

FREE BIBLE COMMENTARY

YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE!

The Superiority of the New Covenant: Hebrews

By Dr. Bob Utley, retired professor of hermeneutics (Biblical interpretation)

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS COMMENTARY

AB	Anchor Bible Commentaries, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary (6 vols.), ed. David Noel Freedman
AKOT	Analytical Key to the Old Testament by John Joseph Owens
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts, James B. Pritchard
BDB	A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs
IDB	The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (4 vols.), ed. George A. Buttrick
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (5 vols.), ed. James Orr
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JPSOA	The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text: A New Translation (The Jewish Publication Society of America)
KB	The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner
LAM	The Holy Bible From Ancient Eastern Manuscripts (the Peshitta) by George M. Lamsa
LXX	Septuagint (Greek-English) by Zondervan, 1970
MOF	A New Translation of the Bible by James Moffatt
MT	Masoretic Hebrew Text
NAB	New American Bible Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NET	NET Bible: New English Translation, Second Beta Edition
NRSV	New Revised Standard Bible
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (5 vols.), ed. Willem A. VanGemeren
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
OTPG	Old Testament Passing Guide by Todd S. Beall, William A. Banks and Colin Smith
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SEPT	The Septuagint (Greek-English) by Zondervan, 1970
TEV	Today's English Version from United Bible Societies
YLT	Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Robert Young
ZPBE	Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia (5 vols.), ed. Merrill C. Tenney

A Word From the Author: How Can This Commentary Help You?

Biblical interpretation is a rational and spiritual process that attempts to understand an ancient inspired writer in such a way that the message from God may be understood and applied in our day.

The spiritual process is crucial but difficult to define. It does involve a yieldedness and openness to God. There must be a hunger (1) for Him, (2) to know Him, and (3) to serve Him. This process involves prayer, confession and the willingness for lifestyle change. The Spirit is crucial in the interpretive process, but why sincere, godly Christians understand the Bible differently is a mystery.

The rational process is easier to describe. We must be consistent and fair to the text and not be influenced by our personal or denominational biases. We are all historically conditioned. None of us are objective, neutral interpreters. This commentary offers a careful rational process containing three interpretive principles structured to help us overcome our biases.

First Principle

The first principle is to note the historical setting in which a biblical book was written and the particular historical occasion for its authorship. The original author had a purpose, a message to communicate. The text cannot mean something to us that it never meant to the original, ancient, inspired author. His intent—not our historical, emotional, cultural, personal or denominational need—is the key. Application is an integral partner to interpretation, but proper interpretation must always precede application. It must be reiterated that every biblical text has one and only one meaning. This meaning is what the original biblical author intended through the Spirit's leadership to communicate to his day. This one meaning may have many possible applications to different cultures and situations. These applications must be linked to the central truth of the original author. For this reason, this study guide commentary is designed to provide an introduction to each book of the Bible.

Second Principle

The second principle is to identify the literary units. Every biblical book is a unified document. Interpreters have no right to isolate one aspect of truth by excluding others. Therefore, we must strive to understand the purpose of the whole biblical book before we interpret the individual literary units. The individual parts—chapters, paragraphs, or verses—cannot mean what the whole unit does not mean. Interpretation must move from a deductive approach of the whole to an inductive approach to the parts. Therefore, this study guide commentary is designed to help the student analyze the structure of each literary unit by paragraphs. Paragraph and chapter divisions are not inspired, but they do aid us in identifying thought units.

Interpreting at a paragraph level—not sentence, clause, phrase or word level—is the key in following the biblical author's intended meaning. Paragraphs are based on a unified topic, often called the theme or topical sentence. Every word, phrase, clause, and sentence in the paragraph relates somehow to this unified theme. They limit it, expand it, explain it, and/or question it. A real key to proper interpretation is to follow the original author's thought on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis through the individual literary units that make up the biblical book. This study guide commentary is designed to help the student do that by comparing modern English translations. These translations have been selected because they employ different translation theories:

1. The United Bible Society's Greek text is the revised fourth edition (UBS4). This text was paragraphed by modern textual scholars.

2. The New King James Version (NKJV) is a word-for-word literal translation based on the Greek manuscript tradition known as the Textus Receptus. Its paragraph divisions are longer than the other translations. These longer units help the student to see the unified topics.
3. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is a modified word-for-word translation. It forms a mid point between the following two modern versions. Its paragraph divisions are quite helpful in identifying subjects.
4. The Today's English Version (TEV) is a dynamic equivalent translation published by the United Bible Society. It attempts to translate the Bible in such a way that a modern English reader or speaker can understand the meaning of the Greek text. Often, especially in the Gospels, it divides paragraphs by speaker rather than by subject, in the same way as the NIV. For the interpreter's purposes, this is not helpful. It is interesting to note that both the UBS4 and TEV are published by the same entity, yet their paragraphing differs.
5. The Jerusalem Bible (JB) is a dynamic equivalent translation based on a French Catholic translation. It is very helpful in comparing the paragraphing from a European perspective.
6. The printed text is the 1995 Updated New American Standard Bible (NASB), which is a word for word translation. The verse by verse comments follow this paragraphing.

Third Principle

The third principle is to read the Bible in different translations in order to grasp the widest possible range of meaning (semantic field) that biblical words or phrases may have. Often a Greek phrase or word can be understood in several ways. These different translations bring out these options and help to identify and explain the Greek manuscript variations. These do not affect doctrine, but they do help us to try to get back to the original text penned by an inspired ancient writer.

This commentary offers a quick way for the student to check his interpretations. It is not meant to be definitive, but rather informative and thought-provoking. Often, other possible interpretations help us not be so parochial, dogmatic, and denominational. Interpreters need to have a larger range of interpretive options to recognize how ambiguous the ancient text can be. It is shocking how little agreement there is among Christians who claim the Bible as their source of truth.

These principles have helped me to overcome much of my historical conditioning by forcing me to struggle with the ancient text. My hope is that it will be a blessing to you as well.

Bob Utley
June 27, 1996

A GUIDE TO GOOD BIBLE READING: A PERSONAL SEARCH FOR VERIFIABLE TRUTH

What follows is a brief explanation of Dr. Bob Utley's hermeneutical philosophy and the procedures used in his commentaries.

Can we know truth? Where is it found? Can we logically verify it? Is there an ultimate authority? Are there absolutes which can guide our lives, our world? Is there meaning to life? Why are we here? Where are we going? These questions—questions that all rational people contemplate—have haunted the human intellect since the beginning of time (Eccl. 1:13-18; 3:9-11). I can remember my personal search for an integrating center for my life. I became a believer in Christ at a young age, based primarily on the witness of significant others in my family. As I grew to adulthood, questions about myself and my world also grew. Simple cultural and religious clichés did not bring meaning to the experiences I read about or encountered. It was a time of confusion, searching, longing, and often a feeling of hopelessness in the face of the insensitive, hard world in which I lived.

Many claimed to have answers to these ultimate questions, but after research and reflection I found that their answers were based upon (1) personal philosophies, (2) ancient myths, (3) personal experiences, or (4) psychological projections. I needed some degree of verification, some evidence, some rationality on which to base my worldview, my integrating center, my reason to live. I found these in my study of the Bible. I began to search for evidence of its trustworthiness, which I found in (1) the historical reliability of the Bible as confirmed by archaeology, (2) the accuracy of the prophecies of the Old Testament, (3) the unity of the Bible message over the sixteen hundred years of its production, and (4) the personal testimonies of people whose lives had been permanently changed by contact with the Bible. Christianity, as a unified system of faith and belief, has the ability to deal with complex questions of human life. Not only did this provide a rational framework, but the experiential aspect of biblical faith brought me emotional joy and stability.

I thought that I had found the integrating center for my life—Christ, as understood through the Scriptures. It was a heady experience, an emotional release. However, I can still remember the shock and pain when it began to dawn on me how many different interpretations of this book were advocated, sometimes even within the same churches and schools of thought. Affirming the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible was not the end, but only the beginning. How do I verify or reject the varied and conflicting interpretations of the many difficult passages in Scripture by those who were claiming its authority and trustworthiness? This task became my life's goal and pilgrimage of faith. I knew that my faith in Christ had brought me great peace and joy. My mind longed for some absolutes in the midst of the relativity of my culture and the dogmatism of conflicting religious systems and denominational arrogance. In my search for valid approaches to the interpretation of ancient literature, I was surprised to discover my own historical, cultural, denominational and experiential biases. I had often read the Bible simply to reinforce my own views. I used it as a source of dogma to attack others while reaffirming my own insecurities and inadequacies. How painful this realization was to me!

Although I can never be totally objective, I can become a better reader of the Bible. I can limit my biases by identifying them and acknowledging their presence. I am not yet free of them, but I have confronted my own weaknesses. The interpreter is often the worst enemy of good Bible reading! Let me list some of the presuppositions I bring to my study of the Bible so that you, the reader, may examine them along with me:

I. Presuppositions

1. I believe the Bible is the sole inspired self-revelation of the one true God. Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of the intent of the original divine author through a human writer in a specific historical setting.
2. I believe the Bible was written for the common person—for all people! God accommodated Himself to speak to us clearly within a historical and cultural context. God does not hide truth—He wants us to understand! Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of its day, not ours. The Bible should not mean to us what it never meant to those who first read or heard it. It is understandable by the average human mind and uses normal human communication forms and techniques.
3. I believe the Bible has a unified message and purpose. It does not contradict itself, though it does contain difficult and paradoxical passages. Thus, the best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible itself.
4. I believe that every passage (excluding prophecies) has one and only one meaning based on the intent of the original, inspired author. Although we can never be absolutely certain we know the original author's intent, many indicators point in its direction:
 - a. the genre (literary type) chosen to express the message
 - b. the historical setting and/or specific occasion that elicited the writing
 - c. the literary context of the entire book as well as each literary unit
 - d. the textual design (outline) of the literary units as they relate to the whole message
 - e. the specific grammatical features employed to communicate the message
 - f. the words chosen to present the message

The study of each of these areas becomes the object of our study of a passage. Before I explain my methodology for good Bible reading, let me delineate some of the inappropriate methods being used today that have caused so much diversity of interpretation, and that consequently should be avoided:

II. Inappropriate Methods

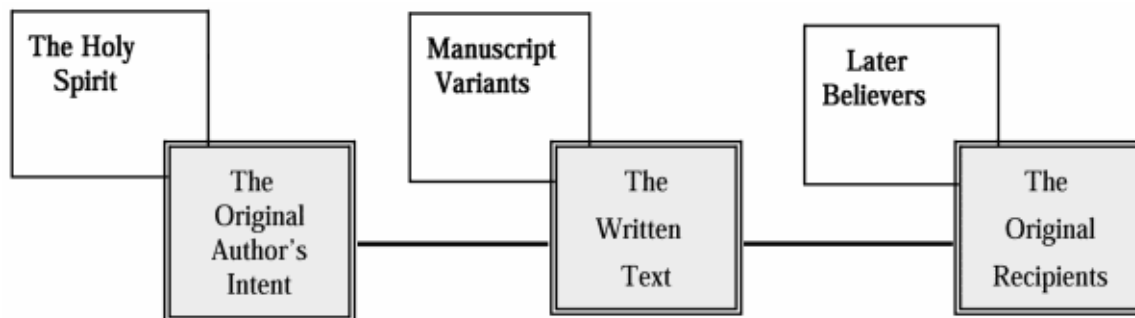
1. Ignoring the literary context of the books of the Bible and using every sentence, clause, or even individual words as statements of truth unrelated to the author's intent or the larger context. This is often called "proof-texting."
2. Ignoring the historical setting of the books by substituting a supposed historical setting that has little or no support from the text itself.
3. Ignoring the historical setting of the books and reading it as the morning hometown newspaper written primarily to modern individual Christians.
4. Ignoring the historical setting of the books by allegorizing the text into a philosophical/theological message totally unrelated to the first hearers and the original author's intent.
5. Ignoring the original message by substituting one's own system of theology, pet doctrine, or contemporary issue unrelated to the original author's purpose and stated message. This phenomenon often follows the initial reading of the Bible as a means of establishing a speaker's authority. This is often referred to as "reader response" ("what-the-text-means-to-me" interpretation).

At least three related components may be found in all written human communication:



In the past, different reading techniques have focused on one of the three components. But to truly affirm

the unique inspiration of the Bible, a modified diagram is more appropriate:



In truth all three components must be included in the interpretive process. For the purpose of verification, my interpretation focuses on the first two components: the original author and the text. I am probably reacting to the abuses I have observed (1) allegorizing or spiritualizing texts and (2) "reader response" interpretation (what-it-means-to-me). Abuse may occur at each stage. We must always check our motives, biases, techniques, and applications. But how do we check them if there are no boundaries to interpretations, no limits, no criteria? This is where authorial intent and textual structure provide me with some criteria for limiting the scope of possible valid interpretations.

In light of these inappropriate reading techniques, what are some possible approaches to good Bible reading and interpretation which offer a degree of verification and consistency?

III. Possible Approaches to Good Bible Reading

At this point I am not discussing the unique techniques of interpreting specific genres but general hermeneutical principles valid for all types of biblical texts. A good book for genre-specific approaches is *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, published by Zondervan.

My methodology focuses initially on the reader allowing the Holy Spirit to illumine the Bible through four personal reading cycles. This makes the Spirit, the text and the reader primary, not secondary. This also protects the reader from being unduly influenced by commentators. I have heard it said: "The Bible throws a lot of light on commentaries." This is not meant to be a depreciating comment about study aids, but rather a plea for an appropriate timing for their use.

We must be able to support our interpretations from the text itself. Five areas provide at least limited verification:

1. historical setting
2. literary context
3. grammatical structures (syntax)
4. contemporary word usage
5. relevant parallel passages
6. genre

We need to be able to provide the reasons and logic behind our interpretations. The Bible is our only source for faith and practice. Sadly, Christians often disagree about what it teaches or affirms. The four reading cycles are designed to provide the following interpretive insights:

1. The first reading cycle
 - a. Read the book in a single sitting. Read it again in a different translation, hopefully from a different translation theory
 - (1) word-for-word (NKJV, NASB, NRSV)
 - (2) dynamic equivalent (TEV, JB)
 - (3) paraphrase (Living Bible, Amplified Bible)

- b. Look for the central purpose of the entire writing. Identify its theme.
 - c. Isolate (if possible) a literary unit, a chapter, a paragraph or a sentence which clearly expresses this central purpose or theme.
 - d. Identify the predominant literary genre
 - (1) Old Testament
 - a) Hebrew narrative
 - b) Hebrew poetry (wisdom literature, psalm)
 - c) Hebrew prophecy (prose, poetry)
 - d) Law codes
 - (2) New Testament
 - a) Narratives (Gospels, Acts)
 - b) Parables (Gospels)
 - c) Letters/epistles
 - d) Apocalyptic literature
2. The second reading cycle
- a. Read the entire book again, seeking to identify major topics or subjects.
 - b. Outline the major topics and briefly state their contents in a simple statement.
 - c. Check your purpose statement and broad outline with study aids.
3. The third reading cycle
- a. Read the entire book again, seeking to identify the historical setting and specific occasion for the writing from the Bible book itself.
 - b. List the historical items that are mentioned in the Bible book
 - (1) the author
 - (2) the date
 - (3) the recipients
 - (4) the specific reason for writing
 - (5) aspects of the cultural setting that relate to the purpose of the writing
 - (6) references to historical people and events
 - c. Expand your outline to paragraph level for that part of the biblical book you are interpreting. Always identify and outline the literary unit. This may be several chapters or paragraphs. This enables you to follow the original author's logic and textual design.
 - d. Check your historical setting by using study aids.
4. The fourth reading cycle
- a. Read the specific literary unit again in several translations
 - (1) word-for-word (NKJV, NASB, NRSV)
 - (2) dynamic equivalent (TEV, JB)
 - (3) paraphrase (Living Bible, Amplified Bible)
 - b. Look for literary or grammatical structures
 - (1) repeated phrases, Eph. 1:6,12,14
 - (2) repeated grammatical structures, Rom. 8:31
 - (3) contrasting concepts
 - c. List the following items
 - (1) significant terms
 - (2) unusual terms
 - (3) important grammatical structures
 - (4) particularly difficult words, clauses, and sentences
 - d. Look for relevant parallel passages
 - (1) look for the clearest teaching passage on your subject using a) "systematic theology" books b) reference Bibles c) concordances

- (2) look for a possible paradoxical pair within your subject. Many biblical truths are presented in dialectical pairs; many denominational conflicts come from proof-texting half of a biblical tension. All of the Bible is inspired, and we must seek out its complete message in order to provide a Scriptural balance to our interpretation.
- (3) look for parallels within the same book, same author or same genre; the Bible is its own best interpreter because it has one author, the Spirit.
- e. Use study aids to check your observations of historical setting and occasion
 - (1) study Bibles
 - (2) Bible encyclopedias, handbooks and dictionaries
 - (3) Bible introductions
 - (4) Bible commentaries (at this point in your study, allow the believing community, past and present, to aid and correct your personal study.)

IV. Application of Bible Interpretation

At this point we turn to application. You have taken the time to understand the text in its original setting; now you must apply it to your life, your culture. I define biblical authority as "understanding what the original biblical author was saying to his day and applying that truth to our day."

Application must follow interpretation of the original author's intent both in time and logic. We cannot apply a Bible passage to our own day until we know what it was saying to its day! A Bible passage should not mean what it never meant!

Your detailed outline, to paragraph level (reading cycle #3), will be your guide. Application should be made at paragraph level, not word level. Words have meaning only in context; clauses have meaning only in context; sentences have meaning only in context. The only inspired person involved in the interpretive process is the original author. We only follow his lead by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But illumination is not inspiration. To say "thus saith the Lord," we must abide by the original author's intent. Application must relate specifically to the general intent of the whole writing, the specific literary unit and paragraph level thought development.

Do not let the issues of our day interpret the Bible; let the Bible speak! This may require us to draw principles from the text. This is valid if the text supports a principle. Unfortunately, many times our principles are just that, "our" principles—not the text's principles.

In applying the Bible, it is important to remember that (except in prophecy) one and only one meaning is valid for a particular Bible text. That meaning is related to the intent of the original author as he addressed a crisis or need in his day. Many possible applications may be derived from this one meaning. The application will be based on the recipients' needs but must be related to the original author's meaning.

V. The Spiritual Aspect of Interpretation

So far I have discussed the logical process involved in interpretation and application. Now let me discuss briefly the spiritual aspect of interpretation. The following checklist has been helpful for me:

1. Pray for the Spirit's help (cf. I Cor. 1:26-2:16).
2. Pray for personal forgiveness and cleansing from known sin (cf. I John 1:9).
3. Pray for a greater desire to know God (cf. Ps. 19:7-14; 42:1ff.; 119:1ff).
4. Apply any new insight immediately to your own life.
5. Remain humble and teachable.

It is so hard to keep the balance between the logical process and the spiritual leadership of the Holy Spirit. The following quotes have helped me balance the two:

1. from James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting*, pp. 17-18:
 "The illumination comes to the minds of God's people—not just to the spiritual elite. There is no guru class in biblical Christianity, no illuminati, no people through whom all proper interpretation must come. And so, while the Holy Spirit gives special gifts of wisdom, knowledge and spiritual discernment, He does not assign these gifted Christians to be the only authoritative interpreters of His Word. It is up to each of His people to learn, to judge and to discern by reference to the Bible which stands as the authority even to those to whom God has given special abilities. To summarize, the assumption I am making throughout the entire book is that the Bible is God's true revelation to all humanity, that it is our ultimate authority on all matters about which it speaks, that it is not a total mystery but can be adequately understood by ordinary people in every culture."

2. on Kierkegaard, found in Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 75:
 According to Kierkegaard the grammatical, lexical, and historical study of the Bible was necessary but preliminary to the true reading of the Bible. "To read the Bible as God's word one must read it with his heart in his mouth, on tip-toe, with eager expectancy, in conversation with God. To read the Bible thoughtlessly or carelessly or academically or professionally is not to read the Bible as God's Word. As one reads it as a love letter is read, then one reads it as the Word of God."

3. H. H. Rowley in *The Relevance of the Bible*, p. 19:
 "No merely intellectual understanding of the Bible, however complete, can possess all its treasures. It does not despise such understanding, for it is essential to a complete understanding. But it must lead to a spiritual understanding of the spiritual treasures of this book if it is to be complete. And for that spiritual understanding something more than intellectual alertness is necessary. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and the Bible student needs an attitude of spiritual receptivity, an eagerness to find God that he may yield himself to Him, if he is to pass beyond his scientific study unto the richer inheritance of this greatest of all books."

VI. This Commentary's Method

The Study Guide Commentary is designed to aid your interpretive procedures in the following ways:

1. A brief historical outline introduces each book. After you have done "reading cycle #3" check this information.
2. Contextual insights are found at the beginning of each chapter. This will help you see how the literary unit is structured.
3. At the beginning of each chapter or major literary unit the paragraph divisions and their descriptive captions are provided from several modern translations:
 - a. The United Bible Society Greek text, fourth edition revised (UBS4)
 - b. The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update (NASB)
 - c. The New King James Version (NKJV)
 - d. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
 - e. Today's English Version (TEV)
 - f. The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)

Paragraph divisions are not inspired. They must be ascertained from the context. By comparing several modern translations from differing translation theories and theological perspectives, we are able to analyze the supposed structure of the original author's thought. Each paragraph has one major truth. This has been called "the topic sentence" or "the central idea of the text." This unifying thought is the key to proper historical, grammatical interpretation. One should never interpret, preach or teach on less than a paragraph! Also remember that each paragraph is related to its surrounding paragraphs. This is why a paragraph level outline of the entire book is so important. We must be able to follow the logical flow of the subject being addressed by the original inspired author.

4. Bob's notes follow a verse-by-verse approach to interpretation. This forces us to follow the original author's thought. The notes provide information from several areas:
 - a. literary context
 - b. historical, cultural insights
 - c. grammatical information
 - d. word studies
 - e. relevant parallel passages
5. At certain points in the commentary, the printed text of the New American Standard Version (1995 update) will be supplemented by the translations of several other modern versions:
 - a. The New King James Version (NKJV), which follows the textual manuscripts of the "Textus Receptus."
 - b. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which is a word-for-word revision from the National Council of Churches of the Revised Standard Version.
 - c. The Today's English Version (TEV), which is a dynamic equivalent translation from the American Bible Society.
 - d. The Jerusalem Bible (JB), which is an English translation based on a French Catholic dynamic equivalent translation.
6. For those who do not read Greek, comparing English translations can help in identifying problems in the text:
 - a. manuscript variations
 - b. alternate word meanings
 - c. grammatically difficult texts and structure
 - d. ambiguous texts Although the English translations cannot solve these problems, they do target them as places for deeper and more thorough study.
 - e. At the close of each chapter relevant discussion questions are provided which attempt to target the major interpretive issues of that chapter.

INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

CRUCIAL OPENING STATEMENT

As I have studied this book it has become more and more obvious that my theology has been molded by Paul's. It is very difficult for me to allow the plurality of the other NT authors to present their inspired thoughts because I tend to put them into Pauline categories. This is particularly evident in the emphasis of Hebrews on continuing in the faith. In the book of Hebrews faith is not a forensic position (justification by faith), but a faithful life to the end (Heb. 11-12).

I am afraid that many of the questions I struggle with in Hebrews would have never been asked by its author (nor Peter, nor James). Hebrews is an occasional document, like all the NT books. I must let the author speak even when he/she makes me uncomfortable; even when he/she does not use my cherished categories or even radically disrupts those categories. I dare not substitute my systematic theology for an inspired NT author's message.

I prefer to repent of my theological dogmatism and live within a NT tension that I do not fully understand or like! I am afraid I view the NT through the filter of a modern evangelical, conversionist grid. I want to affirm biblical promises; promises of God's love, provision, and keeping power; yet I am convicted by the powerful warnings and mandates of the NT authors. I desperately need to hear Hebrews, but it is so painful! I want to explain away the tension. I suppose, in reality, I want to affirm a free salvation and a cost-everything Christian life. But where do I draw the line when the ideal is not met? Is eternal fellowship with God an initial faith response or a continuing faith response? Hebrews clearly states the mandate of a continuing faith response. The Christian life is viewed from the end, not the beginning!

This is not meant to imply a works-oriented salvation, but a works-oriented confirmation. Faith is the evidence, not the mechanism (which is grace). Believers are not saved by works, but unto works. Works are not the means of salvation, but the result of salvation. Godly, faithful, daily Christlikeness is not something we do, but who we are in Him. If there is no changed, and changing life of faith, there is no evidence of our salvation, no security for the believer. Only God knows the heart and the circumstances. Assurance is meant to be a companion in a life of faith, not an initial theological assertion devoid of lifestyle evidence.

My prayer is that we will allow this inspired NT author to clearly speak and not relegate Hebrews to a theological footnote in a systematic theological grid, be it Calvinistic or Arminian.

OPENING INSIGHTS

- A. This book uses OT texts interpreted by rabbinical hermeneutics to communicate its message. In order to understand the original author's intent, this book must be interpreted in light of first century rabbinical Judaism, not modern western thought.
- B. This book begins like a sermon (no salutation or typical greeting) and ends like a letter (typical Pauline close of chapter 13). It is possibly a synagogue homily turned into a letter. The author calls his/her book "a word of exhortation" in Heb. 13:22. This same phrase is also used in Acts 13:15 of a sermon.
- C. This is an insightful New Covenant commentary on the Mosaic covenant:
 1. a very authoritative view of the OT
 2. a comparison of the old and new covenants
 3. the only NT book which calls Jesus our high priest
- D. This book is filled with warnings against falling away ("shrinking back" cf. Heb. 10:38), or returning

to Judaism (i.e., chapters 2,4,5,6,10,12; cf. *No Easy Salvation* by R. C. Glaze, Jr., published by Insight Press).

E. Although it is an over-generalization, it is helpful to see Paul with his emphasis on salvation as a finished work of the sovereign God (i.e., justification by faith) assert security as an initial truth (i.e., Romans 4). Peter, James, and the letters of 1 and 2 John emphasize the ongoing responsibilities of the New Covenant and assert that security is daily, confirmed by a changed and changing life. The author of Hebrews, emphasizing a life of faithfulness (cf. chapter 11), asserts security from an end-of-life perspective. Modern western rational thinking tends to polarize these perspectives, while the NT writers, by one divine author (i.e., the Spirit), wants to hold them in tension and affirm all three. Assurance is never the goal, but the by-product of an active faith in the promises of God.

AUTHORSHIP

A. Although the authorship of Hebrews is in dispute, several early Gnostic works (i.e., *Gospel of Truth*, *Gospel of Philip* and *The Apocrypha of John*) quote it several times, which shows it was considered part of the authoritative Christian writings by the second century (cf. Andrea Helmbold's *The Nag Hammadi Gnostic Texts and the Bible*, p. 91).

B. The Eastern Church (Alexandria, Egypt) accepted Paul's authorship as is seen by its listing Hebrews in Paul's writings in the early papyrus manuscript P⁴⁶. This manuscript is called the Chester Beatty Papyri and was copied at the end of the second century. It places Hebrews after Romans. Some Alexandrian leaders recognized the literary problems related to Paul's authorship.

1. Clement of Alexandria (a.d. 150-215, quoted by Eusebius) says that Paul wrote it in Hebrew and Luke translated it into Greek.
2. Origen (a.d. 185-253) asserted that the thoughts are Paul's but it was written by a later follower, such as Luke or Clement of Rome.

C. This book is omitted in the list of Paul's letters adopted by the Western Church called the Muratorian Fragment (a list of NT canonical books from Rome about a.d. 180-200).

D. What we do know about the author

1. He was apparently a second generation Jewish Christian (Heb. 2:3).
2. He quotes from the Greek translation of the OT called the Septuagint.
3. He uses ancient tabernacle procedures and not current temple rituals.
4. He writes using classical Greek grammar and syntax (this book is not platonic. Its orientation is the OT, not Philo).

E. This book is anonymous, but the author was well known to the recipients (cf. Heb. 6:9-10; 10:34; 13:7,9).

F. Why there are doubts about Paul's authorship

1. The style is so different (except chapter 13) from Paul's other writings.
2. The vocabulary is different.
3. There are subtle differences in word and phrase usage and emphasis.
4. When Paul calls his friends and co-workers "brother" the person's name always comes first (cf. Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:1; 16:12; 2 Cor. 1:1; 2:13; Phil. 2:25) but Heb. 13:23 has "our brother Timothy."

G. Theories of Authorship

1. Clement of Alexandria's in his book *Hypotyposes* (quoted by Eusebius) believed Luke translated into Greek Paul's original writing in Hebrew (Luke used excellent Koine Greek).

2. Origen said either Luke or Clement of Rome wrote it but followed Paul's teaching.
3. Jerome and Augustine accepted Paul's authorship only to facilitate the book's acceptance into the Canon by the Western Church.
4. Tertullian (*De Pudic.* 20) believed Barnabas (a Levite associated with Paul) wrote it.
5. Martin Luther said Apollos, an Alexandrian-trained intellectual associated with Paul (cf. Acts 18:24), wrote it.
6. Calvin said Clement of Rome (the first to quote it in a.d. 96) or Luke was the author.
7. Adolph von Harnack said Aquila and Priscilla (they taught Apollos the full gospel and were associated with Paul and Timothy, cf. Acts 18:26) wrote it.
8. Sir William Ramsey said Philip (the evangelist) wrote it for Paul while Paul was in prison at Caesarea.
9. Others have asserted Philip or Silas (Silvanus).

RECIPIENTS

- A. The title "to the Hebrews" addresses the Hebrew people, therefore, the book was written to all Jews (cf. Clement of Alexandria, quoted by Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* VI, 14).
- B. The internal evidence following R. C. Glaze, Jr.'s *No Easy Salvation* asserts that a specific group of believing Jews or a synagogue is being addressed (cf. Heb. 6:10; 10:32-34; 12:4; 13:7,19,23).
 1. They seem to be Jewish believers because of the numerous OT quotes and the subject matter (cf. Heb. 3:1; 4:14-16; 6:9; 10:34; 13:1-25).
 2. They had experienced some persecution (cf. Heb. 10:32; 12:4). Judaism was recognized as a legal religion by the Roman authorities while later in the first century Christianity was considered illegal when it separated from synagogue worship.
 3. They had been believers for a long time, but were still immature (cf. Heb. 5:11-14). They were afraid to break completely with Judaism (cf. 6:1-2).
- C. The ambiguous text of Heb. 13:24 could imply it was written (1) from Italy or (2) to Italy, probably Rome.
- D. The location of the recipients is linked to the different theories concerning authorship.
 1. Alexandria - Apollos
 2. Antioch - Barnabas
 3. Caesarea - Luke or Philip
 4. Rome - Clement of Rome and the mention of Italy in Heb. 13:24.
 5. Spain - This was the theory of Nicolas of Lyra (a.d. 1270-1340)

DATE

- A. Just before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman General (later Emperor) Titus, in a.d. 70
 1. the author mentions Paul's companion Timothy by name (cf. Heb. 13:23)
 2. the author refers to sacrifices continuing (cf. Heb. 8:13; 10:1-2) in the Temple
 3. the author mentions persecution which may fit Nero's day (a.d. 54-68)
 4. the author encourages the readers not to return to Judaism and its rituals
- B. After a.d. 70
 1. the author uses the rituals of the tabernacle, not Herod's temple
 2. the author mentions persecution
 - a. possibly under Nero (cf. Heb. 10:32-34)
 - b. later possibly under Domitian (cf. Heb. 12:4-13)
 3. the book may relate to the revival of rabbinical Judaism (writings from Jamnia) late in the first

century

C. Before a.d. 95 because the book is quoted by Clement of Rome

PURPOSE

- A. The Jewish Christians are encouraged to leave the synagogue and identify publicly (fully) with the church (cf. Heb. 13:13).
- B. The Jewish Christians are encouraged to take up the missionary mandate of the gospel (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).
- C. The Jewish unbelievers in fellowship with these Jewish Christians are the focus of chapters 6 and 10. Notice the presence of three groups, "we," "you," and "they." They are warned to personally respond to the abundant and clear evidence in the lives of their Christian friends and co-worshippers.
- D. This supposed historical reconstruction is taken from *No Easy Salvation* by R. C. Glaze, Jr.
"The problem was not that of tension between the Christian majority and the non-Christian minority. The very opposite was true. The Jewish Christians of this congregation had so compromised their faith and sense of stewardship that the two groups could worship together as one congregation. Neither group seriously troubled the conscience of the other. No longer did the preaching of the Christian group result in conviction and decision on the part of the unsaved members of the synagogue. The Christians were in a state of stagnation because of their unwillingness to accept the full demands of courageous Christian living. The unbelievers had become hardened by continual rejection to the point of utter indifference. These groups had now become compatible bedfellows.
The reluctance of the Christian group to 'press on unto perfection' (6:1) was motivated by two phenomena: high regard for the traditions of Judaism and unwillingness to pay the price of full identification with Christianity, which was becoming more and more a Gentile movement" (p. 23).

BRIEF OUTLINE OF HEBREWS

Heb. 1:1-3	Superiority of the Son over the prophets
Heb. 1:4-2:18	Superiority of the Son over the angels
Heb. 3:1-4:13; 4:14-5:10	Superiority of the Son over the Mosaic Covenant
Heb. 6:13-7:28	Superiority of the Son over the Aaronic Priesthood
Heb. 5:11-6:12	Superiority of the believing Jews over the unbelieving Jews
Heb. 8:1-10:18	Superiority of the Son over the procedures of the Mosaic
Heb. 10:19- 13:25	Covenant Superiority of the Son advocated and revealed in believers

This is an example of the rabbinical hermeneutic called "Lesser to Greater."

READING CYCLE ONE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Therefore, read the entire biblical book at one sitting. State the central theme of the entire book in your own words.

1. Theme of entire book
2. Type of literature (genre)

READING CYCLE TWO (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Therefore, read the entire biblical book a second time at one sitting. Outline the main subjects and express the subject in a single sentence.

1. Subject of first literary unit
2. Subject of second literary unit
3. Subject of third literary unit
4. Subject of fourth literary unit
5. Etc.

HEBREWS 1

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS*

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
God has Spoken by His Son	God's Supreme Revelation	The Prologue	God's Word Through His Son	The Greatness of the Incarnate Son of God
1:1-4	1:1-4	1:1-4	1:1-3	1:1-4
The Son Superior to the Angels	The Son Exalted Above Angels	The Superiority of Christ to Angels (1:5-2:18)	The Greatness of God's Son 1:4-13	The Son is Greater Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
1:5-14	1:5-14	1:5-14	1:14	1:5-13 1:14

* Although they are not inspired, paragraph divisions are the key to understanding and following the original author's intent. Each modern translation has divided and summarized the paragraphs. Every paragraph has one central topic, truth, or thought. Each version encapsulates that topic in its own distinct way. As you read the text, ask yourself which translation fits your understanding of the subject and verse divisions.

In every chapter we must read the Bible first and try to identify its subjects (paragraphs), then compare our understanding with the modern versions. Only when we understand the original author's intent by following his logic and presentation can we truly understand the Bible. Only the original author is inspired—readers have no right to change or modify the message. Bible readers do have the responsibility of applying the inspired truth to their day and their lives.

Note that all technical terms and abbreviations are explained fully in the following documents: [Brief Definitions of Greek Grammatical Structure](#), [Textual Criticism](#), and [Glossary](#).

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. The first paragraph is a poetic/hymnic presentation of Jesus' cosmic and redemptive achievements. He is Lord of all creation and especially Lord of this planet. This is spelled out in

seven descriptive phrases. It is one of the highest Christologies in the NT (cf. John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:6-11; and Col. 1:15-17).

1. the heir of the Father's creation (Heb. 1:2)
2. the agent of the Father's creation (Heb. 1:2)
3. radiance of the Father's glory (Heb. 1:3)
4. exact image of the Father's nature (Heb. 1:3)
5. the sustainer of the Father's creation (Heb. 1:3)
6. the means of forgiveness of the Father's creation (Heb. 1:3)
7. the royal and priestly Messiah sent by the Father (Heb. 1:3)

B. Verses 1-4 deal primarily with how God has spoken to us in a new way through a son, Jesus of Nazareth. No longer do we receive revelation bit by bit through servants (i.e., the prophets of the OT), but now through a full revelation in a family member ("a son," cf. Heb. 1:2; 3:6; 5:8; 7:28).

C. Hebrews 1:1-3 displays Jesus, the Anointed One, as being the ultimate fulfillment of all three OT anointed offices (i.e., prophet, priest and king).

D. The second paragraph (Heb. 1:5-14) continues the theme of Jesus' superiority. In Heb. 1:1-4 He is a more superior revelation than the prophets; in Heb. 1:5-14 He is a more superior mediator than the angels; confirmed by a series of seven OT texts from the Septuagint (mostly from the Psalms): Psalm 2:7; 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 97:7; Ps. 104:4; Ps. 45:6-7; Ps. 102:25-27 and Ps. 110:1.

E. Notice that the author is structuring his/her text in careful ways. Seven is the number of perfection in Jewish numerology (i.e., the seven days of Genesis 1).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 1:1-4

¹God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ²in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. ³And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

1:1 "God, after He spoke" "God" is not first (fronted) in the Greek sentence; therefore, this text is not emphasizing the doctrine of revelation, but the manner of revelation in the past (aorist active participle).

▣ **"in the prophets"** The Jews believed that prophets wrote Scripture. This is why Moses was considered a prophet (cf. Deut. 18:15) and why the Jews labeled the historical books of Joshua through Kings as the "former prophets." Therefore, this phrase does not refer to the OT prophets only, but to all the OT writers.

The phrase "in (*en*) the prophets" (v.1) is parallel to "in (*en*) His son" (v.2). There is an obvious contrast between the two means of revelation. One was a servant and one is a family member. The first was only partial but the second is full and complete (cf. Col. 1:15-17).

NASB	"in many portions and in many ways"
NKJV	"at various times and in different ways"
NRSV	"in many and various ways"
TEV	"many times and in many ways"
NJB	"at many moments in the past and by many means"

The OT revelation was piece-meal in form and content. This phrase is placed first (fronted) in the Greek text of Heb. 1:1 to show the author's emphasis. Each OT writer had an important, but partial, message.

God revealed Himself:

1. to Moses in a burning bush
2. to the High Priest by the Urim and Thummim
3. to Elijah in a still, small voice
4. to Ezekiel in a vision
5. to Hosea through a bad marriage
6. to Jonah through a fish

1:2 "in these last days" This period of time goes by several names.

1. end of the days, Num. 24:14; Deut. 8:16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14
2. in the last days, Jer. 23:20; 30:24; 49:39; Ezek. 38:8,16; Hos. 3:5; Joel 2:28 (Acts 2:17); John 6:39,40,44,54; 11:24; 12:48; 2 Tim. 3:1; James 5:3
3. in the Last Time, 1 Pet. 1:5
4. at the end of the times, 1 Pet. 1:20
5. during the last of the days, 2 Pet. 3:3
6. the last hour, 1 John 2:18

At the end of the last days is the "day of the Lord" (i.e., "the consummation," Matt. 13:39,40; 24:3; 28:20; Heb. 9:26).

The Jews of the interbiblical period saw two ages: the current evil age of rebellion and sin (starting at Genesis 3) and the coming age of righteousness inaugurated by the coming of the Messiah in the power of the Spirit. The OT emphasizes the coming of the Messiah in judgment and power to establish the new age. However, it failed to see clearly the first coming of Jesus as (1) the "Suffering Servant" in Isaiah 53; (2) the humble One riding the colt of a donkey in Zech. 9:9; and (3) the pierced One of Zech. 12:10. From NT progressive revelation we know that God planned two comings of the Messiah. The period between the Incarnation (the first coming) and the second coming involves the overlapping of the two Jewish ages. This is designated in the NT by the phrase "last days." We have been in this period for over 2000 years.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THIS AGE AND THE AGE TO COME

■ **"His Son"** The anarthrous phrase "a son" should not be capitalized because the reference here is to the manner of revelation, not a title for Jesus (cf. Heb. 3:5-6; 5:8; 7:28). Jesus is not a servant like Moses or the prophets, but a family member (a son).

■ **"whom He appointed"** This is an aorist active indicative, which implies completed action (aorist tense) in past time (indicative mood). When did God appoint Jesus heir? Was it at His baptism (cf. Matt. 3:17) or resurrection (cf. Rom. 1:4)? This question led to the heresy of "adoptionism" (see Glossary), which said that Jesus became the Messiah at some point in time. This, however, contradicts John 1:1-18; 8:57-58; Phil. 2:6-7; and Col. 1:17. Jesus has always been deity (cf. John 1:1-2); therefore, heirship must even predate the incarnation in an ontological sense.

■ **"heir of all things"** As the "Son of God," the unique son of God (cf. John 3:16), He is the heir (cf. Matt. 21:33-46; Ps. 2:8). The amazing thing is that sinful humanity, through faith in Him, shares His heirship (cf. Heb. 1:14; 6:12; Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:1-7; 1 Pet. 1:4).

■ **"through whom also He made the world"** It is always difficult to know for certain how related terms are to be interpreted. There is only a certain semantic overlap between synonyms. The technical Greek term for creation out of nothing is *ktizō*, yet the word in this text is *poieō*, which meant to form something from a pre-existing substance. Is the author using these terms synonymously or is a specific distinction intended? It is doubtful that a technical distinction is intended because the theological context (i.e., Heb. 1:3) refers to creation by the spoken word (*ex nihilo*, cf. Gen. 1:6,9,16,20,24,26, but in Heb. 2:7 God formed man). See a new book by John Walton, *The Lost world of Genesis One*.

The term "world" is literally "ages" (*aiōnos*). This can refer to the earth (cf. Matt. 28:20) or to the ages (i.e., time). Jesus is surely the creator of both (cf. John 1:3; Col. 1:16; 1 Cor. 8:6). The author of Hebrews uses both *aiōnos* (cf. Heb. 1:2; 6:5; 11:3) and *kosmos* (cf. Heb. 4:3; 9:26; 10:5; 11:7,38), apparently as synonymous terms.

1:3

NASB "He is the radiance of His glory"
NKJV "who being the brightness of His glory"
NRSV, NJB "He is the reflection of God's glory"
TEV "He reflects the brightness of God's glory"

The word "radiance" (*apaugasma*) is used only here in the NT. In Philo it was used of the Messiah's relationship to YHWH in the sense that the *logos* was a reflection of deity. The early Greek church fathers used it in the sense of Christ as the reflection or effulgence of God. In a popular sense to see Jesus is to see God (cf. John 14:8-9), as a mirror reflects the light of the full sun. The Hebrew term "glory" (*kabod*) was often used in the sense of brightness (cf. Exod. 16:10; 24:16-17; Lev. 9:6).

This phrasing may be related to Prov. 8:22-31, where "wisdom" (the term is FEMININE in both Hebrew and Greek) is personified as God's first creation (cf. *Sirach* 1:4) and agent of creation (cf. *Wisdom of Solomon* 9:9). This same concept is developed in the apocryphal book *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:15-22a and 22b-30. In Pro. 8:22 wisdom fashions all things; in Heb. 1:25 wisdom is pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; in Heb. 1:26 wisdom is the reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God; and in Heb. 1:29 compared with the light (i.e., sun and stars) she is found to be superior."

In the OT the most common Hebrew word for "glory" (*kabod*) was originally a commercial term (which referred to a pair of scales) which meant "to be heavy." That which was heavy was valuable or had intrinsic worth. Often the concept of brightness was added to the word to express God's majesty during the Wilderness Wandering Period (*Shekinah* Cloud of Glory). He alone is worthy and honorable. He is too brilliant for fallen mankind to behold. God can only be truly known through Christ (cf. Matt. 17:2; Heb. 1:3; James 2:1).

NASB "the exact representation of His nature"
NKJV "the express image of His person"
NRSV "the exact imprint of God's very being"
TEV "the exact likeness of God's own being"
NJB "bears the imprint of God's own being"

This phrase is found only here in the NT but is found often in the writings of Philo, who completes and adds to the previous characterization. This Greek term was originally used of an engraving tool, but it came to represent the mark it made. Jesus not only reflects deity, He bears the unique stamp of deity (cf. John 14:9).

There are two Greek terms used to describe Christ's relationship to the Father: (1) *eikon*, which means image (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) and (2) *charaktēr* (cf. Heb. 1:3). The former is the more common in the NT but the latter term is stronger in meaning (cf. KJV "the exact image"). What is God like? He is exactly like Jesus of Nazareth, who is the full and complete revelation of the invisible God!

■ **"upholds all things"** This is the common term "to bear or carry" (*pherō*), but in this context it has the connotation of "to uphold," "to maintain," "to sustain." This conveys the theological concept of "Providence" (cf. Col. 1:17 and another possible allusion to *Wisdom of Solomon* 8:1). Not only did Jesus create the universe (another possible meaning of *pherō*) by the spoken word (cf. Gen. 1), but He sustains it by the spoken word!

■ **"by the word of His power"** In Jewish thought God's power was presented by the spoken word. Elohim creates by the spoken word (cf. Gen. 1:3,6,9,14,20,24). YHWH's word had an independent force to

accomplish His will (cf. Isa. 55:11). It is not by accident that the Christ is called "the Word" in John 1:1.

■ **"When he had made purification of sins"** This is an aorist middle participle which emphasizes the subject (middle voice) and describes a completed act (aorist tense, cf. Heb. 7:27; 9:12,28; 10:10). Jesus has acted on behalf of sinful mankind (cf. Mark 10:45; 2 Cor. 5:21).

The term "purification" is used in the NT in several senses.

1. ceremonial cleansing (cf. Luke 2:22; 5:14; John 2:6)
2. physical healing (cf. Mark 1:44)
3. a metaphor for expiation (cf. Heb. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:9, so says William D. Mounce in his *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, p. 257)

We get the English word "catharsis" from this Greek term.

Notice the descriptive phrase "of sins." There are two possible ways to understand this phrase: (1) it is objective genitive "of sins," not ablative "from sins." Jesus' death dealt with the sin problem; (2) it is plural which does not imply mankind's Adamic nature, "the sin problem," but individual acts of sin. Jesus dealt with the guilt of mankind's rebellion (past and present).

This textual option is accepted by the UBS⁴ scholars, but there is another possibility. In the Alexandrian textual family represented by P⁴⁶ the phrase "through himself" (*dia heautou*) occurs instead of "His" (*autou*), which makes it refer to the previous clause. This same type of manuscript variant is found in 1 John 5:18b. It is interesting that this "through himself" is lacking in other early Alexandrian textual family representatives (κ and B). It is surely possible that orthodox scribes feared that the phrase "through himself made purification of sins" might lead to gnostic speculation and changed "*di'heautou*" to "*autou*." For a more complete discussion of the tendencies of orthodox scribes see Bart D. Ehrman's, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Oxford Press, 1993.

