

# **THY KINGDOM COME**

## **12. Hebrews**

Tim Attaway

**A Teaching Commentary  
of the New Testament**

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## 1. The Other New Testament Letters

Other than the letters of Paul, the New Testament also contains the following letters: Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude.

James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude are often called the “Catholic Epistles.” This has nothing to do with the Catholic Church. The word “catholic” means “universal.” These were considered to be universal letters because they were not written to specific individuals or churches. The letters of Paul were written to specific churches (Corinth, Ephesus, etc.) or people (Timothy or Titus). The Catholic Epistles were written as general letters, intended to be universally circulated in the Christian community.

It is somewhat of a misnomer that the letters are classified in this way. In fact, 2 John and 3 John were addressed to specific churches or individuals. Furthermore, Hebrews was written as a letter to be universally circulated. If there was going to be a classification of “Catholic Epistles,” it probably should have included Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude.

Realize that none of this really has anything to do with Scripture. Peter did not sit down one day and say, “I think I’ll write a Catholic Epistle today.” John did not sit down at his keyboard one day and say, “OK, what number am I on? Three. I’ll write 3 John today and I believe I will address it to a specific individual because I already did one of those Catholic things.” These naming conventions are things that people imposed on these letters a long time after they were written.

## 2. Hebrews

Hebrews is the first of the non-Pauline letters. Some would take exception to that. The authorship of Hebrews has been a question for centuries and many have believed it to be Paul’s writing. In fact, the title of the book in the King James Version of the Bible is “The Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews.” Other translations, such as the NIV simply call it “Hebrews.” The authorship is uncertain. If the author was not Paul (most likely it was not), he was familiar with the writings or teachings of Paul because they are reflected at points in the letter. Stylistically, however, the letter is dissimilar to Paul’s other works. Many possible authors have been suggested, including Barnabas, Aquila and Priscilla, and Apollos. We do not know.

In fact, we are not even positive that the letter was indeed addressed to the Hebrews. The name of the book is not included in the book and the letter contains no opening greeting identifying the recipient (as is typical in Pauline literature). Because the text of the letter draws so deeply from Old Testament imagery, it is generally assumed that it was written to Hebrew Christians.

Whether or not the intended audience was of a Hebrew origin, this is a deeply Jewish letter. The author used the Old Testament to define the New. He used Old Testament characters and language to define Jesus, the great high priest.

We are not sure who wrote Hebrews or to whom. We do not really know when or why it was written. We do know that from a very early time the church has considered this important enough to count it as Scripture and has benefited from the rich wisdom that it contains.

## 2.1 *The Son is Superior to the Angels*

Hebrews 1:1-2:9

Hebrews 1:1-4 opens the letter:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

God has always been in the business of communicating with his creation. At various points in history, this has occurred in various ways. Creation itself is a revelation of God to man. The law and the writings such as Psalms communicate to us the nature of God. At times God has spoken to man through prophets. In the fullness of time, however, God sent the fullest revelation that he ever gave to us – his Son. Jesus is the “radiance of God's glory,” incarnate in human form. He came to be God in our midst. He provided a sacrifice to purify us from sin. Then he returned to the side of the Father.

There are those who embrace a cessationist viewpoint who interpret this passage to be Biblical proof that the gift of prophecy ceased with the coming of Jesus. They roughly translate it to say, “God used to speak through the prophets, but now he has spoken to us once and for all through his Son.” It is stretching the verse a bit far to reach such a conclusion. Realize that the passage says that God spoke to us “through the prophets at many times and in various ways.” If one assumes that prophetic communication ceased with the coming of Jesus, then does he also assume that the communication through “various ways” must have ceased as well? Has creation ceased to be a revelation of the splendor of God? Did Jesus nullify the law and the writings?

Jesus was not the end of God's revelation to man. He was the pinnacle. What man was never able to totally grasp in other ways, Jesus came to teach. He set man on a path where he would be able to understand future communication. He died, making atonement for our sin. Then he returned to the Father. Because of this, Jesus assumes a place superior to any angel in heaven.

In the remainder of chapter 1, the writer emphasizes that Jesus is not merely another angel. He cites a great deal of Old Testament text to justify the position. He begins quoting Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14. Hebrews 1:5 says:

For to which of the angels did God ever say,

“You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father ”?

Or again,

“I will be his Father,  
and he will be my Son”?

The 2 Samuel passage is a record of the promise that God made to David relative to his offspring. A son of David would be adopted by God as his own Son. There was never an angel who entered into a father/son relationship with God. Jesus did, however. This sets Jesus above any angel. In Hebrews 1:6 the writer says that angels worship Jesus. In Hebrews 1:7-8 he says that the angels are servants of God, but God has set Jesus on an eternal throne and given him a scepter of righteousness. Hebrews 1:13 quotes Psalm 110:1:

To which of the angels did God ever say,

“Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies  
a footstool for your feet”?

