

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews

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INTRODUCTION

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews,¹ so entitled in the King James Version (KJV), is a complex book in the New Testament (NT) canon of Scripture. It has fostered a great variety of interpretations and consequent theological debates. There are several reasons for this. First, many commentators of Scripture and even of *Hebrews* have not had biblical qualifications to comment on the Bible. The Scripture requires that those who handle the text must be regenerated interpreters (Ps. 50:16-17). Not only must they have the Spirit of truth within but they must be a member of the Lord's institution of truth—the Baptist assembly (I Tim. 3:15; cf. Mt. 28:19-20). An additional requirement necessitates that the interpreter recognizes that the Bible is the word of God and not the word of man (I Thes. 2:13). Those that meet these biblical requirements, as does the present author, have the potential of knowing all things (I Jn. 2:20, 27).

The second reason for the various and contradictory interpretations is that these biblically unauthorized exegetes fail to allow the immediate internal context of *Hebrews* and the greater context of the Old Testament (OT) and NT Scriptures to give authorized commentary. Biblically unauthorized commentators with flawed practices of hermeneutics cannot possibly yield a scripturally accurate and precise interpretation of any book of the Bible, including *Hebrews*. A third problem for unbiblical interpretations results from the rejection of the Lord's *Received Text*² (Jn. 17:8) in favor of the Gnostic-laced *Critical Text*³ (CT), which text spawned out of the Higher Criticism movement and was approved by theological liberals and pseudo-Christian cultists.⁴ Using the deficient CT will result in contrary interpretations and inferior theology.

By God's grace, this commentary will yield the biblical interpretation of *Hebrews* by allowing the Divine Author to lead the authorized interpreter in applying biblical hermeneutics to the authorized text, resulting in the Christ-honoring exegesis.

The early title to the *Book*, "to the Hebrews" (πρός Ἑβραίους) suggests a whole realm of possibilities about purpose, audience, authorship and date. The content of the *Epistle*, along with other biblical data, helps fashion answers to its purpose, audience, authorship and date. The Greek behind *Hebrews* has several features which play into ascertaining answers to the aforementioned issues. 1) The Greek style is very polished suggesting a professional rhetorician behind its writing. 2) The vocabulary and use of figures and argumentation all point to an educated writer. 3) The employment of OT citations hints at a writer well versed

¹Greek Manuscripts (MSS) read the title as Πρός Ἑβραίους ("To the Hebrews").

²The *Textus Receptus* (TR) finds ultimate expression in Scrivener's text, Frederick H. A. Scrivener, *Scrivener's Annotated Greek New Testament: Being the Exact Greek Textus Receptus that Underlies the King James Bible* (Collingswood, NJ: Dean Burgon Society Press), 1999.

³Kurt Aland, Editor. *The United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*. Third Edition (NY: United Bible Societies), 1975.

⁴Thomas M. Strouse, *The Lord GOD Hath Spoken: a Guide to Bibliology* (Cromwell, CT: Bible Baptist Theological Press, 2015), pp. 123-136.

in the precise study of the Hebrew Scriptures.⁵ Since the *Book* has no declared audience or author, it demands a thorough study of and knowledge about *Hebrews* for the exegete to understand the *Epistle*. Answers to its purpose, audience, authorship, and date will unfold as one progresses through *Hebrews*, while allowing the Spirit of God to illuminate truth from within it and as well as from the Scriptures. The *Book of Hebrews* does indeed exalt Jesus of Nazareth as the divine Son of God and High Priest, and consequently making Him the Mediator between God and sinners. The Lord Jesus Christ is far better than all of the shadows and figures of the OT Scriptures to Whom they pointed.

PURPOSE

The Superiority of Christ

The author desired to demonstrate the superiority of Christ as revealed in his word of exhortation. The canonical Πρὸς Ἑβραίους emphatically declares the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ over the OT figures and shadows. Whereas, the first-century Jews had lived within the theological, spiritual and ethnical lineage of Judaism for fifteen centuries, their collective and personal effort of abandoning this for Christianity was difficult, to say the least. Both Peter (Acts 10:9-16; Gal. 2:11-16) and Paul (cf. Acts 16:3 with Gal. 2:3; Acts 21:26-29) struggled with the question of how much Judaism they could retain as a faithful Christian. To them it was obvious that Jesus Christ was superior over all that pointed to Him in their Scriptures,⁶ so what was allowed to them in the transition? Therefore the writer of *Hebrews* gave the biblical perspective which focused on the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The perfect God-Man in Person is superior over the prophets, angels, Moses, and unbelief. His divine Melchizedekian Priesthood is superior over the Aaronic priesthood. The author constantly employed terms referring to Christ, such as the adjective “*better*” (κρείττων [13x])⁷ and the verb “[to be] *perfect*” (τελειώω [9x]).⁸ The writer employed both the doctrinal format (Heb. 1:1-14; 2:5-18; 5:1-14; 6:13-9:28 and 13:18-25) and the homiletical format (Heb. 2:1-4; 3:1-4:16; 6:1-12; and 10:1-13:17) to appeal to his audience. He demonstrated that the Son of God as Christ is the fulfillment of the OT and therefore superior. The author also urged the necessity of his audience to respond to the truth that Jesus as their messianic Son of God.

Whereas the *Gospels* focused upon the Lord Jesus Christ as King, the *Book of Hebrews* revealed Him as High Priest of the Melchisedecian Priesthood. Originally the LORD wanted His chosen people to be a nation of priests, contingent of course on their obedience, as He affirmed, saying, “*Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel*” (Ex. 19:5-6). Their disobedience forfeited their national privilege and resulted in one family from one tribe to be the divinely designated priests (Ex. 32:1-10; Num. 16-17). Moses consecrated Aaron from the tribe of Levi and established the Levitical Priesthood (Ex. 28:1 ff.).

⁵There are at least eighty-six direct references to the Hebrew Scriptures in *Hebrews*.

⁶The Lord Jesus Christ had asserted in the presence of His apostles that the OT Scriptures pointed to Him, saying, “*For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*” (Jn. 5:46-47), and “*And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me*” (Lk. 24:44).

⁷Cf. Heb. 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 14, 22; 8:6[2x]; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; and 12:24.

⁸Vide Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:19; 9:9, 11; 10:1; 11:40; 12:23; and 13:21.

Eventually the Levitical Priesthood became corrupt (Mal. 1:6-2:9), consequently pointing to the Perfect High Priest with the perpetual Priesthood (Ps. 110:1, 4). The Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal High Priest of the order of Melchisedec, which truth the Apostle Paul explicated.

The Word of Exhortation

In addition, the writer designated his *Epistle* as “*the word of exhortation*” (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως⁹ [Heb. 13:22]). This *dis legomena* occurs also in Acts 13:15 referring to a Pauline sermon based on the OT and encouraging the listeners to recognize and realize that the Hebrew Scriptures all point toward Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment (cf. Lk. 24:44). Several salient points give the nature of “*any word of exhortation*” (Acts 13:15, 17-41). Paul started his synagogue sermon with the following truths. 1) God chose Israel and then delivered them from Egypt, establishing the Mosaic covenant (see Dt. 4:37; Ex. 24:7-8; respectively). 2) He determined that He would teach the nation of Israel which had covenanted with Him during the forty years of wilderness wanderings (Neh. 9:14). 3) Jehovah destroyed the seven Canaanite nations and divided their land inheritance under Joshua (Josh. 14:1 ff.). 4) The LORD gave them judges and kings to rule His people, including King Saul and King David (I Sam. 9:1; I Sam. 13:14). 5) The Saviour would come from David’s seed, culminating in the raised Jesus (II Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 16:10). 6) The forerunner of the Messiah John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the fulfillment (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1; Jn. 1:30). 7) The Scriptures that the Jews read every Sabbath spoke of Jesus as the Messiah. 8) Pilate allowed Him to be slain on a tree and to be buried. 9) God raised Jesus from the dead as Scriptures predicted (Pss. 2:7 and 16:10). 10) Jesus was the biblical means of forgiveness of sins and justification (Mt. 1:21). Paul concluded his “*word of exhortation*” with the warning not to reject and despise Jesus as Messiah, and thereby fulfilling Habakkuk’s warning of unbelief (Hab. 1:5).

This “*word of exhortation*” must be received by faith for forgiveness of sins and justification of life to avoid the awful consequences of despising revelatory truth. No doubt the Apostle to the Gentiles preached this message each time he was privileged to give “*any word of exhortation*” to the mixed multitude (believing and unbelieving Jews and Gentiles) of the various synagogue audiences. Having preached many times in many synagogues that the Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all the Mosaic types, figures, and shadows, the Apostle then inscripturated this message for the church in Jerusalem. Πρὸς Ἑβραίους is the finished, literary, inscripturated form of Paul’s preached synagogue sermons.

AUDIENCE

The issue of the audience of Hebrews invokes several questions which must be answered. 1) What was their ethnicity? 2) Where did they dwell? 3) What was their spiritual condition? The Christian, who studies the Word of God, indwelt with its author the Spirit of God, serving in the Church of God, and abides under the authority of the Man of God, has full assurance of knowing all revealed truth as John promised, saying, “*ye know all things*” (I Jn. 2:20). The Lord has recorded in the very *Epistle* data which establish parameters for knowing possible answers to these queries.

⁹The Greek of Acts 13:15 reads λόγος...παρακλήσεως. (*logos parakleseos*, “a word of exhortation”). Since Paul made his expression articular (“*the*” τοῦ), presumably he emphasized the final and formal rendering of his “*word of exhortation*” synagogue messages.

Ethnicity

Early Christianity

Concerning the audience's ethnicity, the numerous references to OT institutions, people, and practices would exclude Gentiles, unless they were God-fearers attending synagogue services. Only those with a full acquaintance of Jewish heritage would appreciate the message of the *Epistle*, traditionally known as "to the Hebrews."

The Christian era or dispensation started with the baptizing ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner to the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1). The Gospel of Mark revealed this truth, stating, "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*" (Mk. 1:1-4). As the Baptist pointed to Jesus of Nazareth saying, "*Behold the Lamb of God!*" (Jn. 1:36), multitudes of Jews became disciples of Jesus through biblical baptism.¹⁰ Scripture states, saying, "*Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins*" (Mt. 3:5-6). The Christian era began as a Baptist movement, with thousands of Jews receiving believers' immersion and becoming Jesus' baptized disciples.¹¹

The Lord Jesus Christ came to the Jewish nation people first of all, claiming to be their King and that His kingdom was at hand (Mt. 4:17). John revealed saying, "*He came unto his own, and his own received him not*" (Jn. 1:11), indicating that the Lord came to His "own" (τὰ ἴδια *ta idia* [neuter noun]) "nation" and His "own" (οἱ ἴδιοι *hoi idioi* [masculine noun]) "people" did not receive Him. According to Matthew's Gospel, Christ's early ministry was exclusively to the Jews,¹² the seed of Abraham (Mt. 1:1-2). Matthew represented Jesus of Nazareth as the only Jewish descendent of David (Mt. 1:1-17) who fulfilled the prophecy of being virgin born (Mt. 1:18-25), being born in Bethlehem (Mt. 2:1-8), fulfilling the star of Jacob prophecy (Mt. 2:2, 7, 9, and 10), coming out of Egypt (Mt. 2:13-15), fulfilling Jeremian prophecy (Mt. 2:16-18), growing up in Nazareth (Mt. 2:23), receiving the forerunner's identification of baptism (Mt. 3:16), overcoming temptation (Mt. 4:1-11), bringing light to Galilee (Mt. 4:12-22), and healing the multitudes (Mt. 4:23-25).