■ **"He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high"** This is a figurative way of stating Jesus' finished work and exaltation (cf. Ps. 110:1; Luke 22:69). God does not have a right hand. This is a biblical metaphor (anthropomorphic) of power, authority, and preeminence. No OT priest ever sat down! Jesus' earthly work is finished. In a sense this is a kingly, royal metaphor (cf. Ps. 2; 45; and 110:1-3) linked to a priestly function (cf. Ps. 110:4 and Zechariah 4). The Dead Sea community expected two Messiahs, one priestly (i.e., line of Aaron, tribe of Levi), one kingly (i.e., line of Jesse, tribe of Judah). Jesus fulfills all three OT anointed offices: prophet (cf. Deut. 18:18), priest (cf. Ps. 110:4), and king (cf. 2 Sam. 7:13,16; Ps. 2; 110:1-3).

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV "the Majesty on high"

TEV "of God, the Supreme Power"

NJB "the divine Majesty on high"

This is a circumlocution. Jews were afraid to use God's name lest they take it in vain (cf. Exod.20:7) so they inserted many alternate terms and phrases (i.e., "Kingdom of heaven," "throne," etc.) or used the passive voice to refer to Him.

1:4 This verse seems to be a transition between Heb. 1:1-3 and Heb. 1:5-14. Today's English Version (TEV) begins the discussion of Jesus' superiority over the angels with Heb. 1:3.

The name which Jesus has been given that is greater than the angels (cf. Rom. 8:38-39; Eph. 1:21; Col. 2:15) is "son" (cf. Heb. 1:5 [twice] and 8) or "Lord" (cf. Heb. 1:10 and Phil. 2:9-11).

For "much better" see full note at Heb. 7:7.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 1:5-14

⁵For to which of the angels did He ever say,
"You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You"?
And again,

"I will be a Father to Him
And He shall be a Son to Me?"

⁶And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says,
"And let all the angels of God worship Him."

⁷And of the angels He says,
"Who makes His angels winds,
And His ministers a flame of fire."

⁸But of the Son *He* says,
"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom."

⁹You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of gladness above Your companions."

¹⁰And,
"You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens are the works of Your hands;

¹¹They will perish, but You remain;
And they all will become old like a garment,

¹²And like a mantle You will roll them up;
Like a garment they will also be changed.
But You are the same,
And Your years will not come to an end."

¹³But to which of the angels has He ever said,
"Sit at My right hand,
Until I make Your enemies
A footstool for Your feet"?

¹⁴Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

1:5 "you are my son" This is the first in a series of seven OT passages quoted from the Septuagint to prove the superiority of the Messiah over the angels. The first phrase comes from Ps. 2:7, while the second is from 2 Sam. 7:14. This first phrase is used several times in the Gospels to refer to Christ:

1. at His baptism (cf. Matt. 3:17; Luke 3:22)
2. at the Transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7)
3. at the Resurrection (cf. Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4)

The term "son," used in both quotes of Heb. 1:5, is from the OT where it can refer to different people/groups (see full note at Heb. 2:7).

1. angels (cf. Gen. 6:2,4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Ps. 29:1, always plural)
2. the nation of Israel (cf. Hos. 11:1)
3. the Israeli king (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 89:27)
4. the Messiah (cf. Ps. 2:7)

■ **"today I have begotten you"** Jesus has always been deity (cf. John 1:1-18). Therefore, this cannot refer to the essence of His nature, but to His manifestation in time (the incarnation). Some commentators relate it to the resurrection (cf. Rom. 1:3-4). Some rabbis saw Ps. 2:7 as the Messiah brought back to life after divine suffering (cf. Isaiah 53). The verb is a perfect active indicative means "have begotten." This may be a rabbinical allusion to Pro. 8:22-31, where "wisdom" (which is feminine in Hebrew) was the first creation of God and became God's agent in further creation (also see *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:1-8:1). This is alluded to, not to bring in a feminine aspect to deity, nor to affirm Jesus as a created being, but to affirm

Jesus of Nazareth as God the Father's agent of creation (cf. Heb. 1:10; John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16 which was mentioned in Heb. 1:2).

■ **"I will be a Father to Him"** This is a quote from the Septuagint of 2 Sam. 7:14, which initially referred to Solomon. The author of Hebrews applies it to Jesus. This dual reference is similar to the "virgin birth" prophecy of Isa. 7:14. Both are examples of multi-fulfillment prophecy. The NT authors under inspiration used the OT in rabbinical ways, typological ways, and word plays which are not appropriate for later interpreters. See discussion below.

SPECIAL TOPIC: ILLUMINATION

1:6

NASB	"and when He again brings"
NKJV	"But when He again brings"
NRSV	"And again, when he brings"
TEV	"But when God was about to send"
NJB	"Again, when he brings"

This does not refer to a second coming of the son. It is a literary way of introducing a new quote (cf. Heb. 1:5d; 2:13; 4:5; 10:30).

Notice that NASB, NKJV, NRSV, and NJB have "bring" while TEV has "send." The first would emphasize the ascension of the glorified Christ; the second would refer to the incarnation at Bethlehem. Because the Father-Son analogy begins with Jesus' incarnation, the TEV fits the context best.

■ **"firstborn"** This phrase is used

1. in the OT where the firstborn child received a double inheritance to take care of the parents
2. in Ps. 89:27 to refer to the king of Israel
3. in Rabbinical Judaism it came to be a phrase for pre-imminence (cf. Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15,18; Rev. 1:5).

This phrase was the heart of the Arius/Athanasius controversy. Arius asserted that Jesus was God's highest creation, quoting this passage and Ps. 89:27. Athanasius asserted that Jesus was full deity and quoted verses 2 and 3; (4) in a figurative sense, Christ is "the first-born of a new humanity which is to be glorified, as its exalted Lord is glorified. . .one coming forth from God to found the new community of saints" (from *A Greek-English Lexicon* by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danken, p. 726); and (5) in the Greco-Roman world the firstborn acted as priest for the family (cf. *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* by Moulton and Milligan, p. 557).

SPECIAL TOPIC: FIRSTBORN

■ **"into the world"** This implies the pre-existent Jesus, who has always been deity, but a new stage of His redemptive ministry began at Bethlehem when He took on human flesh (cf. Phil. 2:6-8a). This is not the more common term *kosmos*, but *oikoumenē*, which was used of the surface of the earth which was inhabited by humans. This term is also used in Heb. 2:5 metaphorically as a reference to the new age.

■ **"He says, 'And let all the angels of God worship him'"** This is a quote from the Septuagint of either Deut. 32:43 or Ps. 97:7. The Hebrew word for "angels" used in Ps. 97:7 is *Elohim*. From Cave #4 of the Dead Sea Scrolls we have a corroboration of this Septuagint translation. The term *Elohim* can refer to God, angelic beings, human judges (cf. Exod. 21:6; 22:8-9), or even a deceased human spirit (cf. 1 Sam. 28:13).

This quote is not meant to teach that angels did not worship Christ until the incarnation. In context it is showing the superiority of the Son by the fact that angels worship Him.

1:7 **"Who makes his angels winds"** This begins a comparison between angels being changeable (cf.

LXX of Ps. 104:4) in contradistinction to Jesus who is permanent and unchanging (cf. Heb. 1:8,11,12; 13:8). The rabbis, quoting Lam. 3:23 or Dan. 7:10, said that God created the angels new every morning.

1:8 "Thy throne, O God, is forever" This is a quote from the Septuagint of Ps. 45:6, which addresses the Messianic King. In the OT context the pronoun is very ambiguous and can refer to God the Father or God the Son. However, in this text it seems that this is one of the strongest affirmations of the deity of Christ found anywhere in the Scriptures (cf. John 1:18; 20:28).

There is a significant Greek manuscript problem at this point. Some very early manuscripts (P⁴⁶, α , and B) have the pronoun (*autou*, i.e., "His throne") which adds to the ambiguity. The United Bible Society's fourth edition supports "your" with a "B" rating (the text is almost certain). This form is found in the uncial manuscripts A and D and is the exact quote from the Septuagint of Ps. 45:6. Often ancient scribes tended to make texts more explicit, especially if they relate to Christological debates of their day (cf. Bart D. Ehrman *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Oxford Press, 1993, p. 265).

This discussion is not meant in any way to deny the full deity of Christ, but to show the tendency of ancient scribes to alter texts for theological as well as grammatical purposes. This is why the modern academic discipline of Textual Criticism judges manuscript variants based on the following.

1. the most unusual reading is probably original
2. the reading that explains the other variants is probably original
3. the reading with a wide geographical distribution (not just one family of manuscripts) is probably original

Bart Ehrman's book also makes the point that scribes made changes to the Greek text for theological purposes, especially during the periods of conflict over Christology and the Trinity (i.e., third and fourth centuries).

■ **"forever and ever"** This obviously does not refer to a millennial reign, but the eternal reign (cf. Isa. 9:8; Dan. 7:14,18; Luke 1:33; 2 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 11:15).

SPECIAL TOPIC: FOREVER (GREEK IDIOMS)

One Greek idiomatic phrase is "unto the ages" (cf. Luke 1:33; Rom. 1:25; 11:36; 16:27; Gal. 1:5; 1 Tim. 1:17), which may reflect the Hebrew *'olam*. See Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, pp. 321-319. Other related phrases are "unto the age" (cf. Matt. 21:19 [Mark 11:14]; Thess. 1:55; John 6:58; 8:35; 12:34; 13:8; 14:16; 2 Cor. 9:9) and "of the age of the ages" (cf. Eph. 3:21). There seems to be no distinction between these idioms for "forever." The term "ages" may be plural in a figurative sense of the rabbinical grammatical construction called "the plural of majesty" or it may refer to the concept of several "ages" in the Jewish sense of "age of innocence," "age of wickedness," "age to come," or "age of righteousness."

1:9 "you have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness" This is a quote from the Septuagint of Ps. 45:7 which relates to the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS

■ **"has anointed you"** The Hebrew term "anointed" (*mashiach*, BDB 603) is the OT word for Messiah (*masiah*). In the OT prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with olive oil as a symbol of God's choice and provision for an assigned task. In this context it also refers to the cultural usage of olive oil at a time of joy and feasting (cf. Isa. 53:11).

SPECIAL TOPIC: ANOINTING IN THE BIBLE (BDB 603)

■ **"above your companions"** This is a continuation of the quote from the Septuagint of Ps. 45:6-7. Every detail of the Psalm should not be forced into a theological affirmation relating to Jesus. The phrase could relate to Jesus' superiority over (1) angels; (2) Israel's Kings; (3) worldly rulers; or (4) redeemed mankind.

1:10 "you Lord" Only the Septuagint translation of Ps. 102:25 includes the word "Lord" which refers to YHWH, but in this context it refers to Jesus. This is another contextual reason why Heb. 1:9 also refers to Jesus as "God."

■ **"laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands"** This is an allusion to 1:2 of Jesus being the Father's agent in creation. See Special Topic: *Archē* at Heb. 3:14.

Genesis 1 asserts *Elohim's* creation by the spoken word (cf. Gen. 1:3,6,9,14,20,24,26), while Genesis 2 affirms YHWH's direct personal involvement, implying "hands on" fashioning of Adam and Eve from clay (cf. Gen. 2:7,8,19,22). This quote (Ps. 102:25) extends the personal metaphor to all physical creation.

1:11 "they will perish but you will remain; And they all will become old like a garment" This again shows the eternity of the Son. In the OT the prophets often use a court scene to communicate YHWH's displeasure at His rebellious wife, Israel. He takes "her" (Israel) to divorce court and calls on the two required witnesses (cf. Deut. 19:15)—the two most permanent witnesses, "heaven and earth"—to corroborate His testimony. Even these two most permanent witnesses will pass away. This quote suggests two possible scenarios: (1) the first verb (*apollumi*) has the connotation of violent destruction (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10) and (2) the second phrase implies a growing old and passing away like a piece of clothing.

This is another comparison of the instability of the created order (angels, creation) versus the permanence and stability of God's throne and Son!

1:12 "but you are the same" This is a quote from the Septuagint of Ps. 102:27. This same concept (immutability) is used in Heb. 13:8 to describe the unchangingness of Jesus. Angels change, heaven and earth change, Jesus does not change, herein is mankind's hope (cf. Mal. 3:6; James 1:17).

■ **"your years will not come to an end"** As the previous phrase addresses the stability of Jesus' character, this one addresses the permanence of His person.

1:13 "Sit at My right hand" This is a quote from the Septuagint of Ps. 110:1. This is a wonderful Messianic Psalm quoted and alluded to often in Hebrews (cf. Heb. 1:3,13; 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:3,11,17,21; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2). It combines the royal (Heb. 1:1-3) and priestly (Heb. 1:4-7) aspects of the Messiah (as do the two olive trees of Zech. 4). Notice the two forms of "lord"; the first is YHWH, the second is *Adon* (Lord). David's Lord (the Messiah) sits on YHWH's (lord) throne, in the place of authority and power. This never, never, never happens to angels!

1:14 "Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" Angels exist to serve God and mankind. Redeemed mankind is a higher spiritual order of creation than the angels. Believers will judge the angels (cf. 1 Cor. 6:3). Jesus did not die to redeem the angels (cf. Heb. 2:14-16).

[SPECIAL TOPIC: SALVATION \(GREEK VERB TENSES\)](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What is the emphasis of Heb. 1:1?
2. What is the difference between natural and special revelation?
3. List the seven aspects of Jesus' person and work in verses 2-3.
4. Why is this description of Jesus so important to the recipients?

5. How are angels related to Jesus' ministry?

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HEBREWS 2

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Great Salvation	Do Not Neglect Salvation	Warning Against Falling Away	The Great Salvation	An Exhortation
2:1-4	2:1-4	2:1-4	2:1-4	2:1-4
The Pioneer of Salvation	The Son Made Lower than Angels	The Humiliation and Exaltation of Jesus	The One Who Leads Us to Salvation	Redemption Brought by Christ, Not by Angels
2:5-9	2:5-9	2:5-9	2:5-10	2:5-8a
	Bring Many Sons to Glory			2:8b-9
2:10-18	2:10-18	2:10-13		2:10-13
			2:11-13	
		2:14-18	2:14-18	2:14-18

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Chapters one and two are a literary unit. It continues the superiority of Jesus over the OT revelation (cf. Heb. 1:1-3) and Jesus' superiority over the angels (cf. Heb. 1:4-2:18).
- B. The new emphasis of chapter two is Jesus' connection with His people (cf. Heb. 2:10-18). Jesus is truly identified with them and they, as a result, share in His glory. The purpose of a superior covenant is that fallen mankind is restored (cf. Heb. 2:9-11,14-18) to his place of pre-eminence in creation (cf. Ps. 8). Jesus is the ideal human, our perfect example.
- C. Chapter 2 is the first in a series of warnings (Heb. 2:1-4; 3:7-4:11; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29). This first warning is directed to those who might neglect the new covenant revelation (the gospel).

This probably refers to people of Jewish background who had a deep reverence for the Mosaic covenant, thus the need for the comparison.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 2:1-4

¹For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*. ²For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, ³how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, ⁴God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

2:1 "For this reason" This refers to the truths of chapter 1.

■ **"we must"** This is the term "*dei*," which means moral necessity. This is the first (i.e., Heb. 2:1-4) of many warnings in the book of Hebrews addressed to a group of believing Jews still worshipping in a synagogue with unbelieving Jews. Some of the warnings of the book are directed at the believers to take the plunge, publicly join the church and move on into the fullness and maturity of the worldwide mission of the gospel (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). Other warnings are addressed directly to the unbelieving Jews who had heard the gospel and seen its power in the lives of their believing Jewish friends and co-worshippers, but had refused to personally accept Jesus as the promised Messiah and to move beyond their rabbinical traditions (cf. Hebrews 6; 10).

NASB	"pay much closer attention"
NKJV	"give the more earnest heed"
NRSV	"pay greater attention to"
TEV	"hold on all the more firmly to"
NJB	"turn our minds more attentively"

This is a strong Greek comparative and infinitive which means to give special, complete attention and care to something or someone (cf. Acts 8:6,10; 16:14). The New Covenant of the Son (the gospel) is both precious and dangerous! God's truth must be handled appropriately.

■ **"do not drift away *from it*"** This term is used only here in the NT. It literally means "to flow by" or "slip away." It is used figuratively of a current of wind or water causing someone to be carried past a safe anchorage.

This warning is stated as an aorist passive subjunctive first person plural. There is an element of contingency caused by an unstated outside agent (passive voice) and the subjunctive mood. Drifting past or away from the truth was a real possibility. It is also possible that the metaphor is directed to the recipients still remaining while the truth moves on. This may be an allusion to Prov. 3:21 in the Septuagint where the same verb is used.

There are three ways of viewing this warning.

1. as referring to those who refused to respond to the gospel (cf. Heb. 2:3)
2. as referring to those who had believed (cf. "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard," v. 1), but not matured
3. as referring to those who had believed and were in danger of not holding on to their original profession/confession of faith in Christ.

The first would refer to the unbelieving Jews, while the second and third would refer to the believing Jews. The use of the first person plural seems to mean that the author groups himself with those addressed and would imply that they were believers or at least in a synagogue where the gospel was shared (cf. Heb.

2:3). However, this same grammatical plural appears in a literary, not literal, usage in Heb. 10:26.

2:2 "if" This is a first class conditional sentence which is assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes. It is often translated in English as "since" or "because."

▣ **"the word spoken through angels"** This is referring to the Mosaic Law. The Jews believed that angels acted as mediators between YHWH and Moses on Mt. Sinai (cf. Exod.3:2; 14:19; 23:20-23; 32:34; 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Acts 7:38,53; Gal. 3:19).

NASB	"proved unalterable"
NKJV	"proved steadfast"
NRSV	"was valid"
TEV	"was shown to be true"
NJB	"proved to be so reliable"

God is faithful to His word, both blessings and/or cursings (cf. Deut. 27-28).

[SPECIAL TOPIC: GUARANTEE](#)

▣ **"every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty"** The Mosaic Covenant was based on obedience! Willful disobedience has clear and immediate consequences (cf. Heb. 10:28).

These two terms are formed with the same preposition; *parabasis* and *parakoē*, which may have been an intentional word (sound) play.

2:3 "how will we escape" The book of Hebrews has many severe warnings about neglecting God's truth (cf. Heb. 2:1-4; 3:7-4:11; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29).

▣ **"if we neglect so great a salvation"** The term "neglect" (*ameleō*) means "to pay no attention to" or "to be unconcerned about" something or someone. It is used in the NT for (1) an admonition for Timothy not to neglect his spiritual gift (cf. 1 Tim. 4:14) and (2) an affirmation of YHWH's lack of attention to Israel because they violated His covenant (cf. Heb. 8:9).

This is the major point of the argument that if the Mosaic Covenant had such tremendous consequences for its neglect then how much more severe the consequences for neglecting the new and better Covenant brought by Jesus (the Son). The consequences of knowingly neglecting a message are related to the majesty of the One who brings the message (i.e., parables of royal wedding, cf. Matt. 22:2-14).

The interpretive question then becomes, "Is this referring to (1) a rejecting of the new covenant (the gospel) or (2) a neglecting of the new covenant?" The contemporary usage of the term implies #2. Some commentators would add the use of "we" as an evidence of the author identifying with a believing group, but in Heb. 10:26 the author uses this same pronoun (first person plural) in addressing the unbelieving group. These recipients were not rejecting the gospel, but minimizing its influence in their lives.

▣ **"it was at the first spoken through the Lord"** Jesus is called by YHWH's OT covenant title "I Am that I Am" (cf. Exod.3:14, which was later read as "Lord" [adon]). See Special Topic at Heb. 2:7. This is one of the ways that NT authors show the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. YHWH Himself bears witness to the truthfulness of Jesus' message (cf. Heb. 2:4). See Special Topic: *Archē* at Heb. 3:14.

▣ **"by those who heard"** Both John Calvin and Martin Luther said that this phrase refers to a second generation Christian. Obviously this cannot mean Paul (cf. Gal. 1:11). Paul was not the human author of Hebrews. See note at Heb. 13:23.

2:4 "God also testifying with them by signs and wonders and by various miracles" Signs and wonders were intended both to encourage believers and to help unbelievers accept the truth (cf. Acts 2:22). God continues (present active participle) to bear witness to the truth of the gospel. There was an intensification of both evil and spiritual signs surrounding Jesus' first coming, as there will be surrounding

His second coming.

■ **"and by gifts of the Holy Spirit"** Every believer has at least one spiritual gift given by the Spirit at the time of conversion (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7,11,18; Eph. 4:11,12). This spiritual giftedness of believers is one of the contemporary evidences of the gospel's validity, which some of the recipients of the letter were denying or rejecting!

■ **"according to His own will"** The Spirit chooses and distributes gifts (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7,11,18). Believers are not gifted based on personal merit or personal choice! If the spiritual gift relates to a natural talent, it is energized and so directed as to bring honor to Christ, not the individual Christian. All the gifts serve the body. Each believer is to live for the health and growth of the body!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 2:5-9

⁵For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking.

⁶But one has testified somewhere, saying,

"What is man, that You remember him?

Or the son of man, that You are concerned about him?

⁷You have made him for a little while lower than the angels;

You have crowned him with glory and honor,

And have appointed him over the works of Your hands;

⁸You have put all things in subjection under his feet."

For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. ⁹But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

2:5 "For He did not subject to angels the world to come" It is true that angels are in a place of spiritual pre-eminence now (cf. Deut. 32:8 in the Septuagint and the book of Daniel, chapter 10). However, in the world to come, it will be human beings, by means of their incarnate, glorified Savior, who will be in the place of authority. This is another comparison relating to the superiority of Jesus and His followers over the angels who were viewed as being involved in the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Heb. 1:4-14).

2:6 "But one has testified somewhere saying" This is a Hebrew idiom for the inspiration of the entire OT, not a lapse of memory as to where these quotes are found (cf. Heb. 4:4). There follows a series of OT quotes, which is common in Hebrews.

■ **"What is man that you remember him"** This is a quote from the Septuagint of Ps. 8:4-6 based theologically on Gen. 1:26,28. Verses 6, 7, and 8 do not refer to the Messiah ("the Son of Man"), but to humanity. In the Psalm the term "son of man" is in a parallel relationship with the term "man" and should not be capitalized. It is a Hebrew idiom for humanity, *ben adam*, so common in Ezekiel (cf. Ezek. 2:1; 3:1,3,4,10,17, etc.).

2:7 "you have made him for a little while lower than the angels" This is the continuation of the quote of Ps. 8:5-6 from the Septuagint. The question for both translation and interpretation is, how should the Hebrew term "*Elohim*" be understood?

1. The Septuagint translated Ps. 8:5 as "angels," as did the Aramaic Targums and Pehsitta, Vulgate, and KJV translations.
2. The Jewish Publication Society of America translated it as "little less than divine." Several English translations have "God" (cf. ASV, NASB, RSV, NEB, NRSV, REB, JB, NJB, TEV). The term, when used in the OT with a singular verb, like Gen. 1:1, refers to God. Jesus used it in this sense in John 10:31-39. It is also used of the "gods" of the pagan nations. It can refer to angels in the sense of

God's heavenly council made up of Himself and angelic servants (cf. 1 Kgs. 22:19; Dan. 7:10).

3. There is even the possibility that it refers to the Judges of Israel (cf. Exod.21:6; 22:8-9,28; Ps. 82:1,6).

In this context the theological point is that Jesus and His followers (cf. Heb. 1:14) are superior to the angels.

There is a Greek manuscript variation at the end of Heb. 2:7. Some ancient Greek manuscripts (κ, A, C, D*, P) continue to quote from Ps. 8:7, but others stop at "You crowned him with glory and honor" (P⁴⁶, B, D^C, K, L). As with so many of these variations, it makes no difference in the interpretation of the text.

SPECIAL TOPIC: NAMES FOR DEITY

■ **"You crowned Him with Glory"** see note at Heb. 1:3.

2:8 This is from Ps. 2:6, but is an allusion to Gen. 1:26,28-30. Humans made in God's image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27) were to function as managers on earth (as God's representatives). But the fall of Genesis 3 thwarted this purpose (cf. Heb. 2:9c).

2:9 "But we do see Him" The NASB has all of the pronouns in small letters in Heb. 2:7 and 8 (i.e., the author quoting the Psalm), but in Heb. 2:9 they are in capital letters (the author now applying the Psalm), thus comparing fallen mankind with the ideal Man. God placed mankind in an honored position of authority, but mankind sinned and forfeited that position. Jesus the Incarnate God fulfills humanity's destiny and by His death restores believing mankind to the place of honor. Jesus was truly human! This is another Adam-Christ typology (cf. Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22,45-49; Phil. 2:6-11).

■ **"who was made for a little while lower than the angels"** This is an obvious comparison with verses 6 and 7. It speaks of Jesus' incarnation and life on earth.

■ **"Jesus"** The author of Hebrews characteristically uses "Jesus" without any additional description (cf. Heb. 2:9; 3:1; 6:20; 7:22; 10:19; 12:2,24; 13:12). It is possible that this is a typological play on Jesus as the new Joshua. The names are exactly the same. The author of Hebrews uses the Exodus material extensively. As Joshua brought God's people into the rest of the Promised Land, so too, will Jesus bring them into heaven (i.e., the seventh day rest).

■ **"because of the suffering of death"** This reflects Gen. 3:15; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53. He was God's Agent in redemption!

■ **"crowned with glory and honor"** This is a perfect passive participle. He has been and continues to be the crowned One! See note at Heb. 1:3.

■ **"by the grace of God"** This translation (*chariti Theos*) is found in all English Bibles and is supported by the ancient Greek manuscripts (P⁴⁶, κ, A, B, C, D). However, a curious reading "apart from God" (*chōris Theos*), occurs in many later ancient texts. In *A Textual Commentary On The Greek New Testament*, Bruce M. Metzger says that this was originally a marginal gloss related to 1 Cor. 15:27, which was misunderstood as a correction to "*chariti Theos*" (p. 664).

The United Bible Society's *A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews* by Paul Ellingworth and Eugene A. Nida offers another opinion, that "apart from God" may allude to Psalm 22, which Jesus used to express His sense of being all alone on the cross (cf. Mark 15:34) p. 37. This same opinion is given by Myles M. Bourke in the *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (p. 385).

There is also a third option (taken from Bart D. Ehrman's, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Oxford Press, 1993, pp. 146-150) that scribes intentionally changed "apart from God" for theological reasons, specifically the theological threat of gnosticism.

This variant was known to Origen and Jerome. Also the word "apart" (*chōris*) is used thirteen times in Hebrews, which shows this author's tendency to use this term. Also according to Ehrman (p. 148), it always

is followed by an anarthrous (no article) noun.

■ **"He might taste death"** It is important to realize that suffering was in the will of God for Jesus Christ (cf. Gen. 3:15; Isa. 53:4,10; Mark 10:45; 2 Cor. 5:21). This theme of suffering continues in the OT quotes found in the remainder of chapter 2.

■ **"for everyone"** This context refers to the vicarious, substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ (cf. Isa. 53:6; Rom. 5:6,8,10,17-19; 1 Cor. 15:22; 1 Tim. 2:4,6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus died to deal with mankind's sin problem. The only thing that keeps all humans from being saved is their unwillingness to accept God's free gift in the finished work of Jesus Christ by faith (cf. John 3:17-21).

SPECIAL TOPIC: YHWH's ETERNAL REDEMPTIVE PLAN

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 2:10-13

¹⁰For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. ¹¹For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹²saying,

"I will proclaim Your name to My brethren,

In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise."

And again,

"I will put My trust in Him."

¹³And again,

"Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me."

2:10 "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things" Again, the pronouns are ambiguous. This could refer to God the Father (cf. Rom. 11:36) or the Son (cf. Heb. 1:2,3; Col. 1:15-17). Because Jesus is referred to as "the author" in the latter part of this verse, the earlier pronoun must refer to the Father. However, Jesus was the Father's agent in creation (cf. Heb. 1:2; John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; 15:25-27) as He was in redemption and will be in judgment.

■ **"in bringing many sons to glory"** The family aspect of the new covenant is fully revealed in the remaining verses of chapter 2. Notice the number of family terms used. The goal of the new covenant is the restoration of the image of God in fallen mankind. The term "many" does not mean "some" as opposed to "all" (cf. Heb. 2:9, "everyone"). The terms "all" and "many" are used synonymously in the Bible (compare Isa. 53:6 with 11,12 and Rom. 9:18 with 19). Therefore, Mark 10:45 and 14:24 must refer to "all," not "some"! This cannot function as a proof-text for radical Calvinism (i.e., supra-lapsarian).

NASB	"to perfect the author of their salvation"
NKJV	"to make the author of their salvation perfect"
NRSV	"should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect"
TEV	"should make Jesus perfect"
NJB	"make perfect. . .the leader of their salvation"

The term "perfect" (aorist active infinitive) meant "to be complete, mature, equipped for the assigned task" (cf. Eph. 4:12). The author of Hebrews uses "perfect" three times to describe Jesus (cf. Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28) and three times to describe His followers (cf. Heb. 10:14; 11:40; 12:23). See Special Topic at Heb. 7:11.

Jesus was a true human being (cf. Luke 2:40,52). He grew in faith and obedience (cf. Luke 2:40,52). He was tested by adversity (cf. Heb. 5:8-9). He faced and overcame every spiritual obstacle (cf. Heb. 4:15). He became mankind's great example (cf. 1 Pet. 2:21).

SPECIAL TOPIC: AUTHOR/LEADER (ARCHĒGOS)

■ **"through suffering"** Jesus was perfected, humanly speaking, by suffering (cf. Heb. 5:8-9). Jesus often spoke of the trials and persecution His followers would face (cf. Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-19; 17:14).

The early church faced much opposition from the Jews, the pagans, the Roman government, and the evil one, but God took this opposition and turned it into a tool for producing trust and Christlikeness (cf. Rom. 8:17; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:12; James 1:2-4; and 1 Pet. 4:12-19). The truth can be illustrated from (1) the OT (cf. Heb. 11) and (2) Paul's ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 4:9-12; 6:4-10; 11:24-27).

2:11

NASB, NRSV "for both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified"

NKJV "for both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified"

TEV "He purifies people from their sins, and both he and those who are made pure"

NJB "For consecration and consecrated"

This is a play on the term "holy" or "sanctified" (cf. Heb. 10:10,14). The first usage is a present active participle (Jesus) and the second is a present passive participle (His people, cf. John 17:19). Jesus is identified with His people (cf. Heb. 1:14 and 2:6-8,9-18).

Believers are sanctified by the Father (cf. John 17:17; 1 Thess. 5:23); through the agency of the Son (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 10:10,14,29; 13:12); these aspects are united in Heb. 2:11.

1. a Holy Father
2. a Holy Son
3. holy believers (cf. 1 Pet. 1:13-25)

This is true both positionally and experientially. We are holy in Christ and we are called to be holy like Christ.

SPECIAL TOPIC: NEW TESTAMENT HOLINESS/SANCTIFICATION

■ **"are all from one *Father*"** "Father" is not in the Greek text (cf. NASB, NRSV, TEV). The pronoun "He" in the next phrase refers to Jesus (cf. NRSV, TEV, NIV). Therefore, perhaps the NJB's translation, "all of the same stock" or NIV's "are of the same family" fits the context best. If so, it is an emphasis on the humanity of Jesus (cf. Heb. 2:14).

■ **"for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren"** Jesus identifies Himself completely with believing mankind. Through His suffering the image of God is restored in them. The next three OT quotes (cf. Heb. 2:12-13) seem somewhat out of context, but they are from Messianic passages using rabbinical word plays. The context of Heb. 2:10-18 identifies Jesus completely with His followers:

1. they both proclaim the Father
2. they both praise the Father
3. they both put their trust in the Father
4. Jesus (cf. the "I" of Heb. 2:13b) and His followers ("children" of Heb. 2:13b) are linked by God the Father's gift to the Son
5. both Jesus and His followers share a human nature
6. both Jesus and His followers are tempted

2:12-13 This series of OT quotes describes how Jesus identifies with believers using these OT texts.

2:12 "I will proclaim your name to my brethren" This is from Ps. 22:22 which relates prophetically to the crucifixion.

■ **"congregation"**

SPECIAL TOPIC: CHURCH (EKKLESIA)

2:13 "I will put my trust in him" This phrase is a quote from Isa. 8:17. At this point let me add just a word about the author's continuing use of the Septuagint which is different, sometimes very different, from the Hebrew (Masoretic) text. There seems to be much controversy in our day related to different English translations. Some prefer one over another, sometimes even questioning the motives and Christianity of translators. If God's Spirit can use the Greek translation to communicate the gospel to the ancient near east, He can surely use the differing translations to do the same in our day. It is not a question of translation theory but the will of God that humans hear and believe the good news about Christ.

▣ **"Behold, I and the children whom god has given me"** This is a quote from the Septuagint of Isa. 8:18. The whole point is to emphasize the unity of Jesus with believers (cf. Heb. 2:17).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 2:14-18

¹⁴Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and ¹⁵might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. ¹⁶For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

2:14 "since" This is a first class conditional sentence which is assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purpose.

▣ **"the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same"** The verb "share," (*koinōnia*) perfect active indicative] speaks of the initial and continuing full humanity of Jesus Christ. Verses 14 and 17 emphasize the true humanity of Jesus which was the theological problem of the early gnostic heretics (cf. 1 John 4:1-6).

The phrase in Greek is literally "blood and flesh." This is exactly opposite from the normal use of the phrase. The rabbis used this phrase for the frailty of man. The author of Hebrews possibly reversed the phrase to show that although Jesus was human, He was not affected by mankind's sinful fall (cf. Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:7-8).

Hebrews emphasizes both the deity (cf. Heb. 1:1-3; 4:14) and humanity of Jesus.

1. Heb. 2:14 took on human nature
2. Heb. 4:15 tempted in all ways as humans are
3. Heb. 5:7 prayed to the Father with loud crying and tears
4. Heb. 5:8-9 perfected by suffering

▣ **"through death"** By Jesus' death, death died! This is the Jewish corporate theology of sacrifice (cf. Lev. 1-7). One innocent One died on behalf of all (cf. Rom. 5:12-21; 2 Cor. 5:14-15,21).

2:15 "might render powerless him" This is the very same term (*katargeo*) that the King James Version translates "destroy" both here and in Rom. 6:6. It certainly has this connotation in 2 Thess. 2:8. It is often difficult, even in context, to know if this verb should be translated "destroy/abolish" or "make null and void" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24, 26; Eph. 2:15). However, the term also has the connotation of "to bring to naught, to make null and void, to render inoperative" (cf. Rom. 3:3, 31; 4:14; 6:6; 1 Cor. 2:6; 13:8; 2 Cor. 1:7).

SPECIAL TOPIC: NULL AND VOID (KATARGEŌ)

▣ **"who had the power of death, that is, the devil"** Satan does not have the absolute power over death (cf. Job 2:4-6; 1 Cor. 5:5), but he does hold the power of the fear of death (cf. Heb. 2:15) which he holds

over all mankind (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54-57). There is a personal force of evil who is out to thwart all of God's will in this world (cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 4:4; 5:19). Jesus has abolished death (cf. 2 Tim. 1:10) and He has the keys of hades and death (cf. Rev. 1:18).

SPECIAL TOPIC: SATAN

2:16

NASB	"For assuredly"
NKJV	"For indeed"
NRSV, TEV	"For it is clear"
NJB	--omitted--

The NRSV and TEV express the idea best.

■ **"He does not give help. . . He gives help"** These are both present middle (deponent) indicatives. The "not" is placed first in the Greek sentence for emphasis. The verb is *epilambanō*, which is from the root *lambanō*, "to take" or "to grasp" with either positive or negative purposes. In this context it refers to Jesus' positive actions (cf. Heb. 8:9) on behalf of believing humans, which are never directed toward angels. Again Jesus and His followers are contrasted to the angelic world.

■ **"to the descendants of Abraham"** This is literally "the seed of Abraham." YHWH promised childless Abram that he would be the father of a great nation with many descendants (cf. Gen. 12:2; 15:2-6; 17: 4-7; 18:10, 18). The term "seed" can be plural or singular. Therefore, it refers to both the nation of Israel and the coming Messiah. From other NT Scriptures we realize that it relates to faith, not race or performance (cf. John 8:31-59; Gal. 3:7,9,29; Rom. 2:28,29). The Abrahamic promises are unconditional (cf. especially Gen. 15:12-21; Rom. 4), while the Mosaic covenant is conditional on obedience.

2:17 "He had to be made like His brethren in all things" Jesus' intercessory work on mankind's behalf is related to His complete understanding of our nature (cf. Heb. 2:11,18; 4:15) so He could be our great high priest.

■ **"so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest"**

SPECIAL TOPIC: JESUS AS HIGH PRIEST

■ **"to make propitiation for the sins of the people"** The term "propitiation" is used in the Septuagint for the mercy seat (lid) over the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. However, its Greek connotation was to placate an angry deity, thereby removing the barriers between "the gods" and mankind. Because of this usage of the term modern translations are nervous about this connotation referring to YHWH (cf. RSV and NJB) and translate it as "expiation." Jesus brings together YHWH's justice and mercy (cf. 1 John 2:2; 4:10). However, we must not see this as an angry OT deity and a loving Jesus. The Father sent the Son (cf. John 3:16). The son represents and mimics the Father.

2:18 "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered" "He has suffered" is a perfect active indicative which speaks of the ongoing trials that Jesus faced. The term "tempted" (*peirazō*) has the connotation to tempt with a view toward destruction (cf. Heb. 4:15; Matt. 4:1). The evil one tried to destroy Him at Calvary, but God turned this into the great victory of redemption.

SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK TERMS FOR TESTING AND THEIR CONNOTATIONS

■ **"He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted"** This same truth is repeated in Heb. 4:15. Jesus fully identifies with His needy people (cf. Heb. 2:17)!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. List the ways the new covenant is superior to the Mosaic covenant.
2. Why does this author quote so often from the Mosaic covenant?
3. To whom are the warnings of chapter 2 directed?
4. Does 2:6-8 refer to mankind or Jesus?
5. Why did Jesus have to suffer and how is the Christian affected by suffering?
6. According to verse 14 does Satan have the power of death over the Christian?
7. List the reasons why Jesus came.

HEBREWS 3

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Jesus Superior to Moses	The Son Was Faithful	Christ is Superior to Moses	Jesus is Greater than Moses	Christ Higher than Moses
3:1-6	3:1-6	3:1-6	3:1-6	3:1-6
A Rest for the People of God	Be Faithful	Warning and Exhortation	A Rest for God's People	How to Reach God's Land of Rest
(3:7-4:13)		(3:7-4:13)	(3:7-4:13)	(3:7-4:13)
3:7-11	3:7-15	3:7-19	3:7-11	3:7-11
3:12-19	Failure of the Wilderness Wandering		3:12-15	3:12-19
	3:16-19		3:16-19	

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS: HEBREWS 3:1-4:13

- A. This section deals with Jesus' superiority over the twin leaders of the Mosaic Covenant, Moses and Aaron, who were brothers and Levites. This leads us into the practical discussion of the Melchizedek priesthood of Heb. 4:14-7:28.
- B. This section is a rabbinical play on two concepts: (1) "the house of God," in Heb. 3:1-6 (cf. Num. 12:7-8; 2 Samuel 7) and (2) the "rest" in Heb. 3:7-4:13 (cf. Ps. 95:7-11).
- C. The argument develops as follows.
 1. Moses was part of God's house/household, but Jesus was the builder of the house/household
 2. Moses is a servant in the house, while Jesus is a family member
 3. Moses failed to bring in God's rest, while Jesus did not fail

D. The theological thrust of the literary unit is a warning to be obedient and faithful. Jesus was obedient and faithful, but the Israelites were not. The Mosaic covenant had consequences for disobedience which were severe. How much more dire are the consequences of rejecting or violating the new covenant (cf. Heb. 2:1-4)?

E. This section is typological. It views the NT as the new, spiritual exodus!

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 3:1-6

¹Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; ²He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. ³For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. ⁴For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses *was faithful* in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; ⁶ but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

3:1

NASB, NKJV "holy brethren"

NRSV "brothers and sisters"

TEV "my Christian friends"

NJB "holy brothers"

To whom was this book addressed? The term "brethren" is used repeatedly (cf. Heb. 2:11; 3:1,12; 10:19; 13:22) which (along with the subject matter) implies Jewish believers.

- **"partakers of a heavenly calling"** This concept is used in several ways in the Bible.
 1. Israel was called by God to be a kingdom of priests to bring the world back to God (cf. Gen. 12:3; Exod.19:5). In the OT this was a call to service, not individual salvation, and a corporate call (national Israel) to an assigned task (worldwide evangelization).
 2. Individual believers are called (cf. John 6:44,65) to an eternal salvation.
 3. Every individual Christian is called to serve the body of Christ through spiritual giftedness (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7,11).

SPECIAL TOPIC: CALLED

- **"consider Jesus"** This is an aorist active imperative. It means to consider thoughtfully (cf. Heb. 10:24). In context this implies comparing His person and work with the leaders of the Mosaic covenant.
- **"the Apostle and High Priest"** These two titles deal with Jesus' superiority over Moses as official messenger and Aaron as the Levitical high priest. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with Jesus' superiority over Aaron. Since the Greek terms for "messenger" and "angel" are the same, "apostle," which was a Greek term "to send," may relate to both angels sent by God to serve those being saved (cf. Heb. 1:14) and to Jesus sent by God to redeem those who are being saved (cf. John 3:17). This is the only place in the NT that Jesus is called "the Apostle," although John uses the verb over and over to refer to Him being "sent" from the Father (cf. John 3:17,34; 5:36,38; 6:29,57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3,18,21,23,25; 20:21).
- **"Apostle"** This comes from the verb "to send" (see [Special Topic: Send \(apostellō\)](#)) and was used by the rabbis in the sense of one sent as an official representative of another. Moses served in the house of

God as a servant while Jesus was "a son," a family member. God called Moses to serve, but sent Jesus from heaven.

■ **"High Priest"** Hebrews is the only book of the Bible to call Jesus high priest (cf. Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14,15; 5:5,10; 6:20; 7:26,28; 8:1,3;9:11; 10:21). It takes an extensive rabbinical argumentation to convince first century Jews that Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, really was a priest. The Dead Sea Scrolls community expected two Messiahs, one royal (tribe of Judah) and one priestly (tribe of Levi, cf. Psalm 110; Zechariah 3-4).

■ **"our confession"** This is the Greek term *homologia*, which is a compound of "to say" and "the same." The readers had made a confession of their faith in Jesus Christ. Now they must hold fast this confession/profession (cf. Heb. 4:14; 10:23). This is one of the main issues of the book.

SPECIAL TOPIC: CONFESSION

3:2 "He was faithful to Him who appointed Him" In context the emphasis is on (1) the Father's choosing and equipping Jesus for an assigned redemptive task (cf. Mark 3:14) and (2) Jesus exercising faith (present participle) in the Father as believers are to exercise faith. He is truly one with mankind. However, one possible etymology for "appointed" is "create." Arius used the verb "appointed" in his controversy with Athanasius to assert that Jesus was the highest creation (cf. Prov. 8:22) of God, but not deity Himself (cf. Acts 2:36; Rom. 1:4; Col. 1:15). This fourth century controversy produced the clear teaching of one divine essence, but three eternal personal manifestations, Father, Son, and Spirit (the Trinity). These three divine persons have eternally made up the one true God (cf. John 1:1-18). For a good brief discussion of Arianism, see *Christian Theology* (2nd ed.) by Millard J. Erickson, pp. 711-715.

■ **"all His house"** This is a reference to Num. 12:7,8. The people of God being the house of God is an oft repeated biblical metaphor (cf. Heb. 3:6, "household," Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 3:15; "spiritual house," 1 Pet. 2:5; "household of God," 4:17). "House" is used six times in this paragraph, sometimes with the connotation of a building and sometimes of a family. The argument seems to run as follows

1. Moses was part of God's house/household, but Jesus was the builder of that house
2. Moses is a servant, while Jesus is a family member
3. Moses failed to bring in God's rest, while Jesus will not fail

3:3 "counted worthy of more glory than Moses" This is a perfect passive indicative. This would have been an absolutely shocking statement to Jews (cf. 2 Cor. 3:7-11).

3:4 "For every house is built by someone" This has been used for the philosophical/theological argument of "ultimate cause" in an attempt to prove the existence of God (cf. Thomas Aquinas). However, this line of reasoning ("first cause") can never arrive at the revelation of God as Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor at God as friend of sinners.

■ **"but the builder of all things is God"** The Father is creator of all (cf. Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 15:25-27). Jesus was the Father's agent in creation (cf. John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2).

3:5-6 "but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house" Jesus a son (there is no article, cf. Heb. 1:2; 3:6; 5:8; 7:28) is contrasted with Moses, the servant (cf. Heb. 1:2; 3:5; 5:8; 7:28; Exod. 14:31; Num. 12:7). Moses was a faithful servant (cf. Num. 12:7), but Jesus was a family member!

3:5 Moses spoke of Christ in Deut. 18:18-19 (cf. 1 Pet. 1:11). This repeats the truth of Heb. 1:1.

3:6 "whose house we are" This is the family of faith described as a house (cf. Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5; 4:17). This same type of collective building metaphor is employed when the church is called a temple (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16). The focus is on (1) Jesus' ownership and (2) the people of God as a corporate

entity.

It is unusual to speak of the church as Jesus' house. Because of this some ancient Greek manuscripts changed the pronoun so that it refers to the Father (cf. MSS P⁴⁶ and D^{*}).

■ **"if"** This is a third class conditional which means potential action (*ean* plus a subjunctive). This gives the statement an element of contingency (cf. Heb. 3:14; 4:14; Rom. 11:22; 1 Cor. 15:2).

■ **"we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope"** "Hold fast" is a continuing emphasis on perseverance (aorist active subjunctive, cf. Heb. 3:14; 4:14, see Special Topic at Heb. 4:14). The rest of this chapter and chapter 4 is one continual warning (1) for the Jewish believers to move to maturity and (2) for those who have heard the gospel and seen it powerfully in the lives of their believing Jewish friends to fully accept it themselves.

■ **"boast of our hope"** This emphasis on hope is characteristic of Hebrews (cf. Heb. 3:6; 6:11; 7:19; 10:23; 11:1). Hope refers to the sure consummation of our faith!

SPECIAL TOPIC: HOPE

■ **"firm until the end"** This phrase does not appear in the ancient Greek manuscripts P⁴⁶ or B and, therefore, is possibly not original. However, it is included in other ancient uncial Greek manuscripts (κ, A, C, D, K, and P). It is included in Heb. 3:14 and was probably transposed here by a scribe for the sake of balance. It surely fits the theology of the context. See Special Topic at Heb. 7:11.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 3:7-19 (complete paragraph includes 3:7-4:13)

⁷Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,

"Today if you hear His voice,

⁸Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me,

As in the day of trial in the wilderness,

⁹Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me,

And saw My works for forty years.

¹⁰Therefore I was angry with this generation,

And said, 'They always go astray in their heart,

And they did not know My ways';

¹¹As I swore in My wrath,

'They shall not enter My rest.'"

¹²Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. ¹³But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called

"Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

¹⁵while it is said,

"Today if you hear His voice,

Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me."

¹⁶For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

3:7 "as the Holy Spirit says" This is attributing the inspiration of the OT to the Holy Spirit. In context this

is very significant because Scripture is attributed to the Father in Heb. 1:5,13; 2:6,11; 4:3,4; 10:9; 13:5. Therefore, this is a strong passage on the deity and personality of the Spirit (See [Special Topic: Personhood of the Spirit](#), cf. Heb. 9:8; 10:15).

