

NOTES ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

\* \* \* **PRESS ON TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY IN CHRIST** \* \* \*

S.L.H.  
Soli Deo Gloria!

"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

THEREFORE, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us **go on unto perfection . . .**"

**Hebrews 5:12-6:1a**

AUTHOR: Paul (c. 65 AD)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE. The writer of Hebrews does not identify himself by name in the epistle. Nevertheless, the consistent testimony from the early Church attributes the authorship of Hebrews to the Apostle Paul. More than a millennia after the epistle was written, scholars began offering a variety of speculations as alternatives to Pauline authorship, including Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, and even Priscilla<sup>1</sup>, none of which have any actual support; the attraction of these speculations seems to be solely that they offer alternatives to Paul. The position of modern scholarship could be characterized as, "We may not be sure who wrote Hebrews, but we're sure it wasn't Paul!" Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD) asserted that Paul originally wrote the epistle in Hebrew<sup>2</sup>, and that it was translated into Greek by Luke; if true, this could explain stylistic differences between the Greek of Hebrews and that found in Paul's other epistles<sup>3</sup>.

The internal evidence within the epistle itself points strongly to Paul. Commentaries that deal with the authorship of Hebrews generally devote considerable space attempting to deal with the large amount of evidence in Hebrews that, on its face, seems to uniquely identify Paul as its author. Evidence pointing to Paul includes:

- Timothy was a ministry companion to the writer of Hebrews (Heb13:23), but there is no record in the N.T. that Timothy ministered with anyone other than the Apostle Paul;

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of Priscilla as the author of Hebrews is irreconcilable with: 1) Scripture's own testimony that it came by means of "holy men of God" (2Pet1:20-21), 2) Scripture's prohibition of women exercising doctrinal authority over men (1Tim2:11-14), and 3) the use of a masculine participle by the author of Hebrews when describing himself (Heb11:32).

<sup>2</sup> There are no extant manuscripts of the Epistle to the Hebrews written in Hebrew.

<sup>3</sup> Significant stylistic differences in Greek usage between Hebrews and the (other) Pauline epistles is considered one of the strongest arguments against the Pauline authorship of Hebrews.

- Paul is the only epistle writer that solicits prayer for himself (Cp., Heb13:18);
- The writer of Hebrews had been imprisoned for his faith (Heb10:34), an accurate description of Paul in the Book of Acts, which he mentions in several of his epistles;
- The epistle was written from "Italy" (Heb13:25), which is consistent with Paul's presence in Rome from the mid to late 60's (Act28:16);
- The format of the epistle follows that of the Pauline epistles, a lengthy doctrinal section (Heb1-10), followed by a shorter section of application/exhortation (Heb11:1-13:17), and closing with a few personal salutations (Heb13:18-25); no other N.T. epistle writer follows this pattern;
- Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted three times in the N.T. (Rom1:17; Gal3:11; Heb10:38), with these three epistles seemingly forming a theological trilogy expounding on the three elements of this verse, suggesting a common author;
- The Apostle Peter alludes to the fact that, as he had in his two epistles (cf. 1Pet1:1-2; 2Pet3:1), Paul had also written an epistle addressed to Jewish Christians (2Pet3:15); and
- Paul's unique "token", which appears in "every epistle" he wrote (2Thess3:17-18), is also present in Hebrews (Heb13:25), but appears in none of the non-Pauline epistles.

If Paul wrote Hebrews, why did he refrain from affixing his name to it as he did in all of his other epistles? A possible answer to this question is that Paul understood his apostleship was to be officially directed *primarily* toward the Gentiles (Act9:15; 22:21; Rom11:13; Gal2:8). Since all of Paul's other epistles (written to Gentile churches) open authoritatively with, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (e.g., 2Cor1:1), he may have believed his characteristic opening affixed to the Epistle to the Hebrews would be presumptuous or inappropriate. Nonetheless, Paul's original calling made clear that he was a "chosen vessel unto [God], to bear [His] name before . . . the children of Israel" (Act9:15); Paul accomplished that aspect of his divine call especially by authoring the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Epistle to the Hebrews must have been written before the destruction of the Temple, since the numerous allusions made to the Temple and its rituals in the epistle consistently use verbs/verbals in the present tense (Cp., Heb8:4-5; 10:11; 13:10). The Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, so Hebrews was written before that date.

**AUDIENCE.** The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to **Jewish Christians**<sup>4</sup> living **in** and around **Jerusalem**. The main concern of the author was the danger that his audience would revert back to Judaism, and the close proximity of the Temple and its rituals only heightened the temptation to do so; such a return to Judaism would only be a temptation for Jews, not Gentiles. Although considerable debate continues among many as to whether

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<sup>4</sup> There are five N.T. epistles that are written explicitly to Jewish believers: Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, and Jude. While these contain some applications for all believers, some of their content directly applies only to Jews.

the original Jewish recipients of the epistle were genuine believers or mere professors (which has tremendous significance in how one understands the so-called "warning passages" in Hebrews), the author of the epistle clearly addresses his audience as genuine believers (cf. Heb3:1; 4:16; 5:12; 6:9; 10:24-26,39; 12:28; 13:20-22).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT. As Christianity grew, Jewish Christians (especially those living in Jerusalem/Israel) increasingly underwent persecution from their unbelieving Jewish friends, families, and countrymen, including public shunning, exclusion from common/necessary commercial transactions, and even confiscation of personal property (Heb10:32-34). The pressures of such persecutions created a tremendous temptation for these Jewish Christians to return to their old lives of Judaism, including attendance at synagogue, adherence to Mosaic law, and worship/sacrifice at the Temple.

The destruction of Jerusalem that was to come in 70 AD, prophesied by the Lord Jesus Christ (Luk19:41-44), was a decree of divine judgment on the nation of Israel for the "unpardonable sin" of rejecting the Messiah (Matt12:24-32). This heinous act was a national sin committed under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant requiring the ultimate "curse" under the Law of Moses, namely national dispersion (cf. Lev26:32-46; Deut28:63-68). While individual Jews of this generation could still be saved by personal repentance/faith, the coming judgment on the nation could not be averted<sup>5</sup>. For these Jewish Christians to return to the Mosaic system was to identify with that generation of Israelites that rejected the Messiah, making themselves subject to the coming judgment of God on Israel/Jerusalem. The five infamous "warning passages" in Hebrews have often been misinterpreted as threatening individual believers with the loss of personal salvation; however, these warnings have nothing to do with eternal damnation, but concern the possibility of physical death in the divine judgment coming upon national Israel (and subsequent loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ; 2Cor5:10). By refraining from a return to Judaism and separating themselves from that apostate generation (Act2:36), these Jewish believers could escape the coming judgment (cf. Act2:37-40; Luk21:20-24).

With the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, a return to Temple sacrifices is no longer possible; thus, this particular temptation was unique to the first generation of Jewish believers who lived prior to 70 AD.

THEME OF THE EPISTLE. Because of the supremacy of the Person of Christ (as the divine Son of God and perfect High Priest) and the finality of His sacrificial work on man's behalf that fully propitiated God, it is impossible for Jewish believers to return to the Mosaic system of worship (cf. Gal2:18; Heb10:38); to do so would diminish the Person of Christ and make His unique, once-and-for-all sacrificial death appear ineffectual (Heb10:9-10,18). Thus, the only course available for the believer is to press on to spiritual maturity in Christ (Heb6:1; 10:32-39; 12:1-2; Cp., Gal3:23-25).

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<sup>5</sup> An analogous scenario occurred at Kadesh-Barnea where the Exodus generation of Israelites committed a national "unpardonable sin" by refusing to enter the Promised Land (Num13-14). Although the eternal consequences of their sin was forgiven by subsequent repentance (Num14:20), God's physical judgment upon that generation of Israelites (i.e., they would die in the wilderness; Num14:28-35) was not averted. A comparison to this previous historical event is made in Hebrews 3:7-19.

In that light, it is even more inconsistent for Gentile Christianity, for whom the Old (i.e., Mosaic) Covenant never applied (cf. Eph2:11-12), to embrace elements of that now obsolete Jewish system (Heb8:13).

KEY WORDS. An important (key) word used 13 times in Hebrews is "better". In contrasting the Old Covenant (i.e., Mosaic Judaism) with the New Covenant, it is not the case that the Old Covenant was bad whereas the New Covenant is good. In its proper time and place, the Old (Mosaic) Covenant was indeed good. However, in every respect, the New Covenant is "better"; it has a better Messenger, a better High Priest, and a better Sacrifice.

Another key word used 12 times is "perfect" or "perfection". As used in Hebrews, "perfect" and "perfection" do not necessarily imply sinlessness, but spiritual maturity (in contrast to immaturity; e.g., Heb5:13-6:1). This is consistent with the Apostle Paul's usage of "perfect" in all of his epistles (e.g., 1Cor2:6; Philip3:15; 2Tim3:17).

OUTLINE OF HEBREWS.

I. SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER THE OLD COVENANT	<b>Hebrews 1-10</b>
A. Over Prophets	Heb1:1-3
B. Over Angels	Heb1:4-2:18
(1st series of admonitions/warnings; Heb2:1-4)	
C. Over Moses	Heb3:1-6
(2nd series of admonitions/warnings; Heb3:7-4:7)	
D. Over Joshua	Heb4:8-10
(3rd series of admonitions/warnings; Heb4:11-13)	
E. Over High Priest/Sacrifices	Heb4:14-10:18
(4th series of admonitions/warnings; Heb5:11-6:12)	
(5th series of admonitions/warnings; Heb10:19-39)	
II. APPLICATIONS FOR JEWISH CHRISTIANS	<b>Hebrews 11-13</b>
A. Faith Illustrated from the O.T.	Heb11:1-40
B. Exhortation to Persevere in Faith	Heb12:1-2
(6th series of admonitions/warnings; Heb12:3-13:19)	
C. Conclusion/Benediction	Heb13:20-25

## CHAPTER 1

The Epistle to the Hebrews opens with an extended comparison of Christ to God's messengers under the Old Covenant (Heb1:1-4:10), including prophets, angels, Moses, and Joshua. Christ as the Son of God and supreme/final Messenger of the New Covenant is demonstrated to be "so much better" than those of the Old Covenant (cf. Heb1:4).

### SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER PROPHETS

- [1] With no introduction whatsoever, the epistle opens by considering God's historical pattern of speaking "unto the fathers" (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; i.e., Israel; Rom3:1-2) through "prophets". It notes that this "past" mode of revelation from God was not continuous but progressive, occurring at "sundry times" (Cp., Isa28:9-10), and came in "diverse manners" that included dreams, visions, types, and prophecies (Cp., Hos12:10); however, all of these prior revelations of God to man, though wholly inspired and absolutely true, were incomplete.
- [2] Although there are times when the N.T. uses the phrase "last days" to mean the final days of the Church Age (e.g., 2Tim3:1), here "last days" has in view the entirety of the Church Age, in the sense that the Church Age is the "last" age (i.e., dispensation) before the return of Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth (i.e., the Millennium). In this present age, Messiah has come, which is the event toward which all previous ages progressed. This understanding is consistent with the context of this verse, which alludes to Christ as being the one who "made the worlds" (see discussion below).

The present age is unique in that in it the principal Messenger of God (in contrast to the prophets of previous ages; v1) is His "Son". The Son is the final Messenger, as Jesus Himself taught (Cp., Matt21:33-41). For this reason, the final book of the Bible is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev1:1). The supremacy and finality of God's revelation "by His Son" is supported by seven unique characteristics that distinguish Him from all messengers that came before (and why no more messengers are needed after).