Having demonstrated that Jesus of Nazareth met all of the biblical requirements to be Israel's Messiah and King, Matthew presented the Lord Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" message (Mt. 5-7) to the Jewish people who were expecting their King-Messiah to usher in His millennial reign after Daniel's Seventieth Week of Tribulation (Dan. 9:24-27). After the Lord demonstrated His power over all (Mt. 9:18-35), He called out His twelve Apostles and sent them "*to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (v. 5). When it became clear that the nation of Israel had rejected their Saviour-Messiah-King (cf. Mt. 11:14 with vv. 28-30), He postponed the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 13) and extended the Gospel to the Gentiles (Mt. 28:19-20).

¹⁰Biblical baptism by immersion demands a testimony of repentance from sin and faith toward the Lord Jesus, the conditions for conversion (Mk. 1:15). John's baptism was Christian baptism, since the Author and Finisher of the Christian faith (Heb. 12:2) received it (Mt. 3:16), as well as the Apostles who were instructed to perpetuate it (Mt. 28:19). It is the "*one baptism*" (Eph. 4:5) continuing as an ordinance throughout the church dispensation (Acts 2:41, 47).

¹¹When the Lord began to reveal the narrowness of discipleship, Scripture states concerning all of these Baptists, saying, "*From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him*" (Jn. 6:66).

¹²There were exceptions (Mt. 4:25; 8:5-10; 15:22-28). Paul continued the Lord's approach by going to Jews and then to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10).

The Covenant Community

From the context of Hebrews it is apparent that the audience had a thorough knowledge of the theology and practice of the Hebrew Scriptures, including the teaching that God had a Son Who was superior to the prophets (Heb. 1:1-3), Who was superior to angels (Heb. 1:4-2:18), Who was superior to Moses (Heb. 3:1-6), Who was the rest for the Jews in wilderness under Moses (Heb. 3:7-19), Who was superior to Joshua (Heb. 4:1-10), Who was of the order of Melchizedek and superior to the order of Levites (Heb. 5:1-7:28), Who mediated the superior New Covenant (Heb. 8:1-13), Who functioned as the great High Priest and final sacrifice (Heb. 9:1-10:18), Whose crucifixion must not be despised (10:19-38), Who was the object of the faith of the patriarchs (Heb. 11:1-40), Who is the author and finisher of biblical Judaism (Heb. 12:1-17), Who is in the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:18-24), and yet Who died outside the camp (Heb. 13:7-14). The Gentiles of the first century were ignorant of any firsthand knowledge of the teaching found in *Hebrews*. The Apostle Paul declared concerning the Gentile Christians at Ephesus, saying, “*Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world*” (Eph. 2:11-12). Therefore *Hebrews* was not written to Gentile Christians, and in fact, there is no reference to the “*Gentiles*” (τὰ ἔθνη *ta ethne*) in the letter. The focus of the *Epistle* is upon the ministry of the high priest (ἀρχιερεύς *archiereus*)¹³ of the Messiah, a central focus of the Levitical priesthood revealed in the *Torah* (Lev. 1-7).

Other details about the members of the audience included the fact that they suffered rejection and persecution from fellow Jews (Heb. 10:32-34) and that they met in synagogues (Heb. 10:25). There was the imminent danger of apostasy and sudden destruction for some of the audience (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-39).

The audience consisted of baptized Jewish disciples of Christ who had initially followed him, but were on the verge of walking no more with him (cf. Jn. 6:66). In fact, they were the last generation of what might be called the “Covenant Community.” Organized Judaism started about 1446 BC with Moses ratifying the Old Covenant between Jehovah and His nation of Israel. Scripture states, saying, “*And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words*” (Ex. 24:7-8). In fact, the Apostle Paul defined this historical, social, and political Judaism as “*the commonwealth of Israel*” (Eph. 2:12) and “*the Israel of God*” (cf. Gal. 6:16). The Lord Jesus seemed to allude to it as “*the sheepfold*” (Jn. 10:1)¹⁴ and writer of *Hebrews* called it “*the house of Moses*” and “*the camp*” (Heb. 13:11-13).

Certain institutions represented the Covenant Community such as the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees,¹⁵ the synagogue, the Zerubbabel-Herod Temple, and even the city of Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus Christ excoriated the spiritual vanity relating to these institutions, saying, “*But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!...O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*” (Mt. 23:13-38). The ceremonial practices of the

¹³The noun occurs 17x in *Hebrews* of the 123x of the NT.

¹⁴The Lord Jesus sought out the healed blind man who was cast out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:34-35), and in His parable the Lord promised His sheep that He would lead them out of “*the sheepfold*” which represented Judaism (Jn. 10:3).

¹⁵Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee and was cognizant of all that they knew in the *Tanak* and all that they rejected in unbelief.

Covenant Community came to their biblical end with the crucifixion of Christ, as the author of *Hebrews* testified about the ceremonial laws, saying, “Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation” (Heb. 9:10). Furthermore, the Apostle Paul declared, saying, “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph. 2:14-16), and saying, “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col. 2:13-14).

Biblically the Covenant Community ceased in AD 30 when Christ died on the cross. Practically, the Covenant Community came to an abrupt end in AD 70 when the Lord allowed the ruthless Romans to destroy over one million Jews, the Temple, and the city of Jerusalem. It was during this forty year period, the last generation of the Covenant Community, that the Jews were to trust in the final sacrifice and cease from the Temple sacrifices and offerings of the high priest and every priest in Jerusalem (Heb. 10:11). If they would not, the Lord had promised a fiery judgment for them. Just as the first generation of the Covenant Community had the great privilege of the presence of Jehovah and spiritual light which they rejected leading to destruction and death (Neh. 9:18-21), so the last generation of the Covenant Community had the great privilege of the presence of the “*I AM*” and rejected Him at the peril of immediate destruction and death (Heb. 10:26-29).

The audience of *Hebrews* was the last generation of the Covenant Community, baptized “disciples” of Jesus, some of whom wavered in the midst of persecution from Judaism. The security of fifteen centuries of Judaism weighed heavily over these Jews as they were forced to choose between animal sacrifices or the final sacrifice of Christ on the cross. *Hebrews* warned, apostasy would result in fiery judgment!

Location

The dwelling place of the audience was not in Rome, as the writer was indeed in Rome, as he declared, saying, “they of Italy salute you” (Heb. 13:24). Since the author cited the Hebrew OT he must certainly have directed *Hebrews* to Jerusalem Jews. Jerusalem was the home of Judaism and the Jews read from Moses’ Hebrew *Torah* every day, as Luke revealed, saying, “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day” (Acts 15:21). The Jews in Jerusalem desired to continue with the Hebrew language and Jewish culture, and many in defense of Jewish widows resisted the Hellenization of the Jerusalem church, as Luke recorded, saying, “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations” (Acts 6:1). Hebrew was still the language of the Jews in the first century, and not Aramaic, since the inscription on the cross was in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew (Lk. 23:38). Furthermore, the Lord Jesus not only spoke Aramaic from the cross (“*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” [Mk. 15:34]), but also Hebrew, saying, “*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (Mt. 27:46).¹⁶

Jerusalem was the location to which the author sent his “word of exhortation” since he dealt with continuing practices of priests sacrificing animals in the Temple, which practice the author condemned (cf. Heb.

¹⁶Paul, “an Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5), testified that the Lord Jesus spoke to him in Hebrew, the heavenly language, saying, “And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 26:14).

8:4; 10:11). The geographical center of all Judaism, including the Temple, the Aaronic priesthood, and the animal sacrifices, was at this time the city of David, Mount Zion, Jerusalem. Presumably, the writer sent *Hebrews* to the Jerusalem assembly for instruction not only for the members but also for their family and friends, facing the theological predicament and eternal consequences so addressed.

Spiritual Condition

The spiritual condition of the audience was the same as the mixed multitude of the first generation of the “Covenant Community”—those with a great deal of light of which some received by faith and others rejected (*vide* Heb. 3:7-19; 6:4-6). With several warnings about apostasy signaled by the expression “*lest*,”¹⁷ the Apostle challenged the mixed multitude about responding to the light that they had received or experience dire consequences (Heb. 2:1; 3:12, 13; 4:11; 12:3, 13, 15). Further, he coupled with the warnings thirteen hortatory subjunctives expressed as “*let us*.” For instance, he said “*let us hold fast our profession*” (Heb. 4:14; cf. also Heb. 4:1,11, 14, 16; 6:1; 10:22, 23, 24; 12:1, 28[2x]; 13:13, 15). The author addressed *Hebrews* to the Jerusalem Jews of which some thousands had been saved (Acts 21:20). He exhorted them to give up the Jewish practices (i.e., animal sacrifices) that would keep them from receiving Jesus of Nazareth as their only Messiah, because sudden destruction was about to come upon them in the form of Titus’ decimation of the Jews and desolation of the city and Temple.¹⁸ Therefore, the audience consisted of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles who professed faith in Christ and were baptized church members. No doubt great pressure arose upon these church members from family and friends who pressured the professed Jewish Christians to recant and come back to Judaism. Apparently, some church members were tempted with actually practicing animal sacrifices, or were sympathetic with this sinful practice, and needed to obey this “*word of exhortation*” or suffer consequent and immediate damnation.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

Author

The authorship and date are obviously connected. The *Book* is anonymous and thus evidence must be sifted with biblical discernment by NT church members. From external evidence, Eusebius affirmed that “who wrote this Epistle, God knows this truth (i. e., that Paul wrote it).” The conservative Eastern patristics accepted Pauline authorship (e.g., Clement of Alexander, Origen) whereas the Western fathers rejected Pauline authorship (Hippolytus and Irenaeus). Theologians have posited several other candidates for authorship, namely Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, Priscilla, Silas, etc., with very little recent consensus.¹⁹

¹⁷“*Lest*” occurs 11x in *Hebrews*.

¹⁸In AD 66, the Jews revolted against the Roman Empire causing Titus to sweep across Judea towards Jerusalem. Galilee was sacked in AD 67 and the entire Judean coast and north was subjugated to Titus by AD 68. After Nero committed suicide in AD 68, the attack upon Judaea intensified. Within the next year (AD 69) there were four Roman emperors concluding with Vespasian, who summoned Titus to Jerusalem. There, Jerusalem was sacked, the Temple destroyed, and 1,100,000 Jews killed by AD 70. With the destruction of the Temple, Judaism had no place to sacrifice and no need for priests. Judaism came to a dramatic end in AD 70! The Covenant Community existed from the time of Moses’ covenant in 1446 BC to the time of the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.

¹⁹Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Hebrews*, Vol. 15 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983.), pp. 21-24.

