a twofold definition: "Faith is" (1) the realization or essence "being sure" of what we hope for and (2) the proof or conviction; being "certain" of what we do not see. The transition occurs next, and is interesting in that it points out that for having these two certainties, the "ancients" were "commended". Of course the "ancients" are the Old Testament forefathers (characters) who will be discussed next.

While it really isn't practical to discuss so many examples in this handout, the following chart lists the 18 examples, and the most relevant items will be mentioned the class.

Verse	Person	What they did "by faith"
2	Ancients	Were commended
3	"We"	Understand the creation
4	Abel	Offered a better sacrifice Was commended as a righteous man Still speaks from the dead
5	Enoch	Avoided death
7	Noah	Built the ark Was commended as a righteous man
8	Abraham	Became heir of righteousness Left home for an unknown land
9		Made his home in tents like a stranger in the promised land
11		Became a father when too old
19		Reasoned that God could raise the dead
20	Isaac	Blessed the future of Jacob and Esau
21	Jacob	Blessed Joseph's sons Worshipped
22	Joseph	Spoke of the exodus, instructed about his bones
23	Moses' parents	Hid baby Moses for three months
24	Moses	Refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter Chose to be mistreated with the people of God Regarded disgrace for Christ as better than the treasures of Egypt
27		Left Egypt
28		Kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood
29	The people	Passed through the Red Sea
30		The walls of Jericho fell down after the people marched around them
31	Rahab	Was not killed with those who were disobedient

After these examples are 6 more verses in which "the prophets" are credited with 20 more deeds.

11:10-16: In these verses, we see an amazing set of facts: Abraham and his heirs were looking forward to the fulfillment of the promises God made to Abraham through Jesus Christ. Abraham is a co-heir with Christ, we Christians are co-heirs with Christ: the ultimate fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham is in Christ. There are two parts of that covenant. First, is the promise of offspring, more numerous than the stars of the heavens, and that all nations of the earth would be blessed. This of course is fulfilled by Abraham's descendants through Isaac... and ultimately through the saving work of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. The other part is the land promise. Abraham's descendants lived in the promised land, but they were looking forward to our day, because the ultimate fulfillment would be eternity in heaven for all of God's people through Christ. (See Gal. 3:29; Eph. 2:19; Rom. 8:17; 1Pet. 1:4) Verses 11-12 show the offspring side of the covenant, and in the next verse we see a note of encouragement: "All these people were still living by faith when they died." This has a special note in this section that urges Christians to hold onto the faith through persecution and trial. They didn't fully realize the fulfillment of the promises, for they were far in the future, but note: they admitted that they were strangers "on earth". This implies that home was not on earth; neither were the promises. In 14-16 the author tells us that the people were not looking for an earthly home, but a city that God would prepare for them, a heavenly home. (cf. John 14:1-3). Again, it is clear that the ultimate fulfillment of the land promise is in eternity with Christ in heaven, not in the Middle East.

11:26: Notice here that Moses realized that there was something far greater to be had than all of the riches and possibilities Egypt had to offer. He chose to be with his people, who were slaves of the Egyptians for the sake of Christ (Messiah) because his future would be far greater with God than with earthly riches. The association here with Christ is interesting to note for the man through whom the Law was given. Moses, the Lawgiver saw that his future related to Christ, as opposed to keeping Law! Of course, Hebrews is quite explicit about the inadequacies of the Law relative to salvation.

Discipline!

Today's Text: Hebrews 12

Introduction

This chapter begins with the word “therefore” connecting it with what has just preceded it.

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” (He. 11:39-40)

12:1-3: Since all of the heroes of faith from the Old Testament are to be made perfect *with us*, and since they are ‘watching’ we must throw off anything that can hinder us in running the race in this life. This again is language used to describe an athletic contest, and the idea is that those people of faith from the OT who have been commended for their faith are in the grandstands watching; cheering us on to victory. Verse 2 reminds us of how we are to compete: Fix your eyes upon Jesus, the One who has made it all the way through the sacrificial process and who now sits at God’s right hand... *that* is where we are running to. Finally in verse three, we get to the point: As we move through life, having tossed aside anything that impedes our progress, we must keep in mind the fact that Jesus had to do the same thing, and His reward was literally out of this world.

12:4-6: This section is a word of encouragement; however much any of us has suffered for their faith in Christ, it has not yet come to the shedding of blood (death). Proverbs 31:11-12 is quoted here, and even though it is about discipline, it is intended to be considered an encouragement because in disciplining us, God is treating us not as subjects, pawns or slaves, but as “sons”. In this parent-child scenario, the believers are asked to view their struggles in this life as the discipline that a parent gives to a child; loving. The idea is that as a parent applies discipline to a child to teach and nurture the child’s development, so too do the struggles of this life aid us in growing, learning and making a complete break from the life of rebellion against God.

12:7-17: In the process of struggling through life, God is treating us as His children. Consider the struggles that most of us went through during our teen years for instance. While we didn’t enjoy every minute of those years, we grew up and became the people we are as adults because (and sometimes in spite of) those experiences. Those of us who fought our parents and teachers had a more difficult time, while those of us who made an extra effort to cooperate usually grew up faster than those who didn’t. Think about that in contemplating your Christian growth. While our parents disciplined us as best they could, God definitely and without question makes all of the right moves in this regard; we should endure and learn. The text goes on to give some practical suggestions of things we can do in order to make the process easier; easier in the sense that if we don’t fight with our Heavenly Father we will grow up more quickly. The practical advice is fairly obvious in meaning.