First, He has been "appointed heir of all things." As the "Son" of God, He is His "heir", "appointed" to inherit "all things" (Cp., Matt21:37-38; Gal4:6-7); this is an allusion to the lordship of the Son over all of creation (Rom10:12). This was not true of any previous messenger.

Second, "He made the worlds". Here, "worlds" is not a translation of the Greek word κοσμος (never used in the plural in the N.T.) but of αιωνας, often translated *ages*; while it is true that the Son created the physical universe (Jn1:3; Coll1:16), the idea here is that He designed the ages through which this world would progress (i.e., the dispensations; cf. Isa46:9-10), consistent with His declaration to be the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev22:13). The Son planned God's program for the world. This was not true of any previous messenger.

- [3] Third, He is "the brightness of [God's] glory". This indicates the Son is one in essence with God (Jn1:14); He is divine (Jn10:30-33).

While it is true that no man has seen God at any time, the "Son" (v2) who has been seen is the perfect revelation of Him (Jn1:18). That the Son was in possession of the "brightness of [God's] glory", even after His incarnation, was demonstrated on the mount of transfiguration (cf. Luk9:28-31). This was not true of any previous messenger.

Fourth, He is "the express image of [God's] person". The single Greek word translated "express image" is transliterated into English as *character*. The word designates the mark left by a stamp, or the imprint left by a die; the "express[ed] image" is an exact replication of the stamp or die. Thus, the Son is a perfect expression of the "person" of God (Coll:15). This was not true of any previous messenger.

Fifth, He "[upholds] all things by the word of his power". Not only did the Son create the world and plan its progression through the ages, moment-by-moment He sustains the creation (Coll:17) and guides it toward its appointed consummation (Isa46:9-11). He does this merely by the "power" of His "word", where "word" is a translation of *ῥῆμα* (meaning *spoken word*; Cp., Ps33:4,9; Heb11:3). This was not true of any previous messenger.

Sixth, He "by himself purged our sins". Furthermore, the Son entered His creation to perform the priestly work necessary to redeem sinful men. This total work of redemption He performed "by himself"<sup>6</sup>, which is why salvation is freely offered to men according to grace/mercy, apart from any works on the part of men (Eph2:8-9; Tit3:5). This was not true of any previous messenger.

Seventh, He "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high". Two immensely profound truths are inherent in this final clause. The fact that He "sat down" after His priestly work of purification emphasizes the completeness and finality of His work; the author of this epistle will later call attention to the fact that the priests of the Old Covenant never sat down, indicating their work was never complete (cf. Heb10:10-12). The fact that He sat down "on the right hand of the Majesty on high" emphasizes that the Son has been installed in the position of preeminent honor, reward, and authority; this is God's unqualified stamp of approval on the Person and work of the Son. This was not true of any previous messenger.

#### SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER ANGELS

- [4] Hebrews 1:3 ends with the Son sitting, *in His humanity*, in heaven at the right hand of God. Though "angels" played a role in revealing the Old (Mosaic) Covenant (cf. Gal3:19), in His glorified humanity, the Son (as a Man) is "so much better than the angels". The appearance that angels comprise an order of creation higher than humanity is an abnormal condition after the Fall. God's primeval purpose was for man (made both male and female and created in His image) to be His vice-regent exercising dominion over all of the creation (cf. Gen1:26-28), including angels.

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<sup>6</sup> The verbal in this clause is in the aorist tense, indicating a finished/completed act, and middle voice, indicating an action of intense personal interest and involvement on the part of the Son.

Thus, the truth asserted in Hebrews 1:4-2:18 is that the Son, as an exalted Man, is superior to angels—which was God’s original design for humanity. Today, there is a Man in heaven exalted “far above” all angelic creatures (cf. Eph1:20-22); see the CHART: JESUS CHRIST THE EXALTED MAN IN HEAVEN.

- [5] The “more excellent name” (v4) of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ is **Son**. Whereas redeemed/exalted man (both male and female) will be “called the sons of God” (1Jn3:1-2), no angel will ever be honored with this “name”.

“Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” is a quotation from Psalm 2:7, a reference to the birth of Jesus Christ, the incarnation of the **Son** of God. It is by the incarnation that Jesus Christ is forever identified with humanity, distinct from and in contrast to “angels”. “I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son” is a quotation from 2 Samuel 7:14, implying that the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant is in Jesus Christ the Man, who is both the son of David and the **Son** of God.

- [6] Here, use of the “first-begotten” is both a reference to the incarnation of the **Son** and a title of preeminence (Cp., Col1:15). The preeminence of the Son is further demonstrated in the command, “let all the angels of God worship him”<sup>7</sup>. The man Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, received worship (cf. Matt9:18; 28:17; Luk24:52; Jn9:38), but it has never been acceptable for any angel to receive worship (Cp., Col2:18; Rev22:8-9). Since God alone is to receive worship (cf. Deut5:6-9; 6:13; Matt4:10), this is a clear assertion of the deity of Jesus Christ.

- [7] Quoting Psalm 104:4, the point here is that God made “angels” to be His “spirits” and “ministers” (cf. v14).

- [8] In contrast, “the **Son**” possesses a “throne”, “scepter”, and “kingdom” over which He will rule “forever”. Verses 8-9 are a quote of Psalm 45:6-7, whose subject is “God”, but apply it to the **Son**, another assertion of the deity of Jesus Christ.

- [10] Verses 10-12 are a quotation of Psalm 102:25-27, whose subject is the “LORD” (i.e., YHWH/Jehovah), but applied by the author of Hebrews to the **Son**, another assertion of the deity of Jesus Christ. This quotation calls attention to the work of the **Son** as Creator (v10; Cp., Jn1:1-3; Col1:16) and His divine attributes of eternity (v11) and immutability (v12; Cp., Heb13:8).

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<sup>7</sup> It is asserted by modern text critics that “let all the angels of God worship him”, as it appears in Hebrews 1:6, is a quotation of Deuteronomy 32:43 from the (alleged) 4th century Codex Vaticanus (i.e., from the Greek Septuagint; LXX), which differs from the traditional Hebrew text at this verse. However, Edward F. Hills has demonstrated that this reading is uncertain in the oldest LXX manuscripts, and was likely altered in Codex Vaticanus and later LXX manuscripts in order to agree with Hebrews 1:6, which is almost certainly the case with all alleged quotations from the LXX in the N.T. See Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (Christian Research Press, Des Moines, IA: 2006) p. 124. Rather, Hebrews 1:6 is a quotation from Psalm 97:7.

- [13] Verse 13 quotes Psalm 110:1, highlighting the fact that the **Son** has been given the position of greatest honor and authority, the "right hand" of God (v3), an honor never bestowed on any of "the angels".
- [14] This discourse on the superiority of the **Son** over the angels closes by highlighting God's purpose for angels; namely, to be "ministering spirits" to "them who shall be heirs of salvation" (i.e., redeemed humanity).

## CHAPTER 2

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### 1ST PARENTHETICAL ADMONITION/WARNING (Hebrews 2:1-4)

Hebrews 2:1-4 is the first of six parenthetical passages in the epistle that direct admonitions/warnings to its Hebrew Christian readers. This admonition draws its significance from the present context, which is that the Son is "so much better than the angels" (Heb1:4).

- [1] Because the Son is "so much better than the angels" (Heb1:4), the conclusion is drawn that "the things which we have heard" from Him (i.e., the revelation given by Jesus Christ and His apostles) "ought" to be "heed[ed]" with an even greater fervor<sup>8</sup>. The use of "ought" suggests that this admonition is more than a mere command, it is a logical conclusion; to do otherwise would be nonsensical. The danger is that "we should let [these revealed N.T. truths] slip [away]"; the picture is of a boat that is loosed from its anchor and begins to drift away from where it ought to be stationed. By using the first person "we", Paul (a "Hebrew of the Hebrews"; Philip3:5) includes himself as one who might be susceptible to such a temptation.
- [2] The "word spoken by angels" is a reference to the Mosaic Covenant made with the nation of Israel at Sinai (cf. Deut33:2; Ps68:17; Act7:53; Gal3:19). That revelation included a detailed law code that prescribed "just" judgments for every "transgression and disobedience" of it.
- [3] Just as transgression of the Law of Moses carried temporal consequences/judgments<sup>9</sup>, so also Hebrew Christians should expect that to "neglect so great salvation" now "spoken by the Lord [Jesus Christ]" and made possible by His finished work on their behalf would similarly bring (a temporal) judgment. Paul's earnest desire is that the Hebrew Christians to whom he is writing "escape" a coming judgment, which is the Roman siege of Jerusalem, culminating in the destruction of the city and the Temple in 70 AD in which more than one million Jews will die. This judgment was prophesied by "the Lord" Himself (cf. Luk19:41-44; 21:20-24).

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<sup>8</sup> This is a classic argument from the lesser to the greater, a polemical device often used by the Apostle Paul (Cp., Rom11:15).

<sup>9</sup> The "blessings" (i.e., promised benefits conditioned on obedience) and "cursings" (i.e., threatened consequences of disobedience) of the Mosaic Covenant are enumerated in specific detail in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Personal salvation is not a "blessing", nor is personal damnation a "curse", of that covenant. The blessings and cursings of the Mosaic Covenant were all temporal (i.e., to be enjoyed during this present life on earth).

This new revelation, both that of "so great salvation" conditioned on personal faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ (cf. 1Cor15:1-4) and of coming judgment on the unbelieving generation of Israel that rejected Messiah, was "first . . . spoken by the Lord [Jesus Christ]", but also "confirmed to us by them that heard him" (i.e., the disciples/apostles of Jesus Christ who were present with Him during His earthly ministry); the writer of this epistle (i.e., Paul) distinguishes himself from those "that heard him" during that time, though he has heard the testimony of James, Peter, and many of the other apostles (cf. Act15:6-22).

- [4] Furthermore, this new revelation given by Jesus Christ and His apostles was accompanied by "signs", "wonders", and "miracles" as support for its authenticity<sup>10</sup> (2Cor12:12). Note that this revelation "was confirmed" (v3) by miraculous "gifts of the Holy Spirit".

**Cessation of Miraculous Sign Gifts.** The Greek verb translated "was confirmed" (Heb2:3) is in the aorist tense, indicative mood. According to leading Greek grammarian Daniel Wallace, the aorist tense "presents an occurrence in summary, viewed as a whole from the outside, without regard for the internal make-up of the occurrence. This contrasts with the present and imperfect, which portray the action as an ongoing process... In the *indicative*, the aorist usually indicates *past* time with reference to the time of speaking" (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, pp. 554-555). Thus, the implication is that the "signs", "wonders", and miraculous "gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Heb2:4) that were given for the purpose of confirming the new revelation of Christ and His apostles had already ceased (cf. 1Cor13:8-10) by the time the Epistle to the Hebrews was written (c. 65 AD).

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#### SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER ANGELS – CONTINUED

The discourse on the Son being "so much better than the angels" that began in Hebrews 1:4 resumes.

- [5] In this verse, the Greek word translated "world" is a form of **οἰκονομία**, meaning an organized world or *dispensation*. The idea is that in "the [dispensation] to come" (i.e., the Millennial Kingdom; Cp., Eph1:10) the entire world will be in subjection to the Son as "king over all the earth" (Zech14:9), not "the angels".
- [6] Verses 6-8 are a quotation of the (Messianic) Psalm 8:4-6. Here, "the son of man", which is the title Jesus Christ most used of Himself in the gospels, is the incarnate Son.
- [7] In His humiliation (cf. Philip2:5-8), the Son was made "lower than the angels" for a short period of time, the reason for which will be given in v9. But in His glorification, the Son (as a Man) will be exalted "over [all] the works of [God's] hands". This was God's original plan/purpose for Adam and his race (Cp., Gen1:26-28), which

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<sup>10</sup> Note that signs, wonders, and miracles alone are not sufficient evidence to authenticate a message as coming from God (cf. Deut13:1-5).

was forfeited in the Fall. That the **Son** of man by His grand work of redemption will regain this position of authority is the reason He is called "the last Adam" (1Cor15:45).