The clearest biblical statement on authorship is that which critical scholars so readily ignore or dismiss. Peter stated, saying, “*And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction*” (II Pet. 3:15-16). Peter made the following affirmations: 1) Paul wrote Scripture, 2) he wrote it to Peter’s audience, and 3) Peter’s audience was the Jewish διασπορά (vide II Pet. 3:1; I Pet. 1:1; Jam. 1:1). Paul wrote to the ethnic group Jews, many of whom re-located back in Jerusalem at some point. Therefore, Peter revealed that Paul wrote to these very Jews. Biblically, it is irrefragable that Paul wrote πρὸς Ἑβραίους in his total *corpus* of fourteen NT Books (thirteen were written to Gentile Christians or churches).²⁰

In spite of this clear scriptural declaration by the inspired and authoritative statement by the Apostle Peter, unqualified commentators have made inane and dangerous statements about Peter’s assertion. For instance, the renowned Lutheran theologian Lenski states,

“The fact that v. 1 (II Peter 3:1) cannot refer to First Peter is plain. That letter has been lost. Have we this letter of Paul’s to which Peter refers? Many say that we have, but when they try to identify it, there is complete disagreement. Romans, Ephesians, Galatians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Hebrews, even Laodiceans (Col. 4:16) have been mentioned. For ourselves we admit that the letter written by Paul to which Peter refers, has been lost to us... We confess that it seems strange that valuable apostolic letters should have become lost, at least two of Paul’s (I Cor. 5:9 and Col. 4:16) and one of Peter’s.”²¹

Lenski denied that Paul could have written anything to Peter’s Jewish readership, and others say it is not necessary to know. For instance, commenting on II Pet. 3:15-16, Leon Morris, states, “But what did Paul write to the recipients of 2 Peter? It is impossible to answer that question. Nor is it necessary to do so in view of Peter’s general statement: ‘He [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters.’”²²

Common arguments against this biblical testimony are the following:

1. The absence of Paul’s name as required by II Thess. 3:17 indicates that he did not write this anonymous Letter. However, Paul made his promise to Gentile churches that he would put his name on his literature to Gentiles affirming Pauline apostolic authority to the Gentiles, since someone was forging letters as from him (cf. II Thes. 2:2). Moreover, the Jews would not accept the “authority” of an apostle to the Gentiles to replace their OT system.

2. The literary style and vocabulary is “non-Pauline.” Obviously, this is a very subjective, and hence an extremely weak argument since style and vocabulary change with the author’s audience, purpose, etc. (see the *hapax legomena* in of *Hebrews*).

²⁰After all, Paul was trained in the Hebrew Scriptures under the leading Jewish scholar Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), he had a tremendous burden to testify to Jews like himself that Jesus was the Messiah (Rom. 10:1), and although “*the Apostle to the uncircumcised*” (Gal. 2:7), he was “*a Hebrew of the Hebrews*” (Phil. 3:5).

²¹R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publ. House, 1966), p. 353. Lenski was a reformed Roman Catholic in the Lutheran Church, and he demonstrated a very weak bibliography.

²²Leon Morris, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary. I and II Peter*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publ. House), p. 288.

3. The author does not deal with the same doctrines that Paul did in his Gentile Epistles. Again, a different audience with different subjects requires different theological emphases. *Hebrews* deals with the theology and practice of the Covenant Community, subjects very unfamiliar with gentile Christians.

4. The chronology does not fit Paul's life. To the contrary, it may have been written while Paul was in his second Roman imprisonment while Peter was still alive, after Timothy's release, and before AD 70, or about AD 64-67 (II Tim. 4:7-17; Heb. 13:23). Nero became emperor in AD 54 and committed suicide in AD 68. Late in his reign he increasingly persecuted followers of Christ (64 ff.). Following Nero's short-lived replacements such as Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, Vespasian reigned (AD 69) and used his son Titus to destroy Jerusalem, the Jews, and the Temple (AD 70).²³ These first four objections are feckless.

5. The so-called dependence of the author on the first generation believers eliminates Paul (cf. Heb. 2:3). Kistemaker states emphatically with regard to this verse, saying, "The conclusion may be drawn that the writer had not heard the Lord personally but had to rely on the reports of others. Paul, of course, states categorically that he did not receive the gospel from anyone but Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12)...Paul, therefore, could not have written the words of Hebrews 2:3."²⁴ MacArthur follows this similar refrain and declares, saying,

"It is significant that the writer includes himself among those people who had received confirmation of Christ's message from others (2:3). That would seem to rule out someone like Paul, who claimed that he had received such confirmation directly from God and not from men (Gal. 1:12)."²⁵

Guthrie is not quite as dogmatic, saying, "Whereas this statement in 2:3 could possibly be interpreted to include the apostle Paul, it is not the most natural understanding of it. Paul would never have admitted having received the core of his gospel second hand, as this author appears to do."²⁶

Actually, the author employed the *aorist* passive form of the verb βεβαίωω (*bebaioo*) which denotes the corroboration, validation, or verification of truth. The verb occurs seven other times (Mk. 16:20; Rom. 15:8; I Cor. 1:6, 8; II Cor. 1:21; Col. 2:7; and Heb. 13:9), receiving the *KJV* translation of "confirm"²⁷ (4x), "establish" (2x), or "stablish" (1x). The verb is important since the author needed the original audience of the Lord Jesus to confirm, verify, substantiate, corroborate, or validate the truth that he had received from the Lord. Many commentators seem to misunderstand the nature of the βεβαίωω verb involved, positing the meaning of another verb, namely "to deliver" (παράδιδωμι *paradidomi*). They interpret "confirm" to mean "deliver," arguing that the first generation Christians "delivered" the teachings of Christ to the second generation Christians, which practice did occur, but not in the unique case of Paul!

Paul asseverated that God had saved him, called him, and revealed divine truth to him, saying, "For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12) and "To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:16). Following this revelation, the Apostle eventually met with Peter, as he stated, saying,

²³Titus' brother Domitian began to reign in AD 81, and increased persecution against Christians including the Apostle John, who was banished to the isle of Patmos by AD 95 (cf. Rev. 1:9).

²⁴Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary. Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 8.

²⁵John MacArthur, *Hebrews. MacArthur Bible Studies* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publ. Co., 2006), p. 1.

²⁶Guthrie, p. 23.

²⁷The English word "confirm" gives the sense of "co-firming up" or "co-establishing" truth, necessitating two sources for one to verify the other.

“Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother” (Gal. 1:17-19). When Paul went to “see”²⁸ Peter, the two apostles no doubt shared truth, Peter verifying to Paul the teaching of the Lord, such as the details of the Lord’s Supper. Peter was an eyewitness to the Lord’s Table (Mt. 26:26-29) and corroborated truths to Paul of which he already was aware, as he stated, saying, “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me” (I Cor. 11:23-25).

In addition, Paul visited James the Lord’s brother who was also an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, and who confirmed truth to the Apostle to the Gentiles. Both Peter and James heard the Lord Jesus Christ’s teaching on “so great salvation” (Heb. 2:3) and they confirmed, verified, substantiated, corroborated, and validated the truth to Paul, who received the same truth from the resurrected Christ. Paul is the only one who received special revelatory training in truth (including the mysteries [Eph. 1:9, *et al*]) and could say that the first generation saints “confirmed” the truths he had been taught by the Saviour. Paul was the only person who could have possibly written Hebrews, which truth confirms Peter’s revelation (II Pet. 3:15-16). Hebrew 2:3 is not an argument against Paul as author, but is the irrefutable contextual argument that he is the only possible candidate!

The ongoing assault upon the Pauline authorship is demonically leveled at the divine Author to cause confusion in interpretation and its subsequent application.²⁹ The real issue revolves around any arguments that can refute the Pauline authorship. There are none! The testimony of Peter and the exegesis of Heb. 2:3 demand the Pauline authorship of *Hebrews*. The author of *Hebrews* was a spiritual giant of the first century who was a Jewish Christian with vast knowledge of the OT Scriptures. Paul wrote his “any word of exhortation” to the Jews—the *Epistle to the Hebrews*!

Date

The date of the writing of Hebrews occurred in the author’s lifetime, of course. The exegesis of Hebrews interprets that the book was written by Paul while he was in his second Roman imprisonment and while Peter was still alive, but after Timothy’s release, and before AD 70, or about AD 64-67.

CHRISTOLOGY

Πρός Ἑβραίους focuses on the high priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ, entitling Him at least seventeen times as “high priest” (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14, 15; 5:5, 10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11), “priest” (Heb. 5:6; 7:3, 11, 15, 17, 21), or “great priest” (Heb. 10:21). Paul referred to Him as “Jesus” some fourteen times (Heb. 2:9; 3:1; 4:4, 14; 6:20; 7:22; 10:10, 19; 12:2, 24; 13:8, 12, 20, 21), emphasizing the “dreaded” name associated with the man from Nazareth as the Jews’ Messiah. Other titles such as “Son” (12x), “Lord” (5x), “Mediator” (3x) and “God” (Heb. 1:8) are applied to the Saviour. Special titles such as “forerunner” (Heb. 6:20), “that Great Shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20), “firstborn” (Heb. 1:6), and “apostle” (Heb. 3:1) occur also in the *Epistle*.

²⁸The *hapax legomena* verb ἱστορέω (*historeo*) refers to the activity of historicizing, or discussing historical narrative, such as the life of Christ.

²⁹The numerous commentaries that attempt to interpret and apply *Hebrews* to Christian churches in general or even to Gentile Christians vouch for this criticism.

Christ is the God-Man Mediator while at the same time the eternal and immutable deity of the Triune Godhead (Heb. 13:8). The whole OT was Christological in nature pointing to the fulfillment of the everlasting Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rev. 14:6; Lk. 24:44). Abel pointed to His shed blood, Enoch pointed to His resurrection, and Abraham pointed to His death, burial, and resurrection in a figure (Heb. 11:4-19 ff.).

OUTLINE

“The Superiority of Christ”

- I. Christ is Superior to the Prophets (1:1-3)
 - A. The Preachment of Christ (1:1-2)
 - B. The Person of Christ (1:2-3)
- II. Christ is Superior to the Angels (1:4-2:18)
 - A. In His Deity (1:4-14)
 - B. In His Humanity (2:1-18)
- III. Christ is Superior to Moses and Joshua (3:1-4:13)
 - A. He is Superior in Glory over Moses (3:1-6)
 - B. He is Superior in Rest over Joshua (3:7-4:13)
- IV. Christ is Superior to Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:37)
 - A. He has a Superior Position (4:14-16)
 - B. He has a Superior Order (5:1-7:28)
 - C. He has a Superior Covenant (8:1-13)
 - D. He has a Superior Sacrificial System (9:1-10:37)
- V. Christ is Superior to the Life of Unbelief (10:38-13:25)
 - A. The Life of Faith is Superior (10:38-12:2)
 - B. The Knowledge of Chastisement is Superior (12:3-29)
 - C. The Practice of Christianity is Superior (13:1-25)

THE FLOW OF HEBREWS

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Jews (Covenant Community) of the Jerusalem church, formalizing his synagogue sermon *“any word of exhortation”* as *“the word of exhortation,”* namely, *“the Epistle to the Hebrews.”* Asserting the truth that God had now spoken through His Son, the Apostle revealed that the Son was better than the angels according to the *Tanak* (**Chapter One**).

Although the angels accompanied the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai, the signs and wonders of the Holy Ghost accompanied the Son’s greater and concluding revelatory truth. Having established the truth about the Son, Paul identified Him as Jesus Who was made a little lower than the angels in the incarnation to give salvation to man through His sacrificial suffering. The Son identified with His disciples as He sang with them in the assembly before His death, becoming the faithful High Priest (**Chapter Two**).

He was both Apostle (over His church [the assembly]) and High Priest (over His house [Covenant Community]). Nevertheless, the first generation of the Covenant Community failed to find physical rest in the Promised Land because of unbelief, and the last generation of the Covenant Community was on the verge of not finding spiritual rest because of unbelief (**Chapter Three**).

The rest would come from trusting in the word of God and what it says about a better High Priest (**Chapter Four**). Specifically, the Scripture declared that the Son was the priest of the order of Melchisedec,

fulfilled as He learned perfect obedience to offer eternal salvation. Nevertheless, some in the mixed multitude were un-regenerated “babes” hearing but not believing (**Chapter Five**).