Jesus is not just another angel. He is the Son of God, clearly set apart from the angels. Hebrews 1:14 says:

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

This is an interesting passage. The Bible presents the reality of angels as a given fact. Few places in the Bible is there any attempt to explain their role or function, however. Hebrews 1:14 teaches that they are spirits assigned the task of ministering to the elect. They serve those who will inherit salvation. Jesus provided the salvation that these people inherit. Again, this is an important distinction between the two.

Hebrews 2:1-4 says:

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

What does this mean? What is this “message spoken by angels” which was binding upon us? This is a reference to Old Testament law. The concept of the law being spoken by angels comes from Deuteronomy 33:2, which in the NIV says:

He said: “The Lord came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir; he shone forth from Mount Paran. He came with myriads of holy ones from the south, from his mountain slopes.

In the Septuagint (the Greek rendering of the Old Testament, which was the commonly used Bible in the first century) the word for “holy ones” in this passage is “αγγελιοι,” which is Greek for “angels.” The text in the Septuagint says that thousands of angels accompanied God when he came to give the Old Testament law at Mount Sinai. This “message spoken by angels” in the Hebrews passage was the law, and it was binding.

If the law, which was delivered by angels, was binding, then how much more binding is the new covenant, which was delivered by the Son of God – who is superior to the angels. The writer of Hebrews is appealing to people of a Jewish background. Just as the Son of God is superior to angels, his message is superior to the message of the Old Covenant. God himself has testified to the truth of his message by giving signs and wonders ministries to those who proclaim it.

In Hebrews 2:6-8 the writer quotes Psalm 85:6:

But there is a place where someone has testified:

“What is man that you are mindful of him,  
the son of man that you care for him?”

You made him a little lower than the angels;  
you crowned him with glory and honor  
and put everything under his feet.”

For a time, Jesus assumed a form “a little lower than the angels.” He came as a man. Because he was willing to pay the price of salvation for all mankind, he received a crown of glory and honor. God has put all things under his feet. He suffered the death that each of us deserved.

## **2.2 Made Perfect Through Suffering**

Hebrews 2:10-18

Hebrews 2:14-18 says:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

The only way that Jesus could really lead us to victory over our fleshly existence was become one of us. Thus “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). He was like us in every way. He suffered temptation just like we do, so that he could demonstrate to us that it is possible to rise above temptation – even for one confined to a flesh-and-bones existence. Knowing all that we go through he is able to help us in the times that we are tempted.

Jesus became a part of humanity and showed all humans how to live a life apart from sin. In his submission to death, he took on the death penalty due the rest of mankind. Then, just as he showed us how to achieve victory over sin, he showed us how to achieve victory over death. He led the path into the resurrection from the dead. He broke the ultimate hold that the devil had over us – death.

By experiencing human life and death, and rising victorious over it, he demonstrated the path for each of us to do the same. No angel ever did that. Furthermore, he did it for us, not for the angels.

## **2.3 Jesus Greater than Moses**

Hebrews 3

The writer has established that Jesus is greater than any of the angels. He now makes the point that Jesus is greater than Moses. Remember that this was written to people with a Jewish background. To them, Moses was the greatest prophet that had ever lived. He was the Jews’ father in the faith. The writer does not dispute that. He affirms the greatness of Moses, and says that Jesus was greater.

This chapter opens with Hebrews 3:1:

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

It may seem strange to call Jesus an apostle. Remember from the discussion of Acts 1 that the word “apostle” means “one who is sent.” Jesus was certainly sent by the Father on a mission. Although we do not normally think of Jesus as being an apostle, it is indeed an accurate use of the word.

The writer also calls Jesus a high priest. This is a term that is applied frequently to Jesus in this book. We saw it first in Hebrews 2:17. A high priest is one who interceded for the people with God. He also made sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people. In Jewish life, the high priests came from the descendants of Aaron. It was a role that Moses could not fulfill.

The writer says that we are the house of God. Moses was a faithful servant in the house. Jesus, on the other hand, is faithful as the son who is in charge of God’s house. Thus, Hebrews 3:3 says, “Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses.”

He calls the people to be faithful and obedient to the voice of the Holy Spirit, who calls them to Jesus. He cites Psalm 95:7-11 as a reminder that their forefathers had rebelled against God in the desert and as a result had to wander for forty years. Those who rebelled never entered the Promised Land. The people did not want to make the same mistake now. They were being called to a new Promised Land and they needed to enter it in faith. He calls upon the people to encourage one another while there is still time. They are to bolster one another’s faith so that they will be fortified against temptation to sin. Unbelief was the sin that kept their forefathers from the Promised Land. They must not fall victim to it now.

## **2.4 Entering God’s Rest**

Hebrews 4:1-13

In Hebrews 4:1-13 the writer continues the theme of “entering God’s rest.” The invitation to enter God’s rest was of no benefit to their forefathers because they did not receive it in faith. The writer is calling upon the Hebrews not to make the same mistake. The Gospel of Jesus is an invitation to enter God’s rest. They needed to receive it in faith.