- [8] The "all things" that are to be put "in subjection" to the glorified **Son** of man includes the angels. However, "all things" are "not yet... put under him". That is, the Millennial Kingdom is yet future; we are not "now" living in the Kingdom.
- [9] This is the first time the name "Jesus" is used in Hebrews. The purpose for the incarnation of the **Son**, or the making of Jesus "lower than the angels", was "for the suffering of death". God cannot die; the **Son** had to become a Man in order to suffer death. The death of the **Son** was a propitiation "for every man". Since Christ's work of propitiation is received by nothing more than personal faith (Rom3:25), it is according to "the grace of God" (Cp., Rom4:3-5; Eph2:8-9).

**Doctrines of Substitutionary and Unlimited Atonement.** Hebrews 2:9 clearly teaches the Doctrines of Substitutionary and Unlimited Atonement<sup>11</sup>. In the clause "should taste death for every man", the preposition "for" is a translation of the Greek *ὑπερ*, which when its object is in the genitive case, means "on behalf of" (i.e., substitution). The death of Christ was intended to be a substitute for "every man", meaning for all men. The propitiatory value of Christ's death is unlimited (see also Rom5:18; 2Cor5:14,19; 1Tim2:6; 4:10; 1Pet3:18; 1Jn2:2); it is available to "every man" without exception on condition of personal faith (cf. Act16:30-31).

- [10] It is a truth that "all things" (including the angels) were created by Jesus for Himself (Jn1:3; Coll:16; Rev4:11). And yet, Jesus as the "Captain" (i.e., Author, Designer) of "[every man]'s salvation" was not "perfect" (i.e., complete) without "suffering". That is, the "suffering of death" (v9) by Jesus was necessary to procure the "salvation" of the human race (cf. Rom3:22-26), apart from which God's original (and unchanged) plan for His creation to be ruled by mankind (Gen1:26-28) would be thwarted.
- [11] By the incarnation, the **Son** has forever identified with the human race, even calling "sanctified" men "brethren" (after the resurrection; cf. Jn20:17), for we are now in the same family, "adopted sons" (Gal4:4-7) in the "household of God" (Eph2:19).
- [12] This is a quotation of the (Messianic) Psalm 22:22. That Messiah would identify with those He redeemed as "brethren" was prophesied by David. Note that in the N.T. quotation of this O.T. verse, "church" is used in its non-technical sense, meaning *congregation*.
- [13] This verse contains two partial quotations from Isaiah 8:17-18, used as Psalm 22:22 to demonstrate that this familial relationship between Messiah and the redeemed was anticipated in the O.T. It is much more

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<sup>11</sup> As used in the Bible, atonement is an Old Testament concept meaning a temporary covering for sin, whereas propitiation is the New Testament concept meaning the payment for sin that completely satisfies the debt owed. Here, the doctrine of "atonement" is being used in its theological (rather than biblical) sense, meaning *propitiation*.

than the mere relationship God as Creator has with His creatures. God, in the Person of the **Son** who in the incarnation took on the nature of Man, forever became a fellow member of the human race.

- [14] Since the nature of humanity is "flesh and blood", it was necessary for the **Son** (i.e., Jesus) to take on that same nature in order to become a "near kinsman" (Ruth3:9) qualified to redeem humanity (cf. Lev25:47-49).

**The Humanity of Christ.** This passage demonstrates the absolute necessity for the genuine humanity of Jesus Christ. To qualify to redeem mankind, Christ must be a Man, a "kinsman according to the flesh" (Rom9:3). The denial of the humanity of Christ was an ancient Gnostic heresy (the continuation of which is seen in contemporary cults such as the Jehovah's Witnesses), and the Apostle John labeled any such heretic as an "antichrist" (1Jn4:1-3; 2Jn7).

In this verse, "the devil" is said to have "the power of death" relative to mankind, since it was his work of deception that caused the fall of man (Gen3:1-5) and brought the judgment of death upon the human race (Gen3:17-19). Furthermore, as our "accuser" (Rev12:10) he continually demands our "death" as a judgment for our sin.

- [15] It must be admitted that revelation concerning resurrection and the afterlife was incomplete and ambiguous in the O.T., which resulted in the "fear of death". The work of Christ and the revelation of the gospel has now eliminated such a fear for the believer (2Tim1:7-10).
- [16] In the incarnation, Jesus "took on him [the nature of] the seed of Abraham"; that is, Jesus became a Jewish man "made under the law" (Gal4:4), and by His work as a Jewish man He secured the redemption of mankind. In contrast, the fact that He "took not on the nature of angels" means the angelic race has no kinsman qualified to redeem them. Angels who sin are destined for an eternity spent in the lake of fire (cf. Matt25:41) with no opportunity to be saved. Whereas God has chosen to deal with the human race in grace/mercy, He has chosen to deal with the angelic race in perfect justice. Apparently the angels observe "the church" intently in order to learn lessons concerning God's "grace" (cf. Eph3:8-10).
- [17] For this reason, it "behooved" (i.e., was a necessary requirement) Jesus to become a Man in order to qualify as "a merciful and faithful high priest" who could "make reconciliation for the sins of the people", who would come to be called "his brethren". In this verse, "to make reconciliation" is an infinite in the Greek (i.e., a verbal noun), the noun form of which is always translated *propitiation*. Note that it is imperative for the "high priest" to be both "faithful" and "merciful": "faithful" to fulfill all the requirements of justice demanded by God, yet motivated by a "merciful" attitude toward sinners (cf. v18).
- [18] The genuine humanity of Jesus Christ means that just like us, He "hath suffered being tempted", "in all points tempted like as we are" (Heb4:15), meaning He can not only sympathize but perfectly empathize with all members of the human race in our own human limitations and temptations, something no angel is able to do.

### CHAPTER 3

#### SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER MOSES

The subject of the extended comparison of Christ as the Messenger of the New Covenant now shifts from the angels to Moses.

- [1] Note that the recipients of the epistle are addressed as "holy brethren" and "partakers of the heavenly calling"; Paul considers them to be genuine believers, not mere professors. In this address there is also an implicit contrast between the Old (Mosaic) Covenant and the New Covenant, in that the blessings and benefits of the Mosaic Covenant were entirely *earthly* (cf. Deut28:1-14), whereas those of the New Covenant are "heavenly" (including regeneration, an indwelling Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life; cf. Jer31:33-34; Ezek36:26-27; Jn3:16).

The reader is asked to "consider" a new subject of comparison to "Jesus Christ", who is both "Apostle" and "High Priest". The role of an "Apostle" was to represent God to men, whereas the role of the "High Priest" was to represent men before God; no other person occupied both offices, which when combined in "Christ Jesus" make Him a unique mediator (Cp., 1Tim2:5).

- [2] However, the Jews would have viewed "Moses" as just such a mediator<sup>12</sup>, so a comparison of Jesus Christ to Moses is in order. Moses is characterized as being the most "faithful" representative of his "house" (i.e., Israel; Cp., Num12:7); and yet, the faithfulness of Moses was not perfect, in that God forbid his entrance into the Promised Land for a single act of disobedience (cf. Num20:7-12). In contrast, Jesus Christ "was [perfectly] faithful to him that appointed him" (Jn8:29; 17:4).
- [3] Jesus Christ is "worthy of more glory than Moses", because in building the "house" (i.e., the Tabernacle) Moses merely carried out instructions given to him (Exod40:18:33), but those instructions came from God (Exod25:9,40).
- [4] But even the Tabernacle, which was built and presided over by Moses, was only a miniature, earthly representation of God's throne room in heaven (Heb8:2,5; Cp., Rev11:19), over which the Son presides (Cp., Heb1:3). Also in view here is that whereas Moses built the Tabernacle, God created all things, and He did so through Jesus Christ (Jn1:1-3; Col1:16).
- [5] Although "Moses" was "faithful", he was faithful in the role of a "servant" of God (Cp., 1Chron6:49; Rev15:3). Furthermore, by Moses' own "testimony" one greater than he would come (Deut18:15-19), by which he pointed prophetically to Christ.
- [6] In contrast to Moses who was merely a *servant* in the house of God, "Christ" is a "**son**" in the house of God, which is "his own house". Furthermore, "we" (by whom Paul means Christians) are also sons in

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<sup>12</sup> Moses certainly acted as a mediator. However, his mediatory role was on behalf of the nation of Israel alone, whereas that of Jesus Christ extends to the whole world (Cp., Jn1:29; 1Jn2:2).

that house (cf. Jn1:12; Rom8:14-17; Gal4:1-7), a privilege not enjoyed by Moses or any of the O.T. saints (cf. Matt11:11).

The sonship of believers in this present age, however, appears to be conditional; namely, it is true "if<sup>13</sup> we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end". Note that the author (Paul) includes himself (i.e., "we") in those who might fail to persevere "unto the end" (Cp., 1Cor9:24-27). There are two extreme interpretations of this clause. Arminians understand it to teach that individual salvation can be lost by a failure to persevere in the faith; Calvinists<sup>14</sup> typically teach that such a failure to persevere "unto the end" is evidence that an individual was never born again. However, the testimony of scripture is unequivocal that the salvation of one genuinely born again can never be lost (cf. Jn5:24; 10:28; 1Pet1:3-5), even for believers who fail to persevere in good works (1Cor3:11-15) or belief (Rom3:3-4; 2Tim2:11-13); failure of a genuine believer to persevere brings temporal chastisement (1Cor11:32), up to and including death (1Cor11:30; 1Jn5:16), and loss of rewards in the age to come, but not loss of salvation (1Cor3:11-15). Nevertheless, for these Jewish Christians to revert to Judaism would appear to cast doubt on whether they were genuine believers (Cp., 1Jn2:19).

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#### 2ND PARENTHETICAL ADMONITION/WARNING (Hebrews 3:7-4:7)

In the second parenthetical warning passage, the potential sin of Paul's generation of Jewish Christians in reverting back to Judaism is compared to the actual sin of Moses' generation of Jewish believers in refusing to enter the Promised Land (i.e., they desired to return to Egypt; Num14:3). The proper interpretation of this passage in Hebrews must be consistent with that of Numbers 13-14. The two scenarios are presented as being entirely analogous, so that the consequences threatened on the first generation of Jewish Christians are identical to those that were levied on the Jewish believers of Moses' generation: temporal chastisement up to and including personal death, but not loss of personal salvation.

[7] Hebrews 3:7-11 is a quotation of Psalm 95:7-11, which is anonymous as recorded in the Book of Psalms, but it is attributed to David in Hebrews 4:7 and to the "Holy Spirit" in this verse (2Tim3:16). Note that the quotation is introduced with "the Holy Spirit saith", using a present tense verb; though this Psalm was written c. 1000 BC, its message to believing people of God endures to the present.

[8] The concern is that genuine believers might "harden" their "hearts" in rebellion against what they know to be God's will. The Psalmist has in mind a particular time/event in history when this happened previously, "as in the provocation, in the day of trial in the wilderness" (i.e., the refusal of the Exodus generation of Israelites to enter the Promised Land; cf. Num13-14).

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<sup>13</sup> In Greek, "if" is the conjunction **ἐάν**, making this a 3rd class conditional clause; it communicates that either outcome is genuinely possible.

<sup>14</sup> This includes those today who would affirm the position commonly designated as Lordship Salvation.