[SPECIAL TOPIC: THE TRINITY](#)

■ **"today if you hear his voice"** Verses 7-11 are a quote from the Septuagint of Ps. 95:7-11, which is a warning to Israel during the wilderness wandering against unbelief. Hebrews 3:17 through 4:13 is based on an exposition of this passage. This is a third class conditional sentence. They had the opportunity to see and hear (cf. Heb. 3:9) but willfully refused and hardened their hearts.

3:8 "do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me" The historical allusion is to Israel's wilderness wandering period. The Masoretic Hebrew text lists the geographical sites of Israel's rebellion as *Meribah* (cf. Exod.17:7; Num. 20:13) and *Massah* (cf. Exod.17:7; Deut. 6:16). The Septuagint translates them by their etymology (*Meribah*—place of strife and *Massah*—temptation, cf. Heb. 3:9).

The term "heart" refers to the entire person (cf. Deut. 6:4-5). These Israelites initially had faith, but later did not act in faith (i.e., the report of the 12 spies, cf., Num. 12). As a result they were not permitted to enter the Promised Land.

[SPECIAL TOPIC: THE HEART](#)

■ **"as in the day"** Here is an example of the Hebrew term "*yom*" used in a figurative sense (cf. John 8:56; Heb. 8:9), not in the sense of a literal 24 hour period.

[SPECIAL TOPIC: YOM](#)

3:9 "tried Me by testing Me" The term "provoking" in Heb. 3:8 and the term "test" in Heb. 3:9 in the Masoretic Text are "*meribah*" and "*massah*," two geographical locations mentioned in Exod.17:1-7 where Israel rebelled against God.

In the Greek translation two different terms for "test" or "try" are used. The first (*peirazō*) normally had the connotation of "to test with a view toward destruction" and the second (*dokimazō*) "to test with a view toward approval," but in this context they are synonymous. See Special Topic at Heb. 2:18.

■ **"and saw my works"** God's miraculous dealings with the children of Israel during the forty year period of the wilderness wanderings did not bring them to complete trust. The parable in Luke 16 of Lazarus and the rich man combined with Matt. 24:24 shows that the miraculous is not necessarily the sign of God, nor the best tool for winning men to faith (cf. the devil's temptation of Jesus in Matt. 4:3,6).

■ **"forty years"** This number is used often in the Bible. It must be a Hebrew idiom for a long, indefinite period of time. Actually, in this context, it refers to 38 years (cf. Num. 14:34).

The author of Hebrews has modified both the Hebrew text and Greek text of this Psalm (e.g., Paul's quote of Ps. 68:18 in Eph. 4:8) by connecting the "forty years" with the Israelites seeing YHWH's miracles during the wilderness wandering period. However, the Masoretic Text and Septuagint relate the phrase to YHWH's anger at the people during this period (cf. Ps. 95:10). New Testament authors under inspiration often interpret the OT by rabbinical word plays. This seems to violate our modern commitment to authorial intent as the proper way to interpret the Bible. We must allow the NT authors the right to use the OT in ways that would be inappropriate for modern interpreters. We cannot reproduce the hermeneutical approach of the inspired authors.

3:10 "I was angry with this generation" A good example of YHWH's anger and judgment is found in Numbers 14:11,22-23,27-30,35.

■ **"know"** The Hebrew term has an element of personal relationship (cf. Gen. 4:1; Jer. 1:5), not just facts about someone or something. Biblical faith has both a cognitive element (truths) and a personal element

(trust).

■ **"My ways"** There are many synonyms in Hebrew referring to God's Law (cf. Ps. 19:6-9; 119). God's will was clear to them (i.e., OT Israelites), but they willfully rejected it. This was the problem of the unbelieving Jewish recipients of Hebrews. The message of Jesus had changed "God's ways" (i.e., Matt. 5:21-48; Mark 7:19; 10:5-6). It was hard for these Jewish worshipers to leave Moses and trust completely in the Apostolic message of a "new covenant" (i.e., Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-38) totally apart from human performance!

SPECIAL TOPIC: TERMS FOR GOD'S REVELATION (using DEUTERONOMY and PSALMS)

3:11 "as I swore in my wrath" God's wrath is as true biblically as is God's love. It must be stated; however, that both are anthropomorphic metaphors using human emotions and terminology. They surely are true about God but not ultimate. God has adequately revealed Himself to us, but there is so much about God that we simply cannot receive while still a part of this temporal, physical, sinful reality.

SPECIAL TOPIC: GOD DESCRIBED AS HUMAN (ANTHROPOMORPHISM)

3:12

NASB, NRSV,

NJB "Take care brethren"

NKJV "Beware"

NJB "be careful"

This is a present active imperative; continue to be watchful! It not only is the beginning of the life of faith that is crucial, but also the finish (cf. chapter 11)!!!

NASB, NKJV "brethren"

NRSV "brothers and sisters"

NJB "brothers"

See note at Heb. 3:1. This designation seems to refer to believing Jews, although it could denote ethnic paternity.

■ **"an unbelieving heart"** This describes a believer who deserts the living God. A believing heart is one that continues firm to the end (cf. Heb. 3:14 and chapter 11). The phrase "unbelieving heart" reflects a Hebrew idiom "heart of unbelief" (cf. Heb. 4:6), as does "fall away," which reflects the Hebrew *shuv* ("return" or "turn").

■ **"that falls away from the living God"** This is an aorist active infinitive. This verb is the source of our English word "apostasy." This is addressing a developing faithlessness (it is the opposite of Heb. 3:14). To whom does this passage relate: (1) believing Jews or (2) unbelieving Jews? The use of "brothers" in Heb. 3:1 and the added phrase "partakers of a heavenly calling" and "brothers" in Heb. 3:12 demand that it refer to believers.

What then is the warning relating to: (1) salvation or (2) faithfulness? In context it seems to refer to faithfulness; Jesus was faithful, they must be faithful. Hebrews views the Christian life from the end (cf. Heb. 3:14), not the beginning (like Paul).

The "falling away" of Heb. 3:13 must relate to continual faith and faithfulness. The Israelites had faith, but not functioning, obedient faith. They rejected God's promise of the land flowing with milk and honey by accepting the spies' report (cf. Numbers 13-14), not their belief in God. In this context "falling away" does not mean "falling from faith," but "falling from faithfulness"! However, both are required for a healthy faith. See note at Heb. 3:16-18.

God always comes to us in a covenant relationship. We must respond in faith and faithfulness. The Sovereign God has allowed us to participate in our initial decision and on-going discipleship. The author of Hebrews is difficult to follow because

1. he uses rabbinical logic and hermeneutics
2. he is addressing two groups
 - a. believing Jews
 - b. unbelieving Jews
3. he views Christian assurance and victory from the criteria of faithfulness as well as faith
4. he focuses on faithfulness to the end (cf. Heb. 4:14; chapter 11). He views the Christian life from its conclusion, not its beginning.

The phrase "the living God" is a play on God's covenant name YHWH, which is from the Hebrew verb "to be" (cf. Exod.3:14). See Special Topic: Names for Deity at Heb. 2:7. These readers were not rejecting YHWH, but the irony is that rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ is, in fact, a rejection of YHWH (cf. 1 John 5:9-12).

SPECIAL TOPIC: APOSTASY (APHISTĒMI)

3:13 "But encourage one another" This is a present active imperative. Believers are to emulate the Spirit and the Son in encouraging faith and faithfulness (cf. Heb. 10:24). This is the same root as the word *paraclete*, which means "one called alongside to help" and is used of the Spirit (cf. John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7) and of Jesus (cf. 1 John 2:1).

▣ **"Today"** "Today," used in Psalm 95, shows that the time for trusting God and finding His rest was still open as it was in David's day. The author is emphasizing that now is the time for decision because there comes a time when continual rejection results in blinded eyes that cannot see (i.e., unpardonable sin of the Gospels and the sin unto death of 1 John).

No one chooses the time when they come to God (cf. John 6:44,65). Our only choice is to respond, and respond immediately. Continued rejection and willful unbelief causes a spiritual hardening of the human heart (cf. Aorist passive subjunctive, "be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin"). This is not God's will, but the inevitable consequence of rejection. The people of God who left Egypt in faith balked at God's promise related to possessing the Promised Land. Believers often practice practical unbelief. Beware of segmenting initial faith from continuing faith (cf. Heb. 3:6,14).

▣ **"that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin"** This is an aorist passive subjunctive. Sin is personified as the enemy that hardens hearts. Notice how this truth is presented:

1. take care brethren (Heb. 3:12)
2. lest one have (Heb. 3:12)
 - a. an unbelieving heart
 - b. fall away from God
3. encourage one another (Heb. 3:13)
4. lest you be hardened by sin (Heb. 3:13)
5. we are partakers, if we hold fast (Heb. 3:14)

What a powerful encouragement and warning these verses present.

3:14 "we have become partakers of Christ" This is a perfect active indicative. This implies a finished progress that results in an abiding state of being.

▣ **"if"** This is a third class conditional which means potential action. This is another warning admonishing Christians to hold fast their confession (cf. Heb. 3:6; 4:14; 10:23).

NASB	"if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end"
NKJV	"if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end"
NRSV	"if only we hold our confidence firm to the end"
TEV	"if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at the beginning"
NJB	"if we keep the grasp of our first confidence firm to the end"

This is an emphasis on perseverance. It is as valid a biblical emphasis as is security. They must be super-glued together for a biblically balanced perspective (cf. 3:6; 4:14; Mark 13:13; Rom. 11:22; 1 Cor. 15:2; Gal. 6:7-9; 1 John 2:19; Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 21:7). See [SPECIAL TOPIC: GUARANTEE](#) at Heb. 2:2. For "to the end" see Special Topic at 7:11.

Most biblical doctrines come in dialectical or paradoxical pairs. The Bible is an eastern book which uses figurative language expressing truth in very strong statements, but then balances it with other seemingly contradictory statements. Thereby truth is found between the two stated extremes. Western people tend to proof-text one side of the paradox and radicalize truth by literally and dogmatically interpreting one expression of truth without seeking and being open to the opposite truth. In many ways this is the major source of tension among modern western denominations! See Special Topics below.

[SPECIAL TOPIC: CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE](#)

[SPECIAL TOPIC: ARCHĒ](#)

3:15 "if" This is another third class conditional sentence, like Heb. 3:14, which means potential action. This is a quote from Ps. 95:7-8, which has been the focus of chapter 3.

3:16-18 There are three rhetorical questions in these verses (cf. Heb. 3:16,17,18). If this analogy is taken literally, it seems that all who died in the wilderness (cf. Num. 14), including Moses, Aaron, and the faithful priests during Korah's rebellion, were all spiritually lost for eternity. This is impossible. This is a play on the words "rest" and "disobedience." These are the two key terms of this context. God has a "rest" for those who trust Him (and continue to trust Him), yet there are consequences for "disobedience," both to unbelievers and believers!

3:19 The unbelief of Heb. 3:19 deals with the continuing faithlessness of Israel during the Wilderness Wandering Period!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is Jesus called an "apostle" in Heb. 3:1?
2. List the different uses of "rest."
3. Define "the perseverance of the saints."

HEBREWS 4

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
A Rest for the People of God		Warning and Exhortation	A Rest for God's People	How to Reach God's Land of Rest
(3:7-4:13)	The Promise of Rest	(3:7-4:13)	(3:7-4:13)	(3:7-4:13)
4:1-11	4:1-10	4:1-11	4:1-7	4:1-11
	The Word Discovers Our Condition		4:8-11	
	4:11-13			
4:12-13		4:12-13	4:12-13	4:12-13
Jesus the Great High Priest				
	Our Compassionate High Priest	The Theme of Jesus Our High Priest	Jesus the Great High Priest	Jesus the Compassionate High Priest
(4:14-5:10)		(4:14-5:14)	(4:14-5:10)	(4:14-5:10)
4:14-16	4:14-16	4:14-16	4:14-16	4:14-16

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. The author moves back and forth between the superiority of Jesus and warning to hold fast to Him.
- B. Jesus' superiority (new covenant) over the old covenant
 1. He is the superior revelation (the prophets, Heb. 1:1-3)
 2. He is the superior mediator (angels, Heb. 1:4-2:18)

3. He is the superior servant (Moses, Heb. 3:1-6)
4. He is the superior priest (Aaron, Heb. 4:14-5:10; 6:13-7:28)
5. He is the superior covenant (OT, Heb. 8:1-13; 9:15-22)
6. He is the superior sanctuary (temple, Heb. 9:1-11, 23-28)
7. He is the superior sacrifice (animals, Heb. 9:12-14; 10:1-18)
8. He is the superior mountain (old covenant as Mt. Sinai and new covenant as Mt. Zion, Heb. 11:18-29)

C. In light of Jesus' superiority there is a series of warnings against rejecting His gospel (i.e., the New Covenant, cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-38) or reverting to Judaism (i.e., Old Covenant).

1. Heb. 2:1-4
2. Heb. 3:7-4:13
3. Heb. 5:11-6:12
4. Heb. 10:19-39
5. Heb. 12:14-29

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 4:1-13

¹Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. ²For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. ³For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said,

"As I swore in My wrath,
They shall not enter My rest,"

although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; ⁵and again in this *passage*,

"They shall not enter My rest."

⁶Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,

"Today if you hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts."

⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.

⁹So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. ¹¹Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience.

¹²For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

4:1

NASB, NKJV "fear"

NRSV, TEV "take care"

NJB "Beware"

The verb is an aorist passive (deponent) subjunctive ("let us fear"). The warnings of Hebrews (cf. Heb.

2:1-4; 3:7-13; 4:1-13; 5:11-6:12; 10:26-39; and 12:14-17) elicit a sense of dread (cf. Heb. 4:11). These warnings touch ultimate issues of salvation and assurance.

■ **"while a promise remains of entering His rest"** This is a continuing word play (i.e., "His rest," cf. Heb. 4:1,3,5,8,9,10,11) in which the author uses rabbinical hermeneutical methodology to talk about four parts of the people of God's history and hope.

1. Gen. 2:2, God's rest on the seventh day of creation
2. Num. 13-14, Joshua's rest which was the Promised Land
3. Ps. 95:7-11 God's rest was still available in David's day
4. Heb. 4:1, 10-11 the day of rest as a reference to peace with God and life with God (heaven)

NASB, NKJV "to have come short of it"

NRSV "to have failed to reach it"

TEV "to have failed to receive that promised rest"

NJB "that he has come too late for the promise of *entering his place of rest*"

This reflects a Hebrew term *chatha* ("miss the mark") translated as *hamartia* by the Septuagint, meaning "fall short" or "come short" (cf. Heb. 12:15; Rom. 3:23). A related meaning is "come too late" (cf. NJB).

4:2 "we have had good news preached to us" This refers to the gospel about Jesus Christ, who all may accept by faith. Before Christ it referred to God's Word, which was given in the OT in different ways (i.e., "do not eat of the tree"; "build an ark"; "follow Me to a land"; "keep the law"; "enter the Promised Land," etc.). Each person or group had to believe God and respond by faith (i.e., act on) His Word to them. In the Exodus the ones believing were Joshua and Caleb. They believed God's promise about the Promised Land; most Israelites did not.

■ **"just as they also"** This refers to the Israelites who listened to the ten spies' negative report. Joshua and Caleb, however, did not doubt God's promise about conquering the Promised Land (cf. Numbers 13-14), but had faith, so they could enter Canaan, but their unbelieving contemporaries could not.

NASB "because it was not united by faith in those who heard"

NKJV "not being mixed with faith in those who heard it"

NRSV "because they were not united by faith with those who listened"

TEV "they did not accept it with faith"

NJB "because they did not share the faith of those who did listen"

There is a Greek manuscript variation in this phrase. The best attested reading has a perfect passive accusative masculine plural participle, which would refer to the faith of Joshua and Caleb (cf. NASB, NKJV, NRSV, REB). The other option is a perfect passive nominative masculine singular participle, which would refer to faith in the message heard (cf. TEV, NJB, NIV).

The theological issue involves the faith (salvation) or lack of faith of the Israelite adults (20 years and up) who participated in the exodus. Did their lack of faith in the spies' report mean that (1) they were not allowed to enter Canaan or (2) they were not allowed to enter heaven? This question is not easy to answer because of the author's word play on the term "rest." It seems best to affirm their initial faith in YHWH (i.e., salvation), but admit they lacked the faith to trust His every promise (i.e., taking Canaan). This is the very question related to the first century readers. Was their lack of persistence a sign they were never saved or did it show their weak faith? In his commentary on Hebrews in *The New International Commentary Series*, F. F. Bruce says, "The practical implication is clear: it is not the hearing of the gospel by itself that brings salvation, but its appropriation by faith; and if a genuine faith, it will be a persistent faith" (p. 73).

4:3 "just as He said" This is a perfect active indicative, which is repeatedly used to refer to inspired Scripture (cf. Heb. 1:13; 4:3,4; 10:5,9; 13:5), which can refer to God the Father or God the Son.

■ This is a quote from Ps. 95:11 (as are Heb. 4:5 and 3:11), but also an added OT allusion back to Gen. 2:2, God's Sabbath (the seventh-day rest of creation).

4:4 "For He has said somewhere" This reflects a rabbinical idiom of belief in the inspiration of the entire OT (cf. Heb. 2:6). The "where" (i.e., the exact location of the text) and "who" (i.e., the human author of the text), were not as important as God's authorship of all Scripture. This does not imply the author forgot where the OT reference was to be found.

■ **"seventh day"** The rabbis asserted that God's Sabbath (i.e., "the Day of Rest") never ceased because the regular formula of Genesis 1, "there was evening and there was morning, day. . .," is never mentioned in connection with this seventh day of creation in Gen. 2:2,3 (cf. Exod. 20:11).

4:5 This is a quote from Psalm 95:11.

4:6 "because of disobedience" Faithlessness is evidenced by disobedience (cf. Heb. 3:18; 4:6,11). The larger context of chapter 4 reflects the events recorded in Numbers 13-14, but the specific scriptural reference is Ps. 95:7-11, which relates to Israel's experience at Meribah.

The term "disobedience" is in the ancient Greek uncial manuscripts A, B, D, while "unbelief" is in the papyri manuscript P⁴⁶, and the ancient uncial manuscript κ.

4:7 "fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David" The Greek term "fixes" is the English term "horizon," which means a setting of bounds. "Through David" is not in the Hebrew text of Ps. 95:7-8, but the Septuagint correctly interprets and inserts the traditional author of the Psalm. The author's argument is based on God's rest still being open even during David's reign.

Psalm 95:7-11 has been quoted several times in the context of chapters 3 and 4. Each time a different part of the OT passage is emphasized (like a sermon).

1. Heb. 3:7-11 emphasizes "do not harden your hearts" of Ps. 95:8
2. Heb. 3:15 emphasizes "when they provoked Me" of Ps. 95:9
3. Heb. 4:3,5 emphasizes "they shall not enter My rest" of Ps. 95:11
4. Heb. 4:7 emphasizes "today" of Ps. 95:7

4:8 "if" This is a second class conditional sentence, which is often called "contrary to fact." Joshua did not bring all of the children of Israel into rest. This is using the term "rest" not in the sense of Canaan, but God's spiritual rest (cf. Heb. 4:9-10). From Heb. 4:8-10 it is obvious that the author of Hebrews is using "rest" in three historical/theological senses:

1. the Promised Land of Canaan (Heb. 4:8, Joshua's day, Num. 13-14)
2. the opportunity to trust God (cf. Heb. 4:9 i.e., David's day, Ps. 95)
3. the Genesis 2 (Heb. 4:4) rest of God at creation (Heb. 4:10)
4. heaven (Heb. 4:1 and 11)

■ **"hearts"** See Special Topic at Heb. 3:8.

■ **"Joshua"** The King James translation has "Jesus," which follows the Geneva and Bishops Bibles' translations, but the context demands the OT "Joshua." Both names are spelled the same (i.e., Joshua - Hebrew; Jesus - Aramaic)! The early church often used Joshua as a type of Jesus (cf. Acts 7:45, where the same error in translation is made).

■ **"He"** This must refer to the Divine author of Psalm 95.

4:9 This is the summary of the author's exposition of Psalm 95. There was first an initial promise of rest (cf. Gen. 2:2); there was second a historical fulfillment (Joshua); there was third a later opportunity (David's day); and there is still a fourth opportunity for anyone who chooses to exercise faith in God's promises. Notice the author is using the title "the people of God" for those who believe in Christ (not just Jews).

4:10,11 All of the verbals of Heb. 4:10-11 are aorist, which either (1) point to a completed action or (2) view all of life as a whole. Verses 10 and 11 make it clear that the "rest" of Heb. 4:10 refers to heaven. Believers will one day cease their diligence (cf. Rev. 14:13), but Heb. 4:11 clearly asserts that while physical life remains, believers must continue in faith, repentance, obedience, and perseverance. Verse 11 is a strong warning. Salvation is absolutely free in the finished work of Christ. It is a gift of grace from the Father and the convicting work of the Spirit. However, the sovereign Triune God has chosen to deal with humanity in a covenant relationship. Mankind must respond and continue to respond. Salvation is not a ticket to heaven nor a fire insurance policy, but a day-by-day faith relationship with God which issues in progressive Christlikeness! The covenant has benefits and obligations.

4:11

NASB, NKJV "Let us be diligent to enter that rest"

NRSV "Let us make every effort to enter that rest"

TEV "Let us do our best to receive that rest"

NJB "Let us press forward to *enter this place of rest*"

In English this seems to advocate human performance in attaining God's rest, but the Greek word means "to be eager," "to make haste" (cf. 2 Thess. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:9).

▣ **"lest anyone fall through *following* the same example of disobedience"** See 3:18 and 4:6.

4:12 "word of God" Verses 12 and 13 form one sentence in Greek. The term word (*logos*) does not refer personally to Jesus, as it does in John 1:1, but to God's spoken (cf. Heb. 13:7) or written message either through the OT Scriptures or NT revelation. God's self-revelation is described in three ways:.

1. it is personified as having a life of its own
2. it is like the penetrating power of a sword
3. it is like an all-knowing judge (cf. Heb. 4:13)

In his book *Jewish Christianity*, H. E. Dana makes the suggestion based on Egyptian papyri usage that "word" (*logos*) means "reckoning" or "calling into account." He asserts this fits the original author's overall argument, that there will be a divine reckoning through examination, using the metaphor of a surgeon (p. 227). Therefore, this text is not a description of the revealed word of God, but the discerning judgment of God. This is interesting, but the author of Hebrews used *logos* often for God's word (cf. Heb. 2:2; 4:2; 5:13; 7:28; 13:7) and also the Greek term for the spoken word, *rhēma* (cf. Heb. 6:5; 11:3).

▣ **"living and active and sharper"** This reflects the Hebrew concept of the power of the spoken word of God (cf. Gen 1:1,3,6,9,14,20,24,26; Ps. 33:6,9; 148:5; Isa. 40:8; 45:23; 55:11; 5:17-19; Matt. 5:17-19; 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:23).

▣ **"sharper than any two-edged sword"** This speaks of the penetrating power of God's word (cf. John 12:48 and Rev. 1:6; 2:12,16, where it is used of Jesus).

▣ **"soul and spirit"** This is not an ontological dichotomy in mankind, but a dual relationship to both this planet and to God. The Hebrew word *nephesh* is used of both mankind and the animals in Genesis, while "spirit" (*ruah*) is used uniquely of mankind. God's word penetrates mankind's inner self. This is not a proof-text on the nature of mankind as a two-part (dichotomous) or three-part (trichotomous) being (cf. 1 Thess 5:23). Mankind is primarily represented in the Bible as a unity (cf. Gen. 2:7). For a good summary of the theories of mankind as trichotomous, dichotomous, or a unity, see Millard J. Erickson's *Christian Theology* (second edition) pp. 538-557 and Frank Stagg's *Polarities of Man's Existence in Biblical Perspective*.

▣ **"and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart"** In Hebrew thought the "heart" represents the entire person and their inner motivation. See Special Topic at Heb. 3:8. God knows true

faith and fake faith.

4:13 "but all things are open and laid bare" God knows us completely (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7; Ps. 7:9; 33:13-15; 139:1-4; Prov. 16:2; 21:2; 24:12; Jer. 11:20; 17:10; 20:12; Luke 16:15; Acts 1:24; 15:8; Rom. 8:27).

NASB	"to the eyes of Him"
NKJV	"naked and open"
NRSV	"naked and laid bare"
TEV	"exposed and lies open"
NJB	"uncovered and stretched fully open"

This metaphor literally means "to expose the neck by lifting the chin." This OT metaphor was a warning to judges; here it refers to meeting God face-to-face on judgment day, who has full knowledge of our motives.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 4:14-16 (fuller literary unit to 5:10)

¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

4:14 "a great high priest" The author first mentions Jesus as high priest in Heb. 3:1-6. After the warnings and exhortations of Heb. 3:7-4:13, he now returns to the topic. This same pattern is followed in the warnings in Heb. 5:11-6:12 and in the discussion of Jesus' priestly functions in Heb. 6:13-10:39. See Special Topic at Heb. 2:17.

Hebrews is the only book in the NT that calls Jesus the "high priest." The author's comparison of the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant continues. This would have been hard for the Jewish people to accept and understand. Jesus was not of the priestly tribe of Levi. However, Jesus is called "a priest" in Heb. 1:3; 2:17,18; 3:1. In the OT the Messiah is referred to as priest in only two contexts: Ps. 110 and Zech. 4, both of which have both royal and priestly aspects.

- **"who has passed through the heavens"** This is in the perfect tense. Jesus has passed through the heavens (whether there are 3 or 7), He returned to the Father's presence, and the result of His coming (incarnation) and going (ascension) remains. Therefore, believers can now, through His agency, also pass through the heavens. In Gnostic thought, the heavens are angelic barriers (aeons), but in the OT they are
 1. the atmosphere where birds fly
 2. the windows of heaven where rain comes from
 3. the starry heavens of the sun and moon
 4. the very presence of God

There has been much discussion by the rabbis as to whether there are three or seven heavens (cf. Eph. 4:10; 2 Cor. 12:2). This phrase was also used by the rabbis to describe the heavenly tabernacle, which fits this context best (cf. Heb. 9:23-28).

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE HEAVENS AND THE THIRD HEAVEN

- **"Jesus"** It is possible that this is a typological play on Jesus as the new Joshua. Their names are exactly the same (i.e., Joshua - Hebrew; Jesus - Aramaic). The author of Hebrews alludes to the Exodus material extensively. As Joshua brought God's people into the rest of the Promised Land, so too, will Jesus bring them into heaven.

- **"the Son of God"** This is both an OT divine title applied to Jesus of Nazareth and also the author's

continuing emphasis on Jesus as "son" (cf. Heb. 1:2; 3:6; 5:8; 7:28). It is not by accident that the humanity and deity of Jesus are emphasized together (cf. Ezek. 2:1 – human; Dan. 7:13 – divine). This is the main pillar of NT truth about the person of Christ (cf. John 1:1,14; 1 John 4:1-6).

■ **"let us hold fast our confession"** This is a present active subjunctive. This is the continuing emphasis on the need for perseverance (cf. Heb. 2:1; 3:6,14). We must balance our initial decision (cf. John 1:12; 3:16; Rom. 10:9-13) with ongoing discipleship (cf. Matt. 7:13-27; 28:19-20; Eph. 1:4; 2:10). Both are crucial! Faith must issue in faithfulness! For a discussion of the term "confession," see note at Heb. 3:1.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE NEED TO PERSEVERE

4:15 "sympathize with our weakness" A. T. Robertson gives another possible alternative translation, "suffer with our weakness" (cf. Heb. 2:17-18). Jesus never had a sin nature and never yielded to sin, but He was exposed to true temptation because of mankind's sin.

■ **"tempted"** The term (*peirazō*) has the connotation of "to tempt with a view toward destruction" (cf. Heb. 2:18; 3:9; 11:37). It is a perfect passive participle, which emphasizes a finished state by means of an outside agent, such as the tempter. This term is a title for Satan ("the one tempting") in Matt. 4:3 (also notice Mark 1:13). See Special Topic at Heb. 2:18.

■ **"in all things as we are yet without sin"** Jesus is both fully God and fully human, and yet He understands us! However, He does not participate in fallen mankind's rebellion and independence from the Father (i.e., the innocent, sinless One, cf. Heb. 2:17-18; 7:26; Luke 23:41; John 8:46; 14:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 2:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22; 3:18; 1 John 3:5).

4:16 "Therefore let us draw near" This is a present middle (deponent) subjunctive, which emphasizes the subject's continual involvement, but with an element of contingency. This is a technical term in the Septuagint (LXX) for a priest approaching God. In Hebrews this term is used of fallen mankind's ability to approach God because of Jesus' sacrifice (cf. Heb. 4:16; 7:25; 10:1,22; 11:6). Jesus has made His followers a "kingdom of priests" (cf. Exod. 19:5,6; 1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6).

■ **"with confidence to the throne of grace"** The term "confidence" means "freedom to boldly speak." We have freedom, and therefore, boldness, to approach the very presence of God through Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 10:19,35). This is similar to the symbol of the torn veil of Herod's Temple in Jerusalem on the day that Jesus died (cf. Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Through Jesus, sinful people can come before a holy God where they receive mercy and grace, not condemnation.

■ **"to the throne of grace"** This may be a circumlocution for God, like the use of the passive voice. The author of Hebrews views heaven as a spiritual tabernacle (cf. Heb. 9:11,24), but also a heavenly throne (cf. Heb. 1:8; 4:16; 8:1; 12:2).

■ **"to help in time of need"** The context speaks of warnings against not holding fast our confession. God will surely help us in times of trials and temptations (1) through Jesus and (2) by His own character.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is this chapter so hard for us to understand?

2. Why is the emphasis to "hold on" so recurrent in Hebrews?
3. Is there any theological significance to Jesus being called both "Jesus" and "Son of God" in Heb. 4:4?
4. What does it mean that Jesus "passed through the heavens"?
5. How does perseverance relate to the security of the believer?

HEBREWS 5

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Jesus the Great High Priest		The Theme of Jesus Our High Priest	Jesus the Great High Priest	Jesus the Compassionate High Priest
(4:14-5:10)	Qualifications for High Priesthood	(4:14-5:14)	(4:14-5:10)	(4:14-5:10)
5:1-4	5:1-4 A Priest Forever	5:1-6	5:1-6	5:1-10
5:5-10	5:5-11	5:7-10	5:7-10	
Warning Against Apostasy			Warning Against Abandoning the Faith	Christian Life and Theology
(5:11-6:12)			(5:11-6:17)	
5:11-6:8	Spiritual Immaturity 5:12-14	5:11-14	5:11-14	5:11-14

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

A. In Heb. 3:1 two terms are introduced to describe Jesus: "apostle" and "high priest." The second one is uniquely developed in Hebrews (cf. Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5,10; 6:20; 7:26,28; 8:1,3; 9:11; 10:21).

B. The author of Hebrews knew that the concept of Jesus as high priest in the line of Melchizedek

would be difficult for his Jewish Christian recipients to accept.

C. The literary unit, 5:11-6:20, is a parenthesis in the author's discussion about Melchizedek to warn both the believing Jews and the unbelieving Jews.

D. In Heb. 5:11-6:20 we have three key pronouns: "we" (5:11); "you" (5:11-12—three times); and "those"/"they" (6:4-8). These pronouns reflect three groups.

1. "we" and "us," 5:11; 6:1-3, the writer and his/her missionary team
2. "you," 5:11-12; 6:9-12, the believing Jews to whom the author is writing
3. "those" and "they," 6:4-8, the unbelieving Jews who are co-worshippers and friends of the recipients of the letter

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 5:1-4

¹ For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; ²he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; ³and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. ⁴And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

5:1-4 Verses 1-4 describe OT Levitical high priests.

1. comes from one of the tribes (Levi)
2. stands before God on humanity's behalf
3. offers gifts and sacrifices for sin (cf. Heb. 8:3; 9:9)
4. deals gently with sinners because he is a sinner (cf. Lev. 16:3,6)
5. does not take personal honor, but is honored by God's choice and use

5:2

NASB, NRSV "gently"

NKJV "compassion"

TEV "able to be gentle"

NJB "sympathize with"

This Greek term is used only here in the NT and does not occur at all in the Septuagint. It is used in *Aristeas* 256 to refer to the philosophy of moderation (cf. Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, p. 406).

▣ **"the ignorant and misguided"** In the OT the sins of ignorance and passion were forgivable through sacrifice (cf. Lev. 4:2,22,27; 5:15-18; 22:14; Num. 15:22-31), but sins of premeditation were not (cf. Deut. 1:43; 17:12,13; 18:20; Psalm 51).

In *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 5, A. T. Robertson makes the theological connection between the premeditated sins of the OT for which there was no forgiveness through sacrifice and the warnings of Heb. 3:12 and 10:26. His statement is "for deliberate apostasy (3:12; 10:26) no pardon is offered" (p. 368).

Paul believed God had mercy on him because of his ignorance of the truth and not his intentional rejection of the gospel.

5:3 "and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins as for the people, so also for himself" This refers to the procedures for the high priest atoning for himself is found in Lev. 9:7-17 (initial consecration; 16:6-19 Day of Atonement; and Heb. 9:7. We learn from Heb. 7:26,27 that Jesus never had

to make an offering for His own sin, but He does understand our need (cf. Heb. 4:15).

5:4 "no one takes the honor to himself" God appointed a certain tribe (Levi) and a certain family (Aaron's, cf. Exod.28:1; 1 Chr. 23:13) to act as priests (cf. Num. 16:40; 18:7; 1 Sam. 12:9-14; 2 Chr. 16:18).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 5:5-10

⁵So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him,

**"You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You";**

⁶just as He says also in another passage,

**"You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek."**

⁷In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.

⁸Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. ⁹And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, ¹⁰being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

5:5 "Christ did not glorify Himself" See John 8:50,54.

▣ **"become a high priest"** It would be very difficult to convince a group of Jews that Jesus was high priest when He did not come from the line of Levi. That is the purpose of this extensive argumentation (cf. Heb. 4:14-5:10; 6:13-7:28) based on OT quotes.

▣ **"but He who said"** The author asserts that the Father affirms Jesus' exalted position by quoting a key royal Psalm, 2:7. The Father quoted this same Psalm combined with Isa. 42:1 at Jesus' baptism (cf. Heb. 3:17) and His transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17:5).

Arius (i.e., in the fourth century a.d.) in his theological conflict with Athanasius over the full deity of Jesus) used the second part of this quote to assert that Jesus was the first and highest creation of God (cf. Prov. 8:22-31), but the thrust of the quote is Jesus' sonship (cf. Heb. 1:2; 3:6; 5:8; 7:28). The original psalm was an annual renewal ceremony for the King of Israel or Judah.

5:6 "you are a priest forever

according to the order of Melchizedek" This is a quote from Ps. 110:4. This Psalm is unique in the fact that it specifically gives the Messiah both a priestly and a kingly office (i.e., the two olive trees, cf. Zech. 4:3,11-14; and i.e., Joshua as a branch, cf. Heb. 6:13). We learn from the Dead Sea Scrolls that the Essenes were expecting two Messiahs, one royal and one priestly. Jesus fulfilled both offices. As a matter of fact, He fulfills all three OT anointed offices: prophet, priest and king (cf. Heb. 1:1-3).

▣ **"Melchizedek"** The full development of this theme is in chapter 7. The imagery is taken from Gen. 14:17-20, where he is a Canaanite priest/king of Salem (Jebus, Jerusalem).

5:7 "In the days of His flesh" This refers to Jesus, not Melchizedek. It does not mean to imply that Jesus is not still human. Jesus became Incarnate and remains Incarnate forever.

▣ **"prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears"** This may relate to Jesus' Gethsemane experience in Matt. 26:37 and Luke 22:44. This is possibly related to the rabbis' three levels of prayer, showing the intensity of Jesus' emotion in the Garden of Gethsemane or His high priestly prayer in John 17 the night of the disciples' Passover meal before Gethsemane.

■ **"to the One able to save Him from death"** Was Jesus afraid of death? Death is a natural human fear and Jesus was fully human. Supremely I think He was afraid of the loss of fellowship with the Father (cf. Mark 15:34, quoting Psalm 22). He knew who He was and why He came (cf. Mark 10:45; Matt. 16:21).

All three persons of the Trinity were involved in Jesus' resurrection, not just the Father (cf. the Spirit, Rom. 8:11; and Jesus, John 2:19-22; 10:17-18). Usually the NT asserts that it was the Father who raised Jesus (cf. Acts 2:24; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30,33,34,37; 17:31; Rom. 6:4,9; 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10).

This phrase may reflect several OT texts that assert that YHWH will save the Messiah from physical death (cf. Ps. 33:19; 56:13 or Hos. 13:14) or resurrect Him from death (cf. Ps. 16:10; 49:15; 86:13). If this context reflects Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, then option #1 is best.

NASB	"He was heard because of His piety"
NKJV	"and was heard because of His godly fear"
NRSV	"he was heard because of his reverent submission"
TEV	"Because he was humble and devoted, God heard him"
NJB	"winning a hearing by his reverence"

This phrase, like Rom. 1:4, was used to support the theological heretical concept of "adoptionism," which asserts that God rewarded the man Jesus because of His godly, obedient life. The NT as a whole presents the paradox that Jesus was incarnate deity and was rewarded for His good service! Somehow, both are true.

The differences in the English translations come from the ambiguity of the Hebrew term "fear," especially as it is used of mankind's relationship to God. It seems that it means "reverent awe" or piety, not "terror of." Its basic meaning is "to hold on to securely" in the sense of doing the known will of God.

5:8 "Although He was a Son" The word "son" should not be capitalized. It is another in a series of the comparisons between a family member versus a family servant (cf. Heb. 1:2; 3:6; 5:8; 7:28).

■ **"He learned obedience from the things which He suffered"** This whole section has emphasized both Jesus as a "son" of God (cf. Heb. 4:14) and yet human (cf. "in the days of His flesh" Heb. 5:7, 5:7). He was tempted; He prayed; He cried; He suffered; He learned obedience! It is difficult theologically to hold Jesus' true deity and true humanity as one truth (one nature). Throughout Church history, heresies have developed when either side is depreciated (cf. 1 John 4:1-3).

It is hard for believers to realize that they must follow Jesus' example. This was the problem the believing recipients faced. Would they, like Jesus, follow through to the end, even if it involved suffering? Suffering is part of the package (cf. Heb. 2:10; Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-21; 16:1-2; 17:14; Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 1 Pet. 4:12-19).

How could Jesus be perfected if He was deity? This must refer to His human development (cf. Luke 2:40,52). Suffering served a purpose of developing trust as nothing else could do. If it is true that God's goal for every believer is Christlikeness (i.e., Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:13), then why do modern western Christians flee the very mechanism that produces maturity?

5:9 "and having been made perfect" This is an aorist passive (deponent) participle. The word "perfect" means "mature" or "fully equipped for the assigned task." The perfection or maturity of both Jesus and His followers is a central concept in Hebrews (cf. Heb. 2:10; 5:9,14; 6:1; 7:11,19,28; 9:9,11; 10:1,14; 11:40; 12:2,23). See Special Topic at Heb. 7:11.

■ **"to all those who obey Him"** Obedience is an evidence of true discipleship (cf. Luke 6:46). Jesus is our example in all areas. Obedience gives evidence of a true salvation!

5:10 "being designated by God as a high priest according to the order" So far in Hebrews there have been three titles for Jesus mentioned: (1) son, (2) apostle, and (3) high priest. See [SPECIAL TOPIC: JESUS AS HIGH PRIEST](#) at Heb. 2:17.

■ **"the order of Melchizedek"** Melchizedek is alluded to because he is the only person in the OT who is called both priest and king, and who adequately fulfills the theological requirements of this rabbinical argument. Melchizedek is a rather shadowy figure of Gen. 14:17-20 and Ps. 110:4 who is used to describe the superiority of Jesus' priesthood over the Aaronic priesthood. See full discussion in chapter 7.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 5:11-14

¹¹Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

5:11-6:12 This is one literary unit. Chapter and verse divisions are not inspired and were added much later. See Contextual Insights to chapter 6.

5:11 "him" This pronoun can be either masculine or neuter. I think the neuter fits better (cf. NRSV, TEV, NJB, NIV). Therefore, it would refer to Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood. Hebrews 5:11-6:20 is a theological parenthesis. The author will return to Melchizedek in Heb. 7.

■ **We**" This is a literary plural, and refers to the one author.

■ **"you have become dull of hearing"** This context is unique in Hebrews in that three pronouns are used: "you" (Heb. 5:11,12; 6:9-12), "we" and "us" (Heb. 5:11; 6:1-3,9), and "those" (Heb. 6:4-8). See contextual insights, D. This seems to support the supposed historical reconstruction that the book of Hebrews was written to a group of believing Jews still content to worship in a synagogue setting with unbelieving Jews, never fully embracing the consequences of the gospel.

This is a perfect active indicative, which emphasizes a settled state of being. The term "dull" is used only twice in the NT, here and in Heb. 6:12. The author was having difficulty explaining, not because of the subject matter, but because of the immaturity of the readers. They had become hard of hearing and lazy in spiritual matters.

5:12 "For though by this time you ought to be teachers" Although these believers had been Christians for a long period they had not matured. Length of time is not directly related to maturity. It seems they were continuing to fellowship with unbelieving Jews on the basis of non-controversial Jewish subjects (cf. Heb. 6:1-2). This was possibly (1) to avoid governmental persecution and/or (2) to avoid the "great commission" commitment required of Christians.

NASB	"elementary principles"
NKJV	"first principles"
NRSV	"the basic elements"
TEV	"the first lessons"
NJB	"the elements of the principles"

This term has many possible meanings (i.e., wide semantical field).

1. the basic teachings of a subject
2. the origin of a subject
3. angelic powers (cf. Gal. 4:3,9; Col. 2:8)

In this context #1 seems best. The author asserts that these immature believers need the basics of Christianity taught to them (use # 1), but in Heb. 6:1, definition #2 fits best because 6:1-2 relates to Jewish teaching, not uniquely Christian teachings, which they are to move beyond. The Greek word here is *stoichea*, while in Heb. 6:1 it is *archē* (see Special Topic: *Archē* at Heb. 3:14).

▣ **"oracles of God"** This term is used of OT truths in Acts 7:38 and Rom. 3:2.

▣ **"milk. . .solid food"** These are both God given and both are appropriate at certain times. However, milk is inappropriate for the mature (cf. 1 Cor. 3:2; 1 Pet. 2:2).

5:13 "word of righteousness" The interpretive question is how does this phrase relate to the "good and evil" of Heb. 5:14? The NJB translates the first as relating to doctrine, "the doctrine of saving justice." The TEV translates them as parallel "right and wrong" (Heb. 5:13) and "good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). The first phrase deals with a problem of immaturity, while the second deals with a problem of lack of action/experience.

It is possible that this phrase is in contrast to "the elementary principles" of Heb. 5:12; 6:1. Thereby it would refer to the gospel as over against Jewish doctrines of Heb. 6:1-2.

For a word study on righteousness see special topic at Heb. 1:9.

5:14 "the mature" This term is from the same Greek root translated "perfect" in Heb. 5:9. *Telos* means mature, fully equipped for an assigned task. See Special Topic at Heb. 7:11. Jesus' humanity is an example of faithfulness and growth to maturity (cf. Heb. 5:8-9), just as the readers' lives must be. These believing Jews had experienced some persecution (cf. Heb. 12:4), but they tended to pull back (cf. "shrink back," 10:38) into the relative safety of Judaism.

▣ **"because of practice have their senses trained"** This is a perfect passive participle, which speaks of repeated action that has become consolidated into a settled state of being—practice makes perfect! The same verb is used of God's disciples in Heb. 12:11.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why was it so difficult for Jewish people to accept the truth that Jesus was the high priest?
2. How is suffering related to maturity, both of Jesus and believers?
3. What factors had caused these readers not to mature?

HEBREWS 6

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Warning Against Apostasy (5:11-6:12)			Warning Against Abandoning the Faith (5:11-6:12)	The Author Explains His Intention
5:11-6:8	The Peril of Not Progressing 6:1-8 A Better Estimate	Exhortation and Declaration of Purpose 6:1-8	6:1-3 6:4-8	6:1-8 Words of Hope and Encouragement
6:9-12	6:9-12	6:9-12	6:9-12	6:9-12
God's Sure Promise	God's Infallible Purpose in Christ		God's Sure Promise	
6:13-20	6:13-20	6:13-20	6:13-20	6:13-20

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS for HEBREWS 5:11-6:12

- A. Because of the use of the pronouns "We/us" in Heb. 6:1-3, "those/them" in Heb. 6:4-8, and "you" in Heb. 6:9-12 and 5:11-12, I believe that two distinct groups are being addressed in chapter 6: believing Jews and unbelieving Jews. Also, the Jewish (not Christian) nature of the basic doctrines of Heb. 6:1-2 must point to truths shared with Judaism. There seem to be three groups mentioned.
 1. the author and his/her mission team ("we" and "us," Heb. 6:1-3,9; 5:11)
 2. unbelieving Jews ("those" and "them," Heb. 6:4-8)
 3. the believing Jews ("you," Heb. 6:9-12 and 5:11-12)

- B. There have been several theories about who is being addressed.
1. it is a hypothetical (which usually supplies an "if" in Heb. 6:6)
 2. it refers to Jewish unbelievers
 3. it refers to true apostasy (Jewish believers about to return to OT hopes and procedures instead of continuing faith in Jesus as the Messiah)
 4. it refers to the first-century situation only (which understands the historical setting as a synagogue setting of believing and unbelieving Jews)
 5. it refers to OT examples of unbelief, not current believers
- C. The warnings of Heb. 6:1-12 must be related to the previous warnings to
1. beware of being carried past the safe anchorage, Heb. 2:1
 2. beware of willful unbelief (as OT Israelites), Heb. 3:12-19
 3. beware of remaining immature believers, Heb. 5:11-14
- D. The current debate in the church over "once saved always saved"; "saved, lost, and then resaved" and "once out always out" revolves around:
1. the use of isolated texts (proof-texting)
 2. the use of logical deduction (priority of reason over Scripture)
 3. the use of systematic theological grids (Calvinism, Arminianism, Dispensationalism, etc.)
- E. There are numerous biblical examples of people with problems related to their faith (see Special Topic at Heb. 6:5), but there is no easy answer that covers them all.
1. believers become unfit for service
 - a. carnal Christians or lazy Christian leaders (1 Cor. 3:10-15)
 - b. baby Christians (Heb. 5:11-14)
 - c. disqualified Christians (1 Cor. 9:27)
 - d. unorthodox Christians (1 Tim. 1:19-20)
 - e. unfruitful Christians (2 Pet. 1:8-11)
 2. false professions of faith
 - a. parable of the soils (Matt. 13; Mark 4)
 - b. fruits without personal relationship (Matt. 7:21-23)
 - c. false teachers (1 John 2:18-19; 2 Pet. 2:1-19)
 3. possible apostasy
 - a. Saul (OT)
 - b. Judas (NT)
 - c. false teachers (2 Pet. 2:20-22)
 - d. later interpreters (Revelation 22:19)

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 6:1-8

¹Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. ³And this we will do, if God permits. ⁴For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. ⁷For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also

tilled, receives a blessing from God; ⁸but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

6:1-2 This list of doctrines relates to issues shared by Judaism and Christianity. However, they are primarily Jewish (i.e., washings and laying on of hands). These would be doctrines that believing and unbelieving Jews would agree on easily. They are not the important theological issues related to Jesus of Nazareth as the prophesied Messiah.

