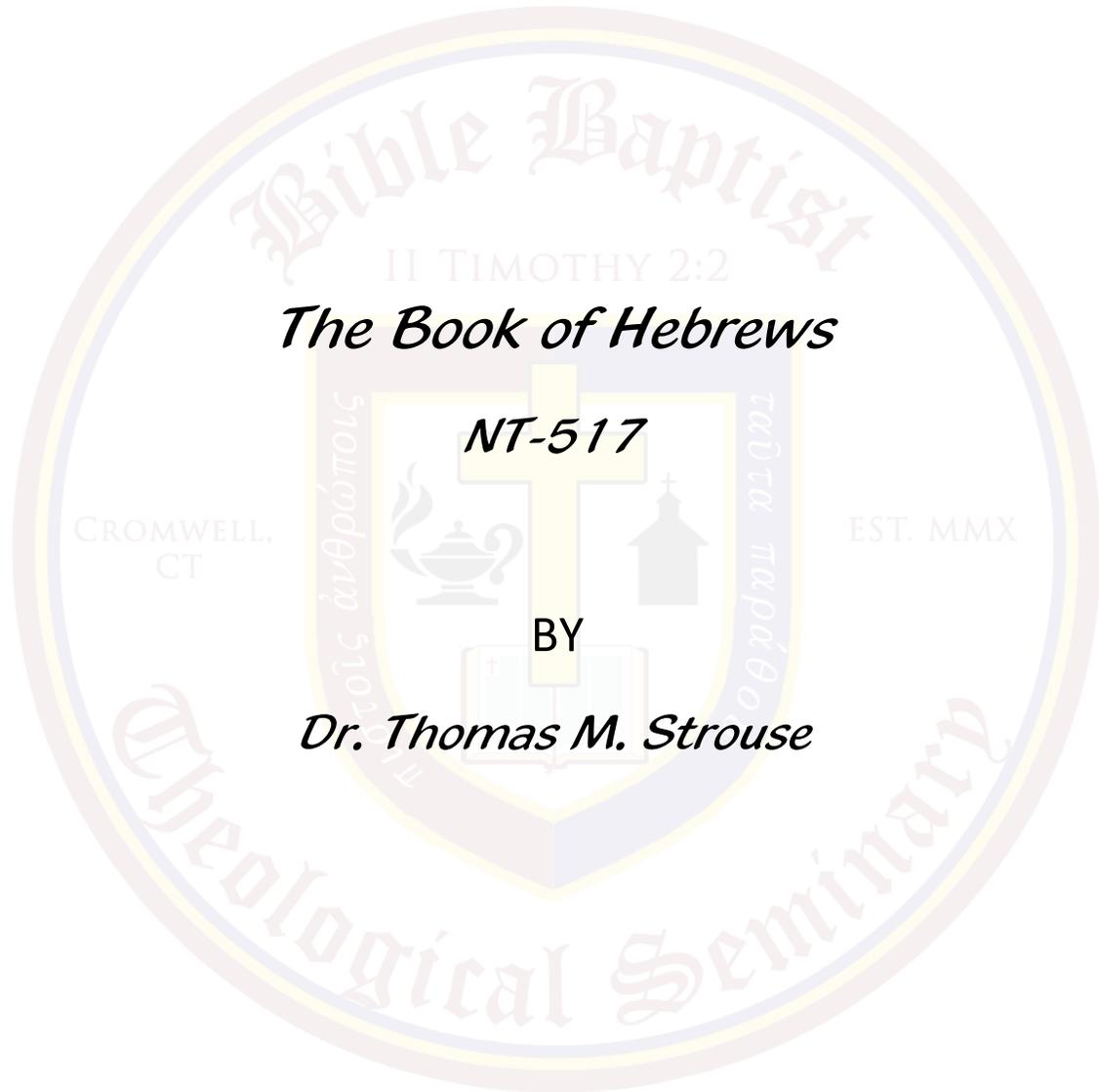


***BIBLE BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY***



**CROMWELL, CONNECTICUT**

# NT 517

## Hebrews Commentary Dr. Thomas M. Strouse BBTS

### Introduction

The early title to the *Book*, “to the Hebrews” (πρός Ἑβραίους) suggests a whole realm of possibilities about purpose, audience, authorship and date. The content of the *Epistle*, along with other biblical *data*, helps fashion answers to its purpose, audience, authorship and date. The Greek behind *Hebrews* has several features which play into ascertaining answers to the aforementioned issues. 1) The Greek style is very polished suggesting a professional rhetorician behind its writing. 2) The vocabulary and use of figures and argumentation points to an educated writer. 3) The employment of Old Testament (OT) citations hints at a writer well versed in the precise study of the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> Since the *Book* has no declared audience or author, it demands a thorough study of and knowledge about *Hebrews* for the exegete to understand the *Epistle*. Answers to its purpose, audience, authorship, and date will unfold as one progresses through *Hebrews*, while allowing the Spirit of God to illuminate truth from within it and as well as from New Testament (NT) Scriptures. The *Book of Hebrews* does indeed exalt Jesus of Nazareth as the divine Son of God and High Priest, and consequently making Him the Mediator between God and sinners. The Lord Jesus Christ is far better than all of the shadows and figures of the OT Scriptures to Whom they pointed.

### Purpose

Πρός Ἑβραίους emphatically declares the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ over the OT prefigurements. Whereas, the first-century Jews had lived within the theological, spiritual and ethnical lineage of Judaism for fifteen centuries, their collective and personal effort of abandoning this for Christianity was difficult, to say the least. Both Peter (Acts 10:9-16; Gal. 2:11-16) and Paul (cf. Acts 16:3 with Gal. 2:3; Acts 21:26-29) struggled with the question of how much Judaism they could retain as a faithful