- [9] The "fathers" were the Jewish ancestors of the Jewish Christians Paul is addressing in this epistle. Just as Moses' generation "tempted" and "proved" God by their refusal to enter the Promised Land (Num14:1-10), resulting in God's judgment that they wander in the wilderness "forty years" (until they all died; Num14:29-34), Paul's generation of Jewish Christians would do the same should they revert back to Judaism. And just as Moses' generation of Jews had witnessed God's mighty "works" in the ten plagues upon Egypt (Num14:22), so Paul's generation of Jewish Christians had witnessed the "signs", "wonders", and "miracles" accompanying the apostolic era (Heb2:4). It should be observed that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple that took place in 70 AD was approximately "forty years" after the rejection of Christ by the nation of Israel.

Hermeneutical Note. To interpret this passage in Hebrews properly, it must be recognized that the Exodus generation of Jews were **believers**. All the Jews present at Kadesh-Barnea (Num13:26) had lived through the first Passover in Egypt. Their 'profession of faith' took place when they applied the blood of the lamb to the doorposts/lintels of their homes on the night of the tenth plague in Egypt, lest they die (Exod12:1-13). The fact that they were present at Kadesh-Barnea indicates they had done so. Their subsequent refusal to enter the Promised Land was not evidence that they never truly believed, but a heinous act of rebellion on the part of genuine believers.

- [10] The sin of Moses' generation of Jews "grieved" God. The "err[or]" of their "heart" was in choosing their own way in preference to God's "ways". In their case, a return to Egypt appeared to be a safer choice than entering the Promised Land (which was clearly God's will for them).
- [11] God's judgment on Moses' generation of Jews for their rebellion against His will was that "they shall not enter into my rest" (i.e., they would all die wandering in the wilderness). In the O.T., possession of the Promised Land by Israel was not a picture of salvation, but of "rest" (i.e., blessing, reward). In theological terms, entrance into the Promised Land was not an issue of justification, but of sanctification, and sanctification is a process that applies only to believers.
- [12] Paul is concerned that his own generation of Jewish believers could commit a similar sin. Namely, should they return to Judaism, they would manifest "an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God". Proper understanding of this clause depends on the context of the comparison (cf. v9, Hermeneutical Note). The "unbelief" Paul has in mind is not a denial of the existence of the Biblical God, but a lack of faith in His promises to them; and their "departing from the living God" is not an apostasy from the faith, but a refusal to walk according to His revealed will.
- [13] Sanctification of the believer cannot be accomplished in solitary isolation, it requires the "exhort[ation]" of other believers on a "daily" basis (Cp., Act2:46; Heb10:25). The clause "while it is called Today" is an allusion back to the quotation of Psalm 95:7 (Heb3:7), the idea being 'while there is still opportunity' (i.e., persistent "sin" on the part of a believer will eventually bring

God's temporal judgment, and after that point, even repentance will not reverse God's decision to judge; cf. Num14:39-45; 1Jn5:16).

- [14] Paul says that "we" (including both himself and the recipients of this epistle) "are made partakers of Christ". This speaks to the point-in-time work of regeneration. The verb in this clause is in the perfect tense, passive voice, indicative mood; this means their regeneration was an act completely accomplished in the past with effects that endure in the present, their regeneration was not a work performed by them but upon them, and their regeneration is a reality (Cp., 2Cor5:17). Paul and his readers are genuine believers who have been born again. However, it was still a possibility that they (including Paul) might fail to persevere "unto the end" (see discussion and footnote associated with v6), just as the believing Jews who left Egypt in the Exodus failed to enter the Promised Land because of their lack of "confidence" in God.
- [15] Alluding back to Psalm 95:7-8 (Heb3:7-8), Paul applies that exhortation to his own generation of Jewish Christians, warning them that they not commit the same sin as Moses' generation of Jewish believers.
- [16] Note that those who committed the previous sin of rebellion against the will of God were "all that came out of Egypt by Moses"; they were all believers since they had all lived through the Passover/Exodus in Egypt, yet it was still possible for them to rebel against God (including Moses himself; cf. Num20:12).
- [17] God was "grieved" with that generation of Jewish believers who rebelled against His will, judging them to wander "forty years" and die in the wilderness (Num14:33).
- [18] God forbid that generation of Jewish believers from entering "into his rest" (i.e., the Promised Land), even after they repented of their rebellion (cf. Num14:39-45), because they "believed not" His promise to give them the land of Canaan (Num13:1-2).
- [19] God judged that generation of Jewish believers with forty years of suffering and eventual death for their sin of "unbelief" (cf. v12).

#### CHAPTER 4

- [1] The concern is that the recipients of this epistle (i.e., Jewish Christians) "should seem to come short" of "entering into [God's] rest", which is a "promise" available to them. Many wrongly confuse "his rest" with the "promise" of heaven for the believer, which leads to an erroneous conclusion that a disobedient believer can lose his salvation. But in the context of Numbers 13-14, the "rest" God offered to Israel was entrance into the Promised Land, not entrance into heaven. The idea in view is a believer's entrance into the "rest" of being in the perfect will of God in this present life, enjoying all the (earthly and temporal) blessings God "promise[s]" to those who believe and obey Him. In contrast, a believer's failure to believe the "promise[s]" of God and obey Him will bring (earthly and temporal) consequences (e.g., 1Cor11:27-30; 1Jn5:16-17).

Note that the writer of the epistle (i.e., Paul) considers himself susceptible to this temptation to stop "short" (Cp., 1Cor9:24-27), since he includes himself in the address of the warning: "Let us, therefore, fear".

- [2] In this verse, there is no article with "gospel" in the Greek text; "gospel" is being used in a non-technical sense, simply meaning a good message. The "us" is Paul's generation of Jewish believers (i.e., Christians), whereas the "them" is Moses' generation of Jewish believers. Both generations received "the gospel" or "the word preached", in that both generations of Jewish believers were offered blessing from God for believing and obeying Him. In the case of Moses' generation, that offer did not "profit" them because it was not "mixed with faith" (i.e., they did not believe that God would give them victory over the giants in the Promised Land; Num13:31-33; 14:11).

**The Extent of Our Faith.** Faith, in its most comprehensive form, is believing much more than the gospel. While simply believing "the gospel" is saving faith (cf. 1Cor15:1-4), saving faith alone is not sufficient to enter into all the blessings of God available to the believer (Cp., Mk9:24); for that, the believer must believe all that God has said (i.e., the Bible). The great spiritual error of modern Christendom is the notion that as long as a person believes the gospel (and is saved), it is unimportant what he believes about the rest of the Bible (Cp., 2Cor10:3-5).

- [3] Here, "we who have believed" is more accurately translated as we who believe; Paul is not concerned about their prior belief in the gospel, but their present belief in the promises of God for the believer. Paul again quotes from Psalm 95:11, but follows it with the assertion that "the works were finished from the foundation of the world" – the idea being that all "works" necessary for the "rest" (i.e., spiritual blessing) of the believer have been accomplished by God, but the believer must appropriate them by personal faith.
- [4] An analogy is made to the "rest" that even "God" Himself enjoyed on the "seventh day" of creation, after He had completed all His work (cf. Gen2:1-2).
- [5] This alludes back to v3, which is a quotation from Psalm 95:11, translated there as "they should not enter into my rest". In the rendering of this clause in Hebrews 4:5, "if" is the Greek particle **εἰ** indicating the construction is a 2nd class conditional clause, the condition of unreality (i.e., it is assumed that the protasis is false, that Moses' generation would not enter into God's rest).
- [6] Although "they to whom it was first preached" (i.e., the Exodus generation) did not "enter into" God's rest because of their "unbelief", it is a spiritual blessing that "remaineth" available to subsequent generations.
- [7] Paul's conclusion of v6 that the spiritual blessing of God's rest remains available to subsequent generations after Kadesh-Barnea is supported by again quoting from Psalm 95:7-8, written by "David", emphasizing his use of "Today". If the blessing was available to David's generation, more than 450 years after being offered to the

Exodus generation (Act13:20), it is reasonable to conclude that such a rest still remains available for God's people.

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#### SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER JOSHUA

Although Moses failed to do so, his successor Joshua led the nation of Israel into the Promised Land. The subject of the extended comparison of Christ as the Messenger of the New Covenant now briefly considers Joshua (intriguingly the namesake of Jesus<sup>15</sup>).

- [8] If God's blessing of "rest" available for Israel had been nothing more than their entrance into the Promised Land, that "rest" would have been accomplished when "Joshua" led the nation into Canaan. The fact that David spoke of the availability of "rest" in his own day testifies to the fact that much more is intended by God. Note that Joshua led the nation of Israel into the Promised Land the first time, whereas Jesus will do it **the second time**<sup>16</sup>.
- [9] Thus, there remains even to Paul's generation a "rest" (i.e., spiritual blessing appropriated by personal faith) available to "the people of God" (i.e., Israel).
- [10] This spiritual "rest" is appropriated by personal faith on the part of the believer who has "ceased from his own works"<sup>17</sup>, entirely analogous to "God" ceasing from His own work of creation on the seventh day.

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#### 3RD PARENTHETICAL ADMONITION/WARNING (Hebrews 4:11-13)

Having established that there still remains a rest available to the people of God (i.e., the Hebrew Christians of Paul's generation; Heb4:8-9), Paul admonishes them to avail themselves of it.

- [11] Paul uses an oxymoron here, exhorting the Hebrew Christians of his generation to "labor" (i.e., work) to enter into the "rest" (i.e., appropriate the promised blessings of God by faith, apart from works) offered by God. Failure to do so is "unbelief" on their part, analogous to the "example" of Moses' generation at Kadesh-Barnea (cf. Heb4:16-19).
- [12] Paul's exposition of Psalm 95:7-11 (begun in Hebrews 3:7) is now over. The failure of Moses' generation at Kadesh-Barnea is not merely a past historical event infallibly recorded in "**the word of God**", but a "quick" (i.e., living, not in the sense of changing, but in the sense of continuing to be relevant to all future generations)

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<sup>15</sup> Jesus is the Hellenized or Greek form of the Hebrew name **Joshua**, which means *Jehovah saves* (Cp., Matt1:21).

<sup>16</sup> The theme of Stephen's sermon in Acts 7 is that Israel always fails to wholly follow Jehovah the first time, but responds in faith (and fulfillment of prophecy) **the second time**.

<sup>17</sup> Moses' faithless generation at Kadesh-Barnea believed that they would have to conquer the giants in Canaan by their "own works", rather than believing that God would supernaturally deliver their enemies into their hands entirely apart from works on their part (Cp., Num14:6-8).

and "powerful" resource for the believer. By use of "the word of God", the believer is able to rightly "discern" the "thoughts and intents of the heart", both his own and those of others, and make proper distinctions between things that are seemingly inextricable (e.g., "soul" and "spirit"<sup>18</sup>, or "joints" and "marrow"). The spiritual condition of Moses' generation of Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea is a clear example of this; one would be tempted to look at their rebellion against God and conclude they were unbelievers, but "the word of God" reveals otherwise.

- [13] There is a subtle shift here between the written "word of God" (v12) and the Son (Jesus Christ) as the living "word of God" (note the use of the masculine personal pronouns "his", "him"; Cp., Jnl:1; Rev19:11-13). As the written "word of God" judges the "creature" in this present life, every "creature" (i.e., believer in the present context) will also be judged in the future by Jesus Christ (2Cor5:10), where his works and motives will be made "manifest"; at this judgment, it is the loss of rewards, not the loss of salvation, that will be under consideration (1Cor3:11-15). Paul is admonishing the Hebrew Christians of his generation, who are tempted to revert back to Judaism, to live in light of this coming judgment.