They knew the teachings of the *Tanak* and rejected them, as did the first generation of the Covenant Community. The last generation of the Covenant Community was privileged as well with revelatory enlightenment, the manna from heaven, the working of the Holy Ghost, the word of God and prophecies. Some members nevertheless were re-crucifying their Messiah with every animal offering, hardening their hearts to immediate damnation. Others, however, believed the seed promise through Abraham and recognized that Jesus was the Melchisedecian High Priest (**Chapter Six**).

The priestly order of Melchisedec was superior to the priestly order of Levi in many ways (**Chapter Seven**). Furthermore, the Melchisedecian High Priest had the New Covenant which was superior to the Old Covenant (**Chapter Eight**). The old order had passed away with its temporal and ineffective limitations. Nevertheless, Christ ratified the New Covenant with His own blood fulfilling the patterns in heaven, His singular death providing eternal redemption (**Chapter Nine**).

The shadows of the Old Covenant were fulfilled according to Scripture with the final and singular sacrifice of Jesus Christ, repudiating the continual practices of animal sacrifices. For those professing to be Christ’s disciples in the Jerusalem church, and who also offered animals, tread under foot the blood of the New Covenant and doomed themselves to fiery damnation. Rather than draw back into Judaism, the Jews needed to believe to the saving of the soul (**Chapter Ten**).

Paul explained and then gave examples of faith, moving basically through at least eighteen named saints plus others, who were justified by faith the *Tanak* (**Chapter Eleven**). He concluded with the greatest example of faith in affliction and temptation with Jesus. Difficulties come to saints as God chastens His children, helping them realize He is testing their faith. Rejecting truth and hardening one’s heart will result in irreversible damnation as it did with Esau. Faith in Jesus takes the Jew from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion and all of the inherent blessings. God’s kingdom was immoveable in their chaotic world; therefore they needed to fear the consuming fire of God (**Chapter Twelve**).

Finally, Paul appealed to the Jerusalem assembly to practice love through faith and obedience, remembering strangers, prisoners, and sufferers, while avoiding immorality. The Jerusalem church was to respect the pastors, avoid heresy, and maintain proper spiritual worship, realizing that they were identifying with Jesus outside of Judaism. The author concluded with several personal notes confirming the Pauline authorship (**Chapter Thirteen**).

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One

(Christ is Superior to the Prophets and Angels)

The first chapter divides into the Son’s superiority over the prophets (vv. 1-3) and over the angels (vv. 4-14). Paul’s first sentence runs from verses one to four giving the unique and majestic opening to the exalted Son of God. According to Paul, the Son was a prophet, heir, creator, representative, upholder, priest, and king. Christ is better than the prophets as the last prophet, and is superior to the angels since none was a Son in the seed promise (*vide* Ps. 2:7; II Sam. 7:14), worthy of angelic worship (Ps. 97:7), creator of angels (Ps. 104:4), and called God as was Jesus (cf. Ps. 45:6-7). As God, He was the Anointed One Who created all things (cf. Ps. 102:25-27), and also was the Exalted One (cf. Ps. 110:1), Whose angels served Christ and the heirs of salvation.

Chapter Two **(Christ is Superior to the Angels in His Humanity)**

Not only is Christ Superior to the angels because of His deity, but also because of his humanity. He was perfect God and perfect man. The salvation that He procured in His humanity was predicted by the angels (Heb. 2:2) and included the millennial kingdom which will be ruled by the resurrected Christ and resurrected redeemed (Heb. 2:8). Finally the author identified the Son as Jesus (Heb. 2:9). Humbled Christ and the redeemed will be exalted because of the Lord's death (Heb. 2:10). The Lord Jesus Christ is in unity with redeemed mankind, not with the angelic realm (Heb. 2:11-12), and identifies with men as brethren because He partook of flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14), not the nature of angels (Heb. 2:16). As the God-man, He suffered so that He could be the high priest for the people (Heb. 2:17-18).

Chapter Three **(Christ is Superior to Moses and Joshua)**

In comparison to Moses, Christ was faithful to God as was Moses. However, the Lord Jesus was the builder of the house (biblical Judaism) whereas Moses was but a mere servant in the house (Heb. 3:2-6). The first generation of the "Covenant Community" hardened its collective heart and suffered the catastrophe of unbelief (Dt. 1:19-46).³⁰ They were destroyed in the wilderness as Ps. 95:7-11 depicted. The last generation of the "Covenant Community" (c. AD 30 - AD 70)³¹ was on the brink of the same unbelief and resultant judgment of destruction (AD 70). What further light could Christ have given the Pharisees and scribes to convince them that He was their Messiah? He therefore condemned them with the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost (Mt. 12:14-32), and Paul's generation was flirting with "*the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*" (Mt. 12:31) as well. He pled with the last generation, saying, "*Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness*" (Heb. 3:8).

Chapter Four **(Christ is Superior over Joshua, Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood)**

Christ is superior over Joshua who could not effectuate Rest. Rest is available to the believer in all dispensations but it must be obtained by faith not works (Heb. 4:10-11). Joshua did not lead all the Israelites into rest because of the mixed multitude of unbeliever with believer, and consequently not all of the Canaanites were destroyed. The true rest comes from complete obedience to the powerful word of God (Heb. 4:12).

Christ is superior over Aaron and his priesthood. Christ was better than Aaron because He had a superior position in that Christ "*passed into the heavens*" and was tempted without sinning (Heb. 4:14-15). Because the Lord Jesus is sympathetic with mankind but in heaven, He is open to the prayer requests for mercy and help.

³⁰Even when Israel repented and attempted to obey God's judgment was final on them (especially vv. 42-46).

³¹Although these professing Jews were baptized church members (cf. Jn. 6:66), they needed to relinquish Jewish doctrine and practice that compromised their professed Christianity. For instance, a baptized Jew could not continue to maintain faith in Jesus Christ if he were to continue to offer animal sacrifices and thereby rejecting Christ's once for all sacrifice (Heb. 10:10).

Chapter Five (Christ is Superior to Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood)

Christ is superior to Aaron because of His Priestly Order. Although the Aaronic priesthood required infirm men to be chosen of God, Christ was both God and man chosen by God. He was in a superior priesthood—“*the order of Melchisedec.*” He manifested His calling to this order by perfectly responding to the temptation of suffering and obeying each time. The Lord was from the tribe of Judah not Levi, and therefore could not be a Levitical priest. He and Melchisedec were both men (I Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:4) and king-priests (Zech. 6:12-13; Gen. 14:18) appointed by God (Heb. 7: 21), both “*the king of righteousness*” and “*the king of peace*” (Isa. 11:5-9; Heb. 7:2).

Because of the professed Jewish Christians’ spiritual immaturity, Paul needed to exhort his audience with the first of two parenthetical warnings (Heb. 5:11-6:20) before he resumed discussing the Melchisedecian order (Heb. 7:1 ff.). Instead of being teachers, they were babes in their spiritual growth struggling over “*the first principles*” (Heb. 5:12 ff.).

Chapter Six (Christ is Superior to Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood [be warned about apostasy])

His parenthetical warning (from 5:11 and extending to 6:8)³² exhorted his hearers not to apostatize. Paul urged the unsaved Jews to go on unto perfection, and become perfected Jews, leaving the familiar truths of OT theology and advancing in the new revelation about Christ, believing that Jesus of Nazareth was also their High Priest (Heb. 6:1-2). With a series of four *aorist* participles he revealed their spiritual privileges from which they dare not turn. Paul affirmed that his audience, just like the first generation of “the covenant community,” had been “*enlightened,*” “*tasted,*” “*made partakers,*” and “*tasted.*” The first generation had the *Shekinah* glory (Ex. 40:34), the wilderness manna (Ex. 16:15), the “upon” ministry of the Holy Ghost (Neh. 9:20), and revelatory truth (Rom. 3:2). The final generation of the “Covenant Community” had Jesus of Nazareth as the light to the world (Jn. 8:12), as the heavenly manna (Jn. 6:42), the Holy Ghost Whom they blasphemed (Mt. 12:31-32), and the Word of God (Jn. 1:1-18; I Jn. 1:1) Who spoke of powers to come (Mt. 8:11).

Those who “*fall away*” (παρὰπεσόντας), the Apostle warned, would be damned because there is no new light that the Lord could give that would persuade them otherwise!³³ In the group of the mixed multitude of unsaved “babes” and perfected Jews, Paul was convinced that the believing remnant would not turn away, since he used the pronouns “*you*” (Heb. 6:9) and “*they*” (Heb. 6:6). The first generation apostatized and was doomed by unbelief at Kadeshbarnea; would this last generation follow in apostasy (cf. Dt. 1:1-46)? The fruit of belief is salvation, the writer affirmed (Heb. 6:9 ff.). The Lord’s promise to Abraham was immutable, and those that believed in the forerunner Jesus Who entered into heaven after the order of Melchisedec shall be safe (Heb. 6:13-20).

Certainly the case could be made for Judas Iscariot as the greatest example of the classic Jewish apostate of the last generation of the Covenant Community. Judas was one of the chosen apostles who was authorized to

³²The Apostle Paul coined six *hapax legomena* in this warning section indicating the uniqueness of the situation. In v. 6 he used words behind the *KJV* equivalents of “*fall away,*” “*to renew,*” and “*seeing they crucify afresh,*” in v. 7 he used “*herbs,*” and “*it is dressed,*” and in v. 8 he used “*burned.*”

³³Heb. 6 seems to be Paul’s version of Christ’s warning of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (cf. Mt. 12:31-32).

perform supernatural miracles to testify of the presence of the Messiah, as Scripture asserted, saying, “*And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease*” (Mt. 10:1).³⁴ Judas was in the “*true vine*” nationally but not personally, since he was not clean (Jn. 13:10). The Lord Jesus taught the true vine illustration with Judas in mind, saying, “*I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you...If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned*” (Jn. 15:1-3,6). Judas repented to the wrong audience, killed himself, and went to his own place (cf. Mt.27:3-5; Acts 1:16-20). The Bible reveals several examples of Jewish apostates, including Esau, the first generation of the Covenant Community, rebels during David’s lifetime, Judas, and the last generation of the Covenant Community.

EXCERPT

Verse 6:1

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.

Without doubt the next eight verses are difficult for many to interpret if the exegete does not understand the identity of the author and the audience.³⁵ Paul put in writing his synagogue message entitled “*a word of exhortation*” (Acts 13:15; Heb. 13:22) to a mixed audience of unsaved Jews (“*a babe*”) and perfected Jews (those “*of full age*”). He was writing to the last generation of the Covenant Community, warning them to not reject the light of signs and wonders confirming God’s word as did the first generation. The unsaved Jews had abundant knowledge about the shadows and figures of the *Tanak*, but refused Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment. They apparently had an initial profession of faith in Jesus but now pressure caused them to doubt. Apostasy was at hand; would they continue to equivocate in their profession and practice?³⁶

With the inferential conjunction διὸ (*vide* 3:7), the Apostle exhorted the unperfected Jews in his audience to build upon their previous doctrine by “*leaving*” (ἀφέντες³⁷ *aphentes*) this revelational truth known by all Jews. They now had new revelation which had been given to them through God’s Son about the Son (1:1-2); it would be tragic for the Jews to stop short with the shadows. Apparently alluding back to “*the first principles of the oracles of God*” (5:12), the writer referred to them with the expression “*the principles of the doctrine of Christ*”³⁸ (τὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγον *ton tes arches tou christou logon*). The “*doctrine*” (τὸν λόγον *ton logon*) of the Messiah, or the “*Anointed*” (מָשִׁיחַ *mashiyach*) was replete in the OT. The

³⁴There is no biblical reason to argue that Judas could not be involved personally with messianic signs and wonders. In the OT, unsaved Balaam prophesied as did unsaved King Saul.