Christian. Therefore, the writer of *Hebrews* gave the biblical perspective which focused on the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The perfect God-Man in Person is superior over the prophets, angels, Moses, and unbelief. His divine Melchisedecian Priesthood is superior over the Aaronic priesthood. The author constantly employed terms to Christ, such as the adjective “*better*” (κρείττων [13x])<sup>2</sup> and the verb “[to be]

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<sup>1</sup>There are at least eighty-six direct references to the Hebrew Scriptures in *Hebrews*.

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

*perfect*” (τελειόω [9x]).<sup>3</sup> In addition, the writer designated his *Epistle* as “*the word of exhortation*” (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως<sup>4</sup> [Heb. 13:22]). This *dis legomena* occurs also in Acts 13:15 referring to a Pauline sermon based on the OT and encouraging the listeners to recognize and realize that the Hebrew Scriptures all point toward Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment (cf. Lk. 24:44). Several salient points give the nature of “*any word of exhortation*” (Acts 13:15, 17-41). Paul started his synagogue preaching with 1) God choosing Israel and then delivering them from Egypt, 2) So that they would be ruled by judges and kings, 3) Concluding with King David, 4) Whose seed was the raised Jesus, 5) About Whom John the Baptist confessed, 6) Whom Pilate allowed to be slain on a tree, and 7) Whom God raised from the dead. Two significant Hebrew Scriptures predicted the resurrection of God’s Son Who saw no corruption (Pss. 2:7 and 16:10, respectively). This “*word of exhortation*” must be received by faith for forgiveness of sins and justification of life to avoid the awful consequences of despising revelatory truth. No doubt the Apostle to the Gentiles preached this message each time he was privileged to give “*any word of exhortation*” to the mixed multitude (believing and unbelieving Jews and Gentiles) of the various synagogue audiences. Hebrews is the finished, literary, inscripturated form of Paul’s preached synagogue sermons.