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#### SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER HIGH PRIEST/SACRIFICES

Up to this point in the epistle, the writer has been concerned with demonstrating that Jesus Christ, God's **Son** and final messenger to the nation of Israel, is superior to all of the messengers that God sent under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant, including the prophets, the angels, Moses, and Joshua. Now, Paul transitions to an extended analysis of the **Son's** role under the New Covenant as high priest and final sacrifice, in which he demonstrates Christ's superiority to the priesthood and sacrifices of the Old Covenant.

- [14] The role of "Jesus, the **Son** of God" under the New Covenant includes that of "high priest". Unlike the priests under the Mosaic Covenant, who officiated in an earthly Temple, Jesus "is passed into the heavens", suggesting that His priestly ministry occurs in the Temple in heaven (cf. Rev11:19). Note that the writer's concern for the recipients of this letter is the possibility that they might fail to "hold fast [their] profession" of faith in "Jesus" as God's "**Son**" and Messiah, His final messenger and final sacrifice, and return to Judaism.
- [15] In His incarnation, Jesus Christ the Man can genuinely understand and identify with the "infirmities" of mankind. While this was true of the descendants of Aaron, Jesus as "high priest" is superior to them since He alone is "without sin". This is incredibly important, since the role of "high priest" is to mediate between sinful men and a holy God (1Tim2:5). In advocating before God on behalf of the sinful people of Israel, the sons of Aaron were always at a disadvantage

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<sup>18</sup> Many modern theologians make no distinction between the "soul" and the "spirit", considering man's nature to be bipartite (i.e., body and soul/spirit) rather than tripartite (i.e., body, soul, and spirit). However, the word of God clearly teaches a tripartite nature for man (1Thess5:23), "dividing asunder [the] soul and spirit" (Heb4:12).

since they themselves were guilty of the very same sins; this disadvantage is eliminated in the high priesthood of Christ.

- [16] Because of Jesus Christ as sinless high priest and perfect advocate for the believer with God the Father (1Jn2:1), Paul exhorts his readers to "come boldly unto the throne" of God, confident that much needed "mercy" and "grace" are readily available. Contrast this with the reality under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant: 1) no ordinary believer ever entered into the presence of God (i.e., the Holy of Holies), the high priest alone being permitted to do so on the Day of Atonement (Num16:1-34), and 2) no high priest ever entered the Holy of Holies with boldness, but rather with fear and trepidation caused by his own unpropitiated (Cp., 1Jn2:2) sinful condition.

#### CHAPTER 5

- [1] Under the Old Covenant, the "high priest" was "taken from among" the sons/descendants of Aaron (cf. Exod28:1), and their role was to offer "gifts" (i.e., the burnt, meal, and peace offerings were freewill offerings; Lev1-3) and "sacrifices for sins" (i.e., the sin and trespass offerings were required offerings; Lev4-5) to "God" on behalf of "men".
- [2] Certainly every priest taken from the descendants of Aaron had "compassion" for those he represented, since he shared with them the same "infirmities" inherited by every natural descendant of Adam. In speaking of "the ignorant", this is a technical term from the Law of Moses; animal sacrifices could only atone for sins committed "in ignorance" (cf. Lev4:2; 5:15).
- [3] Because of his own personal sins, every priest under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant had to "offer" sacrifices "for himself" in addition to those made on behalf of "the people" of Israel (cf. Lev4:3; 16:11).
- [4] To be high priest and minister before God on behalf of others was an "honor" no man could take for himself, he had to be "called of God". Under the Mosaic Covenant, "Aaron" and his sons were chosen by God to be priests (Exod28:1; Num16:40), in contrast to Korah and his family who were severely and supernaturally judged when they attempted to force themselves into the priesthood God had ordained for Aaron (Num16:1-35; Cp. Jude11).
- [5] In the same way, God ordained His "Son", Jesus "Christ", to be "high priest" under the New Covenant. Paul again quotes Psalm 2:7 (also Heb1:5), where God ordained His incarnate **Son** as Messiah (Ps2:2) to be king (Ps2:6); in doing so, Paul calls attention to the apparent crisis that would exist under the Mosaic Covenant, since the offices of king and high priest were mutually exclusive<sup>19</sup> (Cp., 2Chron26:18).
- [6] The apparent crisis is resolved by the fact that King Messiah's priesthood is not after the order of Aaron, but "after the order of Melchizedek" (quoting Ps110:4, a psalm of David that had prophesied the uniting of the offices of king and priest in the Person of

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<sup>19</sup> King Uzziah, who had a very long reign as a good king of Judah (2Chron25:1-5), was judged severely when he attempted to intrude upon the office of the priesthood (2Chron26:16-21).

Messiah; see also Zech6:9-13), the significance of which will be taken up in Hebrews 7:1ff.

- [7] In this verse, the subject "Who" is Christ (v5). The reference to "prayers", "supplications", "crying", and "tears" made "unto him that was able to save him from<sup>20</sup> death" is almost certainly a reference to the prayers of Christ to His Father from Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion (cf. Matt26:36-44; Mk14:32-40). Christ's prayers were not petitions to be spared from dying, but: 1) to confirm that His death was the only way to effect God's purpose of redemption, in which case He was willing to suffer it (Matt26:39), and 2) to petition that His soul not be left in hell, but that He would be raised from the dead (Cp., Ps16:10; Act2:27,31). These prayers of Christ were "heard" (i.e., answered) by God (cf. Act2:3-36).
- [8] Here, the assertion that the "Son" (i.e., Christ) "learned" must be understood in the sense of experiencing the progressive sanctification of His genuine human nature (like us; Heb4:15), not any diminishing of His eternal divine nature.
- [9] The sinless human life lived by the Son, culminating in His substitutionary, sacrificial death, made Him "perfect" (i.e., complete) as the **Savior**, after which God is free to offer "salvation unto all". Many have twisted the end of this verse, "salvation unto all them that obey him", in an attempt to support a salvation by works. However, the obedience God demands for his offer of salvation "unto all" is nothing more than faith (Cp., Jn6:27-29; Rom4:1-5; Eph2:8-9).
- [10] The high priesthood of Christ is "after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps110:4), unique in that it invests the offices of king and priest in one person, something forbidden in the Levitical priesthood established by the Mosaic covenant.

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4TH PARENTHETICAL ADMONITION/WARNING (Hebrews 5:11-6:12)

The subject of the priesthood of Christ was introduced starting in Hebrews 4:14, and it has now arrived at the vitally important issue concerning the fact that it is patterned "after the order of Melchizedek" (in contrast to that of Aaron). The writer has much more to say concerning this issue, which will be resumed at Hebrews 6:20. However, he is concerned that his readers will not be able to understand his argumentation because of their spiritual immaturity. Thus, the fourth parenthetical warning passage is interjected, in which the serious consequences of spiritual immaturity on the part of the believer are considered.

- [11] Paul is concerned that the vitally important, but admittedly "hard" (i.e., advanced), issues related to the person of Melchizedek and the priesthood of Christ he needs to discuss with his readers will not be understood by them because they are "dull of hearing".
- [12] The subject of Melchizedek and the implications of his priesthood relative to the Person and work of Christ is an advanced topic of

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<sup>20</sup> In the phrase, "save him **from** death", "from" is a translation of the Greek **εκ**, which means *out of* (Cp., Rev3:10).

revelation, metaphorically categorized as "meat" in contrast to "milk". Paul's expectation of the believers to whom he is writing is that they have had adequate "time" to mature in their faith and understanding of scripture, such that they should be "teach[ing]" at least the "first principles" of scripture themselves<sup>21</sup>. Paul chastises them that they have failed to progress to the point where they are prepared to receive advanced teaching, needing rather "that one teach [them] again the first principles (i.e., the basics) of the oracles of God". This admonition is as pertinent to believers today as it was for the original recipients of this epistle; the clear implication is that growth in spiritual maturity and an ever increasing understanding of scripture is expected of all believers.

- [13] Paul compares one who is "unskillful in the word" (i.e., have a limited, immature understanding of it) to a "babe". While this is a natural condition for a new believer, it is unacceptable in one who has long been a believer commanded to "study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2Tim2:15).
- [14] In contrast, "them that are of full age" (i.e., mature believers) are expected to be able to handle "meat" (i.e., advanced topics). Preparation for "meat" comes "by reason of use", that is the serious and consistent study of scripture (2Tim2:15); only then will the believer be properly prepared to "discern [between] good and evil".

**Metaphor of Milk versus Meat.** The metaphor used in Hebrews 5:11-14 is that of a baby nourished by milk contrasted with an adult nourished by meat. It is normal and natural for a baby to require milk; in fact, it is impossible for him to eat meat. However, an adult is fully capable of eating meat, and it would be strange and unnatural to find him (as an adult) being nourished on milk alone; indeed, an adult who drank only milk would be seriously malnourished. So also with believers who derive their spiritual nourishment from scripture (cf. 2Pet2:2). At first, new believers (babies) are not prepared to understand anything more than the "first principles" (i.e., basics) revealed in scripture. Mature believers (adults), however, should have progressed to understanding increasingly advanced topics. Just as an adult who used only milk for his physical nourishment would be physically malnourished, so a mature believer who understands only the "milk" of the word is spiritually malnourished.

## CHAPTER 6

Hebrews 6:1-8 is an admittedly difficult passage that has challenged interpretation for many centuries. It has long been the go-to passage for those who would teach that a genuine believer can lose his salvation. However, this passage is **not** teaching that genuine believers can lose their salvation. Three things must be kept firmly in mind in the interpretation of this passage. First, the overall context of the Epistle to the Hebrews is that of Jewish believers considering a return to Judaism

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<sup>21</sup> Paul's expectation that his Jewish audience should by this time be "teachers" of biblical truth is yet another implicit indication that they were genuine believers, or at least he considered them to be; he would never say this of unbelievers.

because of persecution. They were not changing their faith in Jesus as Messiah, only their religious practice. According to Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "These Jewish believers felt they could go back into Judaism and be saved again later when persecution subsided. The new salvation would erase the sin of their apostasy." Second, the immediate context (Heb5:11-14) is one contrasting spiritual maturity with immaturity (i.e., progressive sanctification), not sanctification with justification. Failure to deal properly with the crucifixion of Christ, the final and only effectual sacrifice for sin, will leave these Jewish believers in a permanent state of spiritual immaturity (i.e., infancy); it is impossible to progress any further in biblical/Christian maturity if this proper foundation is not established (cf. 1Cor3:11). Third, scripture never contradicts itself. If the overwhelming and clear testimony of scripture in many diverse places is that of the eternal security of the believer, one difficult passage cannot negate the many clear ones.