³⁵For an overview of the main interpretations, see Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), pp. 146-148.

³⁶In the time of great national apostasy, Elijah queried, saying, “*How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word*” (I Ki. 18:21).

³⁷The *aorist* participle form comes from ἀφίημι *aphiemi* (146x). The connoted meaning is “to depart” or “to abandon.” See Heb. 2:8.

³⁸The KJV expression “*the doctrine of Christ*” occurs also in II Jn. 1:9.

adjective $\pi\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$ occurs thirty-nine times in the *Tanak* (Lev. 4:3 to Hab. 3:13), referring to kings (I Sam. 24:7), to priests (Lev. 4:3), and as well to Jehovah's Messiah (Ps. 2:2; Dan. 9:25-26). The NT believers were looking for the Μεσσίας *Messias* (Jn. 1:41 and 4:25), that is "*the Christ*"³⁹ (Mt. 2:4; Jn. 4:29, 42).

With his next hortatory subjunctive, Paul urged his audience forward, saying, "*let us go on unto perfection*" (ἐπὶ τὴν τελειότητα⁴⁰ φερώμεθα⁴¹ *epi ten teleiotea pherometha*). As the teacher, the writer wanted his audience to be carried along (passive participle) with him as he revealed the divine will for all of his audience to be perfected Jews. The goal to which all would be borne by the Lord's word (Heb. 4:12) would be "the perfection." Further, he dissuaded the effort to remain in and repeat about the shadows and figures with the expression "*not laying again*" (μὴ πάλιν καταβαλλόμενοι⁴² *me palin kataballomenoi*) "*the foundation*" (θεμέλιον⁴³ *themelion*) of six genitive nouns representing basic truths. The six "*first principles*" (Heb. 5:12) are all genitive case nouns that the writer enumerated.

1) "*Of repentance*" (μετανοίας⁴⁴ *metanoias*) "*from dead works*" (ἀπὸ νεκρῶν⁴⁵ ἔργων *apo nekron ergon*). Although the children of Israel practiced external piety with an alleged repentance from disobedience to the law, their actions were disingenuous. The Jews created certain holy days for fasting (Zech. 7:5-7) and yet Jehovah repudiated this dead work, saying through the former prophet Isaiah, "*If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it*" (Isa. 58:13-14). Also, the present generation of Pharisees practiced *Corban*, and brought the wrath of the Lord, Who stated, saying, "*But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye*" (Mk. 7:11-13).⁴⁶ Often, the Jews turning from disobeying the law was superficial and hypocritical, as Paul referred to Esau's "*repentance*" (Heb. 12:16-17).

2) "*Of faith*" (πίστεως⁴⁷ *pisteos*) "*towards God*" (ἐπὶ Θεόν *epi theon*). The nation of Israel started off as monotheistic (Ezk. 16:8 ff.) but eventually turned to polytheism under Jeroboam (I Ki. 12:28 ff.). Faith in God the Father without faith in the God the Son was not sufficient for salvation, as the Lord Jesus repeatedly

³⁹Cf. Heb. 3:1, 6, 14; 5:5.

⁴⁰This articular noun occurs also only in Col. 3:14. It is cognate with the τελειόω verb "to be perfect" (see Heb. 5:9).

⁴¹This is the only example of the first person plural, present passive subjunctive of the verb φέρω (64x) in the NT.

⁴²The present participle from καταβάλλω *kataballo* (3x) denotes "to throw down" a foundation.

⁴³The noun θεμέλιος *themelios* occurs 13x in the NT. Cf. Heb. 11:10.

⁴⁴The noun μετάνοια *metanoia* occurs two other times in *Hebrews* (6:6; 12:17) in its total of 24x in the NT. It means a change of mind and is required as one of two conditions in conversion (see Mk. 1:15).

⁴⁵The prepositional phrase occurs also in Heb. 9:14.

⁴⁶The Lord excoriated the Pharisees for their empty religion, saying, "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*" (Mt. 23:23).

⁴⁷The πίστις noun occurs 244x in the NT and some 32x in *Hebrews* (see note on 4:2). The Scriptures indicate that there are two levels of "faith" or of the cognate verb "believing." For instance, Luke revealed that Simon "*believed*" and was baptized (Acts 8:13), but still he was unsaved, being in "*the bond of iniquity*" (8:23; see also Jn. 20:30-31).

challenged the last generation of the Covenant Community, saying, “*I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him*” (Jn. 10:30-31) and “*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me*” (Jn. 14:1). James repeated the biblical challenge to the scattered Jewish churches, saying, “*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*” (Jam. 2:19-20). Examples of biblical OT faith appeared in Heb. 11:1 ff.).

Verse 6:2

Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

The Apostle continued to enumerate the first principles with the next four genitive nouns.

3) “*Of the doctrine*” (διδαχῆς⁴⁸ *didaches*) “*of baptisms*” (βαπτισμῶν⁴⁹ *baptismon*).⁵⁰ The teaching about “*baptisms*” or ritual washings permeates the *Tanakh*. For instance, the priests needed to be washed, as the *Torah* revealed, saying, “*And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water. And he put upon him the coat, and girded him with the girdle, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod upon him, and he girded him with the curious girdle of the ephod, and bound it unto him therewith*” (Lev. 8:6-7). Individual lepers needed to be washed as well, as the *Torah* required, saying, “*And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean: and after that he shall come into the camp, and shall tarry abroad out of his tent seven days. But it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off: and he shall wash his clothes, also he shall wash*” (Lev. 14:8-9).⁵¹ Clothes needed to be washed for special service, as Moses revealed, saying, “*And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever*” (Num. 19:10). Mark revealed specific details about ablutions among the Pharisees, saying, “*For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables*” (Mk. 7:3-4)

The NT noun for the church ordinance of water immersion is βάπτισμα⁵² *baptisma* (22x) and the cognate verb is βαπτίζω⁵³ *baptizo* (80x). The writer’s use of the plural noun βαπτισμῶν has caused great confusion

⁴⁸Of the 30x διδαχή *didache* occurs in the NT, this is the first of two references (Heb. 13:9). It refers to “doctrine.”

⁴⁹The plural noun βαπτισμός *baptismos* occurs also in Mk. 7:4 (“washing”), 7:8 (“washing”); and Heb. 9:10 (“washings”). It refers to dipping something for ceremonial washing. The Latin *Vulgate* rendered it *baptismatum*. In Col. 2:12 the CT gave the perverted reading for the noun as βαπτισμῶ *baptismo* rather than βαπτισματι *baptismati*, confusing the act of ceremonial washing with the ordinance of baptism.

⁵⁰Tyndale translated the Greek according to word order, saying, “of baptyme of doctryne.”

⁵¹Believers needed to wash hands (Ps. 26:6).

⁵²The CT erroneously used the wrong Greek noun for the reference in Col. 2:12. Instead of the TR reading βαπτισματι *baptismati* (“baptism”), the CT employed βαπτισμῶ *baptismo* (washing).

⁵³This verb βαπτίζω is always used for the church ordinance. Other verbs for the application of liquids or other things are ῥαντίζω *rantizo* (“sprinkling” [e.g., Heb. 9:13]), νίπτω *nipito* (“wash” [e.g., Mk. 7:3]), and ἐκχέω *ekcheo* (“pour out” [e.g., Acts 2:17]), but these verbs are never used for the church ordinance.

among Protestant commentators.⁵⁴ Ryrie makes the inane theological note on this verse in *The Ryrie Study Bible*, saying, “The distinction between various baptisms is a necessary part of basic Christian doctrine (e.g., the baptism of Jewish proselytes, baptism by John the Baptist, Christian baptism).”⁵⁵

4) “*Of laying on*” (ἐπιθέσεως⁵⁶ *epitheseos*) “*of hands*” (χειρῶν *cheiron*). The practice of the “*laying on of hands*” occurred on several significant occasions in the OT. For instance, the elders of Israel received instruction to lay hands on a sacrifice for national sins, as Jehovah ordered, saying, “*And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the LORD: and the bullock shall be killed before the LORD*” (Lev. 4:15). And again, the LORD commanded, saying, “*And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness*” (Lev. 16:21). In addition, the Israelites laid hands upon their spiritual leaders the Levites, as the Lord commanded, saying “*And thou shalt bring the Levites before the LORD: and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites*” (Num. 8:10). Moreover, Jehovah required Moses to lay his hands upon his successor, as Scripture stated, saying, “*And Moses did as the LORD commanded him: and he took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation: And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses*” (Num. 27:22-23).⁵⁷

This practice of “*laying on of hands*” identified the participant with the subject, and also authorized the subject to represent the participant. The OT practice was the antecedent to the NT practice of the spiritual leaders laying hands on the officers of the assembly, namely the deacons (Acts 6:6) and the elders or pastors. Scripture stated for the latter case, saying, “*Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery*” (I Tim. 4:14). This verse requires elders of the “*presbytery*” (τοῦ πρεσβυτερίου *tu presbuterion*) to ordain pastors (cf. II Tim. 1:6).

5) “*Of resurrection*” (ἀναστάσεως⁵⁸ *anastaseos*) “*of the dead*” (νεκρῶν *nekron*). Three key passages in the *Tanak* taught the resurrection, namely in the books of Job, Isaiah, and Daniel. Job revealed the reality of the resurrection, saying, “*For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God*” (Job 19:25-26). Isaiah revealed the reality of the resurrection for the chosen people Israel, saying, “*Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead*” (Isa. 26:19). Daniel revealed the timing of the reality of the

⁵⁴Kistemaker states, “The New Testament does refer to the baptism of John the Baptist...that was still practiced more than twenty-five years after his death...Also there is the Jewish rite of baptism for proselytes,” *Hebrews. New Testament Commentary*, p. 154. He asserts that there was the practice of Jewish proselyte baptism as do many others with no biblical evidence. There is no OT antecedent to John’s NT baptism, and there is no example of a “Jewish rite of proselyte baptism” in the NT!

⁵⁵Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible, King James Version* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 1736. After the last of four cases of the Lord Jesus baptizing believers subsequent to their salvation in the Holy Ghost (cf. Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:5; and 11:16) to authenticate His new place of worship and presence (Acts 2, 8, 10-11, and 19), Paul revealed that the remaining baptism of John (i.e., that of the Great Commission [Mt. 28:19-20]) was the “*one baptism*” (Eph. 4:5).

⁵⁶The noun ἐπίθεσις *epithesis* occurs also in Acts 8:18; I Tim. 4:14; and II Tim. 1:6, and means “placing upon.”

⁵⁷Cf. “*And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses*” (Dt. 34:9).

⁵⁸The compound noun ἀνάστασις *anastasis* occurs 42x in the NT and means “stand again.” Cf. Heb. 11:35.

resurrection for the chosen people as well as for unbelievers, saying, “*And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*” (Dan. 12:1-2).

The Jewish leaders of the last generation of the Covenant Community, the Pharisees, believed in the resurrection, as did Saul of Tarsus, yet were unsaved. Luke recorded the truth about the Pharisees and the Sadducees, saying, “*For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both*” (Acts 23:8; see also v. 6). In fact, the writer of *Hebrews* revealed that the doctrine of the resurrection was well known and believed by OT saints, saying later in this very book, “*Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection*” (Heb. 11:35).