There is a plausible theory that the first phrase should translate *archē* (elementary teachings) as "origins of the Messiah" (cf. A. B. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 197). Could it be that a group of Jews were disillusioned with the growing Gentile flavor of Christianity and were questioning how Jesus had fulfilled OT prophecy and expectations? Could the list of Jewish doctrines be the focus of a discussion about a possible return to the Mosaic covenant for salvation, instead of Jesus?

6:1

NASB, NJB "elementary teachings about the Christ"
NKJV "the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ"
NRSV "the basic teachings about Christ"
TEV "the first lessons of the Christian message"

The Greek term *archē* has a large semantical field (see Special Topic at Heb. 3:14). The basic thrust is the beginning of some thing (the first cause of authority/rule). It is the contextual opposite of *teleios* ("maturity" Heb. 6:1b).

The problem of understanding this phrase is that the principles enumerated in Heb. 6:1-2 do not relate to the Messiah as much as traditional teachings of Judaism. This is one of the textual reason for the supposition that the book was written to a Jewish synagogue audience (cf. Heb. 10:25) of both believing and unbelieving Jews (cf. R. C. Graze, *No Easy Salvation*).

▣ **"let us press on"** This is a present passive subjunctive, "let us be borne." The focus is on the continual provision by a divine agent! They will advance toward maturity if they allow the Spirit the freedom to motivate them. This very Greek term was used by the Pythagorean philosophers for advancing to a higher stage of understanding (cf. A. T. Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, p. 373).

NASB, TEV "maturity"
NKJV, NRSV "perfection"
NJB "completion"

This is a form of the Greek term *teleios*, which is used only here in the NT. See Special Topic at Heb. 7:11. It is the contextual opposite of *archē* of Heb. 6:1a (basic principles). These believers must move beyond those theological topics which they have in common with their Jewish friends and co-worshipers.

▣ **"repentance. . . faith"** These are the old and new covenant obligations, one negative and one positive. Repentance is a difficult topic because of the confusion over its meaning. The Hebrew term reflects a change of action while the Greek term reflects a change of mind. Repentance is the turning from a self-centered, self-directed life to a God-centered, God-directed life.

1. Jesus connected lack of repentance with perishing (cf. Luke 13:3,5 and 2 Pet. 3:9)
2. repentance is linked as the companion obligation to faith (cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38, 41; 3:16; 19; 20:21)
3. God is even affirmed as being the source of repentance (cf. Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25)

6:2 "washings" The plural is never used for Christian baptism, but for OT ceremonial ablutions (cf. Mark 7:4; Heb. 9:10). These three pairs of doctrines are not uniquely Christian. They seem to be common doctrines with Judaism, particularly those which Pharisees shared with Christianity.

- **"laying on of hands"** This is used in several senses in the OT and NT. It shows association with
 1. setting one aside to God's chosen task (cf. Num. 27:18,23; Deut. 34:9; Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6)
 2. identifying with a sacrifice
 - a. priest (cf. Exod.29:10,15,19; Lev. 16:21; Num. 8:12)
 - b. laypersons (cf. Lev. 1:4; 3:2,8; 4:4,15,24; 2 Chr. 29:23)
 3. identifying with a stoning victim (cf. Lev. 24:14)
 4. praying for blessing (cf. Matt. 19:13,15)
 5. praying for healing (cf. Matt. 9:18; Mark 5:23; 6:5; 7:32; 8:23; 16:18; Luke 4:40; 13:13; Acts 9:17; 28:8)
 6. praying for receiving the Spirit (cf. Acts 8:17-19; 19:6)

- **"the resurrection. . .eternal judgment"** The Pharisees and Essenes (i.e., the Dead Sea Scrolls community) held these eschatological doctrines in common with Christianity.

SPECIAL TOPIC: ETERNAL

6:3 "if" This is a third class conditional sentence which means potential action. God will permit, if they will cooperate!

6:4-6a "have once been. . .have tasted. . .have been made. . .have tasted. . .falling away" All of these participles are aorists, while Heb. 6:6b begins a series of present tense verbs. These are such strong statements. The meaning seems to be clear: they knew God on some level, but they rejected full faith in Christ. However, two contextual issues need to be examined: (1) the presence of three groups ("us" [vv. 1-3], "those" [vv. 4-8], "you" [vv. 9-12]) and (2) the Jewish nature of the doctrines in Heb. 6:1-2. These point toward a synagogue in which believing and unbelieving Jews worshiped and studied together. The unbelieving Jews have clearly seen the power, glory, and truth of the gospel in the Scriptures and in the testimony and changed lives of their believing friends.

There seem to be two warnings in Hebrews: (1) to the believing Jews to take their public stand with the persecuted church and not turn back to Judaism and (2) to the unbelieving Jews to embrace Christ. In many ways the first warning is unique to this book, but the second is very similar to the unpardonable sin of the Pharisees in the Gospels and the sin unto death of the false teachers in 1 John.

6:5 "the powers of the age to come" Another example of the lost involved in the power of the age to come is in Matt. 7:21-23. They had power without the necessary personal relationship. This same thing could be said of Judas Iscariot (in the Gospels), Simon Magnus (in Acts), and the false teachers (cf. 1 John 2:18-19).

See special topic at Heb. 1:2.

- **"have fallen away"** This is an aorist active participle. This is the theological climax of the Greek sentence that begins in Heb. 6:4. See Special Topic: Apostasy at Heb. 3:12.

6:6

NASB	"and then"
NKJV	"if"
NRSV, TEV	"and then"
NJB	"And yet in spite of this"

There is a disagreement among Greek scholars whether this is a mild conditional structure or a consistent parallel structure from verse 4. Those who insist on a conditional structure do so for the theological purpose of asserting that verse 6a is a hypothetical situation. However, all these grammatical features imply that all have occurred.

1. the repetitive pattern of aorist participles (been enlightened, tasted, shared, tasted and fell away)

2. the repetitive use of "kai" (and) with the last three
3. the one accusative masculine plural article in Heb. 6:4 which relates to all the participles of verses 4-6

NASB, TEV,

NJB "impossible"

NKJV, NRSV "impossible"

The term appears in Heb. 6:4, but the larger context includes Heb. 6:6. This is the Greek term *dunatos* (able) with the alpha privative (unable). These two terms are used with the connotation of what God does and does not do! It is used in the Greek Papyri found in Egypt of (1) men not strong enough to work and (2) witnesses unable to testify. It is used four times in Hebrews.

1. impossible to renew them again to repentance (6:4)
2. impossible for God to lie (6:18)
3. impossible for OT sacrifices to save (10:4)
4. without faith it is impossible to please God (11:6)

In each case the term means impossible. Therefore, it is surprising that Lowe and Nida's *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* says "In Heb. 6.4 the use of *adunaton* seems to be an instance of hyperbole in view of the warnings against apostasy (see Heb. 5.11-6.12). Therefore, one may translate *adunaton* in Heb. 6.4 as 'it is extremely difficult to'" (p. 669). This seems more theological than lexical when all other uses of the word in Hebrews demand "impossible."

The reluctance to take this term literally is because it leads to the theology of "once out always out" if this refers to believers abandoning their faith. Those denominational groups that teach apostasy also preach repentance and reinstatement. This text seems to depreciate this position.

In many ways the historical setting is the key to the interpretation.

1. two groups addressed (believing and non-believing Jews)
2. one group (believing Jews who have not matured and are now contemplating returning to Moses)

This is a similar heresy to the Judaizers in Galatians who were tempted to trust in OT rites (plus Christ). Paul asserts that they had fallen from grace (cf. Gal. 5:4).

▣ **"renew"** See Special Topic following.

SPECIAL TOPIC: Renew (ANAKAINŌSIS)

▣ **"they again crucify to themselves"** The Greek compound (*anastauroō*) can mean "crucify" (or "nail up," this intensified form is in JB, NEB and Moffatt translations) or "crucify again" (NASB, NKJV, NRSV, TEB, NJB, NIV translations). *The Greek-English-Lexicon of the New Testament* by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, says "in extra-biblical Greek this term always means *crucify*" (p. 61). Tertullian used this passage to assert that post baptismal sins were not forgivable.

The early Greek Fathers understood this context and the compound with *ana* to demand "crucify again," which is followed by the majority of modern English translations. How does this relate theologically to apostasy? It implies believers; however, if the intensified form "personally nail up" is followed, then unbelievers are possibly the referent. Interpreters must allow the text, not their theological biases or theological systems, to speak. This text is so difficult to interpret definitively. Often we think we know what it should or should not mean before we struggle with

1. the book as a whole
2. the four warnings specifically
3. the specific context

However one interprets these texts, the warnings are serious!

▣ **"put Him to open shame"** This term is used in Matt. 1:19 for Joseph's not wanting to publicly disgrace Mary. How would this relate to the context? It may simply refer to Jesus' initial crucifixion as "public shame"

without the implied "again."

6:8 This may be an illustration taken from Gen. 3:17-19 or Isa. 5:1-2 or possibly even the parable of the soils in Matthew 13. Fruit-bearing is the normal evidence of a valid profession! Fruit-bearing (cf. John 15:5-6), not germination, is the evidence of a true relationship with Christ. The fruit is the evidence of, not the means to!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 6:9-12

⁹But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. ¹⁰For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. ¹¹And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹²so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

6:9 "beloved" This paragraph shows the intense love and care that the author has for the readers. Verse 11 mentions (1) "desire," which could be translated "great desire" and (2) "each one of you," which shows individual concern.

▣ **"we are convinced of better things concerning you"** This is a perfect passive indicative plural. The author was confident that this group of readers were Christians and would continue to act appropriately. For "better" see full note at Heb. 7:7.

NASB, NKJV "things that accompany salvation"

NRSV "things that belong to salvation"

TEV "that belong to your salvation"

NJB "on the way to salvation"

This Greek phrase is literally "having (present middle participle) salvation" which defines the "better things" of Heb. 6:9.

6:10 "so as to forget your work" God will judge fairly based on

1. the book of life (cf. Exod. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27)
2. the book of deeds (cf. Ps. 56:8; 139:16; Isa. 65:6; Mal. 3:16; Matt. 25:31-46; Gal. 6:7)

▣ **"the love which you have shown toward His name in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints"** Although these believing Jews had not fully identified with the Church, they did help the Church in its time of persecution (cf. Heb. 10:32-34). Remember the Synagogue was considered legal, while the church was illegal in Roman law of this period!

"Saints" (*hagioi*) is theologically related to the OT term "holy" (*kadash*), which meant "set apart for God's service" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Rom. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). It is always plural in the NT except for one time in Philippians 4:21; even there, it is used in a corporate context. To be saved is to be part of the covenant community of faith, the family of believers.

God's people are holy because of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 4 and 2 Cor. 5:21). It is God's will that they live holy lives (cf. Eph. 1:4; 2:10; 4:1; 5:27; James 2:14-26; 1 Pet. 1:16). Believers are both declared holy (positional sanctification) and called to a lifestyle of holiness (progressive sanctification). This is typical of the NT theological tension between the "already of the Kingdom of God" and the "not yet of the Kingdom of God."

SPECIAL TOPIC: SAINTS

6:11 "full assurance" Notice this is related to lifestyle action (cf. James, 1 Peter, and 1 John). Assurance is not primarily a doctrine to affirm, but a life to live (cf. Matt. 7).

▣ **"until the end"** Perseverance is as true a biblical doctrine as security. By their fruits you shall know them (cf. Matt. 7; James 2:14-26). See note on perseverance at Heb. 4:14, also note Special Topic at Heb. 7:11.

6:12 "sluggish" This is the same term as "dull" (cf. Heb. 5:11). It is used in contrast to "diligence" in Heb. 6:11. The believers had not grown into Christlikeness nor Great Commission Christians as they should have (cf. Heb. 12:1-3).

▣ **"imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises"** This may allude to the roll call of the faithful in chapter 11. These faithful OT believers held out to the end amidst great conflicts and trials, often resulting in physical death (cf. often in chapter 11 and possibly in Heb. 12:4). God's promises are the focus of the paragraph, 6:13-20. They are sure and faithful because He is sure and faithful!

SPECIAL TOPIC: BELIEVERS' INHERITANCE

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 6:13-20

¹³For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, ¹⁴saying, "I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you." ¹⁵And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. ¹⁶For men swear by one greater *than themselves*, and with them an oath *given as confirmation* is an end of every dispute. ¹⁷In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, ¹⁸so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. ¹⁹This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope both sure and steadfast* and one which enters within the veil, ²⁰where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

6:13-20 This is such a powerful promise of security and hope based on God's character and promises (cf. Heb. 6:18a), if we will only respond appropriately (cf. Heb. 6:18b).

6:13 "when God made the promise to Abraham" Abraham is mentioned because he is considered the father of the Hebrew nation to whom YHWH made many covenantal promises (cf. Gen. 12,15,17,18,22), and also because of his relation to Melchizedek (cf. Genesis 14). His faith in God came before the law and is used as a NT paradigm of all those who exercise faith (cf. Romans 4).

It is also theologically possible that Abraham was chosen because God's promises to him were not based on his performance, but on God's unconditional promise (cf. Gen. 15:12-21; as is the "new covenant," cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-38), while the covenant with Moses is based on obedience, a conditional covenant (cf. Deuteronomy 27-28).

▣ **"He swore by Himself"** This refers historically to Gen. 22:16-17 (Abraham's offering of Isaac) or contextually to Ps. 110:4 (cf. Heb. 7:17,21). God's oaths and promises can be depended on (cf. Heb. 6:16-17). This is the theological thrust of the paragraph. Our hope is in the unchanging character (cf. Ps. 102:27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8) and promises of God (cf. Isa. 40:8; 55:11). These are the "two unchangeable things" of Heb. 6:18!

6:14 This section of Hebrews involves the author's use of OT quotes to Abraham. God made promises to him about many descendants through Isaac. The theological problem is that not all of Abraham's natural descendants were faithful followers of YHWH. They were "covenant," "chosen" people, but all did not

exercise personal faith (cf. Heb. 6:18b).

6:15 This does not describe Abraham's perfect faith (he had children by several women, he tried to give Sarah away twice to save his own life) concerning God's word but his faithful heart and obedience. Abraham, like all humans, is a strange mixture of faith and fear, good and evil.

6:18 "two unchangeable things" This refers to God's oath (i.e., Ps. 110:4 quoted in Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17) and God's promise (cf. Heb. 6:14). God's word is our assurance (cf. Isa. 55:11; Matt. 5:17-18).

■ **"in which it is impossible for God to lie"** This may be an allusion to Num. 23:19 or 1 Sam. 15:29. This same truth is affirmed by Paul in 2 Tim. 2:13 and Titus 1:2. See full note at Heb. 6:6.

■ **"we who have taken refuge"** This may relate to

1. the OT cities of refuge (cf. Num. 35:6; Deut. 4:41-43; Joshua 20)
2. a metaphor for a safe harbor in a storm (cf. Heb. 2:14; 6:19)
3. a metaphor referring to God as a strong fortress in which His people take refuge (cf. Ps. 18:1-2; 31:3; 91:2,9; 94:22; 144:2; Isa. 17:10; 25:4; Jer. 16:19; Joel 3:16; Nah. 1:7)

■ **"would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us"** In verse 18 we have the theological balance of a strong, trustworthy, sovereign God (cf. Heb. 6:18a) to whom humans must respond, and continue to respond by faith to the end (cf. Heb. 6:18b).

6:19 "an anchor" This was an ancient Christian symbol for safety, security, and hope. It has been found on the walls of the Roman catacombs. This word brings to mind the hymn,

"I've anchored my soul in the haven of rest,
I'll sail the wild seas no more.
The tempest may sweep o'er the wild stormy deep,
but in Jesus I'm safe evermore."

■ **"steadfast"** See Special Topic: Guarantee at Heb. 2:2.

■ **"one which enters within the veil"** Here the anchor of hope is paralleled with Jesus the high priest entering the heavenly tabernacle (cf. Heb. 8:5; 9:23), even into the holy of holies, which symbolized the very presence of God. The hope of believers is in the character and promises of God and the finished work of Jesus Christ.

This is not Platonism (earthly forms versus heavenly ideas), but the heavenly tabernacle pattern shown to Moses on Mt. Sinai (cf. Heb. 8:5; Exodus 25-40). This type of dualism is also found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. This type of reasoning (i.e., an earthly copy of a heavenly thing) predates the Greek philosopher Plato. It speaks of our invisible but sure hope in Christ (cf. Heb. 9:23ff).

6:20 "as a forerunner" This Greek term was used of (1) a scout going before, learning and marking the right path (i.e. a pioneer) or (2) a small ship leading a larger ship into a safe harbor. Jesus has gone before believers in every necessary way—overcomer, intercessor, savior, priest, and perfect sacrifice!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Are verses 2-4 a list of Christian essentials or truths of Judaism?
2. Does the book of Hebrews teach "falling from grace"? Why or why not?

3. Why is the historical setting of this book so important to a proper interpretation?
4. Does the Bible teach that the truly redeemed will hold out until the end or that those who hold out in faith to the end are the redeemed?
5. Are those spoken to in verses 4-6 believers or unbelievers? Why?
6. How are the "you" of Heb. 6:9 related to the "those" of Heb. 6:4?
7. Describe the persecution the believers were facing.
8. What are the two unchangeable things of Heb. 6:18?
9. How are both God's sovereignty and human freewill balanced in Heb. 6:18?
10. How are the character of God and the finished work of Christ related in Heb. 6:13-20?

HEBREWS 7

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Priestly Order of Melchizedek	The King of Righteousness	The Priesthood of Melchizedek and the Levitical Priesthood Compared	The Priest Melchizedek	Melchizedek
7:1-3	7:1-3	7:1-3	7:1-3	7:1-3 Melchizedek Accepts Tithes from Abraham
7:4-10	7:4-10 Need for a New Priesthood	7:4-10	7:4-10	7:4-10 From Levitical Priesthood to the Priesthood of Melchizedek
7:11-19	7:11-19	7:11-14	7:11-14	7:11-12 7:13-14 The Abrogation of the Old Law
		7:15-19	7:15-19	7:15-19 Christ's Priesthood is Unchanging
7:20-25	7:20-28 Greatness of the New Priest	7:20-25	7:20-22 7:23-25	7:20-25 The Perfection of the Heavenly High Priest
7:26-28		7:26-28	7:26-28	7:26-28

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph

4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 7:1-3

¹For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ²to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all *the spoils*, was first of all, by the translation of *his name*, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. ³Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.

7:1 "Melchizedek" He was a Gentile king/priest of the old Canaanite city then called Salem, which later became Jebus and then later Jerusalem. His name means "my king of righteousness" (very similar to the name of the king of Jerusalem in Jos. 10:1, "my lord is righteous"). His lineage is never mentioned, but Abraham pays homage to him. This is why he is such an appropriate OT type for Jesus Christ. He is only mentioned in Gen. 14:18-20 and Ps. 110:4. There has been much discussion about his identity.

1. for Philo, he is a figure of the human soul
2. for Origen, he is an angel
3. for Ambrose, he is the angel of the Lord
4. for others, he is the national angel of Israel, Michael
5. for Epiphanius, he is the incarnation of Holy Spirit
6. for the Melchizedekites, he is greater than the Messiah and all prayer goes through him
7. for some Jews, Jerome and Luther, he is Shem, Noah's son

Melchizedek is used as a type of Jesus' priesthood for four reasons:

1. Abraham offered a tithe to him (inferiors always tithe to superiors) and by rabbinical hermeneutics thereby Levi also offered a tithe (cf. Heb. 7:4-9)
2. his parents are not listed, so rabbinical theology said he was without parents and thereby eternal (cf. Heb. 7:3; Ps. 110:4b)
3. he was leader in the later holy city, Jerusalem (Salem, cf. Gen. 14:18)
4. he was a priest of God Most High (i.e., *El Elyon*, cf. Gen. 14:18)
5. he allows the author to establish a legitimate priesthood apart from the Levitical Priesthood.

■ **"king. . . priest"** He is the only person in the OT who combines royalty and priesthood (i.e., Psalm 110).

■ **"and blessed him"** The greater blesses the lesser; therefore, Abraham (and by rabbinical implications his descendant, Levi), was blessed by Melchizedek (cf. Gen. 14:19), which shows his superiority over the Aaronic priesthood. It also shows that Jesus, who was from the line of Judah, could be a priest of a different order.

7:2 "a tenth" Notice that the tithe (cf. Gen. 14:20) is older than the Mosaic law. It was a way like the Sabbath and first fruits of showing God's ownership of all (cf. Gen. 14:19c).

■ **"by the translation of his name"** The specific etymology of the phrase "king of righteousness" is uncertain but a similar title is used for the Messiah in Jer. 23:6 ("the Lord our righteousness") and 33:16 ("the Lord is our righteousness"). Also, the Messiah will be righteous and bring peace (cf. Isa. 9:6; 26:3,12; 32:17; and 54:10).

■ **"King of righteousness"** For "righteousness" see Special Topic at Heb. 1:9.

■ **"Salem"** The city may have gotten its name from the Hebrew term *shalom* which means "peace." Some scholars think it refers to a Jebusite deity. The city is called Salem in Genesis 14, but Ps. 76:2 relates it to Jerusalem (i.e., Zion), which was called Jebus during the Canaanite period.

7:3 This is rabbinical hermeneutics (*midrash*, see Appendix Three) based on the fact that Melchizedek's lineage is not given in Gen. 14:18-20. Like all human beings Melchizedek had parents, but he serves as another type of the eternal Messiah (cf. Heb. 7:8). This is developed in Heb. 7:8,12,16,17,21,24,25,28.

■ **"beginnings"** See Special Topic: *Archē* at Heb. 3:14.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 7:4-10

⁴Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. ⁵And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. ⁶But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. ⁷ But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. ⁸In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one *receives them*, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. ⁹And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, ¹⁰for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

7:5 "although these are descended from Abraham" This is rabbinic logic based on Levi being present in the loins of Abraham (cf. Heb. 7:10). This is Jewish exegesis, not scientific fact.

7:7 "the greater" The heart of the book of Hebrews is the comparison between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant in Christ.

This contrast is often expressed by the term "greater" (*kreittōu/kreissōu*), which means "better," "superior," "more excellent," "more valuable," "higher rank." This is a recurrent theme in Hebrews.

1. much better than the angels (cf. Heb. 1:4)
2. better things concerning you (cf. Heb. 6:9)
3. lesser is blessed by the greater (cf. Heb. 7:7)
4. a better hope (cf. Heb. 7:19)
5. a better covenant (cf. Heb. 7:22; 8:6)
6. with better sacrifice (cf. Heb. 9:23)
7. a better possession (cf. Heb. 10:34)
8. a better resurrection (cf. Heb. 11:35)
9. a better country (cf. Heb. 11:16)
10. God has provided something better (cf. Heb. 11:40)
11. he sprinkled blood speaks better (cf. Heb. 12:24)

7:8 "lives on" This refers to the eternality of Melchizedek because (1) his parents (genealogy) are not mentioned in Genesis 14 nor is his death recorded and also (2) Ps. 110:4b's specific comment ("forever").

7:9-10 This is rabbinical exegesis. Since Levi the tribe of Aaron is descendant from Abraham, then by analogy, the Jewish priesthood (i.e., even the High Priest) paid tithes to Melchizedek. Therefore, Melchizedek is superior and Jesus is superior to Jewish priests.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 7:11-22

¹¹Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was *there* for another priest to arise according to the

order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? ¹²For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. ¹³For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. ¹⁴For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. ¹⁵And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶who has become *such* not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷For it is attested of Him,
 "You are a priest forever
 According to the order of Melchizedek."
¹⁸ For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹(for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. ²⁰Inasmuch as *it was* not without an oath ²¹(for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him,
 "The Lord has sworn
 And will not change His mind,
 'You are a priest forever'");
²²so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

7:11 "if" This is a second class conditional which is called contrary to fact. A false statement is made to make a point. The Levitical priesthood did not bring spiritual perfection or maturity.

■ **"perfection"** The Greek family of terms based on *telos* basically means "to bring to the end," "to bring to completion," or "to bring to maturity." Here it refers to an adequate and effective representative or intercessor.

SPECIAL TOPIC: END OR FULL (TELOS)

■ **"through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law)"** This apparently refers to (1) Moses being from the tribe of Levi and being God's messenger in giving the sacrificial system of Israel or (2) the Levites and priests teaching the law to the people.

7:12 "a change of law also" The purpose of the Mosaic law was never to produce righteousness, but to show the continuing results of the fall and mankind's inability to please God (cf. Gal. 3:24-25). This is a major truth in trying to figure out God's purpose for the Mosaic Law.

This phrase in context must refer to the "new covenant."

7:13 "from which no one has officiated at the altar" This is a Perfect active indicative, which may imply that the sacrificial system was continuing. If so, Hebrews was written before Titus' destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70.

No one outside the tribe of Levi and family of Aaron served as a priest in the OT. This was not the case in the Roman period of the occupation of Palestine (i.e., Annas, Caiphas).

7:14 "our Lord was descended from Judah" This is another perfect active indicative. The verb "descend" means "sprang from" and is used for

1. the rising of the sun (cf. Matt. 5:45)
2. the movement of the planets
3. plant shoots
4. metaphorically, for human descent (cf. Zech. 6:12; Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5-6)

Here it refers to Jacob's prophecies about his sons in Genesis 49 (esp. 49:10).

■ **"Judah"** Jesus was from the Davidic royal line of Judah (cf. Gen. 49:8-12; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Isa. 9:6,7). Convincing Jews that Jesus was high priest was so difficult because He was not of the priestly tribe of Levi like Moses and Aaron.

7:15 "if" This is a first class conditional sentence which is assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes. Another priest has come and is from the line of Melchizedek.

7:16

NASB	"not on the basis of a law of physical requirement"
NKJV	"not according to the laws of a fleshly commandment"
NRSV	"not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent"
TEV	"not by human rules and regulations"
NJB	"not in virtue of a law of physical descent"

Jesus' priestly authority does not rest in what tribe/family He descended from, but from His possession of eternal, indestructible life (i.e., Melchizedek's parents are not named in Genesis 14 and the word "forever" is used in Ps. 104:4). Jesus has the endless life of God (as well as the oath and promise of God).

NASB, NRSV,

NJB	"an indestructible life"
NKJV	"an endless life"
TEV	"a life that has no end"

This seems to be related to the rabbinical exegetical (*Midrash*) implication from Ps. 110:4b that Melchizedek had no parents and, therefore, was eternal (cf. Heb. 7:6,8).

7:17 "For it is attested of Him" This is a quote from the Septuagint of Ps. 110:4 (as is Heb. 7:21).

7:18

NASB	"there is a setting aside"
NKJV	"there is an annulling"
NRSV	"the abrogation"
TEV	"is set aside"
NJB	"is thus abolished"

This term has been found in the Egyptian papyri in the sense of (1) "to set aside"; (2) "to make null and void"; or (3) "to be paid in full."

This verse speaks of the setting aside of a commandment (probably the physical lineage of the high priest). It is rather shocking that an inspired OT passage (cf. Matt. 5:17-19) can be "set aside," yet this is exactly Paul's point in Galatians 3, in respect to the redemptive purpose of the law being set aside. Paul, however, asserts that it was the weakness of fallen man (cf. Romans 7), not the OT. The author of Hebrews is showing the superiority of Jesus over Moses and calls the "Law" weak and useless (cf. Heb. 8:13).

■ **"of a former commandment"** This refers to the Levitical system or the Old Covenant characterized by the Mosaic legislation.

■ **"because of its weakness and uselessness"** Romans 7 and Galatians 3 are helpful in interpreting this phrase. It was not the Law of God, but human fallen nature that was weak and the Law was unable to perform its restorative task!

7:19 "(for the Law made nothing perfect)" Read Galatians 3 and see Special Topic at Heb. 7:11.

■ **"better"** See full note at Heb. 7:7.

▣ **"through which we draw near to God"** This is a key concept (cf. Heb. 7:25; 4:16; 10:1). The author asserts that the Mosaic Law, with its Levitical priesthood and sacrifices, failed to bring humanity to God, but Jesus, our high priest, did not fail and will not fail (cf. Heb. 10:22; James 4:7).

Notice that Jesus brings a better covenant, but it is still a covenant to which humans must respond as the priests did (believers are now new covenant priests in a corporate sense, cf. 2 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6).

7:20 "it was not without an oath" God's promises can be trusted because His character and power stand behind them (cf. Isa. 46:10). This oath is a reference to Ps. 110:4, which is discussed in Heb. 6:13-17.

7:21 This is another quote from the Septuagint of Ps. 110:4 (as is Heb. 7:17).

7:22

NASB, NRSV,

TEV, NJB "the guarantee"

NKJV, ASV "the surety"

The Hebrew background is "a pledge put in the hand," which implies surety. It came to be used in Greek for collateral on a loan or a jail bond. Also, in Roman law it stood for that which was legally secured. Jesus is the Father's surety of the effectiveness of the new covenant.

▣ **"a better covenant"** Jer. 31:31-34 speaks of this "new covenant" (cf. Ezek. 36:22-36) where the focus is an internal law motivated and produced by the Spirit, not an external code which relies on human performance.

For "better" see full note at Heb. 7:7.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 7:23-25

²³The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, ²⁴but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. ²⁵Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

7:23 This is another comparison between Jesus and OT priests. This one deals with their numbers and time in office.

7:24 This is a rabbinical conclusion based on Genesis 14, where Melchizedek's lineage is not given, and Psalm 110, which is an allusion to Melchizedek and uses the term "forever" (cf. Ps. 110:4b).

7:25

NASB "to save forever"

NKJV "to save to the uttermost"

NRSV "for all time to save"

TEV "now and always, to save"

NJB "power to save. . .is absolute"

As the above English translations show, this term has several connotations. He is able to save completely, all, forever (cf. Heb. 10:14) because He continues "forever" as a better priest. See special topic on assurance at Heb. 3:14.

▣ **"those"** This is a universal invitation! Whosoever will may come (cf. John 1:12; Rom. 10:9-13; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

▣ **"who draw near to God through Him"** Jesus is God's plan of redemption (cf. John 10:9; 14:6).

Whosoever will may come, but they must come through faith in Him and they must continue in faith (present participle).

■ **"He always lives to make intercession for them"** Jesus' work did not end with the cross, but even today He still prays and pleads for believers (cf. Heb. 9:24; Isa. 53:12; Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 7:26-28

²⁶For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; ²⁷who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. ²⁸For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever.

7:26 This is possibly a quote from an early hymn or poem (like Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:11-13; and possibly 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15-16). The term "holy" can mean "merciful" from LXX (cf. Ps. 16:10). The term "unstained" is a sacrificial term usually translated in the OT as "unblemished." This is a wonderful confessional summary.

SPECIAL TOPIC: BLAMELESS, INNOCENT, GUILTLESS, WITHOUT REPROACH

■ **"separated from sinners"** This is a perfect passive participle. It does not reflect on Jesus' humanity (cf. Phil. 2:6-7), but speaks of His sinlessness (cf. Heb. 4:15; 9:14; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 2:1; 3:5).

■ **"exalted above the heavens"** This may be (1) a statement of preeminence; (2) a reference to the gnostic false teachers' view of salvation as passing through the angelic spheres (cf. Heb. 4:14); or (3) a way of referring to the resurrection/ascension.

7:27 This seems to relate to the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16), but here it is used in the sense of the daily offerings (the OT continual). It is historically and rabbinically verifiable that the high priest was directly involved in daily sacrifices in later Judaism but possibly not during the days of the tabernacle. See Special Topic: Jesus As High Priest at Heb. 2:17.

■ **"He offered"** This is the same term used in Isa. 53:11 in the Septuagint (LXX), "to bear." Some see this as an allusion to the smoke of the sacrifices that rose up to God.

■ **"this He did once for all"** Hebrews emphasizes the ultimacy of Jesus' once-given sacrificial death. This once-done salvation and forgiveness are forever accomplished (cf. "once" [*ephapax*], Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10 and "once for all" [*hapax*], Heb. 6:4; 9:7,26,27,28; 10:2; 12:26,27). This is the recurrent accomplished sacrificial affirmation.

■ **"offered up Himself"** Jesus is the high priest (cf. Ps. 110:4) and victim (cf. Isa. 53:10) of the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb. 9:24). This is a pillar of the NT emphasis on substitutionary, vicarious atonement (cf. Mark 10:45; Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21).

7:28 "the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law" This is a contrast between the writings of Moses procedures and the "oath" of Ps. 110:4.

■ **"appoints a Son"** Jesus is a superior priest because He is part of God's family (i.e., "a son," cf. Heb. 1:2; 3:6; 5:8). This reference seems to combine Ps. 2 and Ps. 110 which were Royal and Priestly Psalms. He combines both OT anointed offices in Himself by the Father's oath.

▣ **"made perfect forever"** This is a perfect passive participle. He has been made perfect (humanly speaking) by suffering and this perfection continues (cf. Heb. 2:10; 5:8-9). See Special Topic at Heb. 7:11.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why does the author take so long to develop the concept of Jesus as high priest?
2. How is Levi linked to Melchizedek?
3. How does Ps. 110 relate to Gen. 14:18-20?
4. Why is Melchizedek used as a type of the Messiah?
5. Who was Melchizedek?

HEBREWS 8

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The High Priest of a New and Better Covenant	The New Priestly Services	The Heavenly Sanctuary and the New Covenant	Jesus, Our High Priest	The New Priesthood and a New Sanctuary
8:1-6	8:1-6	8:1-7	8:1-2 8:3-6	8:1-5 Christ is the Mediator of a Greater Covenant
	A New Covenant			8:6-13
8:7-13	8:7-13	8:8-13	8:7-13	

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS: HEBREWS 8:1-13

- A. This is part of a unified context related to the reader's need for maturity. This section runs from Heb. 5:11-10:18 with a parenthesis of warning from Heb. 5:12-6:20.
- B. As Hebrews 2 develops using Psalm 8, chapters 3 and 4 develop using Psalm 110, and chapter 8 uses Jer. 31:31-34 (Hebrews 10 will use Psalm 40).
- C. The true tabernacle in heaven which was alluded to in Heb. 6:19-20 and 8:2 will not be fully developed until chapter 9.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 8:1-13

¹Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has

taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ²a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. ³For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer. ⁴Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; ⁵who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." ⁶But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. ⁷For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. ⁸For finding fault with them, He says,

"Behold, days are coming, says the Lord,
When I will effect a new covenant
With the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;
⁹Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers
On the day when I took them by the hand
To lead them out of the land of Egypt;
For they did not continue in My covenant,
And I did not care for them, says the Lord.

¹⁰"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
After those days, says the Lord:
I will put My laws into their minds,
And I will write them on their hearts.
And I will be their God, And they shall be My people.

¹¹"And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen,
And everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
For all will know Me,
From the least to the greatest of them.

¹²"For I will be merciful to their iniquities,
And I will remember their sins no more."

¹³When He said, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

8:1

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV "main point"

TEV "the whole point"

NJB "the principle point"

This is a from a form of the Greek term "head," (*kephalē*) used metaphorically for the sum total of monies (cf. Acts 22:28). The Ancients added their figures upward instead of downward. This term had the additional figurative sense of (1) the most important point of the argument of the book so far or (2) a summary of an argument already given.

■ **"high priest"** This title for Jesus is only found in Hebrews (cf. Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1,3; 9:11,25). The priestly nature of the Messiah is revealed in Psalm 110 and Zechariah 3 and 4. He is both priest and sacrifice (cf. Isaiah 53). He stands before God on mankind's behalf and offers Himself as the solution to the sin problem.

■ **"who has taken His seat"** This is the continuing use of Psalm 110 (i.e., Heb. 8:2). It refers to the finished work of Christ. However, it has a royal, not priestly, connotation. No priest ever sat down, only kings (cf. Heb. 1:3).

■ **"at the right hand"** This is an anthropomorphic phrase for the place of authority and power (cf. Heb. 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2; Acts 2:33-35).

■ **"of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens"** God does not have a physical throne because He is a spirit. This is an anthropomorphic phrase describing God in human terms and categories. It is a circumlocutionary or periphrastic way of referring to God without mentioning His name (cf. Heb. 12:2).

The term "heavens" is plural as it is in the OT. It is plural because it refers to several levels

1. the atmosphere above the earth where birds fly and clouds form (cf. Gen. 1:1)
2. the starry sky, the realm of the heavenly lights, sun, moon, stars, and planets (cf. Gen. 1:14)
3. the personal presence of God and the angelic realm

The rabbis often debated whether there were three heavens (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2) or seven heavens (i.e., not in the Bible, but first century rabbinical sources). This concept of several levels can be seen in Deut. 10:14; 1 Kgs. 8:27; and Ps. 68:33; 148:4. The Gnostics used this concept of multiple heavens to assert levels of angelic authority. However, Jesus has passed through them (cf. Heb. 4:14). The plural versus singular of *ouranos* (heaven) seems to have no theological significance in Hebrews (cf. Heb. 9:23 versus 9:24).

8:2 "tabernacle" This is a reference to the ideal tabernacle in heaven (cf. Heb. 6:19-20), of which the one revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai and constructed during the wilderness wandering period (cf. Exod.25-40) was a mere copy (cf. Heb. 9:11,24).

■ **"which the Lord pitched, not man"** This may be an allusion to the Septuagint (LXX) translation of Exod. 33:7 (a special place to meet God) or it could be just another way of referring to the heavenly tabernacle made by God (cf. Heb. 11:10).

8:3 "to offer" This is the emphasis on the substitutionary atonement of Christ's sacrifice. His offering will be His life.

8:4 "if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all" This is a second class conditional sentence, which is called contrary to fact (cf. Heb. 4:8; 7:11; 8:4,7; 10:2; 11:15). Jesus was not of the priestly Levitical tribe, but from the royal tribe of Judah. Jesus' priestly ministry was ultimately performed in heaven.

8:5 "a copy and shadow of the heavenly things" The use of the terms "copy" and "shadow" are reminiscent of the writings of Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish writer and philosopher who lived from 20 b.c. to a.d. 42 and followed Plato. He allegorized the OT in an attempt to make it relevant to Greek society and to advocate Platonism as a means of elucidating YHWHism.

However, this passage does not reflect Philo, but the ancient Jewish tradition that Moses was given on Mt. Sinai a copy of the heavenly sanctuary—the tabernacle of the wilderness wandering period. This same type of reasoning is present in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which shows it was not unique to Plato (i.e., Greek philosophy). It is interesting that the author of Hebrews never discusses either Solomon's or Herod's Temple (nor their procedures). These were never commanded by God as was the tabernacle (cf. Exod.25-40), although 1 Chr. 28:19 comes close to claiming that Solomon's plans were divinely inspired.

The Jewish tradition that the early tabernacle was a copy of the true tabernacle in heaven can be seen in (1) Exod.25:9, 40; (2) Rev. 11:19; 13:6; 15:5; (3) II Baruch 4:5; (4) Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 7:10; (5) Wisdom 9:8; (6) Flavius Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* 3:6:1

This passage cannot reflect Platonism because the Tabernacle in heaven had substance or reality. In Platonism the heavenly was an ideal, a mental, spiritual reality, but in the Bible it is a physical reality. Heaven is not just ideals/concepts/archetypes, but a true aspect of creation (cf. Col. 1:16).

This heavenly tabernacle will one day cease to exist (cf. Rev. 21:22). It served its purpose during this age, but will not be needed in the eschaton!

■ **"He says"** This is a quote from Exod. 25:40. The tabernacle was not the plan of Moses, but the revelation of God.

8:6 "He has obtained a more excellent ministry" This is a Perfect active indicative. This same description of Jesus' excellence is used in connection with the angels in Heb. 1:4.

■ **"He is also the mediator of a better covenant"** All the verbs in Heb. 8:6 are perfects. Like the previous one, this one is a perfect active indicative.

The term "mediator" is a legal term denoting an arbitrator. As a priest stands between a holy God and sinful mankind, so too, Jesus as a mediator (cf. Heb. 9:15; 12:24; 1 Tim. 2:5). This is another way of denoting the work of a High Priest.

■ **"better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises"** This is a perfect passive indicative. The author of Hebrews' presentation of Jesus' authority over the Mosaic covenant is revealed by his use of the term "better" (see note at Heb. 7:7).

SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT

8:7 "if" This is another second class conditional sentence, which is called contrary to fact (cf. Heb. 8:4). This is a major point of the argument. An obviously false statement is used to make a theological point. The first covenant did not produce the desired result of restoration and righteousness.

8:8 "For finding fault with them" Not the Law, but human weakness was the problem (cf. Rom. 7:12,16; Galatians 3).

■ **"He says"** Verses 8-12 are a sustained quote from Jer. 31:31-34. Notice "He" refers to YHWH; however, in Heb. 10:15 this same phrase is attributed to the Holy Spirit. The inspiration of the OT is sometimes ascribed to the Spirit and sometimes to the Father.

■ **"new covenant"** This passage in Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 31:31-34) is the only mention in the OT of a "new" covenant, but it is described in Ezekiel 36:22-38. This would have been very shocking to Jews.

■ **"house of Israel"** This implies the reuniting of the people of God. After the United Monarchy (Saul, David, Solomon) split in 922 b.c., the northern tribes under Jeroboam I were called Israel and the southern tribes under Rehoboam were called Judah.

8:9 "not like the covenant" The difference is not in essence or goal but in methodology.

■ **"On the day when I took them by the hand"** This refers to YHWH as Father (cf. Hosea 11:1-4).

■ **"And I did not care for them"** This follows the Septuagint (LXX) translation. The Masoretic Text (MT) has "although I was a husband to them."

8:10 "minds" This follows the Septuagint (LXX) but the Masoretic text (MT) has "within them." This is how the old covenant differs from the new. The old is characterized by Ezek. 18:31, the new by Ezek. 11:19; 36:26-27.

■ **"Hearts"** This refers to the entire person (cf. Deut. 6:6; 11:18; 30:6,14). See Special Topic at Heb. 3:8.

■ **"And I will be their God and they shall be my people"** This is the covenantal formula of the OT.

8:11 There is a Greek manuscript variation in the term "citizen" versus "neighbor." In light of the Hebrew understanding of covenant brother the variation makes no interpretive difference. As far as the older and more reliable Greek texts are concerned, "citizens" is the best choice (cf. P⁴⁶, α , A, B, D, K, L, and most

later minuscule manuscripts).

8:12 This is the equality of the new covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34). It is mentioned in the NT in Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; and Heb. 8:8; 9:15. There will be no need for leaders, all will know the Lord and His will and ways. The sins that God forgives, God forgets (strong double negative). The OT promises of complete forgiveness are quite wonderful (cf. Ps. 103:3,8-14; Isa. 1:18; 38:17; 43:25; 44:22; Micah 7:19).

8:13

NASB	"But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear"
NKJV	"Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away"
NRSV	"And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear"
TEV	"Anything that becomes old and worn out will soon disappear"
NJB	"And anything old and aging is ready to disappear"

This phrase requires several comments. First, remember the historical setting. There is a group of people who are clinging to the Mosaic Law and another group who are contemplating returning to the Mosaic Law.

Second, this only has to do with the Law as a means of salvation. The OT surely was, and is, God's revelation (cf. Matt. 5:17-19). The Mosaic Law still has a purpose in God's plan (cf. Gal. 3). It brings people to Christ by showing fallen humanity their sinfulness and need for salvation. It helps us understand God and His ways. It is related to the new covenant as promise to fulfillment. It was incapable of bringing salvation because of the weakness and sinfulness of fallen mankind.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is the author of Hebrews emphasizing so strongly the superior high priesthood of Jesus?
2. Is the book of Hebrews influenced by Greek philosophy (Platonism)?
3. Why is Jeremiah 31:31-34 quoted?
4. Why is verse 12 such a precious promise?
5. How is the Mosaic covenant related to the new covenant Christians?

HEBREWS 9

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Earthly and the Heavenly Sanctuaries 9:1-5	The Earthly Sanctuary 9:1-5	The Ministry of the Levitical Priests 9:1-5	Earthly and Heavenly Worship 9:1-5	Christ Enters the Heavenly Sanctuary 9:1-5
9:6-10	Limitations of the Earthly Sanctuary 9:6-10	9:6-10	9:6-10	9:6-10
9:11-14	The Heavenly Sanctuary 9:11-15	Characteristics of the Sacrifice of Christ (9:11-10:18) 9:11-14	9:11-14	Christ Seals the New Covenant with His Blood 9:11-14
9:15-22	The Mediator's Death Necessary 9:16-22	9:15-22	9:15 9:16-22	9:15-28
Sin Put Away by Christ's Sacrifice (9:23-10:18)	Greatness of Christ's Sacrifice 9:23-28	9:23-28	Christ's Sacrifice Takes Away Sin (9:23-10:18)	
9:23-28				

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 9:1-5

¹Now even the first *covenant* had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. ²For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. ³Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, ⁴having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; ⁵and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

9:1 "the first" The regulations for sacrifice and worship connected with the tabernacle are in Leviticus.

▣ **"covenant"** This is not in the Greek text. Most English translations assume it. However, H. E. Dana, in his *Jewish Christianity*, p. 255, believes that it should be translated "first ministry" because chapter 9 is presenting another evidence of Christ's superior ministry (cf. Heb. 8:6). He also charts the comparison on p. 255.

The First Ministry

An earthly service—
"of this world."
Human equipment—
"there was a tabernacle constructed."
External effects—
"cannot as touching the
conscience make the
worshiped perfect."
Temporary in nature—
"carnal regulations set
up pending a time of
construction."

The Second Ministry

A heavenly service—
"not of this creation."
Divine equipment—
"not made with hands."
Internal effects—
"cleanse your conscience
from dead works to serve
the living God."
Permanent in nature—
"the promise of the eternal
inheritance."

9:2 "a tabernacle" This refers to the portable tabernacle in the wilderness, which is described in detail in Exod.25-27 and built in 36-38,40. The author of Hebrews refers to the inner tent as the first (outer) tabernacle (the holy place) and the second (inner) tabernacle (the Holy of Holies).

▣ **"the lampstand"** This refers to one lamp with seven containers burning olive oil, located in the holy place. It is referred to in Exod.25:31-40 and Lev. 24:1-4. It was called the *Menorah*, which is the Hebrew term for "lampstand." Solomon expanded the lamp to ten arms (cf. 1 Kings 7:49; 2 Chr. 4:7). It symbolizes the light of truth and revelation.

▣ **"table and the sacred bread"** This was a table located in the holy place holding twelve large (15 lb.) loaves of bread. They were replaced weekly and became food for the Priests (cf. Exod.25:23-30; 37:10-16; Lev. 24:5-9). They represented God's promised physical provision for the twelve tribes of Jacob.