- [1] The introduction of this passage with "THEREFORE" is an explicit indication that it draws upon the immediately preceding context (Heb5:11-14), that of the spiritual immaturity of the recipients of this epistle. The challenge of Paul to his readers is not to believe the gospel, but to mature in their faith. In order for them to "go on unto perfection" (i.e., maturity), they must progress in their understanding beyond doctrines categorized as "first principles" (Heb5:12), which include "repentance from dead works", "faith toward God", "baptisms", "laying on of hands", "resurrection of the dead", and "eternal judgment". According to the writer of Hebrews, these doctrines are spiritual "milk" (Heb5:12-13).
- [2] Presumably this list of "doctrines" is representative, not exhaustive. However, note that the context suggests that all of these doctrines should have been well known from Judaism (i.e., the Old Testament); foundationally, they are not new revelations in the New Testament. Interestingly, the "doctrine of baptisms" is included in this list, meaning our understanding of "baptism" should be grounded in Judaism<sup>22</sup> (i.e., the Old Testament), which would include: 1) there are multiple "baptisms" (e.g., the baptisms performed by John and Paul were not the same; Act19:3-5; cf. Heb9:10), 2) baptism was never performed on infants or unwilling/unknowing participants, and 3) baptism was always by immersion.
- [3] Here Paul asserts that "we" (i.e., he includes himself with his audience) "will" (future tense) go on unto perfection (v1). This is an action that has not yet taken place, but will take place for both Paul and his readers in the future; this must refer to spiritual maturity, not salvation. The final clause, "if God permit", is a 1st class conditional construction in Greek, meaning it is presumed to be true.
- [4] Verses 4-6 are one long sentence. In Greek, the sentence begins with "it is impossible" in the emphatic position. The key point being emphasized is that "it is impossible . . . to renew them again unto repentance" (v6). Paul's audience believed they could return to the practice of Judaism and its rituals, including animal sacrifices, until the persecution passes, then be "renew[ed] again"; Paul

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<sup>22</sup> Here, "Judaism" is being used to denote the proper exercise of faith under the Mosaic Covenant as revealed and illustrated in the Old Testament and the Gospels, not modern (unbelieving and apostate) Judaism.

emphasizes that this is "impossible"<sup>23</sup>. He then enumerates five spiritual attributes possessed by his audience, all of which are characteristics of genuine believers.

First, they "were once enlightened". This refers to the moment they understood, believed, and were born again (Eph1:18; Cp., Heb10:32). The emphasis is on the fact that regeneration occurs only "once" (i.e., once-and-for-all, never repeated; Cp., Heb9:27-28).

Second, they "have tasted of the heavenly gift". While some have argued that "tasted" suggests something less than ingestion, or full appropriation, the author of Hebrews does not use it that way (Cp., Heb2:9). The "heavenly gift" they had received was salvation (Eph2:8).

Third, they "were made partakers of the Holy Spirit". To be a "partaker" means to enjoy real participation. Only genuine believers enjoy a real and personal relationship with the Holy Spirit (Eph1:13).

- [5] Fourth, they "have tasted the good word of God". Here, the Greek word translated "word" is  $\rho\eta\mu\alpha$ , which generally denotes the spoken word. This generation of believers was privileged to have heard with their own ears prophetic pronouncements from the apostles of Jesus.

Fifth, they "[have tasted] the powers of the age to come". This generation of believers was also privileged to have witnessed the authenticating "signs", "wonders", and "miracles" (same Greek word translated "powers" in this verse) performed by the apostles (Heb2:4).

- [6] Given the unique circumstances of Paul's audience (vv4-5), genuine Jewish believers who had personally heard the apostles and witnessed their miracles, it will be impossible (v4) "to renew them again unto repentance" if they should "fall away"<sup>24</sup>. Two reasons are given for the impossibility. First, it would require a re-crucifixion of Christ, something that will never happen (Heb7:27; 9:28; 10:10). Second, it would "put [Christ] to an open shame", since it would imply that Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice of Himself (Heb10:10), which He asserted "finished" His mission (Jn19:30), was ineffectual.

Paul's generation of Jewish believers living in Jerusalem are in danger of making an irrevocable decision, from which there will be no opportunity to repent, just as the Jews of Moses' generation made at Kadesh-Barnea. They cannot return to Judaism and expect to escape the prophesied judgment (i.e., the destruction of Jerusalem; Luk19:41-44) on that generation of the nation of Israel that rejected Messiah.

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<sup>23</sup> Keep in mind the explicit analogy to the Kadesh-Barnea crisis. After the Jews' rebellion against the clear will of God and His decree to judge that generation of believing Jews for their heinous sin, their opportunity to mitigate the temporal consequences of their actions was past; at that point, repentance on their part and renewal by God was **impossible** (cf. Num14:1-45).

<sup>24</sup> Note that if salvation is the subject of this passage, Hebrews 6:4-6 clearly teaches that if it were to be lost it could never be reacquired.

- [7] In verses 7-8, Paul illustrates the point made in Hebrews 6:1-6 using an observation from nature. It is natural and reasonable for a farmer, who labors to work his land which receives "rain that cometh often upon it", to expect that the land will produce good crops for his enjoyment. Similarly, it is natural and reasonable for God to expect His children, who have often and abundantly received His blessings, to produce good fruit (i.e., "go on unto perfection"; v1).
- [8] If instead of producing a good crop, a well-tilled and watered field produces "thorns" and "briers", those crops will be "burned" rather than enjoyed by the farmer. Similarly, if the abundantly-blessed children of God produce bad fruit instead of good fruit, they must expect judgment; this will take place at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2Cor5:10; cf. 1Cor3:11-15).
- [9] This verse is decisive in constraining the proper interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6. The subject in this passage is not salvation, but "things that accompany salvation" (i.e., not justification, but progressive sanctification). Speaking pastorally, Paul is "persuaded" that his readers will choose the "better" path, which would be to "go on unto perfection" (v1) rather than return to Judaism.
- [10] As an added encouragement, Paul asserts that "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor" on behalf of the "the saints". These Hebrew Christians are suffering persecution, and by standing firm (i.e., not returning to Judaism) they will undoubtedly suffer more. However, all their "work and labor" will be rewarded by God, if not in the present life, in the age to come (1Cor3:11-15; 2Cor5:9-10; Gal6:7-9).
- [11] Paul's "desire" for his readers is that they would persevere in faithfulness "unto the end", in "full assurance of hope". In the N.T., "hope" is never used to mean a desirable but uncertain outcome (as we most often use it today), but always means a *confident expectation that what God has promised will come to pass* (Cp., Rom4:18-21; Tit1:2; 1Pet1:21; 1Jn3:3).
- [12] The "promises" (plural) of God in view here are much more than mere salvation in the life to come, but the rest that comes with progressive sanctification in the present life. This rest is not obtained by the "slothful", but only "through faith and patience" (i.e., belief and perseverance in faithfulness; Cp., Heb4:9-11).

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SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST OVER HIGH PRIEST/SACRIFICES – CONTINUED

The parenthetical passage (Heb5:11-6:12) admonishing the Hebrew Christians to press on to spiritual maturity, and considering the consequences of not doing so, has come to an end. Paul now returns to his discourse on the superiority of the high priesthood of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice over those of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant. However, the warning passage just concluded ended with an exhortation to "be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises [of God]" (v12), so Paul's discourse resumes with Abraham, an example of one whose "faith and patience" in God is worthy of admiration and imitation.

- [13] In the present context, "Abraham" is the perfect example of one whose "faith and patience" (v12) in God should be emulated. Like the 1st century generation of Hebrew Christians, Abraham was called on by God to give up everything he knew (i.e., his former form of worship, place of worship, home, family), relying only on God's "promise" to him (Gen12:1-3). As Abraham had to leave Ur, these Hebrew Christians had to leave Jerusalem (cf. Luk21:20-24).
- [14] Verse 14 is a quotation of Genesis 22:17, God's promise reiterated to Abraham after he had shown himself willing to offer Isaac at God's command.
- [15] In the Bible, Abraham is often extolled as the greatest example of walking by faith (Cp., Rom4:16-21), believing in the promises of God to him, some of which would not be fulfilled in his own lifetime, but in the age to come (cf. Heb11:13). The Greek verb rendered "obtained [the promise]" is in aorist tense, indicative mood, and it is properly translated in this verse as a past tense. While Abraham received the fulfillment of some of God's promises to him during his lifetime (e.g., to have a son, Isaac; Gen17:19; 21:1-3), he did not live to see all of those promises fulfilled (e.g., to inherit the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession; Gen13:14-17; Heb11:9,13). The occurrence of a past tense here should be recognized as a *prophetic* past tense, used in advance as an implicit expression of the certainty of its fulfillment<sup>25</sup>.
- [16] For men, to "swear" an "oath" by an authority "greater" than themselves (i.e., God) is the highest possible expression of veracity and sincerity and is accepted by other men as the greatest level of personal commitment.
- [17] God, in condescending to communicate with Abraham in human terms, is in the predicament<sup>26</sup> of not having an authority greater than Himself by which to swear in support of the "immutability of his counsel"; so, "he swore by himself" (v13).
- [18] Thus, God's commitment to Abraham was assured by "two immutable things" (cf. Deut19:15), namely: 1) His "oath" (i.e., His word, which "cannot be broken"; Jn10:35), and 2) His divine nature (i.e., "it [is] impossible for God to lie"). As Abraham trusted God to keep His promises to him, so all believers after Abraham should likewise have confidence in "the hope [God has] set before us".

In this verse, the phrase "fled for refuge" is an allusion to the cities of refuge, which under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant were God's provision of mercy for the sinner who deserved death (Num35:6-32).

- [19] Ultimately, Abraham's "hope" is the same hope upon which all believers since have relied; that is, the covenant God made with

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<sup>25</sup> Some err in understanding passages like this to suggest that all of God's promises to Abraham were fulfilled in the past, leading to the need to allegorize those promises to Abraham that were not *literally* fulfilled in his lifetime (e.g., possession of the Promised Land). The proper understanding is that all the promises made to Abraham will be literally fulfilled to him, if not in his lifetime, then in the age to come (i.e., in the Millennial Kingdom a resurrected Abraham will personally possess the land promised to him).

<sup>26</sup> This "predicament" implicitly testifies to the aseity and absolute sovereignty of the one true God.

Abraham (Gen12:1-3), since all of God's promises to both Jews and believing Gentiles flow out of that covenant (Gal3:29); see the Chart, GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL COVENANTS WITH ISRAEL. The believer's ultimate "hope" is to "entereth into that within the veil", alluding to the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle/Temple, which represented the personal presence of God (Cp., Lev16:2,15).

- [20] In this hope "Jesus" is our "forerunner", having "entered" into the very presence of God as a resurrected Man and representing all (believing) men as our "high priest" (the role of the high priest is to be the designated representative of men before God). However, under the New Covenant, "Jesus" is a high priest "after the order of Melchizedek" as prophesied in Psalm 110:4, in contrast to the high priests under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant who were after the order of Aaron. The contrasts between these two priesthoods will be taken up starting in the Hebrews 7.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUPERIORITY OF MELCHIZEDEK'S (CHRIST'S) PRIESTHOOD OVER AARON'S PRIESTHOOD

In Hebrews 7:1-8:5, the priesthood of Melchizedek is contrasted with that of Aaron, showing in every way it's superiority. Since under the New Covenant Christ's priesthood is after the order of Melchizedek, it is infinitely "better" than the priesthood provided by the Old (Mosaic) Covenant, making a return to Judaism (i.e., the worship of God as prescribed by the Mosaic Covenant) untenable.

- [1] The record of Melchizedek in the O.T. is extremely brief (Gen14:18-20), but profoundly significant. Melchizedek was both "king of Salem" (i.e., Jerusalem; Ps76:2) and "priest of the most high God". By God's design, the offices of king and priest could never be held by one man under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant.
- [2] Melchizedek's name means "King of righteousness", and his title King of Salem (i.e., *shalom*) means "King of peace". Both of these titles have profound messianic overtones (Cp., Isa9:6; 11:4; Jer23:5-6). The note that Abraham gave to Melchizedek "a tenth part" of the spoils taken at the "slaughter of the kings" (v1; Gen14:15-16;20) is a clear indication that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham.
- [3] Many have understood Melchizedek to be a Christophany (a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ). But rather than teaching that Melchizedek was Christ, this verse asserts the opposite; Melchizedek was "made like unto the Son of God", meaning he was not literally Christ, but merely a **type** of Christ.