6) “*Of eternal*” (αἰωνίου⁵⁹ *aioniou*) *judgment*” (κρίματος⁶⁰ *krimatos*). Certainly the Israelites knew of the doctrinal teaching about eternal judgment of the wicked from passages such as David’s declaration, saying, “*The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God*” (Ps. 9:17). They also knew from experience, as revealed concerning Korah and his associates in the *Torah*, saying, “*And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men: and they became a sign*” (Num. 26:10). Furthermore, Jude revealed about Enoch’s warning, saying, “*And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.*” (Jude 1:14-15).⁶¹

The six “*first principles of the oracles of God*” (Heb. 5:12) permeated the *Tanak* and were foundational to Jewish theology. The fact that the nation of Israel knew them, memorized them, and taught them is discounted since both the first generation and the last generation of the Covenant Community did not believe them to the saving of the soul. The Pharisee *par excellence*, Saul of Tarsus testified about his pre-conversion spiritual deadness, saying, “*Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless*” (Phil. 3:4-6). In fact, in Paul’s audience along with church members and their family and friends may well have been Pharisees. They had the basic facts of the *Tanak*, and the author did not need to repeat them. Knowing “*the doctrine of Christ*” did not save if the audience would not receive Jesus of Nazareth as the divine Son and trust Him as their High Priest. After all, John asserted, saying, “*He came unto his own, and his own received him not*” (Jn. 1:11).

Verse 6:3

And this will we do, if God permit.

⁵⁹Cf. Heb. 5:9.

⁶⁰This is the only reference to κρίμα *krima* in *Hebrews* out of a total 28x in the NT. It means “*judgment,*” “*damnation,*” or “*condemnation.*”

⁶¹Luke revealed that Paul challenged Felix with “*judgment to come*” (Acts 24:25).

Using the future indicative verb “will we do” (ποιήσομεν⁶² *poiesomen*), Paul purposed to advance some in the audience potentially to becoming “perfected Jews.” With the conjunctive particle “if” (ἐάνπερ [cf. Heb. 3:6, 14]) coupled with the present subjunctive verb “permit” (ἐπιτρέπη⁶³ *epitrepe*) the Apostle desired that the Lord would grant the opportunity and power to accomplish the perfecting of Jews in his audience. Since he was aware of Daniel’s prophecy concerning the imminent judgment and destruction on Jerusalem and the Temple (Dan. 9:24-27), and since he probably heard of rumblings out of Rome toward the Jews (e.g., Heb. 10:27), he may have been unsure if his “word of exhortation” would arrive in Jerusalem on time. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul knew that if Jews would be perfected in Christ, the Lord would have to accomplish it through His word (Rom. 10:1-21).

Verse 6:4

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

Historically, this passage (vv. 4-6) has been a theological conundrum for biblical interpreters. For instance, Protestants have attempted to superimpose various soteriological systems upon these verses positing the notions either that Christians may lose their salvation or that the warnings in *Hebrews* are hypothetical. Hermeneutical confusion always abounds when the immediate and greater contexts of Scripture are misunderstood or ignored or both. Failure to understand the audience, author, purpose, and OT background of *Hebrews* will perpetuate false interpretations.⁶⁴

The Apostle Paul, as a saved church member of the last generation of the Covenant Community, warned this generation of Jews in Jerusalem who professed Jesus as the Son of God and their High Priest, about coming judgment from the Lord through the Romans upon those who continued to trust in the shadows and figures of the Levitical sacrifices and priesthood. The wording that the writer used in these three verses came directly from the *Tanak*, namely from Nehemiah. His inscripturated words reviewed the apostasy of the first generation of the Covenant Community, saying, “*Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations; Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not*” (Neh. 9:18-21). For forty years the first generation of the Covenant Community experienced many supernatural miracles and yet it hardened its collective heart and rejected the LORD’s goodness in salvation. Now this last generation has similar spiritual privileges and yet was

⁶²This is the first person plural, future indicative of the servile verb ποιέω (576x). One reading of the CT is the first person plural, subjunctive aorist ποιήσωμεν *poiesomen* (“let us do so”).

⁶³The verb ἐπιτρέπω *epitrepo* occurs 19x in the NT, but only here in *Hebrews*.

⁶⁴For instance, the Lord Jesus’ allegorical discourse about Him being “*the true vine*” must be understood in the context of His audience (Jn. 15:1-6). His teaching was based on the various imageries from the *Tanak* depicting the nation of Israel (Covenant Community) related with the vine and the vineyard (Ps. 80:8-16; Isa. 5:1-7; Ezk. 15:1-8). The exegesis of the man not abiding in the Lord yet a branch in the vine finds interpretative fulfillment in Judas who was connected to the Lord Jesus nationally (a Jew) and officially (an apostle), but not personally (he was not clean [cf. Jn. 13:10 with Jn. 15:3]).

apostatizing to the point of no return. Once Paul's "*word of exhortation*" reached the church in Jerusalem and his warnings perpetuated, those who continued to offer animal sacrifices and trust in the Levitical priesthood were permanently doomed with no hope of salvation!

As well, the Lord Jesus Christ warned the leaders of the last generation of the Covenant Community, the Pharisees and scribes, about attributing His supernatural work to Beelzebub. Those that continued would commit the sin of "*the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*" and be doomed in their lifetime and beyond (Mt. 12:31-32). For the greatly enlightened and privileged people of Israel who desired signs came comparable judgment upon those who rejected the truth confirmed by the supernatural miracles. For those that perpetually hardened their hearts against illuminated truth, their doom was finalized. No additional miracle would change the hardened heart, and so the apostate doomed himself as the LORD brought to fruition the final and permanent end of the heart of apostasy.

In Paul's lengthy sentence (vv. 4-6), he introduced the main verb "*to renew*" in verse six, after negating it and qualifying the audience with a series of four *aorist* participles. Having thrust the adjective "*impossible*" (ἀδύνατον⁶⁵ *adunaton*) in the grammatically prominent position, the writer began to focus on his severe warning for apostasy. He used the non-descript masculine plural article "*those*" (τοὺς *tous*)⁶⁶ with the four masculine plural substantival participles to denote spiritual privileges of those in his audience. The first modifying *aorist* participle is "*enlightened*" (φωτισθέντας⁶⁷ *photisthentas*), qualified with the adverb "*once*" ἅπαξ⁶⁸ *hapax*). Since the student of Gamaliel seemed to paraphrase Nehemiah's summary statement (Neh. 9:19-21; see comments above) about the privileges that the good LORD bestowed on rebellious Israel in the wilderness, it behooved the audience familiar with this truth to take heed. The first generation and the last generation of the Covenant Community, along with David's generation (Ps. 95:7-11), had the proclivity to harden hearts in the midst of great blessed illumination. The Jews in the wilderness had the great privilege of being led by the presence of Jehovah manifested as "*the pillar of the cloud...the pillar of fire...to shew them light*" (Neh. 9:19). They were "*once enlightened*" and yet rebelled against Jehovah at great consequence of judgment. Likewise, the last generation of the Covenant Community had the presence of Jehovah in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in their midst, claiming "*I am the Light of the world*" (Jn. 8:12).⁶⁹ The theological motif that the Lord Jesus was "*the light*" is replete in the NT (e.g., Mt. 4:16; Lk. 2:32; Jn. 1:4, 5, 7, 9; 3:19-20; 9:5; 12:46; Acts 13:47; I Jn. 1:5; 2:8; Rev. 21:23). In spite of having the Light of the world in their midst, the first century Jews continuously rejected the Lord and consequently hardened their hearts beyond any hope of salvation. What more could the Lord have done to convince this generation which was "*once enlightened*" by His presence that He must be received as their Saviour?

⁶⁵The *alpha*-privitive compound adjective from ἀδύνατος (10x) literally means "no power" and occurs three other times in *Hebrews*. Things that are impossible in Paul's "*word of exhortation*" are repenting from final apostasy (6:4-6), lying by God (6:18), the taking away of sins by animals sacrifices (10:14), and pleasing God without faith (11:6).

⁶⁶In English translations the editor used various pronouns such as "*us*," "*we*," "*those*," "*themselves*" and "*you*," forcing the reader to recognize the contextual subject of such. Even in the Greek the original audience had to determine to whom Paul was addressing any and every statement.

⁶⁷Paul used the unique passive form of the verb φωτίζω *photizo* (11x), denoting that God was the One Who enlightened them (cf. also 10:32).

⁶⁸The adverb ἅπαξ occurs 15x in the NT, eight of which occur in *Hebrews* (*vide* also 9:7, 26, 27, 28; 10:2; 12:26, and 27).

⁶⁹The Lord Jesus identified with Jehovah saying Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς *ego eimi to phos*.

The second masculine plural, *aorist* participle “*have tasted*” (γευσάμενους⁷⁰ *geusamenous*) is middle rather than passive voice, connoting a deliberate and initial experience but not necessarily denoting complete consummation of the “*heavenly gift*” (τῆς δωρεᾶς⁷¹ τῆς ἐπουρανίου⁷² *tes doreas tes epouraniou*). With the background of Nehemiah’s summary, the activity to which Paul alluded was the wilderness Israelites tasting the heavenly “*manna*” or מַן⁷³ *man* (Neh. 9:20). Likewise, the last generation of the Covenant Community had also experienced firsthand “*the bread of life*” as Jesus affirmed, saying, “*For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world*” (Jn. 6:33), “*I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst*” (Jn. 6:35), and “*This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever*” (Jn. 6:58; cf. vv. 41, 48, 50, 51). The Lord Jesus Christ was “*the bread of life, the manna,*” and “*the heavenly gift*” Whom the Jews actively experienced. Many of the Jews were cognizant of the Gospel yet did not believe it (Heb. 4:2), and many experienced the Lord Jesus personally and yet did not receive Him (cf. Jn. 20:29-31).

The third masculine plural *aorist* passive participle is “*were made*” (γενηθέντας⁷⁴ *genethentas*) “*partakers*” (μετόχους⁷⁵ *metochous*) “*of the Holy Ghost*” (Πνεύματος Ἁγίου *pneumatōs hagiou*)⁷⁶ Again, Nehemiah affirmed about Jehovah that “*Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them*” (Neh. 9:20). David referred to God’s Spirit as good and also as their teacher, saying, “*Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness*” (Ps. 143:10). The LORD bestowed His Spirit on Moses and on the seventy elders, as the *Torah* revealed, saying, “*Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his **holy Spirit** within him?” (Isa. 63:11) and “*And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of **the spirit** which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone*” (Num. 11:17), respectively. Moreover, the Spirit of God came upon the unsaved Balaam⁷⁷ who taught the Israelites messianic prophecy, as Scripture revealed, saying, “*And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the **spirit of God** came upon him*” (Num. 24:2; see v. 17).⁷⁸*

In like manner, the Jews of the last generation of the Covenant Community “*were made partakers of the Holy Ghost*” as they experienced the Spirit’s working through the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, as Luke revealed, saying, “*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him*” (Acts 10:38). So much so,

⁷⁰See note on Heb. 2:9.

⁷¹The noun δωρεά *dorea* occurs 11x in the NT and only here in *Hebrews*.

⁷²See note on Heb. 3:1.

⁷³The noun מַן (= Greek μάνα *manna* [5x]) occurs 14x in the OT and transliterates the Hebrew expression “what is it.” The Jews tasted it for forty years (Ex. 16:35) as it came from heaven, the psalmist attested, saying, “*And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven*” (Ps. 78:24).