▣ **"the holy place"** This is the outer room of the tent in which the priests ministered daily. It measured 20 cubits by 10 cubits (cf. Exod.25-27). The author of Hebrews usually uses this term (*hagia*) with the article (cf. Heb. 9:8,25; 13:11) and uses it for the inner or second part of the sacred tent called the Holy of Holies (cf. Heb. 9:3) where the Ark was placed, but in this verse the article is absent and the term refers to the outer two-thirds of the sacred tent, called the holy place.

9:3 "second veil" This divided the tent into two compartments (cf. Exod.26:31-35). The Hebrews had two special names, one for the front curtain, which was usually partly open, and one for the inner curtain, which

was never open. Only the high priest entered (twice) on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16).

■ **"the Holy of Holies"** It was a perfect cube of 10 cubits. It contained the ark where YHWH symbolically dwelt between the wings of the cherubim. This ark was the physical symbol of the invisible God (after they entered the Promised Land).

9:4 "golden altar of incense" This was an altar-shaped piece of furniture where incense was placed in large quantities on the Day of Atonement to produce thick smoke which concealed YHWH's presence over the ark. Our author seems to place it inside the Holy of Holies. This has caused commentators to take this phrase to refer to a "censer" because this is how the Septuagint translates this term (cf. Lev. 16:12; 2 Chr. 26:19; Ezek. 8:11; IV Mac. 7:11). However, Philo and Josephus use the same Greek word for the incense altar. In the OT the altar is closely identified with the Holy of Holies (cf. Exod.30:1-10, 37; but especially 1 Kgs. 6:22).

Coals were taken from the great sacrificial altar at the door of the tabernacle and placed on this small stand. Incense was then placed on the coals to produce a large amount of smoke. This wonderful smelling smoke obscured the high priest's eyes from seeing YHWH, who dwelt over the ark of the covenant between the wings of the cherubim, in the Holy of Holies.

■ **"the ark of the covenant"** The ark is described in Exod.25:10-22 and 37:1-9.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

■ **"a golden jar holding manna"** The Septuagint and Philo have the adjective "golden," but the Masoretic Hebrew Text does not (cf. Exod. 16:31-36). Josephus says it held 4 pints. It was a miracle that the manna did not rot (cf. Exod. 16:18-21,22-25).

■ **"Aaron's rod which budded"** This rod was YHWH's sign of confirming the leadership of Moses and Aaron during Korah's rebellion (cf. Num. 17:1-11; 20:8-11).

■ **"the tables of the covenant"** This refers to the two stone tablets with the decalog (ten words) written on them by the finger of God (cf. Exod. 25:16; Deut. 9:9,11,15;10:3-5; 31:18; 32:15). The book of Deuteronomy and Joshua 24 follow the treaty pattern of the Hittites (of the second millennium b.c.). Their covenants always had two copies, one for the vassal king to read yearly and one for the sanctuary of the deity. Therefore, the two stone tablets may have been duplicate copies.

9:5 "the cherubim of glory" This refers to the two angelic creatures on each end of the mercy seat (lid), whose wings overshadowed the ark (cf. Gen. 3:24; Exod.25:18-22; Ezek. 10:14, but note that in Ezek. 41:18 they have two faces, not four). A new possibility from a History Channel video, "Decoding the Exodus" asserts that they were phoenixes. The Bible does not reveal much information about the angelic world. Our curiosity often runs far ahead of revealed truth. For the term "glory" see note at Heb. 1:3.

■ **"mercy seat"** This refers to the golden lid of the wooden box called "the ark of the covenant." It was a special place for "covering" sins. The symbolism seems to be

1. YHWH dwelt between the wings of the two angelic creatures (the rabbis said this was His footstool)
2. the box contained the "ten words" (decalog)
3. the high priest, on the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16), went into the Holy of Holies twice to place blood on the mercy seat, once for his own sin and once for the non-premeditated sins of the nations as a whole (cf. Heb. 9:7)

The requirements of the Law were covered, obscured from YHWH's eyes by the sacrificial blood of an unblemished animal (life is in the blood; sin requires a life).

■ **"but of these things we cannot now speak in detail"** This is a disclaimer. Our author uses details from the ancient tabernacle that are now unknown.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 9:6-10

⁶Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, ⁷but into the second, only the high priest *enters* once a year, not without *taking* blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. ⁸The Holy Spirit *is* signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, ⁹which *is* a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, ¹⁰since they *relate* only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

9:6 "continually entering the outer tabernacle" The priests were to fill the containers on the *menorah* with oil (cf. Exod.27:20-21), replace the bread weekly (cf. Lev. 24:8-9), and place small amounts of incense on the incense altar (cf. Exod. 30:7-8).

9:7 "the high priest. . .once a year" He entered only on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16). "*Kipper*" means "to cover"; the *Akkadian cognate* means "to wipe away." Hebrews 9 focuses on the rituals of the Day of Atonement more than any other chapter in the NT.

▣ **"in ignorance"** Only sins that were not pre-meditated could be dealt with by the sacrificial system. Intentional sins, or "sins of the high hand" (KJV) could not be atoned for (cf. Lev. 4:2; Num. 15:24,27,30,31; Ps. 51:17). The Day of Atonement primarily dealt with the ceremonial impurity of the nation.

9:8-10 These verses show (1) the preliminary nature of the Mosaic covenant and (2) the superiority of the new covenant. How is the new covenant in Christ better?

1. in the old only the high priest entered the inner shrine once a year for his sins and the unintentional sins of Israel (limited access and limited forgiveness).
2. in the new covenant all believers are brought near to God because of Jesus' sinlessness and the removal of the distinction between intentional and unintentional sins (full access and full forgiveness).

The new covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34), based on faith in the finished work of Christ, not meritorious human performance of an external code, has given worshipers confidence (a new heart, a new spirit, cf. Ezek. 36:20-27) to approach a holy God, not through ritual procedures or liturgy (cf. Heb. 6:1-2), but through the gospel.

9:8

NASB	"the outer tabernacle"
NKJV	"the first tabernacle"
NRSV	"the first tent"
TEV	"the outer tent"
NJB	"the old tent"

The author of Hebrews calls the outer part of the tent "the first tabernacle," referring to "the holy place." This would represent Mosaic covenant worship, which did not allow full access to God. The veil of Herod's Temple being torn from top to bottom when Jesus died (cf. Matt. 27:51) symbolized this new access through Christ.

9:9 "which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience" The old covenant was not able to purge the guilt of sin from mankind's conscience (cf. Heb. 9:14). The conscience in the NT (not the OT) is a moral guide (cf. 1 Pet. 3:21). The danger is that it can be culturally conditioned or abused into silence (cf. Matt. 23:25-26). It is the NT counterpoint to the "sound of gentle blowing" or "the still small voice" of 1 Kgs. 19:12.

A very interesting discussion of this term's use in Hebrews is found in Robert B. Girdlestone's

Synonyms of The Old Testament

"The passages in the epistle to the Hebrews in which the word occurs are very interesting and important. From Heb. 9.9, we gather that the offerings under the O.T. could not make man 'perfect as pertaining to the conscience' i.e., could not take away the sense of sin which hinders man from oneness with God. They did not take away sin, as a matter of fact, and they could not, from the nature of things; for if the effect of the Levitical dispensation had been to make men perfect, i.e., at one with God, the offerings would not have needed repetition. If the worshipers had been purged once for all, they would have had no more consciousness of sins (Heb. 10.2). But 'the blood of Christ' cleanses a man's consciousness from dead works, and enables him to serve the living God (Heb. 9.14); and the heart is thus 'sprinkled from an evil conscience' (10.22). In other words, the faithful acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ takes away that sense of sin which had been a bar between man and God, and enables a man to live no longer as a servant, but as a son" (p. 73).

■ **"perfect"** See Special Topic at Heb. 7:11.

9:10

NASB

"a time of reformation"

NKJV

"the time of reformation"

NRSV

"the time comes to set things right"

TEV

"the time when God will establish the new order"

NJB

"the time come to set things right"

This refers to the new covenant inaugurated in Jesus. This phrase was used by the rabbis of the last "Jubilee" when the Messiah would come. It is used in the moral sense in Jer. 7:3,5.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 9:11-14

¹¹But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹²and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

9:11 "But when Christ appeared as high priest" When did this occur:

1. before creation (cf. Rev. 13:8)

2. at Calvary (cf. Heb. 9:12)

3. after ascension to the Father's right hand (entered sanctuary in heaven, cf. Heb. 9:24-25)

Did Jesus offer Himself twice? If so, why the emphasis on "once for all?" Possibly He offered Himself as sacrifice on Calvary, but acted as high priest after His ascension or it may be simply (1) theological imagery or (2) inspired rabbinical mysticism.

■ **"of the good things to come"** The ancient Greek manuscripts vary: (1) "things to come" in κ , A (NASB, NKJV, NJB) and (2) "things already here" in P⁴⁶, B, D* (RSV, NEB, TEV, NIV).

■ **"not made with hands"** Some see this as a reference to believers' resurrected physical bodies (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1) and Jesus' body (cf. Mark 14:58). However, the context seems to refer to the heavenly temple (cf. Heb. 8:2; 9:24).

9:12 "not through the blood of goats and calves" The goats were for the people's sin (cf. Lev. 16:11) and the calves were for the high priests' sin (cf. Lev. 16:11). The sacrificial system of the OT (cf. Lev. 1-7)

was God's gracious provision of allowing (as a foreshadowing of Christ's death) an unblemished animal to pay the death penalty for human sin (cf. Lev. 17:11).

▣ **"but through His own blood"** The Greek preposition "*dia*" can mean (1)"through" (NASB, NIV) or (2) "with" (NKJV, NRSV, NJB).

▣ **"the holy place"** Here this implies "the Holy of Holies" of the heavenly tabernacle.

▣ **"once for all"** This is an often-repeated emphasis (cf. Heb. 7:27; 9:28; 10:10). It emphasizes Christ's complete and finished sacrifice. See full note at Heb. 7:27.

9:12

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV **"having obtained eternal redemption"**

TEV **"obtained eternal salvation"**

NJB **"having won an eternal redemption"**

This is an aorist middle participle, which denotes a completed act emphasizing the subject's participation and interest. The word "eternal" may relate to (1) its quality, "life of the new age" or (2) its quantity, "life without end." With the warnings in Hebrews so poignant, possibly #1 fits best. See Special Topic: Eternal at Heb. 6:2.

▣ **"redemption"** This word refers to the ransom paid by a close relative for someone's release. This is the OT "go'el" (cf. Ruth 4; Isa. 43:1; 44:22,23; 48:20; 12:9; 63:9; Hos. 13:14).

9:13 "if" This is a first class conditional sentence which is assumed to be true. God accepted the Mosaic sacrificial system as a means of covering sin until Christ!

▣ **"ashes of a heifer"** The red heifer's ashes were used for ceremonial cleansing (cf. Numbers 19).

▣ **"sprinkling"** This was part of the Mosaic ritual involving liquids (blood or ashes of the red heifer mixed with water). It was a way of transferring holiness or cleansing power. Robert B. Girdlestone in his *Synonyms of The Old Testament* has an interesting comment.

"The sprinklings (*shantismo*) specially referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews are of two kinds—that which was performed with the ashes of a red heifer on persons who had contracted certain defilement (Heb. 9.13), and that which was performed with blood on the people and the Book in making the old covenant; also on the tabernacle and various vessels connected with the sacred service (Heb. 9.19,21). The substance of which these are the shadows is the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, which speaketh better things than that of Abel (Heb. 12.24)" (p. 152).

9:14 "how much more" Comparing the covenants is the theme of the book (cf. Heb. 2:1-3; 3:3; 8:6; 10:28-29).

▣ **"who through the eternal Spirit"** This is either Christ's pre-existent spirit or the Holy Spirit.

The United Bible Societies' *A Handbook on The Letter to the Hebrews* by Ellingworth and Nida, lists several reasons why it probably should be a small "s" when the majority of modern translations (NASB, NKJV, NRSV, TEV, NJB, NIV) have a capital.

1. there is no definite article

2. the author often speaks of "the Holy Spirit" and addresses Him by this full title

3. this phrase may be parallel to "the power of an indestructible life" in Heb. 7:16 (p. 196).

In his commentary on Hebrews in the *New International Commentary Series*, F. F. Bruce makes an interesting comment that the concept of Spirit is an allusion to the sections of Isaiah containing the "servant Songs" (chapters 40-54). In this section, 42:1 says "I have put my Spirit upon him" (p. 205). In a book like Hebrews, which uses the OT so freely, this makes good sense.

■ **"offered Himself"** This is Christ's voluntary act (cf. John 10:17-18; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 2:8, Isa. 52:13-53:12). See [SPECIAL TOPIC: JESUS AS HIGH PRIEST](#) at Heb. 2:17.

■ **"without blemish"** See Special Topic at Heb. 7:26.

■ **"from dead works"** This same phrase appears in Heb. 6:1 as referring to OT rituals and procedures as a means of gaining salvation. The true means is the finished substitutionary atonement of the Lamb of God (cf. John 1:29; 1 John 3:5). I really appreciate M. R. Vincent's comment in his *Word Studies in the New Testament*, which relates dead works to self-righteous legalism:

"It changes the character of works by purging them of the element of death. This element belongs not only to works which are acknowledged as sinful and are committed by sinful men, but to works which go under the name of religious, yet are performed in a merely legal spirit. None the less, because it is pre-eminently the religion of faith, does Christianity apply the severest and most radical of tests to works. Professor Bruce truthfully says that 'the severest test of Christ's power to redeem is his ability to loose the bonds springing out of a legal religion, by which many are bound who have escaped the dominion of gross, sinful habits'" (pp. 1139-1140).

■ **"to serve the living God"** Notice that believers are saved to serve (cf. Romans 6). Salvation is a freedom from the tyranny of sin, to lordship of God! Salvation is not a product (a pre-purchased ticket to heaven or a fire insurance policy), but a relationship of faith, obedience and service. All believers are gifted for ministry (cf. Eph. 4:11-12) and service to the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7,12).

The adjective "living" is a play on the OT covenant name for deity, YHWH, which is from the root of the verb "to be." YHWH is the ever-living, only-living One!

[SPECIAL TOPIC: NAMES FOR DEITY](#)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 9:15-22

¹⁵ For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were *committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. ¹⁶For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. ¹⁷ For a covenant is valid *only* when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. ¹⁸Therefore even the first *covenant* was not inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you." ²¹And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. ²²And according to the Law, *one may almost say*, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

9:15 "mediator" See note at Heb. 8:6 (cf. Heb. 12:24; 1 Tim. 2:5).

■ **"a new covenant"** This term is first used in Heb. 8:8,13, but alluded to in Heb. 7:22. This shocking term is found in only one OT text (cf. Jer. 31:31-34) and described in Ezek. 36:22-38. Verses 15-18 are a play on the word "covenant," with its two meanings of legal contract or agreement (Hebrew) and last will and testament (Greek and Latin).

■ **"for the redemption of transgression that were *committed* under the first covenant those who have been called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance"** Remember that Hebrews is a comparison of the Old and New Covenants. The Mosaic Covenant became a death sentence (cf. Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 2:14) to God's highest creation (mankind) because after Genesis 3 they were unable to obey

and perform God's commands. The first covenant said "do and live," but no one could fully conform to its requirements. The Old Covenant stated "the soul that sins will die" (cf. 2 Kgs. 14:6; Ezek. 18:4,20). God's answer was a sinless, ideal Israelite who would pay the price for all, for all time (cf. Isa. 52:13-53:12).

The phrase "those who have been called" refers to God's initiating call to know Him (cf. Heb. 3:1; John 6:44,65; Rom. 8:28,30; 9:24). See full note at Heb. 3:1.

The concept of "inheritance" is linked to the Levites' unique relationship to YHWH. They were His inheritance and He was theirs (not land like the other tribes). The new covenant believers are now like OT priests (cf. 2 Pet. 3:5,9; Rev. 1:6). Believers have an eternal inheritance, which is provided by Christ, guarded by God (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-5).

SPECIAL TOPIC: RANSOM/REDEEM

▣ **"inaugurated"** See note at Heb. 10:20.

9:19 "goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop" The author seems to have combined the cleansing by sprinkling blood on a leper in Lev. 14:6-7 with the consecration of the Ten Commandments at Sinai in Exod. 24:1-9. The tabernacle was not in existence in chapter 24 (cf. Exodus 40). Josephus tells us that sprinkling with blood was part of the ritual of Exodus 40.

This word "goats" is missing in several ancient Greek manuscripts (P⁴⁶, κ^c, K, L) as well as the Syriac translation and the Greek text used by Origen. Goats were usually used for sin offerings, not covenant ratifications (although not exclusively, cf. Gen. 15:9). Goats are omitted in the ratification of the "ten words" (Torah) in Exod.24:1-8. Possibly "goats" is another allusion to the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16, where goats are an integral part of the ritual.

It is difficult from our modern perspective to claim that Acts 7 (Stephen's sermon) and the author of Hebrews (chapter 9's description of the ancient tabernacle) are inaccurate. There is so much that is unknown about the ancient rituals themselves and the ever-changing rabbinical traditions associated with them.

9:20 This is a quote from Exodus 24:8.

9:22 "almost say all things" Some things were cleaned without blood in the OT system: (1) Lev. 5:11; (2) Num. 16:46; (3) Num. 31:22-23; (4) Exod. 19:10; 32:30-32; Lev. 15:5; 16:26,28; 22:6; (5) Psalm 51. See note below.

▣ **"without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness"** In the OT cleansing required (1) fire, (2) water, or (3) blood. This author takes sin seriously. Forgiveness involves a life forfeited (cf. Lev. 17:11,14). The OT sacrificial system (cf. Leviticus 1-7) sets the stage for our understanding of Christ's substitutionary death (cf. Matt. 26:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 5:21).

In the OT there were several ways things/people were cleansed without blood.

1. by fire (cf. Lev. 13:52,55; 16:27; Num. 31:23)
2. water (cf. Exod. 19:30; Lev. 15:5; 16:26,28; 22:6; Num. 31:24)
3. flour sacrifice (cf. Lev. 5:11-13)
4. incense (cf. Num. 16:46-48)
5. intercession (cf. Exod. 32:30-32)
6. prayer of confession and contrition (cf. Ps. 32 and 51)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 9:23-28

²³Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; ²⁵nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶Otherwise,

He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. ²⁷And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment, ²⁸so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference* to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

9:23 "for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed" The concept of things in heaven having been polluted by mankind's sin on earth is unusual, but not unique to this author (cf. Rom. 8:18-22). The Day of Atonement, alluded to so often in this chapter, involves the yearly cleansing of the tabernacle from ceremonial defilement (cf. Exod.30:10; Lev. 16:11-20). Heaven may have been polluted by

1. mankind's fall (cf. Rom. 8:18-22; Col. 1:20)
2. Satan's presence (cf. Job 1-2; Zech. 3)
3. simply a concept in rabbinical tradition

9:24 "now to appear in the presence of God for us" Jesus' priestly work was done on two levels: (1) as sacrifice on earth and (2) as priest in heaven. This phrase can be understood in two ways: contextually it refers to His sacrificial death on fallen mankind's behalf, but it could be understood as a reference to His continuing intercessory ministry (cf. Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1).

The term "appear" is *emphanizō*, which means "to manifest" (cf. Matt. 27:53). In Heb. 9:26 the word "manifest," *phaneroō*, (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 John 2:28; 3:2) is used and in Heb. 9:28 the word "appear," *optomai* (cf. Matt. 17:3; Luke 1:11; 9:31; 22:43; 24:34; Acts 2:3; 7:2,30,35; 9:17; 16:9; 26:16).

It is surprising the author uses three synonymous terms.

9:25 This continues the theological emphasis of the book of Hebrews that Jesus gave Himself "once" (cf. Heb. 7:27; 9:11,25-28; 10:10) thereby, His priesthood, sacrifice, and sanctuary are superior to their OT counterparts.

9:26

NASB	"otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often"
NKJV	"He then would have had to suffer often"
NRSV	"for then he would have had to suffer again"
TEV	"for then he would have had to suffer many times"
NJB	"or else he would have had to suffer over and over again"

In his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, A. T. Robertson asserts that this is an assumed second class conditional sentence (Vol. V, p. 404), which would imply a false statement resulting in a false conclusion. Jesus suffered only once, not like the regular sacrifices.

NASB	"at the consummation of the ages"
NKJV	"at the end of the ages"
NRSV	"at the end of the age"
TEV	"now when all ages of time are nearing the end"
NJB	"at the end of the last age"

There are several Greek terms that relate to "time," "eternity," and "age." In chapter 9 three temporal referents are used:

1. Heb. 9:9, "present time," i.e., Old Testament
2. Heb. 9:10, "time of reformation," i.e., New Testament (start of the new age,)
3. Heb. 9:26, "consummation of the ages," i.e., new age of righteousness (consummation of the new age, cf. Matt. 13:39,40,49; 24:3; 28:20)

The rabbis and the NT authors envisioned two ages (a horizontal dualism): (1) a current evil age characterized by human rebellion and the curse of God and (2) the age to come inaugurated by the

Messiah, a day of righteousness.

The OT focuses on the majestic, powerful coming of the Messiah as Judge and Ruler, but as the NT reveals, He will come twice, once as suffering servant, the Lamb of God; and later, just the way the OT predicted. These two distinct comings have caused the overlapping of the two Jewish ages. The Kingdom of God has come with Jesus' birth but will not be consummated until His glorious return. Believers are thus citizens of two realms: the eternal Kingdom and a temporal kingdom.

9:27 This verse surely rejects any notion of the transmigration of souls, the wheel of *kharma*, or previous lives, which is a horrible doctrine for fallen, sinful humanity! It is the Christian worldview of "one life, then judgment" that fuels the urgency of evangelism; that destroys the theological concept of universalism (all humans will be saved in the end); that demands the great commission (cf. Matt. 28:19-20) not be turned into a good suggestion or the great option!

9:28 "to bear the sins of many" This may be an allusion to Isa. 53:12 (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24). The term "many" is not exclusive (some), but parallel to "all" of 53:6 (cf. Rom. 5:18, "all"; 5:19, "many").

The term "bear" may also be an allusion to Isa. 53:4,11,12. The Hebrew verb means "to bear" or "take away" (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24). "Jesus paid a debt He did not owe; we owed a debt we could not pay."

▣ **"will appear a second time"** This probably refers to the Second Coming of Christ, a recurrent NT theme (cf. Matt. 24:3,27,30,37,39,42,44; 26:64; Mark 13:20; 14:62; Luke 21:27; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Cor. 1:7; 15:23; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15-16; 5:23; 2 Thess. 1:7,10; 2:1,8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; James 5:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:7,13; 2 Pet. 1:16; 3:4,12; 1 John 2:28). See Special Topic: Greek Verb Tenses Used for Salvation at Heb. 1:14.

However, it is possible, contextually, that it refers to Christ leaving the heavenly tabernacle after His great and successful sacrifice (cf. *New Testament Transline* by Michael Magill, p. 846, #32 and 35). Something analogous to the OT High Priest exiting the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement.

NASB	"for salvation without <i>reference</i> to sin"
NKJV	"apart from sin, for salvation"
NRSV, TEV	"not to deal with sin, but to save"
NJB	"sin being no more. . .to bring salvation"

This phrase seems to imply that Christ came the first time to deal with mankind's sin problem, but He will come again to gather to Himself (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18) those who have trusted in Him and long for His return (cf. Rom. 8:19,23; 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:20; Titus 2:13).

▣ **"to those who eagerly await Him"** This may be another allusion to the ceremony of the Day of Atonement, where the Israelites eagerly waited for the High Priest to come out of the Holy of Holies alive, which symbolized YHWH's acceptance of his intercessory ministry.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why does the author of Hebrews discuss the ancient tabernacle of the wilderness?
2. Why is 9:9 theologically significant?
3. Is there a real physical tabernacle in Heaven that Christ actually entered and offered a sacrifice?
4. What two connotations of "covenant" does the author use in verses 15-18?

HEBREWS 10

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Sin Put Away by Christ's Sacrifice (9:23-10:18)	Animal Sacrifices Insufficient	Characteristics of the Sacrifice of Christ (9:11-10:18)	Christ's Sacrifice Takes Away Sins (9:23-10:18)	The Old Sacrifice Ineffective
10:1-4	10:1-4 Christ's Death Fulfills God's Will	10:1-10	10:1-4	10:1-10
10:5-10	10:5-10 Christ's Death Perfects the Sanctified		10:5-10	The Efficacy of Christ's Sacrifice
10:11-14	10:11-18	10:11-18	10:11-14	10:11-18
10:15-18			10:15-18	
Exhortation and Warning	Hold Fast Your Confession	Exhortation and Warnings	Let Us Come Near to God	The Christian Opportunity
10:19-25	10:19-25 The Just Live by Faith	10:19-25	10:19-25	10:19-25 The Danger of Apostasy
10:26-31	10:26-39	10:26-31	10:26-31	10:26-31 Motives for Perseverance
10:32-39		10:32-39	10:32-39	10:32-39

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. The literary unit begins in Heb. 8:1 and continues through Heb. 10:18.
- B. This alludes to the three ways in which the ministry of Jesus is superior to the ministry of the Levitical priests.
1. Jesus' superior sacrifice (His own blood, cf. Heb. 9:12-14)
 2. Jesus' once-for-all offering (see full note at Heb. 7:27)
 3. Jesus' heavenly, not earthly, sanctuary (cf. Heb. 9:11)
- C. The verb *teleioō* is used repeatedly in Hebrews.
1. Heb. 2:10, Jesus made perfect through suffering
 2. Heb. 5:9, Jesus made perfect and became the source of eternal salvation
 3. Heb. 7:19, Mosaic Law made nothing perfect
 4. Heb. 7:28, Jesus made perfect
 5. Heb. 9:9, Mosaic ritual not able to make worshipers' consciences perfect
 6. Heb. 10:1, Mosaic ritual unable to make worshipers perfect
 7. Heb. 10:1, Jesus' offering made believers perfect forever
 8. Heb. 11:40, OT and NT saints perfected together
 9. Heb. 12:23, spirits of righteous men made perfect

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 10:1-10

¹For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. ²Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? ³But in those *sacrifices* there is a reminder of sins year by year. ⁴For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says,

"Sacrifice and offering You have not desired,
But a body You have prepared for Me;

⁶in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure.

⁷"Then I said, 'Behold, I have come
(in the scroll of the book it is written of Me)
To do Your will, O God.'"

⁸After saying above, "Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure *in them*" (which are offered according to the Law),⁹ then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will." He takes away the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

10:1 "shadow" The Mosaic legislation ("The Law") and rituals were a type and foreshadow of Jesus' high priestly ministry in the heavenly tabernacle, not made with human hands (cf. Heb. 8:5; 9:23-28).

The Jerome Biblical Commentary has an interesting comment:

"Here the author is not using 'shadow' as he does in Heb. 8:5, where the Platonic heavenly-earthly contrast is intended, but in the Pauline sense of a foreshadowing of that which is to come through Christ (cf. Col. 2:17). . . The annually repeated Day of Atonement sacrifices were not able to remove

sin; they simply foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus" (p. 399).

- ▣ **"of the good things to come"** In Heb. 9:11 this referred to the high priestly ministry of Christ.

NASB	"not the very form of things"
NKJV	"not the very image of the things"
NRSV	"not the true form of these realities"
TEV	"not a full and faithful model of the real things"
NJB	"no true image of them"

This is the Greek term *icon*, which means a detailed reproduction that corresponds to reality (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). Here it is negated and grammatically linked to "a shadow."

- ▣ **"the same sacrifices they offer continually year by year"** Jesus offers one effective sacrifice. Priests offer again and again.
- ▣ **"make perfect"** This term means "to bring to completion," "to fully accomplish." This word (*teleioō* and its other forms) has been a constant theme throughout the book. See Special Topic at Heb. 7:11.
 - The term *telos*
 1. means "a consummation," "to reach a goal," or "end" (cf. Heb. 3:6,14; 6:11)
 2. in Heb. 5:14 *teleios* is used of a mature person
 3. in Heb. 6:1 *teleiotes* is a call to maturity
 4. the terms are used in connection with the ministry of Melchizedek and the heavenly tabernacle in Heb. 7:11 and 9:11

- ▣ **"those who draw near"** In the OT this referred to priests approaching YHWH for worship or ministry. But here, under the new covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34), it refers to all believers (cf. James 4:8) who now have intimate access to God through Christ (cf. Heb. 4:16; 7:19,25; 10:1,22)

10:2

NASB, NRSV,	
NJB	"otherwise"
NKJV	"for then"
TEV	"if"

This is a second class conditional sentence, often called "contrary to fact." A false assertion is made to forcibly make a theological point (cf. Heb. 4:8; 7:11; 8:4,7; 10:2; 11:15).

Verse 2 can be translated as

1. a question expecting a "yes" answer, as in NASB, NRSV, NAB
 2. a partial question, as in NKJV, NIV
 3. a statement, as in TEV, NJB, REB
- ▣ **"would they not have ceased to be offered"** This may imply (cf. Heb. 10:11; 7:28) that the Temple was still functioning; therefore, Hebrews may have been written before a.d. 70, when the Temple (and Jerusalem) were totally destroyed by the Roman general (later Emperor) Titus.
 - ▣ **"because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins"** This was the problem with the Mosaic ritual: it could not cleanse the heart and mind of guilt (cf. Heb. 9:9,14). The new covenant in Christ gives access to God with boldness (a clear conscience)!

10:3 "reminder of sins year by year" This seems to refer to the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16), since this was the focus of chapter 9, but it could refer to the entire sacrificial system. The fact that yearly

sacrifices were needed to cleanse the tabernacle and the nation, continued to remind the Israelites of the seriousness and repetitiveness of human sin and guilt (cf. Galatians 3).

10:4 "for it is impossible" The word impossible is used several times in Hebrews (see full note at Heb. 6:6).

1. Heb. 6:4 (in Greek, but 6:6 in NASB's restructuring). It is impossible to renew them to repentance
2. Heb. 6:18, it is impossible for God to lie
3. Heb. 10:4, it is impossible for the blood of animals to take away sin
4. Heb. 11:6, without faith it is impossible to please God

For the author of Hebrews the Greek term "impossible" cannot mean "difficult"!

10:5

NASB	"when He comes into the world, He says"
NKJV	"when He came into the world, He said"
NRSV	"when Christ came into the world, He said"
TEV	"when Christ was about to come into the world, he said to God"
NJB	"and that is why he said, on coming into the world"

This introduces a quote (cf. Heb. 10:5-7) from Ps. 40:6-8, which shows YHWH's displeasure with the OT sacrifices because they were not accompanied by lifestyle faith. Our author uses Ps. 40:7 as an allusion to the coming Messiah who would perfectly please God.

This quote also implies the pre-existence of Christ (cf. John 1:1-2; 8:57-58; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6-7; 1 John 1:1). There has never been a time when Christ did not exist! His one essence with the Father can be documented from John 5:18; 10:30; 14:9; 10:28.

▣ **"a body you have prepared for me"** This quote follows the Septuagint of Ps. 40:6. The Masoretic Text has "an ear you have dug for me." The specific mention of a physical body prepared for the Messiah would also function in the late first century to combat incipient Gnosticism. Jesus was truly human.

10:6 There are several passages like this in the OT (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11-17; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-27; Micah 6:6-8). They must not be interpreted as God rejecting the sacrificial system, which was an act of His grace to deal with mankind's sin and fellowship problem for a limited time. But fallen humanity took advantage of the procedures and turned them into mechanical ritual and liturgy instead of heartfelt repentance and faith. God rejects the perfunctory performance of religious ritual and liturgy that does not reflect the heart and life of faith (cf. Isa. 1).

10:7 "In the scroll of the book it is written" This is a perfect passive, which refers to the Old Testament. Originally the OT was written in sections on leather scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947 had a copy of Isaiah written on one twenty-nine foot leather scroll.

▣ **"to do your will, o God"** God's will was a new covenant with all humanity established by Jesus' death and resurrection (cf. Mark 10:45; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 10:9). When animals died in sacrificial offerings they had no choice. Jesus willingly laid down His own life (cf. John 10:17-18).

10:8 "sacrifices" This list of four terms in verse 8 seems to cover all types of sacrificial offerings (cf. Leviticus 1-7). The term "sacrifices" literally means a voluntary peace offering.

▣ **"offerings"** This refers to a voluntary "meal offering."

▣ **"burnt offerings"** These were completely voluntary, wholly consumed sacrifices.

▣ **"sacrifices for sin"** This is another class of mandatory sacrifices mentioned in Leviticus chapters 4-5.

▣ **"(which are offered according to the Law)"** The author's purpose is to show the superiority of Jesus'

sacrifice over the Levitical sacrifices. Even when OT sacrifices were performed with the appropriate attitude and procedures, they were only a foreshadowing of the work of Christ.

10:9 "He" This PRONOUN'S antecedent is ambiguous. It could refer to the Father as the One who inaugurates the covenant. Also the phrase "the body of Jesus Christ" in Heb. 10:10 implies He is not the subject. However, all the VERBS in the quote from Ps. 40:6-8 (Heb. 10:5-7) have Christ as their subject.

▣ **"the first"** This refers to the Mosaic covenant (cf. Col. 2:14).

NASB, NKJV	"takes away"
NRSV	"abolishes"
TEV	"does away with"
NJB	"abolishes"

This is a strong Greek term for "destroy" (*anaireō*). The question is how to understand this term in relation to the OT? As a revelation from God it is eternal (cf. Matt. 5:17-19). Paul often quotes the OT as an exhortation to believers. However, as a means of salvation or forgiveness of sin it was only a preliminary stage (cf. Gal. 3). It has been fulfilled and exceeded in the NT in Christ. Context must determine whether this term is to be translated "taken away" (fulfilled) or "abolished" (destroyed).

▣ **"the second"** This refers to the New Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-36) in Jesus.

10:10

NASB, NKJV	"By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"
NRSV	"And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"
TEV	"Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that he made of his own body once and for all"
NJB	"And the <i>will</i> was for us to be made holy by the <i>offering</i> of the <i>body</i> of Jesus Christ made once for all"

Does "the will" refer to Christ's will (cf. Heb. 10:7,9 and NASB, NJB) or to the Father's will (NRSV, TEV)? Since Jesus is the one speaking in Heb. 10:5 (cf. Heb. 10:9), then the context suggests His will.

▣ **"we have been sanctified"** This is a periphrastic perfect passive participle. The goal of Christianity is a righteous people. This was the goal of the OT also. Holiness or sanctification basically is the removal of the curse and consequences of the Fall (cf. Gen. 3), the marring of the image of God in mankind. The new covenant addresses this need in two ways: (1) by a legal declaration, a given position (indicative) and (2) by a call to holiness (imperative). Believers are justified and sanctified by a repentant faith response to God's redemptive sacrifice of Jesus. Once saved, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we are motivated by an internal law, an internal desire (new heart and new spirit) to be Christlike (cf. Rom. 8:29; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 1:4). Sanctification affects both our standing before God and our new family characteristics lived out in daily life. See Special Topic at Heb. 2:11.

▣ **"through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ"** Fallen mankind did not pursue God (cf. Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:10-18); God pursued them! He provided a way for all humans to return to fellowship with Him (cf. Mark 10:45; 2 Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53).

▣ **"once for all"** This is a recurrent theme (cf. Heb. 7:27; 9:12,28; 10:10, see full note at Heb. 7:27). It shows the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice over the repeated sacrifices of the Mosaic covenant (cf. Heb. 10:11-12). Everything that needs to be done for mankind's salvation has been provided. All we must do is respond to God's offer through faith in the finished work of Christ. "Whosoever will may come" (cf. Rom.

10).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 10:11-18

¹¹And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; ¹²but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. ¹⁴For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. ¹⁵And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,

¹⁶"This is the covenant that I will make with them

After those days, says the Lord:

I will put My laws upon their heart,

And on their mind I will write them,"

He then says, ¹⁷

"And their sins and their lawless deeds

I will remember no more."

¹⁸Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering for sin.

10:11 "every priest" The ancient Greek uncial manuscript A has "high priest." The author often uses both terms for Jesus.

▣ **"stands"** The priest stands every year to offer sacrifices, but Jesus "sits" (Heb. 10:12), His work done!

10:12 "one sacrifice for sins for all times" Jesus has dealt with the human sin problem. No one is lost because of "sin." The only barrier to all the world being saved is unbelief. God has provided a way for all, for all time.

The Greek term *diēnekēs*, translated "forever," or "for all time," occurs in Hebrews three times (cf. Heb. 7:3; 10:12,14). It is usually associated with the term or phrase that precedes it, which would relate it to "one sacrifice for sins." It is not part of the Ps. 110:1 quotation which follows.

▣ **"sat down at the right hand of God"** This is a recurring allusion to Ps. 110:1a (cf. Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 12:2). The "right hand" is an anthropomorphic metaphor to the place of royal power, authority, and preeminence. It is also the place of intercession (cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1).

Jesus is the Priest (cf. Ps. 110:4) and King (cf. Ps. 110:1-3), like Melchizedek (chapter 7) who has gone before us and provided everything that we need.

10:13 "until his enemies be made a footstool for his feet" This is another quote from Ps. 110:1b. The spiritual battle has been won (cf. Col. 2:15), but not yet consummated.

10:14 This verse shows the tension of the whole book in the area of security. Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice has permanently perfected (perfect active indicative) believers (see Special Topic at Heb. 7:11). The sacrifice is adequate and complete to accomplish its redemptive task (unlike the Mosaic covenant, cf. Heb. 7:11,19; 9:9).

Believers must continue in their faith response, which is sanctifying them (present passive participle). Continuing faith is the key to individual assurance of salvation. The new heart and new mind (cf. Ezek. 36:22-38) motivates believers to live godly lives in gratitude for a free, complete, and comprehensive salvation. In this book there is never a question about the adequacy of Jesus' sacrifice, but there is a question about individual response—one group's initial profession and a second group's continuing profession.

10:15 "the Holy Spirit" This shows the author's view of the inspiration of the OT (cf. Matt. 5:17-19; 2 Tim. 3:16).

10:16-17 This is a quote from Jer. 31:33-34, but the order of the phrases is reversed. The author seems to have quoted from memory because this quote differs from the Masoretic Hebrew Text and the Septuagint, as does the same quote in Heb. 8:10-12 (unless it was a purposeful reversal).

10:18 This is the climax of the believers' argument and our great hope (the first way has passed away, cf. Heb. 8:13).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 10:19-25

¹⁹Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

10:19

NASB, NRSV "since we have confidence"

NKJV "having boldness"

NJB "we have. . .complete confidence"

The term *parrhēsia* means "boldness" or "the freedom to speak" (cf. Heb. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19,35). This term expresses the believers' new sense of acceptance and intimacy with God. This is what the Law of Moses could not provide (cf. Heb. 9:9)! This confidence must be held fast by faith (cf. Heb. 3:6,14; 4:14). Confidence is based on the finished sacrificial work of Christ (cf. Eph. 2:8-9), not human performance! Confidence is maintained by godly living (cf. Eph. 2:10).

SPECIAL TOPIC: BOLDNESS (PARRĒSIA)

▣ **"to enter the holy place"** Remember, one of the key themes of the book is access to God by means of our forgiveness through Christ's life and death on our behalf. The high priests of the OT entered the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle twice on one day of the year (cf. Heb. 9:25), the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16). But now through Christ's sacrifice all believers can have continual intimate access to God (another metaphor for access is the veil torn from top to bottom, cf. Matt. 27:51, cf. Mark 15:38).

▣ **"by the blood of Jesus"** This is not magical blood, but human blood. It represents Jesus' sacrificial death on behalf of sinful mankind (cf. Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:25; 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20; Heb. 9:12,14; 12:24; 13:12; 1 Pet. 1:2,19; Rev. 1:5; 5:9).

10:20 "new" The term *prospatos* means "freshly slain" and is only used here in the NT.

▣ **"living way"** This is an affirmation of the resurrection. He was slain, but now He is alive (cf. Rev. 5:6) forevermore!

NASB "inaugurated"

NKJV "consecrated for us"

NRSV, TEV "he opened for us"

NJB "has opened for us"

This is an aorist active indicative. This "new and living way" is an accomplished, historical, spiritual

reality.

The Greek-English Lexicon by Walter Bauer, updated by Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, lists two different translations for this term in this context.

1. to open a way (Heb. 10:20)
2. inaugurate or dedicate with solemn rites (Heb. 9:18) (p. 215).

The context suggests to me a closer link between these two occurrences of this rare NT term. Again, the comparison of the covenants is in view; by His blood Jesus has opened a far better way of approaching God and maintaining fellowship.

■ **"through the veil"** This relates to the inner veil in the tabernacle between the holy place and the holy of holies (cf. Matt. 27:51). Here the veil was Jesus' "flesh." This then would refer to Jesus' body being broken for our sins, thus, providing access to God (cf. Isa. 52:13-53:12). The author of Hebrews sees the outer part of the shrine (holy place) as representing the physical realm and the inner shrine (holy of holies) the spiritual realm. In this light the heavenly tabernacle contrasts the earthly pattern (cf. Heb. 6:19).

10:21 "a great priest" See Special Topic: Jesus As High Priest at Heb. 2:17.

■ **"the house of God"** This refers to OT (cf. Heb. 3:5) and NT (cf. Heb. 3:6; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 4:17) believers (cf. Eph. 2:11-3:13). As Moses was a servant in God's house, Jesus is the High Priest and Son!

10:22 "let us draw near" This is a present middle (deponent) subjunctive. Believers' confidence is based on Jesus' finished work, but this benefit and privilege must be embraced! The "drawing near" is used of worshippers' approaching God. Notice the progression:

1. let us draw near with a sincere heart (Heb. 10:22)
2. let us hold fast the confession of our hope (Heb. 10:23)
3. let us consider how to stimulate one another (Heb. 10:24)

The new covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34) is a new heart and a new spirit; an internal love and an external law; a free gift in the finished work of Christ, but it also has requirements, expected fruit, observable consequences! Confidence of salvation issues in godly living! It is not primarily a creed to affirm, nor a theology to embrace, but a Christlikeness (not sinlessness) which is evident to all!

Notice the lists of requirements for "drawing near."

1. with a sincere heart
2. in full assurance of faith
3. having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience
4. our bodies washed with pure water

■ **"sincere heart"** An appropriate attitude is the key to the new faith covenant (positive, cf. Ezek. 36:22-36; negative, Isa. 29:13). See Special Topic at Heb. 3:8.

■ **"in full assurance of faith"** Full assurance is linked to faith! Assurance is based on

1. a life of faith as the evidence of conversion (cf. James 2:14-26)
2. the finished work of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21)
3. the witness of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:16)

Human effort cannot bring salvation or assurance. However, a changed and changing life of faith is the evidence that one has truly been redeemed. The normal result of meeting a Holy God is a holy life of service.

Biblical assurance was never meant to be turned into a doctrine to be affirmed, but a life to be lived! For those who claim to know Christ but live apathetic, indifferent, worldly, self-centered, unfruitful, non-productive, godless lives—there is no assurance! See Special Topic at Heb. 3:14.

■ **"having our hearts sprinkled clean"** This is a perfect passive participle which is an allusion to the ritual inauguration of the first covenant (cf. Exod. 24:8; 1 Pet. 1:2). The sprinkling of the blood of the new covenant is much more effective in cleansing fallen mankind's guilt (cf. Heb. 9:9,14).

▣ **"from an evil conscience"** This is what the OT could not remove (cf. Heb. 9:9; 10:2). However, 1 Pet. 3:21 draws a similar connection between baptism and a clear conscience.

▣ **"our bodies washed with pure water"** This is a present passive participle. It is possible this is another allusion to the actions of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, a historical analogy to OT washing by sprinkling (cf. Lev. 8:6; 16:4; Exod.29:4; 30:17-21; Num. 19:7-8). This does not refer to Christian baptism.

This is another OT allusion to ceremonial washings. It clearly shows that the ritual use of water can refer to (1) death, burial, and resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:1-11 and Col. 2:12) and (2) a washing away of sin (cf. Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5; and 1 Pet. 3:21). The water is not the mechanism, but a metaphor. Since the early church had no buildings, people did not come to the front to publicly trust Christ as they do in many churches today. Their public confession and profession was their baptism. It was the occasion for and illustration of the forgiveness of sins and receiving the Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38) not the means.

10:23 "let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering" This is a present active subjunctive used as an imperative. This is the second of three present subjunctives that show an expected faith (but contingent) response.

▣ **"hope"** The KJV has "faith," but it has no Greek manuscript support. The term "hope" often refers to our glorification at the Second Coming (cf. Heb. 3:6; 6:11,18; 7:19; 1 John 3:2).

NASB	"for He who promised is faithful"
NKJV	"for He who promised <i>is</i> faithful"
NRSV	"for he who has promised is faithful"
TEV	"because we can trust God to keep his promise"
NJB	"because the one who made the promise is trustworthy"

The only verb is an aorist middle (deponent) participle, "promised." This is the theological balance to the three "let us . . ." statements of Heb. 10:22-24. This paradox of a free salvation, provided, produced, and protected by God, must produce an appropriate covenantal human response! God's sovereignty and mankind's free will are both biblical truths and must be held in tension.

The trustworthiness of God is the believers' strongest confidence (cf. Heb. 11:11). God's promises are sure; God's Word is true!

10:24 "let us consider" This is a present active subjunctive. The author uses several different words related to our thinking about theological issues.

1. consider, *katanoēō*, Heb. 1:1; 10:24 (cf. Luke 12:24,27)

2. observe, *theōreō*, Heb. 7:4

3. consider, *analogizomai*, Heb. 12:3

4. considering, *anatheōreō*, Heb. 13:7

Believers must think through their faith.

1. why it is true

2. how to apply it

3. how to help others

4. what is the main purpose

▣ **"how to stimulate one another"** This is a strong Greek term usually with a negative connotation. It is used only twice in the NT. The other place is Paul and Barnabas' argument in Acts 15:39. This may reflect tension between believing and unbelieving Jews worshiping in a synagogue, which best explains the groups ("us," "you," and "them") of Hebrews 6.

▣ **"to love and good deeds"** These are the true fruits of Christianity!

10:25 Verses 24-25 list three things that believers should do.

1. stimulate one another to love and good deeds
2. assemble together (root meaning of "synagogue," used only here in the NT)
3. encourage one another because the Second Coming is approaching

This is the only text in the NT which encourages believers to gather for worship. This may reflect the historical setting of Roman persecution directed toward Christianity (a non-approved religion) versus the relative acceptance of Judaism (an approved religion). It may also reflect different worship days. Very early after the Church began to spread within Judaism, the rabbis (i.e., revival of pharisaic Judaism at Jamnia around a.d. 90) developed a "curse" oath required of every member of the synagogue, which involved rejecting Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. At this point most believers left the synagogue with its Sabbath schedule but continued in their Sunday worship with the Church. James 2:2 uses the term "synagogue" to refer to the Christian place of worship, as does Heb. 10:25.

■ **"the day"** This refers to the Second Coming. In light of the following verses, it also relates to Judgment Day.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 10:26-31

²⁶For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. ²⁸Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony* of two or three witnesses. ²⁹How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." ³¹It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

10:26 "if we" This is not a typical conditional sentence. Possibly the genitive absolute (*hamartanontōn hēmōn*) is functioning as the protasis (if clause).