It has been God’s plan all along for his people to enter his rest. He modeled this for us in the creation of the world. He worked for six days and then concluded the creation process with a day of rest. He intended for rest to be at the end of labor. Because of unbelief and hardness of heart, however, the children of Israel were denied the rest that God intended for them to have. Long after that time, God spoke through David in Psalm 95:7-8 and said:

Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts.”

This is an indication that another chance to enter God’s rest would be offered and a plea for the people not to harden their hearts when they heard the invitation. He says in Hebrews 4:8:

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.

Even though Joshua did ultimately lead people into the Promised Land, this was not the rest that God originally wanted them to have. He was unable to give that to them because of their hardness of heart. That Joshua did not lead them into God’s intended rest is evidenced by the fact that David, writing hundreds of years later, spoke of the invitation that was yet to come. God still intended to lead his people into their Sabbath rest. The writer calls upon the people not to miss that invitation by hardening their hearts to God’s word. He says in Hebrews 4:12-13:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

God knows our hearts. His word penetrates us and judges our hearts and our attitudes. We cannot fool him. He knows our hearts and he knows our attitudes. He knows who receives his promise in faith and who does not. Based upon that, he judges who enters his rest and who does not.

## **2.5 Jesus, the Great High Priest**

Hebrews 4:14-5:14

Hebrews 4:14-5:6 says:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,

“You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.”<sup>1</sup>

And he says in another place,

“You are a priest forever,  
in the order of Melchizedek.”<sup>2</sup>

How important it is that we have a great high priest, Jesus, who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Jesus experienced every sort of temptation that we will ever experience, yet he rose above it and lived without sin. He did that to show us that it was possible. He did not do that so that he could “rub our noses” in it. He did not emerge victorious so that he could be arrogant. He did it so that he could be sympathetic. He can relate to us. Because of his overflowing love, he wants to help us through our experiences. Because of that, we can approach him with confidence “that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

What does this mean in a practical sense? When we have sinned, we can come in genuine repentance and confess the sin to him and we will find forgiveness. We deserve judgment but we receive grace. These words need to be considered carefully, however. Remember that the

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 2:7

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 110:4

word of God pierces us and judges our hearts and attitudes. We cannot approach and ask for forgiveness unless we are ready to turn from the sin. Phony repentance or confession without sorrow will gain you nothing.

There is a better application still. Before we have sinned but while we are facing temptation, we can come to the throne room of grace and ask for help. We can pray our way beyond temptation. Rather than asking for forgiveness after the fact, it is better to come and ask for strength. Give Jesus an opportunity to rejoice with you in a partnered victory over sin. His mercy is sweet when you fail, but not nearly as invigorating as his joy when you work together to triumph. Remember, he knows how to overcome temptation. When you are faced with it, tap into his wisdom. "He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray." When you ask for help, you will never be rebuffed. You will be loved.

It was for this purpose that God appointed Jesus to be our great high priest. He was greater than the high priests that descended from Aaron, because God called him Son. God also set him up as a priest "in the order of Melchizedek." This is a theme that is more fully developed in chapters 6 and 7, so discussion of the meaning will be deferred until then.

Hebrews 5:7-10 says:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

It was through suffering and submission that Jesus learned obedience to the Father. Thus he was made perfect. It was through passionate prayers that he maintained his bond with the Father, "the one who could save him from death." This is a pattern for us. We, too, will suffer. Through suffering and submission, we, too learn obedience. This process perfects us. We, too, bond with the Father through heart-felt prayers. Jesus was perfected so that he could be the source of eternal salvation. If we obey him, we receive the benefit of that salvation.

In Hebrews 5:11-14, the writer indicates that he wishes to teach them more fully, but because of their immaturity they cannot receive the whole teachings. He borrows imagery from 1 Corinthians 3:2 and says that he wants to give them solid food but they are only capable of taking milk. The readers need to grow in their Christian maturity.

## **2.6 Maturity in Christ**

Hebrews 6:1-12

In Hebrews 6:1-3, the writer says that we need to move beyond the elementary teachings of the faith and move towards maturity. As examples of elementary teachings he cites

- repentance from sin
- having faith
- teachings about baptism
- teachings about laying on of hands
- teachings about the resurrection
- teachings about judgment

As a sign of maturity, he says that we should be bearing fruit. In Hebrews 6:4-8 he says:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

That first paragraph is a bit harsh! Is the writer really saying that when a saved person sins he is crucifying Jesus all over again? Although this passage has at times been interpreted to that extreme, that is not what the author said. The person in question did not merely sin. He fell away.

It is possible to walk away from the Kingdom of God. It is possible for someone to receive Christ and to experience all the benefits of Kingdom citizenship, including empowering by the Holy Spirit, and then later give it up and walk away. This is not a case of an occasional sin or even a season of sin. This is evidenced by a lifestyle that produces thorns and thistles rather than fruit.

This sobering thought must be balanced with the story of the prodigal son, however. This man rejected his father, left his home, and squandered his inheritance in sin. Every day the father waited for him to return. When he approached, the father ran to meet him. Even when we stray, the Father wants us back.