⁷⁴See Heb. 1:4.

⁷⁵Cf. Heb. 3:1.

⁷⁶See note on Heb. 2:4.

⁷⁷The NT is very clear that Balaam was a wicked unbeliever who was used of God in spite of his treacherous doctrine and practice (cf. II Pet. 2:15; Jude 1:11; and Rev. 2:14).

⁷⁸King Saul is another example of an unbeliever who partook of the Holy Ghost and prophesied (I Sam. 10:6-12; but consider I Sam. 16:23).

in fact, that the Pharisees charged that Jesus' empowerment to cast demons was not attributed to the Holy Ghost but to Beelzebub, and thereby they committed the sin of blaspheming the Holy Ghost (Mt. 12:24-32). Scripture also revealed that multitudes experienced miracles of the Holy Ghost in healing and by demon exorcism although they were not necessarily saved after the divine miracles. For instance, Luke recorded, saying, "Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them" (Lk. 4:40).

Later, unsaved Caiaphas prophesied messianic truth as did unsaved Balaam many centuries earlier (Num. 24:17), as John's commentary states, saying, "And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." (Jn. 11:49-52). These men had experienced partaking of the Holy Ghost Who gave them prophecy to reveal even though they were unsaved men and associated with the first and last generations of the Covenant Community. For fifteen hundred years "the commonwealth of Israel" (Eph. 2:12), the Covenant Community, had the great privilege of revelatory truth accompanied with divine wonders, and yet many rebelled against Jehovah and hardened their hearts to the impossibility of salvation.

Verse 6:5

And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

For the third and final time in *Hebrews* the Apostle employed the verb "have tasted" (γεύομαι [2:9 and 6:4]) to refer to an actual and intentional experience. The Lord Jesus had experienced death and the Israelites had experienced the heavenly gift of manna/Christ. Using the same *aorist* participle (γευσσάμενους) in this successive verse, the writer asserted that his audience experienced καλὸν⁷⁹ Θεοῦ ῥῆμα⁸⁰ *kalon theou rhema* ("the good word of God"). Again, Nehemiah rehearsed the privileges of the Jews in the wilderness concerning "the good word of God," saying, "Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant" (Neh. 9:13-14). The Greek noun ῥῆμα⁸¹ refers to the spoken word coming from the mouth of the LORD, as He stated concerning Moses, saying, "With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Num. 12:8). Also, the Lord promised to speak through His coming prophet, saying, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him" (Dt. 18:18). Indeed, the nation of Israel had the privilege of being guardian of God's words, as Paul revealed the Jews' "advantage," saying, "Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2).

The Lord Jesus spoke "the good word of God" to the first century Israelites, many of whom rejected in unbelief His revelatory truth. John expressed this reality, saying, "This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat **manna**, and are dead: he that eateth of **this bread** shall live for ever. These

⁷⁹See Heb. 5:14.

⁸⁰Cf. note on Heb. 1:3.

⁸¹The equivalent Hebrew word is אִמְרָה 'imrah (see Prov. 1:21).

things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an **hard saying**; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: **the words** that I speak unto you, **they are spirit, and they are life**. But there are some of you that **believe not**. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time **many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him**” (Jn. 6:58-66).

With the particle “and” (τε) the writer connected the second statement “*the powers of the world to come*” (δυνάμεις⁸² μέλλοντος⁸³ αἰῶνος⁸⁴ *dunameis mellontos aionos*) to the first. The audience had tasted of “*the good word*” and also had tasted of “*the powers*” as well, the author asserted. The expression “*the world to come*” occurs five times in the *KJV* and refers to the Millennium (cf. Mt. 12:32; Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:30; Heb. 2:5; 6:5).⁸⁵ For instance, the Covenant Community experienced the LORD’s supernatural power to heal the sick (Lev. 14:3; Isa. 38:1-5; Lk. 4:40, *et al*) which pre-figured the wellness of the Millennium (Isa. 35:5-6). In addition, the prophet Joel revealed the supernatural powers that would occur in “*the world to come,*” saying, “*And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions*” (Joel 2:28). Both the first and the final generations of the Covenant Community experienced these supernatural powers of God, as Scripture stated concerning the Jews in the wilderness, saying, “*And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream*” (Num. 12:6).

As well, the last generation of the Covenant Community experienced supernatural powers of prophecies (Mt. 13:14), visions (Lk. 1:22), and dreams (Mt. 27:19) pre-figuring the Millennium, even as Peter stated on Pentecost at the first outpouring of the coming of the Spirit which pre-figured the Spirit’s second outpouring, saying, “*But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel*” (Acts 2:16; Joel 2:28-29).

The Apostle Paul knew by biblical history and personal experience that the Covenant Community, both the first and the last generations, had the privileged and blessed corporate and personal relationships with spiritual illumination, heavenly *manna*, the Holy Ghost, the word of God, and the supernatural powers of the coming Millennium. With all of this abundance of spiritual blessings many were like Saul of Tarsus, who rejected divine truth accompanied with signs, and were on the brink of spiritual ruin. His “*word of exhortation*” to Israel was their final warning of severe consequences to the Jews’ apostasy. This was his official effort to put them on “written notice”!

Verse 6:6

If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame

⁸²Cf. Heb. 1:3 and 2:4.

⁸³Paul used here the present participle of the verb μέλλω which denoted reference to the coming of the Millennium in Heb. 2:5.

⁸⁴The root αἰών *aion* usually connotes an unspecified period of time according to context (cf. Heb. 1:8; 5:6), similar to עוֹלָם *`olam* (cf. Ps. 77:5).

⁸⁵See Isa. 2:2 and Rev. 20:2-7 for this glorious age pre-tasted by the Covenant Community.

The Apostle began the conclusion of his warning with the first of three *hapax legomena* participles, the *aorist* participle “*shall fall away*” (παραπεσόντας⁸⁶ *parapesontas*). The context seems to describe a contingency demanding the translation of the conditional “*if*” as employed in the *KJV*. Actually the TR Greek could be rendered “having fallen away” with no “*if*” statement. The translators of the *KJV* followed the *Tyndale* rendering “*yf they faule*” (1534), as did the *Geneva* (1560), the *RSV* (1952), the *NIV* (1973), and the *NKJV* (1982). Since the author interjected between the proposed impossibility and the main verb the condition of apostasy, the lengthy sentence demands the “*if*” contingency. With another rare word, this time the *hapax* present infinitive “*to renew*” (ἀνακαίνιζειν⁸⁷ *anakainizein*), Paul warned about the impossibility “*to renew*” those who have fallen away. By grammatical emphasis the writer intensified the preposition “*again*” (ἀνά *ana*) in the compound verb with the adverb “*again*” (πάλιν) to stress the lack of any second chance. The direct object of the infinitive is the accusative noun “*repentance*” (μετάνοια⁸⁸ *metanoia*). Judas was a past example of one in the Covenant Community who had so hardened his heart that he could not repent and be saved. Scripture revealed this tragic illustration, stating, “*Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*” (Mt. 27:3-5). No doubt Judas regretted his decision to betray the Lord, but he confessed and repented of his sin to the wrong audience—the chief priests and elders. He was beyond the veil of salvation and was doomed. He evinced his hardness of heart by the additional sin of suicide, murdering himself and going to “*his own place*” (cf. Acts 1:18, 25). Later in this *Epistle* the author will use Esau as another biblical example of the impossibility of apostates repenting, saying “*for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears*” (Heb. 12:17).

Paul used the third *hapax legomena* in this sentence, apparently coining the expression “*seeing they crucify afresh*” (ἀνασταυροῦντας⁸⁹ *anastaurountas*). All of the animal sacrifices pre-figured the final sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the “*cross*” (σταυρός⁹⁰ *stauros*). John described the theological message of the cross, saying, “*And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS*” (Jn. 19:19). Paul referenced the Lord’s joyful obedience in submitting to the cross, saying, “*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*” (Heb. 12:12).

For those in Paul’s audience to offer more animal sacrifices, which they were doing (Heb. 10:11), the writer asserted that they were in effect re-crucifying the Son of God. Every animal sacrifice after the crucifixion of the Saviour was the hardened statement that Jesus deserved to die on a tree as the “*accursed of God*” (Dt. 21:22-23), and perpetuated the cry “*crucify him, crucify him*” (Mk. 15:13-14; Lk. 23:21; Jn. 19:6, 15). Since all of the animal sacrifices pre-figured the final sacrifice of the Lamb of God, every sacrifice subsequent to the fulfillment of the figure was a hardened statement of the re-enactment of His crucifixion. The

⁸⁶This masculine plural, *aorist* active participle from compound verb παραπίπτω *parapipto* means “to fall beside” and denotes apostasy.

⁸⁷The present infinitive from the compound verb ἀνακαίνιζω *anakainizo* means “to make new again” or “to renew.” The present tense connotes the continuous state of the verb.

⁸⁸Cf. note on Heb. 6:1.

⁸⁹This is the present participle from the compound verb ἀνασταυρώω *anastaurōo* meaning “to crucify again.”

⁹⁰All 28x the noun σταυρός occurs in the NT it refers to the literal or figurative instrument of Christ’s crucifixion (see Mt. 10:38-Heb. 12:2).

Jews that continued to offer animal sacrifices were deliberately “*putting him to an open shame*”⁹¹ (παραδειγματίζοντας⁹² *paradeigmatizontas*) as they increased in their individual and collective hatred of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul warned the Jews of last generation of the Covenant Community that if they continued to show utter contempt for the crucified Saviour by continuing animal sacrifices, they would reach the point of no return, unable to repent of sins and be saved!

Verses 6:7-8

For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

Under the process of inspiration, the writer used a botanical illustration for his agrarian audience to demonstrate his warning. For instance, Solomon likened the millennial reign of Christ with relevant terms for an agrarian society, saying, “*He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth*” (Ps. 72:6). Furthermore, the Lord Jesus expanded the teaching about the Father’s blessing upon His creation, saying, “*That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*” (Mt. 5:45).⁹³ Concluding with His botanical analogy about trees and respective fruit, the Lord asserted, saying, “*A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*” (Mt. 7:18-20). This biblical teaching gives background to Paul’s warning to the Jewish audience.

Using key words such as “*rain*” (τὸν ὑετὸν⁹⁴ *ton hueton*), “*herbs*” (βοτάνην⁹⁵ *botanen*), “*thorns*” (ἀκάνθας⁹⁶ *akanthas*), “*briers*” (τριβόλους⁹⁷ *tribolous*) coupled with “*blessing*” (εὐλογία⁹⁸ *eulogias*) and “*cursing*” (κατάρα⁹⁹ *kataras*), the author drew the attention of his audience to his powerful illustrative caveat.

⁹¹The cross was the instrument of shame as David predicted that the Messiah would so express, saying, “*But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him*” (Ps. 22:6-8). Furthermore, Isaiah predicted the supposed shame on the Messiah in His ministry culminating in the cross, saying, “*Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted*” (Isa. 53:4).

⁹²This present active participle comes from παραδειγματίζω *paradeigmatizo* and means “to make an alongside example.” It is the Greek source behind paradigm. This *dis legomena* verb also occurs in the Scripture detailing the case of Joseph who did not want “to make a public example” of “immoral” Mary (Mt. 1:19). The CT employed the weakened variant δειγματίσαι *deigmatissai* (“to disgrace” [NET]) in Matthew’s Gospel.