Surprisingly the author grammatically identifies himself with the wilfully sinning group, but this may be a literary technique (editorial plural) similar to Heb. 2:3. The first person does not automatically identify him with the group spoken of in Heb. 10:26-29. This same type of literary technique using the first person can be found in 1 Cor. 13:1-3.

■ **"sinning willfully"** "Wilfully" is placed first in Greek for emphasis. The word is possibly analogous to the "high handed" sin of the OT (cf. note on Heb. 5:2). The grammatical form of the verb (present active participle genitive masculine first person plural) has been used by some to suggest that this refers to believers who continue in sin. If they would cease sinning they would avoid the judgment. However, this does not fit the ominous context of Heb. 6:1-6 and Heb. 10:26-29. This is a life or death warning, a once out, always out warning! Rejection of Jesus in the presence of the clear light of revelation produces the darkest possible spiritual night.

■ **"after receiving the knowledge of the truth"** The verb in English, "receiving," is an aorist active infinitive. This is the crux of the interpretive problem. If they once received the full experiential knowledge (*epignōskō*) of the (definite article) truth; this sounds like believers! This is the same theological issue as Heb. 6:4-6.

It must be admitted there is no easy, clear, obvious interpretation. My personal fear is that my own biases may dominate a very clear text. I must resist a systematic, denominational agenda which silences this powerful, inspired text. The issue is not sinning believers. The issue is believers who cease to believe! I cannot accept a theology that (1) makes salvation dependant on human performance or (2) turns assurance into a dogmatic pronouncement totally unrelated to the Christian life. I reject a theology of lost, saved, lost, saved, lost, saved! I also reject a theology of "once saved, always saved" which is unrelated to

the continuing belief and lifestyle faith. Therefore, what do I do? I exegete the text: in its historical setting, in its literary context, in its grammatical expression, in its choice of terms, in its genre, and its parallel passages. I must admit that if all I had to work with was Heb. 6:4-6 and 10:26-29, there would be little option but that believers fall away from grace. However,

1. the historical setting, the Jewishness of the book, and the presence of persecution are major issues
2. the literary context (cf. Heb. 5:11-6:12) and the three groups (cf. "us," "you," and "those who") seem to reveal a Jewish setting of "believing Jews" and "unbelieving Jews" worshiping and fellowshiping in a synagogue setting
3. the use of so many OT quotes related to the tabernacle, the use of the term synagogue (cf. Heb. 10:25), and the roll call of faith, all point toward a reader familiar with the OT

Therefore, after exegeting the text I think the best overall explanation (not without its own problems and assumptions) is the supposed historical reconstruction of R. E. Glaze, Jr. in *No Easy Salvation*, published by Insight Press, 1966.

Hebrews seems to be a specialized book, to a select group. Does that mean it has no message for today? The warnings of this inspired author (along with James, Peter, and the writer of I and 2 John) should motivate believers to continue to run the race (see F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, pp. 124-125)! The answer does not lie in an easy believism, nor in a fear-generated legalism, but in a godly life of faith, a striving toward holiness, produced by an attitude of gratitude in a full, finished, and final salvation (cf. Heb. 10:14) through Christ by faith.

10:27 "judgment" The author has emphasized again and again the wonderful hope that believers have in Christ, but the negative side is as compelling; judgment is coming, and all will stand before a holy God (cf. Heb. 9:27; Gal. 6:7).

■ **"the fury of a fire will consume the adversaries"** This is an allusion to Isa. 26:11. Fire is often associated with holiness or cleansing. God is an ethical being; His creation is an ethical reality. Humans do not break His laws, they break themselves on His laws.

SPECIAL TOPIC: FIRE

10:28

NASB	"anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses"
NKJV	"anyone who has rejected Moses' law"
NRSV	"anyone who has violated the law of Moses"
TEV	"anyone who disobeys the Law of Moses"
NJB	"anyone who disregards the Law of Moses"

This is a strong word of wilful rejection. In *A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, Ellingworth and Nida say:

"The word for **disobeys** is a strong word, used not of incidental sins, but of breaking the whole covenant (Ezek. 22:26), for example, by idolatry (Deut. 17:2-7), false prophecy (Deut. 18:20), or blasphemy (Lev. 24.13-16)" (p. 236).

■ **"dies without mercy. . .two or three witnesses"** In the OT a capital trial always required two witnesses (cf. Deut. 17:6; 19:15). There are consequences to disobedience!

10:29 "How much severer" This is an argument from the lesser (Moses' covenant) to the greater (Jesus' covenant). This comparison is the theme of Hebrews.

■ **"trampled under foot"** This imagery means to treat contemptuously (cf. Heb. 6:6). This is an aorist active participle, which implies a completed act, as does the next participle.

■ **"Son of God"**

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE SON OF GOD

- **"regarded"** This means a deliberation of facts resulting in a choice.
- **"unclean"** This refers to something that is ceremonially unclean, not fit for its assigned purpose.
- **"the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified"** The question here relates to the verb (aorist passive indicative). Is this referring to the initial rejection of the new covenant or is this a turning away from the new covenant? The aorist participles in the previous phrase and the aorist passive participle in the following phrase imply an initial rejection.
The problem with this interpretation is that every place in Hebrews that "sanctified" is used it refers to believers (cf. Heb. 2:11; 9:13; 10:10,14; 13:12). For me the issue is one of covenant-keeping. The sovereign God has produced a covenant relating to salvation. It is free; it is for all, but it must be received (human free will), not just in an emotional response (cf. Matt. 13:20-22), nor in a uniting with a church (cf. 1 John 2:19). Believing is the key. Those who believe/faith/trust (all possible translations of *pisteuō*) are saved and have assurance. The dual warning of Hebrews is to (1) receive the gospel offer and (2) walk in it. If one fails to receive—judgment; if one ceases to believe—judgment!
- **"and has insulted the Spirit of grace"** He convicts of sin, brings us to Christ, baptizes us into Christ and forms Christ in us as believers (cf. John 16:8-11). The Spirit is insulted or outraged when unbelievers reject His wooing and convicting. Some of the recipients of this book were rejecting Christ in the presence of clear revelation from other members of the synagogue (see Introduction, Recipients).

10:30 "vengeance" This is a quote from the Septuagint of Deut. 32:35a and 36a. This is not anger, but full justice handed out to all involved.

- **"the Lord will judge His people"** This is a further quote from the Septuagint of Deut. 32:36a. The Hebrew text has "vindicate" instead of "judge." Does this phrase imply that the ones wilfully sinning were once God's people? Usually only one aspect of the OT quote is intended. It is probably "judge" that is the focal point of the quote, not that in its original context it referred to idolatrous Israel. The author has been using God's rejection of His own people in judgment as a warning throughout the book.

10:31 "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of a living God" This phrase (cf. Heb. 3:12) reflects the covenant name of God, "YHWH" (cf. Exod.3:14), from Hebrew verb "to be" (cf. Matt. 16:16). See Special Topic at Heb. 2:7. Unbelief reaps an eternal consequence!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 10:32-39

³²But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, ³³partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. ³⁴For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. ³⁵Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

³⁷For yet in a very little while,
He who is coming will come, and will not delay.

³⁸But My righteous one shall live by faith;
And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.

³⁹But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

10:32 "remember the former days" This is a present middle imperative, possibly referring to Heb. 5:12.

■ **"after being enlightened"** This was used of the unbelieving group in Heb. 6:4. I do believe there are two groups being addressed.

1. those Jews who have seen the power of God in the lives and testimonies of their believing friends
2. the believing Jews still worshipping in a synagogue setting.

The "you" of Heb. 10:32-36 is contrasted with Heb. 10:26-31 (as is 6:9-12 with 6:4-8).

■ **"endured"** This is a metaphor from an athletic contest (cf. Heb. 12:1,2,3,7).

■ **"great conflict of suffering"** This probably refers to the persecution which befell the Church, but not the synagogue, because Judaism was a legal religion under Rome, but Christianity was not. This paragraph seems to imply they helped others who went through the persecution and thereby shared some of the reproach (cf. Heb. 10:33-34; 6:10).

10:34 "to the prisoners" Some Christians had been imprisoned, but not the recipients of the letter. They were believers, but not fully identified with the church. This may corroborate the view that they were Jewish believers still attending a synagogue (see Introduction, Recipients).

The KJV has "in my bonds," which many commentators have used as evidence to establish Paul's authorship. However, there are several possible manuscript variations: (1) "in bonds" (P¹³, A, D^{*}, and the Vulgate and Peshitta translations); (2) "on the bond" (P⁴⁶, Ψ, and the Greek text used by Origen); and (3) "on my bonds" κ, D², K, L, P and the Greek text used by Clement of Alexandria).

■ **"accepted joyfully the seizure of your property"** This is a sure evidence of our hope in Christ and our inheritance in Him (cf. Heb. 9:15; 11:16; 13:14; Matt. 5:12; Luke 6:22-23; Rom. 5:3; 8:17).

■ **"better"** See full note at Heb. 7:7.

10:35-36 These verses document the need of the believing group (1) not to throw away their confidence (cf. Heb. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19) and (2) to endure (cf. Heb. 12:1-3). In many ways this sounds like the message to the seven churches of Rev. 2-3 (cf. Rev. 2:3,5,7,10,11,13,16,17,19,25,26; 3:2,3,5,10,11,12,20). True faith is a persevering faith (cf. 1 John 2:19). God's covenant promises must be received and held. See Special Topic at Heb. 4:14.

The real issue in security is not struggling believers, but the multitude of modern western church members who have no evidence of faith in their lives. Easy believism, coupled with an overemphasis on security, has filled our churches with baby Christians at best and lost people in Christian clothing at worst! Discipleship and the call for radical holiness are missing in a materialistic, capitalistic, decadent, modern western culture. Salvation has been turned into a product (a ticket to heaven at the end of a self-centered life or a fire insurance policy against ongoing sin) instead of a daily, growing, personal relationship with God. The goal of Christianity is not only heaven when we die (product), but Christlikeness now!! God wants to restore His image in mankind so that He can reach fallen humanity with His free offer of salvation in Christ. We are saved to serve! Security is a by-product of a life of service and discipleship.

SPECIAL TOPIC: PERSEVERANCE

10:36 This verse is stated with a contingency!

■ **"the will of God"** See Special Topic at Heb. 13:21.

■ **"you may receive what was promised"** This refers to the promises of the new covenant in Christ (i.e., Heb. 9:15)!

10:37-38 This is a quote from the Septuagint of Hab. 2:3-4, but with the last two clauses reversed for emphasis.

■ **"He who is coming"** The Hebrew Masoretic Text has "it," but the Greek Septuagint makes it personal, which implies the Messiah.

10:38 "shall live by faith"

[SPECIAL TOPIC: Believe, Trust, Faith, and Faithfulness in the Old Testament \(μν\)](#)

■ **"my"** There is Greek manuscript confusion as to the antecedent of this personal pronoun. It is related to either "righteousness" or "faith." Our author uses the ambiguity of MT and LXX translations to emphasize (1) the Messiah's coming and (2) the need for believers' faithfulness.

In the ancient Greek uncial manuscripts A & C, "my" relates to righteousness. In the LXX, Peshitta, and ms D*, "my" relates to faith. In P¹³, D^c, H^c, K, P and the Textus Receptus "my" is omitted (following Paul's omission in his quote from Hab. 2:4 in Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11).

The "if" in the second part of the verse is a third class conditional sentence, which means potential action.

10:39 The author summarizes his confidence in his readers' perseverance (cf. Heb. 6:9-12)!

■ **"of those who shrink back"** This is an allusion to Habakkuk 2:4 in the LXX "if he should draw back, my soul has no pleasure in him." The issue in Hebrews for believers is faithfulness to the end. The great danger is "shrinking back."

The interpretive question in this verse is to whom does the phrase "those who shrink back" refer.

1. Israelites in Habakkuk's day
2. the two groups of Heb. 6:1-12, one Jewish and the other believing Jews; the unbelieving group have shrunk back from clear gospel witness to destruction
3. believers in general who do not hold out to the end in faithfulness

The context of the book as a whole and Heb. 6:9-12 supports #2.

■ **"destruction"** This term is often used of those who do not have eternal life (cf. Matt. 7:13; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 2 Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 6:9; 2 Pet. 2:1,3; 3:7). This is not to be understood as ultimate annihilation of the unbeliever, but the loss of physical life. The same metaphorical use is abundant in the OT. One of the mysteries and pain of Hell is its eternal aspect (cf. Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46).

NASB "but of those who have faith to the persevering of the soul"

NKJV "but of those who believe to the saving of the soul"

NRSV "but among those who have faith and so are saved"

TEV "Instead, we have faith and are saved"

NJB "we are the sort who keep *faith* until our souls are saved"

The opposite of "shrink back" is faithfulness. This quote from Habakkuk is used in a different way than Paul uses it in emphasizing the need for initial faith apart from works (cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11), while Hebrews uses it for continuing faith. This statement sets the stage for the role call of faithful in chapter 11. This role call shows that faith often causes persecution, even death. It emphasizes that these OT believers, even amidst great difficulties (cf. Heb. 10:32-33) continued in faith! The author of Hebrews asserts his confidence that his believing readers will also continue in faith to the end.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the

book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is it so important that Christ offered Himself "once for all"?
2. When and what is ultimate, final salvation?
3. Define the NT word "perfect" (*telos*).
4. What was the purpose of the Day of Atonement? How are the OT sacrifices related to 10:8?
5. Why does our author attribute OT passages to Jesus and the Spirit?
6. Is sanctification a once and for all act (Heb. 10:10) or a process (Heb. 10:14)?
7. Why is 10:18 so significant?
8. List the practical things we are encouraged to implement in our lives because of our access to God through Christ.
9. Do verses 26-29 teach apostasy?
10. Why was "assembling together" such a problem for the recipients of this letter?
11. Is suffering God's will? (cf. Heb. 10:32-36).

HEBREWS 11

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Faith	By Faith We Understand	Roll Call of Heroes and Heroines	Faith	The Exemplary Faith of Our Ancestors
11:1-2	11:1-3	11:1-3	11:1-2	11:1-2
11:3	Faith at the Dawn of History		11:3	11:3
11:4-7	11:4-7	11:4-7	11:4	11:4
			11:5-6	11:5-6
	Faithful Abraham		11:7	11:7
11:8-12	11:8-12	11:8-12	11:8-10	11:8-10
	The Heavenly Hope		11:11-12	11:11-12
11:13-16	11:13-16	11:13-16	11:13-16	11:13-16
	The Faith of the Patriarchs			
11:17-22	11:17-22	11:17-22	11:17-19	11:17-19
			11:20	11:20-22
			11:21	
	The Faith of Moses		11:22	
11:23-31	11:23-29	11:23-28	11:23	11:23-29
			11:24-26	
			11:27-28	
	By Faith They Overcame	11:29-31	11:29	
	11:30-40		11:30-31	11:30-31
11:32-38		11:32-38	11:32-35a	11:32-40
			11:35b-38	
11:39-40		11:39-40	11:39-40	

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Chapter 11 is a series of OT examples of those who were faithful in difficult situations (the opposite of 2 Peter 2 and Jude). These are meant to encourage the original readers and believers of every age to remain faithful no matter what physical circumstances may confront them (cf. Heb. 10:32-39).
- B. Also notice these are not initial professions of faith, but lives of faith under the Old covenant. The faithful end is the evidence of a true beginning. Believers start in faith, continue in faith, and die in faith. The author of Hebrews evaluates the believer's life from its faithful conclusion as well as its faith beginning.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 11:1-7

¹Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²For by it the men of old gained approval. ³By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. ⁴By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. ⁵By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. ⁶And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. ⁷By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

11:1 "faith" This is not a theological definition of faith, but a picture of the practical outworking of it. The term is used twenty four times in this chapter. From the OT the primary idea is "faithfulness" or "trustworthy." This is the opposite of apostasy. The Greek term for "faith" (*pistis*) is translated by three English terms: "faith," "belief," and "trust." Faith is a human response to God's faithfulness and His promise. We trust His trustworthiness, not our own. His character is the key.

NASB, NRSV "assurance of *things* hoped for"
NKJV "substance of things hoped for"
TEV "to be sure of the things we hope for"
NJB "guarantee the blessings that we hope for"

This Greek term for "assurance" (*hupostasis*) basically means "to place under" or "to stand under" thereby giving the underlying basis or foundation of something. It, therefore, had a wide variety of meanings in the ancient world. It was especially common in Greek philosophical writings to denote the clear manifestation of something. It was that which was real and true versus the unrealized.

1. in Heb. 1:3 it refers to essence
2. in Heb. 3:14 it refers to the reality of the believers' confession/profession
3. in Heb. 11:1 it refers to the promises of the gospel lived out in the present, but not consummated until the future

This term has been found in the Egyptian papyri meaning "a title deed" (cf. NJB). In this sense it reflects Paul's usage of the Spirit as an "earnest" (cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:4).

The Greek terms used in the LXX suggest it regularly translates *tōhelet* (*The Cambridge History of the Bible*, p. 9), which denoted "an attitude of patient and confident waiting for something, a state of confident expectation" (i.e., hope). Remember the NT authors were Hebrew thinkers writing in the Koine Greek and using the translation traditions of the Septuagint.

Some have seen the clearest meanings in this context reflected in the OT quote in Heb. 10:38 (Hab. 2:2-4). Chapter 11 is a list of examples of those who did not "shrink back." This text is the opposite of what the first readers were in danger of doing.

■ **"conviction"** This word occurs only here in the NT. It refers to "proof by test." The two phrases in Heb. 11:1 are parallel (both present passive participles); therefore, "assurance" and "conviction" are tied closely together and out of them the faithful live their lives.

■ **"things not seen"** The following examples are of people who live in (1) hope in the present and future acts of God and (2) confidence in the spiritual promises of God (cf. Heb. 10:23). Their worldview guides their daily decisions, not circumstances, materialism or self-centeredness.

Physical reality is subservient to the unseen spiritual reality (cf. Heb. 11:3). Physical reality is known by the five senses, and is not eternal, but fleeting. True, eternal reality is unseen (cf. Heb. 11:27) and; therefore, must be held by faith, not sight. However, it is so real and true to believers that it controls and demands their priorities.

11:2

NASB	"gained approval"
NKJV	"obtained a <i>good</i> testimony"
NRSV	"received approval"
TEV	"won God's approval"
NJB	"are acknowledged"

This is similar to Paul's use of "faith" in Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11. Their lives of faith did not save them, but evidenced God's Spirit in them (cf. James 2:14-26).

11:3

NASB, NKJV, NRSV	"worlds"
TEV, NIV	"the universe"
NJB	"the ages"

This is one of two Greek terms (*kosmos*, cf. Heb. 1:6 and *aiōn*, here) used to designate this present physical realm. This "*aiōn*" refers to spiritual times and seasons including both physical and spiritual realms (cf. Heb. 1:2; 6:5; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6,8; 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 1:21; 6:12). See Special Topic at Heb. 1:2.

■ **"the word of God"** This is not the Greek term *logos* but *rhēma* which is used of the spoken word. This then refers to creation by *fiat*, the spoken word (cf. Gen. 1:3,6,9,14,20,24; Ps. 33:6,9). From Heb. 1:2 we know that the *logos* of God was the Father's agent of creation (cf. John 1:1,10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16).

This faith affirmation becomes the worldview out of which believers live their earthly lives. This does not reject scientific research, but puts it within a faith perspective. Believers allow science to discover the mechanisms of the created order (natural revelation), but affirm ultimacy to God alone (see John L. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis*, Who is revealed in the Bible and supremely in Jesus Christ).

■ **"so that what is seen is not made out of things which are visible"** This is not primarily an affirmation of creation *ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), but an example of the reality versus unreality of Heb. 11:1. Believers affirm what they have not personally seen or experienced based on the revelation of God. This is not so much a creedal theology as a life of faith and hope.

11:4 "Abel" This was Adam and Eve's second child, who was killed by his brother, Cain (cf. Gen. 4:3ff).

■ **"a better sacrifice"** It was not the type of sacrifice which Cain and Abel offered which caused the distinction, but the attitude (faith) in which it was given. This cannot be a proof-text to the superiority of a blood sacrifice.

■ **"though he is dead, he still speaks"** This is recorded in Gen. 4:10; Heb. 12:24. In context this is an affirmation of faith that faces death and triumphs over it. The readers were shrinking back from persecution. They must, like Abel, have faith.

11:5 "Enoch" He was the first man after the fall not touched by death (cf. Gen. 5:24). The OT does not elaborate on the circumstances but asserts that he "walked" with God.

■ **"was taken up"** This means "moved to another spot." This is not a "resurrection" but a "translation" like Elijah (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:11). There is a clear distinction in the Bible between

1. people brought back to life (resuscitation)
2. people taken to heaven without physical death (translation)
3. Jesus having a new spiritual body (resurrection)

■ **"he was pleasing to God"** This follows the Septuagint, but the MT has "walked with God."

11:6 "without faith it is impossible to please Him" This is the key assertion of this literary unit. It is not just initial faith, but persevering faith that pleases God. All of these examples remained faithful to the end of life, no matter how that end came. Faith is the way that humans believe, receive, accept the promises of God. Salvation and discipleship are both impossible without faith. Faith in God's actions in the past (creation, revelation); faith in God's presence in the present (persecution, suffering, even death); faith in God's promised actions in the future (salvation, heaven).

For "impossible" see full note at Heb. 6:6.

■ **"must believe"** The Greek word *pistis* is translated by three English terms: "faith," "believe," and "trust." The focus is not on cognitive facts alone, but personal trust in God's trustworthiness; faithing His faithfulness! It is not just an affirmation, but a lifestyle.

The term "must" is a present active indicative, which means "it is binding," "it is necessary." Faith is necessary!

■ **"He is a rewarder of those who seek Him"** This refers to both an initial faith response and a continuing faith response

11:7 "being warned by God about things not yet seen" Here is the faith pattern. These OT saints acted on what they had received from God. Their actions proved their faith was not mere words! Can you imagine the ridicule and humiliation Noah experienced in building such a large boat, so far from the water, to hold animals!

■ **"ark"** This was not a maneuverable boat, but a vessel meant to float like a log. The term was used of a "chest" like the ark of the covenant.

■ **"by which he condemned the world"** How did Noah condemn the world? There are two possibilities: (1) by his faith actions and (2) by his preaching (cf. 2 Pet. 2:5).

■ **"became an heir of the righteousness"** In Genesis 6-8 Noah is the first man in the Bible called "righteous" (cf. 2 Pet. 2:5). It does not mean sinlessness but that Noah walked in the light he had in faith and trust in God. As Abraham's faith was later accounted to him as righteousness (cf. Gen. 15:6), so too, was Noah's. For a word study on "Righteousness" see Special Topic at Heb. 1:9.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 11:8-12

⁸By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. ¹²Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as *many descendants* as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

11:8 "Abraham. . .obeyed" In some ways these cameos are idealized representations of these men's lives. The OT is unique in ancient literature in that it records both the positive and negative about its characters. Abraham was a strange mixture of fear and faith

1. Fear

- a. God said leave your family; he took his father and Lot
- b. God promised a child; he tried to produce a child through Sarah's servant and later tried to give Sarah away to both an Egyptian and a Philistine king in order to save his own life

2. Faith

- a. He did leave Ur
- b. He did believe God would give him descendants
- c. He was willing to offer Isaac (cf. Gen. 22)

God is not looking for "super-saints," but for flawed humans who will respond to Him in repentance and faith and live for Him regardless of the circumstances.

11:9 "he lived as an alien in the land of promise" This is the term "sojourner," which means he did not have rights as a citizen (cf. Heb. 11:13).

11:10 "he was looking" This is an imperfect middle (deponent) indicative. He kept looking!

■ **"the city"** This is a common biblical metaphor (cf. Heb. 11:16; 12:22; 13:14; John 14:2; Gal. 4:26; Rev. 3:12; 21:2), which refers to the place of God's dwelling with humans again, as in Eden.

Abraham lived his life by faith looking not at current reality, but promised reality. Faith says "this world is not my home"; faith says "God's promises are sure"; faith says "reality is not what I see, but what God says"!

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE TWO CITIES

11:11 "Sarah" Some ancient Greek manuscripts (P⁴⁶, D) add "barren." It is significant that none of the patriarch's wives (except Leah) could conceive without the help of God. Also, none of the first born children were the heirs of promise. God acted to show that He was in charge!

Sarah, like Abraham, was a mixture of fear and faith. She gave Abraham her servant; she also laughed at God's promise (cf. Gen. 18:12).

11:12 "as the stars of heaven in number and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore"

This was part of God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 32:12). Remember all of their wives (except Leah) were barren.

■ **"she considered Him faithful who had promised"** She acted based on God's promise, not current reality. This phrase is similar to Heb. 10:23 (cf. Heb. 6:17-18). The readers are also to act in this way.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 11:13-16

¹³All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. ¹⁵And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

11:13 "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises" This is the heart of the comparison of the OT people of faith in chapter 11 to the believing Jewish recipients who were on the verge of "shrinking back" (cf. Heb. 10:38; also 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

■ **"but having. . .and having. . .and having"** Note the three descriptive, parallel phrases!

■ **"they were strangers and exiles on the earth"** Literally, alien residents who had no rights as citizens (cf. LXX Gen. 23:4; Ps. 39:12; Phil. 3:20; 1 Pet. 2:11). Physical reality is not the true, eternal reality. This world was not their home.

11:15 "if" This is a second class conditional sentence called "contrary to fact." They did go out and they did not go back!

11:16 The true reality is spiritual, as seen in the metaphor of a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God (cf. Heb. 11:10). God responds to trust and faith (cf. Heb. 2:11; 11:2,39; 13:14). "Country" and "city" (Heb. 11:10) are theologically parallel as places prepared by God for His faith children!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 11:17-22

¹⁷By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; ¹⁸it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." ¹⁹He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. ²⁰By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. ²¹By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning on the top of his staff*. ²²By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

11:17 "he was tested" When one compares Gen. 22:1 with Matt. 6:13 and James 1:13-14, there is a seeming contradiction. However, there are two words in Greek for "test" with different connotations. One is to test toward destruction (*peirazō*) and the other is to test with a view to approval and strengthening (*dokimazō*). See Special Topic at Heb. 2:18.

God provides opportunities for His children to demonstrate and grow their faith (cf. Gen. 22:1; Exod. 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2,16; 13:3; Jdgs. 2:22; 2 Chr. 32:31). Tests become either a stumbling block or a stepping stone.

■ **"was offering up his only begotten son"** The level of Abraham's faith is seen in his willingness to give back to God the child of promise he had waited for for thirteen years (cf. James 2:21).

The use of *monogenēs* ("only begotten") in relation to Isaac cannot mean "only begotten" since Abraham had other children. It surely means "the child of promise," "the unique child." This is also the meaning of John 3:16.

11:18 This is a quote from Gen. 21:12, which came before the test!

11:19 "raise *men* from the dead" Abraham expected Isaac to return with him (cf. Gen. 22:5). The text does not state how this would happen. Hebrews asserts that he may have expected a resurrection.

■ **"as a type"** The author has been using the OT as a type or foreshadowing of current reality (cf. Heb. 9:9; 10:1; 11:19). Here the type seems to be that as Abraham offered the son of promise, so too, did God offer His Son as a demonstration of His love, mercy, and grace!

11:20 Isaac's blessing of his sons is found in Gen. 27:27ff, while Jacob's first blessing is in Gen. 48:14 for Joseph's sons and later his second blessing in Genesis 49 for his other sons. The blessing once given was not revocable. This is an example of how the author is treating OT history in a selective way (like Chronicles). He is only mentioning the positive aspects.

11:21 "*leaning on the top of his staff*" This is a quote from the Septuagint of Gen. 47:31. The Masoretic Hebrew Text has "bowed at the head of the bed." The Hebrew words for "bed" and "staff" have the same Hebrew consonants, (mth), only the later vowel points are different. From the OT context Jacob is somehow recognizing the fulfillment of Joseph's dream (cf. Gen. 37:5-11), thereby recognizing Joseph's civil authority through prophecy or acknowledging Joseph as a "deliverer" of His people, as Moses and Joshua and the coming Messiah.

11:22 "gave orders concerning his bones" They were to be carried out of Egypt and buried in the Promised Land after the exodus (cf. Gen. 50:24-25; Exod.13:19; Jos. 24:32).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 11:23-29

²³By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. ²⁴By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. ²⁷By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. ²⁸By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. ²⁹By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though *they were passing* through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

11:23 "His parents" The Septuagint has "parents," while the Hebrew Masoretic Text has only "mother."

■ **"because they saw he was a beautiful child"** Jewish tradition says Moses was a physically beautiful child. What parent does not think their child is beautiful? But this is not the theological point. This was a special, God-sent child.

■ **"they were not afraid of the king's edict"** The author mentions this phrase with an eye toward his current readers (cf. Heb. 11:27).

11:24 "son of Pharaoh's daughter" This was an official Egyptian designation and title of authority.

11:25-26 Again the author makes a connection to the temptation facing his readers. They must keep their eyes on the future, sure promises of God, not on current circumstances. Loyalty to Christ is ultimate!

11:27 "left Egypt" This seems to refer to Moses' flight to Midian, not the Exodus (cf. Exod.2:14-15). Again the author is drawing a rather idealized picture of Moses' purpose.

▣ **"as seeing Him who is unseen"** The Israelites believed that to see YHWH caused death, because of His holiness (cf. Gen. 16:13; 32:30; Exod.3:6; 33:17-23; Jdgs. 6:22-23; 13:22; 1 Kgs. 19:11-13; Acts 7:32).

11:28 This is an allusion to Exodus 12. This last plague affected all of Egypt including the land of Goshen. Even the Hebrews had to obey God's instructions and act in faith in order to be spared the visitation of the death angel.

▣ **"firstborn"** See Special Topic at Heb. 1:6.

▣ **"he who destroyed"** This refers to the Death Angel (cf. LXX, Exod.12:23; 2 Sam. 24:16-17).

11:29 This is a summary of the account found in Exod. 14:21ff..

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 11:30-31

³⁰By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

11:30 "Jericho fell down" (cf. Jos. 6:20; 2 Cor. 10:4)

11:31 "Rahab the harlot" This Canaanite became a believer (James 2:25). It is even possible that she is the one listed in the line of the Messiah in Matt. 1:5.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 11:32-38

³²And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of righteousness*, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵Women received *back* their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; ³⁶and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated ³⁸(*men of whom the world was not worthy*), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

11:32 "Gideon" (cf. Jdgs. 6-8)

▣ **"Barak"** (cf. Jdgs. 4-5)

▣ **"Jephthah"** (cf. Jdgs. 11-12)

▣ **"David"** (cf. 1 Sam. 16:1)

■ **"Samuel"** (cf. 1 Sam. 1:20)

11:33 "Righteousness" See Special Topic at Heb. 1:9.

■ **"shut the mouths of lions"** This could refer to Samson, David, Daniel, or an unknown event.

11:34 "quenched the power of fire" This reference to rescue from fire may refer specifically to Daniel 3 or to some other unknown historical event. There is even a possibility that this rescue is mentioned in 1 Cor. 13:3. However, there is a Greek manuscript problem related to 1 Cor. 13:3. The ancient Greek manuscripts P⁴⁶, κ , A, and B have "that I should boast" (*kauchēsōmai*) or C, D, F, G, K, and L have "that I should be burned" (*kauthēsōmai*). The first has (1) the better manuscripts and (2) the term is used often by Paul.

■ **"from weakness were made strong"** (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9)

11:35 "Women received back their dead by resurrection" Theologically speaking this is not resurrection, but resuscitation (cf. 1 Kgs. 17:17-23; 2 Kgs. 4:31-37). There has only been one resurrection that resulted in an eternal body, Jesus.

NASB, NKJV

NRSV "a better resurrection"

TEV, NJB "a better life"

The reference is the honor and victory of a martyr's death. In the mystery of God's plan and will for this fallen planet some are physically restored (i.e., "women received back their dead by resurrection") and some are not. The first is great and wonderful, but the second is an even more powerful testimony of faith, faith to the end.

This may relate to spiritual rewards, but if it does the key is the heart of faith, not the circumstances of one's death. Believers are called on to live boldly for their faith (in YHWH and Jesus). The victory is their faithfulness! YHWH is faithful to His promises; Jesus is faithful in His actions; believers must be faithful in their walk of faith. For "better" see full note at Heb. 7:7.

11:36 "mockings and scourgings" This is possibly a reference to the Maccabean period (cf. I Mac. 1:62-64; 7:34; II Mac. 6:18-20; 7:1-42).

11:37 "They were stoned" Tradition says that Jeremiah was stoned in Egypt by the Jews. A priest (not the OT writer) named Zechariah is recorded as being stoned in 2 Chr. 24:20-21; Luke 11:51.

■ **"sawn in two"** Tradition (*Ascension of Isaiah* 5:1-14) says that Isaiah was put into a hollow log and sawed in two by Manasseh's order.

■ **"They were tempted"** This seems a rather general statement amidst several very specific statements of persecution and torture. The ancient Papyrus manuscript P⁴⁶ omits the phrase. Textual critics have conjectured that since the connected phrase "they were sawn in two" (*epristhēsan*) is very similar to this phrase "they were tempted" (*epeirasthēan*) that possibly a scribal addition occurred early in the textual traditions. There are many variations in the Greek manuscripts (order of the terms, tense of the terms). The United Bible Societies' fourth edition Greek text omits the phrase.

■ **"put to death with the sword"** (i.e., 1 Kgs. 19:10,14; Jer. 2:30; 26:23).

11:38 This describes the terrible history of the persecution of God's followers. Why should the current readers be surprised at their persecutions?

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 11:39-40

³⁹And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

11:39 "having gained approval" This links back to Heb. 11:2 (cf. Heb. 2:11). Lives lived out in faith even amidst terrible circumstances, please God.

11:40 God's promises unite all believers of all ages, all races, all socio-economic strata, all educational levels (cf. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). All these OT persons looked forward to God's new day. It has come in Christ at Bethlehem and will be consummated in Christ from heaven bursting open the eastern sky! His resurrection is the hope to which all believers, OT and NT, look forward in faith (cf. 1 John 3:2).

▣ **"better"** See full note at Heb. 7:7.

▣ **"perfect"** See full note at Heb. 10:1.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Define the Hebrew and Greek words for faith.
2. What do the words *fiat* and *ex nihilo* mean?
3. Does God test believers (cf. Heb. 11:17 versus James 1:13-14)?
4. Is there special honor for persecution? Are all Christians persecuted?
5. Why does the author of Hebrews write this roll call of faith?

HEBREWS 12

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Discipline of the Lord	The Race of Faith	Exhortations and Warnings	God our Father	The Examples of Jesus Christ
12:1-3	12:1-2	12:1-2	12:1-2	12:1-4
	The Discipline of God			
	12:3-11	12:3-11	12:3-11	
12:4-11				God's Fatherly Instruction
				12:5-13
12:12-13	12:12-17	12:12-13	12:12-13	
Warning Against Rejecting God's Grace				Unfaithfulness is Punished
12:14-17		12:14-17	12:14-17	12:14-17
	The Glorious Company			The Two Covenants
12:18-24	12:18-24	12:18-24	12:18-21	12:18-29
	Hear the Heavenly Voice		12:22-24	
12:25-29	12:25-29	12:25-29	12:25-27	
			12:28-29	

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 12:1-2

¹ Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

12:1 "Therefore" Verse 1 is an unusual triple compound (*toigaroun*) found only here and in 1 Thess. 4:8. Based on the preceding examples of faithfulness, the readers are to live godly lives that help and encourage others.

▣ **"cloud"** "Cloud" is often used metaphorically in Greek literature of a group of people (cf. Herodotus VIII.109).

▣ **"witnesses"** This term can mean

1. a legal witness in court
2. someone who shares what they have seen, known, or experienced
3. someone who has been killed (martyred) for their faith in Christ
4. metaphorical expression of the examples of faith in Heb. 11

Because of the context of Heb. 11 it seems best to view this verse not as teaching that "they" watch us, but that we are to look to their lives of faithfulness as examples to follow (NASB Study Bible, p. 1798). This verse is often used, I think, incorrectly, to support the view that our believing-dead loved ones in heaven observe our lives on earth. Believers will surely know each other and be reunited in fellowship on Resurrection Day, but the Bible is silent about a reunion at death or their being able to view the life of loved ones on earth.

The Handbook on The Letters to the Hebrews by Ellingworth and Nida, from United Bible Society, makes the opposite interpretation, "The thought is that the Old Testament heroes are watching how the writer of Hebrews and his readers run their race in the Christian life, since their own salvation is linked with that of Christians (Heb. 11:40)" (p. 287).

▣ **"let us"** This is translated as a subjunctive, but the first verbal is a present active participle. The subjunctive does not appear until "let us run."

Notice what believers should do in light of the faithful OT witnesses.

1. lay aside every encumbrance, Heb. 12:1
2. lay aside every sin which so easily entangles us, Heb. 12:1
3. run the race with endurance, Heb. 12:1
4. fixing our eyes on Jesus, Heb. 12:2

▣ **"lay aside"** This is an aorist middle participle meaning "lay aside as a garment" (cf. Acts 7:58). This grammatical form implies a personal (i.e., middle voice), decisive (i.e., aorist tense) decision. However, Paul used the term figuratively in an ethical sense (cf. Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22,25; Col. 3:8-9 and "put on" in Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10,12,14). Christians must be actively involved in their free salvation (cf. Phil. 2:12-13). There is a race to be run, a witness to be made, a fight to be fought (i.e., Phil. 3:12-14)!

NASB	"every encumbrance"
NKJV, NRSV	"every weight"
TEV	"everything that gets in the way"
NJB	"everything that weighs us down"

This term is literally "fat" or "weight." Those who participated in the Greek athletic contests ran almost naked. It is used

1. literally of body fat
2. of athletic training weights

- 3. metaphorically in Greek literature as pride
- 4. philosophically as be careful of "the good" as the enemy of "the best"

■ **"the sin"** This either refers to (1) the sin nature; (2) a besetting sin; (3) unbelief; or (4) this unique context may give the added meaning of "shrinking back" (cf. Heb. 10:38). This letter/book/sermon is addressed to the Jewish believers and Jewish unbelievers.

NASB	"so easily entangles us"
NKJV	"so easily ensnares us"
NRSV, NJB	"that clings to closely"
TEV	"which holds on to us so tightly"

The ancient papyrus manuscript P⁴⁶ has "easily distracts." This reference is to anything that trips up the believer in the race of life. It may be a recurrent sin, an out-of-balance desire or even the presence of many good things—anything that causes them to neglect the things for which they are gifted and called by God.

- **"run"** This is a Present active subjunctive, which speaks of a continual action but with a note of contingency. This surely fits the overall emphasis of the four warnings directed to Jewish believers who were "shrinking back" from Christ and the gospel.
- **"endurance"** This chapter may be a rabbinical play on the word "endure" (noun, cf. Heb. 10:32,36), which means "voluntary, aggressive (active), patient (passive) endurance." The verb is in Heb. 12:2,3, and 7 and the noun in Heb. 12:1. This is the theme of the book and especially these last few chapters—hang in there!
- **"race"** This Greek word *agōna* is an athletic term from which we get the English term "agony." It is often used as a set course for a race.
- **"that is set before us"** This is a present passive (deponent) participle. The Christian life is often characterized as an athletic contest (cf. 1 Cor. 9:25; Phil. 1:30; 2 Tim. 2:5; racing, 1 Cor. 9:24,26; Gal. 2:2; 5:7; Phil. 2:16; boxing, 1 Cor. 9:26; 1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7; wrestling, Eph. 6:12).

12:2 "fix our eyes on Jesus" This is a present active participle meaning "looking intently." Notice that we watch Him—not the crowd, not the circumstances, not ourselves. This may be figurative of constantly focusing on the new covenant (the gospel).

NASB	"the author and perfecter of faith"
NKJV	"the author and finisher of <i>our</i> faith"
NRSV	"the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"
TEV	"on whom our faith depends from beginning to end"
NJB	"who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection"

This first term (*archēgos*) is used in Heb. 2:10 of Jesus as the author of salvation; in Acts 3:15 of Jesus as the Prince (author) of life; in Acts 5:31 of Jesus as the Prince (leader) and Savior. See Special Topic at Heb. 2:10.

The second word (*teleiōtēs*) means "the one who completes and perfects." It refers to Jesus' total completion of God's assigned redemptive task. In a sense it is like the title Alpha and Omega (cf. Rev. 1:8), the First and the Last (cf. Rev. 1:17; 2:8). This author uses the concept of "perfecting" many times in the book (cf. Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 6:1; 7:11,19,28; 9:9; 10:1,14; 11:40; and here). See Special Topic at Heb. 7:11.

- **"faith"** *Pistis* can refer to
 1. a personal faith relationship with Christ

- 2. a life of faithful Christlikeness
- 3. Christian doctrine (cf. Jude 1:3,20)

Christianity is a person to be welcomed, truth about that person to be believed (the gospel), and a life like that person's to be lived (i.e., Christlikeness)

- **"for the joy"** The preposition *anti* normally means "on account of" or "because of," but can also mean "instead of." The first would refer to Christ leaving heaven (cf. Phil. 2:5-11), the second to His joy at the finished redemption and ascension (cf. Isa. 53:10-12).
- **"set before Him"** This word occurs in Heb. 12:1 referring to the struggle (race) of the Christian life. Now the term is used again of the struggle of Jesus' laying His life down for us. This is the author's way of urging the Jewish believers to persevere. Jesus did His part; they must do theirs. When He finished there was great joy, so too, if they finish the course.
- **"the cross"** The rabbis of Jesus' day saw this as a curse by God because of their interpretations of Deut. 21:23. Paul says that Jesus bore this curse of the Law for us (cf. Gal. 3:13).
- **"despising the shame"** The cross is the objective evidence of the love of the Father and the Son (cf. John 3:16 and Rom. 5:8). This is a strong Greek word. Jesus looked to the glorious outcome of His humiliation (cf. Isa. 53:10-12). The cross was not easy, the price of redemption not cheap!
- **"has sat down at"** This is a perfect active indicative which emphasizes a completed act with abiding results. This is a continuing allusion to Ps. 110:1 (cf. Heb. 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12).
- **"right hand"** This is not literal, but a biblical metaphor for "the place of power," "authority," or "pre-eminence" (cf. Acts 2:33-36).
- **"throne of God"** Fallen humans can only imagine the glory and majesty of the spiritual realm. It must be put into physical imagery (streets of gold, gates of pearl, sea of glass). God is a spiritual, eternal, omnipresent being, far too great for any throne (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:27). See [SPECIAL TOPIC: Anthropomorphic Language to describe God](#) at Heb. 3:11.

NASB (UPDATED TEXT): 12:3-11

³For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; ⁵and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,

**"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
Nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him;**

**⁶For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,
And He scourges every son whom He receives."**

⁷It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? ⁸But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines* us for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness. ¹¹All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

12:3 "For consider" This is an aorist middle (deponent) imperative. It literally means "add it up" and is used to emphasize the careful analysis of something. The ancients added numbers upwards and drew a line at the top for the total.

▣ **"Him who has endured"** This is a perfect active participle. As Jesus endured such shameful treatment for believers' salvation, they need to live for Him and other believers (cf. 1 John 3:16).

▣ **"against Himself"** The singular pronoun is found in all modern translations. However, the majority of the ancient Greek manuscripts, versions, and Patristic quotes support a plural. Although it is a commonly accepted tenet of textual criticism (i.e., see Appendix Two) that the most unusual, most difficult text is probably original, this plural does not fit this context at all. The subject is obviously Jesus. This must be an ancient scribal error from the first one to two hundred years before the majority of the papyri texts were written.

▣ **"so that you will not grow weary and lose heart"** These are athletic terms for runners panting and collapsing after a hard run race. Our author is encouraging these Jewish believers to continue even though it may be difficult. This warning is continued in Heb. 12:15, 25-29.

12:4 "you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood" The original readers had suffered persecution, but not yet death (cf. Heb. 10:32ff). Jesus had suffered death for them, they must be willing to live or die for Him.

▣ **"in your striving against sin"** This is another athletic term as was used in Heb. 12:1. It is transliterated in English as "agony." The "sin" in context of the whole book refers to

1. the sin of unbelief related to the group of unbelieving Jews
2. the sin of apostasy ("shrinking back" Heb. 10:38) relating to the group of believing Jews

12:5 "you have forgotten" This is a perfect middle (deponent) indicative. This term is used only here in the NT. It denotes

1. a complete forgetting (i.e., emphasis on tense)
2. a deliberate forgetting (i.e., emphasis on voice)

▣ **"do not regard lightly. . .nor faint when you are reproved by him"** This is a quote from the Septuagint of Pro. 3:11-12. These both are present imperatives with a negative particle, which usually means to stop an act already in process.

▣ **"the discipline of the Lord"** This term refers to "child training." There is a play on this term in Heb. 12:5-11. This is another familial metaphor. As earthly parents discipline their children, so too, God disciplines His (cf. 1 Cor. 11:32; Rev. 3:19).

12:6 "For those whom the lord loves he disciplines" This is one reason why believers are involved in suffering for the faith (cf. Matt. 5:10-12; Acts 8:1b,4; 14:22; 2 Thess. 1:4-10).

▣ **"and he scourges every son whom he receives"** This is the continuing quote from the Septuagint of Pro. 3:11-12. This is so important! Jesus has been called "a son" several times, while the OT characters have been called "servants." Now NT believers are called "sons" (cf. Heb. 12:7-8). Fathers discipline sons

1. for the father's purpose
2. for the son's benefit
3. for the benefit of the whole family

12:7 "that you endure" This is a present active indicative or present active imperative (same Greek morphology). Since Heb. 12:5 has two present imperatives, this is probably also an imperative. The word means "voluntary, steadfast endurance" (cf. Heb. 12:1,2,3; 10:32,36). This testing will result in stronger

faith!

■ **"God deals with you as sons"** This theme of God as a disciplining parent may be an allusion to Deut. 8:5 as is Hosea 11:1-4.

The verb is a present passive indicative of a term that means "to bring something to Jesus or God, often by means of a sacrifice; but here the passive voice denotes God's willingness to be approached by sinful humans, by implication through Christ's sacrifice.

12:8 "if" This is a first class conditional sentence, which is assumed to be true for the author's purposes. All of God's children have experienced discipline (perfect active indicative).

12:9 "Father of spirits" This has nothing to do with theories of the origin of the "soul." It is used in the sense of the true source of all life. God is being contrasted with earthly fathers (cf. Heb. 12:9-10).

■ **"and live"** The Father's discipline brings true life, not death.

12:10 "but He disciplines us for our good so that we may share His holiness" Every believer is sanctified at salvation (positional) and is called to holiness (see Special Topic at Heb. 2:11). This is God's purpose for every believer (cf. Matt. 5:48; Rom. 8:28-30; 2 Cor. 3:18; 7:1; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 4:13; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:3,7; 1 Pet. 1:15). Believers are predestined to holiness (cf. Eph. 1:4). It often occurs only in a disciplinary setting (cf. Heb. 5:8 and Rom. 8:17).

12:11 "it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" The Christian life is from faith to faith, from affirmation (profession of faith) to character (life of faith, cf. Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:2-4).