The description of Melchizedek as "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life" superficially appears to describe an eternal person (which, if true, would support Melchizedek being a Christophany), but this extended characterization just emphasizes that scripture gives no record of Melchizedek's genealogy, which stands in stark contrast to the Aaronic priesthood, in which it was required that a priest be able to document his physical descent from Aaron (Exod29:9); the priesthood of Melchizedek is not hereditary, as Aaron's was. Furthermore, his "beginning of days" (i.e., birthday) had to be

known, since an Aaronic priest only served in the Temple from age 30 to 50 (cf. Num4:3,23,30,47), in contrast to Melchizedek who "abideth a priest continually".

**The Identity of Melchizedek.** If Melchizedek was not Christ, who was he? He must be a person of great importance, greater even than Abraham, since Abraham paid a tithe to him, and he blessed Abraham (Heb7:4-7). Jewish tradition identifies Melchizedek as **Shem**, the divinely blessed son of Noah (Gen9:26) and ancient forefather of Abraham, which finds some support in Hebrews 7:3. Shem lived in a unique period of time, being born before the Flood but living long after it (Cp., Gen5:32; 7:11; 11:10-11). The Chart, OVERLAP OF GENERATIONS IN THE EARLY EARTH, displays information from the genealogy of Genesis 11. The shaded **green** box under Shem highlights a phenomenon that was unique to the generations represented by the Genesis 11 genealogy. Namely, the rapid decay in human longevity that took place after the Flood gave rise to the strange phenomenon of prior generations outliving subsequent ones, until human ages stabilized somewhat during the days of Jacob. This phenomenon is especially exaggerated for Shem, as he is seen to have lived contemporaneous with 11 generations after him, being alive even in the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From their human perspective, Melchizedek could certainly be described as one "having neither beginning of days nor end of life".

- [4] Verses 4-10 establish "how great" Melchizedek was. Since the "patriarch, Abraham" gave Melchizedek "a tenth of [his] spoils", Melchizedek was greater than Abraham.
- [5] Under the "law" of Moses, "the people" of Israel paid a "tithe" to "the sons of Levi" who held were priests. This analogy suggests that the purpose of Abraham paying a tithe to Melchizedek was to honor him as a "priest of the Most High God" (v1). But note that the Aaronic priests "come out of the loins of Abraham" (i.e., they are physical descendants of Abraham), so that Abraham as their forefather is greater than all Aaronic priests.
- [6] Melchizedek was not a physical descendent of Abraham, yet he "received tithes of Abraham". Furthermore, Melchizedek "blessed" Abraham (Gen14:19), who had received unique "promises" from God (i.e., the Abrahamic Covenant).
- [7] Since it is an axiom without exception that "the less is blessed of the better", Melchizedek's blessing of Abraham is a second witness to his greater status.
- [8] The "men that die" are the Aaronic priests, who were entitled to receive tithes. How much more so should Melchizedek, who (from the perspective of his contemporaries, including Abraham) appeared to "liveth" forever.
- [9] Here is asserted that Levi (who as his father was greater than Aaron, the forefather of all Aaronic priests, who "receiveth tithes") paid tithes to Melchizedek "in Abraham".
- [10] The logical argument is that since Levi, the forefather of all Aaronic priests, "was yet in the loins" of Abraham when Abraham paid

tithes to Melchizedek, Levi himself is credited<sup>27</sup> with Abraham's action; thus, Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek. Since Levi (the forefather of all Aaronic priests) paid tithes to Melchizedek, Melchizedek must be greater than all the Aaronic priests of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

- [11] Paul asks this rhetorical question to call attention to the fact that the "Levitical priesthood" ordained under the "law" was not capable of "perfection", which is why a new priesthood "after the order of Melchizedek" was necessary. What follows is an enumeration of the imperfections, or limitations, of Aaron's priesthood.
- [12] The Aaronic "priesthood" and the "law" of Moses are inextricably linked together. You cannot have one without the other, and to set aside one necessitates also the setting aside of the other. Thus, an argument for the end of the Aaronic priesthood is tantamount to an end of the Mosaic Covenant and its "law". Since God had prophesied that Messiah's coming would bring a new priesthood "after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps110:4), it also implied an end of the "law".
- [13] It was impossible for Jesus to be a priest "after the order of Aaron" (v11) because he was not a physical descendant of Aaron, or even a Levite.
- [14] The Messiah (Jesus) came from the tribe of Judah (Matt1:3-16), so under the Law of Moses he was not eligible to be a priest.
- [15] Here is a clear assertion that the historical person of "Melchizedek" was a "similitude" (or prophetic type<sup>28</sup>) of "another priest" (and priesthood) that would come after Aaron (i.e., Messiah, Jesus).
- [16] The priesthood of Jesus was not authorized by the "law" of Moses, whose "commandment" pertained to "carnal" men (i.e., mortal men who inevitably died, a limitation of the Aaronic priesthood), but by virtue of His "endless life".
- [17] The prophecy of Psalm 110:4 was that Messiah would be "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek", so only the resurrected Jesus is eligible for this priesthood.
- [18] The fact that Psalm 110:4 prophesied another priesthood would come after Aaron's is a testimony that "the commandment" (i.e., the Law of Moses, with which the Aaronic priesthood is inextricably linked; v12) would be "disannul[led]" at that time.

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<sup>27</sup> Paul makes an entirely analogous argument in Romans 5:12; namely, when Adam sinned, "death passed upon all men, for **all sinned**" (using an aorist, active, indicative verb). Since all men were in the loins of Adam when he sinned, all of humanity descended from Adam is credited with his action and its consequences (1Cor15:22). This is the doctrine of Seminal Headship.

<sup>28</sup> In this verse Melchizedek is plainly declared to be a type of Christ, which confirms he was definitely not a Christophany; a type and its antitype are never identical.

- [19] "The law" of Moses was "weak" and "unprofitable" (v18) because it "made nothing perfect". It provided a temporary covering for sin (i.e., atonement; Lev16:34), but it could not "take away sins" (Heb10:4). The "better" priesthood of Melchizedek, with its perfect and final sacrifice, will be a genuine propitiation (cf. Rom3:25; 1Jn2:2; 1Jn4:10), finally making it possible for the believer to "draw near unto God"<sup>29</sup>.
- [20] The unique significance of Messiah (Jesus) being a priest after the order of Melchizedek includes the fact that He was ordained into that office by an "oath" of God (i.e., Ps110:4).
- [21] In contrast, Aaronic priests assumed their positions as a matter of simple heredity. Furthermore, an important aspect of the "oath" that "the Lord swore" was that Messiah's position as priest would endure "forever".
- [22] A new priesthood implies a new "testament" (i.e., covenant). The prophecy of a "better" priesthood of "Jesus" (Ps110:4) is a "surety" (i.e., a certain guarantee) that a "better testament" (i.e., the New Covenant; Jer31:31-34; Ezek36:24-27) will come.
- [23] Of necessity there were "many priests" under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant, since every priest eventually died and had to be replaced.
- [24] In contrast, "this man" (i.e., Melchizedek as the type, Messiah/Jesus as the antitype) "continueth ever" as priest by virtue of his "endless life" (v16). Whereas the Aaronic priesthood must come to an end because of its inherent limitations, the new priesthood after the order of Melchizedek will be "unchangeable".
- [25] The duty of the priest is to "interce[de]" with "God" on behalf of the believer. In this role an Aaronic priest could only obtain an atonement (i.e., a temporary covering) for sin because his offering was inadequate (Heb10:4), and eventually his own death ended his ability to do even this. In contrast, Jesus as priest "ever liveth", so His "intercession" on behalf of the believer will never come to an end. Furthermore, Jesus is able to "save . . . to the uttermost" since His sacrifice of Himself is a perfect propitiation (1Jn2:1-2).
- [26] Jesus is the kind of high priest that is needed by a sinner. It is necessary that He be: "holy", "harmless", "undefiled", and "separate from sinners" so that His access to God is not prevented or limited by any deficiencies in His own person or character, and "made higher than the heavens" so that His ministry can be executed in the true Temple in heaven (Rev11:19; 15:5) rather than its infinitely inadequate representation on earth (Heb9:24; Cp., 1Kgs8:27).
- [27] The "high priest" under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant was himself a fallen, sinful man, such that every year without exception he had to "offer up [a] sacrifice" even "for his own sins" (review the procedure observed annually on the Day of Atonement; Leviticus 16); this illustrates his own inadequacy as a mediator with God on behalf of others. In contrast, Jesus is a high priest "without sin"

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<sup>29</sup> It should be recognized that one of the purposes of the priesthood and Temple cultus under the Law of Moses was to strictly exclude (believing, but sinful and unredeemed) Israelites from the presence of God.

(Heb4:15), so there is no offering required for Himself. Furthermore, since His offering of "Himself" was a propitiation that fully and finally satisfied the demands of God for all men (1Jn2:2), His offering needs occur only "once".

- [28] The contrast between the "law [of Moses]" and the "oath [of God]" (Ps110:4) is concluded. Under the "law", high priests were sinful men who could approach God only with great difficulty and limitation, and whose ministry was eventually ended by death. But according to the "oath", the high priest will be Jesus the "**Son**" of God, having unfettered access to God "for evermore". Thus, the "oath" is better than the "law".

### CHAPTER 8

#### SUMMATION OF THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD

- [1] The "sum" (i.e., summary) of Paul's argumentation started in Hebrews 4:14 concerning the priesthood of Jesus Christ, which is far superior to the Aaronic priesthood authorized under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant, is as follows: 1) God (the Father) has exalted the resurrected and glorified Man, Jesus Christ, to the position of highest honor and authority over the creation; no Aaronic priest was ever so honored.
- [2] 2) As a high priest, Jesus Christ "minister[s]" in the "true tabernacle", which is in heaven (cf. Rev11:19; 15:5).
- [3] Just as Aaronic the "high priest" offered "gifts and sacrifices" in the earthly tabernacle/temple, Jesus Christ must "offer" the same in the "true tabernacle" (v2).
- [4] It would make no sense for Christ's priesthood to function on earth, since the "law" of Moses already provided an earthly priesthood.
- [5] The Aaronic priesthood and earthly "tabernacle" concerning which God commanded "Moses" (Exod25:9,40) were merely "example[s]" (i.e., types, or "shadows"). The antitypes to which they pointed were the high priesthood of Jesus Christ, who ministers in the "true tabernacle" (v2) which is in "heaven".

#### CHRIST MEDIATES A BETTER COVENANT

- [6] Whereas Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant, Jesus Christ is the mediator of a "better covenant", which is the New Covenant (cf. Jer31:31-34; Ezek36:24-27; Matt26:28; Mk14:24; Luk22:20). The first reason the New Covenant is "better" than the Old (Mosaic) Covenant is that it was "established upon better promises". The "promises" of the New Covenant are "better" for the following reasons: 1) they are unconditional, whereas those of the Mosaic Covenant were conditional, and 2) their benefits are heavenly and eternal, whereas those of the Mosaic Covenant were earthly and temporary.
- [7] The fact that God made a "second" covenant (i.e., the New Covenant) with the nation of Israel implies that the "first" covenant (i.e., the Mosaic Covenant) was not "faultless" (Rom8:3-4). What was the "fault" (v8) of the Mosaic Covenant? Some attempt to associate the

**Conditional vs. Unconditional Covenants.** The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional covenant; under it the blessings of God promised to Israel were conditioned upon the nation keeping its Law (cf. Exod19:5-8; Lev26:3-13; Deut28:1-14). In contrast, the Abrahamic Covenant with all its component parts (including the New Covenant) is an unconditional covenant; God has unilaterally committed Himself to bless Israel (and through Israel all nations of the earth; Gen12:1-3) without any conditions<sup>30</sup> required of Israel (cf. Chart, GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL COVENANTS WITH ISRAEL).