### Audience

The issue of the audience of Hebrews invokes several questions which must be answered. 1) What was their ethnicity? 2) Where did they dwell? 3) What was their spiritual condition? The Christian, who studies the Word of God, indwells with its author the Spirit of God, serving in the Church of God, and abides under the authority of the Man of God, has full assurance of knowing all revealed truth as John promised, saying, “*ye know all things*” (I Jn. 2:20). The Lord has recorded in the very *Epistle* data which establish parameters for knowing possible answers to these queries. Concerning the audience’s ethnicity, the numerous references to OT institutions, people, and practices would exclude Gentiles, unless they were God-fearers attending synagogue services. Only those with a full acquaintance of Jewish heritage would appreciate the message of the *Epistle*, traditionally known as “to the Hebrews.” The dwelling place of the audience was not in Rome, as the writer was indeed in Rome, as he declared, saying, “*they of Italy salute you*” (Heb. 13:24). Since the author cited the Hebrew OT, and not the *LXX*,<sup>5</sup> he must certainly have directed the epistle to Jerusalem Jews (cf. Acts 15:21). Furthermore, animal sacrifices continued in Jerusalem, which the author condemned (cf. Heb. 8:4; 10:11). The center of all Judaism, including the Temple, the Aaronic priesthood, and the animal sacrifices, was at this time the city of David, Mount Zion, Jerusalem. The spiritual condition of the audience was the same as the mixed multitude of the first generation of “the covenant community”—those with a great deal of

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<sup>3</sup>*Vide* Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:19; 9:9, 11; 10:1; 11:40; 12:23; and 13:21.

<sup>4</sup>The Greek of Acts 13:15 reads **λόγος ἐν ὑμῖν παρακλήσεως**.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas M. Strouse, “Scholarly Myths Perpetuated on Rejecting the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament,” *Emmanuel Baptist Theological Journal* 1 (Spring 2005): 37-61.

light of which some received by faith and others rejected (*vide* Heb. 3:7-19; 6:4-6). With several warnings about apostasy signaled by the expression “*lest*,”<sup>6</sup> the Apostle challenged the mixed multitude about responding to the light that they had received or experience dire consequences (Heb. 2:1; 3:12, 13; 4:11; 12:3, 13, 15). Further, he coupled with the warnings thirteen hortatory subjunctives expressed as “*let us*.” For instance, he said “*let us hold fast our profession*” (Heb. 4:14; cf. also Heb. 4:1,11, 14, 16; 6:1; 10:22, 23, 24; 12:1[2x], 28; 13:13, 15). The author addressed *the Epistle to the Hebrews* to Jerusalem Jews, exhorting them to give up the Jewish practices (i.e., animal sacrifices) that would keep them from receiving Jesus of Nazareth as their only Messiah, because sudden destruction was coming upon them in the form of Titus’ decimation of the Jews and desolation of the city and temple.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the audience consisted of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles who professed faith in Christ and were baptized church members. Apparently, some were either practicing animal sacrifices, or were sympathetic with this sinful practice and needed to obey this “*word of exhortation*” or suffer damnation.

### Authorship and Date

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

The clearest biblical statement on authorship is that which critical scholars so readily ignore or dismiss. Peter stated, saying, “*And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction*” (II Pet. 3:15-16). Peter made the following affirmations: 1) Paul wrote Scripture, 2) he wrote it to Peter’s audience, and 3) Peter’s audience was the Jewish διασπορά (*vide* II Pet. 3:1; I Pet. 1:1; Jam. 1:1). Therefore, Paul wrote one *Epistle to the Hebrews* in his total corpus of fourteen NT Books (thirteen were written to Gentile Christians or churches).<sup>8</sup> Arguments against this biblical testimony are the following:

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<sup>6</sup>“*Lest*” occurs 11x in Hebrews.

<sup>7</sup>In AD 66, the Jews revolted against the Roman Empire causing Titus to sweep across Judea towards Jerusalem. Galilee was sacked in AD 67 and the entire Judean coast and north was subjugated to Titus by AD 68. After Nero committed suicide in AD 68, the attack upon Judaea intensified. Within the next year (AD 69) there were four Roman emperors concluding with Vespasian, who summoned Titus to Jerusalem. There, Jerusalem was sacked, the Temple destroyed, and 1,100,000 Jews killed by AD 70.