For a word study on "Righteousness" see Special Topic at Heb. 1:9.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 12:12-13

¹²Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

12:12 This is an allusion to Isa. 35:3, which may be the background of the whole discussion in chapter 12. The mature ought to strengthen the weak (those close to shrinking back). "Strengthen" is literally "make straight," which is a word play on the next vers.

12:13 "make straight paths for your feet" This may be an allusion to Pro. 4:26 in the Septuagint (LXX) or to a well known proverb using "straight paths" as an OT metaphor for righteousness.

■ **"put out of joint"** This phrase can be understood

1. in its OT sense (cf. 1 Kgs. 18:21) of a metaphor for alternating between two opinions, like the people of Israel alternating between YHWH and Ba'al
2. in Greek literature of fixing the road so that the lame will not fall and hurt themselves (cf. M. R. Vincent's *Word Studies in the New Testament*, p. 1168)

■ **"but rather be healed"** Encouraging one another leads to restoration (cf. Gal. 6:1; James 5:16).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 12:14-17

¹⁴Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; ¹⁶that *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal. ¹⁷For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance,

though he sought for it with tears.

12:14-17 this is the last warning (cf. Heb. 2:1-4; 3:7-4:11; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-17).

12:14 "Pursue peace" This is a present active imperative. In the context of

1. persecution from without
2. unbelief among friends (Jewish unbelievers with whom the believing Jews were still worshipping)
3. doubt within (the danger of "shrinking back" (cf. Heb. 10:38) this discussion of peace is very important.

There are several related passages about "peace."

1. Ps. 34:14, "seek peace, pursue it"
2. Mark 9:50, "be at peace with one another"
3. Rom. 12:18, "If possible, so as it depends on you, be at peace with all men"
4. 1 Cor. 7:15, "Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave. . .but God has called us to peace"
5. 2 Tim. 2:22, "pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart"

■ **"and the sanctification"** This term "sanctification" must relate to Heb. 12:10 and is connected to "discipline." God disciplines believers for holiness. The goal of salvation is Christlikeness.

This is not positional (instantaneous) sanctification, but experiential (progressive) sanctification. The gospel presents salvation and the Christian life in two tension-filled ways. In one sense it is a finished, free, once-for-all gift from God (indicative), but it is also a life of faith, obedience, service, and worship (imperative). Many believers emphasize one aspect to the exclusion of the other (Augustine vs. Pelagius; Calvin vs. Arminius). Believers' relationship with God begins at a point in time, a point of conviction, culminating in repentance and faith, but it must also move through time to a culmination at death or the Second Coming; faithfulness, righteousness, perseverance are important, crucial evidences of a true salvation.

Compare the following texts on sanctification.

Positional (indicative)

Acts 26:18
Romans 15:16
1 Corinthians 1:2-3; 6:11
2 Thessalonians 2:13
Hebrews 2:11; 10:10,14; 13:12
1 Peter 1:2

Progressive (imperative)

Romans 6:19
2 Cor. 7:1
Ephesians 1:4; 2:10
1 Thess. 3:13; 4:3-4,7; 5:2
1 Timothy 2:15
2 Timothy 2:21
Hebrews 12:14
1 Peter 1:15-16

■ **"without which no one will see the Lord"** This is paradoxical: (1) believers will see the Lord one day (cf. Job 19:25-27; Ps. 17:15; Matt. 5:8; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 22:4) and (2) believers cannot see the Lord now (cf. Exod.33:20; John 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 4:12).

This may refer to one's spiritual eyes, in the sense of responding to the gospel. In this context it may be metaphorical of "understanding."

12:15 "See to it" Literally "observing" (*episkopountes*) is a present active participle used in an imperatival sense. This term is built on a form of one of the terms for pastor (literally bishop, *episkopos*, cf. Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7 and of Jesus in 1 Pet. 2:25). Here it can refer to church leaders or to mature believers who should care for others. Apostasy should be confronted by maturity. This group of believers desperately needed to act in a mature way (cf. Heb. 5:11-14).

No Christian is an island (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7). Christianity is a team sport! The term "saint" is always plural

(except one time in Phil. 4:21, where it is used in a corporate sense). We are our brother's keeper. We must spare no effort to encourage one another. We are given and gifted for the health of the whole.

■ **"that no one comes short of the grace of God"** This is a present active participle used in an imperatival sense meaning "falling short of the grace of God." This word is used in Heb. 4:1 in the sense of "fail to attain," but in this verse the preposition "away" (*apo*) forms a prepositional phrase implying "a falling away from something previously possessed" (cf. Heb. 6:4-6; 10:23,38-39; 12:25). Apostasy was a real possibility in this cultural situation. See [SPECIAL TOPIC: APOSTASY \(APHISTĒMI\)](#) at Heb. 3:12.

Or, as I have maintained, there are two groups being addressed: (1) believing Jews in danger of "shrinking back" (Heb. 12:15) and (2) unbelieving Jews having clearly understood the gospel in the lives and testimonies of their believing synagogue companions, rejecting Jesus (Heb. 12:25). Whichever theory is correct, the truth remains that salvation is not a product, but a relationship. It is more than an initial response. The warnings are serious, challenging, and real. In this context it is a call to help believers in danger of "shrinking back" (cf. Heb. 10:38).

■ **"no root of bitterness"** This may be an allusion to Deut. 29:18 in the Septuagint, which warned the people of God about the dangers of idolatry, both individually and corporately. All of Israel was never right with God, but only a believing faithful remnant. The phrase "a root of bitterness" in Deuteronomy is parallel to "whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God."

■ **"and by it many be defiled"** The presence of one disgruntled person affects the whole group. Our beliefs, actions, and attitudes do influence others. What an awesome responsibility!

12:16 "Esau" He becomes a very evil person in rabbinical Judaism's traditions (cf. *Jubilees* 25:1,8 and *Genesis Rabba* 70d,72a). This context, however, uses him because he knew God's promises but did not act on them.

12:17 "the blessing" The patriarchal blessing could not be recalled. This involves the Hebrew concept of the power of the spoken word (cf. Genesis 1 and Isa. 55:10-12).

■ **"for he found no place for repentance"** In its OT context this refers to his sorrow after Isaac, his father, blessed his younger brother, Jacob, and the blessing could not be recalled. The author uses this as a warning to the recipients of the letter. He wants them to make a decision for Christ now while there is time and then to persevere in that new relationship with Christ because there is no second chance (cf. Heb. 6:6; 10:26).

[SPECIAL TOPIC: REPENTANCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT](#)

■ **"with tears"** This is from Gen. 27:34 and 38.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 12:18-24

¹⁸For you have not come to a *mountain* that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, ¹⁹and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. ²⁰For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." ²¹And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling." ²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, ²³to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, ²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood of Abel*.

12:18-21 This section is a description of the giving of the Mosaic Law on Mt. Sinai (cf. Exod.19:16-25; Deut. 4:11-14).

■ **"to darkness and gloom"** This is possibly an allusion to Deut. 5:22.

12:19 "blast of a trumpet" God's voice sounded like a trumpet (cf. Exod.19:16,19; 20:18)

■ **"who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them"** YHWH's awesome power on Mt. Sinai frightened the people (cf. Exod.20:19; Deut. 5:22-27; 18:16).

12:20 "if even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned" This is a third class conditional sentence. It is another allusion to the awesome holiness of God descending on Mt. Sinai (cf. Exod.19:12-13).

12:21 "I am full of fear and trembling" This is a quote from Deut. 9:19 which refers to Aaron's golden calf. Rabbinical hermeneutics used this phrase for Moses' fear of God at Mt. Sinai.

12:22 "But you have come" This is a strong contrast. These believing readers are not trusting in a Sinaitic covenant, but in a new covenant, a heavenly Jerusalem, a new Mt. Zion, a new city. In Gal. 4:21-31 Paul uses the same type of analogy using two OT mountains (Mt. Sinai versus Mt. Zion).

■ **"Mount Zion"** The author is comparing the first covenant at Mt. Sinai to the new covenant with the new heavenly city (cf. Heb. 11:10,16; 13:14; Rev. 3:12; 21:2,10).

■ **"of the living God"** This is a play on the covenant name for God, YHWH, which is a form of the Hebrew verb "to be." YHWH is the ever-living, only-living One. In the OT He swears by Himself, "the living God." See Special Topic: Names for Deity at Heb. 2:7.

12:23 "church of the firstborn" Because of Exod. 4:22 some commentators understand the references to OT Israelites, but context demands that it be understood as all the people of faith (cf. Heb. 11:40). The "first born" is a reference to Christ, "the first born"

1. of many brothers (the image of God, Rom. 8:29)
2. of all creation (the image of God, Col. 1:15)
3. of the dead (Col. 1:18 and 1 Cor. 15:20,23 [first fruits])

Look at all the ways the new covenant is designated in this paragraph.

1. Mt. Zion
2. the city of the living God
3. the heavenly Jerusalem
4. myriads of angels

For "church" see Special Topic at Heb. 2:12. For "firstborn" see Special Topic at Heb. 1:6.

■ **"enrolled"** The Bible speaks of two books of God (cf. Dan. 7:10 and Rev. 20:12). One is the book of life (cf. Exod.32:32; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Luke10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27). The other is the book of remembrances (cf. Ps. 56:8; 139:16; Isa. 65:6; Mal. 3:16). The first is for believers, the second for both (cf. Rev. 14:13). These are metaphors for the memory of God. See [Special Topic: The Two Books of God](#).

■ **"to God, the Judge of all"** The OT regularly depicts God as Judge (cf. Gen. 18:25; Ps. 50:6; 96:13; 98:9; Isa. 2:4; 51:5; Jer. 11:20; Lam. 3:59; Ezek. 7:3,27). The coming Messiah is also depicted as Judge (cf. Isa. 11:3-4; 16:5). The Father has placed all judgment in the Son's hands (cf. John 5:22-23,27; 9:39; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5).

■ **"to the spirit of the righteous made perfect"** This is a perfect passive participle, implying "made

perfect by God and the results continue." Because of Heb. 11:40 this may refer to the OT saints of chapter 11 and all believers before Christ's coming.

For "perfect" see note at Heb. 10:1.

12:24 "Jesus the Mediator" Jesus, the high priest and sacrifice (1) stands before the Father for us and (2) brings a better covenant (cf. Heb. 7:22; 8:6,9-10; 9:15; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-36).

■ **"to the sprinkled blood"** This was the way OT covenants were inaugurated (cf. Heb. 9:19; 10:22; 1 Pet. 1:2).

■ **"better"** See full note at Heb. 7:7.

■ **"blood of Abel"** Abel's blood cried out for vengeance; Jesus' blood cries for mercy, forgiveness, and love.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 12:25-29

²⁵See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *will we escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven. ²⁶And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." ²⁷This *expression*, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire.

12:25 "See to it" This is a present active imperative. This is a different Greek word than the one used in Heb. 12:15. This same warning is found in Heb. 3:12. After being enlightened by the superiority of the new covenant in Christ, it is crucial that one respond appropriately. There is danger (for both the unbeliever and the believer) in knowing truth and not acting on it.

■ **"that you do not refuse Him"** This is one of the two main warnings. The other being, "do not shrink back." This is an aorist middle (deponent) subjunctive. We must make a volitional decision. What will you do with Jesus, the author and finisher of the faith?

■ **"if"** This is a first class conditional sentence which is assumed to be true from the author's point of view or for his literary purposes. Again, the awesome responsibility of rejecting a superior covenant and person is the focus of the comment.

12:26 "His voice shook the earth" This is a reference to the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai mentioned earlier in this chapter (cf. Exod. 19:18-19), but it is a paraphrase from the Septuagint of Haggai 2:6. This prophecy speaks of a new shaking of the heavens and earth connected to the new post-exilic temple (cf. Hag. 2:6-9). The new temple will receive glory. The new temple will be better than the first. The new temple will bring peace. These descriptions foreshadow the new covenant in Jesus.

12:27 "Yet once more" This world is passing away. I do think God is going to recreate it (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10) much like it is, but without the curse of Gen. 3:14,17; Zech. 14:11; Rev. 22:3. The Bible starts with God, man, and the animals (cf. Isa. 11:6-9) in a garden setting (cf. Gen. 1-2) and it also ends the same way (cf. Rev. 21-22).

12:28 "a kingdom which cannot be shaken" This refers to the spiritual nature of the new covenant. It is the last and permanent covenant between God and His people.

▣ **"let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe"** This describes the appropriate response of the new covenant believers: a life of service because of gratitude for the matchless grace of the Triune God (cf. Heb. 13:15,21; Rom. 12:1-2). We were saved to serve, to serve the family of faith (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:12).

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

12:29 "a consuming fire" This may be a reference to Mt. Sinai (cf. Deut. 4:24). We dare not forget to Whom it is we are responding (cf. Heb. 10:31). Fire can cleanse and purify or totally destroy. He will be our heavenly Father or He will be our Judge from heaven. What we do and continue to do with Jesus is the determiner. Believe! Hang in there!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. List the attributes of the men of chapter 11 and 12:18-29 that we should emulate.
2. Does verse 1 teach that the dead view the lives of the living?
3. Why does the author use so many athletic metaphors in this chapter?
4. What was the purpose of this chapter in relation to the entire book?
5. What is God's ultimate purpose for our lives? (Heb. 12:10,28)

HEBREWS 13

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Service Well-Pleasing to God	Concluding Moral Directions	Concluding Admonitions	How to Please God	Final Recommendations
13:1-6	13:1-6	13:1-6	13:1-3 13:4 13:5-6	13:1-6
13:7-16	13:7-17 Concluding Religious Directions	13:7-16	13:7-9 13:10-16	13:7-16 Obedience to Religious Leaders
13:17		13:17	13:17	13:17-19
13:18-19	Prayer Requested 13:18-19	Personal Messages 13:18-19	13:18-19	
Benediction and Final Greetings	Benediction, Final Exhortation, Farewell	Benediction	Closing Prayer	News, Good Wishes and Greetings
13:20-21	13:20-25	13:20-21 Postscript	13:20-21 Final Words	13:20-21
13:22-25		13:22-25	13:22-23 13:24 13:25	13:22 13:23-25

READING CYCLE THREE (from "[A Guide to Good Bible Reading](#)")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired but it is the key to following the original author's intent which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Several things do not fit the "supposed" historical setting.
 - 1. Christian leaders
 - 2. Admonishment apparently to pagans, not Jews
- B. This last chapter has several Pauline features.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 13:1-6

¹Let love of the brethren continue. ²Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. ⁴Marriage *is to be held* in honor among all, and the *marriage* bed *is to be* undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. ⁵Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you, ⁶"so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?"

13:1

NASB	"Let love of the brethren continue"
NKJV	"Let brotherly love continue"
NRSV	"Let mutual love continue"
TEV	"Keep on loving one another as Christians"
NJB	"Continue to love one another like brothers"

This is a present active imperative (not a subjunctive, as NASB translates), meaning "abide" or "continue." The thing the readers are to continue is "brotherly love" (*philadelphia*, cf. Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 Pet. 3:8). They have done this in the past (cf. Heb. 6:10; 10:32-35) and are encouraged to continue. It is a clear sign that one knows God (cf. John 13:34-45; 15:12,17; 1 John 2:10; 3:11,14,17-24; 4:7-21; 2 John 5, see [Special Topic: "Abiding" in John's Writings.](#)).

There are several *philoō* compounds.

1. brother love, Heb. 13:1
2. stranger love, Heb. 13:2
3. money love, Heb. 13:5

13:2 "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers" This is a present middle (deponent) imperative. It is a compound of "*phileō*" and "stranger" i.e., "love of strangers." There were no motels in those days except immoral inns and they were very expensive. Christians are called on to open their homes to itinerant ministers (cf. Matt. 25:35; Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:9; 2 John; Didache 11:4-6).

▣ **"entertained angels without knowing it"** This is an allusion to Genesis 18, where Abraham meets three angels who looked like men (cf. also *Tobit* chapters 4-7). Angels also appeared to Gideon (Judges 6); Manoah (Judges 13); Lot (Genesis 19); Hagar (Genesis 21). This does not mean that Christians may have angels visit; as men of old helped strangers and received a blessing, so too, are believers to do.

13:3 "Remember the prisoners" This is a present middle (deponent) imperative. These readers had

followed Christ's words of Matt. 25:44-45, for in Heb. 10:32-36 they had helped other believers. Their imprisonment was not for evil deeds, but for their faith in Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 4:14-15). Imprisonment was a real possibility for all early believers, as it is for many believers in today's world also.

■ **"since you yourselves also are in the body"** This could refer to (1) the physical body (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2, same Greek structure), susceptible to persecution and imprisonment or (2) the body of Christ (although the text does not have the expected Greek article), the Church, which was the object of persecution.

13:4 "Marriage is to be held in honor among all" There is no verb. If one supplies an indicative, "is," then the statement is against false teaching (cf. 1 Cor. 7:38, which made marriage morally inferior to celibacy or 1 Tim. 4:3). If one supplies an imperative, "Let. . .be. . .," as in NASB of Heb. 13:1, then it is an encouragement against the immoral tendencies of pagan culture (Heb. 13:4 favors this option).

■ **"the marriage bed is to be undefiled"** Marriage is a gift from God and the norm for all (cf. Gen. 1:28; 9:1,7). It is not sinful or shameful. The Greek philosophical concept of asceticism, the view that the body is evil and that to deny its wants and needs show a superior spirituality, affected the early church! And still does! The term "undefiled" is used in Heb. 7:26 to describe the sexual purity of Jesus, our high priest. It was used in the Septuagint to refer to adultery.

This warning against sexual promiscuity is surprising if this book is written to Jewish people. The Gentile culture of the first century was characterized by sexual exploitation, but not the Jewish community. There is so much about the historical setting and recipients of Hebrews that is uncertain.

■ **"fornicators"** The term in the OT means sexual relations between two unmarried people, but in the NT it has the wider connotation of sexual immorality of any kind. We get the English word "pornography" from this Greek term.

■ **"adulterers"** This refers to sexual relations between people, one or both of whom are married to other people. Sexual sins were a major concern of the early church because of the rampant immorality and worship practices of pagan culture (cf. Gal. 5:19-21).

■ **"God will judge"** God's judgment of improper human sexuality can be seen in Rom. 1:24-32; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:19; Col. 3:5; Rev. 21:8; 22:15. However, there are other passages like 1 Cor. 5:5 and 1 Tim. 1:9-11, which relate to believers who commit these immoral acts. The early church had to face immorality in the lives of believers and try to draw some guidelines.

1. they need to repent
2. other believers are to help them (cf. Gal. 6:1; James 5:16,19-20)
3. believers are not to be "best" friends with immoral believers (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-13).

The Christian witness of morality, strong marriages, hospitality, and brotherly love are as crucial today as in the first century.

13:5

NASB	"Make sure that your character is free from the love of money"
NKJV	"Let your conduct be without covetousness"
NRSV, TEV	"keep your lives free from the love of money"
NJB	"Put avarice out of your lives"

There is no verb, again an imperative is implied. The noun is a compound of

1. an alpha privative
2. *phileō* (the third compound with *phileō* since Heb. 13:1), to love
3. a silver coin

It means "not a lover of money." The problem is not the money, but the love of money (cf. Luke 12:15; 16:14; 1 Tim. 3:3; 6:10,17-19; 2 Tim. 3:2).

▣ **"being content with what you have"** This is a present passive participle used in an imperatival sense. This is a key issue for happiness. It is a worldview that does not focus on the physical and the immediate. Contentment is a wonderful gift from God that must be accepted by faith and lived out daily (cf. 2 Cor. 9:8; Phil. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 6:6-10).

▣ **"I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you"** This is a loose quote with two emphatic double negatives, taken from God's promises to His leaders and people. God is with us and for us (cf. Deut. 31:6-7; Jos. 1:5; 1 Chr. 28:20; Isa. 41:10,13,14,17). Believers do not have to fear for daily provisions (cf. Matt. 6:19-34).

13:6 "The Lord" This is a quote from the Septuagint of Ps. 118:6, but this same truth is also found in Psalm 56:4,11.

▣ **"The Lord is my helper"** Psalm 118 is a powerful word of confidence in God's love, forgiveness, presence, and help.

The noun "helper" is used only here in the NT (but the verb is in Heb. 2:18), but is used often in the LXX. It means "to give aid," "to come to one's rescue."

▣ **"What will man do to me"** This great truth (cf. Ps. 56:4,11; 118:6) is also stated in slightly different terms in Rom. 8:31b and then illustrated in Heb. 8:32-39.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 13:7-16

⁷Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. ⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ⁹Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefitted. ¹⁰We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. ¹¹For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. ¹²Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. ¹³So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come. ¹⁵Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. ¹⁶And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

13:7 "Remember" This is a present active imperative. The implication is to pray for the leaders and honor them! This is a different, but similar, word from Heb. 13:3. Believers need to be conscious of the need for praying for and honoring their leaders' loving service to the body of Christ (cf. Heb. 13:3) and her leaders (cf. Heb. 13:7,17,24; 1 Thess. 5:12-13).

▣ **"those who led you"** Verses 17 and 24 deal with current leaders, so Heb. 13:7 must refer to those leaders who first preached the gospel, but are now dead.

▣ **"who spoke the word of God to you"** This is the task of Christian leaders. They do not teach or preach their discoveries or personal/cultural preferences, but the gospel of Jesus Christ. For this we honor them, respect them, and pray for them.

▣ **"considering the result of their conduct"** This is a present active participle used as an imperative. These leaders, like those in the roll call of the faithful in chapter 11, remained faithful during life and until death. Their lives witnessed to the validity of their messages.

▣ **"imitate their faith"** This is a present middle (deponent) imperative. Our author is calling on his readers to mimic the faith of their leaders. Paul often encourages believers to imitate his faith (cf. 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1-2; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7,9).

13:8 "Jesus. . .same" The OT characters of chapter 11 were good examples; the former and current leaders were good examples; Christ is our supreme example. His character and faithfulness never change (cf. Ps. 102:26-27, quoted in Heb. 1:12). This same theological statement is made concerning YHWH in Mal. 3:6. God's character and mercy are constant and, so too, are Jesus Christ's.

13:9 "Do not be carried away" This is a present passive imperative with a negative particle which usually means to stop an act already in process. Some of the hearers were contemplating "shrinking back" (cf. Heb. 2:1; 10:38). The passive voice implies the activity of Satan or the demonic.

▣ **"by varied and strange teachings"** Exactly what this involved is uncertain, but a similar combination of Jewish and pagan practices is condemned in Col. 2:16-23.

It almost seems to me that parts of chapter 13 are a Pauline close added to a letter to a synagogue. Parts of this chapter (i.e., Heb. 13:4-5) fit a mixed-church setting, not a synagogue.

NASB	"for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace"
NKJV	"For <i>it is</i> good that the heart be established by grace"
NRSV	"for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace"
TEV	"It is good to receive inner strength from God's grace"
NJB	"it is better to rely on grace for inner strength"

This is a present passive infinitive. These hearers need to be firmly established, not on ritual, animal sacrifice or food laws, but on the undeserved, unmerited grace of God in Jesus Christ (i.e., the gospel, cf. Heb. 13:7). They were vacillating between Moses and Jesus. Jesus, the unchanging Word of the Father, is far superior to the procedures and words of the first covenant.

Understanding God's unchanging character and love, so clearly expressed in the life, teaching, and death of Jesus (the gospel), is what gives believers encouragement. Believers' hearts and minds are strengthened through a knowledge of the gospel and a personal relationship with the Great Shepherd, not through external rituals and procedures (the old Mosaic covenant).

This author often addresses the spiritual issue of the "heart" (see Special Topic at Heb. 3:8). He quotes several OT texts.

1. Heb. 3:8,15; 4:7, "do not harden your hearts" (Ps. 95:8)
2. Heb. 3:10, "go astray in their hearts" (Ps. 95:10)
3. Heb. 8:10, "write them upon their hearts" (Jer. 31:33)

He then summarizes these truths in Heb. 3:12; 4:12, and 10:22. The heart represents the mental, emotional, and volitional aspects of mankind. Christianity deals with the internal needs of fallen humanity, whereas Judaism could not.

▣ **"heart"** See Special Topic at Heb. 3:8.

▣ **"not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefitted"** This is an obvious reference to Leviticus 11. The food laws had passed away in Christ (cf. Matt. 15:11; Mark 7:18-23; Acts 10; Col. 2:16-23). They were no longer binding on believers for salvation (cf. Galatians 3; Acts 15), but in a church setting, believers were still to be conscious of "weaker brothers" (cf. Acts 15:19-20; Rom. 14:1-15:6; 1 Corinthians 8; 10:23-33) and to try not to offend their weak consciences.

13:10 "We have an altar" The analogy seems to be a spiritual (heavenly) tabernacle, not a physical altar and, therefore, it refers to Jesus' sacrificial work on behalf of believers. It is a powerful metaphor of our access to God through Christ.

■ **"no right to eat"** This is another allusion to Leviticus 16.

13:11 "as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp" This is another allusion to the procedures of Lev. 16:27 — the Day of Atonement.

13:12 "Jesus. . .suffered outside the gate" This is a rabbinic word play as the OT sacrifices were taken outside of the camp, Jesus was taken outside the city of Jerusalem to be crucified.

13:13 "So, let us go out to Him" This is a key verse in the book. It is a present middle (deponent) subjunctive, which speaks of continuous action and adds an element of contingency (this is the final admonition and warning against "shrinking back"). Believers need to publicly identify with Him and bear His reproach regardless of the consequences. This is the clear call for these "sheltered" synagogue believers to move into the full light of Great Commission Christianity (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8).

13:14 "the city" This is a metaphor for heaven using the Israelite capital of the Promised Land (cf. Heb. 11:10,16; 12:22; John 14:2). This same type of metaphor is seen in Heb. 11:14, "a country."

13:15 "through Him" This refers to Jesus, mentioned by name in Heb. 13:12, who sanctified His people by the sacrifice of His own blood outside the gate of Jerusalem. All spiritual benefits come through Him!

■ **"let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise"** This is a present active subjunctive. The sacrificial system, given to Israel to promote fellowship with God by dealing with the sin problem, involved five types of sacrifices.

- A. Two were mandatory
 - 1. the "sin offering"
 - 2. the "trespass or guilt" offering
- B. Three were voluntary
 - 1. wholly burnt offering
 - 2. grain/meal offering
 - 3. fellowship, or peace, offering

It is in connection with these last three that the concept of thanksgiving and praise are mentioned (cf. Lev. 7:12). These sacrifices are described in detail in Leviticus 1-7. The Psalms mention this aspect of adoration often (cf. Ps. 27:6;50:14; 69:30; 107:22; 116:17). The phrase "sacrifice of praise" comes from the Septuagint (cf. Lev. 7:2,3,5; 2 Chr. 29:31; 33:16; Ps.49:14,23; 106:22).

■ **"the fruit of lips"** This phrase reflects Isa. 57:19 and Hosea 14:3 from the Septuagint. Passages like this were used by the Israelites in exile to substitute verbal praise in place of animal sacrifices because the Temple had been totally destroyed in 586 b.c. by Nebuchadnezzar II, the neo-Babylonian king. It was destroyed again by Rome in a.d. 70. The date of the writing of this book is uncertain.

NASB	"that give thanks to His name"
NKJV	"giving thanks to His name"
NRSV	"that confess his name"
TEV	"that confess him as Lord"
NJB	"those who acknowledge his name"

For believers our praise to God is our confession (*homologēō*) of Jesus (using His name as in Matt. 28:19-20 or Rom. 10:9-13) as Lord (cf. TEV, which reflects Phil. 2:6-11).

13:16 "and do not neglect doing good" This is a present middle imperative with a negative particle, which usually means to stop an act in progress. God is pleased when His children love and help each other (cf. Phil. 4:18).

In a Jewish context this "good things" (*koinōnia*) probably refers to almsgiving (cf. Matt. 6:1), a weekly

gift of money given by members of the synagogue to purchase food for the needy. The Jews considered this an act of righteousness.

■ **"sharing"**

SPECIAL TOPIC: KOINŌNIA

■ **"for with such sacrifices God is pleased"** Notice in Heb. 13:15 the acceptable sacrifice was professed faith in Christ; now it is Christlike living. The gospel is surely both!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 13:17

¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

13:17 "Obey. . .submit" This is a present passive (A. T. Robertson lists it as a middle voice) imperative and present active imperative. Although individuals are free in Christ we must yield ourselves to spiritual authority for growth and service (cf. Heb. 13:7; 1 Cor. 16:16; 1 Thess. 5:12-13).

This word of encouragement to submit to Christian leaders is much needed in our day of disrespect for authority of any kind, and an overemphasis on the rights and powers of the individual. God has placed some as leaders among His people (note Num. 16:3-5). We honor them because of their call, training, commitment, and service. However, there is an opposite "ditch." God's calling has been abused by some authoritarian personalities. There must be a balance, a mutual respect, a co-operative spirit between God's people and God's leaders. All believers are called to be subject to one another out of respect for Christ (cf. Eph. 5:21).

■ **"they keep watch"** This term means "to be awake," "to be vigilant" (cf. Mark 13:33; Luke 21:36; Eph. 6:18), which is a metaphor for diligent watchfulness and service (cf. Isa. 62:6; Ezek. 3:17; 33:7-9).

■ **"as those who will give an account"** Leaders are responsible for their ministry and will give an account to God (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15). They are stewards!

■ **"Let them do this with joy and not with grief"** The attitude of the congregation does not determine the ministry, but it does make the process enjoyable or painful.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 13:18-19

¹⁸Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. ¹⁹And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.

13:18 "Pray for us" Prayer by leadership and for leadership is crucial (cf. Eph. 6:18-19; Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:25; 1 Tim. 2:1-2,8). The plural may refer to a ministry group including Timothy (cf. Heb. 13:23).

■ **"for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things"** Attitude and lifestyle set the foundation for leadership. The author of Hebrews has mentioned the "conscience" several times (cf. Heb. 9:9,14; 10:2,22; 13:18). The power of Jesus' redemption and the indwelling Spirit has removed the fear of God and shame of past sins and replaced them with a joy, peace, confidence, not in human performance, but in the gospel! This knowledge of the gospel is the helmet of salvation (cf. Eph. 6:17; 1 Thess. 5:8).

Some commentators have seen this verse as relating to some type of accusations being leveled at the author (similar to Paul's situation in 1 Corinthians and Galatians).

13:19 This is a rather cryptic verse. Somehow the author's coming was related to their prayers. This

sounds so much like Paul (cf. Philemon 22). Prayer releases God's effective power for ministry. Believers' prayers affect God and others.

Some commentators (e.g., H. E. Dana's *Jewish Christianity*, p. 268) have assumed this refers to the author's sickness, or even imprisonment (the term "sooner" is also used of Timothy in Heb. 13:23).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 13:20-21

²⁰Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, ²¹equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

13:20 "Now the God of peace" This title for God the Father is used only here and in Paul's writings (cf. Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; "Lord of Peace" 2 Thess. 3:16).

■ **"who brought up from the dead"** The NT normally depicts God the Father as raising Jesus from the dead (cf. Acts 2:24; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30,33,34,37; 17:31; Rom. 6:4,9; 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10). This shows the Father's acceptance of Jesus' life, teachings, and sacrifice. However, there are other texts which assert the agency of the resurrection was the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:11) or the Son Himself (cf. John 2:19-22; 10:17-18). Theologically speaking, all three persons of the Trinity are active in all the redemptive acts.

■ **"the great Shepherd"** The term "shepherd" is an OT metaphor for

1. YHWH (cf. Gen. 49:24; Ps. 23:1; 78:52; 80:1; Eccl. 12:11; Isa. 40:11; 63:11; Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 34)
2. the leadership of His people (cf. Jer. 10:21; 50:6-7; Ezek. 34:2-3; Zech. 11:3,5,15,17)
3. the coming Messiah, son of David (cf. Ps. 78:70-72; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24; Micah 5:4; 7:14; Zech. 13:7; John 10:2,11,14; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4)

Several times in the OT (cf. Num. 27:17; 1 Kgs. 22:17; 2 Chr. 18:16; Ezek. 34:5; Zech. 10:2) God's people are described as scattered and without a shepherd, but now the Great Shepherd has come. He has delivered us and is with us!

■ **"through the blood"** This refers to His life given which inaugurated the new covenant (cf. Zech. 9:11; Mark 14:24; 1 Cor. 11:25).

■ **"the eternal covenant"** It is difficult to sort out the different "eternal" covenants because, as Hebrews shows, the Mosaic covenant was conditional and because of human weakness, not eternal. The OT records conditional and unconditional covenants (i.e., the Exodus, Gen. 15:17-21). The covenant with Abraham, whereby all the nations would be blessed, is unconditional (i.e., everlasting covenant), and thereby, eternal (cf. Genesis 17:7,13,19; Psalm 105:9-10). The covenant with David, first revealed in 2 Samuel 7, is a foreshadowing of the Messiah, son of David, which is unconditional, and thereby, eternal (cf. Ps. 89:3-4). The new covenant is mentioned as a promised new day of righteousness (new age of the Spirit) for God's people (cf. Isa. 55:3; 59:21; 61:8; Jer. 31:33; 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 16:60; 37:26). One can see how the Jews of Jesus' day were shocked at His message. He had always been God's plan of redemption, but the failure of Israel to keep God's law given to Moses showed the need of another way of salvation than human performance (cf. Galatians 3). See [SPECIAL TOPIC: ETERNAL](#) at Heb. 6:2.

[SPECIAL TOPIC: FOREVER \('OLAM\)](#)

13:21

NASB	"equip you in every good thing"
NKJV	"make you complete in every good work"
NRSV	"make you complete in everything good"
TEV	"provide you with every good thing"

NJB "prepare you. . .in every kind of good action"

This verb (*katartizō*, a rare aorist active optative, which is an expressed wish or desire) means to make someone or something completely adequate, sufficient, or fully qualified (cf. Luke 6:40; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 3:10; 1 Pet. 5:10). Theologically this is parallel to Eph. 2:10. God's will is that believers are conformed to the image of Jesus (cf. Rom. 8:29), resulting in godly living which attracts the lost to Christ.

■ **"to do His will"** Jesus did the Father's will in coming as the Suffering Servant (cf. Heb. 10:7). Now His followers are called on to also do His will (cf. Heb. 10:36).

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE WILL (*thelēma*) OF GOD

■ **"to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen"** This phrase, so common in Paul's and Peter's writings, is ambiguous. Sometimes it refers to God the Father (cf. Rom. 11:36; Eph. 3:21; 1 Pet. 4:11; 5:11; Jude 25; Rev. 1:6; 7:12), sometimes to Jesus the Son (cf. 2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Pet. 3:18) and sometimes to both (cf. Rom. 16:27; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 5:13 and here). Often NT authors use the same titles, actions, and phrases to describe both the Father and the Son as a way of asserting the equality and deity of Jesus of Nazareth.

■ **"Amen"** The original Hebrew term meant "to be firm." This developed into the metaphorical sense of faithfulness, dependability, and trustworthiness (cf. Hab. 2:4). It came to be used in the sense of "I affirm" or "I agree with" a particular statement.

SPECIAL TOPIC: AMEN

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 13:22-24

²²But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. ²³Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. ²⁴Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

13:22-24 The closing verses, 22-24, are similar to the way Paul closes his letters penned by a scribe, where he takes the pen and adds a small personal note and blessing.

13:22 "I urge you" The author calls his book "a word of exhortation." He urges his readers often (cf. Heb. 3:13; 10:25; 12:15; 13:15,22). They are brothers (and sisters) in Christ, but they must cling to Him, follow Him, serve Him!

■ **"bear with this word of exhortation"** This is a present middle imperative, which emphasizes the involvement of the subject and commands continual listening. The phrase "word of exhortation" is used in Acts 13:15 for a synagogue sermon. Many believe this is what Hebrews originally was, but was modified to become a letter.

13:23 "brother Timothy" When Paul uses "brother," the person's name always comes first (cf. Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:1; 16:12; 2 Cor. 1:1; 2:13; Phil. 2:25). This is a key evidence against Paul's authorship. The mentioning of Timothy reveals a time frame for the book's composition, during Paul's lifetime or soon after his death (a.d. 68), before Timothy's death.

■ **"has been released"** This is a perfect passive participle. We know nothing from Scriptures or elsewhere of Timothy being in prison. In his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, p. 451, A. T. Robertson asserts that Timothy was put in prison when he came to visit Paul, mentioned in 2 Tim. 4:11,21. The word "released" (perfect passive participle) is used in (1) Matt. 27:15; John 19:10; Acts 3:13; 4:21,23; 5:40 for release from prison and (2) Acts 13:3, metaphorically for a release from a ministry assignment, and it may

mean that here.

■ **"if he comes soon, I will see you"** This may imply that the author of Hebrews worked and traveled with Timothy.

13:24 "saints" See Special Topic at Heb. 6:10.

■ **"those from Italy greet you"** This phrase could mean

1. the author is in Italy
2. the author is from Italy
3. part of the author's missionary team was from Italy
4. the author is writing to Italy

In *Jewish Christianity*, H. A. Dana says that this verse implies that the letter was written to the Jewish faction of the church at Rome. The first mention of the book of Hebrews was by Clement of Rome about a.d. 97 (p. 270). However, I think it was sent to a Jewish synagogue (possibly in Rome) that had believers as members. The warnings are directed to two groups, the believing Jewish group (the "you" of chapter 6), for them not to "shrink back" (cf. Heb. 10:38) and to the unbelieving group (the "those" of chapter 6) to profess/confess Jesus as the Messiah and for both groups to fully embrace Christianity.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: HEBREWS 13:25

²⁵Grace be with you all.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. If Hebrews is a letter, which appears certain from chapter 13, why is there no opening greeting?
2. Does chapter 13 reflect the Jewish unbelievers or false teachers?
3. What does this chapter say about Christian "leaders"?
4. How does verse 23 date the book of Hebrews?

BRIEF DEFINITIONS OF GREEK GRAMMATICAL TERMS

Koine Greek, often called Hellenistic Greek, was the common language of the Mediterranean world beginning with Alexander the Great's (336-323 b.c..) conquest and lasting about eight hundred years (300 b.c.-a.d. 500). It was not just a simplified, classical Greek, but in many ways a newer form of Greek that became the second language of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean world.

The Greek of the New Testament was unique in some ways because its users, except Luke and the author of Hebrews, probably used Aramaic as their primary language. Therefore, their writing was influenced by the idioms and structural forms of Aramaic. Also, they read and quoted the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) which was also written in Koine Greek. But the Septuagint was also written by Jewish scholars whose mother tongue was not Greek.

This serves as a reminder that we cannot push the New Testament into a tight grammatical structure. It is unique and yet has much in common with (1) the Septuagint; (2) Jewish writings such as those of Josephus; and (3) the papyri found in Egypt. How then do we approach a grammatical analysis of the New Testament?

The grammatical features of Koine Greek and New Testament Koine Greek are fluid. In many ways it was a time of simplification of grammar. Context will be our major guide. Words only have meaning in a larger context, therefore, grammatical structure can only be understood in light of (1) a particular author's style; and (2) a particular context. No conclusive definitions of Greek forms and structures are possible.

Koine Greek was primarily a verbal language. Often the key to interpretation is the type and form of the verbals. In most main clauses the verb will occur first, showing its preeminence. In analyzing the Greek verb three pieces of information must be noted: (1) the basic emphasis of the tense, voice and mood (accidence or morphology); (2) the basic meaning of the particular verb (lexicography); and (3) the flow of the context (syntax).

I. TENSE

A. Tense or aspect involves the relationship of the verbs to completed action or incomplete action. This is often called "perfective" and "imperfective."

1. Perfective tenses focus on the occurrence of an action. No further information is given except that something happened! Its start, continuation or culmination is not addressed.
2. Imperfective tenses focus on the continuing process of an action. It can be described in terms of linear action, durative action, progressive action, etc.

B. Tenses can be categorized by how the author sees the action as progressing

1. It occurred = aorist
2. It occurred and the results abide = perfect
3. It was occurring in the past and the results were abiding, but not now = pluperfect
4. It is occurring = present
5. It was occurring = imperfect
6. It will occur = future

A concrete example of how these tenses help in interpretation would be the term "save." It was used in several different tenses to show both its process and culmination:

1. aorist - "saved" (cf. Rom. 8:24)
2. perfect - "have been saved and the result continues" (cf. Eph. 2:5,8)
3. present - "being saved" (cf. I Cor. 1:18; 15:2)
4. future - "shall be saved" (cf. Rom. 5:9, 10; 10:9)

C. In focusing on verb tenses, interpreters look for the reason the original author chose to express

himself in a certain tense. The standard "no frills" tense was the aorist. It was the regular "unspecific," "unmarked," or "unflagged" verb form. It can be used in a wide variety of ways which the context must specify. It simply was stating that something occurred. The past time aspect is only intended in the indicative mood. If any other tense was used, something more specific was being emphasized. But what?

1. perfect tense. This speaks of a completed action with abiding results. In some ways it was a combination of the aorist and present tenses. Usually the focus is on the abiding results or the completion of an act (example: Eph. 2:5 & 8, "you have been and continue to be saved").
2. pluperfect tense. This was like the perfect except the abiding results have ceased. Example: John 18:16 "Peter was standing at the door outside."
3. present tense. This speaks of an incomplete or imperfect action. The focus is usually on the continuation of the event. Example: I John 3:6 & 9, "Everyone abiding in Him does not continue sinning." "Everyone having been begotten of God does not continue to commit sin."
4. imperfect tense. In this tense the relationship to the present tense is analogous to the relationship between the perfect and the pluperfect. The imperfect speaks of incomplete action that was occurring but has now ceased or the beginning of an action in the past. Example: Matt. 3:5, "then all Jerusalem were continuing to go out to him" or "then all Jerusalem began to go out to him."
5. future tense. This speaks of an action that was usually projected into a future time frame. It focused on the potential for an occurrence rather than an actual occurrence. It often speaks of the certainty of the event. Example: Matt. 5:4-9, "Blessed are . . . they will . . ."

II. VOICE

- A. Voice describes the relationship between the action of the verb and its subject.
- B. Active voice was the normal, expected, unemphasized way to assert that the subject was performing the action of the verb.
- C. The passive voice means that the subject was receiving the action of the verb produced by an outside agent. The outside agent producing the action was indicated in the Greek NT by the following prepositions and cases:
 1. a personal direct agent by *hupo* with the ablative case (cf. Matt. 1:22; Acts 22:30).
 2. a personal intermediate agent by *dia* with the ablative case (cf. Matt. 1:22).
 3. an impersonal agent usually by *en* with the instrumental case.
 4. sometimes either a personal or impersonal agent by the instrumental case alone.
- D. The middle voice means that the subject produces the action of the verb and is also directly involved in the action of the verb. It is often called the voice of heightened personal interest. This construction emphasized the subject of the clause or sentence in some way. This construction is not found in English. It has a wide possibility of meanings and translations in Greek. Some examples of the form are:
 1. reflexive - the direct action of the subject on itself. Example: Matt. 27:5 "hanged himself."
 2. intensive - the subject produces the action for itself. Example: II Cor. 11:14 "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."
 3. reciprocal - the interplay of two subjects. Example: Matt. 26:4 "they counseled with one another."

III. MOOD (or "MODE")

- A. There are four moods in Koine Greek. They indicate the relation of the verb to reality, at least within the author's own mind. The moods are divided into two broad categories: that which indicated reality (indicative) and that which indicated potentiality (subjunctive, imperative and optative).
- B. The indicative mood was the normal mood for expressing action that had occurred or was occurring, at least in the author's mind. It was the only Greek mood that expressed a definite time, and even here this aspect was secondary.
- C. The subjunctive mood expressed probable future action. Something had not yet happened, but the

chances were likely that it would. It had much in common with the future indicative. The difference was that the subjunctive expresses some degree of doubt. In English this is often expressed by the terms "could," "would," "may," or "might."

- D. The optative mood expressed a wish which was theoretically possible. It was considered one step further from reality than the subjunctive. The optative expressed possibility under certain conditions. The optative was rare in the New Testament. Its most frequent usage is Paul's famous phrase, "May it never be" (KJV, "God forbid"), used fifteen times (cf. Rom. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; I Cor. 6:15; Gal. 2:17; 3:21; 6:14). Other examples are found in Luke 1:38, 20:16, Acts 8:20, and I Thess. 3:11.
- E. The imperative mood emphasized a command which was possible, but the emphasis was on the intent of the speaker. It asserted only volitional possibility and was conditioned on the choices of another. There was a special use of the imperative in prayers and 3rd person requests. These commands were found only in the present and aorist tenses in the NT.
- F. Some grammars categorize participles as another type of mood. They are very common in the Greek NT, usually defined as verbal adjectives. They are translated in conjunction with the main verb to which they relate. A wide variety was possible in translating participles. It is best to consult several English translations. *The Bible in Twenty Six Translations* published by Baker is a great help here.
- G. The aorist active indicative was the normal or "unmarked" way to record an occurrence. Any other tense, voice or mood had some specific interpretive significance that the original author wanted to communicate.

IV. For the person not familiar with Greek the following study aids will provide the needed information:

- A. Friberg, Barbara and Timothy. *Analytical Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.
- B. Marshall, Alfred. *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- C. Mounce, William D. *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.
- D. Summers, Ray. *Essentials of New Testament Greek*. Nashville: Broadman, 1950.
- E. Academically accredited Koine Greek correspondence courses are available through Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, IL.

V. NOUNS

- A. Syntactically, nouns are classified by case. Case was that inflected form of a noun that showed its relationship to the verb and other parts of the sentence. In Koine Greek many of the case functions were indicated by prepositions. Since the case form was able to identify several different relationships, the prepositions developed to give clearer separation to these possible functions.
- B. Greek cases are categorized in the following eight ways:
 1. The nominative case was used for naming and it usually was the subject of the sentence or clause. It was also used for predicate nouns and adjectives with the linking verbs "to be" or "become."
 2. The genitive case was used for description and usually assigned an attribute or quality to the word to which it was related. It answered the question, "What kind?" It was often expressed by the use of the English preposition "of."
 3. The ablative case used the same inflected form as the genitive, but it was used to describe separation. It usually denoted separation from a point in time, space, source, origin or degree. It was often expressed by the use of the English preposition "from."
 4. The dative case was used to describe personal interest. This could denote a positive or negative aspect. Often this was the indirect object. It was often expressed by the English preposition "to."
 5. The locative case was the same inflected form as the dative, but it described position or location in space, time or logical limits. It was often expressed by the English prepositions "in, on, at, among, during, by, upon, and beside."

6. The instrumental case was the same inflected form as the dative and locative cases. It expressed means or association. It was often expressed by the English prepositions, "by" or "with."
7. The accusative case was used to describe the conclusion of an action. It expressed limitation. Its main use was the direct object. It answered the question, "How far?" or "To what extent?"
8. The vocative case was used for direct address.

VI. CONJUNCTIONS AND CONNECTORS

A. Greek is a very precise language because it has so many connectives. They connect thoughts (clauses, sentences, and paragraphs). They are so common that their absence (asyndeton) is often exegetically significant. As a matter of fact, these conjunctions and connectors show the direction of the author's thought. They often are crucial in determining what exactly he is trying to communicate.