We do not get to choose our path of return, however. If the sacrifice that Jesus already made for you is not good enough, then you are out of luck. There will be no other provided. The Father wants you to return, but you return through the Son. Jesus died to bring you into the Kingdom. He is not going to crawl up on the cross a second time.

Each of us must keep a check on our own lives. If a person's life consistently bears thorns and thistles rather than a good crop, then he is in trouble. If he walks away from salvation in Christ, there is no other way that he can ever receive it.

The writer goes on in Hebrews 6:9-12 to indicate that he believes that his readers will rise above the things just discussed and will mature in their salvation. He encourages them to struggle to grow in faith and patience.

## ***2.7 Jesus, A Priest in the Order of Melchizedek***

Hebrews 6:13-7:28

God made an oath to Abraham that he would bless him and give him many descendants. Because this came to him in a promise from God, it was surely fulfilled. God wanted to ensure that the descendants of Abraham understood that the promised blessings were theirs as well, and thus he affirmed the covenant with his descendants (see Genesis 26:2-4, Genesis 28:10-15). Because God affirmed the promise to the descendants of Abraham, they should have hope as well. Hebrews 6:18-20 says:

God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the

curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Because God promised it to us, then the promise is sure, because "it is impossible for God to lie." That fact is such a treasure. All of the promises of the Bible are sure because it is impossible for God to lie. That hope is "an anchor for the soul" and it draws us into the Holy of Holies, into the very presence of God. Jesus led the way into that sanctuary for us and invites us to follow. The text again says that he "has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." This refers back to the statement made in Hebrews 5:6.

Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14:17-20 (actually he is only mentioned in 18-20):

After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

This mysterious character appears in the life of Abraham for a brief moment and then disappears. That is all the historical information that we have about him. Still he inspired the attention of the Biblical writers, for he is mentioned in Psalm 110 and then again in Hebrews chapters 5, 6, and 7. (Actually Hebrews chapters 5 and 6 quote Psalm 110 and say that Jesus is the fulfillment of that reference.)

There are a few things that should be observed in the Genesis passage. First of all, Salem is an ancient name for Jerusalem. The Valley of Shaveh (also known as the King's Valley) is in Jerusalem. Melchizedek was the king of Jerusalem. He was also the priest of God Most High. He blessed Abraham, and Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek. This was a sign that Abraham recognized his own inferiority to Melchizedek and paid homage to him. This man, chosen by God above all others to be a blessing to the world, submitted in homage to this mysterious character Melchizedek.

It was significant that this man was both priest and king. For the Jews, the kings were of the tribe of Judah. The priests were of the tribe of Levi, specifically the descendants of Aaron. It was impossible for a single individual to be both. Melchizedek was both. Thus the one who would achieve priesthood in the order of Melchizedek would be superior to one with Aaronic priesthood.

Hebrews 7:1-3 adds to the background of Melchizedek:

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.

This description adds to the mystery behind the man. It indicates that Melchizedek had no beginning. The implication here is that he was a preincarnate manifestation of Jesus, a Christophany. Levites collect a tithe from the Jews, but Melchizedek indirectly collected a tithe from Levi, who "was still in the body of his ancestor," Abraham (Hebrews 7:10). The implication here is not subtle. The Jews submit to the Levites, but the Levites and even Abraham himself submitted to Melchizedek.

The Levitical priests administered the law of the Old Covenant. Jesus, the priest in the order of Melchizedek, administers the law of the New Covenant. Just as the Levitical priests were submitted to Melchizedek, so must the law of the Old Covenant be submitted to the law of the New. Hebrews 7:11-19 says:

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come – one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. For it is declared:

“You are a priest forever,  
in the order of Melchizedek.”

The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

This echoes the teachings of Paul in Romans 3-8 and Galatians 2-4.

Jesus is our priest not on the basis of his ancestry but because of the life he led. He achieved the status of Melchizedek and brought a new law and a new covenant. The old must submit to the new. Just as we have our hope in God because of his promises (and because he cannot lie), we may hope in Jesus as well, because he received his priesthood on the basis of a promise of God (Psalm 110:4, “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.’”)

Levitical priests come and go, because they are mortal men who die. Jesus is eternal. He will be our priest for eternity, interceding for us with the Father constantly. Levitical priests had to frequently make atonement for their own sins. Jesus never does because he is without sin. Furthermore, unlike Levitical priests, he does not need to continually make atonement for our sins. He has done it once for eternity and it does not need to be repeated. Hebrews 7:28 says:

For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

What do we learn from this section?

- Melchizedek, the mysterious figure in Genesis 14, seems to have been a preincarnate appearance of Jesus. It was necessary that he come so that Abraham, the father of all Jews, would have an opportunity to pay homage to this one who would ultimately descend from him in a human sense.
- The appearance of Melchizedek was also necessary because it set the expectation for the order of priest that would come, to which the Levitical priesthood should bow in homage.
- The descendants of Abraham were the messengers of the Old Covenant. That Old Covenant – the Law – should bow in homage to the New Covenant brought by Jesus, the priest in the order of Melchizedek.
- God’s word had promised that all of this would happen. God cannot lie. Therefore we should find strength and hope in this surety of this promise.