12:18-24: This section is once again an encouragement. It contains a contrast of two mountains: Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion. In the first case, the author makes clear that the OT people came to a mountain that was a real and physical mountain; Mt. Sinai. The scene was terrible in its fearfulness that made evident God’s inapproachability. Even Moses trembled with fear. The second mountain is the one that we have come to, Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion is the location of the city of Jerusalem, but this Mt. Zion is not a physical city. While in the OT God’s presence dwelt in the Holy of holies in the temple on Mt. Zion in the city of Jerusalem, our goal, and the goal of those people of faith in the OT is not a physical place, but the very dwelling place of God in Heaven; this is the Mt. Zion described here. At this place, God judges all, but at His side is our Superior High Priest who has already brought a superior sacrifice that makes us “perfect” (without sin) in God’s sight; thus we have nothing to fear. The children of Israel in the OT approached Sinai with fear and trembling, we approach Zion with joy and praise.

12:25-29: The final verses in this chapter are a warning: do not refuse God! In the OT, the people refused (disobeyed, sinned, rebelled against) God and did not escape His wrath. We of the NT, having received superior promises and a superior sacrifice, not to mention having seen in reality what they could only imagine will not escape God's wrath if we "refuse" Him, therefore, persevere, endure and live.

“Let brotherly love remain”

Today's Text

Hebrews 13

Introduction

This final chapter of Hebrews begins by continuing the practical exhortations and instructions that began in chapter 12. It concludes with the ethical admonitions and personal information that the epistles of the NT usually close with. The presentation of arguments is over now, and even though the letter did not begin with the usual sort of opening, it concludes with the usual sort of closing.

Points of Interest

13:1-6: Verse one literally reads “Let brotherly love remain”. In the next two verses is a twofold example of what brotherly love looks like in practice: hospitality and thinking about those who are less fortunate. The idea of hospitality in v. 2 can be summed up by saying, offer friendship to one another. More has been written of course about entertaining angels, and that reminds us of Jesus’ words in Matt. 25:35. In v. 3 we see the idea of the less fortunate expressed as “those in prison” and those who are “mistreated”. We should bear in mind that the author is referring to people who are in prison and mistreated for their faith in Jesus Christ, and again we have an echo from Matthew 25. Brotherly love can be summed up as putting the interests of others ahead of our own. While the first three verses give us examples of what we should do, verses 4-6 tell us what we should not do. First, we should realize that holiness does not allow for sexual immorality; sexual immorality is something that kills relationships, and it is clearly not putting the interests of others ahead of our own. As for the love of money, we should be content with what we have, for loving money will kill our relationship with Christ Himself.

13:7-8: The leaders spoken of here are said to have proclaimed the Word of God, so we can infer that the author is speaking primarily of those whose ministries lie within the areas of preaching and teaching. The proclamation of God’s Word is the central aspect of the Great Commission both before and after someone enters into relationship with Christ, and is worthy of respect and imitation. Verse eight is one that is often written about, but in context it is telling the reader that as Jesus is constant and dependable, so is the example of those who proclaim His Word. Paul told the Corinthians to follow his example, for he was following the example of Christ. So it was with the “leaders” spoken of here.

13:9-16: The author has made extensive remarks in this letter regarding the temptation to return to the old (OT) ways. In doing this, he has repeatedly shown the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old. Here, he makes one last appeal to the people to move away from the Old Covenant practices, recognizing the total and utter superiority of the New. He begins by talking about “foods”. Even though the NIV adds the word “ceremonial” to “foods”, the Greek text does not contain this word, thus we can infer that the meaning is in reference to which foods are clean and which are unclean. (Lev. 11) Verse 10 refers to the food sacrifices that the priests ate, and there is no counterpart in the New Covenant; thus they are not permitted to eat from the altar of our Covenant (the cross). The next two verses refer to the OT practice of bearing a sacrifice outside the city to be burned on the ash heap (Lev. 4) and comparing it with Jesus who was crucified outside the city. We do not bear the sacrifice, but instead we bear the disgrace of His crucifixion though suffering for our faith. By this we are made holy through His shed blood. In verse 15 we see that we offer sacrifices of praise and good deeds, not of animals, verse 16 exhorts the people to continue offering sacrifice in this way, for it is pleasing to God. We must understand that all of this centers on the example of Jesus who put the interests of others ahead of His own interests: brotherly love.

13:17-25: Verse 17 is one that is not “politically correct” today; thus it may be problematic for some. Earlier we were called to “remember” our leaders; here we are commanded to “obey” them. Those who lead through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God have an awesome responsibility and are not only responsible for their own lives, but for watching over the lives of the members of their flock. Those

members can make this a “joy” or they can make it a “burden”. Making it a “burden” for the leaders will not be a benefit to those who do so; in fact it is disobedience to God Himself. Frustrating the efforts of your leaders will result in your loss. Verses 18 ff. are the closing personal remarks and greetings.