<sup>8</sup>After all, Paul was trained in the Hebrew Scriptures under the leading Jewish scholar Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), he had a tremendous burden to testify to Jews like himself that Jesus was the Messiah (Rom.

1. The absence of Paul's name as required by II Thess. 3:17 indicates that he did not write this anonymous *Letter*. *Contra*: Paul made his promise to Gentile churches that he would put his name on his literature to Gentiles, affirming Pauline apostolic authority to the Gentiles. The Jews would not accept the "authority" of an apostle to the Gentiles to replace their OT system.

2. The literary style and vocabulary is "non-Pauline." *Contra*: This is a very subjective and hence weak argument since style and vocabulary change with the author's audience, purpose, etc.

3. The so-called dependence of the author on the first generation believers eliminates Paul (cf. Heb. 2:3). *Contra*: This passage teaches that the author's revelation *was confirmed* (ἔβεβαιώθη [8x])<sup>9</sup> by first generation believers, not "**handed over**" (παραδίδωμι [cf. I Cor. 11:23]) by them; revelation can only be confirmed by revelation.

4. The author does not deal with the same doctrines that Paul did in his Gentile Epistles. *Contra*: a different audience with different subjects requires different theological emphases.

5. The chronology does not fit Paul's life. *Contra*: It may have been written while Paul was in his second Roman imprisonment while Peter was still alive, after Timothy's release, and before AD 70, or about AD 64-67 (II Tim. 4:7-17; Heb. 13:23). Nero became emperor in AD 54 and committed suicide in AD 68. Late in his reign he increasingly persecuted followers of Christ (64 ff.). Following Nero's short-lived replacements such as Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, Vespasian reigned (AD 69) and used his son Titus to destroy Jerusalem, the Jews, and the Temple (AD 70).<sup>10</sup>

The ongoing assault upon the Pauline authorship is demonically leveled at the divine Author to cause confusion in interpretation and its subsequent application. The real issue revolves around any arguments that can refute the Pauline authorship. The author of *Hebrews* was a spiritual giant of the first century who was a Christian with vast knowledge of the OT Scriptures. Peter said Paul wrote Scripture to the Jews—the *Epistle to the Hebrews*!

## Christology

Πρός Ἑβραίους focuses on the high priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ, entitling Him at least seventeen times as "*high priest*" (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14, 15; 5:5, 10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11), "*priest*" (Heb. 5:6; 7:3, 11, 15, 17, 21), or "*great priest*" (Heb. 10:21). Paul referred to Him as "*Jesus*" some fourteen times (Heb. 2:9; 3:1; 4:4, 14; 6:20; 7:22; 10:10, 19; 12:2, 24; 13:8, 12,

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10:1), and although the Apostle to the uncircumcised (Gal. 2:7), he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews (Phil. 3:5).

<sup>9</sup>Paul confirmed the promises made to the patriarchs about Gentile salvation, saying, "*Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers*" (Rom. 15:8). He was not dependent upon the patriarchs passing on these promises to him, but his ministry, given by God, confirmed the OT promises.

<sup>10</sup>Titus' brother Domitian began to reign in AD 81, and increased persecution against Christians including the Apostle John, who was banished to the isle of Patmos by AD 95 (cf. Rev. 1:9).

20, 21), emphasizing the “dreaded” name associated with the man from Nazareth as the Jews’ Messiah. Other titles such as “*Son*” (12x), “*Lord*” (5x), “*Mediator*” (3x) and “*God*” (Heb. 1:8) are applied to the Saviour. Special titles such as “*forerunner*” (Heb. 6:20), “*that Great Shepherd of the sheep*” (Heb. 13:20), “*firstborn*” (Heb. 1:6), and “*apostle*” (Heb. 3:1) occur also in the *Epistle*. Christ is the God-Man Mediator while at the same time the eternal and immutable deity of the Triune Godhead (Heb. 13:8). The whole OT was Christological in nature pointing to the fulfillment of the everlasting Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rev. 14:6; Lk. 24:44). Abel pointed to His shed blood, Enoch pointed to His resurrection, and Abraham pointed to His death, burial, and resurrection in a figure (Heb. 11:4-19 ff.).