- Jesus, our eternal high priest, will always be there making intercession for us with the Father. Our sacrifice has been paid once and for all. Thus we are sure of our salvation and our standing before the Father.

## **2.8 Jesus, The Priest of the New Covenant**

Hebrews 8

The tabernacle and the priesthood of the Old Covenant were never anything more than the shadow of what was to come. God gave Moses very specific instructions about how the tabernacle was to be built so that it would properly reflect the sanctuary in heaven, but this was never meant to be the true tabernacle. In Hebrews 8:8-12 the writer quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34. It is a section where Jeremiah prophesies about the coming of the new covenant. He says:

The time is coming, declares the Lord,  
 when I will make a new covenant ...  
 It will not be like the covenant  
 I made with their forefathers...  
 I will put my laws in their minds  
 and write them on their hearts...  
 For I will forgive their wickedness  
 and will remember their sins no more.

Jeremiah would never have told of a new covenant if the old one had been sufficient. The old covenant did not work, however. It was not really the fault of the covenant. It was the fault of the people. They would not abide by the covenant. God would not give up on them, however, so he established the new covenant and Jesus as the priest of the new covenant. This was a covenant written on men's hearts rather than tablets of stone. The result of this new covenant was forgiveness and forgetfulness of sins. Hebrews 8:13 says:

By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

## **2.9 Jesus, The Sacrifice of the New Covenant**

Hebrews 9-10

Chapters 9 and 10 of Hebrews contain some of the best information that we find anywhere in Scripture about the functioning of the priesthood. Remember that as a preface to this section, the writer has established that:

- the tabernacle was a foreshadowing of the eternal sanctuary.
- the old covenant was a foreshadowing of the new covenant.
- the Levitical priesthood was a foreshadowing of Jesus, the Great High Priest.

Having established this, he proceeds to draw analogies between the old and the new. Hebrews 9:1-5 says:

Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone

tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

This passage poses some interesting problems. First of all, Exodus 30:6 and Exodus 40:5 indicate that the golden altar of incense was in the Holy Place, just in front of the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The writer of Hebrews places it in the Holy of Holies. We are not sure why the discrepancy exists. Perhaps at some point the altar was moved behind the veil or perhaps a second incense altar was added there. The author also indicates that the Ark of the Covenant contained a gold jar of manna, Aaron's rod that budded (see Numbers 17), and the stone tablets of the covenant – the Ten Commandments. The Old Testament never mentions anything being in the Ark except the tablets. In fact, 1 Kings 8:9 says, "There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt." Again, we are not sure why the discrepancy exists. It is possible that the writer of Hebrews is talking about a different point in history, when perhaps a jar of manna and Aaron's rod were added.

The Hebrews writer is not really trying to make a point here. In fact, he says "we cannot discuss these things in detail now." He is laying groundwork for the rest of the chapter by describing the tabernacle and its furnishings. He continues in Hebrews 9:6-10:

When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings – external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

The priests ministered daily in the tabernacle. Fresh incense was offered each evening and morning. Fresh bread was put on the table of shewbread regularly. Daily a priest entered the Holy Place to perform these ministries. The Holy of Holies was only entered once each year, however, on the Day of Atonement. The high priest would enter with a blood sacrifice to make atonement for the sins of the nation. Even though this service was performed regularly, it never actually had the power to deal with the sin problem. These ceremonies dealt with the external. They may have brought about external cleanliness, but sin is really an internal problem. Going through these motions never really cleared guilt. It was an act of faith indicating a desire to reconcile, but it brought about no internal change in the sinner. Its purpose was to point to the sacrifice of Jesus. The writer continues in Hebrews 9:11-14:

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Jesus entered the Most Holy Place, not by means of the sacrifice of some unwilling animal, but through self-sacrifice. His offering was his own blood. As an unblemished sacrifice and through the power of the Holy Spirit, he alone had the power to change us from within. He alone had the

power to clear away our guilt and “cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death.” Thus his sacrifice bought our eternal redemption, and freed us to “serve the living God.”

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament had a purpose. From the time that it was given, it illustrated to us that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). The price of sin has always been death. At the same time, God has never wanted to collect that penalty from those whom he loves. Thus the sacrificial system allowed a substitute. An animal could die in our place. The message was still grim. Blood is the price of sin. Hebrews 9:22 says “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

The animal sacrifice was imperfect, however, because it had to be repeated again and again. Its purpose was to point to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus that was made once for all. Hebrews 9:24-28 says:

For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

In Jesus’ first appearing, he became the perfect sacrifice to ransom many. When he comes again, he will gather up those who hope in him and take them to a mansion in the Father’s house. He opened the door to the true sanctuary, which is the very presence of the Father. There we will dwell, in the Most Holy Place, the way having been cleared for us by the sacrifice of his blood.