"fault" with the (fallen) people of Israel, who could not keep the Law of Moses. But this understanding is not correct; the "fault" was intrinsic to the covenant itself. The "fault" of the Mosaic Covenant was its inability to provide forgiveness of sins and produce righteousness.

- [8] The fact that the Mosaic Covenant included an intrinsic "fault" was always known to God<sup>31</sup>. Even in the days in which the nation of Israel was under the Mosaic Covenant, God prophesied that there would be a New Covenant. To demonstrate this, Paul quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 (vv8b-12). From this quotation, it is important to note that the "new covenant" would be made "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (i.e., the whole nation of Israel, just as the Mosaic Covenant; the New Covenant is not made with the Church<sup>32</sup>).
- [9] The New Covenant will be distinct from the Old (Mosaic) Covenant, the conditions of which the nation of Israel failed to keep, resulting in God executing all the curses of that covenant upon the nation (Lev26:14-39; Deut28:15-68).
- [10] The Mosaic Covenant imposed 613 laws (by Jewish reckoning) on the nation of Israel, almost all of which merely regulated external behavior<sup>33</sup>. Under the Mosaic Covenant, God did nothing to enable individuals to keep the Law, and fallen men could not. In contrast, spiritual regeneration and the Holy Spirit permanently indwelling the believer will enable men to walk in righteousness (Gal5:16-25).
- [11] This part of the prophecy will ultimately be fulfilled during the Millennial Kingdom. Evangelization will not be necessary, for all will understand the requirements of King Messiah who is present on earth. The last clause, "all shall now me, from the least to the

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<sup>30</sup> God's commitment to provide the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant to Israel and all the nations of the earth are unconditional (Gen12:1-3). However, any individual person (whether Jew or Gentile) enters into the blessings of the covenant through personal faith (Gal3:6-9,26-29).

<sup>31</sup> Note that the Abrahamic Covenant, of which the New Covenant would be a component part, was instituted by God before the Mosaic Covenant (i.e., Genesis 12 vs. Exodus 19).

<sup>32</sup> The Church is not a party to the Abrahamic/New Covenant. As the Body and Bride of Christ (Eph5:29-32), the Church participates in the New Covenant by virtue of being "in Christ" (2Cor5:17), who is a party to the covenant as the King of Israel (Luk1:31-33). Gentile believers from all nations of the earth benefit from the spiritual blessings provided by the New Covenant, mediated through the nation of Israel (Gen12:3; Gal3:6-9,26-29).

<sup>33</sup> The most important exceptions to this were the two "great[est] commandments" (Matt22:36-40), to love God and to love one's neighbor.

greatest", applies specifically to the nation of Israel, all members of which will be saved (Cp., Rom11:26).

- [12] This is the most important contrast between the Mosaic and New Covenants. The Mosaic Covenant was not able to provide forgiveness of personal "sins" and "iniquities" (Heb10:4), whereas the New Covenant will. This ends the quotation from Jeremiah 31.
- [13] Thus, the "new covenant" renders the "first" covenant "old" (i.e., obsolete). Why would a Hebrew Christian of Paul's generation want to forsake a "new covenant" that provides forgiveness of sins in order to return to an "old" one that cannot?

## CHAPTER 9

### THE (EARTHLY) TEMPLE AND ITS ORDINANCES WERE MERELY TYPES

- [1] Under the "first [Mosaic] covenant", "ordinances of divine service" (i.e., worship) were required to be performed in an "[earthly] sanctuary" (i.e., the Tabernacle/Temple). In the following verses these will be contrasted with those of the New Covenant.
- [2] Here, "sanctuary" is used to refer to what is more often called the Holy Place (cf. Exod26:33). Only priests could enter the Holy Place, which contained the golden "lampstand" and the "table" of "showbread". Although not mentioned in this verse, the Holy Place also contained the golden altar, also called the altar of incense, situated immediately adjacent to the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, but physically residing in the Holy Place (cf. Exod31:8; 40:26). However, the function of the Golden Altar was so intimately associated with that of the Holy of Holies it is often described along with it.
- [3] Here, the Holy of Holies is referred to as "the tabernacle" and "the Holiest of all". It was separated from the Holy Place by a "veil" (Exod26:31-35), which is designated as the "second" to distinguish it from the one that served as "the door of the tent" (i.e., the entire structure; Exod26:36-37). The Holy of Holies could only be entered by the high priest on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev16).
- [4] The sole piece of furniture in the Holy of Holies was the "ark of the covenant", which originally contained only "the tables of the covenant" (i.e., the stone tablets upon which were the divinely engraved ten commandments; Exod24:12; 25:21; 34:1), but to which were later added a "golden pot that had manna" (Exod16:33) and "Aaron's rod that budded" (Num17:10). The "golden censer" was used by the high priest to take burning incense from the golden altar into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement (Lev16:12).
- [5] Often treated as a unique article of tabernacle furniture, the "mercy seat" was in effect the lid of the ark of the covenant. It was fashioned from pure gold and featured two "cherubim" facing each other (Exod25:17-21); it was upon the "mercy seat" that the high priest applied the blood of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement (Lev16:15) in order to procure an atonement for the sins of the nation (of Israel) for one year (Num16:34). The final comment, "of which we cannot now speak particularly", suggests that every feature

of the Tabernacle had typological significance, but Paul confines himself to a discussion of only those chief features relevant to the current comparison.

- [6] The "first tabernacle" is the Holy Place, in which the "priests" performed "the service of God".
- [7] The "second [tabernacle]" is the Holy of Holies, entered by "the high priest alone" on the Day of Atonement (Num16:34). On that day, the high priest actually entered the Holy of Holies twice, once to apply the "blood" of a sin offering "for himself", then again to do so "for the errors of the people" (i.e., the nation of Israel). The description of the sins of the people of Israel as "errors" is significant, highlighting the fact that a sin offering under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant procured an atonement only for sins of ignorance (Lev4:2; Cp., Lev16:5), the profound significance of which will come up subsequently (Heb10:26).
- [8] This elaborate system was designed for the purpose of preventing access to "the holiest of all" (i.e., the presence of God) by a believing but sinful people. That "first tabernacle" (i.e., the earthly Tabernacle/Temple) and its ordinances, while "yet standing", would never provide the solution needed to permanently reconcile God and sinners.
- [9] Rather, that "first tabernacle" (v8) was a "figure" (Greek **παραβολή**, a type) for that "time" (Greek **καιρός**, a season), the time prior to the coming of Jesus Christ and His finished work of redemption (cf. Jn19:30). None of the "gifts" and "offerings" (i.e., animal sacrifices) made under the old Mosaic system could "make him that did the service perfect" (i.e., the procured an atonement at best, they could not affect propitiation). Furthermore, in his "conscience" the O.T. saint knew he was guilty of committing willful sins, for which the Mosaic system provided no atonement (Cp., Lev4:2; 5:15;17).
- [10] All of these external features of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant were merely "figures" (v9), "imposed" on the people of God (i.e., the nation of Israel) for a typological purpose "until the time of reformation"; that is, "until" the finished work of Jesus Christ made a "propitiation for [Israel's] sins, and not for [Israel's] only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1Jn2:2; Cp. Jn1:29).

**Baptism and the Law of Moses.** Included among the "ordinances" prescribed in the Law of Moses were "diverse washings" (Heb9:10). The Greek word translated "washings" is a plural form of **βαπτισμός**, translated as **baptisms** in Hebrews 6:2. Baptism was the standard ritual used for ceremonial cleansing under the Law of Moses (e.g., Lev15:5-8,10-11,13,18,21-22,27). Generally translated as "bathe" in the O.T., Jewish baptisms were never performed on infants (or even children) and required total immersion. By the 1st century they had come to be performed inside the synagogue using special baths (*mikvahs*) dedicated to this purpose, similar to baptistries used in Christian churches. No explanation of baptism (including its proper subjects or mode) was necessary when John (the Baptist), Jesus, and His apostles called for it, since their Jewish audiences observed it every week in their local synagogue.

THE TYPES OF THE MOSAIC SYSTEM POINTED TO THE REALITY OF  
THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

- [11] In contrasting "Christ" as "high priest" (of the New Covenant) with those of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant, His superiority includes the fact that He ministers in a "greater and more perfect tabernacle" in heaven, which is "not of this building". The Greek word translated "building" is **κτίσις**, which in virtually all other occurrences in the N.T. is translated as *creation* (Cp., 2Cor5:17); the idea here is that the true "tabernacle" in heaven was not only "not made with [human] hands", but is entirely distinct from the present creation.
- [12] Several additional contrasts are made in this verse. First, the "blood" offered by Christ as high priest was not that of "goats and calves", but "his own blood". Second, He applied His blood "once", in contrast with the need under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant to repeat the sacrifices every year. And third, His offering "obtained eternal redemption" for His people, whereas that under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant merely procured an atonement for one year (cf. Lev16:34).
- [13] Whereas "the blood of bulls and goats" is an allusion to the sacrificial system of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant, the "ashes of an [red] heifer" refers to the ritual required under that system to purify one rendered ceremonially "unclean" (cf. Num19:1-22).
- [14] If the rituals of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant had some value in procuring cleansing of the flesh and atonement for sins (albeit of limited extent and duration), of "how much more" efficacy the very "blood of Christ"? This is an argument from the lesser to the greater, characteristic of the Apostle Paul. Adding further contrasts, whereas the animals offered "to God" under the Mosaic system were required to be "without spot" (i.e., no physical blemishes; cf. Lev1:3,10; 3:1; 4:1; Num19:2), Christ was "without sin" (Heb4:15; 1Pet1:19); that is, the physical perfection required of animals used for sacrifice was a type of the spiritual perfection of Christ. The phrase "purge your conscience from dead works" is an allusion to the fact that O.T. saints understood that the required "works" performed under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant were "dead", in that they could not procure what was genuinely needed (i.e., "eternal redemption", or propitiation for willful sins committed by the believer; v12). Finally, in this verse it is noted that "Christ" the **Son** offered Himself to "God" the **Father** through the "eternal **Spirit**", such that the work of "eternal redemption" (v12) involved all three Persons of the Godhead.
- [15] Christ is the "mediator" (Cp., 1Tim2:5) of the "new testament" (i.e., New Covenant). It is "by means of [His] death" that "redemption" (i.e., propitiation) is procured for those who have committed "transgressions" (i.e., willful sins, in contrast to the "errors" of v7) under the "first testament" (i.e., the Mosaic Covenant). The propitiatory work of Christ allows God to extend to sinners "the promise of eternal inheritance" (i.e., eternal life; Rom6:23), a promise never made under the Old Covenant<sup>34</sup>. However, the reception

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<sup>34</sup> Eternal life was never offered under the Mosaic Covenant because it had no power to procure it (note Heb10:4); the promise of eternal life is unique to the New Covenant (Jer31:34-36).

of this promise is conditioned (i.e., "might receive" is in the subjunctive mood) on personal faith (cf. Rom3:23-28).

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**CHAPTER 10**

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5TH PARENTHETICAL ADMONITION/WARNING (Hebrews 10:19-39)

Introduction.

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[26] Having genuinely believed on Christ, been born again, and having received by illumination of the Holy Spirit "the knowledge of the truth" (Heb6:4-5), for the Hebrew Christians of Paul's generation to return to Judaism would be to "sin willfully", an iniquity for which that old Mosaic system had "no more sacrifice for sins" (i.e., there was no offering provided to procure atonement for a willful sin; Cp., Lev4:2; 5:15;17).

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APPLICATIONS FOR JEWISH CHRISTIANS (Hebrews 11-13)

Introduction.

**CHAPTER 11**

FAITH ILLUSTRATED FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

Introduction.

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## CHAPTER 12

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**CHAPTER 13**

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--- S.D.G. ---

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