## Outline

### *“The Superiority of Christ”*

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

## **Chapter One**

### **(Christ is Superior to the Prophets and Angels)**

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

## **Chapter Two**

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

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

## **Chapter Three**

### **(Christ is Superior to Moses and Joshua)**

In comparison to Moses, Christ was faithful to God as was Moses. However, the Lord Jesus was the builder of the house (biblical Judaism) whereas Moses was but a mere servant in the house (Heb. 3:2-6). The first generation of "the covenant community" hardened its collective heart and suffered the catastrophe of unbelief (Dt. 1:19-46).<sup>11</sup> They were destroyed in the wilderness as Ps. 95:7-11 depicted. The last generation of "the covenant community" (c. AD 30 - AD 70)<sup>12</sup> was on the brink of the same unbelief and resultant judgment of destruction (AD 70).

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<sup>11</sup>Even when Israel repented and attempted to obey God's judgment was final on them (especially vv. 42-46).

<sup>12</sup>Although these professing Jews were baptized church members (cf. Jn. 6:66), they needed to relinquish Jewish doctrine and practice that compromised their professed Christianity. For instance, a baptized Jew could not continue to maintain faith in Jesus Christ if he were to continue to offer animal sacrifices and thereby rejecting Christ's once for all sacrifice (Heb. 10:10).

What further light could Christ have given the Pharisees and scribes to convince them that He was their Messiah? He therefore condemned them with the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost (Mt. 12:14-32), and Paul's second generation was flirting with "*the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*" (Mt. 12:31) as well. He pled with the last generation, saying, "*Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness*" (Heb. 3:8).

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

Christ is superior over Joshua. Rest is available to the believer in all dispensations but it must be obtained by faith not works (Heb. 4:10-11). Joshua<sup>13</sup> did not lead all the Israelites into rest because of the mixed multitude of unbeliever with believer, and consequently not all of the Canaanites were destroyed. The true rest comes from complete obedience to the powerful word of God (Heb. 4:12).

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

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

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

Because of the professed Jewish Christians' spiritual immaturity, Paul needed to warn his audience before he resumed discussing the Melchisedecian order (cf. Heb. 7:1 ff.). Instead of being teachers, they were babes in their spiritual growth struggling over "*the first principles*" (Heb. 5:12).

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

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<sup>13</sup>The name Ἰησοῦς refers to either Joshua or Jesus. The modern versions translate the name Ἰησοῦς as Joshua (*NIV, NAS, NET, and NKJV*). Who was it that did not give the apostates rest?

His parenthetical warning (extending through chapter six) exhorted his hearers not to apostatize. Paul urged them to go on unto perfection, leaving OT theology and advancing in the new revelation concerning Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ (Heb. 6:1-2).<sup>14</sup> With a series of four *aorist* participles he revealed their spiritual privileges from which they dare not turn. Paul affirmed that his audience, just like the first generation of “the covenant community,” had been “enlightened” (φωτισθέντας), “tasted” (γευσαμένους), “made (γενηθέντας) partakers,” and “tasted” (γευσαμένους). The first generation had the *shekinah* glory (Ex. 40:34), the wilderness manna (Ex. 16:15), the upon ministry of the Holy Ghost (Neh. 9:20), and revelatory truth (Rom. 3:2). The final generation of “the covenant community” had Jesus of Nazareth as the light to the world (Jn. 8:12), as the heavenly manna (Jn. 6:42), the Holy Ghost Whom they blasphemed (Mt. 12:31-32), and the Word of God (Jn. 1:1-18; I Jn. 1:1) Who spoke of powers to come (Mt. 8:11). Those who “fall away” (παραπεσόντας), the Apostle warned, would be damned because there is no new light that the Lord could give that would persuade them otherwise!<sup>15</sup> In the group of the mixed multitude, Paul was convinced that the remnant would not turn away, since he used the pronouns “you” (Heb. 6:9) and “they” (Heb. 6:6). The first generation apostatized and was doomed by unbelief at Kadeshbarnea; would this last generation follow in apostasy (cf. Dt. 1:1-46)? The fruit of belief is salvation, the writer affirmed (Heb. 6:7-9). The Lord’s promise to Abraham was immutable, and those that believe in the forerunner Jesus who is entered into heaven after the order of Melchisedec shall be safe (Heb. 6:13-20).