Hebrews 10:1-11 reiterates much of this. The law was never able to bring about perfection. If it could, people would have already reached it and the sacrifices would have ceased long ago (timing from the writer’s perspective, not ours). In fact, the sacrifices are an annual reminder of our sinful condition and our need of salvation. Hebrews 10:11 says of the Levitical priests, “Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.”

But of Jesus, Hebrews 10:12-14 says:

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Our perfect sacrifice has made us holy. We may not feel holy much of the time, but when God looks at us he sees Jesus. Remember that Jeremiah 31:31-34 says that our sins are forgiven and forgotten. In fact, the Hebrew writer now turns back to that passage. In Hebrews 10:15-18 says:

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

“This is the covenant I will make with them  
after that time, says the Lord.  
I will put my laws in their hearts,  
and I will write them on their minds.”

Then he adds:

“Their sins and lawless acts  
I will remember no more.”

And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

This last verse is significant. Our sins have been forgiven before they are committed. Sacrifice is no longer needed because forgiveness has already been appropriated. As an old hymn stated, “Hallelujah! What a Savior!”

Because of this forgiveness, we may enter the Most Holy Place in confidence. Realize that God has granted us permission to enter his throne room when we please. We can do so because we have been cleansed from within. Our guilt has been relieved. Our consciences have been cleansed. This should produce in us confidence and hope. We have hope because all of this is based on the promise of God, who cannot lie.

Our hope should bond us together and cause us to encourage one another. It gives us reason to love one another and to be involved in each other’s lives. Hebrews 10:25 encourages this involvement in lives of other believers:

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

This knowledge should also produce in us a change in behavior. Remember the point that was made in Hebrews 6:4-8. If we belong to Christ, it should be evidenced by a life that bears fruit. This point is reiterated in Hebrews 10:26-27:

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

As stated earlier, this is not referring to an occasional sin. This is talking about a lifestyle. This is talking about someone who comes to Jesus but is unwilling to repent. If you walk away from the truth of Jesus, do not expect to find another path to salvation. It is a true/false test, not multiple choice. The price is great for rejecting the offer of Jesus. Hebrews 10:28-31 says:

Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

This is a stern warning. There is no reason not to take it at face value. Rejecting the offer of salvation is trampling “the Son of God under foot.” It is treating as unclean “the blood of the covenant.” It is insulting “the Spirit of grace.” One puts himself in very bad company when he does this.

Receiving Jesus’ offer of salvation does not necessarily make life easy now. There will still be times of suffering and persecution. We must persevere in such times. We will be rewarded for faithfully enduring such trials. Such times call for faith. Hebrews 10:38-39 says:

But my righteous one will live by faith.  
And if he shrinks back,  
I will not be pleased with him.”

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

We have confidence in our status before God because of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. We may enter his throne room at will and talk to him about anything. Thus we have omniscient counsel available to us in times of trial. We must not shrink back. We must face them with faith.

## **2.10 Faith**

Hebrews 11

Hebrews 11 is known as the “faith chapter” of the Bible. Hebrews 11:1 contains a frequently quoted definition of faith:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Because Jesus died to give us entry into the Holy of Holies and because our salvation is based on the promise of God, who cannot lie, we should have this kind of faith. Our hope in reconciliation with the Father and our assurance of his care in all of life’s circumstances is sure.

Faith is not a strange, new concept. It has been around since the beginning of time. The writer scans the major figures of the Old Testament and highlights for us many examples of faith in action:

- Faith caused Abel to offer a pleasing sacrifice to God when Cain did not. Because of his faith, God considered him righteous. (Genesis 4:3-5)
- It was Enoch’s faith that made him a righteous man, so that God took him without causing him to experience death (Genesis 5:24). His faith made him pleasing to God. Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”
- In faith Noah built the ark (Genesis 6-9). As a result he and his family were saved. Hebrews 11:7 says, “By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”
- It was faith that caused Abraham to follow God in obedience, leaving his home for a place he had never seen (Genesis 12:1-5). He had faith in God’s promise. Isaac and Jacob also had faith in God’s promise, and it was that faith that allowed them to become heirs of the promise.
- Through faith in God’s promise, Abraham and Sarah, who were well beyond childbearing years, had Isaac (Genesis 17:19-22, Genesis 21:1-5). Abraham never saw the fulfillment of many of God’s promises to him, but he lived and died in faith that they would come true.
- In faith, Abraham was willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, even though he was the child of promise (Genesis 22:1-14). Hebrews 11:19 says, “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”
- In faith Isaac passed blessings to Jacob and Esau. (Genesis 27:1-40)
- Because he had faith in the promise of God, at the end of his life Jacob adopted the sons of Joseph as heirs to the promise. (Genesis 48:1-20)
- Because he had faith in the promise of God, Jacob spoke of the exodus and gave instructions about his own burial. (Genesis 48:21-22, Genesis 49:29-32)
- In faith, Moses’ parents hid him to protect him from being killed. (Exodus 2:1-4)

- In faith, when Moses was grown he identified with his own people (Exodus 2:11-12). He gave up the treasures of Egypt for the promises of God.
- In faith Moses observed the requirements of the Passover, sparing the firstborn of Egypt from death. (Exodus 12:21-23)
- In faith Moses led the people to walk through the Red Sea on dry ground. Because of the faith of Moses, the Egyptian army was killed when they tried to do the same thing. (Exodus 14:15-28)
- It was faith that brought down the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6:20) and it was faith that spared Rahab when the city fell (Joshua 6:22-25).