B. Here is a list of some of the conjunctions and connectors and their meanings (this information has been gleaned mostly from H. E. Dana and Julius K. Mantey's *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*).

1. Time connectors

- a. *epei, epeidē, hopote, hōs, hote, hotan* (subj.) - "when"
- b. *heōs* - "while"
- c. *hotan, epan* (subj.) - "whenever"
- d. *heōs, achri, mechri* (subj.) - "until"
- e. *priv* (infin.) - "before"
- f. *hōs* - "since," "when," "as"

2. Logical connectors

a. Purpose

- (1) *hina* (subj.), *hopōs* (subj.), *hōs* - "in order that," "that"
- (2) *hōste* (articular accusative infinitive) - "that"
- (3) *pros* (articular accusative infinitive) or *eis* (articular accusative infinitive) - "that"

b. Result (there is a close association between the grammatical forms of purpose and result)

- (1) *hōste* (infinitive, this is the most common) - "in order that," "thus"
- (2) *hiva* (subj.) - "so that"
- (3) *ara* - "so"

c. Causal or reason

- (1) *gar* (cause/effect or reason/conclusion) - "for," "because"
- (2) *dioti, hotiy* - "because"
- (3) *epei, epeidē, hōs* - "since"
- (4) *dia* (with accusative) and (with articular infin.) - "because"

d. Inferential

- (1) *ara, poinun, hōste* - "therefore"
- (2) *dio* (strongest inferential conjunction) - "on which account," "wherefore," "therefore"
- (3) *oun* - "therefore," "so," "then," "consequently"
- (4) *toinoun* - "accordingly"

e. Adversative or contrast

- (1) *alla* (strong adversative) - "but," "except"
- (2) *de* - "but," "however," "yet," "on the other hand"
- (3) *kai* - "but"
- (4) *mentoi, oun* - "however"
- (5) *plēn* - "never-the-less" (mostly in Luke)
- (6) *oun* - "however"

f. Comparison

- (1) *hōs, kathōs* (introduce comparative clauses)
- (2) *kata* (in compounds, *katho, kathoti, kathōsper, kathaper*)

- (3) *hosos* (in Hebrews)
- (4) *ē* - "than"
- g. Continuative or series
 - (1) *de* - "and," "now"
 - (2) *kai* - "and"
 - (3) *tei* - "and"
 - (4) *hina, oun* - "that"
 - (5) *oun* - "then" (in John)

3. Emphatic usages

- a. *alla* - "certainty," "yea," "in fact"
- b. *ara* - "indeed," "certainly," "really"
- c. *gar* - "but really," "certainly," "indeed"
- d. *de* - "indeed"
- e. *ean* - "even"
- f. *kai* - "even," "indeed," "really"
- g. *mentoi* - "indeed"
- h. *oun* - "really," "by all means"

VII. CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

- A. A conditional sentence is one that contains one or more conditional clauses. This grammatical structure aids interpretation because it provides the conditions, reasons or causes why the action of the main verb does or does not occur. There were four types of conditional sentences. They move from that which was assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his purpose to that which was only a wish.
- B. The first class conditional sentence expressed action or being which was assumed to be true from the writer's perspective or for his purposes even though it was expressed with an "if." In several contexts it could be translated "since" (cf. Matt. 4:3; Rom. 8:31). However, this does not mean to imply that all first classes are true to reality. Often they were used to make a point in an argument or to highlight a fallacy (cf. Matt. 12:27).
- C. The second class conditional sentence is often called "contrary to fact." It states something that was untrue to reality to make a point. Examples:
 - 1. "If He were really a prophet which He is not, He would know who and of what character the woman is who is clinging to Him, but He does not" (Luke 7:39)
 - 2. "If you really believed Moses, which you do not, you would believe me, which you do not" (John 5:46)
 - 3. "If I were still trying to be pleasing to men, which I am not, I would not be a slave of Christ at all, which I am" (Gal. 1:10)
- D. The third class speaks of possible future action. It often assumes the probability of that action. It usually implies a contingency. The action of the main verb is contingent on the action in the "if" clause. Examples from I John: 1:6-10; 2:4,6,9,15,20,21,24,29; 3:21; 4:20; 5:14,16.
- E. The fourth class is the farthest removed from possibility. It is rare in the NT. As a matter of fact, there is no complete fourth class conditional sentence in which both parts of the condition fit the definition. An example of a partial fourth class is the opening clause in I Pet. 3:14. An example of a partial fourth class in the concluding clause is Acts 8:31.

VIII. PROHIBITIONS

- A. The present imperative with *mē* particle often (but not exclusively) has the emphasis of stopping an act already in process. Some examples: "stop storing up your riches on earth. . ." (Matt. 6:19); "stop worrying about your life. . ." (Matt. 6:25); "stop offering to sin the parts of your bodies as instruments of wrongdoing. . ." (Rom. 6:13); "you must stop offending the Holy Spirit of God. . ." (Eph. 4:30); and "stop getting drunk on wine. . ." (5:18).

- B. The aorist subjunctive with *mē* particle has the emphasis of "do not even begin or start an act." Some examples: "Do not even begin to suppose that. . ." (Matt. 5:17); "never start to worry. . ." (Matt. 6:31); "you must never be ashamed. . ." (II Tim. 1:8).
- C. The double negative with the subjunctive mood is a very emphatic negation. "Never, no never" or "not under any circumstance." Some examples: "he will never, no never experience death" (John 8:51); "I will never, no, never. . ." (I Cor. 8:13).

IX. THE ARTICLE

- A. In Koine Greek the definite article "the" had a use similar to English. Its basic function was that of "a pointer," a way to draw attention to a word, name or phrase. The use varies from author to author in the New Testament. The definite article could also function
 - 1. as a contrasting device like a demonstrative pronoun;
 - 2. as a sign to refer to a previously introduced subject or person;
 - 3. as a way to identify the subject in a sentence with a linking verb. Examples: "God is Spirit" (John 4:24); "God is light" (I John 1:5); "God is love" (4:8,16).
- B. Koine Greek did not have an indefinite article like the English "a" or "an." The absence of the definite article could mean
 - 1. a focus on the characteristics or quality of something
 - 2. a focus on the category of something
- C. The NT authors varied widely as to how the article was employed.

X. WAYS OF SHOWING EMPHASIS IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT

- A. The techniques for showing emphasis vary from author to author in the New Testament. The most consistent and formal writers were Luke and the author of Hebrews.
- B. We have stated earlier that the aorist active indicative was standard and unmarked for emphasis, but any other tense, voice, or mood had interpretive significance. This is not to imply that the aorist active indicative was not often used in a significant grammatical sense. (Example: Rom. 6:10 [twice]).
- C. Word order in Koine Greek
 - 1. Koine Greek was an inflected language which was not dependent, like English, on word order. Therefore, the author could vary the normal expected order to show
 - a. what the author wanted to emphasize to the reader
 - b. what the author thought would be surprising to the reader
 - c. what the author felt deeply about
 - 2. The normal word order in Greek is still an unsettled issue. However, the supposed normal order is:
 - a. for linking verbs
 - (1) verb
 - (2) subject
 - (3) complement
 - b. for transitive verbs
 - (1) verb
 - (2) subject
 - (3) object
 - (4) indirect object
 - (5) prepositional phrase
 - c. for noun phrases
 - (1) noun
 - (2) modifier
 - (3) prepositional phrase
 - 3. Word order can be an extremely important exegetical point. Examples:
 - a. "right hand they gave to me and Barnabas of fellowship." The phrase "right hand of

- fellowship" is split and fronted to show its significance (Gal. 2:9).
 - b. "with Christ" was placed first. His death was central (Gal. 2:20).
 - c. "It was bit by bit and in many different ways" (Heb. 1:1) was placed first. It was how God revealed Himself that was being contrasted, not the fact of revelation.
- D. Usually some degree of emphasis was shown by
1. The repetition of the pronoun which was already present in the verb's inflected form. Example: "I, myself, will surely be with you. . ." (Matt. 28:20).
 2. The absence of an expected conjunction, or other connecting device between words, phrases, clauses or sentences. This is called an asyndeton ("not bound"). The connecting device was expected, so its absence would draw attention. Examples:
 - a. The Beatitudes, Matt. 5:3ff (emphasized the list)
 - b. John 14:1 (new topic)
 - c. Romans 9:1 (new section)
 - d. II Cor. 12:20 (emphasize the list)
 3. The repetition of words or phrases present in a given context. Examples: "to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:6, 12 & 14). This phrase was used to show the work of each person of the Trinity.
 4. The use of an idiom or word (sound) play between terms
 - a. euphemisms - substitute words for taboo subjects, like "sleep" for death (John 11:11-14) or "feet" for male genitalia (Ruth 3:7-8; I Sam. 24:3).
 - b. circumlocutions - substitute words for God's name, like "Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 3:2) or "a voice from heaven" (Matt. 3:17).
 - c. figures of speech
 - (1) impossible exaggerations (Matt. 3:9; 5:29-30; 19:24)
 - (2) mild over statements (Matt. 3:5; Acts 2:36)
 - (3) personifications (I Cor. 15:55)
 - (4) irony (Gal. 5:12)
 - (5) poetic passages (Phil. 2:6-11)
 - (6) sound plays between words
 - (a) "church"
 - (i) "church" (Eph. 3:21)
 - (ii) "calling" (Eph. 4:1,4)
 - (iii)"called" (Eph. 4:1,4)
 - (b) "free"
 - (i) "free woman" (Gal. 4:31)
 - (ii)"freedom" (Gal. 5:1)
 - (iii)"free" (Gal. 5:1)
 - d. idiomatic language - language which is usually cultural and language specific:
 - (1) figurative use of "food" (John 4:31-34)
 - (2) figurative use of "Temple" (John 2:19; Matt. 26:61)
 - (3) Hebrew idiom of compassion, "hate" (Gen. 29:31; Deut. 21:15; Luke 14:36; John 12:25; Rom. 9:13)
 - (4) "All" versus "many." Compare Isa. 53:6 ("all") with 53:11 & 12 ("many"). The terms are synonymous as Rom. 5:18 and 19 show.
 5. The use of a full linguistic phrase instead of a single word. Example: "The Lord Jesus Christ."
 6. The special use of *autos*
 - a. when with the article (attributive position) it was translated "same."
 - b. when without the article (predicate position) it was translated as an intensive reflexive pronoun-"himself," "herself," or "itself."
- E. The non-Greek reading Bible student can identify emphasis in several ways:
1. The use of an analytical lexicon and interlinear Greek/English text.
 2. The comparison of English translations, particularly from the differing theories of translations. Example: comparing a "word-for-word" translation (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV)

with a "dynamic equivalent" (Williams, NIV, NEB, REB, JB, NJB, TEV). A good help here would be *The Bible in Twenty-Six Translations* published by Baker.

3. The use of *The Emphasized Bible* by Joseph Bryant Rotherham (Kregel, 1994).

4. The use of a very literal translation

a. *The American Standard Version* of 1901

b. *Young's Literal Translation of the Bible* by Robert Young (Guardian Press, 1976).

The study of grammar is tedious but necessary for proper interpretation. These brief definitions, comments and examples are meant to encourage and equip non-Greek reading persons to use the grammatical notes provided in this volume. Surely these definitions are oversimplified. They should not be used in a dogmatic, inflexible manner, but as stepping stones toward a greater understanding of New Testament syntax. Hopefully these definitions will also enable readers to understand the comments of other study aids such as technical commentaries on the New Testament.

We must be able to verify our interpretation based on items of information found in the texts of the Bible. Grammar is one of the most helpful of these items; other items would include historical setting, literary context, contemporary word usage, and parallel passages.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

This subject will be dealt with in such a way as to explain the textual notes found in this commentary. The following outline will be utilized

- I. The textual sources of our English Bible
 - A. Old Testament
 - B. New Testament
- II. Brief explanation of the problems and theories of "lower criticism" also called "textual criticism."
- III. Suggested sources for further reading

I. The textual sources of our English Bible

A. Old Testament

1. Masoretic text (MT) - The Hebrew consonantal text was set by Rabbi Aquiba in a.d. 100. The vowel points, accents, marginal notes, punctuation and apparatus points started being added in the sixth century a.d. and were finished in the ninth century a.d. It was done by a family of Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes. The textual form they used was the same as the one in the Mishnah, Talmud, Targums, Peshitta, and Vulgate.
2. Septuagint (LXX) - Tradition says the Septuagint was produced by 70 Jewish scholars in 70 days for the Alexandria library under the sponsorship of King Ptolemy II (285-246 b.c.) The translation was supposedly requested by a Jewish leader living in Alexandria. This tradition comes from "Letter of Aristeas." The LXX frequently was based on a differing Hebrew textual tradition from the text of Rabbi Aquiba (MT).
3. Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) - The Dead Sea Scrolls were written in the Roman b.c. period (200 b.c. to a.d. 70) by a sect of Jewish separatists called the "Essenes." The Hebrew manuscripts, found in several sites around the Dead Sea, show a somewhat different Hebrew textual family behind both the MT and the LXX.
4. Some specific examples of how the comparison of these texts have helped interpreters understand the Old Testament
 - a. The LXX has helped translators and scholars understand the MT
 - (1) the LXX of Isa. 52:14, "As many shall be amazed at him."
 - (2) the MT of Isa. 52:14, "Just as many were astonished over you."
 - (3) in Isa. 52:15 the pronoun distinction of the LXX is confirmed
 - (a) LXX, "so will many nations marvel at him"
 - (b) MT, "so he sprinkles many nations"
 - b. The DSS have helped translators and scholars understand the MT
 - (1) the DSS of Isa. 21:8, "then the seer cried, Upon a watchtower I stand. . ."
 - (2) the MT of Isa. 21:8, "and I cried a lion! My Lord, I always stand on the watch tower by day. . ."
 - c. Both the LXX and DSS have helped clarify Isa. 53:11
 - (1) LXX & DSS, "after the travail of his soul he will see light, he will be satisfied"
 - (2) MT, "he shall see. . .of the travail of his soul, He shall be satisfied"

B. New Testament

1. Over 5,300 manuscripts of all or parts of the Greek New Testament are extant. About 85 are written on papyri and 268 are manuscripts written in all capital letters (uncials). Later, about the ninth century a.d., a running script (minuscule) was developed. The Greek manuscripts in written form number about 2,700. We also have about 2,100 copies of lists of Scripture texts used in worship that we call lectionaries.
2. About 85 Greek manuscripts containing parts of the New Testament written on papyrus are

housed in museums. Some are dated from the second century a.d., but most are from the third and fourth centuries a.d. None of these MSS contain the whole New Testament. Just because these are the oldest copies of the New Testament does not automatically mean they have fewer variants. Many of these were copied rapidly for a local use. Care was not exercised in the process. Therefore, they contain many variants.

3. Codex Sinaiticus, known by the Hebrew letter \aleph (*aleph*) or (01), found at St. Catherine's monastery on Mt. Sinai by Tischendorf. It dates from the fourth century a.d. and contains both the LXX of the OT and the Greek NT. It is of "the Alexandrian Text" type.
4. Codex Alexandrinus, known as "A" or (02), a fifth century Greek manuscript which was found in Alexandria, Egypt.
5. Codex Vaticanus, known as "B" or (03), found in the Vatican's library in Rome and dates from the middle of the fourth century a.d. It contains both LXX of the Old Testament and Greek New Testament. It is of "the Alexandrian Text" type.
6. Codex Ephraemi, known as "C" or (04), a fifth century Greek manuscript which was partially destroyed.
7. Codex Bezae, known as "D" or (05), a fifth or sixth century Greek manuscript. It is the chief representative of what is called "The Western Text." It contains many additions and was the main Greek witness for the King James translation.
8. The NT MSS can be grouped into three, possibly four, families that share certain characteristics.
 - a. Alexandrian text from Egypt
 - (1) P⁷⁵, P⁶⁶ (about a.d. 200), which record the Gospels
 - (2) P⁴⁶ (about a.d. 225), which records Paul's letters
 - (3) P⁷² (about a.d. 225-250), which records Peter and Jude
 - (4) Codex B, called Vaticanus (about a.d. 325), which includes the whole OT and NT
 - (5) Origen quotes from this text type
 - (6) other MSS which show this text type are \aleph , C, L, W, 33
 - b. Western text from North Africa
 - (1) quotes from North African church fathers, Tertullian, Cyprian, and the Old Latin translation
 - (2) quotes from Irenaeus
 - (3) quotes from Tatian and Old Syriac translation
 - (4) Codex D "Bezae" follow this text type
 - c. Eastern Byzantine text from Constantinople
 - (1) this text type is reflected in over 80% of the 5,300 MSS
 - (2) quoted by Antioch of Syria's church fathers, Cappadoceans, Chrysostom, and Therodoret
 - (3) Codex A, in the Gospels only
 - (4) Codex E (eighth century) for full NT
 - d. the fourth possible type is "Caesarean" from Palestine
 - (1) it is primarily seen only in Mark
 - (2) some witnesses to it are P⁴⁵ and W

II. The problems and theories of "lower criticism" or "textual criticism."

A. How the variants occurred

1. inadvertent or accidental (vast majority of occurrences)
 - a. slip of the eye in hand copying which reads the second instance of two similar words and thereby omits all of the words in between (homoioteleuton)
 - (1) slip of the eye in omitting a double letter word or phrase (haplography)
 - (2) slip of the mind in repeating a phrase or line of a Greek text (dittography)
 - b. slip of the ear in copying by oral dictation where a misspelling occurs (itacism). Often the

misspelling implies or spells a similar-sounding Greek word.

- c. the earliest Greek texts had no chapter or verse divisions, little or no punctuation and no division between words. It is possible to divide the letters in different places forming different words.

2. intentional

- a. changes were made to improve the grammatical form of the text copied
- b. changes were made to bring the text into conformity with other biblical texts (harmonization of parallels)
- c. changes were made by combining two or more variant readings into one long combined text (conflation)
- d. changes were made to correct a perceived problem in the text (cf. I Cor. 11:27 and I John 5:7-8)
- e. some additional information as to the historical setting or proper interpretation of the text was placed in the margin by one scribe but placed into the text by a second scribe (cf. John 5:4)

B. The basic tenets of textual criticism (logical guidelines for determining the original reading of a text when variants exist)

1. the most awkward or grammatically unusual text is probably the original
2. the shortest text is probably the original
3. the older text is given more weight because of its historical proximity to the original, everything else being equal
4. MSS that are geographically diverse usually have the original reading
5. doctrinally weaker texts, especially those relating to major theological discussions of the period of manuscript changes, like the Trinity in I John 5:7-8, are to be preferred.
6. the text that can best explain the origin of the other variants
7. two quotes that help show the balance in these troubling variants

- a. J. Harold Greenlee's book, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, p. 68:

"No Christian doctrine hangs upon a debatable text; and the student of the NT must beware of wanting his text to be more orthodox or doctrinally stronger than is the inspired original."

- b. W. A. Criswell told Greg Garrison of *The Birmingham News* that he (Criswell) doesn't believe every word in the Bible is inspired, "at least not every word that has been given to the modern public by centuries of translators." Criswell said: "I very much am a believer in the textual criticism. As such, I think, the last half of the 16th chapter of Mark is heresy: it's not inspired, it's just concocted. . . .When you compare those manuscripts way back yonder, there was no such thing as that conclusion of the Book of Mark. Somebody added it..."

The patriarch of the SBC inerrantists also claimed that "interpolation" is also evident in John 5, the account of Jesus at the pool of Bethesda. And he discusses the two different accounts of the suicide of Judas (cf. Matt. 27 and Acts 1): "It's just a different view of the suicide," Criswell said. "If it is in the Bible, there is an explanation for it. And the two accounts of the suicide of Judas are in the Bible." Criswell added, "Textual criticism is a wonderful science in itself. It is not ephemeral, it's not impertinent. It's dynamic and central..."

III. Manuscript problems (textual criticism)

A. Suggested sources for further reading

1. *Biblical Criticism: Historical, Literary and Textual*, by R.H. Harrison
2. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* by Bruce M. Metzger
3. *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, by J. H Greenlee

GLOSSARY

Adoptionism. This was one of the early views of Jesus' relation to deity. It basically asserted that Jesus was a normal human in every way and was adopted in a special sense by God at his baptism (cf. Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11) or at His resurrection (cf. Rom. 1:4). Jesus lived such an exemplary life that God, at some point, (baptism, resurrection) adopted Him as His "son" (cf. Rom. 1:4; Phi. 2:9). This was an early church and eighth century minority view. Instead of God becoming a man (the Incarnation) it reverses this and now man becomes God!

It is difficult to verbalize how Jesus, God the Son, pre-existent deity, was rewarded or extolled for an exemplary life. If He was already God, how could He be rewarded? If He had pre-existent divine glory how could He be honored more? Although it is hard for us to comprehend, the Father somehow honored Jesus in a special sense for His perfect fulfillment of the Father's will.

Alexandrian School. This method of biblical interpretation was developed in Alexandria, Egypt in the second century a.d. It uses the basic interpretive principles of Philo, who was a follower of Plato. It is often called the allegorical method. It held sway in the church until the time of the Reformation. Its most able proponents were Origen and Augustine. See Moises Silva, *Has The Church Misread The Bible?* (Academic, 1987)

Alexandrinus. This fifth-century Greek manuscript from Alexandria, Egypt includes the Old Testament, Apocrypha, and most of the New Testament. It is one of our major witnesses to the entire Greek New Testament (except parts of Matthew, John, and II Corinthians). When this manuscript, which is designated "A," and the manuscript designated "B" (Vaticanus) agree on a reading, it is considered to be original by most scholars in most instances.

Allegory. This is a type of Biblical interpretation which originally developed within Alexandrian Judaism. It was popularized by Philo of Alexandria. Its basic thrust is the desire to make the Scripture relevant to one's culture or philosophical system by ignoring the Bible's historical setting and/or literary context. It seeks a hidden or spiritual meaning behind every text of Scripture. It must be admitted that Jesus, in Matthew 13, and Paul, in Galatians 4, used allegory to communicate truth. This, however, was in the form of typology, not strictly allegory.

Analytical lexicon. This is a type of research tool which allows one to identify every Greek form in the New Testament. It is a compilation, in Greek alphabetical order, of forms and basic definitions. In combination with an interlinear translation, it allows non-Greek reading believers to analyze New Testament Greek grammatical and syntactic forms.

Analogy of Scripture. This is the phrase used to describe the view that all of the Bible is inspired by God and is, therefore, not contradictory but complementary. This presuppositional affirmation is the basis for the use of parallel passages in interpreting a biblical text.

Ambiguity. This refers to the uncertainty that results in a written document when there are two or more possible meanings or when two or more things are being referred to at the same time. It is possible that John uses purposeful ambiguity (double entendres).

Anthropomorphic. Meaning "having characteristics associated with human beings," this term is used to describe our religious language about God. It comes from the Greek term for mankind. It means that we speak about God as if He were a man. God is described in physical, sociological, and psychological terms which relate to human beings (cf. Gen. 3:8; I Kgs. 22:19-23). This, of course, is only an analogy. However, there are no categories or terms other than human ones for us to use.

Therefore, our knowledge of God, though true, is limited.

Antiochian School. This method of biblical interpretation was developed in Antioch, Syria in the third century a.d. as a reaction to the allegorical method of Alexandria, Egypt. Its basic thrust was to focus on the historical meaning of the Bible. It interpreted the Bible as normal, human literature. This school became involved in the controversy over whether Christ had two natures (Nestorianism) or one nature (fully God and fully man). It was labeled heretical by the Roman Catholic Church and relocated to Persia but the school had little significance. Its basic hermeneutical principles later became interpretive principles of the Classical Protestant Reformers (Luther and Calvin).

Antithetical. This is one of three descriptive terms used to denote the relationship between lines of Hebrew poetry. It relates to lines of poetry which are opposite in meaning (cf. Pro. 10:1, 15:1).

Apocalyptic literature. This was predominantly, possibly even uniquely, a Jewish genre. It was a cryptic type of writing used in times of invasion and occupation of the Jews by foreign world powers. It assumes that a personal, redemptive God created and controls world events, and that Israel is of special interest and care to Him. This literature promises ultimate victory through God's special effort.

It is highly symbolic and fanciful with many cryptic terms. It often expressed truth in colors, numbers, visions, dreams, angelic mediation, secret code words and often a sharp dualism between good and evil.

Some examples of this genre are (1) in the OT, Ezekiel (chapters 36-48), Daniel (chapters 7-12), Zechariah; and (2) in the NT, Matthew 24; Mark 13; II Thessalonians 2 and Revelation.

Apologist (Apologetics). This is from the Greek root for "legal defense." This is a specific discipline within theology which seeks to give evidence and rational arguments for the Christian faith.

A priori. This is basically synonymous with the term "presupposition." It involves reasoning from previously accepted definitions, principles or positions which are assumed to be true. It is that which is accepted without examination or analysis.

Arianism. Arius was a presbyter in the church at Alexandria Egypt in the third and early fourth century. He affirmed that Jesus was pre-existent but not divine (not of the same essence as the Father), possibly following Proverbs 8:22-31. He was challenged by the bishop of Alexandria, who started (a.d. 318) a controversy which lasted many years. Arianism became the official creed of the Eastern Church. The Council of Nicaea in a.d. 325 condemned Arius and asserted the full equality and deity of the Son.

Aristotle. He was one of the philosophers of ancient Greece, a pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great. His influence, even today, reaches into many areas of modern studies. This is because he emphasized knowledge through observation and classification. This is one of the tenets of the scientific method.

Autographs. This is the name given to the original writings of the Bible. These original, handwritten manuscripts have all been lost. Only copies of copies remain. This is the source of many of the textual variants in the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and ancient versions.

Bezae. This is a Greek and Latin manuscript of the sixth century a.d. It is designated by "D." It contains the Gospels and Acts and some of the General Epistles. It is characterized by numerous scribal additions. It forms the basis for the "Textus Receptus," the major Greek manuscript tradition behind the King James Version.

Bias. This is the term used to describe a strong predisposition toward an object or point of view. It is the mindset in which impartiality is impossible regarding a particular object or point of view. It is a prejudiced position.

Biblical Authority. This term is used in a very specialized sense. It is defined as understanding what the original author said to his day and applying this truth to our day. Biblical authority is usually defined as viewing the Bible itself as our only authoritative guide. However, in light of current, improper interpretations, I have limited the concept to the Bible as interpreted by the tenets of the historical-grammatical method.

Canon. This is a term used to describe writings which are believed to be uniquely inspired. It is used regarding both the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

Christocentric. This is a term used to describe the centrality of Jesus. I use it in connection with the concept that Jesus is Lord of all the Bible. The Old Testament points toward Him and He is its fulfillment and goal (cf. Matt. 5:17-48).

Commentary. This is a specialized type of research book. It gives the general background of a Biblical book. It then tries to explain the meaning of each section of the book. Some focus on application, while others deal with the text in a more technical way. These books are helpful, but should be used after one has done his own preliminary study. The commentator's interpretations should never be accepted uncritically. Comparing several commentaries from different theological perspectives is usually helpful.

Concordance. This is a type of research tool for Bible study. It lists every occurrence of every word in the Old and New Testaments. It helps in several ways: (1) determining the Hebrew or Greek word which lies behind any particular English word; (2) comparing passages where the same Hebrew or Greek word was used; (3) showing where two different Hebrew or Greek terms are translated by the same English word; (4) showing the frequency of the use of certain words in certain books or authors; (5) helping one find a passage in the Bible (cf. Walter Clark's *Howto Use New Testament Greek Study Aids*, pp. 54-55).

Dead Sea Scrolls. This refers to a series of ancient texts written in Hebrew and Aramaic which were found near the Dead Sea in 1947. They were the religious libraries of sectarian Judaism of the first century. The pressure of Roman occupation and the zealot wars of the 60's caused them to conceal the scrolls in hermetically sealed pottery jars in caves or holes. They have helped us understand the historical setting of first century Palestine and have confirmed the Masoretic Text as being very accurate, at least as far back as the early b.c. era. They are designated by the abbreviation "DSS."

Deductive. This method of logic or reasoning moves from general principles to specific applications by means of reason. It is opposite from inductive reasoning, which reflects the scientific method by moving from observed specifics to general conclusions (theories).

Dialectical. This is the method of reasoning whereby that which seems contradictory or paradoxical is held together in a tension, seeking a unified answer which includes both sides of the paradox. Many biblical doctrines have dialectical pairs, predestination-free will; security-perseverance; faith-works; decision-discipleship; Christian freedom-Christian responsibility.

Diaspora. This is the technical Greek term used by Palestinian Jews to describe other Jews who live outside the geographical boundaries of the Promised Land.

Dynamic equivalent. This is a theory of Bible translation. Bible translation can be viewed as a continuum from "word to word" correspondence, where an English word must be supplied for every Hebrew or Greek word, to a "paraphrase" where only the thought is translated with less regard to the original wording or phrasing. In between these two theories is "the dynamic equivalent" which attempts to take the original text seriously, but translates it in modern grammatical forms and idioms. A really good discussion of these various theories of translations is found in Fee and Stuart's *Howto Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, p. 35 and in Robert Bratcher's Introduction to the TEV.

Eclectic. This term is used in connection with textual criticism. It refers to the practice of choosing readings from different Greek manuscripts in order to arrive at a text which is supposed to be close to the original autographs. It rejects the view that any one family of Greek manuscripts captures the originals.

Eisegesis. This is the opposite of exegesis. If exegesis is a "leading out" of the original author's intent, this term implies a "leading in" of a foreign idea or opinion.

Etymology. This is an aspect of word study that tries to ascertain the original meaning of a word. From this root meaning, specialized usages are more easily identified. In interpretation, etymology is not the main focus, rather the contemporary meaning and usage of a word.

Exegesis. This is the technical term for the practice of interpreting a specific passage. It means "to lead out" (of the text) implying that our purpose is to understand the original author's intent in light of historical setting, literary context, syntax and contemporary word meaning.

Genre. This is a French term that denotes different types of literature. The thrust of the term is the division of literary forms into categories which share common characteristics: historical narrative, poetry, proverb, apocalyptic and legislation.

Gnosticism. Most of our knowledge of this heresy comes from the Gnostic writings of the second century. However, the incipient ideas were present in the first century (and before).

Some stated tenets of Valentian and Cerinthian Gnosticism of the second century are: (1) matter and spirit were co-eternal (an ontological dualism). Matter is evil, spirit is good. God, who is spirit, cannot be directly involved with molding evil matter; (2) there are emanations (*eons* or angelic levels) between God and matter. The last or lowest one was YHWH of the OT, who formed the universe (*kosmos*); (3) Jesus was an emanation like YHWH but higher on the scale, closer to the true God. Some put Him as the highest but still less than God and certainly not incarnate Deity (cf. John 1:14). Since matter is evil, Jesus could not have a human body and still be Divine. He was a spiritual phantom (cf. I John 1:1-3; 4:1-6); and (4) salvation was obtained through faith in Jesus plus special knowledge, which is only known by special persons. Knowledge (passwords) was needed to pass through heavenly spheres. Jewish legalism was also required to reach God.

The Gnostic false teachers advocated two opposite ethical systems: (1) for some, lifestyle was totally unrelated to salvation. For them, salvation and spirituality were encapsulated into secret knowledge (passwords) through the angelic spheres (*eons*); or (2) for others, lifestyle was crucial to salvation. They emphasized an ascetic lifestyle as evidence of true spirituality.

Hermeneutics. This is the technical term for the principles which guide exegesis. It is both a set of specific guidelines and an art/gift. Biblical, or sacred, hermeneutics is usually divided into two categories: general principles and special principles. These relate to the different types of literature found in the Bible. Each different type (genre) has its own unique guidelines but also shares some common assumptions and procedures of interpretation.

Higher Criticism. This is the procedure of biblical interpretation which focuses on the historical setting and literary structure of a particular biblical book.

Idiom. This word is used for the phrases found in different cultures which have specialized meaning not connected to the usual meaning of the individual terms. Some modern examples are: "that was awfully good," or "you just kill me." The Bible also contains these types of phrases.

Illumination. This is the name given to the concept that God has spoken to mankind. The full concept is usually expressed by three terms: (1) revelation-God has acted in human history; (2) inspiration-He has given the proper interpretation of His acts and their meaning to certain chosen men to record for

mankind; and (3) illumination-He has given His Spirit to help mankind understand His self-disclosure.

Inductive. This is a method of logic or reasoning which moves from the particulars to the whole. It is the empirical method of modern science. This is basically the approach of Aristotle.

Interlinear. This is a type of research tool which allows those who do not read a biblical language to be able to analyze its meaning and structure. It places the English translation on a word for word level immediately under the original biblical language. This tool, combined with an "analytical lexicon," will give the forms and basic definitions of Hebrew and Greek.

Inspiration. This is the concept that God has spoken to mankind by guiding the biblical authors to accurately and clearly record His revelation. The full concept is usually expressed by three terms: (1) revelation-God has acted in human history; (2) inspiration-He has given the proper interpretation of His acts and their meaning to certain chosen men to record for mankind; and (3) illumination-He has given His Spirit to help mankind understand His self-disclosure

Language of description. This is used in connection with the idioms in which the Old Testament is written. It speaks of our world in terms of the way things appear to the five senses. It is not a scientific description, nor was it meant to be.

Legalism. This attitude is characterized by an over-emphasis on rules or ritual. It tends to rely on the human performance of regulations as a means of acceptance by God. It tends to depreciate relationship and elevates performance, both of which are important aspects of the covenantal relationship between a holy God and sinful humanity.

Literal. This is another name for the textually-focused and historical method of hermeneutics from Antioch. It means that interpretation involves the normal and obvious meaning of human language, although it still recognizes the presence of figurative language.

Literary genre. This refers to the distinct forms that human communication can take, such as poetry or historical narrative. Each type of literature has its own special hermeneutical procedures in addition to the general principles for all written literature.

Literary unit. This refers to the major thought divisions of a biblical book. It can be made up of a few verses, paragraphs or chapters. It is a self-contained unit with a central subject.

Lower criticism. See "textual criticism."

Manuscript. This term relates to the different copies of the Greek New Testament. Usually they are divided into the different types by (1) material on which they are written (papyrus, leather), or (2) the form of the writing itself (all capitals or running script). It is abbreviated by "MS" (singular) or "MSS" (plural).

Masoretic Text. This refers to the ninth century a.d. Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament produced by generations of Jewish scholars which contain vowel points and other textual notes. It forms the basic text for our English Old Testament. Its text has been historically confirmed by the Hebrew MSS, especially Isaiah, known from the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is abbreviated by "MT."

Metonymy. This is a figure of speech in which the name of one thing is used to represent something else associated with it. As an example, "the kettle is boiling" actually means "the water within the kettle is boiling."

Muratorian Fragments. This is a list of the canonical books of the New Testament. It was written in Rome before a.d. 200. It gives the same twenty-seven books as the Protestant NT. This clearly shows the local churches in different parts of the Roman Empire had "practically" set the canon before the major

church councils of the fourth century.

Natural revelation. This is one category of God's self-disclosure to man. It involves the natural order (Rom. 1:19-20) and the moral consciousness (Rom. 2:14-15). It is spoken of in Ps. 19:1-6 and Rom. 1-2. It is distinct from special revelation, which is God's specific self-disclosure in the Bible and supremely in Jesus of Nazareth.

This theological category is being re-emphasized by the "old earth" movement among Christian scientists (e.g. the writings of Hugh Ross). They use this category to assert that all truth is God's truth. Nature is an open door to knowledge about God; it is different from special revelation (the Bible). It allows modern science the freedom to research the natural order. In my opinion it is a wonderful new opportunity to witness to the modern scientific western world.

Nestorianism. Nestorius was the patriarch of Constantinople in the fifth century. He was trained in Antioch of Syria and affirmed that Jesus had two natures, one fully human and one fully divine. This view deviated from the orthodox one nature view of Alexandria. Nestorius' main concern was the title "mother of God," given to Mary. Nestorius was opposed by Cyril of Alexandria and, by implication, his own Antiochian training. Antioch was the headquarters of the historical-grammatical-textual approach to biblical interpretation, while Alexandria was the headquarters of the four-fold (allegorical) school of interpretation. Nestorius was ultimately removed from office and exiled.

Original author. This refers to the actual authors/writers of Scripture.

Papyri. This is a type of writing material from Egypt. It is made from river reeds. It is the material upon which our oldest copies of the Greek New Testament are written.

Parallel passages. They are part of the concept that all of the Bible is God-given and, therefore, is its own best interpreter and balancer of paradoxical truths. This is also helpful when one is attempting to interpret an unclear or ambiguous passage. They also help one find the clearest passage on a given subject as well as all other Scriptural aspects of a given subject.

Paraphrase. This is the name of a theory of Bible translation. Bible translation can be viewed as a continuum from "word to word" correspondence, where an English word must be supplied for every Hebrew or Greek word to a "paraphrase" where only the thought is translated with less regard to the original wording or phrasing. In between these two theories is "the dynamic equivalent" which attempts to take serious the original text, but translates it in modern grammatical forms and idioms. A really good discussion of these various theories of translations is found in Fee and Stuart's *Howto Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, p. 35.

Paragraph. This is the basic interpretive literary unit in prose. It contains one central thought and its development. If we stay with its major thrust we will not major on minors or miss the original author's intent.

Parochialism. This relates to biases which are locked into a local theological/cultural setting. It does not recognize the transcultural nature of biblical truth or its application.

Paradox. This refers to those truths which seem to be contradictory, yet both are true, although in tension with each other. They frame truth by presenting it from opposite sides. Much biblical truth is presented in paradoxical (or dialectical) pairs. Biblical truths are not isolated stars, but are constellations made up of the pattern of stars.

Plato. He was one of the philosophers of ancient Greece. His philosophy greatly influenced the early church through the scholars of Alexandria, Egypt, and later, Augustine. He posited that everything on earth was illusionary and a mere copy of a spiritual archetype. Theologians later equated Plato's "forms/ideas" with the spiritual realm.

Presupposition. This refers to our preconceived understanding of a matter. Often we form opinions or judgments about issues before we approach the Scriptures themselves. This predisposition is also known as a bias, an *a priori* position, an assumption or a preunderstanding.

Proof-texting. This is the practice of interpreting Scripture by quoting a verse without regard for its immediate context or larger context in its literary unit. This removes the verses from the original author's intent and usually involves the attempt to prove a personal opinion while asserting biblical authority.

Rabbinical Judaism. This stage of the life of the Jewish people began in Babylonian Exile (586-538 b.c.). As the influence of the Priests and the Temple was removed, local synagogues became the focus of Jewish life. These local centers of Jewish culture, fellowship, worship and Bible study became the focus of the national religious life. In Jesus' day this "religion of the scribes" was parallel to that of the priests. At the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70, the scribal form, dominated by the Pharisees, controlled the direction of Jewish religious life. It is characterized by a practical, legalistic interpretation of the Torah as explained in the oral tradition (Talmud).

Revelation. This is the name given to the concept that God has spoken to mankind. The full concept is usually expressed by three terms: (1) revelation-God has acted in human history; (2) inspiration-He has given the proper interpretation of His acts and their meaning to certain chosen men to record for mankind; and (3) illumination-He has given His Spirit to help mankind understand His self-disclosure.

Semantic field. This refers to the total range of meanings associated with a word. It is basically the different connotations a word has in different contexts.

Septuagint. This is the name given to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Tradition says that it was written in seventy days by seventy Jewish scholars for the library of Alexandria, Egypt. The traditional date is around 250 **b.c.** (in reality it possibly took over one hundred years to complete). This translation is significant because (1) it gives us an ancient text to compare with the Masoretic Hebrew text; (2) it shows us the state of Jewish interpretation in the third and second century b.c.; (3) it gives us the Jewish Messianic understanding before the rejection of Jesus. Its abbreviation is "LXX."

Sinaiticus. This is a Greek manuscript of the fourth century a.d. It was found by the German scholar, Tischendorf, at St. Catherine's monastery on Jebel Musa, the traditional site of Mt. Sinai. This manuscript is designated by the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet called "*aleph*" [א]. It contains both the Old and the entire New Testaments. It is one of our most ancient uncial MSS.

Spiritualizing. This term is synonymous with allegorizing in the sense that it removes the historical and literary context of a passage and interprets it on the basis of other criteria.

Synonymous. This refers to terms with exact or very similar meanings (although in reality no two words have a complete semantic overlap). They are so closely related that they can replace each other in a sentence without loss of meaning. It is also used to designate one of the three forms of Hebrew poetic parallelism. In this sense it refers to two lines of poetry that express the same truth (cf. Ps. 103:3).

Syntax. This is a Greek term which refers to the structure of a sentence. It relates to the ways parts of a sentence are put together to make a complete thought.

Synthetical. This is one of the three terms that relates to types of Hebrew poetry. This term speaks of lines of poetry which build on one another in a cumulative sense, sometimes called "climatic" (cf. Ps. 19:7-9).

Systematic theology. This is a stage of interpretation which tries to relate the truths of the Bible in a unified and rational manner. It is a logical, rather than mere historical, presentation of Christian

theology by categories (God, man, sin, salvation, etc.).

Talmud. This is the title for the codification of the Jewish Oral Tradition. The Jews believe it was given orally by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In reality it appears to be the collective wisdom of the Jewish teachers through the years. There are two different written versions of the Talmud: the Babylonian and the shorter, unfinished Palestinian.

Textual criticism. This is the study of the manuscripts of the Bible. Textual criticism is necessary because no originals exist and the copies differ from each other. It attempts to explain the variations and arrive (as close as possible) to the original wording of the autographs of the Old and New Testaments. It is often called "lower criticism."

Textus Receptus. This designation developed into Elzevir's edition of the Greek NT in 1633 a.d. Basically it is a form of the Greek NT that was produced from a few late Greek manuscripts and Latin versions of Erasmus (1510-1535), Stephanus (1546-1559) and Elzevir (1624-1678). In *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 27, A. T. Robertson says "the Byzantine text is practically the Textus Receptus." The Byzantine text is the least valuable of the three families of early Greek manuscripts (Western, Alexandrian and Byzantine). It contains the accumulation errors of centuries of hand-copied texts. However, A.T. Robertson also says "the Textus Receptus has preserved for us a substantially accurate text" (p. 21). This Greek manuscript tradition (especially Erasmus' third edition of 1522) forms the basis of the King James Version of a.d. 1611.

Torah. This is the Hebrew term for "teaching." It came to be the official title for the writings of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). It is, for the Jews, the most authoritative division of the Hebrew canon.

Typological. This is a specialized type of interpretation. Usually it involves New Testament truth found in Old Testament passages by means of an analogical symbol. This category of hermeneutics was a major element of the Alexandrian method. Because of the abuse of this type of interpretation, one should limit its use to specific examples recorded in the New Testament.

Vaticanus. This is the Greek manuscript of the fourth century a.d. It was found in the Vatican's library. It originally contained all the Old Testament, Apocrypha and New Testament. However, some parts were lost (Genesis, Psalms, Hebrews, the Pastorals, Philemon and Revelation). It is a very helpful manuscript in determining the original wording of the autographs. It is designated by a capital "B."

Vulgate. This is the name of Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible. It became the basic or "common" translation for the Roman Catholic Church. It was done in the a.d. 380's.

Wisdom literature. This was a genre of literature common in the ancient near east (and modern world). It basically was an attempt to instruct a new generation on guidelines for successful living through poetry, proverb, or essay. It was addressed more to the individual than to corporate society. It did not use allusions to history but was based on life experiences and observation. In the Bible, Job through Song of Songs assumed the presence and worship of YHWH, but this religious world view is not explicit in every human experience every time.

As a genre it stated general truths. However, this genre cannot be used in every specific situation. These are general statements that do not always apply to every individual situation.

These sages dared to ask the hard questions of life. Often they challenged traditional religious views (Job and Ecclesiastes). They form a balance and tension to the easy answers about life's tragedies.

World picture and worldview. These are companion terms. They are both philosophical concepts related to creation. The term "world picture" refers to "the how" of creation while "worldview" relates to "the Who." These terms are relevant to the interpretation that Genesis 1-2 deals primarily with the

Who, not the how, of creation.

YHWH. This is the Covenant name for God in the Old Testament. It is defined in Exod. 3:14. It is the causative form of the Hebrew term "to be." The Jews were afraid to pronounce the name, lest they take it in vain; therefore, they substituted the Hebrew term *Adonai*, "lord." This is how this covenant name is translated in English.

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DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

I do not particularly care for statements of faith or creeds. I prefer to affirm the Bible itself. However, I realize that a statement of faith will provide those who are unfamiliar with me a way to evaluate my doctrinal perspective. In our day of so much theological error and deception, the following brief summary of my theology is offered.

1. The Bible, both the Old and New Testament, is the inspired, infallible, authoritative, eternal Word of God. It is the self-revelation of God recorded by men under supernatural leadership. It is our only source of clear truth about God and His purposes. It is also the only source of faith and practice for His church.
2. There is only one eternal, creator, redeemer God. He is the creator of all things, visible and invisible. He has revealed Himself as loving and caring although He is also fair and just. He has revealed Himself in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Spirit, truly separate and yet the same in essence.
3. God is actively in control of His world. There is both an eternal plan for His creation that is unalterable and an individually focused one that allows human free will. Nothing happens without God's knowledge and permission, yet He allows individual choices both among angels and humans. Jesus is the Father's Elect Man and all are potentially elect in Him. God's foreknowledge of events does not reduce humans to a determined pre-written script. All of us are responsible for our thoughts and deeds.
4. Mankind, though created in God's image and free from sin, chose to rebel against God. Although tempted by a supernatural agent, Adam and Eve were responsible for their willful self-centeredness. Their rebellion has affected humanity and creation. We are all in need of God's mercy and grace both for our corporate condition in Adam and our individual volitional rebellion.
5. God has provided a means of forgiveness and restoration for fallen humanity. Jesus Christ, God's unique son, became a man, lived a sinless life and by means of his substitutionary death, paid the penalty for mankind's sin. He is the only way to restoration and fellowship with God. There is no other means of salvation except through faith in His finished work.
6. Each of us must personally receive God's offer of forgiveness and restoration in Jesus. This is accomplished by means of volitional trust in God's promises through Jesus and a willful turning from known sin.
7. All of us are fully forgiven and restored based upon our trust in Christ and repentance from sin. However, the evidence for this new relationship is seen in a changed, and changing, life. The goal of God for humanity is not only heaven someday, but Christlikeness now. Those who are truly redeemed, though occasionally sinning, will continue in faith and repentance throughout their lives.
8. The Holy Spirit is "the other Jesus." He is present in the world to lead the lost to Christ and develop Christlikeness in the saved. The gifts of the Spirit are given at salvation. They are the life and ministry of Jesus divided among His body, the Church. The gifts which are basically the attitudes and motives of Jesus need to be motivated by the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit is active in our day as He was in the biblical times.
9. The Father has made the resurrected Jesus Christ the Judge of all things. He will return to earth to judge all mankind. Those who have trusted Jesus and whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will receive their eternal glorified bodies at His return. They will be with Him forever. However, those who have refused to respond to God's truth will be separated eternally from the joys of fellowship with the Triune God. They will be condemned along with the Devil and his angels.

This is surely not complete or thorough but I hope it will give you the theological flavor of my heart. I like the statement:

"In essentials—unity, In peripherals—freedom, In all things—love.