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

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

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

Christ is superior to the Levitical Priesthood because He has a superior covenant. Paul summarized his points that Christ is the high priest Who is at the right hand of God in heaven

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<sup>14</sup>Paul urged the Hebrews to move beyond OT teaching concerning the Messiah, repentance, faith, washings (“baptisms;” cf. Heb. 9:10), laying on of hands, resurrection, and eternal judgment.

<sup>15</sup>Hebrews Six seems to be Paul’s version of Christ warning of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (cf. Mt. 12:31-32).

(Heb. 8:1-5). He has an excellent ministry based on the better covenant and better promises. Obviously, the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 19:5 ff.) was limited, and hence was superseded by the New Covenant. The New Covenant was promised to Israel (cf. Jer. 31:31 ff., Ezk. 36:25 ff.) and ratified by Christ (cf. Mt. 26:26-28), by which Christians receive the spiritual promises of it and Israel will receive the spiritual and physical promises. Christians become the ministers of the New Covenant (cf. II Cor. 3:6) urging sinners into the Kingdom of God (cf. Jn. 3:3, 5) through regeneration (cf. Acts 28:31). The Old Covenant is gone, Paul declared (Heb. 8:13).

## **Chapter Nine**

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

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

Christ as testator of the New Covenant or Testament, needed to die to ratify the New Testament (Heb. 9:15-18). Moses had ratified his covenant (Heb. 9:19-23), and now Christ had ratified His for the final time, just once (ἅπαξ),<sup>16</sup> enabling believers to look for His second coming (Heb. 9:24-28).

## **Chapter Ten**

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

Christ is superior to Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood because His sacrifice was final, whereas the Mosaic never had finality and was practiced continually (Heb. 10:1-18). To continue to practice the giving of animal sacrifices was to reject the final sacrifice (cf. Ps. 40:6-8), and showed a hardness of heart that was unforgiveable. With three hortatory subjunctives, Paul urged his hearers, “let us draw near...let us hold fast...let us consider” (Heb. 10:22-24). Some were defecting from the assembly<sup>17</sup> indicating their indecision about Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice and facing the impending Roman destruction. There was no remedy for deliberate sin, and swift judgment would fall. In the OT deliberate sinners were stoned; the Lord had on their

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<sup>16</sup>*Hapax* (ἅπαξ) occurs 8x in Hebrews (6:4; 9:7, 26, 27, 28; 10:2; 12:26, 27).

<sup>17</sup>“*The assembling*” (τὴν ἐπισυναγωγὴν) gives the concept of meaning “the congregating in a synagogue” (Heb. 10:25).

doorstep a far worse judgment, about which history indicates several million Jews died by the hands of Titus and his army. Paul expected his audience to trust in the final Lamb and endure the persecution by faith, since *“the just shall live by faith”*<sup>18</sup>...*to the saving of the soul*” (Heb. 10:38-39).