After citing these specific examples, the writer gives a summary of many other figures of faith. Hebrews 11:32-38 says:

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon<sup>3</sup>, Barak<sup>4</sup>, Samson<sup>5</sup>, Jephthah<sup>6</sup>, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms<sup>7</sup>, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions<sup>8</sup>, quenched the fury of the flames<sup>9</sup>, and escaped the edge of the sword<sup>10</sup>; whose weakness was turned to strength<sup>11</sup>; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies<sup>12</sup>. Women received back their dead, raised to life again<sup>13</sup>. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection<sup>14</sup>. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison<sup>15</sup>. They were stoned<sup>16</sup>; they were sawed in two<sup>17</sup>; they were put to death by the sword<sup>18</sup>. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins,

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<sup>3</sup> Gideon, along with an unarmed army of 300 men, defeated the Midianite and Amalekite armies in Judges 6-8.

<sup>4</sup> Barak and Deborah defeated the Canaanite army in Judges 4.

<sup>5</sup> Samson defeated the Philistines in Judges 14-16.

<sup>6</sup> Jephthah defeated the Ammonites in Judges 11.

<sup>7</sup> By faithfully following God, David expanded the borders of Israel to the greatest extent it ever reached.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel in Daniel 6.

<sup>9</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3.

<sup>10</sup> The faith of David spared him the sword of Goliath. The faith of Esther spared the entire Jewish race annihilation by the sword.

<sup>11</sup> David against Goliath, Gideon against the Midianites and Amalekites, etc.

<sup>12</sup> Gideon and Barak are prime examples.

<sup>13</sup> Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:17-22, Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4:32-35.

<sup>14</sup> This may refer to persecution under Nero. See later footnote.

<sup>15</sup> Jeremiah was imprisoned multiple times. So were many New Testament characters such as Paul. Paul and Jeremiah both faced jeers as well (Jeremiah spent time in the stocks). Paul was flogged according to 2 Corinthians 11:24. This could also refer to persecution under Nero. See later footnote.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen in Acts 6.

<sup>17</sup> Tradition says that Manasseh had Isaiah sawed in two.

<sup>18</sup> James in Acts 12:2.

destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them<sup>19</sup>. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground<sup>20</sup>.

All of these people were driven by faith in the promises of God. Many of them never saw the promises fulfilled in their own lifetime. It did not matter. God's word is timeless and will be fulfilled according to his schedule. But it will be fulfilled. It is always true.

## **2.11 Fix Your Eyes on Jesus**

Hebrews 12:1-13:17

In Chapter 11, the writer painted a picture of "The Faith Hall of Fame." Having shown the many heroes of the faith who were motivated by faith, he continues in Hebrews 12:1-3:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Every father of the faith had times of struggles and persecution. Each of them had to operate in faith at some point or other – some most of the time. The letter was written to people who also had to face persecution. Remember that the persecution by Nero may have been in the background of the letter, but even if it was not Christians in the first century faced persecution beginning with the stoning of Stephen. In the face of stoning, burning, flogging, etc., it is difficult to do anything but focus on the circumstances at hand. It is still true, even in less life-threatening circumstances.

Remember Job. He faced the loss of his family and all of his possessions and still praised God. He faced the loss of his health and physical misery and still praised God. Only when his friends began to attack his integrity did he begin to feel sorry for himself. Often circumstances that are far from life threatening do more to upset our attitudes than those which could take our very lives. Either way, we are called to a higher vision. We are to fix our eyes upon Jesus. He is "the author and perfecter of our faith." He already paid the price to reconcile us to the Father. Our focus should be on the perfection that he already bought for us rather than the troubles of the day.

We should also remember that a certain amount of hardship may be God's discipline for us. Hebrews 12:7-8 says:

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

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<sup>19</sup> The background of this may be the persecution of Christians that occurred under Nero. After the city of Rome burned (the blaze may have been set by Nero himself) Nero needed somebody to blame for the trouble. He picked the new religious sect called Christians. To publicly punish them, he committed many atrocities. For sport, he would dress Christians in the skins of animals and turn wild animals loose on them to tear them to shreds. Others were tied to poles and burned as torches in the night, often as entertainment at Nero's parties.

<sup>20</sup> This describes the lifestyle of John the Baptist as well as certain groups of Jews, e.g. the Essenes.

A human father who loves his children will discipline those children. If they do not learn discipline as children it will be a serious handicap when they reach adulthood. If human fathers have enough sense to do this, then how much more will our heavenly Father discipline his children. In doing so, he is fitting us for Kingdom citizenship. For this reason, we should submit to hardship and even be joyful in the face of it. It may hurt for a season, but we are better off in the long run for having endured it.