⁹³Of course, this verse repudiates the phenomenological assertion that the biblical writers spoke about the sun’s “so-called” (*sic*) movement from their vantage point. From God the Father’s vantage point, outside of His created heavens and earth, He makes His sun to rise (cf. Josh 10:13)!

⁹⁴The noun occurs 6x in the NT referring to physical rain, and is the source behind “hyetograph” (a rain graph).

⁹⁵The source for “botany,” this noun is another of Paul’s *hapax legomena*.

⁹⁶The noun occurs 14x in the NT and is the Greek counterpart to the Hebrew קֹטֵץ *qotz* (Gen. 3:18).

⁹⁷See Mt. 7:16 for the other reference to this *dis legomena*.

⁹⁸This compound noun literally means “a good word” and occurs also in Heb. 12:17 in its 16x in the NT.

⁹⁹Cf. also Gal. 3:10, 13[2x]; Jam. 3:10; and II Pet. 2:14 for this strong imprecation.

The anarthrous “earth” (γῆ *ge*) is qualified by “which drinketh” (ἡ πιούσα¹⁰⁰ *he pioussa*) and “bringeth forth” (τίκτουσα¹⁰¹ *tiktoussa*) and is the subject of the verb “receiveth” μεταλαμβάνει *metalambanei*).

Paul stressed that the earth received rain “that cometh oft” (πολλάκις¹⁰² ἐρχόμενον *pollakis erchomenon*). “Them by whom” (ἐκείνοις δι’ οὓς *ekeinous di’ hous*) “it is dressed” (γεωργεῖται¹⁰³ *georgeitai*) have provided herbs which are “meet” (εὐθετον¹⁰⁴ *eutheton*), he averred. The earth receives “blessing” (εὐλογίας *eulogias*) “from God” (ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ *apo tou theou*) in the form of bountiful rain when the herbs are carefully dressed. So far, the message of the illustration is that as the Lord pours out His blessing on earth and man must cultivate the “blessing” (εὐλογίας) so that the end goal is appropriate, useful, “meet” (εὐθετον).

In contrast to the divine blessing and human responsibility, the earth “that which beareth” (ἐκφέρουσα¹⁰⁵ *ekpherousa*) “thorns and briars,” the writer continued, “is rejected” (ἀδόκιμος *adokimos*). The lack of appropriate cultivation had resulted in not only the rejection of the poor crops but also of the land. Hence, the worthless result “is nigh unto cursing” (κατάρως ἐγγύς¹⁰⁶ *kataras eggus*) and “whose end is to be burned” (ἧς τὸ τέλος εἰς καῦσιν¹⁰⁷ *hes to telos eis kausin*). Paul applied the illustration to his audience, warning that although God’s blessing is continually poured out on His people, those that cultivate it by faith will be blessed (cf. Heb. 4:2), but those that refused to cultivate it by faith are cursed and ready for fiery destruction!

(END OF EXCERPT)

Chapter Seven

(Christ is Superior to Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood)

Christ is superior to the Levitical Priesthood because He is of the superior Melchisedecian order. Melchisedec prefigured Christ as a type (but not a Christophany), whose natural descent was unknown (Heb. 7:1-3). Melchisedec was preeminent over Levi because Abraham gave tithes to Melchisedec (Gen. 14:17-20), as did Levi, proving that “the less is blessed of the better” (Heb. 7:7). Levites died off and the order was not permanent, but David declared about that One after him was of the order of Melchisedec (Ps. 110:4). Christ’s resurrection allows Him to continue forever (Heb. 7:24) making His order superior (Heb. 7:26-28).

Chapter Eight

(Christ is Superior to Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood)

Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood because He has a superior covenant. Paul summarized his points that Christ is the High Priest Who is at the right hand of God in heaven (Heb. 8:1-5). He has an excellent

¹⁰⁰This feminine *aurist* participle is the only usage of the πίνω *pino* verb in *Hebrews* of the 75x in the NT.

¹⁰¹The verb root τίκτω *tikto* (19x) of the feminine present participle occurs also in Heb. 11:11. Literally the verb means “to give birth” (cf. Mt. 1:21).

¹⁰²The Apostle used the adverb πολλάκις *pollakis* (18x) three other times in *Hebrews* (9:25-26; 10:11).

¹⁰³This third person singular, present passive verb from γεωργέω *georgéo* is another one of Paul’s *hapax legomena* verbs in *Hebrews*. It means “to act as a farmer” or “to cultivate.”

¹⁰⁴This *tris legomena* adjective means “well placed” and occurs also in Lk. 9:62 and 14:35.

¹⁰⁵This feminine singular, present active participle from the compound verb ἐκφέρω *ekphero* (7x) qualifies the earth (v. 7).

¹⁰⁶Cf. Heb. 8:13 for this adverb meaning “ready.”

¹⁰⁷This noun is one of Paul’s *hapax legomena* in *Hebrews*. It is the source for the English word “cautery” (in surgery).

ministry based on the better covenant and better promises. Obviously, the Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 19:5 ff.) was limited, and hence was superseded by the New Covenant. The New Covenant was promised to Israel (cf. Jer. 31:31 ff., Ezk. 36:25 ff.) and ratified by Christ (cf. Mt. 26:26-28), by which Christians receive the spiritual promises of it and Israel will receive the spiritual and physical promises. Christians become the ministers of the New Covenant (cf. II Cor. 3:6) urging sinners into the Kingdom of God (cf. Jn. 3:3, 5) through regeneration (cf. Acts 28:31). The Old Covenant is gone, Paul declared (Heb. 8:13).

Chapter Nine **(Christ is Superior to Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood)**

Christ is superior to the order of Aaron and the Levitical priesthood because He has a superior sacrificial system. The Mosaic sacrificial system included the “*worldly sanctuary*” or tabernacle. It was comprised of two sections or tabernacles, the holy place and the holiest of holies (Heb. 9:1-7). The high priest could only go in the holiest of holies once a year for atonement, indicating no final sacrifice (Heb. 9:8-10). These ordinances did not deal with the conscience and needed to wait for the “*the time of reformation.*” This reformation came with Christ’s finished work of Himself as the sacrificial Lamb of God (cf. Jn. 19:30), Who shed His blood for the sins of mankind (“*but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*”), purifying even the conscience (Heb. 9:11-14).

Christ as testator of the New Covenant or Testament, needed to die to ratify the New Testament (Heb. 9:15-18). Moses had ratified his covenant (Heb. 9:19-23), and now Christ had ratified His for the final time, just once, enabling believers to look for His second coming (Heb. 9:24-28).

Chapter Ten **(Christ is Superior to Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood)**

Christ is superior to Aaron and the Levitical priesthood because His sacrifice was final, whereas the Mosaic system never had finality and was practiced continually (Heb. 10:1-18). To continue to practice the giving of animal sacrifices was to reject the final sacrifice (cf. Ps. 40:6-8), and showed a hardness of heart that was unforgiveable. He gave the second of two parenthetical warnings about rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ (10:19-39). The consequences of rejection were irreversible, irrevocable, incurable, and irreparable. With three hortatory subjunctives, Paul urged his hearers, “*let us draw near...let us hold fast...let us consider*” (Heb. 10:22-24). Some were defecting from the assembly, indicating their indecision about Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice and their realization of the potential impending Roman destruction. There was no remedy for deliberate sin, and swift judgment would fall. In the OT deliberate sinners were stoned; the Lord had on their doorstep a far worse judgment, about which history indicates several million Jews died by the hands of Titus and his army. Paul expected his audience to trust in the final Lamb and endure the persecution by faith, since “*the just shall live by faith...to the saving of the soul*” (Heb. 10:38-39).

Chapter Eleven **(The Life of Faith is Superior)**

Christ is superior to the life of unbelief because He has a long history of those who have believed in His final sacrifice, which was prophesied from the beginning, even Abel. Multitudes from Abel to the prophets had risked all to live the life of “*faith*” trusting in the finished work of Christ, graphically explained in Abraham’s parabolic sacrifice of Isaac (Heb. 11:17-19). The OT saints looked for a city (i.e., the New Jerusalem)¹⁰⁸ made by God (Heb. 11:10), prepared as heavenly (Heb. 11:16), inhabited by Jesus and His blood (Heb. 12:24), and “*continuing*” (Heb. 13:14). They all “*obtained a good report*” by faith (Heb. 11:2)¹⁰⁹ because they looked for the “*better thing*” (Heb. 11:40).

The life of faith is the life of obedience, as Paul averred elsewhere about his life, saying, “*for obedience to the faith*” (Rom. 1:5). Chapter Eleven is Paul’s illustrative explanation of his theme of Romans, wherein he stated, “*faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith*” (Rom. 1:17). The believing response to the Gospel effectuates the perseverance of the believer! Moreover, the sins of the OT saints are strikingly absent. The writer’s purpose was to exalt the faith of these examples in Hebrew history, obviously omitting their individual lapses in faith and outright sin, because they were now benefiting from the finished work of Jesus Christ which ratified the promises of the New Covenant, even the forgiveness and forget-ness of sins (Jer. 31:34). Paul could say that the life of faith is superior to apostasy!

Chapter Twelve **(The Blessings of Faith are Superior)**

Christ is superior to the life of unbelief because the blessings are great and the rejection is grievous. Paul used many examples of believers suffering greatly and yet maintaining faith in God’s promises. Of course, the greatest example of faithfulness in the midst of trials was the Lord Jesus Christ. For the Covenant Community the final work of Christ brings two responses and two consequences. For the apostate, sore damnation comes without forgiveness! For the believer, trying times come as the Lord chastens His just ones to help them live by faith. Chastening brings about proof of divine love (Heb. 12:6), obedience (Heb. 12:9), spiritual profit (Heb. 12:10), the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11). Outright rebellion like Esau’s was unforgiveable and proof that he did not have faith. His bitterness stopped his repentance from being effective (Heb. 12:15-17). The Covenant Community had before it the future blessings of the heavenly Jerusalem, which Paul enumerated with at least seven realities: 1) it is the city of the living God; 2) it contains the innumerable angels in the general assembly; 3) it contains the names of baptized church members on earth (Phil. 4:2-3); 4) it contains God the Judge; 5) it contains the spirits of just men made perfect (OT saints); 6) it contains Jesus the mediator of the new covenant; and 7) it contains the blood of sprinkling (Heb. 12:22-24). The members of Paul’s audience needed to see that “*ye refuse not him the speaketh*” (Heb. 12:25) because “*our God is a consuming fire*” (Heb. 12:29).

¹⁰⁸ “*The city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*” is the ultimate “*rest*” (Heb. 4:9) for all believers (His bride) and receives detailed description in Rev. 21:1-27. It is the Holiest of Holies (a perfect cube at least 1400 miles square) in which the great High Priest and Worthy Lamb, Jesus of Nazareth the Christ, resides.

¹⁰⁹ At least 18 OT characters are named in this lineage of faith, including Abel, [Cain], Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sara, [Esau], Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel.

Chapter Thirteen **(The Practice of Christianity is Superior)**

Christ is superior to the Life of Unbelief because the Christian life is superior. The life of faith obediently fulfils social duties, Paul explained. These duties included love, hospitality, compassion, moral purity, and contentment (Heb. 13:1-6). Spiritual duties also included worshipping the Lord in the assembly and respecting the spiritual ecclesiological leadership. Although forms of worship under the Old and New Covenants changed, Christ is the same (Heb. 7-17). Finally, Paul wanted them to pray for him as he concluded his “*word of exhortation.*” The personal greetings reflect the identity about and compassion of the author (Heb. 13:18-25).

Finis

Bibliography (See Commentary)