## **Chapter Eleven** **(Christ is Superior to the Life of Unbelief)**

Christ is superior to the life of unbelief because He has a long history of those who have believed in His final sacrifice, which was prophesied from the beginning, starting with Abel. Multitudes from Abel to the prophets had risked all to live the life of *“faith”*<sup>19</sup> trusting in the finished work of Christ, graphically explained in Abraham’s parabolic sacrifice of Isaac (Heb. 11:17-19). The OT saints looked for a city (i.e., the New Jerusalem)<sup>20</sup> made by God (Heb. 11:10), prepared as heavenly (Heb. 11:16), inhabited by Jesus and His blood (Heb. 12:24), and *“continuing”* (Heb. 13:14). They all *“obtained a good report”* by faith (Heb. 11:2)<sup>21</sup> because they looked for the *“better thing”* (Heb. 11:40). The life of faith is superior!

## **Chapter Twelve** **(Christ is Superior to the Life of Unbelief)**

Christ is superior to the life of unbelief because the knowledge of chastisement is superior. For “the covenant community” the final work of Christ brings two responses and two consequences. For the apostate, sore damnation comes without forgiveness! For the believer, trying times come as the Lord chastens His just ones to help them live by faith. Chastening brings about proof of divine love (Heb. 12:6), obedience (Heb. 12:9), spiritual profit (Heb. 12:10), the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11). Outright rebellion like Esau’s was unforgiveable and proof that he did not have faith. His bitterness stopped his repentance from being effective (Heb. 12:15-17). “The covenant community” had before it the future blessings of the heavenly Jerusalem, which Paul enumerated with at least seven realities (set off by καὶ): 1) it is the city of the living God; 2) it contains the innumerable angels in the general assembly (πανηγύρει); 3) it contains the names of baptized church members on earth (Phil. 4:2-3); 4) it contains God the Judge; 5) it contains the spirits of just men made perfect (OT saints); 6) it contains Jesus the mediator of the new covenant; and 7) it contains the blood of sprinkling (Heb.

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<sup>18</sup>Hab. 2:4 is cited here as well as in Paul’s two other *Letters* (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11).

<sup>19</sup>The noun πίστις occurs 24x in this chapter out of a total 244x in the whole NT.

<sup>20</sup>*“The city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem”* is the ultimate *“rest”* (Heb. 4:9) for all believers (His bride) and receives detailed description in Rev. 21:1-27. It is the Holiest of Holies (a perfect cube 12,000 furlongs square) in which the great High Priest and Worthy Lamb, Jesus of Nazareth the Christ, resides.

<sup>21</sup>At least 19 OT characters are named in this lineage of faith.

12:22-24). The members of Paul's audience needed to see that "*ye refuse not him the speaketh*" (Heb. 12:25) because "*our God is a consuming fire*" (Heb. 12:29).

### **Chapter Thirteen** **(Christ is Superior to the Life of Unbelief)**

Christ is superior to the Life of Unbelief because the Christian life is superior. The life of faith fulfils social duties, Paul explained. These duties included love, hospitality,<sup>22</sup> compassion, moral purity, and contentment (Heb. 13:1-6). Their worship to the Lord and regard for spiritual ecclesiological leadership<sup>23</sup> needed to be constant since Christ was the same (Heb. 7-17). Finally, Paul wanted them to pray for him as he concluded his "*word of exhortation*" (Heb. 13:18-25).

Finis

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<sup>22</sup>This is probably an allusion to Gen. 18:1-8.

<sup>23</sup>Apparently, ἡγουμένων (as a plural participle used adjectivally), refers to the elders, bishops, and pastors of NT assemblies.

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Author: Although some include the Book of Hebrews among the apostle Paul's writings, the certain identity of the author remains an enigma. Missing is Paul's customary salutation common to his other works. In addition, the suggestion that the writer of this epistle relied upon knowledge and information provided by others who were actual eye-witnesses of Christ Jesus (2:3) makes Pauline authorship doubtful. Some attribute Luke as its writer; others suggest Hebrews may have been written by Apollos, Barnabas, Silas, Philip, or Aquila and Priscilla. Regardless of the human hand that held