We must also remember that we can control some of the discipline we receive. God disciplines us where we need to be disciplined. To reduce our own suffering and hardships, we should seek to live lives at peace with other men and with God. Avoid sinfulness. In the Old Testament, men approached God in trembling and fear of death. Jesus has cleared the way for a new approach to the Father, however. When Moses went up Mount Sinai to meet with God, all the other people were warned that they would die if they approached the mountain. We have a different arrangement, however. Hebrews 12:22-24 says:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

We are privileged to approach God in a joyful assembly. Our names are written in heaven because we have been bought with the blood of Jesus. That is our citizenship. We belong there. We have free access to the King. As part of that, however, we are obliged to listen and obey when he speaks. Hebrews 12:28 also says that we are to “worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.” We have free access, but we are to approach in acceptable worship.

We must strive to maintain a proper attitude towards God. We must also strive to maintain a proper attitude towards one another. Hebrews 13:1-3 says:

Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Often we approach relationships from a viewpoint of what we can get rather than what we can give. This is wrong. There may well be times when God sends angels into our lives to test our kindness to strangers. An act of kindness to one of God’s beloved, whether angelic or human, will never go unrewarded. Not to overstate a point, but never lose sight of the single, two-pronged theme that runs throughout the Bible. The theme is relationship. The prongs are our relationship with God and our relationship with our fellow man. God cares greatly about both. The writer especially calls upon us to care for those in prison for the sake of the faith. They deserve the support of those who are not experiencing this persecution. If we pull together when one of us is in need then we are all stronger.

The writer calls upon people to avoid sexual sin and the love of money. Both have the potential to disrupt the relationship with God and the relationship with man. The price is too great. He calls upon us to follow the example of our fathers in the faith and to follow the example of Jesus Christ himself. Hebrews 13:8 reminds us that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” His example is always right. Furthermore the truth about him is constant; it does not evolve over time.

The writer next addresses some false teachings that seem to be evolving among the Hebrew Christians. Hebrews 13:9-14 says:

Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

We are unsure of the exact nature of the false teaching that is referred to in the passage. This passage bears somewhat of a resemblance to Colossians 2:16-23. There may have been some Gnostic teaching infiltrating the ranks. Some of this is clearly a throwback to Judaism. Some people were obviously trying to better themselves spiritually through ceremony, including the eating of ceremonial foods. The writer has gone to great lengths in the epistle to demonstrate that we have a better covenant than the old. Under the sacrifice of Jesus, we have rights and privileges before God that those of the Old Covenant do not enjoy. "We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat."

According to the Old Covenant, on the Day of Atonement the body of the sacrificial animal was burned outside the camp (Leviticus 16:27). Likewise, Jesus was sacrificed outside the camp – outside the city limits of Jerusalem – to make ultimate atonement for our sin. We should no longer look inside Jerusalem – synonymous with Judaism – for salvation, but to the city to come – the Kingdom of God.

Thus the writer calls the people back to pure teaching. They were to follow the teachings of Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. They should not be caught up in the teachings of those who would draw them back into Jewish ceremony or any other ceremony as a source of spiritual betterment. There is no other way than to follow in the steps of Jesus. He has made the ultimate sacrifice for us, so there is no need for the sacrifices of the law. Instead, Hebrews 13:15-16 says:

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

In closing this section, the writer calls upon the people to submit to church leadership so that their work may be a joy rather than a burden.

## **2.12 Closing**

Hebrews 13:18-25

The closing of the letter contains several statements that sound like they were written by Paul. Hebrews 13:18-19 says:

Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

This sounds like one of Paul's prison epistles. Hebrews 13:23 says:

I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.

Paul and Timothy were close associates. This passage sounds like Timothy has been released from prison and will be joining the writer soon. It would be natural for Timothy to run to his father in the faith after such a trial. Hebrews 13:24 says:

Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.

We know that Paul wrote letters from prison in Rome.

All of these pieces could be evidence that Paul is the author, but it is not necessarily so. Paul was certainly not the only important figure in the church who was imprisoned. Paul was certainly not the only one who spent time in Rome. Paul also was not the only friend that Timothy had. In spite of the fact that these pieces would fit comfortably into the life of Paul, they could also be true of Barnabus, Apollos, or any other number of people. We do not know who wrote this letter.

We do know that whoever it was had an intimate knowledge of Judaism and a respect for that spiritual heritage. He had a love for Hebrew people. He had a deep and abiding love for Jesus. He also had an insight into the way that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament law deeper than we see anywhere else in Scripture. To a serious student of the Old Testament, the book of Hebrews comes alive. It is like watching the book of Leviticus take human form and dance before our eyes. When you really understand all that Hebrews has to say, then you will not be able to believe all the times you fell asleep reading Leviticus.

Perhaps this discussion is best closed with the writer's own words. Hebrews 13:20-21 says:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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